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# Editorial: Life after death

'He is not here; he has been raised again' (Mt. 28:6). 'We believe that Jesus died and rose again; and so it will be for those who died as Christians; God will bring them to life with Jesus' (1 Thes. 4:14). At the heart of the Christian good news is the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead on the first Easter day. The central importance of the resurrection for the early church is obvious enough from the New Testament.

It was important for them *apologetically*. It was their meeting with the risen Christ that decisively convinced the disciples that Jesus was Lord and God, and it was on the basis of what they had heard and seen that they went out confidently proclaiming Jesus in face of sustained opposition: 'as we can all bear witness' (Acts 2:32). Subsequent generations of Christians have not been witnesses in the same sense as the first disciples, but the evidence for the resurrection as a historical event remains extremely strong, and proclamation of the resurrection as a real event that happened and that cannot easily be explained away is still a centrally important ingredient in Christian apologetic.

The importance of the resurrection is, secondly, *theological*. The resurrection was not just a remarkable one-off event. It was rather, as Christians have recognized from New Testament times onwards, a clear demonstration that Jesus of Nazareth is truly Lord and Christ (not just a self-styled Messiah), that his death was an effective and triumphant defeat of sin and Satan, and that the new age of resurrection life has dawned.

Arising out of this, the importance of the resurrection is, thirdly, *pastoral*, bringing hope to the dying and to the bereaved, and giving purpose to life. Because of the resurrection Christian hope is not a vague hope for some sort of eternal survival; it is rather a confident anticipation of resurrection life with Christ and like Christ's. Because of this the Christian knows that his or her 'labour is not in vain' (1 Cor. 15:58); and because the resurrection was resurrection and transformation of the body, it gives value to the physical world in which we live and work.

In any Christian discussion of life after death the central and decisive importance of Jesus' resurrection is clear. But there are many questions connected with the subject to which the answers are less clear: some of these questions are addressed in the first three articles of this *Themelios*.

For example, most theological students (and indeed many scholars) are not sure what to make of the Old Testament teaching — or lack of teaching — about the after-life: is the Old Testament entirely this-worldly and thoroughly materialistic? Or does it teach that all who die survive in a dim half-life in Sheol? Or is there a variety of views in the Old Testament, and is it possible to detect a significant evolution

of ideas within the Old Testament? If any of these views is correct, how is it to be squared with New Testament teaching, if at all?

There are also plenty of debated questions about life after death in the New Testament. For example, there is the question of the so-called 'intermediate' state: what happens to the Christian dead between death and the final resurrection? Also hotly disputed, especially in some evangelical circles, are questions about the interpretation of the book of Revelation and in particular of the 'millennium' described in Revelation.

Perhaps as perplexing as any, because they are so serious, are questions about judgment: about the fate of those who have never heard the gospel of Christ, about the nature of hell and eternal judgment, about the universality of God's saving purposes. Questions such as these are carefully and helpfully discussed in this issue of *Themelios*, though the authors would not claim to have reached conclusive answers on many of the points discussed.

There are many other questions concerning death and life after death that are not addressed in this *Themelios*. For example, there are all sorts of questions raised by non-Christian religious and secular thinking about death and life after death and also by what we might call Christian speculative thinking. Some ideas are relatively easy to evaluate from a Christian point of view. For example, the idea of reincarnation, despite its popularity, is clearly contrary to the New Testament's consistent teaching about the finality and reality of judgment after death, and also about the life to come. Other ideas and claims are much harder to evaluate: for example, what are we to make of the supposedly scientific claims to knowledge about death made by people who have experienced clinical death but have then been revived? Or, what are we to make of the claims of spiritists and even of some professing Christians to have contact with the dead? Are their claims delusory, demonic or true?

The answer to that last question may be 'all three'! 1. The power of human beings to be deceived themselves and to deceive others (deliberately or otherwise) is enormous. It is important for Christians to recognize this, and to be careful to base their ideas on the sure rock of biblical truth rather than on insecure and subjective interpretations of personal experience. 2. The reality of demons is made very clear by the Bible and should not be thought to be the figment of primitive people's imaginations. Demonic activity is characteristically deceptive, being intended to lead people away from Christ and from God's truth, and the deception may well be effected through the presentation of misleading 'spiritual' phenomena (as also through the presentation of misguided, but plausible, theological arguments!) (cf. 2 Thes. 2:9, 10). 3. The possibility that people do sometimes have real

contact with the dead can hardly be ruled out in view of the biblical evidence (e.g. the story of Saul and the witch of Endor in 1 Sam. 28).

However, although the Bible does not allow us to say that there is no possible contact with the dead, it does make it extremely clear that seeking such contact is wrong, and that dabbling in occult practices of any kind is evil and dangerous (e.g. Dt. 18:9-14; Rev. 21:8). It also discourages us, by its teaching and its example, from speculation about what has not been revealed (e.g. Acts 1:7). In the Bible God has given us an entirely adequate map to guide us through life, and it is our task to concentrate on following the route indicated by the map (which is all we need to know), not to waste time speculating about what lies off the edge of the map. There is a huge amount concerning the spiritual world and the life to come that God has not chosen to reveal to us and that we do not need to know.

The only qualification to this statement which needs to be made is that there is a need for some Christians to take an interest in psychic and paranormal phenomena, if only in order to be able to react with non-Christians who are involved in research in the field. But it is an area fraught with more spiritual danger than most, and Christians involved in it need to be prayerfully alert and to be careful not to go beyond the bounds of biblical revelation; it is important that they make the Bible the basis of their interpretation of the phenomena rather than making the phenomena the basis of their biblical interpretation (as so easily happens).

Another important range of questions concerned with death and life after death that this *Themelios* does not cover are the pastoral questions that arise in the context of ministry to the dying and the bereaved. It is clear that the Christian minister has something vitally important to share with people in the face of death; but effective ministry in that situation

requires not only knowledge of the truth of Christ, but also great sensitivity to people's needs and feelings. We need the love of Christ within us enabling us to weep with those who weep and the Spirit of Christ within us guiding us in what we say and do. Only so will we minister the wonderful gospel of the risen Christ appropriately and helpfully to people in pain and grief.

The fourth article in this *Themelios* is not on life after death but on Islam and Christianity. The author, Miss Ida Glaser, contributed an earlier article in the same area in Vol. 7.3 of *Themelios* under the title 'Towards a mutual understanding of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation'; we are glad to have a further contribution from her. She has recently taken up a position as Asian Project Worker with a church in the north of England.

#### **Editorial notes**

We warmly welcome as new international editors Professor Samuel Escobar and Dr Hans Kvalbein. Professor Escobar comes from Peru, but has recently been appointed Professor of Missiology in the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Dr Kvalbein from Norway is this year guest professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

The need for committed Christians to be involved in theological research is as urgent as ever in our world where there is so much theological confusion and uncertainty. But many theological students who could do so never seriously consider whether God might be calling them to this vital (though sometimes unglamorous) ministry. A leaflet about research possibilities, *Serving Christ through Biblical and Theological Research*, is available free of charge from Tyndale House, Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge CB3 9BA.

# The Old Testament view of life after death

Desmond Alexander

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## Introduction

It is not uncommon to encounter statements which suggest that the Old Testament has almost nothing to say on the subject of life after death; and what little it does report is usually assessed in quite negative terms. Indeed, not a few writers give the distinct impression that for the Hebrews the after-life was envisaged as a dull, dreary existence, lacking any of those pleasures which make this present life enjoyable and fulfilling. It was not until the late post-Exilic period that immortality and resurrection became a part of Jewish thinking on life after death.

Yet, does this portrayal do justice to the contents of the Old Testament? Was this really the way in which the Hebrew patriarchs, prophets, priests and people perceived their future? Did the grave represent for them nothing more than an empty, joyless form of existence? Such queries readily prompt the basic question: What was the Old Testament view of life after death?

However, at the very outset we confront another problem: Was there an Old Testament view of life after death? Does the Hebrew Bible present a single, uniform picture? Or ought we to look for a variety of positions reflecting, perhaps, different stages in the development of the Hebrew concept of the after-life, or, alternatively, distinctions between 'official' and 'popular' views?

The general trend in recent writings has been to distinguish clearly between pre- and post-Exilic developments in the Old Testament concept of the after-life. The pre-Exilic period is dominated by the belief that death, as a purely natural phenomenon, marked the end of life. The after-life, if one can call it that, consisted of a silent existence in *Sheol*, the realm of the dead, where both righteous and wicked shared a common fate, isolated for eternity from God and the living. After the Exile the Hebrew view of the after-life underwent various transformations due to the influence of other ideas. According to J. Jeremias, three significant changes occurred:<sup>1</sup> (a) the concept of resurrection gave rise to the idea that the dead would not remain in *Sheol* for ever; (b) Greek and Persian views on retribution after death resulted in the division of the underworld into different compartments for the righteous and the wicked; (c) the Greek concept of immortality led to the idea that the righteous went directly to heaven whereas the wicked descended to *Sheol*, which consequently was perceived as a place of punishment.

Although it is now widely accepted that the Old Testament concept of the after-life developed, broadly speaking, along these lines, further considerations suggest that it may be necessary to modify this position somewhat.

## The Old Testament view of death

Central to any discussion on the Old Testament view of the after-life is the Hebrew understanding of *death*. How was death perceived? What actually happened to an individual when he died? Did it mean the end of existence? Or was there something beyond death?

Initially it is important to note that the Hebrew term for 'death', *māwet*, has a variety of connotations in the Old Testament. According to W. Brueggemann,<sup>2</sup> *māwet* is used in three distinctive ways: (a) *biologically*, indicating 'the end of historical life' (e.g. Gn. 21:16); (b) *mythologically*, 'as a power, agent or principle' (e.g. Jb. 18:13; Je. 9:21);<sup>3</sup> and (c) *symbolically*, 'as the loss of rich, joyous existence as willed by God' (e.g. Dt. 30:15; Ps. 13:3-4). However, as these last two references reveal, it is not always possible to be completely certain when 'death' is being used in a symbolical or metaphorical sense; in both instances 'death' could be understood in its purely biological sense, 'the end of historical life'. A fourth possibility, not discussed by Brueggemann, is that 'death' refers to the place of existence after biological cessation (e.g. Jb. 38:17; Is. 28:15).<sup>4</sup> The fact that *māwet* 'death' can convey a variety of meanings creates real difficulties in interpreting some passages. Not surprisingly this can be a significant factor in attempting to appraise the Old Testament perception of the after-life.

## A 'good' death or a 'bad' death

In a recent monograph, *Death in the Literature of the Old Testament*, L. R. Bailey suggests that within the Hebrew Bible descriptions of biological death fall into two basic categories: an individual may experience either a 'good' death or a 'bad' death. The account of Abraham's decease in Genesis 25:8 conveys a certain sense of comfort and reassurance: 'Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people' (cf. Gn. 15:15). A similar appraisal of death occurs in the words of Eliphaz to Job about the fate of the righteous: 'You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season' (Jb. 5:26, RSV). Such descriptions, however, contrast sharply with those which refer to a 'bad' death. Jacob, for example, finds no comfort in the death of Joseph: 'Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave [*Sheol*] to my son." So his father wept for him' (Gn. 37:34-35). Jacob's unwillingness to be comforted arose from the fact that Joseph had encountered a 'bad' death.

Given that the ancient Hebrews appear to have distinguished between a 'good' and a 'bad' death, what factors separated these two types of death? Bailey, for his part,

suggests three conditions which characterize a 'bad' death: (1) if it is premature (e.g. 2 Sa. 18:32-33; Is. 38:1-12); (2) if it is violent (e.g. 1 Sa. 28:15-20; 1 Ki. 2:28-33); (3) if there is no surviving heir (e.g. Gn. 15:2-3; 2 Sa. 18:18).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, those who live to a good old age with children to succeed them have no reason to fear death (e.g. Gn. 25:8; 35:28-29).

While these factors certainly deserve consideration, it is the present writer's conviction that they do not *of themselves* explain why the Hebrews distinguished between a 'good' and a 'bad' death. The rationale for this distinction must be sought elsewhere. An initial reason for suggesting this is the fact that premature or violent deaths are not always viewed as 'bad'. Concerning premature death, we read in Isaiah 57:1-2, 'The righteous perish, and no-one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no-one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.' Here premature death is clearly envisaged as good, bringing deliverance from evil.<sup>6</sup> An actual case of this is King Josiah, who experienced not only a premature but also a violent death (2 Ki. 23:29-30). Prior to his death he received the following divine assurance: "I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place" (2 Ki. 22:20; cf. 2 Ch. 35:24). Although these passages may prove to be exceptional, they do raise the possibility that the distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' death may be due to factors other than those suggested by Bailey.

To appreciate fully Bailey's position it is essential to note that two important premises underlie his approach: (1) death in the Old Testament is viewed as a *natural* consequence of man's mortality; (2) after death a similar fate awaits both the righteous and the wicked. Let us examine both of these assumptions.

#### *Death: natural or punitive*

An important passage towards understanding the Old Testament perception of death is the account of its origin. Attention naturally focuses on the early chapters of Genesis where, in the garden of Eden narrative (Gn. 2:4 - 3:24), death is introduced for the very first time. Here discussions have tended to ask whether death is portrayed as *natural*, a consequence of man's mortality, or as *punitive*, a result of man's disobedience. On this issue modern scholarship seems to be almost equally divided.<sup>7</sup>

For his part Bailey follows the suggestion of E. Nielsen<sup>8</sup> that there are two different conceptions of death underlying the present account in Genesis 2 - 3: (i) 'a Paradise-*hubris* myth that looks upon death as a punishment for arrogance'; (ii) 'a Creation myth that regards death as the natural termination of created life'. Significantly, the first of these etiologies, according to Bailey, 'had no influence upon subsequent OT literature, although there is the related idea that human sin leads to *premature* death'.<sup>9</sup> However, the second etiology, which portrays death as natural, represents 'the basic perspective of the OT literature'.<sup>10</sup> Because death was natural, there was no need to fear it. 'Death . . . was not an irrational, intruding enemy but part of an ordered, controlled, harmonious creation. Biological life and death are not

separate phenomena, as if the latter intruded to thwart the Creator's design. They are bound together as part of a singular divine will for his creatures. To accept one is to accept the other; to despise one is to despise the other.'<sup>11</sup> This being so, death was viewed as a natural consequence of human existence; it was only 'unnatural' when it occurred prematurely.

This proposal, however, that death was perceived by the Hebrews as natural, runs counter to much of the evidence. Bailey himself acknowledges that the account in Genesis 2 - 3 'can be read as a continuous story rather than as a combination of two earlier and conflicting folk accounts',<sup>12</sup> and, as Nielsen readily admits, these two accounts have been combined with the result that 'death appears unambiguously as a punishment, for man's disobedience as well as for his arrogance'.<sup>13</sup> If, however, as Bailey suggests, 'the basic perspective of the OT literature' was to view death as natural, would we not have expected this outlook to dominate the final form of the narrative in Genesis 2 - 3? Thus, although a substantial number of writers suggest that death is viewed here as 'natural', there does seem to be a strong case, especially in the light of 2:17 and 3:3-4, for maintaining that death is portrayed as a divine punishment.<sup>14</sup>

Support for the opinion that all deaths were understood as *unnatural* can be deduced from various regulations in Leviticus and Numbers. In Numbers 19:16 we read: "Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days." Thus corpses and objects closely associated with death defile an individual. This fact is underlined by the preceding verses of the same chapter: verses 11-13 describe the process of purification necessary after touching a corpse, and verses 14-15 indicate that one is defiled merely by entering a tent containing a dead body.<sup>15</sup> Stricter rules limiting contact with corpses are applied to priests (Lv. 21:2-3, 10-11) and Nazirites (Nu. 6:6-12; cf. Jdg. 14:8-9).<sup>16</sup> Finally, Leviticus chapter 11 reveals that unless they have been ritually slaughtered, the carcasses of *all* animals are unclean.<sup>17</sup> That death is the decisive factor here is demonstrated by the fact that whereas a Hebrew might handle with impunity *living* unclean animals (e.g. camels, pigs), he would become temporarily unclean by touching the corpses of these same animals (vv. 8, 11, 24-28). In a similar fashion household objects or utensils were defiled when touched by the carcasses of certain small animals (vv. 29-38).

In all of these examples death is presented in negative terms: death, like sin, defiles and pollutes. If death was perceived by the Hebrews as entirely 'natural', is it not strange that they should have linked it with ritual defilement and uncleanness? Such a connection hardly supports the suggestion that death was 'part of an orderly, controlled, harmonious creation'. Thus Bailey's proposal that death in old age represented the divine intention in creation, and that only premature death was unnatural, is mistaken. On the contrary, the weight of evidence surely favours the view that death was indeed perceived by the Hebrews as a punishment for man's rebellion against God.

#### **The Hebrew perception of 'Sheol'**

The second major premise underlying Bailey's position is

that all men, irrespective of their moral character, share a similar destiny after death: all go down to *Sheol*.<sup>18</sup> On account of this any attempt to distinguish between a 'good' and a 'bad' death must be based on events *prior* to rather than *after* death. Thus Bailey focuses on the *circumstances* of death: whether it is premature, violent or childless.

The assumption, however, that the righteous and the wicked share the same fate in the after-life rests upon a particular understanding of the Hebrew concept of *Sheol*: (a) that after death everyone, without exception, descends into the nether world, and (b) that in *Sheol* no distinction is drawn between the righteous and the wicked. However, as we shall presently observe, this portrayal of *Sheol* reflects only one of a number of possibilities.

Before considering these other possibilities we should note that efforts to determine the precise meaning of *Sheol* by appealing either to extra-biblical occurrences or to etymology have so far proved unsuccessful. Whereas the term *Sheol* occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament, it is found only once in extra-biblical material, in the fifth-century Aramaic papyri of the Jewish inhabitants of Elephantine in Egypt,<sup>19</sup> and apart from the fact that it clearly refers to the place of the dead, little else can be gleaned from this particular reference. Regarding the etymology of *Sheol*, various suggestions have been made to explain its origin. F. Delitzsch proposed almost a century ago that it developed from an Accadian word *šū'alū* which he took to mean 'nether world'. More recently a number of scholars have followed the opinion that it is derived from the Accadian verb *š'īl* (to 'ask' or 'enquire'; compare Hebrew *š'īl*); initially *Sheol* denoted 'examination ordeal' but through time it came to mean 'nether world'. These proposed etymologies, unfortunately, are not without their difficulties and cannot be relied upon with complete certainty.<sup>20</sup> Since its exact meaning cannot be known from either extra-biblical references or etymology, we are left with no choice but to determine from each Old Testament context what *Sheol* was intended to denote. A number of possibilities exist.

#### *Segregation within Sheol*

One view with a long history, and which used to enjoy widespread support, is the idea that whereas everyone on dying actually descends into *Sheol*, once there the righteous and the wicked are segregated into different compartments. This idea is found, for example, in the *Hebrew and English Lexicon* of Brown, Driver and Briggs, where the Hebrew words *'ābadōn* 'destruction', *bôr* 'pit' and *šāhat* 'corruption' or 'pit' are taken to denote a 'place of ruin in She'ol for lost or ruined dead'.<sup>21</sup> It can, however, be traced back as far as the intertestamental book of 1 Enoch, where it is now generally thought to reflect a later development in Jewish thinking on the after-life. In 1 Enoch 22:1-14 *Sheol* is divided into four sections: '(1) for the righteous - v. 9b; (2) for the wicked who have not been punished in this life - vv. 10f.; (3) for the martyred righteous - v. 12, cf. vv. 5-7; (4) for the wicked who have been punished in this life - v. 13'.<sup>22</sup> It has even been suggested that such a belief surfaces in a number of New Testament passages (e.g. Acts 2:27,31; Eph. 4:9; 1 Pet. 3:19).<sup>23</sup>

While it is tempting to suggest, especially in the light of later Jewish thinking, that in Old Testament times *Sheol* was

perceived as consisting of different regions, the biblical texts themselves do not support such a possibility. As has been clearly indicated by a number of scholars the terms *'ābadōn*, *bôr* and *šāhat* are merely synonyms for *Sheol*, and ought not to be viewed as designating a separate lower region within the nether world.<sup>24</sup> Similarly we may reject all suggestions that certain New Testament passages allude to a compartmentalized nether world. When examined more closely it is quite apparent that they do not presuppose such a concept of *Sheol*.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Sheol and the grave*

More recently a quite different approach has been suggested by R. L. Harris.<sup>26</sup> He argues that *Sheol* refers without exception to the grave, the place where the physical body is laid to rest. Significantly, this proposal is motivated by a desire to avoid a difficulty which arises if one accepts that the souls of all men co-exist in *Sheol*: 'Does the OT teach, in contradiction to the NT, that all men after death go to a dark and dismal place where the dead know nothing and are cut off from God?'<sup>27</sup> This theological problem disappears, however, if *Sheol* denotes merely the grave, the resting place of the body but not of the soul. For the ultimate destiny of men's souls we must look elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g. Ex. 3:6; Mt. 22:32).

Several factors, however, argue against this proposal. Firstly, although *Sheol* comes sixty-five times in the Old Testament it never takes the definite article, suggesting that it may well have been used as a proper name denoting the nether world. Secondly, although Harris is correct in pointing out that some descriptions of *Sheol* resemble closely a Palestinian tomb (e.g. Ezk. 32:26-27), this may result from the fact that the Hebrews viewed *Sheol* as an extension of the grave. As O. Keel comments, 'As a land from which no one has ever yet returned (cf. Ps. 88:10; Jb. 7:9-10; 10:21; Akkadian *eršet lā tari* "land of no return"), the actual realm of the dead is a speculative entity. Its concrete features are derived from empirical observation of the grave. Beyond that, very little can be said about the world of the dead. For that reason, it appears as a prototypical grave raised to gigantic proportions'.<sup>28</sup> Thus although Harris demonstrates that some descriptions of *Sheol* do resemble an ordinary grave, these same descriptions may also be equally appropriate for the nether world.

#### *The nether world and the wicked*

A third approach is that of A. Heidel who proposes that the term *Sheol* exhibits a broad range of meanings. Whereas on occasions it clearly denotes the subterranean spirit world (e.g. Nu. 16:30-33; Dt. 32:22), elsewhere it may refer to the grave (e.g. Is. 14:11; Ezk. 32:26-27), or even be 'used as a figure of speech to denote extreme misfortune, seemingly inescapable death, the brink of death, or the like (Pss. 30:4; 86:13; 88:4; Jonah 2:3 [= 2:2 in the English translation])'.<sup>29</sup> However, as well as suggesting that *Sheol* has a wide range of connotations, Heidel makes another observation of special relevance for our present discussion: 'As regards She'ol . . . we have evidence that it, in the signification of the subterranean realm of the spirits, applies to the habitation of the souls of the wicked only'.<sup>30</sup> In saying this Heidel distinguishes clearly

between the destiny of the righteous and the wicked in the after-life; whereas the souls of the ungodly go down to *Sheol*, the souls of the pious ascend to heaven.

Although Heidel's thesis has the advantage of avoiding any theological difficulties created by the co-existence of the righteous and the wicked in the nether world, it may, however, be objected that he interprets the biblical evidence in a somewhat arbitrary manner. If a passage refers to the death of a righteous person, *Sheol* is taken invariably to mean 'grave' (e.g. Gn. 37:35; 42:38; Is. 38:10); but when the wicked are mentioned, *Sheol* usually means 'nether world' (e.g. Nu. 16:30; Is. 14:13-15), although Heidel does allow that it can on occasions merely denote a grave (e.g. Is. 14:11; Ezk. 32:26-27). The question then arises, to what extent is Heidel's view on the fate of the righteous after death dependent upon his reading of *Sheol* as the 'grave'? Is his conclusion still viable if *Sheol* is understood to denote solely the 'nether world'?

Unfortunately, space does not permit us to discuss in detail every occurrence of *Sheol*. We must therefore restrict ourselves to several summary observations. Firstly, apart from a few references which are indecisive (e.g. Ec. 9:10; Song 8:6), *Sheol* always conveys negative overtones: for example, it is somewhere fearful and to be avoided (e.g. 2 Sa. 22:6; Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 86:13); it is the antithesis of heaven (e.g. Jb. 11:8; Ps. 139:8; Am. 9:2). Secondly, in a significant proportion of passages *Sheol* is linked unquestionably with evil-doers (e.g. Nu. 16:30, 33; 1 Ki. 2:6, 9; Jb. 24:19; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; Pr. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; Is. 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; Ezk. 31:15-17; 32:21, 27). Taken together these observations would seem to indicate that *Sheol* does indeed denote the ultimate abode of the wicked alone.

There are, however, a few occurrences of *Sheol* which are generally thought to imply that the righteous were also to be found in the nether world. In mourning the untimely death of his son Joseph, Jacob laments, 'In mourning will I go down to the grave [*Sheol*] to my son' (Gn. 37:35). Similar comments come in Genesis 42:38 and 44:29, 31, this time motivated by Jacob's fear that his youngest son Benjamin will also be killed. Whereas Heidel takes *Sheol* to mean grave in 37:35, Jacob's unwillingness to be comforted following the apparent killing of Joseph by a wild animal could suggest that he considers Joseph to have been divinely punished, and hence with the wicked in the nether world. This understanding of *Sheol* would certainly add weight to the expression of Jacob's grief for his son Joseph. A similar explanation would account for the use of *Sheol* in 42:38 and 44:29, 31.

Another passage which seems to imply that the righteous descend to *Sheol* is Isaiah chapter 38. After the prophet Isaiah predicts that king Hezekiah will suffer an early death, the king pleads that God may remember him. As a consequence he is granted a further fifteen years to live (vv. 1-8). In subsequently describing his feelings Hezekiah writes: 'In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death [*Sheol*] and be robbed of the rest of my years? . . . Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave [*Sheol*] cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness'" (vv. 10, 17-18). These comments are usually interpreted to mean that Hezekiah viewed the

righteous as going to *Sheol*. However, in the light of Isaiah's prediction against him (v. 1) and the knowledge of his own sins (v. 17), Hezekiah may have had every reason to believe that he was doomed to join the wicked in the nether world. It is thus possible that both Hezekiah and Jacob understood *Sheol* to denote the final abode of the wicked.

Of the alternatives outlined above for understanding *Sheol*, we may now reject as improbable (i) the once popular view that *Sheol* consisted of different compartments, and (ii) the proposal of R. L. Harris that it denotes solely the grave. In choosing between the two remaining possibilities we must decide whether or not the Hebrews believed that all men descended into the nether world, or only the wicked. As far as our investigation of the term *Sheol* is concerned it is difficult to reach a decisive conclusion, although the weight of evidence possibly favours Heidel's opinion that only the ungodly descended there. Moreover there are a number of passages which seem to point in the same general direction.

Firstly, the accounts of the translations of Enoch and Elijah suggest that not all men descend to *Sheol* (Gn. 5:24; 2 Ki. 2:1-18). Whereas the reference to Enoch is brief, in the case of Elijah it is clearly stated that he was taken up by God to heaven (2 Ki. 2:1). In both instances it is implied that God has the power to take to himself those who enjoy an intimate relationship with him (cf. Ps. 73:24). Secondly, the author of Psalm 49, troubled by the prosperity and success of the wicked, finds comfort in the fact that any present imbalance between the fortunes of the godly and the ungodly will be put to rights in the after-life.<sup>31</sup> The psalmist clearly believes in different rewards in the life to come.

These two ideas: (a) the continuity beyond death of an intimate relationship with God, and (b) the redressing in the hereafter of inadequate temporal rewards and punishments, obviously reflect Hebrew thinking on the after-life. Unfortunately many scholars have tended to play down the significance of these, and other, passages, or have interpreted them in such a way as to remove any reference to the future life.<sup>32</sup> Such an approach, however, seems to be influenced more by the assumption that the concepts of immortality and resurrection were late developments in Jewish religion, than by a detailed study of the biblical texts in the light of other ancient Near Eastern documents.<sup>33</sup>

The belief that *Sheol* was the final abode of the wicked is in keeping with the idea, discussed above, that the Hebrews perceived death as punitive rather than as natural. Since mankind was considered to be under divine condemnation the normal consequence of dying was imprisonment in a dark, gloomy region from which no one could ever escape. To go down to *Sheol* was to suffer a 'bad' death.

### The righteous in the after-life

Although the wicked encountered a 'bad' death, the righteous, in contrast, were perceived as experiencing a 'good' death. The question arises, however: What happened to the righteous after death?

Surprisingly perhaps, the Old Testament contains no detailed account of the fate of the righteous immediately after death. As a result the best that one can do is piece together

various snippets of information in the hope of producing a clear picture. One factor, however, which is especially significant in this regard is the concept of resurrection.

As noted earlier many modern writers consider the concept of resurrection to be a relatively late development in Jewish thinking on the after-life.<sup>34</sup> Two main arguments are forwarded in support of this position. Firstly, those passages which refer explicitly to the resurrection of the dead can all be dated to the post-Exilic period (*i.e.* Is. 26:19; Dn. 12:2).<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the Jewish concept of the resurrection appears to have been influenced by the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, and this probably occurred during the early post-Exilic period when the Jews and Persians were in close contact.

In a recent study, however, L. J. Greenspoon has challenged the view that the belief in a resurrection was a post-Exilic development.<sup>36</sup> Rejecting the influence of both earlier Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths and rituals concerning 'dying-and-rising gods', and later Zoroastrian beliefs regarding the 'reconstitution of the body', he suggests that the Old Testament belief in bodily resurrection developed 'out of themes associated with YHWH as Divine Warrior'. In this capacity Yahweh is perceived as having the power to overcome death and release those under its control. Further, from a survey of relevant passages he concludes that the 'concept of bodily resurrection of the dead is expressed in biblical material that ranges in date of composition from the ninth to the second centuries B.C.E.'<sup>37</sup> Although Greenspoon's arguments are unlikely to reverse the present consensus favouring a late date for the introduction of the concept of resurrection into Jewish thinking on the after-life, he does present reasonable grounds for believing that the idea of bodily resurrection can be traced back to the pre-Exilic period.

An important implication of the doctrine of resurrection is that the righteous remain in the realm of the dead until divinely raised to life again.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that there must be some form of intermediate state between the time of death and resurrection. If, as many writers maintain, all men irrespective of their moral character descend to *Sheol*, then we must view the righteous as being resurrected from there. However, if *Sheol* is understood to be the abode of the wicked alone, then the righteous must have existed elsewhere prior to being raised to life again. Unfortunately the Old Testament reveals little regarding the precise nature of the intermediate abode of the righteous.

One of the few indications of what became of the righteous after death is the expression 'to be gathered to one's people' (Gn. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Nu. 27:13; 31:2; Dt. 32:50) or 'to be gathered to one's fathers' (Jdg. 2:10; 2 Ki. 22:20; 2 Ch. 34:28). 'That these figures of speech do not refer to the interment in the grave of the fathers, or the ancestral tomb, as has been maintained, is clear from the fact that Abraham, Aaron and Moses were not united with their fathers in the grave. Nor do they have reference to burial in general, for in the stories of the "gathering" of Abraham and Isaac it is expressly added that they were buried (Gn. 25:8-9; 35:29); moreover, Jacob was "gathered to his people" (Gn. 49:33) several months before his body was committed to the ground (50:1-13).'<sup>39</sup>

Significantly, in their use of the expression 'to be gathered to one's fathers' (or 'people') the biblical writers seem to convey a sense of optimism regarding death (*cf.* Gn. 15:15). Although death may separate an individual from his family and kin in this life, the righteous are reunited with those members of their families who have already died.

That death is sometimes described as falling asleep (*e.g.* Ps. 13:3; Dn. 12:2) and the resurrection as reawaking<sup>40</sup> (*e.g.* 2 Ki. 4:31; Jb. 14:12; Is. 26:19; Dn. 12:2) suggests possibly that the intermediate state of the righteous is one of comparative tranquillity and peace. Even so, they are still perceived as being in the realm of the dead. Perhaps for this reason the Old Testament focuses attention not on the intermediate state of the righteous but rather on their eventual resurrection.

Taking these factors into account we may now be in a better position to appreciate the somewhat ambivalent attitude, noted above, of the Old Testament writers towards *Sheol*. Although all men may have been viewed as initially descending there on dying, the fact that the righteous would subsequently be resurrected, leaving behind the wicked, possibly explains why *Sheol* is generally presented in quite negative terms. Whereas the righteous would eventually enter into God's presence the wicked continued to languish in the depths of *Sheol*. Thus, in spite of the temporary sojourn of the righteous there, *Sheol* represented for the Hebrews the ultimate and lasting abode of those who were excluded from the divine presence.

### Conclusion

While some of the evidence is ambiguous, and questions remain to be answered, we are perhaps now in a position to clarify certain fundamental issues regarding the Old Testament perception of the after-life. Firstly, we may reject the currently popular belief that in the pre-Exilic period death was viewed by the Hebrews as a natural legacy of man's mortality and that, as a consequence, little interest was shown in the after-life. Secondly, it seems probable that the term *Sheol* frequently, if not always, designated the nether world, and that as such it represented the continuing abode of the ungodly. Thirdly, whereas the wicked were thought to remain in the dark, silent region of *Sheol*, the righteous lived in the hope that God would deliver them from the power of death and take them to himself (*cf.* Ps. 49:15).

<sup>1</sup> J. Jeremias, 'hades', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), vol. 1, p. 147. Various writers, however, question the extent of foreign influences upon Jewish thinking regarding the after-life; *cf.* G. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Harvard Theological Studies 26, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); J. J. Collins, 'Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death', *CBQ* 36 (1974), pp. 21-43; W. Wifall, 'The Status of "Man" as Resurrection', *ZAW* 90 (1978), pp. 382-394.

<sup>2</sup> 'Death, theology of', *IDB Supplement* 1976, pp. 219-220. This threefold division is developed more fully by L. R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Overtures to Biblical Theology) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 39-47.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann comments, 'Israel's environment sustained a mythology which presented Death (Mot) as an active personal agent in combat with Yahweh' (*IDB Supp.*, pp. 219-220).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2nd edn 1949), p. 177; R. L. Harris, 'mawet,' *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), p. 497.

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives*, pp. 48-51.

<sup>6</sup> Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 150; cf. F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (Edinburgh), pp. 368-369.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 266-267.

<sup>8</sup> 'Creation and the Fall of Man', *HUCA* 43 (1972), pp. 1-22.

<sup>9</sup> *Biblical Perspectives*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58; cf. J. B. Burns, 'The Mythology of Death in the Old Testament', *SJT* 26 (1973), pp. 327-340.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38; cf. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), pp. 92-94. Nielsen's proposal that two earlier and quite distinct accounts have been combined to form the present account is questionable: see J. T. Walsh, 'Genesis 2.4b-3.24: A Synchronic Approach', *JBL* 96 (1977), pp. 161-177.

<sup>13</sup> 'Creation', p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> H. Blocher, *In The Beginning* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), pp. 184-187; cf. Rom. 5:12; 6:23.

<sup>15</sup> G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 290-291.

<sup>16</sup> These indicate that death and holiness are incompatible; cf. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 20; E. Feldman, *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology* (New York: Ktav, 1977), pp. 13-30.

<sup>17</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 176-177; cf. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (Leicester: IVP), pp. 129-130.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. T. H. Gaster, 'Dead, Abode of the', *IDB*, vol. 1, pp. 787-788; A. Dagan, 'Olam Ha-ba', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 12, p. 1356.

<sup>19</sup> A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), lxxi.15.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. R. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p. 37; J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Biblica et Orientalia 21) (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), pp. 21-23.

<sup>21</sup> *BDB*, p. 2; cf. pp. 983, 1001; see also L. J. Afonso, 'Netherworld', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 12, p. 996.

<sup>22</sup> M. A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 110-111; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII:14.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Jeremias, 'hadēs', *TDNT*, vol. 1, p. 147; Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. E. F. Sutcliffe, *The Old Testament and the Future Life* (Bellarmine Series VIII) (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1946), pp. 43, 57-59; Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 177; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, pp. 66-71, 80-81.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of 1 Peter 3:19 see R. T. France, 'Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples', in I. H. Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 268-272. He concludes, 'Christ went to the prison of the fallen angels, not to the abode of the dead, and the two are never equated' (p. 271).

<sup>26</sup> 'The Meaning of the Word *Sheol* as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Passages', *JETS* 4 (1961), pp. 129-135; cf. R. L. Harris, 'She'ol',

*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, pp. 892-893.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 892. This position has been adopted in the NIV where *Sheol* is usually translated in the text by 'grave' or 'death', with a footnote referring to 'Sheol'.

<sup>28</sup> O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 63; cf. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, p. 38: 'Sheol is, in fact, a sort of vast grave of which the individual tombs are merely particular manifestations'; W. H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 270.

<sup>29</sup> Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 177. This would seem to be the view adopted by the translators of the AV: *Sheol* is translated 31 times 'hell', 31 times 'grave', 3 times 'pit'.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 184-186; Sutcliffe, *OT and Future Life*, pp. 99-102; S. Woudstra, 'The Old Testament on the Afterlife', *Vox Reformata* 20 (1973), p. 13. Psalm 73 reveals a somewhat similar position. Balaam's comment, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs' (Nu. 23:10), also implies that there was a distinction between the death of the righteous and the wicked.

<sup>32</sup> Sutcliffe, *OT and Future Life*, pp. 81-108, sees them as having had a major influence in the formulation of the doctrines of immortality and resurrection in the last centuries of the pre-Christian era. Alternatively, however, these passages may presuppose the existence of such beliefs.

<sup>33</sup> This point is forcefully made by M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (Anchor Bible 17A) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. xli-lit; cf. E. Smick, 'The Bearing of New Philological Data on the Subjects of Resurrection and Immortality in the Old Testament', *WTJ* 31 (1968), pp. 12-21. However, note the response of, among others, B. Vawter, 'Intimations of Immortality and the Old Testament', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 158-171.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. T. H. Gaster, 'Resurrection', *IDB*, vol. 4 (New York: Abingdon, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> This assumes, however, a 2nd cent. BC date for Daniel and a late Exilic or post-Exilic date for the Isaiah Apocalypse (chs. 24-27).

<sup>36</sup> 'The Origin of the Idea of Resurrection' in B. Halpern and J. D. Levenson (eds), *Traditions in Transformation. Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), pp. 247-321.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>38</sup> In only one of the passages examined by Greenspoon is the concept of resurrection applied to the wicked (*i.e.* Dn. 12:2). Dating the book of Daniel to the 2nd cent. BC, Greenspoon considers this passage to be the very latest Old Testament reference to resurrection, and significantly, it contains an important innovation: 'not only the righteous, but also the wicked are reawakened from the sleep of death' (p. 282). It may, however, be, as B. J. Alfring has suggested ('L'idée de Résurrection d'après Dan. XII, 1.2', *Biblica* 40 (1959), pp. 355-371), that v. 2 ought to be interpreted as saying, 'Many of those who sleep in the land of dust will reawake, these to everlasting life, those (who do not reawake) to disgrace and everlasting contempt'. Apart from bringing this verse into line with other Old Testament passages which restrict the resurrection of the dead to the righteous alone, this proposal also has the advantage of explaining why the first part of the verse restricts the scope of the resurrection to 'many'.

<sup>39</sup> Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. F. A. Sawyer, 'Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead', *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 218-234.

# The New Testament view of life after death

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We live in days of mounting concern about issues relating to human beginnings: Is the human fetus a person? Are there any circumstances in which the termination of a pregnancy is morally permissible? Is it legitimate to conduct experiments on human embryos before they are viable? While the Bible is not lacking in guidance on these matters, it has much more to say about man's life after death than about his life before birth, about eschatology than about anthropology.

Before we deal with man's state immediately after death (the 'intermediate state') and his state after the return of Christ (the 'final state'), some comments should be made about the nature of death and immortality as depicted in the New Testament.

## 1. The nature of death

Apart from the passages where death is depicted as a realm where the evil one reigns (Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:13), as a ruler who dominates his subjects (Rom. 5:14, 17) or as a warrior bent on destruction (Acts 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 6:8; 20:14), there are four senses of the terms 'die' and 'death'.<sup>1</sup> *Physical death* is a process as well as an event. It may denote the gradual debilitation of physical powers (2 Cor. 4:12, 16), or exposure to danger that could prove fatal (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 4:10-11), as well as the actual termination of bodily functions (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:27; cf. 2 Sa. 14:14). *Spiritual death* refers to man's natural alienation from God and hostility to God that express themselves in sin (Mt. 8:22; Jn. 5:24-25; Rom. 6:23; Jas. 5:20; Jude 12). Both physical and spiritual death are portrayed as the consequence and penalty of sin and the common lot of mankind (Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 7:13; Eph. 2:1, 5; Heb. 9:27). The 'second death' describes the permanent separation from God that befalls those whose names are not found written in the book of life (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14-15; 21:8). *Death to sin* is that unresponsiveness to the appeal and power of sin that results from dying and rising with Christ and from being alert and responsive to the voice of God (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 6:4, 6, 11, 13). But by far the most common use of 'death' and 'die' is in relation to the end of physical life (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:22).<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The nature of immortality

Does man possess an immortal soul that guarantees his survival beyond death? Three Greek terms are used in the New Testament to express the idea of immortality: *athanasia*, 'deathlessness' (as in 1 Cor. 15:53-54); *aphtharsia*, 'incorrupt-

bility' (Rom. 2:7); and *aphthartos*, 'incorruptible' (Rom. 1:23). It is significant that the terms are never used in association with the word 'soul' (*psyche*),<sup>3</sup> and, when used of man himself, always refer to his future destiny, never his present state.<sup>4</sup> In New Testament usage, where all of the ten uses of the two nouns are Pauline, 'immortality' denotes immunity from decay and death, an immunity that results from having (in the case of God), or sharing (in the case of man), the eternal divine life. Just as God is 'never-dying' (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16) because he is 'ever-living' (Jn. 5:26), so believers are destined to become immune from decay and death because they will participate fully and immediately in God's life (2 Pet. 1:4).

The view of immortality that predominates in Western and Christian thought is Platonic, according to which the term signifies an inherent characteristic of every rational soul that guarantees its persistence after death.<sup>5</sup> For Paul, however, immortality is a natural attribute of God alone (1 Tim. 6:16) and a future acquisition of the righteous gained by means of a resurrection transformation (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:52-54). Immortality is conditional, but only in the sense that there is no eternal life except in Christ. This does not imply that existence beyond death is conditional and that unbelievers will be annihilated.<sup>6</sup> Because, in New Testament usage, immortality has positive content, being more than mere survival beyond death, its opposite is not non-existence but the 'second death' (Rev. 20:6, 14) which involves exclusion from God's presence (2 Thes. 1:9). All human beings survive beyond death but not all will become immortal in the Pauline sense.

As for the question of man's original state, we may suggest that he was created neither immortal (see Gn. 3:22-24) nor mortal (see Gn. 2:17) but with the potentiality to become either, depending on his obedience or disobedience to God.<sup>7</sup> While not created *with* immortality, he was certainly created *for* immortality. Potentially immortal by nature, man actually becomes immortal through grace.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. The intermediate state

This expression is not found in Scripture, but in Christian theology it traditionally refers either to the condition of all mankind between death and resurrection or to the period of time that elapses (from an earthly viewpoint) between the death of the individual and the consummation of history. This condition or period is called 'intermediate' because it lies between two fixed points, death and resurrection, and because it is temporary, ultimately being eclipsed by the 'final state' of mankind.

Are the departed conscious and active as they await the End? Although the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

(Lk. 16:19-31) was told to illustrate the danger of wealth (Lk. 6:24) and the necessity of repentance (Lk. 16:28-30), not to satisfy our natural curiosity about man's anthropological condition after death, it is not illegitimate to deduce from the setting of the story the basic characteristics of the *post mortem* state of believers and unbelievers.<sup>9</sup> Both groups are conscious of surroundings: Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom and comforted (vv. 22-23, 25), the rich man is in Hades and tormented (vv. 23-25, 28). There is memory of the past: the rich man is instructed to 'remember' earlier circumstances (v. 25), and he can recall his family and their attitude to 'Moses and the prophets' (vv. 27-30). Moreover the whole dialogue with Abraham suggests that the departed have not only retained their capacity to reason (v. 30) but also gained an acuteness of perception (vv. 27-28). Significantly, the same three characteristics (consciousness, memory, rationality) may be deduced from the plea for vindication uttered by the martyrs who rest under the altar in God's presence (Rev. 6:9-10): 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' (v. 10). Or again, it would have been incongruous for Paul to express a preference (2 Cor. 5:8) or a desire (Phil. 1:23) to leave the securities of earthly existence and reside with the Lord unless that *post mortem* state involved fellowship with Christ that was even more profound than his experience of Christ on earth. Not only are departed believers safe in God's hands (Lk. 23:46; cf. Acts 7:59) as they 'rest' from their labours in joyful satisfaction (Heb. 4:10; Rev. 14:13); they 'live for God's glory' (Lk. 20:38, *autō zōsin*) and 'live spiritually, as God does' (1 Pet. 4:6, *zōsi . . . kata theon pneumatī*).

But what of the verb 'sleep' (*koimasthai*), used some fifteen times in reference to persons who are deceased? Does it not imply that in the interval between death and resurrection the believer's soul or 'inner man' is in a state of suspended animation, although secure in Christ's presence and possession? This view, known as psychopannychism (the doctrine of 'soul sleep'), has found notable advocates at various stages of church history, most recently O. Cullmann in his celebrated essay *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead*.<sup>10</sup>

This verb *koimasthai* was a common euphemism for the act of dying. In its nine Pauline uses the sense is basically, if not exclusively, punctiliar ('fall asleep') rather than linear ('be asleep'), while elsewhere in the New Testament it is only where the present tense of the verb is used, in reference to physical sleep, that a linear sense must be given (viz. in Mt. 28:13; Lk. 22:45; Acts 12:6).<sup>11</sup> Christians who die 'fall asleep' in that they are no longer active in or conscious of the earthly world of time and space, although they are fully alert to their new environment. Since Paul applies the verb only to Christians (men in general simply 'die', *apothnēskēin*), it may possibly allude to the peaceful manner of the Christian's dying, whatever the mode of death (cf. Acts 7:60, of Stephen's death under a hail of stones), or to the certainty of awakening to life through resurrection.

We have already mentioned passages that demonstrate that the dead are not unconscious (viz. Lk. 16:19-31; 20:38; 1 Pet. 4:6). It is also clear that immediately after death the believer is 'with' the Lord. When Jesus said to the penitent robber, 'I solemnly assure you, today you shall be with me [*met' emou*] in paradise' (Lk. 23:43), he was not promising a

king's welcome when the gates of paradise were opened at the end of the age but his personal companionship in God's presence immediately after death: 'today, with me'. Nor can there be doubt that in 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul is depicting the location and state of the Christian after death. 'We prefer to depart from this form of embodiment and take up residence with the Lord [*pros ton kyrion*].' A temporal distinction can hardly be drawn between the destruction of the earthly house (2 Cor. 5:1) and departure from the mortal body (2 Cor. 5:8). As soon as residence in physical embodiment ceases, so too does absence from the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:6). Similarly, when Paul expresses his desire 'to depart and be with Christ [*syn Christo*]' (Phil. 1:23), the word 'and' (*kai*) is explicative: to depart from this life is to be immediately with Christ. This being or dwelling with the Lord (*meta, pros, syn*) involves more than incorporation in Christ or union with Christ, for although such incorporation and union are as real after death as before,<sup>12</sup> each passage implies that the *post mortem* state of the believer is qualitatively superior to his spiritual life on earth. Nor can these three prepositions refer merely to an impassive spatial juxtaposition to Christ, as a table may be said to be 'with' a chair in a room, for they depict a relationship between persons. Rather, just as the expression 'live in', as used of the Spirit's indwelling of the believer, 'denotes a settled permanent penetrative influence',<sup>13</sup> so the expression 'be with', as used of the believer's dwelling with the Lord, suggests a settled permanent mutual fellowship. The concepts of active communion with Christ and of sleep are not incompatible if we remember that Paul regarded death as a 'falling asleep' to this world rather than as a 'residing in unconsciousness' in the presence of Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

Is the intermediate state one of disembodiment? The traditional view regarding departed believers is that they await the second advent of Christ and the resurrection of the body as incorporeal spirits; only at the Parousia is the integrity of the personality reconstituted, with the reunion of a preserved soul and a transformed body. So it is that J. N. Sevenster distinguishes between a preliminary 'being with Christ' (Phil. 1:23) in a disembodied state immediately after death and the ultimate 'being with the Lord' (1 Thes. 4:17) in an embodied state after the return of Christ.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, many hold that death is the moment when believers acquire their heavenly embodiment, so that the interim state is not an interval of incorporeal existence but a period of fellowship between resurrected disciple and risen Lord in anticipation of the corporate consummation of the church.<sup>16</sup>

What is uniformly stressed throughout the New Testament is that the twofold basis of God's judgment by Christ of the living and the dead is a person's relationship to Christ (e.g. Mk. 8:38; Jn. 3:36; Rom. 5:9) and his people (Mt. 25:31-46), and works performed during his or her lifetime (Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13). So far from being a probationary period during which dross is purged from the character of the believer and a further opportunity for repentance is afforded to the unbeliever,<sup>17</sup> the intermediate state is marked by a 'parting of the ways' after a preliminary divine judgment at death that anticipates the final judgment at the End (Heb. 9:27). The righteous attain to such heavenly bliss (cf. Rev. 14:13) as may be experienced by disembodied human spirits or by resurrected individuals before Christ's building of his church is complete and the new heavens and

the new earth are ushered in. The unrighteous experience intense and unrelieved spiritual anguish and torment in Hades (Lk. 16:23-25, 28; cf. Jude 7) as they await resurrection and the Great Assize (Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Pet. 2:9).<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The final state

Quite unequivocally John 5:28-29 distinguishes two types of future resurrection. 'Those who have done good' will emerge from their tombs 'to a resurrection that leads to life', while 'those who have practised evil' will experience 'a resurrection that leads to judgment'. Not only in the Fourth Gospel but throughout the New Testament, a resurrection to immortality (which is the future aspect of eternal life) is depicted as a privilege reserved for those who are in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The only other explicit reference to a resurrection of unbelievers is Acts 24:15, where Paul speaks of his hope in God 'that there will certainly be a resurrection including both [*te kai*] the righteous and the unrighteous'. This doctrine of a resurrection of the wicked as a prelude to their condemnation is clearly implied in Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; Revelation 20:5, 11-15, and may possibly be inferred from Matthew 12:41-42; 25:31-46; Luke 14:14; 20:35. Also, since 'resurrection' occasionally denotes no more than reanimation (Heb. 11:35; cf. Rev. 20:5), a universal judgment may be said to imply a universal 'resurrection'. The unrighteous dead will 'rise up' and appear before God in the integrity of personal life, either as disembodied spirits or in some undisclosed bodily form, will have their relationship to Christ and their works assessed, and will receive a verdict of condemnation (*krisis*, Jn. 5:29). Although the New Testament emphasizes the benefits of believing rather than the dire consequences of rejecting the gospel, its testimony is uniform that such condemnation involves permanent banishment from the divine presence (Mt. 7:23; 25:41; Lk. 13:25-28) and eternal retribution (Mt. 25:46; Rom. 2:8; Heb. 6:2; 10:29). These two motifs of deprivation and recompense, frightening in their implications, are associated and perhaps identified in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, where the retribution inflicted on 'those who refuse to know God and on those who refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (v. 8) is described as 'the punishment of eternal ruin and exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (v. 9).

As well as referring to a judicial verdict involving consignment to perdition, the term 'judgment' has the neutral sense of a judicial investigation that may lead to either a positive or a negative verdict. In this neutral sense all persons, including Christians, are 'judged'. 2 Corinthians 5:10 indicates that in Christ's judgment of believers a verdict of 'bad' (*phaulon*) as well as 'good' (*agathon*) may be passed on specific deeds or on action regarded in its totality. But the purpose of this assessment by Christ is not to decide the Christian's destiny but to assess his or her works and determine the appropriate reward. Whatever else may be involved in the believer's reward, the principal element is God's personal commendation (1 Cor. 4:5; cf. Rom. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:9) expressed in such words as 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (cf. Mt. 25:21, 23), commendation which may be given or may be withheld (= 'suffering loss', 1 Cor. 3:15, the forfeiture of reward), and which will be given in varying measure (1 Cor. 3:8; 4:5; cf. Lk. 19:12-19).

We can conveniently summarize the essential ingredients of New Testament teaching about the believer's final state in six adjectives.

(i) *Embodied*. In Orphic and Gnostic thought the *summum bonum* consisted of emancipation from the defilement caused by embodiment. *Sōma sema*, 'the body is a tomb'. It is, of course, incontestable that incorporeal conscious existence is possible (God exists as pure spirit), but in Pauline as in Jewish thought true existence for human beings or a full life either on earth or beyond the grave was inconceivable apart from embodiment. Somatic resurrection was the prerequisite for the resumption of true life after the intervention of death. Paul makes it clear that the object of the Christian's desire is 'the redemption of the body' from its bondage to decay and sin, through its transformation (Rom. 8:23, where *tou sōmatos* is an objective genitive, not a genitive of separation). When he spoke of the 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15:44), a body animated and guided by the redeemed human spirit and revitalized by the divine Spirit, he was implicitly rejecting not merely a materialistic view of resurrection (it was a *spiritual* body) but also a spiritualistic view of immortality (it was a *spiritual body*).

Details of the anatomy and physiology of the spiritual body were of no more consequence to New Testament writers than was celestial topography. But its basic properties in addition to 'spirituality' are clear. It is of *divine origin* (1 Cor. 15:38), with God as its architect and builder (2 Cor. 5:1-2). It is *imperishable*, free from any form of decay; *glorious*, of radiant and unsurpassed beauty; *powerful*, with limitless energy and perfect health (1 Cor. 15:42-43, 50, 52-54). It is *angel-like*, not because it is sexless (sexual identity, an essential element in personality, is retained in the resurrection) but because it is deathless (Lk. 20:36) and without sexual passions or procreative powers (Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25; cf. 1 Cor. 6:13-14).<sup>20</sup> It is *heavenly*, perfectly adapted to its natural habitat, heaven (2 Cor. 5:1-2). According to Paul, these were also characteristics of the resurrected body of Jesus,<sup>21</sup> so that Christ now is what redeemed believers will be; the risen Christ is the firstfruits of perfected humanity.

For some believers the transition to spiritual corporeality will be by way of death and resurrection, but for others by means of a resurrection-type transformation. The distinction is between those who die before the Parousia of Christ and those who are alive at the Parousia. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 deals with the latter category of Christians (who may, with the population explosion of the twentieth century and the expansion of Christianity, in fact outnumber the sum total of believers under the old and the new covenant who experience death!). Paul recognizes in the case of Christians who live to witness the Parousia an exception to his rule that death is a prerequisite for resurrection (1 Cor. 15:36). By special revelation (1 Cor. 15:51a) he knew that those who did not, by a pre-Parousia death, qualify for the transformation that was necessary for the inheritance of the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50) would nevertheless all undergo the required transformation at the Parousia (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Both the dead and the living will be transformed, but only the dead are also raised. And for both groups the outcome of the transformation is identical: possession of a spiritual body comparable to Christ's 'glorious body' (Phil. 3:21).

(ii) *Localized*. We have seen that heaven is the natural habitat of the resurrection body, its normal sphere of operation. Although heaven is a condition, that of knowing and serving God, it is also and always a place, the locality where God's presence is most perfectly expressed and felt. P. Badham rightly insists that the concept of a resurrected body and the notion of a non-spatial heaven are irreconcilable. In reality the options are a resurrected body in a place or an immortal soul existing without location, for 'a body is spatial and a soul is non-spatial'.<sup>22</sup>

An ever-present danger in the discussion of eschatology is an exclusive concentration on the spiritual relation of the individual to God, so that scriptural teaching about the destiny of the material universe is ignored. In fact the destinies of man and the non-rational material order are interlocked. As at the Fall, so in the Rebirth (Mt. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21): what affects one affects the other. Just as the entire material universe shared in the consequences of human sin, so it will share the destiny of Christ's people (Rom. 8:18-25; Phil. 3:20-21). Creation will be emancipated from its frustrating imperfection and slavery to decay (Rom. 8:20-21) in the same way that man will be set free from sin and mortality. The 'new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will have its permanent home' (2 Pet. 3:13) correspond to man's new resurrection body. Whether this 'newness' of creation comes about by annihilation or by transformation (both concepts find expression in Rev. 21:1, 5), the result will be that God is 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) and the whole material order will unswervingly serve the purposes of spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Related to this matter of localization is the doctrine of the millennium. According to Revelation 20:1-10 (cf. 5:10) the people of God share the messianic reign of Christ for a period of 1,000 years between the binding and release of Satan and between the first and the second resurrections. There are three schools of interpretation concerning the millennium which may be sketched in broad terms as follows, although there are numerous variations within each of the systems.

*Post-millennialism* regards the millennium as the period of Christ's spiritual rule in and through the church on earth during the present era. The second coming of Christ occurs after (thus *post-*) the millennium. *A-millennialism* interprets the millennium symbolically as the perfect and glorious reign of Christ and believers 'in heavenly places' during the present age, and denies (hence *a-millennialism*) that there is any actual rule of Christ on earth for 1,000 years either before or after his second coming. As in the post-millennialist view, 'the first resurrection' mentioned in Revelation 20:5b-6 is generally taken to represent the new birth of believers or their sharing in the spiritual benefits of Christ's resurrection, while the (implied) second resurrection of Revelation 20:5a is the general resurrection at the return of Christ. According to *pre-millennialism* the millennium is the period between the resurrection of believers at Christ's Parousia (= 'the first resurrection') and the resurrection of unbelievers (= the second resurrection, involving 'the rest of the dead', Rev. 20:5a). Christ's second advent takes place before (thus *pre-*) the millennium. During this future thousand-year period Christ will administer a universal theocracy of peace and righteousness on earth.<sup>24</sup>

Most proponents of post-millennialism and a-millennialism envisage the millennium as occurring during the present era, either on earth or 'in heavenly places'. But on a pre-millennial view — a view which perhaps generates fewer exegetical problems than either of the other interpretations of Revelation 20 — the material world itself, the 'first earth' (Rev. 21:1b), becomes the scene of the vindication of Christ's cause within human history. This vindication takes place during a specific future period, the millennium, which forms the first stage of the eternal kingdom and is distinguishable from the final state of restoration when the redeemed will inhabit the 'new earth' (Rev. 21:1a).<sup>25</sup>

(iii) *Personal*. The Christian doctrine of resurrection is a safeguard against an impersonal view of immortality. Although the identity between the physical body and the spiritual body is neither material nor substantial, there is real continuity in that the same historically identifiable *ego* finds expression in two successive but different types of body. When the physical body is transformed into or replaced by the spiritual body, personal identity is preserved. 'God will raise us up' (1 Cor. 6:14). Belief in God's power to restore dead persons to life and to impress them with the image of Christ without in any way compromising their individuality leaves no room for a pantheistic immortality in which the Many are absorbed into the One, or a racial immortality in which a person survives solely in his posterity. From first to last God treats us as distinctive individuals.

(iv) *Active*. There is a sense in which the dead permanently 'rest from their labours' (Rev. 14:13), but relief from toil does not amount to perpetual inactivity. There is no reason to think that Jesus is passively awaiting the End simply because he is 'sitting' at God's right hand. On the contrary, he is permanently active, for he upholds the universe, exercises his reign over his church and kingdom, builds his church, affords support to those in temptation, advocates the cause of the repentant sinner, and engages in high-priestly intercession for his people. There is ceaseless work, but without exertion or failure. Similarly, the final state of believers will be one of joyful activity as they 'follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (Rev. 14:4; cf. 7:17). 'For ever and ever' they will share Christ's universal reign (Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:6; 22:5). Free from the taint of sin and from the frustrations of spiritual powerlessness, they will worship and serve God and the Lamb enthusiastically and acceptably (Rev. 7:9-11; 19:9; 22:3-4).<sup>26</sup>

(v) *Corporate*. The life of the Age to Come is not marked by an exclusively individual enjoyment of the beatific vision of God so that myriads of individuals live in fellowship with God but in isolation from other worshippers. Unmediated inter-personal communion between the individual believer and his Lord there certainly will be, but only in the corporate context of the City of God, the capital of the consummated kingdom or new commonwealth and the centre of the 'new heaven and new earth'. In the classic description of this City (Rev. 21:1 - 22:5; cf. Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22-24) attention is focused not only on its superlative beauty and its inviolate holiness but on its inhabitants among whom God will dwell in a perfect society.

(vi) *Permanent*. 'We know that if our earthly tent-dwelling is dismantled, we have a permanent heavenly building provided by God and not constructed by human hands'

(2 Cor. 5:1). 'They shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 22:5). Just as the resurrection body will be permanently durable, not susceptible to decay or dissolution (1 Cor. 15:42, 53-54), so too believers' corporate and individual life with God will be unending. When the son of the widow of Nain or Lazarus were restored to life, they resumed physical lives that were identical with their former lives and therefore not free from ultimate death. But when believers are resurrected from the dead, they will assume an immortality which guarantees the permanency of their resurrection state. Resurrected believers, like the risen Christ (Rom. 6:9; 2 Cor. 13:4), 'will never die again' because they 'live by the power of God'. Once a person experiences a resurrection transformation, he or she will know perennial rejuvenation and so be equipped for the worship and service of God 'for ever and ever'.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Concluding observations

Several general remarks about New Testament eschatology need to be made to ensure that our subject is seen in proper perspective.

First, the main object of Christian hope is a Person rather than an event or a series of events or life after death. Christians certainly 'wait for . . . the coming of the day of God' and for 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:12-13) and 'seek for . . . immortality' (Rom. 2:7), but in the final analysis they simply 'await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3:20) who will himself set in motion and superintend that series of events which will herald the arrival of the consummated kingdom of God. New Testament eschatology focuses on the Last One rather than the last things; on the Father and the Son, both of whom are given the title of Omega in the Apocalypse.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, all New Testament writers share the conviction that what a person believes about human destiny influences his present attitudes and conduct.<sup>29</sup> For example, the most detailed discussion of death, resurrection and immortality found in Scripture concludes with an exhortation to consistent and enthusiastic service: 'Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you, always devote yourselves fully to the Lord's work in the knowledge that your labour in the Lord is not futile' (1 Cor. 15:58). Eschatology and ethics are inextricably linked. The glimpses of the future afforded by the New Testament are designed not to satisfy our curiosity about the unknown but to stimulate holiness of life.

Thirdly, in their teaching about life after death New Testament authors focus their attention not on the fate of the unbeliever but on the destiny of the believer, and not on the penultimate 'intermediate state' of the righteous dead but on the final destiny of resurrected saints: permanent residence in God's immediate presence, worshipping and serving him and the Lamb for ever, in spiritual bodies perfectly adapted to the ecology of heaven and totally responsive to the dictates of the Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> See further L. Morris, *The Wages of Sin. An Examination of the New Testament Teaching on Death* (London: Tyndale, 1954); K. Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972); L. R. Bailey, Sr. (ed.), *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Medically this would be defined as the irreversible cessation of all spontaneous respiratory, circulatory and cerebral activity.

<sup>3</sup> Note, in contrast, the conjunction of *athanatos* ('immortal') and *psyche* ('soul') in 4 Macc. 14:6; 18:23.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 52, 53 (twice), 54 (twice).

<sup>5</sup> On Plato's view, see R. L. Patterson, *Plato on Immortality* (University of Pennsylvania: University Park, Pennsylvania, 1965); on ancient views of immortality in general, see E. Rohde, *Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (Kegan: London, 1925, 8th edn); A. S. Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of Immortality* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1922); C. H. Moore, *Ancient Beliefs in the Immortality of the Soul* (Harrap: London, 1931).

<sup>6</sup> For a defence of annihilationism, see E. W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, California, 1982); against annihilationism, see H. Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Presbyterian and Reformed: Philadelphia, 1957; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> To express this in the classical distinctions, man was not created unable to die (*non posse mori*), but able not to die (*posse non mori*), although after the Fall he was unable not to die (*non posse non mori*). L. Morris tentatively proposes that scientific and theological considerations can be harmonized if we regard death in its biological aspect as being 'at one and the same time . . . completely natural and completely unnatural'. We must take seriously 'man's original constitution as being in a special relation both to God and to nature. Is it too much to imagine that this closeness to God and this primacy over nature found expression in forces of a spiritual character which kept the natural tendency to bodily decay in check? The entrance of sin so radically altered the situation that fleshly dissolution could no longer be held at bay, and thus death became inevitable' (*Wages*, p. 12).

<sup>8</sup> On all the issues in this section, see M. J. Harris, *Raised Immortal. Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott: London, 1983; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1985), pp. 189-205, 237-240, 273-275.

<sup>9</sup> The destinies of the rich man and Lazarus are fixed and irreversible (Lk. 16:23, 25-26), yet it is the intermediate, not the final, state that is being depicted, for life on earth continues (vv. 27-29) and resurrection and judgment lie in the future (vv. 27-31).

<sup>10</sup> Epworth: London, 1958, pp. 48-57, especially p. 51 n. 6.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the data, see Harris, *Raised Immortal*, p. 260 n. 35. See further D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1964), pp. 262-269; and especially P. Hoffmann, *Die Toten in Christus* (Aschendorff: Münster, 1969, 2nd edn), pp. 186-206, 321, who concludes that Paul shows no special interest in the word *koimasthai* and that his view of death and of the *post mortem* state cannot be derived from the imagery of death as sleep.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase *hoi nekroi en Christo* (1 Thes. 4:16) means 'the dead who are in Christ' (cf. 1 Cor. 15:18), not 'the dead who died in Christ'. Death does not remove the Christian from his incorporation 'in Christ' (Rom. 8:38-39). The difference between 'the dead in Christ' and Christians who are alive is not in their status (both groups are equally 'in Christ') but in the quality of their fellowship with Christ and the degree of their proximity to Christ ('being with Christ').

<sup>13</sup> W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1902, 5th edn), p. 196.

<sup>14</sup> Even if the Christian dead are thought of as in some sense 'sleeping', the two concepts of sleep and communion are not mutually exclusive, for one could argue that where a predominantly corporate eschatology finds expression (as in 1 Thes. 4 and 1 Cor. 15) Paul views the whole company of departed Christians as 'sleeping' in Christ as they await the Consummation, while in passages (such as 2 Cor. 5 and Phil. 1) which embody essentially individual eschatology he describes the individual believer as enjoying communion with Christ during the interim state.

<sup>15</sup> 'Some remarks on the GYMNNOS in 2 Cor. 5:3', in *Studia Paulina in honorem Johannis de Zwaan* (Bohn: Haarlem, 1953), p. 207.

<sup>16</sup> Arguments in favour of this view are summarized in Harris, *Raised Immortal*, pp. 98-101. Paul's twofold use of 'naked' (*gymnos*) in 1 Cor. 15:37 and 2 Cor. 5:3 is inconclusive evidence in the discussion. In the former passage the adjective describes the seed without the clothing of the blade and the ear or, at most, mortal man without the spiritual body. In the latter it probably denotes the ideal of disembodiment espoused by certain gnosticizing Corinthians and rejected

by Paul, not an intermediate state of physical disembodiment feared by him.

<sup>17</sup> The doctrine of purgatory is generally derived from such passages as Lk. 12:59; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 15:29, and the view that the *post mortem* state affords unbelievers an opportunity to embrace the gospel is usually based on 1 Pet. 3:18-19; 4:6 as well as allegedly universalistic passages in Paul. For a balanced discussion of the passages cited above, see K. Hanhart, *The Intermediate State in the New Testament* (Wever: Gronigen, 1966), pp. 185-190, 213-224, 235-236.

<sup>18</sup> From the viewpoint of the living who witnessed the burial of the dead, all the dead are resting in the grave (Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Thes. 4:16-17) or are resident in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31), the invisible realm in the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40). But from the viewpoint of God and in reality, the unrighteous are in Hades (here conceived of as an interim state of woe) and the righteous are in heaven (Jn. 12:26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; and compare the equivalent expressions in Lk. 16:9, 23; 23:43; Jn. 14:2; Rev. 6:9).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:17, 21; Lk. 14:14; 20:35-36; 1 Cor. 15:23, 52; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Rev. 20:5-6.

<sup>20</sup> The error of the Sadducees was in imagining that the resurrection state was merely the perpetuation of present earthly relationships in a new locality.

<sup>21</sup> The body of the risen Jesus was spiritual (1 Cor. 15:45), from God (Rom. 8:11), imperishable and immortal (Rom. 6:9), glorious (2 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 3:21a; cf. Acts 22:6, 11), powerful (Phil. 3:10, 21b), and heavenly (1 Cor. 15:44; 1 Thes. 4:16; cf. Acts 26:13, 19).

<sup>22</sup> *Christian Beliefs about Life after Death* (Macmillan: London, 1976), pp. 90-94 (the citation is from p. 91).

<sup>23</sup> On the theme of this paragraph, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 211-234.

<sup>24</sup> See further R. G. Clouse (ed.), *The Meaning of the Millennium* (IVP: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1977); and more briefly, R. Ludwigson, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1973), pp. 92-131.

<sup>25</sup> On the possibility that in 1 Cor. 15:20-28 Paul alludes to this millennial reign of Christ, see the discussion of I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Macmillan: London, 1919; Baker: Grand Rapids, 1967 reprint), pp. 95-100.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. Baillie, *And The Life Everlasting* (London: OUP, 1934), pp. 228-237 (who speaks of 'development in fruition', p. 234); U. Simon, *Heaven in the Christian Tradition* (Rockcliff: London, 1958), pp. 227-236; and especially B. H. Streeter, 'The Life of the World to Come', in *Immortality* by B. H. Streeter et al. (Macmillan: London, 1917), pp. 131-166.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of intertestamental Jewish views on life after death, see Hoffmann, *Toten*, pp. 81-155; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Jr., *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (OUP: London, 1972); H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life After Death. Part I* (Gleerup: Lund, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> Rev. 1:8; 21:6 (of the Father); 1:7; 2:8; 22:13 (of the Son).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Mt. 24:45-51; Mk. 13:32-37; Lk. 16:9; Jn. 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:8-10; Heb. 11:9-10; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:13, 17; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; Jude 17-23; Rev. 2:7, 11.

## The problem of judgment

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The notion of divine judgment has never been particularly popular, except perhaps among those who were convinced that they, at least, were exempt from its terrors. J. A. T. Robinson made the interesting comment: 'We live, in the twentieth century, in a world without judgment, a world where at the last frontier post you simply go out — and nothing happens. It is like coming to the customs and finding there are none after all. And the suspicion that this is in fact the case spreads fast: for it is what we should all like to believe.<sup>1</sup> So judgment is a problem. We prefer to manage without the idea of someone to whom we must give account of our lives, someone standing over us to remind us that we are both finite and guilty.'

However, 'judgment' in itself is a neutral word. Whilst it implies accountability, it does not presuppose any particular verdict. According to the New Testament the Last Judgment, like an earthly judgment, may issue for any particular individual in a verdict of acquittal or of condemnation. So the real problem is not so much the prospect of judgment as the prospect that some people will receive a verdict of eternal condemnation. How, we ask, can the idea of eternal punishment be reconciled with the love of God as it is revealed in Christ? How can people be happy in heaven if they know that others are imprisoned in hell? Why should God reject as worthless people who have lived good lives? Would it not be a

defeat for God if some human beings fail ultimately to find a place in his kingdom? Would it not be terribly unfair of God to condemn people who have had inadequate opportunity, or no opportunity, to understand and respond to the Christian message? In particular, what about sincere adherents of non-Christian religions? Surely a just and loving God would not write people off merely because they happened to be born in a place and culture where Islam or Hinduism or one of the other religions is the norm?

So the questions keep coming. And they are deep and urgent questions, because they are questions not so much about a theological system or a verse of Scripture as about one's family and friends. But before we try to reflect on these questions, let us notice that there is also a problem if there is *no* judgment. Already in the Ancient Near East writers were questioning how the gods could be just when the righteous suffered at the hands of the wicked:

They walk on a lucky path, those who do not seek [a god],  
Those who devoutly pray to [a goddess] become poor and weak.<sup>2</sup>

Job and Ecclesiastes wrestle with the same problem: why does God, if he is just, allow the wicked to prosper and inflict disaster on the innocent?

It is all one; therefore I say,  
he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.  
When disaster brings sudden death,  
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.  
The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;  
he covers the face of its judges —  
if it is not he, who then is it? (Jb. 9:22-24; cf. Ec. 3:16-4:3; 9:1-3).

And the psalmists express their longing for vindication in the face of their suffering at the hands of evildoers (e.g. Pss. 43; 79; 94). If they did not maintain faith that somehow, some time God would demonstrate his justice by delivering them from suffering, then suffering would be compounded by utter despair. When people look for a God of judgment whilst they suffer at the hands of a Pharaoh, an Antiochus or a Hitler, it is not necessarily because they wish to gloat in vengeance over the fate of the wicked. It is because if God's just dealings with mankind are not *ultimately* to be demonstrated, they would think it necessary to give up faith in God's justice altogether.

Although the suggestion that we should drop the idea of divine judgment is superficially attractive, it leads in fact not to the liberation of man but to his belittling. To deny that all people are responsible *for* their actions and responsible *to* God is to deny an essential part of human personality and to reduce us to the level of machines. The prospect of judgment may even be welcomed, because it assures us that God treats all our actions as significant. If the idea of judgment is removed, then ultimately *no* actions are significant.

The doctrine of judgment is sometimes dismissed because it is wrongly assumed to involve the notion that life is a great obstacle race for which the booby prize is to be thrown on the bonfire by God, the cosmic sadist. The Oxford philosopher Richard Robinson wrote:

If it really were probable that we should burn eternally, or not burn eternally, according as we disobeyed or obeyed a certain set of moral laws, that would, indeed, be an excellent reason for obeying them. But it would be a poor reason for respecting them. . . . On the contrary, they and the God who imposed them on us in this unbelievably brutal way, could only be regarded as beneath contempt.<sup>3</sup>

But that is not how the New Testament writers understood divine judgment, as we shall see.

### The New Testament message of judgment

It will be useful to summarize New Testament teaching before attempting to handle specific problems. I shall not describe it in detail, since it has been done elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> I shall not distinguish sharply between different New Testament writers, since what follows is, I believe, uncontroversial and fairly central to the New Testament as a whole.

(a) Whilst judgment is characteristically an eschatological term and the New Testament's focus is frequently on the final judgment, there is a sense in which men judge themselves now.

This is the judgment [*i.e.* this is how the process of judgment works], that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed (Jn. 3:19f.).

By the choices we make, by the way we respond when confronted by Christ and his gospel, we bring judgment on ourselves. Whilst prominent in John's Gospel, this theme is not peculiar to that writer. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul gives a vivid description of the process of judgment. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men . . .', he begins, and he goes on to say three times, 'God gave them up . . .' (vv. 24, 26, 28). Men adopt a

mode of life which leaves the living God out of account, and he allows them to experience the consequences of their own choice. The wrath of God does not mean some cataclysmic act of destruction; rather it is God's withdrawing of his presence and his blessings from men who have refused to receive them.

But there is one crucial feature in the New Testament's description of the judgment which men bring on themselves in the present. It is not final. This Godlessness is experienced only so long as people refuse to enter the kingdom of God.

(b) All people will be judged. The New Testament has a way of emphasizing this in its repeated insistence that God (or Christ) will judge 'the living and the dead' (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5; *cf.* 2 Cor. 5:10). A few passages speak of a 'resurrection of the unjust' as well as of the just (Jn. 5:29; Acts 24:15), as if to make it plain that God will ensure that no-one escapes this judgment, whether they are dead or alive, Christian or not Christian, when Christ comes finally to pass judgment on men's lives. That this future judgment of all men is associated with Christ's final coming (*parousia*) is clear from passages such as Matthew 13:47-50; 25:31-46; Mark 8:38; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 22:12.

(c) Judgment is personal: there is a Judge. C. H. Dodd's famous description of wrath as an impersonal 'inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe'<sup>5</sup> is misleading in that it distances God from the consequences of sin which he himself has willed. Judgment is a process in which God is involved, though it is characteristic of the New Testament to refer to Christ as his agent in carrying out the judgment. The Father 'has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man' (Jn. 5:27; *cf.* Mt. 25:31-46; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10). J. E. Fison comments:

The importance of realizing that Jesus Christ is the judge cannot be overemphasized. At the end we shall not approach a distant doomsday, but we shall be confronted by an immediate presence. If only we realized it, it is the presence of a living and loving person, however mediated, with whom we have to deal here and now, and with whom we are bound to deal hereafter.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of this is brought home in that startling phrase in the Revelation to John: 'the wrath of the Lamb' (Rev. 6:16). Admittedly, the Lamb in Revelation is not the picture of vulnerable innocence which it has sometimes been taken to be, but is an apocalyptic symbol for the fierce and powerful leader of God's people.<sup>7</sup> He is, nevertheless, the Lamb who was *slain* for our redemption (Rev. 5:6-14). If there are those who reject him and thereby bring upon themselves his wrath, they reject not the cosmic sadist whose obstacle race they have failed to complete, but the one who in his love has offered himself to all mankind. And it is he who will confront us at the judgment.

(d) Judgment will be 'according to works'. This is consistently taught in the New Testament (see Mt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). It is not in conflict with Paul's doctrine of justification through faith. For to be justified means to be brought into a right relationship with God, within which one experiences God's power at work.<sup>8</sup> But, like any gift, it is only ours if we receive it and make use of it. So justification through faith, though it is a gift of God's free

grace, involves the obligation to work out our new status in practice. The only kind of faith of which Paul approves is the faith which shows its reality by the fruit it produces: 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). And at the final judgment a man's works will be the evidence of the kind of man he is. It is not a question of earning salvation by good works: works are the evidence of the reality of the faith through which we are saved.

(e) The final judgment will be a moment of division between those who are revealed truly to belong to Christ and those who do not. The last judgment will underline and make known the self-judgment which men and women have chosen during the present life (Mt. 10:32f.; 25:31-46; Jn. 5:25-29; Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Thes. 5:1-11).

Some interpreters of the New Testament argue for two or more different judgments. For example, they may distinguish between a judgment of believers (2 Cor. 5:10), a judgment of the nations (Mt. 25:31-46) and a judgment of the unrighteous dead (Rev. 20:11-15). But it seems to me that these are variant ways of talking about the same judgment, whose purpose is to reveal the true character of men and allot their destinies accordingly. It is hard to see how passages such as Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5-11, 16, with their reference to 'the day' of judgment, could imply separate judgments for different categories of people.

(f) The New Testament views salvation and condemnation basically in terms of relationship or non-relationship to God. A failure to grasp this truth causes many of our distortions of the biblical doctrine of judgment.

We should note first that the *criterion* by which men's destinies will be determined is their attitude to Christ – their relationship to him. This is of course implied in the word 'faith': commitment to someone in relationship. And on the negative side, in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul speaks of 'those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus'. They are not in relationship to him and so will come under his wrath. As we saw above, this emphasis is not in conflict with judgment according to works, since works are the outward evidence of the relationship (or lack of relationship). 2 Thessalonians 1:8 itself makes plain the parallelism between 'knowing God' (relationship) and 'obeying the gospel' (which has moral implications).

Secondly, just as the criterion of judgment is expressed in terms of relationship to God or to Christ, so also is the *result* of the judgment. Condemnation means 'exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thes. 1:9), whilst the destiny of God's people is to be 'always . . . with the Lord' (1 Thes. 4:17; cf. 2 Cor. 5:8). In Jesus' teaching, too, the destiny of those who respond to him is pictured in terms of being in the presence of God or of Christ (Mt. 25:34; Lk. 23:43). Hell, on the other hand, means to be excluded from God's presence (Mt. 7:23; 8:12; 25:41). The same theme is differently expressed in Matthew 10:32f. (= Lk. 12:8f.):

Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge [as my own] before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny [*i.e.* declare that I have no dealings with them] before my Father who is in heaven (cf. Mk. 8:38).

Thus we can understand the link between self-judgment in the present and judgment at the last day. The final judgment means God's underlining and ratification of the relationship towards him which we have chosen in this life. If we have fellowship with God now, we shall enter into a fuller experience of his presence then. If we do not know him now, we shall not know him then.

If this is so, we can see that both heaven and hell are best spoken of not as reward and punishment for the kind of life we have lived, but as the logical outcome of our relationship to God in this life. Heaven is not a reward for being a Christian any more than marriage is a reward for being engaged. And hell, we may say, is not a punishment for turning one's back on Christ and choosing the road that leads to destruction. It is where the road leads.

### The nature of 'eternal punishment'

The biblical doctrine of judgment offers confidence to those who humbly seek to respond to the love of Christ. But it presents a stark picture for those who do not. One way of 'softening the blow' has been sought in the idea of 'conditional immortality'. On this view those who are condemned at the final judgment will not endure endless conscious torment (which traditionally has been the common view of Christians) but will be 'annihilated'. Since in the biblical view men are not naturally immortal, and the gift of immortality or eternal life is conditional upon faith in Christ, those who do not have such faith will not receive immortality. They will simply cease to be.

The traditional view of eternal punishment has normally been defended on the grounds that the soul is immortal, that strict justice requires it, and that it is the plain teaching of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Murray Harris has recently argued for it, pointing to references to retributive punishment in Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8f.; Hebrews 10:29; and to the significance of the word 'eternal' (*aīōnios*) in passages such as Matthew 25:41, 46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2. Thus in Matthew 25:46, where *aīōnios* is applied to both 'life' and 'punishment', 'if the life that is described as *aīōnios* is without end, so too will be the punishment that is described in the same way'. 'That the concept of "destruction" (*apōleia*) . . . or "perishing" (*apollusthai*) . . . does not imply annihilation is clear from the use of the verb "perish" (*apollusthai*) in John 11:50; Acts 5:37; 1 Corinthians 10:9-10; Jude 11.' 'There are . . . sufficient warnings of the dire, eternal consequences of rejecting Christ to leave us in no doubt that the Early Church rejected both universalism and annihilationism.'<sup>10</sup>

Arguments for annihilationism or conditional immortality include the following:

(a) Since the Bible teaches that immortality is not natural to man but is a gift given by God to believers, that logically implies that unbelievers do not exist indefinitely after death.

(b) Biblical images such as 'fire' and 'destruction' suggest annihilation more readily than they suggest continuing conscious existence. Harris's appeal to the use of *apollusthai* in John 11:50; *etc.*, does not appear to make out a case for the opposite view.

(c) 'Eternal' in places such as Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2 may signify the permanence of the *result* of judgment rather than the continuous operation of the act of punishment itself. So 'eternal punishment' means an act of judgment whose results are irreversible.

(d) Eternal torment involves an eternal cosmic dualism which is impossible to reconcile with the conviction that ultimately God will be 'all in all'. It leaves us with no solution to the problem of how God's people could be happy in heaven while others continue to suffer in hell.

In attempting to weigh up such arguments J. W. Wenham suggests, first, that the traditional case for eternal torment should not be lightly surrendered; but, secondly, that the case for conditional immortality deserves to be considered much more seriously than has been the case hitherto.<sup>11</sup>

But it is important not to get the differences between the two views out of proportion. The very ambiguity of the biblical evidence should remind us that this issue was of secondary importance to the biblical writers. As we say, they understood judgment in terms of relationship to God. Thus the most significant thing about the destiny of unbelievers is that they will be separated from God. Compared with that tragic fact, there is — from the perspective of the New Testament writers — little point in asking for a more precise definition of their destiny, whether it involves continued conscious existence or not.

#### Will not all be saved?

A more radical solution to the problem posed by the prospect of God's condemnation of many of the people he has created lies in the doctrine of universalism, which has become increasingly popular over the last fifty years.<sup>12</sup> John Hick's exposition of this view that all will ultimately be saved will be considered as an example.

In *Evil and the God of Love* he argues that 'God will eventually succeed in his purpose of winning all men to himself in faith and love'.<sup>13</sup> Whilst it is logically contradictory to say that creatures endowed with free will are predetermined ultimately to love God, it is factually the case that God will lovingly persist, like a divine psychotherapist, in helping his patients to find their true selves. We must take seriously Jesus' warnings that selfish deeds lead to real sufferings after death, but we must believe that because God is love those sufferings will be temporary and redemptive. In *Death and Eternal Life* Hick agrees that in Matthew 25:31-46, and probably in Matthew 25:30 and Mark 3:29, *eternal* torment appears to be taught. But since a larger number of passages do not specify that condemnation is eternal we should not allow the small cluster of passages on eternal torment to determine our view.<sup>14</sup>

Hick further argues that a doctrinal system which offers only two outcomes — death or life — is ethically intolerable. And alongside these 'judgment' passages we must set the 'universalist' passages which are present particularly in Paul (Rom. 5:18; 11:32; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:4). The two sets of statements are not incompatible because they are different *types* of statement. Paul's are 'detached' theological statements about the purpose of God. The warnings of judgment in Jesus' teaching are 'existential' statements, designed

not to propound a theological theory but to goad his hearers to repentance.

Hick adds that since God has made us for himself, with a 'bias' towards him, we do not need to think of God working *against* human freedom in bringing men to the response of love towards himself. We should think of him like a psychiatrist helping the patient — both before death and beyond — to remove the blockages which prevent our free response to his love.

Hick, like other universalists, has a fine emphasis on God's love, and of the sorrow it must bring to God — and ought to bring to us — if all men were not in the end to respond to that love. Nevertheless serious criticisms must be made.

(a) Whilst the universalist is right to assert that God's will is to draw all men to himself, he underplays man's freedom — which is itself a gift of God's love — to resist him. Love does not force itself on its object, even though resistance causes the utmost anguish. Hick invites us to picture God as a divine psychiatrist guiding men to their true goal, gradually winning their *free* response of love. But what of the man who refuses to go to the psychiatrist? Hick underplays man's 'bias' *against* God.

(b) A scheme which presupposes a period of purgation after death, during which a person moves from rebellion or imperfect response towards a complete openness to God, suffers from total lack of New Testament evidence. The idea of remedial punishment or of the steady transformation of persons after death is a guess which contradicts the general thrust of Scripture.<sup>15</sup> There is something suspect about the argument (which is often put forward) that 'the general thrust of Scripture', with its revelation of God's love, requires us to postulate a period of purgation, or a 'second chance', after death. For if it is Jesus himself in whom God's love is supremely displayed, must we not regard with utter seriousness the fact that *his* teaching about God's love (as recorded in the gospels) apparently included nothing about opportunities for repentance and transformation after death?

(c) Hick's argument that warnings of eternal condemnation are a different type of statement from the statements about God's universal plan of salvation fails to cope with the case of a man who refuses to heed the warnings. What is the use, or the morality, of an existential threat which turns out to have no corresponding reality?

(d) New Testament texts which speak in universalist terms ought to be taken more seriously than traditional Christianity has usually taken them, and Hick is right to remind us of them. But they cannot justifiably be used as an argument for universal salvation. Nearly all of them occur alongside statements about the need for faith in order to experience salvation. In Colossians 1:19-23, for example (a passage not in Hick's list), God's purpose of 'reconciling to himself all things' is said to include the Gentiles at Colossae, '*provided that you continue in the faith. . .*'. It seems better, therefore, to interpret these 'universalist' texts not as assertions of what *will* happen but as declarations that God's saving *purpose* has universal scope, even though some people may refuse to enter into that purpose.<sup>16</sup>

It may be objected to my argument, with its emphasis on human free will as the corollary of divine love, that it fails to take seriously enough the sovereign grace of God. Or it may

be argued that we ought to express the gospel's warnings of hell and its promise of universal salvation without attempting to resolve the paradox. E. Schweizer, for example, writes:

It is just as impossible to state that some will be punished in hell someday as it is to state the opposite — that eventually all will be saved. Both anticipate something which is God's prerogative.<sup>17</sup>

These are important perspectives, and it needs to be emphasized — over against the modern climate — that the sovereign grace of God, rather than human choice and decision, is at the heart of the gospel. Nevertheless, when the theological tide is flowing strongly towards a universalism which underplays the New Testament's stress on the eternal consequences of what men do with the gospel, it is important to put up barriers against the tide.

### Divine judgment and non-Christian faiths

The questioning of the traditional doctrine of judgment and the shift towards universalism have increased significantly as Christians have tried to take seriously the status of those whose cultures and beliefs are shaped by one or other of the religions of the world. Will not a 'good Muslim' meet with God's favour at the judgment? Would it not be unfair of God to condemn people just because they happen to have grown up in a non-Christian culture? I shall deal only briefly with this question, which featured prominently in *Themelios* 9.2 (January 1984).<sup>18</sup>

It seems to me that certain common ways of handling this problem must be rejected because they are lacking in evidence or faulty in method. It is unsatisfactory to solve it by adopting universalism, for reasons summarized above. It is unsatisfactory to argue from specific texts such as John 1:9 ('the true light that enlightens every man') or Acts 10:34-35 ('... in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him') that sincere pagans can be in a right relationship to God apart from knowledge of Christ. For that is not what those passages are saying, as Wright, for example, shows.<sup>19</sup> It is unconvincing to deflect the force of 'exclusivist' passages such as Acts 4:12 ('there is salvation in no one else') and John 14:6 ('no one comes to the Father, but by me') by arguing that the New Testament writers knew nothing of our multi-religious world and were making a confession of gratitude born out of personal experience, not an absolute claim intended in an absolute sense.<sup>20</sup> For such statements in the New Testament are not *merely* statements about experience. And the early church *did* arise in a multi-faith context, in which rival claims had to be carefully considered.

If we are to handle our question on the basis of the biblical revelation we must accept that there may be no tidy solution, no final answer before the final judgment itself. But we may make some progress if we take as our starting point Paul's rather paradoxical use of the motif of divine impartiality in Romans.<sup>21</sup> Paul invokes God's impartiality in connection with the final judgment (Rom. 2:11). For Jews and Gentiles alike the outcome will be tribulation for those who do evil, glory for those who do good (Rom. 2:7-10). God shows no favouritism to those who possess the law. Performance of the law's demands, not mere possession of it, is what matters. And if a Gentile who does not 'possess' the law sometimes does what the law requires, this shows that Gentiles *as*

*Gentiles* can stand as equals beside Jews at the final judgment (Rom. 2:12-16).<sup>22</sup> If a Jew can stand before God at the judgment and be accepted, so can a Gentile, despite his lack of Jewish privileges.

But Paul goes on to apply the principle of impartiality in a different way. Whereas Romans 2:7-16 seem to offer the possibility that Gentiles, like Jews, may do God's will and find salvation, Romans 3:9 declares that 'all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin' (cf. vv. 19f.). Yet just as there is 'no distinction' between Jew and Gentile with regard to sin, so justification is available 'for all who believe' (vv. 22-24). This familiar Pauline emphasis, that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are under judgment and all may be justified through faith, is fundamental to our understanding of the gospel. The right reaction to 'the problem of judgment' is to be eager to preach the gospel of justification.

Yet that is not the whole story, since Paul's use of the impartiality motif in Romans 3 should not obscure his use of it in Romans 2. Admittedly, in Romans 2:12-16 he does not say (as he is sometimes imagined to say) that those who have not heard the gospel will be saved if they live a good life according to their own lights. But he does insist that Jews, who have received special revelation from God, have no special advantage over Gentiles, who do not have that special revelation, when the day of judgment comes. God's impartiality will ensure that. Now of course Paul believed that Jews could be saved on the basis of the work of Christ, but without necessarily having heard the Christian gospel. Abraham for him is the supreme example of one who was justified through faith (Rom. 4), and like the rest of the New Testament (cf. Mt. 8:11; Heb. 11) Paul's letters reflect the assumption that Israel's men and women of faith will share in God's final kingdom.

It seems to follow from the principle of God's impartiality that there is a door open similarly — if only slightly and tentatively — for people whose lives are lived outside the range of Christian influence and gospel preaching. If some find acceptance at the judgment, it will not be because they have been 'good Hindus' or 'good Muslims' any more than Christians are saved by being 'good Christians'. It will be because, like Abraham, they have been people of faith, looking (as Heb. 11 has it) for that which is not yet seen. They are not satisfied with what they have but hunger to know the God whose character and will is not entirely unknown to them (Rom. 1:19f.; 2:14f.). They have been open to the grace of God and to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, even though they have not necessarily named the name of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

Is divine judgment a problem? Certainly it is no comfortable doctrine. But I have argued that to underplay it is to diminish human significance and to dismantle the gospel. Universalism, for all its attractiveness, is painfully short of biblical foundation. And it is possible to take seriously the problem of those who have not properly heard the gospel without surrendering *either* the fairness of God *or* the urgency of worldwide evangelization. And when we reach questions we cannot answer, we may trust 'the Judge of all the earth' to 'do right' (Gn. 18:25).

<sup>1</sup> *On Being the Church in the World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> 'A Dialogue about Human Misery', lines 70f., in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 439.

<sup>3</sup> *An Atheist's Values* (London: OUP, 1964), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. L. Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (London: Tyndale, 1960); my *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), ch. 7, and works cited there.

<sup>5</sup> *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *The Christian Hope* (London: Longmans, 1954), pp. 48f.

<sup>7</sup> See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1974), pp. 124f.

<sup>8</sup> See E. Käsemann's emphasis on this, "'The Righteousness of God" in Paul', *New Testament Questions of Today* (ET London: SCM, 1969), pp. 170f.

<sup>9</sup> See my *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, pp. 133-136.

<sup>10</sup> *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1983), pp. 180-185 (quotations from pp. 183, 184).

<sup>11</sup> *The Goodness of God* (London: IVP, 1974), pp. 27-41. For a detailed defence of conditional immortality see E. W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Fallbrook, California: Verdict Publications, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> The issue was thoroughly handled in *Themelios* 4.2 (January 1979), so I will not discuss it at length here. See also *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, pp. 124-133.

<sup>13</sup> *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 2nd edn 1977), p. 342.

<sup>14</sup> *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), pp. 242-261, is

the central part of Hick's argument for universalism.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W. Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life* (London: Epworth, 2nd edn 1970), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> See further N. T. Wright, 'Towards a Biblical View of Universalism', *Themelios* 4.2 (January 1979), pp. 54-58.

<sup>17</sup> *The Good News according to Mark* (ET London: SPCK, 1971), p. 199. See the whole paragraph.

<sup>18</sup> See especially C. J. H. Wright, 'The Christian and other religions: the biblical evidence', *Themelios* 9.2, pp. 4-15. See also now C. J. H. Wright, 'Inter Faith Dialogue', *Anvil* 1 (1984), pp. 231-258: this is a critique of *Towards a Theology of Inter-Faith Dialogue*, a report by the Church of England's Board of Mission and Unity (London: CIO, 1984). I wrote earlier on this topic in 'The Life of the World and Future Judgement', *Churchman* 97 (1983), pp. 31-40.

<sup>19</sup> *Themelios* 9.2, pp. 12-14.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. K. Stendahl, 'Notes for Three Bible Studies', in G. H. Anderson & T. F. Stransky (eds.), *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), pp. 11-15; P. Starkey, 'Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism', *International Review of Mission* 71 (1982), pp. 66-77; and my criticism of her in *Churchman* 97, pp. 35f.

<sup>21</sup> On this theme see J. M. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), esp. pp. 137-170.

<sup>22</sup> I accept Bassler's arguments against the view that Rom. 2:14 refers explicitly to *Christian* Gentiles (*Divine Impartiality*, pp. 141-145).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. L. Newbigin, 'Christ and the World of Religions', *Churchman* 97 (1983), pp. 27-29.

# The concept of relationship as a key to the comparative understanding of Christianity and Islam

Ida Glaser

Religion concerns the interaction of finite and infinite: the relationship of parties that are essentially other. Sometimes the otherness may be stressed, and sometimes the relationship. The balance between the two is, I would suggest, a determinant of a system.

Where the idea of otherness is submerged, there are two possible outcomes. We may find an infinite that is almost human, or that can be apprehended by human reason, as in the ancient Greek or modern liberal systems. Alternatively, we may find that humanity is absorbed into the infinite, as in Hinduism or Buddhism.

Where the idea of relationship is weak, we may find that the infinite recedes so far from man as to be inaccessible and unknowable. It is towards this end of the scale that orthodox Islam lies<sup>1</sup> – although by no means at its extreme. The Christian faith, on the other hand, lies somewhere in the middle. It is clear that God and man are other, but it also offers close relationship between them. The ideas of otherness and relationship are not considered mutually exclusive; and in this I suppose it to be unique. It is therefore a helpful basis on which to build a comparative understanding of other religions.

In this paper we shall seek to compare Christianity and Islam. Beginning with the nature of God himself, we shall see that the notion of relationship runs through a number of major areas of Christian doctrine, and that a weakening of this notion will produce doctrines that come close to an Islamic understanding. We shall go on to see how these differing ideas of relationship make some key areas of the Christian faith unacceptable to Muslims. The discussion will include a number of statements that appear rather simplistic and in need of qualification. This is necessary for brevity, and for clarity in comparison of emphases in the two systems.

## The nature of God

The Christian doctrine of the nature of God is that of the Trinity: three persons in one God from eternity. It is also that of a God with certain characteristics, notably holiness and love.

All this implies relationship. For what do we mean by a person? The great characteristic of a person is that he relates to others. He communicates, chooses, acts in relationship to other persons. To say that God is three persons is to imply that those persons relate. It is relationship that unites persons, so at least one way of understanding the unity of the three is as a unity of relationship.

What is holiness? It implies otherness, but it also implies morality. The Trinity is set apart from us by its moral purity. Yet I would ask how we can understand moral purity apart from relationship. Can one be good in a vacuum? I doubt it! Goodness is a quality, as is faithfulness, but we can only see it when it is applied in the context of some sort of relationship, just as we can only be aware of light when it enters our eyes. To say that a person is good without reference to anything but himself may be true, but his goodness can only be seen — and hence known — with reference to its results relative to others.

What about love? Love makes no sense without an object, for love has essentially to do with relationship. God is love from eternity not because he might potentially love, but because he does in fact love. There is love — and therefore relationship — between the persons of the Trinity.

So at the centre of the Christian idea of God we see the relationship of persons that are other. God is three — he is three persons that exist over against each other. But he is also one, for the three are united in a relationship of holiness and love.

If we remove the concept of relationship, what have we left? If we have the one, we cannot have the three. We can have the holiness, but not the love, and the moral dimension of holiness must be changed. This moves us towards the Islamic idea of God. There is no plurality in him: his essential characteristic is that of unity. He is not plural in himself, and he is to be associated with no other. He is not, therefore, in relationship in eternity, for there is no other with whom he might relate.

The characteristics of holiness and love are not absent from the Islamic concept of God. Both are predicated of him: but I would suggest that the words do not have the same content as they do in a Christian context. Thus God's holiness sets him apart, and makes him the judge, but it does not tie him down to morality. In fact, nothing can tie him down. He is free to will as he wishes, and powerful to carry out his will. He can therefore be tied down by no law, not even one that he has made.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, his moral character is secondary. It is subject to his will.

God's love may cause him to have mercy on his creatures, even to the extent of communicating with them; but it is a love that condescends in beneficence rather than a love that shares in relationship. God may love us if he so chooses, but his relationship with the objects of his love is very different from that envisaged in the Christian faith.

In Islam, God is certainly other than man. He is high and exalted, and powerful to do and will as he pleases. These are his fundamental characteristics, which can supercede both justice and love as the Christian would understand them. Both will and power are predicated of God himself, without necessary reference to anyone else, for God in eternity is not in relationship. The relationship characteristics of justice and love are secondary.

In Christianity, on the other hand, love and justice are primary. God is all-powerful, and can will as he pleases, but his character of faithfulness ensures that he does not act apart from his love and justice. His power and will are in that sense limited. He is in relationship from eternity, and the relationship characteristics come first.

### The nature of man

The fundamental difference between the relating-in-eternity God of Christianity and the purely-one God of Islam is reflected in other areas of religious understanding. Most importantly it is reflected in understandings of the nature of man.

In the Christian scheme we see man as a creature over against God and other than him. Yet he is made 'in the image of God': there is a likeness between creature and creator. This likeness includes the quality of personhood: the essential characteristic of God that implies the ability to relate is present in man also.

This does not only mean that man can relate with his fellow men. The biblical picture indicates that the likeness between creature and creator is sufficient to make possible between them the mutual love, pain and communication of relationship. Man can relate with God himself: indeed, it is for this relationship that he is made. He is to relate with his maker in mutual love as a son relates with his father.

The Islamic picture is different. Man is, as in Christianity, a spiritual as well as a physical being.<sup>3</sup> He is able, and responsible, to receive God's revelation and to act with reference to him. But the idea that he is made in the image of God is absent. Man cannot be said to be 'like God' — the very suggestion is considered blasphemous, since there is none like him.<sup>4</sup> The absence of likeness immediately removes the dimension of mutuality in any relationship between man and God.

In particular, man cannot affect God, since this would detract from his power and self-sufficiency. As the Hadith says,

'O my servants, you can neither do Me any harm nor can you do Me any good.'

Not the combined races of men and Jinn can in any way conspire to augment or reduce the power of God.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian would largely agree with this, but the Muslim would push the idea to the conclusion that man cannot affect God IN ANY WAY. He cannot cause him grief or joy. Thus, although God has deigned to communicate with his creatures, and even to love them, the relationship cannot be mutual since man's response can make no difference to God. We read in the Qur'an:

'I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.

I seek no livelihood from them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me.

Lo! Allah! He it is that giveth livelihood, the Lord of unbreakable might.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship becomes more like that between potentate and subject than that between father and son, since man is made primarily for worship rather than relationship. There is relationship between God and man, but it is not that of mutual love pictured in the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Khurshid Ahmad describes 'realization of man's relation to Allah' in terms of the saying of Muhammed, 'You should worship Allah as if you are seeing him, for he sees you though you do not see him.' He tells us:

It means that all action should be performed with Allah in your vision. If that is not possible you must realize that Allah is seeing you. This realization is regarded as the basis of true devotion. It signifies that man has identified his will with the Will of God and has brought it, at least as far as he is concerned, completely in tune with the Divine Will. . . . Man comes nearest to God by excelling in this process of identification of man's will with the Divine Will.<sup>8</sup>

Closeness between man and God is described in terms of knowledge rather than likeness, and the ultimate in relationship is willing submission rather than interaction.

#### **The nature of sin**

The fundamental question concerning the nature of sin is not so much what constitutes sin as what sin does, for the latter determines the former.

In the Christian scheme, the dreadful thing about sin is that it breaks relationship between God and man. This has an effect on the sinner — it cuts him off from God's presence, makes him deaf to God's communication, and puts him under judgment. However, since the relationship is mutual, sin also affects God. It offends him and grieves him so that he longs to restore the sinner, although his character of holiness means that he will not overlook the sin.

In Islam, on the other hand, we have seen that God cannot be grieved or offended by anything that man does. Sin can only affect man and not God. In our relationship picture, since there was no mutual relationship in the first place there is no relationship to be broken. After sin, man is still the subject of the potentate as he was before. The difference is that sin makes him liable to punishment in the hereafter, and to all the consequences of not following the path that God has declared to be best in the present. When he sins, man may injure himself and his people, but not God.<sup>9</sup>

This difference in the effects of sin is reflected in what constitutes sin in the two systems. In Islam, sin is essentially a violation of the law, of God-given instructions concerning religious duties and moral and social obligations. In Christianity, on the other hand, sin is often described in relationship terms: grieving the Holy Spirit, spurning the Son, being at enmity with the Heavenly Father. In Romans 6, for example, Paul speaks of men being in sin and under the dominion of sin: fundamentally, sin is a state of separation from God rather than a series of violations of his regulations.

Yet there is some overlap here: the Bible also describes sin as transgression of the law or wrongdoing.<sup>10</sup> Does this imply that the biblical and Qur'anic understandings of sin are closer than I have suggested? I think not, for the biblical and Qur'anic understandings of law are widely separated.

The differences can again be understood in terms of relationship. In the biblical system even the Old Testament law is given in the context of relationship. It is significant that Abraham comes before Moses: the law is given to those who are already God's covenant people. The regulations are given in the context of covenant relationship and are expressive of it. The New Testament has the same emphasis: it is as God's chosen ones, those who are in relationship with him, that we are to act in accordance with his will. We are to be perfect because we are children of the Heavenly Father.<sup>11</sup> That is why disobedience spoils relationship: it defies the one with whom we ought to relate.

In Islam, the order is reversed. It is not that we become God's people, and therefore act in a particular way, but that we act in a particular way and are therefore God's people. The practices, the obedience to regulations, are of primary importance. It is by keeping these that the believer pleases God and draws near to him, and that he receives the best in this life and in the next. That is why violation of the commandments deprives him of the good that comes through acting according to what God has said.

Sin for the Christian, then, is anything that offends God and therefore breaks relationship with him, while sin for the Muslim is a wandering from God's laws that results in judgment.

These fundamental differences in understanding of God, man and sin result in many mutual misunderstandings. In particular, Christian doctrines about salvation and about the Lord Jesus Christ may appear unnecessary, nonsensical and even blasphemous to the Muslim. It is to these doctrines that we now turn.

#### **The doctrine of salvation**

In his book *Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Devotions* (Kegan Paul International, 1983, pp. 28-29), Muhamed Abul Quasem recognizes that, in the Christian faith, 'salvation is primarily deliverance from sin'. 'Such deliverance', he says of Christianity, 'is possible here and now. When it is made actual a new spiritual life is achieved through which the interrupted communion or fellowship with God is restored.' Such is not the case with Islam:

Islamic teaching is that sin stands between man and God no doubt, but he is not dead in it; so no new birth of the spirit is needed; he must, however, repent. Man is not by nature in a position from which he needs to be redeemed. He commits sin from which he must repent; his repentance is not salvation, but only a means to it; salvation is safety from punishment from sin in the life after death (p. 29).

Quasem is clear here on the differences between the Christian and Islamic ideas of salvation. The Christian seeks salvation from the state of sin itself, and the Muslim from punishment for sin. This, of course, reflects the ideas of sin discussed above. The Christian wants to be saved from the state of sin because that state is one of being cut off from relationship with God. The Muslim does not see the need for such a salvation, since he does not believe that he has fallen out of relationship. Indeed, he does not believe this relationship to be possible. He sees man as he is — fallen, out of relationship with God — and assumes that to be his natural state. He may therefore seek to approach closer to God, and to know more of him, but he will not seek the restoration of a relationship which he does not believe ever existed. Salvation for him, if we can rightly use the word in this context, can imply only an escape from judgment and an entry into paradise.

Since the nature of salvation in the two systems is different, the means of attaining it is also different. The Christian believes that God's primary holiness requires judgment on all sin, and that something must be done to remake the broken relationship, hence the need for the work of Jesus Christ. The Muslim, however, would reject both of these ideas. Firstly, since there is no broken relationship, nothing need be done to restore it. Secondly, since God's holiness is subject to his

will, there is no necessity that sin should be judged. The Qur'anic idea of justice differs from that in the Bible:

The idea of transference of the punishment of sins or vicarious punishment is not accepted by the Qur'an. But it must be noticed that, according to the Qur'an, the punishment is not the necessary and unavoidable consequence of sin. If there is repentance then any sin, however grave it may be, can be forgiven by the mercy of God. God is not bound to punish. Contrary to Augustinian understanding of justice, Divine justice in the Qur'an means that God does not punish anyone without reason, or beyond that which is necessary. Justice also means that no good of man is left by God unrecognized and unrewarded. It does not mean that God is not allowed to leave any sin unpunished.<sup>12</sup>

God, then, is free to forgive, to show mercy, on whom he wills. Nothing has been broken by sin so nothing needs to be mended. Nothing needs to be done in expiation for sin: sacrifice is unnecessary.

What, then, is necessary for salvation — escape from judgment — in Islam? From God, the Muslim needs not an act of salvation but an act of revelation. He needs guidance as to what he should do, and mercy to help him to do it. The guidance is available in the Qur'an and in the Hadith — the words revealed to the Prophet Muhammed and the records of his life. The believer's response is to be twofold. He is to believe in God and in his messenger and message, and he is to act as the message directs. This will lead him both to the best in this life, and to paradise after death.

For the Muslim, therefore, the Christian means to salvation are quite simply unnecessary. God can forgive sin without sacrifice or mediator,<sup>13</sup> and no restoration is required. At the same time Christianity is seen as lacking in what is really needed for salvation — the details of actions that will please God. The Bible, and particularly the New Testament, is singularly lacking in regulations about both religious and social duties, since it primarily records the history of relationship between God and man, and seeks to lead man back into that relationship. The Muslim seeks law that will lead him into salvation; biblical law makes sense only in the context of relationship — of salvation already achieved.

### The doctrine of Jesus Christ

For the Muslim, there is simply no need for anyone to be sent from God in other than a prophetic capacity.<sup>14</sup> Since guidance and warning are the ultimate needs of man, there can be no higher calling than that of bringing him the needed message. Since the biblical idea of the work of Christ is unnecessary within the Islamic framework, Christian doctrines about his person are also superfluous.

More than that, the Christian doctrine of Jesus is rooted in the idea of relationship between God and man. The essential work of Christ is to restore relationship, but there is more to it than that. The very idea that God can appear in human form implies a certain likeness, and therefore a possible relationship, between God and man. In Jesus, God himself comes among his creatures and relates with them. Not only does he speak to them, guide them and judge them: he also touches them, weeps with them, rejoices with them and eats with them. If there is no likeness between God and man, this cannot be. The very thought of it is blasphemy.

When we consider the nature of Jesus himself, we find a problem not unlike that of the Trinity: we have a plurality in unity. There, three persons in one God; here, two natures in

one person. Again, a possible key is relationship. If God and man can relate, we can conceive of both being perfectly present in Christ. If not, if their essential otherness dominates, incarnation is nonsense, and the suggestion that a man might be God becomes unthinkable blasphemy. Even the notion of Jesus as Son of God does not help. For one not used to thinking in terms of relationship, this would imply a physical sonship — an idea as abhorrent to Christians as to Muslims.

### Conclusion

It is therefore not surprising if Muslims vehemently deny biblical ideas about Jesus and the salvation that he brings. At best these ideas are considered unnecessary and nonsensical; at worst, blasphemous. We need to understand that such reactions may not be the results of ignorance of Christian doctrines, nor of hostility towards them, nor even of spiritual blindness. They are the expected consequences of belief in a system that is fundamentally different from Christianity in its understanding of God and of his creatures. If Muslims and Christians are to understand each other, these differences must be recognized.

<sup>1</sup> This paper deals with mainstream, Sunni Islam, although much of it is also relevant to other forms of Islam. An exception is Sufism, the esoteric, mystical branch of Islam. Sufis often use vocabulary that implies relationship ideas similar to those in Christianity, or even a pantheistic view. It is worth noting here that even such vocabulary must be interpreted within the Muslim understanding of the overwhelming transcendence of God. Thus the famous statement of Hallaj, 'I am God', implies, according to some interpreters, not the absorption of man into God but the negation of man in relationship to the one God who is all. See for example Rumi, Discourse 11.

<sup>2</sup> Commenting on Surah 87, The Most High, v. 7: 'We shall teach you to read and you shall not forget save what Allah wills', Sayyid Qutb writes. 'Every time the Qur'an states a definite promise or a constant law, it follows it with a statement implying that the Divine will is free of all limitations and restrictions, even those based on a promise from Allah or a law of His. For His will is absolute beyond any promise or law.' (*In the shade of the Qur'an*, vol. 30, p. 140, MWH, London.)

<sup>3</sup> See Surah 15, Al-Hijr, vv. 26ff.

<sup>4</sup> See Surah 117, The Unity, but note again the divergence with Sufism where the tradition that 'God made Adam in his image' is often quoted, although not necessarily with the same content as in Christianity.

<sup>5</sup> Sahih Muslim, Al-Birr (ch. 1115 in Abdul Hamid Siddiqi's translation, Kitab Bhavan, India, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Surah 51, The Winnowing Winds, vv. 56-58, translation from M. M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Mentor).

<sup>7</sup> Again we note the expressions of mutual love between God and man in Sufism. It is of interest, however, that the picture of father and son is seldom used to illustrate this love. Even when the analogy is that of lover and beloved, God is usually the beloved who is sought rather than the lover who seeks.

<sup>8</sup> In *Islam — its meaning and message* (Islamic Council of Europe, 1975), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> See the description of the sin of Adam, Surah 7, The Heights, v. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *E.g.* Jas. 2:9-10; 1 Jn. 3:4; 5:17; *etc.*

<sup>11</sup> *E.g.* Mt. 5:48; Col. 3:12ff.; *etc.*

<sup>12</sup> Muzammil Husain Siddiqi, 'The Doctrine of redemption: a critical study', in K. Ahmad and Z. I. Ansari (eds.), *Islamic Perspectives* (Islamic Foundation, 1979), pp. 99-100.

<sup>13</sup> There are traditions about the intercession of Muhammed as a means to entering paradise, and some look to 'Ali or to other saints as intercessors. However, there is still no idea of one person bearing another's sin.

<sup>14</sup> The prophetic capacity here includes personal example, as is recorded in the case of Muhammed in the Hadith.

# Book reviews

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A. Graeme Auld, **Joshua, Judges and Ruth** (The Daily Study Bible, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press/Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). viii + 282 pp., £3.50.

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Many readers will by now be familiar with this series of commentaries on the Old Testament. Its aims, as described by the general editor, J. C. L. Gibson, are twofold: to introduce some of the more important results of Old Testament scholarship and, secondly, with all due caution, to draw out the contemporary relevance of the text for the lay Christian reader. The model, and hence the format, is based on the hugely successful series of the late William Barclay.

Clearly, Graeme Auld's contribution must be judged by the aims which his editor has set him. As regards the first, he is generally able to indicate how these books are presented in moderate contemporary academic circles. Without becoming technical, he introduces the Deuteronomic history, relegates certain sections to later redactions, and so on. Curiously, however, this seems to have little effect on the exposition. Although Auld occasionally makes clear that he does not take a high view of the historical value of certain parts of the narrative, he nevertheless discusses them for the most part at face value; we might have hoped that, if he did decide to treat them under the fashionable category of 'story', this would have had a greater exegetical pay-off.

The second aim of the series — that of Christian application — is not so successfully handled, and certainly is not given the central prominence which the editor and the publisher's blurb lead us to expect. Indeed, most of Auld's modern examples are drawn from the Arab-Israeli problems in the Middle East. Though these are sometimes pointed and thought-provoking, I suspect that most church-goers will be disappointed to find so little guidance in terms of personal application. Of course, evangelicals must be aware that theirs is not the only framework within which the Old Testament may be regarded as part of Christian Scripture, but even taking the most catholic approach I still found that only little effort had been made under this rubric. All will be sympathetic to Auld in that Joshua, Judges and Ruth are by no means the easiest books to tackle in such a series. The need for expert guidance is therefore all the more necessary; it is difficult not to conclude that an important opportunity has here been lost.

H. G. M. Williamson, University of Cambridge.

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D. J. A. Clines, **The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story** (JSOTS 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 260 pp., £19.50 hb, £8.95 pb.

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This brilliant book is the most illuminating study of Esther I have read (and, indeed, expect ever to read). An exceptional piece of work.

The book's thesis is presented in four sections. The first section is a superb literary analysis of the story of Esther which focuses on plot and narrative development. Although Clines is at pains to do justice to the story as a whole in its familiar Hebrew, *i.e.* Masoretic, form, his analysis nonetheless shows how in terms of the internal concerns of the story it is most likely that the story originally ended at the end of chapter 8, and that chapters 9 and 10 are subsequent additions that developed the story in new directions.

The next two sections are technical studies of textual history and development which, though exemplary in content and presentation, are perhaps too technical for most non-specialists. The author argues, first, that one ancient Greek version of Esther, the Septuagint A text, whose significance has generally been discounted by scholars, is, in

its own original form, evidence for a similar story line and ending to Esther such as he has argued for the Masoretic text; and, secondly, that such differences as exist between the A text and the Masoretic text point to the A text being an older version of the story than the Masoretic, and so of prime importance.

In a final, non-technical, section Clines outlines a possible development for the various versions of the story of Esther, with a particularly valuable discussion (pp. 151ff.) of its various theological dimensions.

Apart from arguments over details, one difficulty that some readers may have is the question of the historical reliability of the contents of Esther. Although the author does not address the question as such, his argument clearly implies minimal historicity of content; and, indeed, that prepossession with historical questions is likely to be largely beside the point. But if it is possible that evangelical scholars have sometimes made too sweeping claims about the correlation between the truth and value of a narrative and the historicity of its content, then this book may lead to a fresh understanding of a little-read and little-appreciated portion of Scripture.

R. W. L. Moberly, University of Durham.

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John F. A. Sawyer, **Isaiah** vol. I (The Daily Study Bible, gen. ed. John C. L. Gibson; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew's Press/Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 267 pp., £3.50.

George A. F. Knight, **Servant Theology: Isaiah 40 - 55** (International Theological Commentary, gen. eds. George A. F. Knight & Fredrick Carlson Holmgren; Edinburgh: Handsel Press/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 204 pp., £4.75.

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Although they do not deal with the same chapters of Isaiah, these two commentaries invite comparison because they both set out to offer an exegesis of the text as Scripture with a relevance to the life of the Christian and the church. Both aim to be of practical use to the non-specialist.

Sawyer's commentary illustrates the approach to the Old Testament proposed by B. S. Childs in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Understanding how the final text developed from the original words of the prophet Isaiah is therefore a feature of the commentary; importance is attached to what later generations thought of, and did with, the words which they received. Since this is seen to be more important than discerning separate major authors within the Isaianic literature, it is not surprising that the two volumes on Isaiah in this series are divided at the end of chapter 32 (the approximate half-way mark) rather than at the end of chapter 39.

It is also not surprising that the reader is introduced to additions and editorial changes, not as encumbrances to be pruned away to reveal the original prophetic word, but as features worthy of the exegete's attention, showing how subsequent generations of the community of faith reacted to that word. *E.g.* an original word of judgment can be transformed into an expression of hope and, in a new context, can eventually function as a messianic prophecy (pp. 97-98). The last stage of such a development is no less significant than the original words, for any addition or adaptation 'reminds us that Isaiah is consistently represented as a prophet whose words, visions and ideals transcend his eighth-century environment' (p. 79).

The method naturally imports into the task of exegesis all the subjectivity and pitfalls of the critical approaches on which it builds. For example, the contrast between the denunciation of Judah in chapter 1 and the prophecies of salvation in chapter 37 and elsewhere are highlighted because they 'enable us to distinguish between how things really were in 701 BC and how they came to be interpreted later' (p. 7). Sawyer follows those who believe that 701 saw Jerusalem defeated and humiliated, the 'later' story of the city's miraculous deliverance having no basis in history. Quite apart from the fact that the contrasting prophecies need not point to that conclusion in the first place, this view naturally leads to a distinctive exegesis of those passages which speak in one breath of the humiliation of Jerusalem

and the discomfiture of the Assyrians (e.g. 10:1-19; 29:1-8). Since such passages have to be seen as in part reflecting the historical truth of 701, and in part being the product of the later tradition, Sawyer can only take them seriously from a *theological* point of view (cf pp. 112-114, 238-240); 'the theme is not historical but theological' (p. 238).

Readers with conservative convictions will obviously not be happy with such treatments. Also this reviewer cannot help suspecting that many non-specialists, whether conservative or not, will simply be baffled by an approach which treats original Isaianic material, and supposedly later interpretations which turn that material completely on its head, with equal respect. The approach raises major questions which do not yet seem to have been satisfactorily faced.

George A. F. Knight's commentary on Isaiah 40-55 (a completely revised edition of a work which first appeared in 1965) is of an altogether different type, partly because the chapters dealt with differ in character from chapters 1-39, but chiefly because Knight's approach contrasts sharply with Sawyer's.

For Knight these sixteen chapters are a coherent and closely-argued thesis. The prophet's method 'is to make constant reference backward and forward as he proceeds, and bit by bit he binds his book together in one sustained and developing argument' (p. 24). The end product is nothing less than a theological thesis 'as decisive and significant for an understanding of Christian faith as are the sixteen chapters of Paul's Epistle to the Romans' (p. 1). Yet, Knight observes, these chapters from the Old Testament have received relatively little theological interest, most scholars stopping at the level of critical issues. Knight sets out to redress the balance, producing what he describes as 'a theological and exegetical commentary' (p. 3). The reader will find only fleeting reference to such critical matters as the various *Gattungen* which have been discerned in Isaiah 40-55, not because Knight regards these issues as unimportant, but because (as he says) they are adequately dealt with in the many existing 'Introductions' to Deutero-Isaiah. A bibliography of some seventy books and articles is provided, and Knight evidently hopes that his readers will take their studies further than the reading of one or two commentaries. Indeed, some of the works listed are on fairly technical topics, and not all are English. (Sawyer, on the other hand, lists only five books for further reading, three being commentaries and two being general works on Old Testament prophecy.)

Knight assumes that DI (the abbreviation for Deutero-Isaiah which he uses throughout) was a prophet of 'the second half of the 540s BC' (p. 27). It is good to see a few reasons for this belief set out in the brief Introduction, since many commentators now take this date to be self-evident and in need of no justification. The historical setting is important for Knight's understanding of these chapters; he believes that DI affirms 'that the living Word of the living God began to be united - though still in a proleptic sense - with the very flesh of God's son Israel at that specific period in which DI himself was participating' (p. 5).

This brings us to Knight's view of the servant in DI. He does not spend time in a search for the servant's identity: 'The "scissors-and-paste" method of handling the text . . . compelled scholars to make such a search. But if we take the so-called "Servant Poems" in context, then DI himself gives us his own dogmatic answer to our question' (p. 166). Knight's close-knit exegesis leads him to conclude that the portrait of the servant 'comprises two elements, that of a very human Israel, and that of "God in Israel"' (p. 171). In his exegesis of chapter 53 he says: ' . . . The extraordinary inference can be made that it was "God in Israel" who became the Suffering Servant that Israel was elected to be, for Israel could not fulfill her calling alone' (p. 172). For Knight, while these chapters are important for our understanding of Christ's ministry and the New Testament interpretation of it, they are not *about* Christ: 'For it is Israel that we read of in DI's text, and not the person of Christ' (p. 4).

Knight is well aware that some of his interpretations 'may appear to the informed reader to be biased or even tendentious', but he expresses the hope that the reader will at least be stimulated to ask himself 'Is that what the prophet really meant to say?' (p. 5). The reviewer found himself posing that question frequently, and in some cases (e.g. the 'extraordinary inference' referred to above) is still not sure of the answer. But that is no bad thing; this is a mind-stretching and rewarding commentary for those with the time and inclination to consider its arguments closely.

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**Robert Martin-Achard and S. Paul Re'emi, God's People in Crisis: Amos and Lamentations** (International Theological Commentary; Edinburgh: Handsel Press/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 134 pp., £4.50.

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The international character of this series is to the fore in the authorship of this volume: a French-speaking scholar from Switzerland writes on Amos, and a Hebrew-Christian from Israel expounds Lamentations. Familiarity with commentaries and articles in French, German and Hebrew makes for breadth of outlook and freshness of presentation, and both authors keep very much in mind the worldwide church as they expound the text. In keeping with the purpose of the series to move beyond the critical-historical approach to the Bible and offer a *theological* interpretation of the Hebrew text, there are no footnotes. This could be a serious disadvantage to a student who needed to verify information, though for the overview of these books in relation to the rest of Scripture it makes for readability.

A brief introduction of eight pages (out of a total of seventy on Amos), having set the scene, ends with a comment on the 'atheistic' reading of Amos by people like Ernst Bloch, who miss the fundamental purpose of the prophet. Amos sought to confront his contemporaries with the true God: he 'saw' what had to date escaped his contemporaries; he was enabled 'to read off the reality in the way God understands it'. Martin-Achard refuses to ride on a socio-political bandwagon, and insists on the timeless divine Word that meets us in our own situations and suddenly becomes relevant. Though he mentions editorial additions belonging possibly to later times, he seems to regard Amos himself as the author of most of the book, and with regard to the oracles against the nations (chs. 1 and 2), he considers Amos responsible also for their arrangement. In general he takes a conservative view of 'corrections' to the text, and prefers the Hebrew readings.

Professor Martin-Achard draws attention to literary forms used by Amos, pointing out their significance for his message. In particular he finds helpful the suggestion of J. de Waard that there is chiastic structure in 5:1-17. But his central theme is Israel's standing before God in the light of God's judgment. Is Israel's rejection by God final? Though Amos is extraordinarily severe on the northern kingdom, the book that bears his name ends on a note of hope. By using the interpretation given by James in Acts 15:15ff. Martin-Achard is able to end his commentary on a missionary note: 'The prophet, announcer of the end of Israel, thus becomes witness to the unity of believers of every lineage in the worship of the only God and of his Christ.'

Paul Re'emi brings to his appreciation of Lamentations acute awareness of the recent anguish of the Jewish people of Europe, as well as their long history of suffering, but above all he sees that the destruction of Jerusalem was a crisis of faith. 'It shattered a whole system of religious belief' (p. 93); 'Israel is now on the verge of the ultimate horror' (p. 98); ' . . . that ultimate horror, known absolutely to Jesus on the cross . . . of being abandoned by God himself'. The reason, of course, was Israel's sin, 'the sign that she does not agree with God [!] whose whole being and purpose is to pour himself out in love and compassion for the ordinary people of this world' (p. 111). This author grapples with the internal dynamic of the book, enters into its deep gloom, but shows how, by the grace of God, sterile complaint leads ultimately to new hope.

For someone who is looking for help in appreciating the message of Amos and Lamentations without going into too much detail, this volume would be ideal, except, perhaps, its price, which is a little high considering its size.

**Joyce Baldwin**, Bristol.

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**John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (The Forms of Old Testament Literature XX; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 120 pp., \$14.95.**

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This series seeks to provide a form-critical study rather than a philological, historical or theological commentary. This volume fulfils its aim well, although one might question whether the fruit of form-criticism justifies a complete series. Since the method tries to determine literary genre, setting and intention on the basis of a work's structure by differentiating the typical from the unique, this volume could be justified as a separate entity since it deals with the main OT example of the apocalyptic genre. One wonders how separate volumes on 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings will be justified if the typical rather than the specific is of primary interest.

The first portion of the book introduces apocalyptic as a genre and compares and contrasts subgenres such as 'other-worldly journeys' (e.g. 2 Enoch and the Testament of Abraham) and histories (e.g. Daniel and Jubilees). Each of these has its own subgenres and forms of revelation. One found relevant here is *ex eventu* prophecy, 'the prediction of events which have already taken place' (p. 11), in other words a pseudo-prophecy. This form is found in Ancient Near Eastern literature, but the arguments for its existence in the Bible must be carefully weighed, not least in the light of one's position regarding inspiration. Is this the only acceptable type of prophecy because there cannot be any predictive prophecy in a strictly secular-scientific world, or does one have a view of God such that predictive prophecy is possible, but still consider that this particular genre was chosen from among several possible prophetic genres? Collins appears to adopt the latter approach.

The body of the book looks firstly at Daniel as a whole. It is dated in the Maccabean period and arises from the union of originally independent tales and visions. Individual units are then studied. Each smaller section has an outline and a discussion of its genre, setting and intention, with an occasional bibliography. The book closes with a useful sixteen-page glossary defining form-critical terms and giving a brief discussion of the various genres referred to in the course of the book, this often being a *verbatim* repetition of statements made in the book's body.

The bibliographies located in various places in the book include works as recent as 1984 and are quite comprehensive. Critical works are the rule, though conservative material is not completely lacking. Readers of this journal will miss reference to the articles in *Themelios* 2.2 (1977) and 3.2 (1978) and those in D. J. Wiseman (ed.), *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (Tyndale, 1965). The use of the bibliographies is a bit difficult. Reference is usually made to works listed at the start of major sections or the end of a sub-section, but this is not consistent.

Collins' book will be of interest to *Themelios* readers as presenting the current state of study in this particular area. It accepts without discussion such things as pseudonymity and *ex eventu* prophecy, ideas which need much more careful study by evangelicals (see J. Baldwin in *Themelios* 4.1, 1979), as does the ultimate goal and use of the form-critical endeavour itself. Does classification suffice, or does one still need a fully-fledged exegetical and theological discussion in order to see the riches of a book?

**David W. Baker**, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.

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**Bernard W. Anderson, ed., *Creation in the Old Testament, Issues in Religion and Theology* 6 (London: SPCK/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). 178 pp., £3.50.**

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In a foreword the series' aim is stated as 'collecting and reproducing key studies' and giving a 'balanced overview of the problems and various approaches to them'. This goal is approached by a new introductory essay by the editor, followed by nine further essays in

English, all having been published during the past ninety years. Four of these have been abridged, with one being updated. They explore this important area from a number of approaches including comparative religion, linguistics, form criticism, theology and ethics.

Anderson's introduction looks at 'Mythopoetic and Theological Dimensions of the Creation Faith', seeing the chronological development of the motif based on a critical reconstruction of the relative dating of the biblical texts. This development is from the creation of a people during the pre-monarchical period, through 'order', based on the election of David and Zion, the dependence of his creatures on God found in Psalm 104, the idea of 'creation as origination' in the Priestly source, and the new creation in Deutero-Isaiah. The discussions are useful, though some of their force is diminished if one espouses a different view of the relative dates of biblical passages.

H. Gunkel's comparative study of the biblical creation account with Babylonian myth broke new ground when it appeared in 1895. He posits a series of mythic features in Genesis 1 and elsewhere which have Babylonian roots. While it is important not to read Genesis as arising from a cultural vacuum, many of Gunkel's proposals have been abandoned or modified, though his contributions still merit study.

In another epochal essay, G. von Rad asks about the theological relationship between creation on the one hand and election and salvation on the other. He sees the former as only secondary and supportive of the latter. This controversial position has been debated strongly by a number of scholars, including three in this volume. H. H. Schmid, looking not only at the biblical evidence but also at ancient Near Eastern sources, convincingly argues that 'the doctrine of creation . . . is not a peripheral theme of biblical theology but is plainly the fundamental theme'. C. Westermann in his contribution also stresses the importance of creation and the creator for all of theology. G. M. Landes, in studying 'creation and liberation', comes down strongly in support of the link between these two doctrines, with salvation and creation both being necessary for an adequate understanding of either.

W. Eichrodt looks at the first Hebrew word in Genesis, 'in the beginning'. He compares the validity of its translation as a relative (RSV margin, NEB) to an absolute (AV, RSV, NIV). He argues for the latter on linguistic and theological grounds. D. J. McCarthy compares the Ugaritic motif of the conflict between chaos and order with similar biblical motifs. He sees the Ugaritic documents as 'merely sources for means to describe what is important . . . the proper ordering of the world of man'. H.-J. Hermisson observes the place of creation in wisdom literature. He looks in particular at Psalm 104 and Job 38-41, among other passages. In the final essay on 'creation and ecology', Anderson usefully explores the relationship between human and non-human creation. He looks at the place of violence in creation, deriving from man rather than God, and sees the current and future responsibility of man toward the rest of creation based on the Noahic covenant and the new creation.

In sum, this collection of essays serves as a very useful entry into the study of this key area of theology. While differences in presuppositions and procedures will preclude blanket acceptance by most readers of this review of all of the views expounded, the questions raised should continue to spark further research. One hopes that this will include work by conservative scholars, whose absence is marked in this collection. One suggestion which would increase the value of this collection for all its readers is that Scripture and subject indices be included in any future edition.

**David W. Baker**, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.

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**R. Mohrlang, Matthew and Paul. *A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (SNTS Monograph 48; Cambridge: CUP, 1984). x + 242 pp., £18.00/\$34.50.**

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To give a concise outline of the ethical perspective of any one New Testament author is no easy task; and to make an adequate comparison of two is more than doubly difficult. Mohrlang,

however, has tackled the problems with considerable skill and insight and has given us a book (originally a 1979 Oxford DPhil Thesis) which is eminently sane and balanced. Many comparisons of Matthew and Paul have fallen into the trap of reading Matthew through Paul's eyes or else setting up exaggerated contrasts between law (Matthew) and grace (Paul). But Mohrlang follows a steady course between the two extremes, pointing out the similarities between the two writers while allowing their different perspectives and emphases to emerge.

As the title suggests, the book is concerned more with fundamental ethical principles than the details of particular instructions. It consists of five chapters dealing with the topics of 'Law', 'Reward and Punishment', 'Relationship to Christ and the Role of Grace', 'Love' and 'Inner Forces'. In each case Matthew's and Paul's perspectives are described separately before comparisons are drawn. On the whole the descriptions successfully bring out each writer's particular concerns: Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as teacher and interpreter of the law and on the threat of judgment as an ethical sanction; in contrast, Paul's ethical basis in the death and resurrection of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the priority of grace. Mohrlang often underlines the considerable differences between the two writers and occasionally his conclusions lapse into generalized and over-schematized contrasts; but he generally recognizes the important elements common to both writers even where they are expressed in quite different terminology. In the final resort he concludes that 'the emphases of the two are complementary' (p. 132) and suggests seven factors which go towards explaining their differences: not least is the fact that Matthew is writing a gospel and therefore working within the limits of the gospel tradition, although using it to give instruction to his community.

It is unfortunate that the first chapter, on 'Law', is the least satisfactory section of the book (despite its length – 40 pages of text and 314 footnotes!). This is partly due to the mere fact that it is discussed first, since for both Matthew and Paul the place of the law can only be properly understood in the context of Christology and salvation-history. Although Mohrlang touches on Christological themes later in the book (ch. 3), he fails to bring out the essential context of God's dealings with Israel. For Matthew, Jesus' attitude to the law is only understandable if he is the fulfiller of Israel's role ('the King of the Jews', 'the one greater than the temple') who calls Israel to repentance and to enter the Kingdom of heaven (another theme curiously underplayed by Mohrlang). For Paul, statements such as 'faith establishes the law' (Rom. 3:31) or 'Christ is the end of the law' (Rom. 10:4) are deeply embedded in his discussion of Abraham, faith and Israel's destiny and to abstract them from this context is to misconstrue their meaning. Mohrlang's lack of perspective here ultimately accounts for his unconvincing conclusion that Matthew held side by side two essentially contradictory views of the law and that Paul's thought is based on a hidden distinction between ritual and moral aspects of the law. As a result he finds the two writers very difficult to harmonise: 'at bottom, their understandings of the role of the law in the church are radically divergent' (p. 42). Of course such questions are extremely complex and contested; but there are several occasions when one feels that Mohrlang's argument is hindered by the volume of secondary literature cited and his reluctance to engage in what Barrett has called 'the bayonet-fighting of detailed exegesis'.

Nevertheless, the book contains a number of valuable insights and makes a very helpful contribution to the (often neglected) study of New Testament ethics. The coverage of secondary literature is impressive (with a few gaps since 1979) although the use of endnotes and their frequent citation of authors by name only (requiring a third 'finger' in the bibliography) is tiresome. This is certainly not a book for the newcomer to this territory, but to seasoned visitors it is a very stimulating guide.

**John Barclay**, University of Glasgow.

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F. F. Bruce, **The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians** (NICNT; Exeter: Paternoster, 1985/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 442 pp., £16.85.

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Professor Bruce wrote on Colossians in this same series in 1957; it was then his first attempt at a Pauline commentary, and he returns to the epistle more than twenty-five years later as one who has not only taught and written widely on Christian origins in general, and on Paul in particular, but also as one who has produced commentaries (some major) on most of the Pauline epistles. With this experience he modestly says 'I hope I [now] understand better what is involved in the interpretation of Colossians' (p. xi).

The new Colossians commentary may fairly be described as a revision of the older one (similarities being obvious in many sections), but the revised version is appreciably longer and crisper, and so incorporates much more detail. The Introduction affords a considerably more nuanced discussion of the Colossian heresy, which Bruce elucidates in terms of analogies drawn primarily from Jewish Merkābāh speculation concerning heavenly ascents, thus abandoning as unnecessary hypotheses both the neo-Pythagorean background suggested by Schweizer and the pagan Gnostic background proposed by Käsemann and Schlier for something like the type of Jewish incipient gnosticism described by Scholem. The errorists were advocating an ascetic spiritual regimen in order that they might experience visionary ascent into the heavens – and the danger was that their exalted experiences of angelic worship of God might not only puff them up, but also lead to undue veneration of the powers themselves and eclipse the soteriological uniqueness of Christ. On the question of authorship Bruce still regards Colossians (and Ephesians) as Pauline (an easier option in his view than Ephesian dependence on Colossians or vice versa).

In the commentary proper the hymnic structure of Colossians 1:15-20 is now fully recognized (Bruce essentially follows the strophic arrangement of P. Benoit), and modern writers on this central passage are certainly engaged, even if their views and arguments are not fully reviewed (e.g. as when Bruce insists that 1:15-17 do not merely affirm that the personified wisdom of the Old Testament books is really Christ, but that the Christ who lived on earth, 'whom God made our wisdom', is the one who was before all creation, 'the cosmic Christ'. Here he is taking Dunn's thesis to task, but the fact only emerges in the second part of a footnote.) Bruce is fairly dismissive (probably rightly) of the worth of attempts to detail the tradition history of the passage (thus, e.g., rejecting that in a pre-Pauline stage the word 'body' in v. 18 denoted the *kosmos*, not the church), and (again rightly), has a keen eye (in this passage and throughout) for what the proposed 'parallels' do *not* say (e.g. in Judaism, where the Messiah is a pre-existent being he is this ideally (not really) and has no *cosmic* role as such; similarly Wisdom may be said to be intimately involved in creation, but creation is never for Wisdom as for Christ (v. 16), etc.); so the distinctiveness of Paul's assertions is seen in relatively clear relief. Similar strengths are shown throughout the commentary – though the reviewer felt that 2:13-19 deserved even fuller treatment.

The commentary on Philemon occupies a mere thirty-four pages, of which fourteen deal with introductory matters (Authorship; Date and Provenance (Rome in the 'sixties); Paul and Onesimus; and The Significance of the Letter (including a critical review of Knox's suggestion that Philemon reached the canon because the Onesimus of the letter is the same Onesimus who later became bishop of Ephesus)). On Bruce's view Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon were all sent on the same occasion with Tychicus and Onesimus, and so it is particularly appropriate that the commentary on this short but undeservedly ignored letter should accompany Colossians and Ephesians rather than being attached to Philippians (as earlier in the series).

The last 188 pages are devoted to Ephesians, which Bruce has elsewhere labelled 'the Quintessence of Paulinism'. A brief introduction sets Ephesians in relation to other Pauline epistles and their teaching, and questions the contention of Käsemann *et al* that we have here a post-Pauline development of early Catholic character. Instead Bruce suggests that the relationships with Colossians, and shifts of emphasis from that letter, are best explained if Paul was exploring the role of Christ as Lord of the cosmos (Colossians) now

from the perspective of the church. He thinks that Paul sent this 'encyclical' with Tychicus to the churches of the Lycus valley (and possibly other Asian churches), and that the letter may have received its textually dubious name as a result of the church at Ephesus retaining a copy.

The commentary itself may not be marked by extreme novelty — and there are plenty of details one might wish to question (e.g. the treatment of 'head' as 'origin' (following Bedale) at pp. 274, 389, etc.; *patria* as 'fatherhood' at p. 323, and so on) — but once again a comprehensive awareness of modern scholarship is evinced (less detailed than in Colossians) and shrewdly summarized.

An evangelical student or pastor deciding on a commentary on Colossians would find Bruce a worthy candidate for his choice; on Ephesians there is simply no competitor, at this level, worth mentioning. As a single volume on the three epistles together it is of outstanding value.

Max Turner, London Bible College.

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Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), xviii + 174 pp., no price stated.

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This recent addition to the *New Century Bible Commentaries* has been written by a scholar who has made up his own mind about various questions raised by the text and who has, in the process, reformulated some agreed views. It is based on the Revised Standard Version and does not take for granted that readers will know Greek, which is always transliterated when quoted. In the introduction, Professor Grayston states as his aim the involvement of the reader in the effort of trying to understand these New Testament writings in their appropriate cultural situation.

Like C. H. Dodd, Grayston denies common authorship of 1 John and the Fourth Gospel. In addition, he does not believe that 1, 2 and 3 John were all written by the same person. In fact, he sees evidence for more than a single author behind 1 John, which he considers to have been composed by a group of people with interpolations by a single writer addressing his readers with pastoral care. In particular, the first four verses are said to read like a piece of committee drafting clumsily done. It has long been recognized that 1 John is not in the form normally adopted for writing letters in the ancient world, though 1 John 5:13 ('I write this to you who believe . . .') seems to suggest that it was indeed a letter. In spite of this verse, Grayston regards 1 John as neither epistle nor treatise but as an enchiridion or instruction booklet for applying the tradition in disturbing circumstances.

Professor Grayston argues against the widely held view that the false teachers attacked in these documents were docetic gnostics tarred with the same brush as Cerinthus. He believes that the dissidents held far different opinions from those of that arch-heretic and that they must be allowed to have their own independent existence. In particular, Diotrefes (3 John 9) cannot be regarded as a prototype monarchical bishop or as the leader of an unsuccessful bishops' revolt against the central authority of John the Elder. Such a view can be maintained, according to Professor Grayston, only if it can be shown that the Johannine Epistles were written after the Fourth Gospel. Unlike most scholars, he does not believe that this can be done.

The chief value of this present commentary is that it represents a fresh approach to these New Testament writings which forces us to re-examine commonly accepted opinions. The evidence is set out in such a way as to enable the intelligent reader (with or without a knowledge of Greek) to make up his own mind, as the author himself has done, on the many puzzling questions that are raised by the text.

William G. Morrice, St John's College, Durham.

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E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 444 pp., £15.00.

Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress/London: SPCK, 1984), 112 pp., £3.95.

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One of my heroes is Hans Andersen's little boy who dared to say that the emperor had no clothes. Here are books by two men whose scholarly output has been largely devoted to following his example.

E. P. Sanders first came to notice by challenging the basic tenets of form criticism in *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*. Then, in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, he unmasked the caricature of first-century Judaism with which most New Testament scholars had operated. Now in *Jesus and Judaism* he continues the same crusade against those who label first-century Jews, and Pharisees in particular, as heartless legalists searching for salvation by accumulated merit. But his ruthless iconoclasm reaches much further, and there will be few readers who do not find that he wants to undermine some of their favourite assumptions. After reading this book one might well wonder if there is *anything* which can be taken for granted. It might well have been subtitled, to use his own phrase (p. 157), 'commonly held opinions which should be queried'!

Not that Sanders' aim is purely destructive. Far from it. He wants to establish his understanding of Jesus firmly on 'the facts' (a much-used phrase), and it is to that end that he strips away all that he cannot accept as 'fact'. In particular, he is sceptical of the tendency among recent interpreters of Jesus to base their reconstruction on elements of his teaching which are claimed to pass the tests of authenticity. His scepticism is more far-reaching than theirs, in that the sayings tradition as a whole is for him at best a subsidiary and uncertain source of historical information. It is rather in certain aspects of the narrative tradition that he expects to find firm fact. It was not as a *teacher* that Jesus was executed, and it was not out of a new teaching that Christianity grew.

So what was Jesus' intention? How did he relate to first-century Judaism? Why did he have to die? What was it about him that gave rise to a new religious movement?

Starting from Jesus' demonstration in the temple, Sanders argues that his aim was the *restoration of Israel* (echoes of *The Aims of Jesus* by Ben Meyer, Sanders' colleague). His aim was not militaristic, but neither was it a call to repentance (here Jesus differed from John the Baptist); central was the vision of a new temple for the new age, while the selection of twelve disciples symbolized the eschatological community. He was the prophet of the coming 'kingdom'. (Even here, however, Sanders debunks most of the *sayings* about the kingdom of God, and looks to Jesus' *acts* for his historical foundation.) His miracles authenticated his message; here Sanders toys appreciatively with Morton Smith's *Jesus the Magician* hypothesis, but finally opts for 'prophet' as a better model. Jesus expected the new kingdom to include *sinners*. Here Sanders' provocative article in *JSNNT* 19 is taken further, aiming to overturn most New Testament scholars' assumptions, especially those of Jeremias; what distinguished Jesus from other Jews, Sanders believes, is not that he wanted sinners to repent (so did the Pharisees), but on the contrary that he accepted the *wicked* (not just the common people) without requiring them to repent and make restitution as Jewish law and piety required. A 'kingdom of God' containing unrepentant sinners was as shocking to good Jews as it is to us, and Sanders is not reluctant to shock! 'I realize that my proposal will not be a popular one', he says (p. 208). Its theological implications are surely serious, but Sanders sticks rigidly to his brief as historian rather than theologian, and leaves others to pick up the pieces. Indeed, he has 'been engaged for some years in the effort to free history and exegesis from the control of theology' (p. 333).

Jesus was, then, an 'eschatological charismatic', not unique as such within Judaism. So why was he persecuted and killed? Sanders argues at length that it was not the law that was at issue — Jesus did not break or teach against the law in any fundamental way. There was 'no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees' (p. 291). Rather it was his attacks on the temple, his self-appointed role as spokesman for God, and his daring inclusion of unrepentant sinners in his 'kingdom' which caused the priests (not the Pharisees) to dispose of him.

In depicting Jesus finally as 'a visionary who was mistaken about the immediately future course of events' (p. 327), Sanders consciously dissociates himself from those who reconstruct Jesus to fit their own prior religious commitment. His own reconstruction, he claims, is uninfluenced by, and does not correspond to, his own religious beliefs. Whether this proudly asserted 'freedom from theology' is so self-evident a virtue as Sanders imagines may be open to debate. But in any case this is surely no 'objective' historian's view, for the conclusion that 'Jesus accepted "covenantal nomism"' (p. 336), while it may not be tailored to Sanders' *religious* presuppositions, does fit remarkably conveniently into his previously declared *scholarly* position!

Such a trenchant, wide-ranging and clear-sighted attack on most people's cherished ideas cannot be expected to meet with instant acceptance. It is a book we shall all have to notice, as was the case with *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. But my impression, for what it is worth, is that Sanders' iconoclastic zeal has this time carried him too far, and that few will be prepared to adopt his position as a whole. He will blame this, no doubt, on their prior commitment to the traditional Jesus which prevents them, as it did the emperor's courtiers, from seeing the true state of affairs. But I wonder whether Sanders' X-ray vision may not in fact have failed to register some very important theological clothes.

Jacob Neusner has been as bold a questioner of traditional stereotypes in Jewish studies as Sanders is in New Testament scholarship, and a far more prolific one. But this latest offering provides no new shocks. It consists largely of material already published elsewhere (in quite different contexts), brought together to provide an introduction to first-century Judaism for the student beginning a course on Christian origins. Neusner writes as a believing Jew who wants Jews and Christians to learn to appreciate one another's positions, as two parallel developments from the common religion of what we call the Old Testament; each represents, he claims, a rebirth and renewal after disaster (the cross for Christians, the destruction of the temple for Jews).

The first chapter ('The World of Jesus' People') constitutes in itself a brief and attractive study of first-century Jewish history, with proper attention to its political, social and economic aspects. This chapter alone gets near to fulfilling the aims of the book, and is suitably angled to the beginning student.

None of the other four chapters is so satisfying. Three of them survey significant currents in Jewish religion: 'Sage, Priest and Messiah'; 'The Pharisees'; and a survey of Jewish reactions to the disaster of AD 70, focusing on the bold reinterpretation preached by Yohanan ben Zakkai. The fourth, a longer study of the Rabbinic traditions about Hillel, is an interesting source of material for the student of Jewish tradition, but its scale and approach are out of keeping with the rest of the book. Here we see Neusner the radical form critic, whose historical scepticism outranks even that of Bultmann; the study of Hillel is proposed as a comparative model for study of the 'historical Jesus', and Neusner believes that in neither case is the search for 'historical fact' either appropriate or necessary.

Altogether a disappointing little book, which begins well but fails to come together; it reads like what it is, a collection of unconnected pieces intended for different types of readership. The beginning student for whom it is designed is better served elsewhere.

**Dick France**, London Bible College.

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**E. Earle Ellis, *The World of St. John: the Gospel and the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Exeter: Paternoster). 96 pp., £4.40.**

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This short but penetrating study is substantially a reprint of a book first published in 1965 by Lutterworth and Abingdon Presses. The author, who is research professor of New Testament Literature at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, not only upholds common authorship of the fourth gospel and the three letters but argues for the identity of John the evangelist, apostle and elder. He seems to retract partially from this view by saying that the Gospel has been given its present form by another hand.

Professor Ellis recognizes that the greatest factor in the background to these writings is Palestinian Judaism. Though John did not use the other evangelists, they all went to the same 'Sunday School'. They used the same primitive Christian documents, perhaps sermons of Jesus in Jewish synagogues. Or perhaps John simply wrote to give the mind of Jesus rather than his exact words, since history and interpretation are woven together to produce a dynamic presentation of Jesus' mission and person.

A simple exposition of John's gospel is followed by an equally simple account of the ever-widening spiral in which the teaching of first John develops. The second letter stresses the reality of the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus Christ. Yet only those who speak the truth in love can help fellow Christians led astray by false teachings. The third letter is one of appreciation to Gaius for hospitality to missionaries in the past and a request for similar help to the bearer of the letter.

But what is the meaning of these writings for today? Here, Professor Ellis is particularly helpful. John's relevance lies in the fact that he spoke to life-problems that have changed very little. He witnessed to a unique person and to a unique event. He offers assurance to people living today in an uncertain age and gives guidance concerning Christian unity and its expression. Even though the world of St John is far removed from that in which we live today, the message he proclaimed is the abiding message of Jesus Christ.

**William G. Morrice**, St John's College, Durham.

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**William G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984). 173 pp., £4.95 pb.**

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Dr Morrice, who is New Testament tutor and librarian in St John's College, Durham, wrote his Ph.D. thesis on 'Joy in the New Testament' at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of A. M. Hunter. One part of the thesis was the basis of an earlier publication by the author: *We Joy in God* (London: SPCK, 1977), and the present work is based on other material in the thesis. In his earlier book Dr Morrice gave a biblical theology of the concept of joy in the New Testament, showing how it was based on various aspects of the Christian doctrine of God and salvation and how it found expression in song, in living for Christ and as joy in the midst of suffering.

This new book tackles the theme from two other angles. First, it offers a detailed study of the vocabulary of joy in the New Testament, examining in turn eleven word-groups which are used to express the idea. Altogether the author traces some 362 uses of the vocabulary of joy in the New Testament, a fact which illustrates that this is indeed a key concept whose importance might be overlooked by anybody who was not aware of the full range of the vocabulary used. Each of the word-groups is examined against its background in Greek usage, and there are helpful statistical tables of usage and expositions of key texts.

Second, Dr Morrice looks at the figure of Jesus himself as 'The Man of Joy', and then at the major New Testament writers to see how the concept of joy is expressed by each of them. Thus the distinctiveness of each of the New Testament contributions to an understanding of the nature of joy is brought out.

By this comprehensive treatment Dr Morrice has given a model of the use of the various types of approach to biblical theology — lexicography, the study of the distinctive teaching of the different authors, and systematic summary. The whole is presented in a clear and simple style, and here Dr Morrice shows himself to have imbibed well the spirit of his teacher. The treatment is throughout based on good scholarship and adopts a conservative approach to the text. The book does not contain any surprises for the reader; its value lies rather in the way in which the author has brought together the New Testament teaching in such a comprehensive and easy manner. Students might perhaps have appreciated some fuller documentation and discussion in the footnotes. And it is a pity that Dr Morrice divided his material between two books; one complete treatment would have been preferable.

Dr Morrice's book, then, is not an earth-shaking, original

contribution to biblical scholarship. But it is an excellent guide to a vital aspect of Christian living, and preachers will bless him for this useful tool for exposition.

I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen.

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W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (London: SPCK, 1984). xi + 419 pp., £25.

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On Professor Davies's sixty-fifth birthday, some five years ago, he was presented with a *Festschrift* of the usual kind – a work of distinction, as befitted the scholar whom the editors and contributors desired to honour. To mark his seventieth birthday, some of his friends have arranged for the publication in one volume of sixteen of his *opera minora*, which originally appeared in various journals, dictionaries and *Festschriften*. Their decision to celebrate the occasion in this way must be highly applauded.

Students of a younger generation can scarcely appreciate the impact which W. D. Davies made in 1948 with his first edition of *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. Pauline studies have never been the same since then. After decades of endeavour to find the sources of Paul's distinctive thought in mystery religions or other areas of Hellenistic culture, it was refreshing to have so thorough a demonstration of Paul's fundamental Jewishness. True, Paul underwent a complete reorientation on the Damascus road, but the man who underwent this reorientation had been well and truly founded in rabbinical Judaism.

W.D.'s work from then on may fairly be viewed as a development of one aspect or another of *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. This is so even with *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* and *The Gospel and the Land*; it is self-evidently true of most of the articles collected in the present volume. (It is gratifying, by the way, to find evidence that the author has been given an opportunity of bringing these up to date, especially in bibliographical data.) The articles are classified under three headings: Judaica, Pauline studies, New Testament miscellanea.

Of the five studies coming under the first heading, that entitled 'Reflections on Tradition: The 'Abot Revisited' is of special interest. W.D. tells how, on first looking into *Pirqê 'Abot*, he felt 'like some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken'; and the reviewer well remembers the new world that opened up to him when he for his part read that tractate for the first time. The tractate is indispensable for the serious New Testament student, but W.D. underlines its importance for the understanding of Judaism – its power to explode some of the most confidently cherished fallacies about Jewish faith and life (the antithesis between prophet and priest, for example). In some of the sayings W.D. tentatively detects a reply to Christian positions. For example, the sayings of Halafta ben Dosa, 'If ten men sit together and occupy themselves in the law, the Shekinah rests among them', is often quoted as a parallel to Matthew 18:20. But what if it is a reaction against Matthew 18:20? And when Joshua ben Levi asserted, 'you find no free man except the one who occupies himself in the study of the Law', is this a rebuttal of Paul's argument that subjection to the law is a form of slavery from which Christ has set his people free (Gal. 5:1)?

Similarly, the essay 'Reflections on the Spirit in the Mekilta' (second-century midrash on Exodus) considers the possibility that *Mekilta* tries to meet the challenge which Christianity presented to the close relation of the Spirit of God to the land of Israel.

Under the heading 'Pauline studies' there are two essays – 'Paul and the People of Israel' (delivered as the presidential address in 1976 to the Society for New Testament Studies) and 'Paul and the Gentiles' – which must be regarded as required reading for commentators on Romans 9-11. The discussion in these three chapters is found to lead to the paradox that 'in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek and yet a continued place for the Jewish people as such'. But this paradox 'has its basis in the stubborn stuff of history itself'. Paul's admonition to Gentile

Christians in Romans 11:13-24 was conspicuously ignored by them in the course of history. (There is a suggestion on pp. 160f. that an allusion to sacred olive of Athens may be implicit in the parable of the olive tree – that the wild olive may stand for the whole world of pagan culture which, for all its glory, was spiritually fruitless. Even if Paul's readers would be aware of the Athenian association, it is doubtful if it would have occurred to Paul himself.)

Other important essays in this collection deal with law in first-century Judaism, Paul and the law, law in the New Testament; with the territorial dimension of Judaism, conscience and its use in the New Testament, the moral teaching of the early church. There is a full-length review of Hans Dieter Betz's *Hermeneia* commentary on Galatians; W.D. is highly appreciative of Betz's work (and very properly so), but makes some acute criticisms of omissions in his treatment of the letter. What these amount to is simply that Betz has expounded Paul against the background of his own tradition: that perspective is undoubtedly valid, but could be enriched by being associated with other perspectives. In this review, as in much of his other writing, W.D. is very sensitive to Israel's abiding role in the divine purpose.

The reviewer has read most of these essays in their original settings, but their collection within the covers of one volume makes him rejoice afresh as one who finds great spoil.

F. F. Bruce, University of Manchester.

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R. J. Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 329pp., \$16.50, cloth.

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This book is a published thesis, which gained its author a PhD at Oxford in 1982. It comes complete with a commendation from Professor Maurice Wiles of that university, who praises the author's boldness of vision and readiness to check the assertions he makes against the known facts, whilst reserving judgment as to how far his argument will succeed in convincing other scholars of his thesis.

Of the author's boldness of vision there can be no doubt. He is a conceptual thinker in the mould of Harnack, whose general opinions he follows at many points, though seldom slavishly. He attempts to redate Marcion, putting his death somewhat later (c. 150-154) than the traditional date (c. 144), and claiming that he was actively founding churches by 117 at the latest. The evidence which he offers in support of this hypothesis is necessarily fragmentary and inconclusive, consisting as it does mainly of obscure references to heretical teachers in the writings of Polycarp (d. 156), and to the Latin prologues of the Pauline epistles, which he believes to have been of Marcionite inspiration.

His reconstruction of Marcion's background and the history of the early church follows the line taken by Walter Bauer, Harnack and others, and must therefore be regarded as highly suspect. He not infrequently acknowledges the existence of material which could provide contrary evidence to his thesis, and sometimes even admits the weakness of his own case, only to go on developing his hypotheses on the assumption that these highly questionable positions are solid fact. The most difficult of these is his assumption that there was a decline of Pauline theology in the late first century, and that Marcion spearheaded an attempt to recover it for the church. This thesis is certainly familiar to readers of Harnack, but students of early Christianity will not swallow it with such ease. In particular, it is impossible to accept that Luke's gospel (as we have it) and the pastoral epistles were intentionally anti-Marcionite compositions.

The book contains a long discussion of the meaning of apostleship, and claims that Marcion was devoted to Paul to the extent of condemning the twelve apostles as perverters of the gospel. His early dating of Marcion's activity makes a confron-

tation between Marcion and John at Ephesus seem highly likely, and one or two rather obscure references are cited in support of this improbable event. Here much depends on dating, and the author unfortunately puts the New Testament books as late as he possibly can, in order to support his contention that Marcion's 'heresy' was a perfectly legitimate development of Christian teaching, at least in its earlier stages.

There is a chapter on the relationship between Marcion and Gnosticism which is broadly sound, though again subject to unproved hypotheses, like the assertion that Apelles was a disciple of Marcion, which forms a major part of his argument. There is then a treatment of Marcionite dualism, 'Paulinism' and even Judaism; contrary to popular opinion, Marcion is here presented as being more Jewish in outlook, and more sympathetic to Judaism than any of his major adversaries. He believed that Jesus Christ had come from a God who was superior to the God of Moses, but that did not in itself mean that he rejected the Old Testament as a revelation *for Jews*. Christ had come to supplant the law by fulfilling it, not by repudiating it completely.

In all this there is much food for thought, though the reader must be warned to keep a sharp eye open for the distinction between fact and hypothesis, which is often blurred in the text. Perhaps the main problem with a book of this kind is that it starts from the wrong end, given the available evidence. It tries to reconstruct the teachings of a man who is known to us only through his opponents, a procedure which is hazardous at the best of times and liable to produce any amount of distortion. It might have been more useful to concentrate on what his opponents said and why. There is a chapter on this at the end, but it is not very satisfactory, relying as it does on the highly improbable assumption that Ephesians and Colossians were post-Pauline anti-Marcionite tracts, and that the unknown letter to the Laodiceans was in fact written by Marcion!

**Gerald Bray**, Oak Hill College, London.

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**E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). 177 pp., \$6.95.

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Mind or spirit? This question has occupied a large place in the Christian Church from apostolic times (e.g. 1 Cor. 14) to our own day. Very often formal study and serious scholarship are regarded as unspiritual. This is in part because many heresies have entered under the name of scholarship. Yet the great advances of the faith have also been brought about by scholarship. The author demonstrates how one such advance, the Reformation, had solid roots in scholarship.

Treating the general subject of scholarship as a Christian calling, the figures of Jerome, Augustine, Abelard and Aquinas are discussed. Each is a model for a different view of the integration between so-called secular knowledge and Christian truth. Harbison finds three of the Renaissance scholars he studied (Petrarch, Valla, and Pico) unable to attain a clear calling as Christian scholars. Here is one of the themes repeated in this book: scholarship done by Christians, but not integrated with and related to their faith, is not Christian scholarship. Harbison reserves his praise for those who accomplished that: Colet, Luther and Calvin. Indeed, the book ends with a plea for this integration to take place today.

As a tract for our time, this book should be read by every theological student and teacher. It is a call to action, the hard work required by those who would teach and pastor God's people. But it is more than a historical survey. Harbison makes plain that scholars often have mixed motives. 'There is always an irreducible egotism in most scholarship' (p. 80). He also condemns trivial research and immature publication as problems in any century. The student who wishes to become a scholar would profit from the application of sound scholarly principles found in this book.

Finally, the portraits of Calvin and especially of Luther as scholars are particularly worthwhile and should be read by all who study theology. The enduring value of this book is seen by the issuing of this new edition nearly 20 years after it first appeared. Its message is still fresh, its call for devotion to Christ still needed.

**James Stamoelis.**

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**Reginald C. Fuller, *Alexander Geddes 1737-1802: A Pioneer of Biblical Criticism*** (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1984; *Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship* 3), 176 pp., 8 pp. of illustrations, £15.95/\$25.95 hb, £6.95/\$12.95 pb.

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An eighteenth-century Scottish Roman Catholic priest seems an unlikely pioneer of Old Testament criticism, but Alexander Geddes was influenced by the French Enlightenment and German biblical criticism rather than by Scotland or the Roman Catholic Church. He was, in fact, one of the few British biblical scholars at that time who took any serious notice of German scholarship, and earned the reward of being himself taken seriously by the great German critics of the time. But Dr Fuller has not convinced me that Geddes' contribution to the development of biblical criticism was a particularly important one. Certainly he was outspokenly in favour of the principle on which biblical criticism is founded: that the biblical documents are to be studied like any other ancient literature. But his historical criticism seems to have consisted largely in a rationalistic approach to the miraculous and an application of the notion of myth which rather lacked the sophistication of its contemporary German advocates. In his literary criticism of the Pentateuch, he helped to develop the Fragment Hypothesis in opposition to the beginnings of the Documentary Hypothesis, but, insofar as Fuller reports his arguments, they seem again to be rationalistic historical, rather than literary, ones.

Geddes is an illustration of the extent to which eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism contributed to the origins of biblical criticism ('reason, reason only, is the ultimate and only sure motive of credibility, the only solid pillar of faith'), but whereas in Germany this was integrated into a real concern with its theological consequences, Geddes seems frustratingly silent about the grounds for what Fuller calls his 'professed allegiance to the person of his Saviour', let alone his allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. His rationalistic interpretation of Old Testament history was supposed to remove obstacles to belief, but he failed to explain how his principles could also establish belief.

Geddes' rather peculiar position in the world of biblical scholarship probably gave him an occasional advantage of perspective. Thus he quite correctly observed how the Reformation in its later stages inhibited the development of textual criticism, while fully recognizing also the Counter-Reformation's apologetic misuse of textual criticism (pp. 32-33). I was intrigued by his notion of a small circle of enlightened biblical scholars whose principles are the same regardless of denomination. He would have been at home in the modern world of essentially non-confessional biblical scholarship.

Dr Fuller, himself a Roman Catholic biblical scholar, wrote this work as his Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, but it has waited fifteen years to be published, apparently owing to the economics of publishing. The Almond Press has not only overcome these difficulties, but has produced the work in an attractive form. It is based on solid research and makes an interesting contribution to the history of biblical scholarship.

**Richard Bauckham**, University of Manchester.

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**David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*** (London: Hutchinson/Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1984), 276 pp., £13.95.

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Methodism (or more often John Wesley), according to some popular apologetic, saved Britain from political revolution. At a time when

the industrial revolution was causing bad working and living conditions and the French revolution was encouraging popular subversion, so the story goes, Methodism was embraced by the common people. Their Christian convictions, it is suggested, ensured that social harmony reigned. David Hempton's book shows that this case cannot stand. Methodism encompassed men of radical views who would have liked a change of government; and it drew in too small a proportion of the population to prevent revolution. The author demonstrates that the true relationship between Methodism and politics was much more complicated — and, it may be added, much more illuminating for the Christian concerned to explore the interaction between faith and political action.

John Wesley bequeathed to his followers no elaborate political philosophy, but his conservative tendencies were developed by his successors as leaders of the Methodist connection. In times of social disorder they expelled all those suspected of disaffection, whether to the ecclesiastical principles of Methodism or to the government of the day. Furthermore, they were threatened by government with the prohibition of travelling preachers, the essence of the Methodist system of spreading the gospel, and so felt compelled to proclaim their loyalty conspicuously in order to earn official gratitude. Roman Catholic attempts to prevent the advance of the gospel in Ireland, where lived nearly a quarter of the Methodists in the British Isles, made the connection increasingly anti-Catholic. That posture, together with demands for state assistance for their schools, dictated that Wesleyan leaders developed stronger Tory leanings. Yet at the same time Liberal convictions were taking root among ordinary Methodist members, and they were to blossom in support for Gladstone later in the nineteenth century.

Although this persuasive case is written for historians, it is a readable study that many others will enjoy. Its author, no doubt with the average reader in mind, is prepared to speak of luck rather than providence, but he is himself an evangelical who is acutely aware of the political pitfalls awaiting the unwary Christian.

D. W. Bebbington, University of Stirling.

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Ronald H. Nash, **The Concept of God: an exploration of contemporary difficulties with the attributes of God** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Exeter: Paternoster, 1984). 127 pp., £4.80 pb.

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This is a book intended for the beginner in philosophy of religion. It is written for the (Christian) theist who thinks that God has attributes and that we can know something about them. And it adopts a classical, Thomist view of Christian theism. The value of its pages is that it puts into readable terms the basic arguments of those professional philosophers who develop and then use their own jargon and so make their important discussion virtually inaccessible to the uninitiated.

The topics examined are: omnipotence; omniscience and human freedom; two recent objections to omniscience; eternity; simplicity; immutability and necessity. Dr Nash explains the classical, orthodox approach to each of these topics and then summarizes and criticizes significant modern discussions. Thus the book is not about whether God exists or what kind of defence can be presented for classical theism.

Further, the book is not about the connection between a right concept of God and the practical tasks of preaching and pastoring. It only deals with an intellectual problem — that connected with the statement of the attributes of God in classical theism. Thus it appeals only to those who want to think clearly and traditionally in this area.

There is a seeming lack of consistency in the general plan of the book. The opening chapter initiates an interesting contrast between the 'God' of process theology (panentheism) and the 'God' of classical theism but this contrast is not followed through in later chapters. For in these chapters the criticisms of classical theism from contemporary philosophers (mostly in the linguistic tradition) are noted and answered. I cannot under-

stand why more attention was not given to answering the objections of such process thinkers as Ogden, Cobb and Griffin in the main body of the book.

This said, I still think that the book will be useful for those making a start in philosophy of religion or apologetics.

Peter Toon, Boxford, Suffolk.

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William Hasker, **Metaphysics, Constructing a World View** (Contours of Christian Philosophy series) (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 1983). 132 pp., \$4.95/£2.95.

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The aim of this series is to introduce readers to important philosophical areas with the strategic purpose of fostering a greater philosophical awareness among Christians particularly. This is of crucial importance and this particular book makes a solid contribution to the goal. It will be very useful to the theological student and also, I dare to hope, to the layman whose church is bothering to encourage intellectual Christian development.

The book begins with a 'common sense' type of justification of metaphysical issues and the necessity for such thought for believers. Metaphysical systems are to be evaluated in terms of 'empirical fit', inner consistency and explanatory power. The following three chapters deal with the great themes of 'Freedom and Necessity', 'Minds and Bodies', and 'The World', which underlines the fact that we are all, albeit unknowingly, metaphysicians. Hasker is particularly clear on the issue of freedom and necessity, and is fair to positions not cohering with a theistic interpretation. He deals with the 'ghost in the machine' issue of mind and body similarly, juxtaposing naturalistic and more idealist types of interpretation, before offering a tentative proposal of his own to satisfy both sets of demands. He has a useful sub-section on immortality and resurrection to jog not only the mind but also the imagination.

On 'The World' he again discusses realist and idealist proposals, and is helpful, to the likes of this reviewer with an arts background, in a review of scientific theory and metaphysical implications. The final main chapter 'God and the World' once more reviews the more positivistic and idealistic views, including Pantheism and Panentheism. He is very American in giving a sharp focus, and sympathetic consideration, to process theology. He prompts us to rethink the character of God's relation to the world.

Altogether a fine little book. European readers could have asked for a review of a *Hegelian* idealist metaphysic, as well as the process view, because of the renaissance of Hegelian thought in such major theologians as Pannenberg and Moltmann, not to mention the dialectically structured New Hermeneutic. This book will, however, help students interpret subtle theologians such as Macquarrie and will stimulate theological enterprise, as well as being a good, solid, although by its own intention not comprehensive, discussion of key metaphysical themes.

Tim Bradshaw, Trinity College, Bristol.

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Arthur F. Holmes, **Ethics: approaching moral decisions** (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 1984). 132 pp., \$4.95/£2.95.

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This, the third book in Inter-Varsity's Contours of Christian Philosophy Series, edited by C. Stephen Evans, presents us with an overview of Christian philosophical ethics. Holmes, who is chairman of the philosophy department at Wheaton College, treats both ethical theory and its application to various contemporary issues.

The very important first chapter sets the stage for the ensuing discussion. Here Holmes clearly delineates the relationship of the Bible to ethics. He finds that there is a mutual interdependence in which biblical morality and philosophical ethics both make contributions to each other. With that foundation laid, Holmes moves on to examine positions which are not amenable to a Christian interpretation.

Holmes examines in turn cultural relativism, emotivism, ethical egoism, and utilitarianism. He tries to be sensitive to their subtle variations and their potential truth; nonetheless, they come out inadequate for a Christian ethic.

The next three chapters are given over to Holmes' development of Christian ethics. He argues that a Christian ethic must be committed to both love and justice, implemented according to specific cases on the basis of an understanding of what is universally human. Ultimately the ethical obligation, the 'oughtness', derives from God himself.

Now Holmes turns to four areas of practical application. The first one is human rights, a category under which Holmes defends a multitude of positions ranging from political self-determination to a moderately conservative stance on abortion. In the following chapter on criminal punishment, he argues for a view combining rehabilitation and retribution. Holmes' answer to the question of the next chapter, whether we can legislate morality, will not win him too many friends because in its guardedness it fails to endorse either a libertarian or a paternalistic approach entirely. The chapter on sex and marriage provides a fresh reminder of the need for both love and justice in this most intimate expression of personhood.

Holmes closes his book with a creative defence of the classical position that ethical decisions are inseparable from personal virtue.

The greatest merit of this book lies in its unapologetic commitment to Christian principles (or at least a Judeo-Christian theism). One does not have to wait for the last paragraph of each chapter, let alone the last chapter of the book, to learn of the Christian perspective. Clearly Holmes intended to develop a Christian ethic, and he never lets the reader drift away from this point.

The chief drawback of the book is that it is simply too ambitious. Holmes' attempt to make reference to all major competing systems, develop his Christian approach, and apply it to almost all topical concerns, prevents him from doing justice to any view, even his own. The book reads at times like a well-written précis of a much more detailed exposition where oblique references to important thinkers are expanded and tenuous linkages in arguments, such as the one from human rights to egalitarian marriage, are filled out. One wishes Holmes had concentrated more on a few topics in depth.

But the benefits outweigh the costs. This book is well worth reading, especially if accompanied by further literature or classroom instruction.

**Winfried Corduan**, Taylor University, Upland, Indiana.

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**Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church: the Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 288 pp., \$6.95.**

To those interested in, and working towards, the renewal of the church, Howard Snyder should be no stranger. From his pen have come three previous studies – *The Problem of Wineskins* (IVP, 1975), *The Community of the King* (IVP, 1977), and *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (IVP, 1980) – each of which were significant contributions to a more mature, biblical ecclesiology. This newest volume follows in the wake of the earlier studies, probing deeply into the purpose and function of the church in the world. According to Snyder, the church's greatest need is 'to be set free for the Kingdom of God, to be liberated from itself as it has become in order to be itself as God intends. The church must be freed to participate fully in

the economy of God' (p. 11). How the church can be thus liberated sets the agenda for the present book.

For Snyder, the modern church suffers from near-sightedness. It is caught up in the 'church business' – primarily concerned with self-preservation and maintenance of the status quo. Required, then, is a radical re-thinking of the church's purpose and service in God's kingdom. To this end, Snyder employs two key words: *ecology* – descriptive of the essential inter-dependence of all aspects of life on this planet; and *economy* – the ordering or managing of these interrelationships. With these concepts, he drives home the church's purpose to glorify God in submission to his sovereign lordship in his kingdom which encompasses all of creation, and not just 'spiritual affairs'. 'God's plan is a plan for real human history in all its social, personal, political, economic, scientific, and spiritual beauty and ugliness' (p. 29). Snyder then proceeds to elucidate bold models for the church and its ministry. To the reader is unveiled in prophetic fashion the responsibilities of the church *vis-à-vis* the poor, the lost, the environment, the systems of society – that is, towards all creation.

In addition to the depth of reflection evident on every page, a major plus of Snyder's work is his ability to be practical in both general and specific terms. Importantly, such provisions are made without causing the book to appear as a superficial, 'three easy steps to success' guide. So, the fundamental reorientation and restructuring of the church for which Snyder calls comes across as more than theory. For example, Snyder asserts, 'the church's most potent role as community is in community building' (p. 128) – and then goes on briefly to spell out this kind of service in terms of the family, church, and neighbourhood. One might wish, however, that Snyder had specifically addressed the practicalities involved in redirecting the course of theological education and pastoral training; long term, pervasive renewal of the nature he envisions will hardly be possible until changes are made at this level.

Others may find Snyder's study lacking in his presuppositions about the character of ministry. Ephesians 4:10-13, the pivotal passage for Snyder, is certainly important. However, it is debatable whether it outlines the New Testament pattern of ministry. How does Snyder deal with the diversity of the New Testament portrayals of church order?

Over-all, *Liberating the Church* should prove a helpful, provoking tool for pastors and church leaders. It contains one of the most balanced discussions to be found on relationship of the church to the poor and on the role of women in the church. Above all, it will serve as a prophetic word compelling the church to risk itself in the service of the kingdom. It should be noted that the book was written with the American church scene in view; nevertheless, its timely message will benefit a wider audience.

**Joel B. Green**, University of Aberdeen.

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Gustavo Gutierrez, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, ***We Drink from Our Own Wells: the Spiritual Journey of a People*** (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984 [Spanish 1983]), 181 pp., \$7.95

*We Drink from Our Own Wells* was originally an annotated series of lectures delivered in 1982 by Gutierrez at his training centre in Lima, Peru. The tone is both pastoral and apologetic, with thirty-four pages of densely documented endnotes and nine pages of Scripture and source indexes.

Gutierrez's message is that the absolute beginning point for all authentic theology is 'an encounter with the Lord' which through critical reflection then becomes relevant and tangible in the context of life. True liberation is necessarily and profoundly spiritual. The three parts describe how this theme relates to the people of Latin America.

In part one, Gutierrez explains anew 'the contextual experience

that is the matrix or crucible of the spirituality now being born in Latin America' (p. 2). Admitting aberrations within the liberation movement, he maintains that liberation entails a holistic process generated from spiritual experience; anything less is not genuine liberation.

Part two serves as an analysis of Christian spirituality from two perspectives. First is a fairly detailed biblical study on the concepts of *flesh, spirit and resurrection of the body* through which the author seeks to clarify the wholeness of man. To the detriment of both his point and his exegesis, Gutierrez skirts the traditional concept of bodily resurrection.

The second perspective concerning spirituality derives from the testimonies of Augustine, Bonaventure, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola and many others. Through these historic examples, coupled with those of modern Latin America, Gutierrez develops his central thesis that every spirituality receives its initial impulse from an inner encounter with God. Only by means of individual experience with the Spirit and subsequent reflection is theology born.

In part three, Gutierrez sketches a profile, with five summary characteristics, of 'the new way that is coming into existence among us' (p. 94). Primary is *conversion*, a break from old ways and a solidarity with 'the church of the poor'. Second is a sense of *gratuitousness*, seeing divine grace in all of history leading to the utopian kingdom; ultimately, 'everything is grace' (p. 109). A third mark of the liberation movement is deep-felt joy in the midst of suffering. Fourthly is the aspect of *spiritual childhood*, which he again yokes with unreserved commitment to the poor. He declares categorically, 'Spiritual poverty is obligatory for every Christian and for the church as a whole' (p. 123). As a final characteristic, Gutierrez deals with the axis of *solitude and community*, the two enriching one another: a liberationist's persecution because of his preferential love for the poor drives him more fervently to appreciate the fellowship of the suffering community.

Amidst the objections to Gutierrez's theology, three stand central.

1. The author states, 'we approach the Bible from our experience as believers and members of the church. It is in the light of that experience that we ask our questions' (p. 34). We might ask, with John Goldingay, if it is not simply a reflection of themselves that liberationists see at the bottom of the hermeneutical well? (cf. 'The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4:2 - 5:1 (Dec 1982-June 1983), p. 140.)

2. Christologically we remain with the suspicion that Jesus is far less than the pre-temporal member of the Godhead. As we encounter 'the Spirit of Jesus' within the depth of our being, questions arise: How do I know this I experience is the Jesus of the Bible? Is *Jesus* but a name for what is essentially a universal spiritual experience? Is Christology without the husks, therefore, just anthropology?

3. While we must be humble before biblical exhortations to care for the needy, can we not contend that Gutierrez has advanced a mythology of the poor? Do only the rich oppress the poor? Or are the poor themselves sometimes cruel oppressors? Can we credibly believe that slums, so generally rampant with prostitution, addiction and brutality, are in fact the haven of the people of God on earth? That rich are evil and poor are good? With this central premise, Gutierrez with searing literary energy creates a romantic ideal. Surely need exists for biblical balance. While criticizing critics for being reductionistic, Gutierrez must fend with this weakness in his own system.

*We Drink from Our Own Wells* may cause you anger or may leave you edified. It will probably do both. The work is a standard for all who care to understand the theological flow of the Third World.

J. Scott Horrell, Texas, USA.

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**John Fischer, *The Olive Tree Connection*** (Downers Grove: IVP, 1983. Published previously by the Watchmen Association under the title *Sharing Israel's Messiah*, 1978). 209 pp., \$6.95.

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The author, who introduces himself as a messianic Jew on p. 89 of his book, deals with the best ways of sharing the Messiah with Israel. He stresses the divine charge to communicate the message of Jesus (Yeshua) to the Jewish people as well as to the whole world at the strategic time when the prophecies of Luke 21:24 and Genesis 13:14-18 are being fulfilled. He points out that God is dealing with Israel today and that he can today 'join those broken-off branches to their own tree again' (Rom. 11:24). These views I fully endorse, but I do not consider his statement on p. 46 that all the Jews will ultimately 'be restored to God', with reference to Romans 11:26, to be in agreement with the trend of Romans 11 just as 'the fulness of the Gentiles' does not refer to all the Gentiles but to those who have been redeemed in Christ. There is no further reference to this statement in the rest of the book.

Illuminating information is furnished on the Jewish world view. The author mentions (among other things): appreciation of learning, emphasis on the family, involvement in 'Jewish causes' (p. 35), concern about assimilation, the equating of Zionism with racism, and anti-Semitism. A survey of church-synagogue relations reveals anti-Jewish sentiments in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as well as in the Protestant churches over many centuries up to the present time. This is a sad story, but it should be told.

The present war situation in the Middle East is referred to. The press coverage is described as one-sided (p. 71). The impracticability of the solution of a secular democratic state is exposed. The military victory of Israel in 1967 when she was largely isolated and the significant fashion in which God subsequently worked spiritually amongst the Jews, is highlighted. Increasing numbers of Jews are accepting Jesus as Messiah. Some rabbis estimate the number from two to three thousand every year (p. 83). But there is also increased opposition in Jewish circles to evangelism and assimilation. Simultaneously there is a strong trend to 'be thoroughly biblical as well as authentically Jewish' in commitment to Jesus Christ (p. 84). In the USA congregations or synagogues are formed in Jewish communities. This helps to 'resolve the tension between Jewish openness to Jesus' message and Jewish resistance to evangelism and assimilation' (p. 85). It is estimated that 'being Jewish is important' for 89% of the Jewish people (p. 88). This does not imply 'exclusiveness'. In messianic synagogues 'gentile Christians are completely welcome' (p. 90). It is accepted that 'observing the Jewish customs and ceremonies will never result in salvation, blessing, spirituality or merit' (p. 90) and that salvation is 'only by grace through faith in Jesus' (p. 92).

The author makes valuable practical suggestions regarding the sensitive communication of the Christian message to Jews. Some of these are: 'the truth must be accurately communicated', 'friendship, trust and good will must come first' (p. 105), 'study the Bible together, ... talk about life in all its fullness' (p. 109). Two extensive appendices on 'using the Jewish Bible' and 'Responding to questions and objectives' are a valuable addition. This book points the way to a well-balanced, vital approach in sharing the precious message of Jesus Christ with Jewish friends.

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- John Fischer **The Olive Tree Connection** (W. J. van der Merwe)



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προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ.