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Editorial: Radical Discipleship

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world was the coming of a wonderful revolution: the sick were healed, the hungry fed, the possessed were cured, sinners were brought back into fellowship with God, social and racial barriers were broken down, rich and poor began to share, the dead were raised. And this revolution was achieved not by violence and hatred, but through the power and love of God working through Jesus.

But what has happened to that revolution? The church of Jesus Christ today, at least by comparison, seems anything but a revolutionary force.

Was Jesus' revolution, like so many revolutions, just a short-lived and exciting experiment that soon burned out, and that lost momentum as soon as it became institutionalized in the church? No Christian can accept that diagnosis.

Three things deserve to be said: *first*, the Jesus revolution never was an unqualified success. The time of his ministry certainly was a very exciting time; but Jesus faced intense opposition from outside his community and stubborn selfishness and materialism within his community. His ministry was a struggle with Satan, and, although the resurrection was proof of his final victory, his death was a measure of the fierceness of Satan's attack; his enemies killed him, and his friends deserted him. Jesus warned his disciples that they would face the same sort of thing: lack of response to the sowing of the Word of God, people falling away under the heat of persecution and through the choking effect of riches, and personal suffering and danger.

This was, of course, what happened in the New Testament church: although the church was in many ways a sensational success, it was not all like that. It only takes a reading of Paul's epistles or of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation to show that the early church experienced many of the problems and sins that we face today.

A *second* thing to be said is that, although today's church has its full share of problems and sins, the light of Jesus' revolutionary love is still shining brightly in many parts of the church. Sometimes we may be inclined, because of the difficulty of our particular situation, to accept the popular and distorted image of the church as an irrelevant and outmoded institution; but in reality in many places and in many ways Christ's revolution is going on: people are coming to new life in Christ and are being wonderfully changed; missionary work is increasing, not decreasing, in some parts of the world; Christians are living lives that are different—both famous people like Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and unknown people like the saints in your church and mine who cheerfully sacrifice themselves for others.

But to point to the problems of the New Testament church and to encouragements in today's church situation must not lead us to complacency. The early church and Jesus'

own fellowship of disciples had plenty of faults; but these were not regarded as things to be tolerated, but as denials of the gospel and as meriting judgment. Jesus warned against religiously saying ‘Lord, Lord’ without acting accordingly. So the *third* and most important thing to say about the church’s failure to live out Jesus’ revolution is that the situation poses an urgent challenge to us and to our churches: we must repent—really and not only in word—and follow in Jesus’ revolutionary footsteps—really and not only in word. That challenge is a costly one: it was the path that took Jesus to the cross.

The title of this editorial is borrowed from a recent book¹ written by a former *Themelios* contributor, Chris Sugden, who is at present working in India. In his book he takes further the thinking of Ronald Sider and others about the social implications of the gospel and the relationship of social concern and evangelism (providing plenty of thought-provoking ideas and a very useful bibliography). He notes interestingly how ‘the proposers of radical discipleship’ have often come from evangelical churches with very conservative views of the Bible. This is surely as it should be (but not as it always has been): no-one who takes the Bible seriously and Jesus Christ seriously should be content with a comfortable undemanding form of Christianity (though many of us and many evangelical churches easily slip into that). We may not find all of Sugden’s suggestions applicable to our situations; but we do need to hear the challenge to follow Jesus radically—in every aspect of our lives, and not only to hear but also to begin to work it out in practice. This might seem a hopeless task; but it is not: Jesus inaugurated the revolution of the kingdom of God; he gives us his Spirit so that we may live the revolution here and now, and he will one day bring what he has begun to completion.

¹ Christopher Sugden, *Radical Discipleship* (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1981).

Weakness – Paul’s and ours

Richard Bauckham

Dr Bauckham, author of this expository study, is lecturer in theology in the University of Manchester.

2 Corinthians has for a long time seemed to me among the most impressive documents of early Christianity. When I need to remind myself that the Christian message is convincing – still convincing today in spite of our great chronological and cultural distance from its first-century origins – I turn as readily to 2 Corinthians as I do to the gospels, and cannot remember failing to be impressed. The key to this impressiveness I find in the insight 2 Corinthians gives us into the way Paul integrated his message and his life. Remarkable as Paul’s expositions of his message are, in Romans and Galatians, I find myself needing also to see, in 2 Corinthians, how Paul lived that message. A critical reader of Paul might wonder whether a message as exclusively concentrated on the death and resurrection of Jesus as Paul’s gospel was could actually have the power to interpret and direct a man’s actual living experience in a life-enhancing way. 2 Corinthians shows how in Paul’s own instance it did.

To say that Paul’s autobiographical reflection in 2 Corinthians is impressive may be a little paradoxical, because Paul’s obsession in this letter is with how unimpressive he is, or at least with the fact that the only impressive thing about him is his *weakness*. In this rambling *apologia* for his life and work as an apostle, Paul’s weakness is the recurring theme. In chapter 4, for example, Paul writes of the glory of God revealed in the gospel and of his own call to be a minister of that gospel, when the glory of God in Christ shone in his heart (4: 6). But the thought of the glory and the power of the gospel entrusted to him immediately, by contrast, suggests the thought of his own frailty: ‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels’ (4: 7). The clay pot is both a very ordinary and a very fragile container for treasure. What makes this theme of the apostle’s weakness so arresting and intriguing is that Paul is not in the least apologising for it or mentioning it only for the sake of honesty. In chapters 11-12 (with deliberate irony, of course) Paul boasts of it, as precisely the qualification which validates his claim to be an apostle of Christ. He catalogues his sufferings (11: 23-33), not as

heroic ordeals, but as evidence of how his ministry was marked by the physical and psychological frailty of an ordinary human being, ending the catalogue with a vivid memory of the ignominious occasion when he had to flee for his life from Damascus by being lowered in a basket from the city wall (11: 32-33).

This weakness of Paul was the occasion for the power of God to be active and evident in his ministry: ‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us’ (4: 7); ‘I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’ (12: 9). The power of God evident in Paul’s ministry, not least in the transforming effect of the Gospel he preached, could be seen to be no merely human achievement of Paul’s but divine power which found its opportunity in Paul’s weakness. In his weakness Paul was obliged to trust in God and his converts to recognize God.

Some modern readers might begin to feel uneasy about this Pauline motif of the apostle’s weakness and God’s power. Someone may recall Bonhoeffer’s famous passage about the religion which *exploits* human weakness:

Religious people speak of God when human knowledge . . . has come to an end, or when human resources fail – in fact it is always the *deus ex machina* that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure – always, that is to say, exploiting human weakness or human boundaries. . . . I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weaknesses but in strength.¹

That might, at first glance, seem like a direct rejection of Paul’s idea. Is Paul’s God to be found only at the end of human resources, when human strength runs out?

Or it might be thought that Paul falls victim to Dorothee Soelle’s incisive critique of Christian masochism (as she calls it), that attitude which calls for willingness to suffer because suffering demonstrates human impotence by contrast with God’s omnipotence. ‘Suffering is there to break our pride, demonstrate our powerlessness, exploit our dependency. Affliction has the intention of

¹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 281-282.

bringing us back to a God who only becomes great when he makes us small.² Is Paul's God the God who can only be exalted at man's expense?

Such questions should be borne in mind and may help us to avoid misunderstanding Paul, but as criticisms of Paul they would miss his point. In the first place, when Paul reflects on his weakness, he is being soberly realistic. In his dedication to his missionary task, Paul constantly drove himself to the limits of his physical and psychological endurance. As he would have put it, the love of Christ controlling him (5: 14) drove him to those limits. His missionary labours were, quite literally, killing him (4: 10-12). Human resources do have their limits and Paul discovered them, not because he sought God only there or because he embraced suffering masochistically to demonstrate his powerlessness, but simply because the demands of his apostolic mission took him to those limits. From the hazards of ancient travel, the perils of persecution, the anxiety and depression incurred by his pastoral responsibilities, Paul learned that when God equipped him for his apostolic ministry he did not turn him into some kind of superman or angel, immune from danger, untouched by weariness or stress. On the contrary, precisely his apostolic ministry made his ordinary, limited human capacities plain for all to see. Yet Paul found that such weakness was not after all an impediment to his ministry: somehow (and it may well have seemed strange to him at first) the power of the gospel became all the more apparent and effective. There is nothing grovelling about Paul's recognition of this. He does not have to pretend to be a miserable worm in order to let God be God. He simply sees that he is human, not superhuman, and need not step outside his human weakness in order to be an apostle of Christ.

Paul's *theological* breakthrough in 2 Corinthians was to understand this weakness of the bearer of the gospel in relation to the content of the gospel. If God's definitive salvific act occurred through the weakness of the crucified Jesus, then it should be no surprise that the saving gospel of the crucified Jesus should reach the Gentiles through the weakness of his apostle. And just as the crucified Jesus proved, through his resurrection, to be the power of God for salvation, so the weakness of the apostle had, as its reverse side, the power of God effective for salvation through his ministry. Paul found the pattern of the cross and resurrection of Jesus — death and life, weakness and power —

reflected in his own ministry and used it as the key to his own experience. If he experienced the dying of Jesus in his frailty and sufferings (1: 5; 4: 10-12), he also found in every escape from death, every encouragement after anxiety and depression, every convert made in the midst of persecution, a participation in the resurrection of Christ, God's ability to bring life out of death (*cf.* 1: 5, 9-10; 4: 10-12). Such experiences were not necessarily dramatic or miraculous deliverances, like the escape from death to which 1: 9-10 refers, but were often relatively ordinary events. One example Paul gives is the arrival of Titus, after a worrying delay, with unexpectedly good news about affairs in the church at Corinth (7: 5-7; note the echoes of the language of 1: 3-7). In 4: 8-9 Paul gives a rhetorical list of 'cross' and 'resurrection' aspects of his experience:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not driven to despair;
persecuted, but not forsaken;
struck down, but not destroyed.

The second member of each pair here seems strikingly understated: just the negative point that Paul's weakness had not yet put an end to his ministry. The demands of his ministry had almost proved too much for him, but, by God's grace, not quite.

Thus Paul's experience might often seem outwardly unremarkable. But because he sees the death and resurrection of Jesus as the key to his life, as to everything else, he can find there a pattern which makes Christian sense of his experience. The shape which everyone needs to give to his experience in order to understand it Paul found in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. This pattern, however, was more than an interpretation of the experience: it also made the experience what it was for Paul. All the ups and downs of his ministry were for Paul experiences *of God*, events in which he experienced an identification with Jesus in his dying and rising: 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies' (4: 10).

To identify with Paul's experience we do not need to be shipwrecked or imprisoned or lowered in a basket from a city wall. Even without the physical dangers of Paul's career, anyone who throws himself into the work of Christian ministry of any kind with half the dedication of Paul will experience the weakness of which Paul speaks: the times when problems seem insoluble, the times of weariness from sheer overwork, the times of depression when there seem to be no results, the

² D. Soelle, *Suffering* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), p. 19.

depression when there seem to be no results, the emotional exhaustion which pastoral concern can bring on — in short, all the times when the Christian minister or worker knows he has stretched to the limits of his capacities for a task which is very nearly, but by God's grace not quite, too much for him. Anyone who knows only his strength, not his weakness, has never given himself to a task which demands all he can give. There is no avoiding this weakness, and we should learn to suspect those models of human life which try to avoid it. We should not be taken in by the ideal of the charismatic superman for whom the Holy Spirit is a constant source of superhuman strength. Nor should we fall for the ideal of the modern secular superman: the man who organizes his whole life with the object of maintaining his own physical and mental well-being, who keeps up the impression of strength because he keeps his life well within the limits of what he can easily cope with. Such a man is never weak because he is never affected, concerned, involved or committed beyond a cautiously safe limit. That was neither Jesus' ideal of life nor Paul's. To be controlled by the love of Christ means inevitably to reach the limits of one's abilities and experience weakness.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the Christian minister should not take sensible precautions against overwork or reasonable steps to maintain

his physical and mental health. Nor am I suggesting he should not do his best to be efficient in his work. He owes it to his Lord to do so. But a Pauline perspective on Christian service takes us further than that. The Christian minister should be sensible, but above all he must be wholehearted. He should try to be efficient, but even when his efficiency runs out the effectiveness of his ministry need not do so. His efficiency may actually need sometimes to run out — by necessity, not neglect — if the power of Christ is to prove effective in his ministry.

That the Christian minister's life should match his message is a common enough thought. But the content which Paul gives to it is not so commonplace. For Paul the Christian minister's weakness is not the point where he is failing, but the point where the deepest integration of his life and his message is possible. If he can respond to God at that point in his experience as Paul did, then it will be for him an experience of Jesus Christ, and for his ministry an occasion for God's power to be most evidently and characteristically at work. The impressiveness of his ministry will not be his own impressiveness, but that of his message which matches up to the experience of human weakness and makes it the vehicle of God's power.

A new Tübingen school? Ernst Käsemann and his commentary on Romans

T. N. Wright

Dr Wright, who is now Assistant Professor of New Testament at McGill University in Canada, contributed to Themelios (6:1) a major review article on C. E. B. Cranfield's commentary on Romans. Now he guides us expertly around one of the most important German commentaries, which has recently appeared in English translation.

In 1925, as a student of 19 years old, Ernst Käsemann attended a lecture course (by Erik Peterson) on the Epistle to the Romans. Looking back from the vantage-point of 1973, he could write that this early experience determined his course of study 'and in some sense, as befits a theologian, my life'. 'The basic problem was posed. In the follow-

ing semesters I then listened to the expositions of H. von Soden and R. Bultmann. I then turned successively to the work of K. Barth, A. Schlatter, Luther and Calvin, studied them critically, and was led by them into interpretation ancient and modern. No literary document has been more important for me.'¹

¹ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: SCM, 1980), p. vii. (ET of *An die Römer*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 8a, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), ³1974.) Page references below are to this book unless otherwise stated; and, unless otherwise noted, the German and English publishers of Käsemann's other writings are the same as for the commentary. There are only small changes between the first and third German editions, though they involve some renumbering of pages.

For those with ears to hear, that quotation says it all. Käsemann is self-consciously a Protestant; a pupil of Bultmann; an avid historical critic; and one who has wrestled long and hard with Paul, and with the problems of Romans in particular. His large-scale commentary is the result. It breathes the air of the sophisticated German Protestant criticism of the last 50 years, with all its dialectical to-ings and fro-ings. It is passionately concerned with Paul's view of Christian freedom, and equally concerned to maintain the true (*i.e.* Reformation) heritage and tradition. It is doggedly set on producing, through ruthless historical criticism, both an accurate view of what Paul was talking about and the message which Romans has for the church in the twentieth century.

There is already a tension in this double aim which is perhaps all the healthier for never being resolved in Käsemann's writings. On the one hand the commentary gives constant support to an earlier statement of intent:

My questioning and my listening have never been directed exclusively to academic theology. . . . Theology has both the commission and the capacity to summon the church to take up the promise which is given to her. . . . my work is intended to have doctrinal implications. If it were to be content with less, it would be merely pretentious. . . . it is for the very purpose of liberating the church for decisive action that theology has to carry out its work of radical and critical questioning.²

On the other hand, the commitment to rigorous historical-critical exegesis — already invoked, in fact, as part of the *hermeneutical* task — is stated with equal vigour:

The impatient, who are concerned only about results or practical application, should leave their hands off exegesis. They are of no value for it, nor, when rightly done, is exegesis of any value for them.³

One can see what he means, even if the expression is a little harsh. Yet the distinction between the practical value of theological exegesis which Käsemann commends and exemplifies and the 'practical application' which he despises is, in the last resort, a subtle one, and the reader will have to decide whether it can be consistently maintained.

² *New Testament Questions of Today* (hereafter *NTQT*: London, 1969), p.x. (ET of essays, mostly from *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, ²1965.)

³ P. viii. Compare the passages which speak disparagingly of 'edifying' exposition, *e.g.* p. 250: 'Apocalyptic alone can express this (*i.e.* the paradoxical nature of the revelation of Christ's love) and preserve us from the usual edifying interpretation of the text' (*i.e.* Rom. 8:35). See too *Jesus Means Freedom* (hereafter *Freedom*; London, 1969), p. 14. (ET of *Der Ruf der Freiheit*, Tübingen, ³1968; a 5th, enlarged, German edn. was published in 1972.)

Certainly for Käsemann the desire (and calling?) to 'liberate the church for decisive action' is so strong that in many passages Paul is made — forced, some might say — to speak directly to the twentieth century. Käsemann has lived and worked all his life with the fundamental question of 'New Testament Theology' ('Are we doing history, or normative theology, or both?'):⁴ and the tension that results from giving the answer 'both' is clear throughout his work, just as it was, though in different ways, in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann.

But the world to which Käsemann believes that Paul must be related is not a world in which many readers of the new English translation of his commentary will feel at home. It is the world of post-war German Lutheranism, bruised and shocked after the 'church struggle' of the '30s and '40s, horrified by the Holocaust, bewildered to discover that Naziism is still not eradicated, fearful lest the church again be seduced into compromising the gospel. Those who know little about Bonhoeffer and nothing about the Barmen Declaration will find themselves at sea in passage after passage of Käsemann's polemic. He not only fights battles which are vital for him but not (say) for Englishmen or North Americans (we have our own battles: some of them may have analogies with the German situation: but they are not the same ones); he does so allusively, like Dante, so that the uninitiated need almost a running commentary to see what lies behind the sharp remark, the sudden outburst, the sustained polemic, indeed the whole massively thought-out reinterpretation of Paul and Romans. Perhaps the most revealing of his books in this respect is his *Jesus Means Freedom* (subtitled *A Polemical Survey of the New Testament*).⁵ There we see — though still in flashes — what Käsemann is really worried about. He discerns in contemporary German Protestantism a comfortable bourgeois mentality that seeks from the gospel not a challenge to radical obedience but a prop for the status quo. He sees in the rediscovery of 'salvation history' a relapse into the sort of theology that allowed Naziism to look respectable ('find out what God is doing in our nation, and do it with him . . .').⁶ He opposes a

⁴ See R. Morgan *The Nature of the New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1973).

⁵ See n. 3.

⁶ See his article on 'Justification and Salvation History' in *Perspectives on Paul* (hereafter *PP*; London, 1971), pp. 60-78, esp. 63ff. (ET of *Paulinische Perspektiven*, Tübingen, 1969.) On this, see my article 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith', *TynB* 29, 1978, pp. 61-88, esp. 63f., 69f. See also *Freedom*, pp. 28ff., 134f., etc. Käsemann is here close to Barth and Bonhoeffer in his emphasis on the first commandment (see E. Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical*

'theology of resurrection' with the old Lutheran *theologia crucis*: God is not the God of the godly, the devout, the comfortable, those who are at ease in Zion, but is the justifier of the outsider, the ungodly, the God who in Jesus became the friend of sinners and set comfortable society by its ears. (It would be to miss the point entirely to object that Christianity is based on the cross *and* the resurrection. Käsemann knows that perfectly well: he is here conducting a war of slogans, of attitudes which he, and those he opposes, have characterized in this sometimes unhelpful fashion. The question is not — or not directly — whether Käsemann 'believes in the resurrection', but whether it is to be seen as the all-embracing theme, with the cross merely as its preliminary, or as the next chapter in the theology of the cross itself.)

Thus Käsemann can write of Jesus that 'the revolutionaries had their eye on him, and felt able to set their hopes on him at least for a time. We are now paying heavily for the fact that German Christian people (original: *deutsche Christenheit*) failed to appreciate this and made him a bourgeois after their own image: and in exactly the same way his laments over the church and the theologians of his own time have never been taken seriously enough by those who had every occasion to do so.'⁷ It might be thought that Käsemann is fighting out-of-date battles, seeking merely to exorcise ghosts from the past. I am not in a position to comment on that. I do know that the concerns which most fire him are not, and for all sorts of good reasons simply cannot be, pressing concerns for those who have not shared the struggles of German Protestantism⁸ — unless we are to see Germany as Käsemann thinks Paul saw Israel, as somehow paradigmatic for the rest of mankind.

If these remarks serve to distance English readers from Käsemann, they should in doing so heighten, rather than lessen, their respect for him. Germany has signally refused to allow the academic to be isolated from the 'real world', and Käsemann stands in the noble tradition of those who are determined to integrate all the different sides of a theologian's existence. And because Käsemann remains, by conviction, an exegete first and foremost, one who has struggled long and hard to think Paul's thoughts after him, his work remains fascinating, powerful and dramatic, even for those like myself who, as though born out of

due time, are unable to feel the last war as part of their own experience. For those who *can* remember, and for those who wish to continue to relate the New Testament to what Barth called 'theological existence today', his lifework has already provided a great stimulus and will no doubt continue to do so.⁹

Before launching into an exposition and critique of Käsemann's theological position, some remarks are in order about his commentary as a book and as a tool for studying Romans.¹⁰ Perhaps the most telling thing that can be said about it is that its tone is very reminiscent of Barth's famous commentary. It is more like a theological treatise, which happens to follow the text of the epistle, than a commentary as usually understood; but because it *does* follow the text of the epistle it is a difficult treatise to read. (This is of course the result of the tension we noted earlier between historical work and theological results.) Important theological discussions jostle with minor textual or verbal notes, without any signposts or crossheadings within the long sections into which Käsemann divides the epistle. Forgoing the writing of excursuses has some merit in giving apparent priority to exegesis; but there are plenty of shadowy excursuses-in-all-but-name, confusing in their unheralded appearance. There is no introduction or conclusion; nor are there any indices, and the running heads are very inadequate. In order to be able to *use* the book one really needs to scribble in one's own headings, and to complete indices as one goes along. And — another trait reminiscent of Barth, who has perhaps been more influential for Käsemann than a pupil of Bultmann would care to acknowledge — there are many passages both evocative and cryptic, teasing and paradoxical. Contrast this with (say) Cranfield; at least with the latter you know that if you concentrate, think hard, and read the sentence again, light will dawn. With Käsemann, as often with Barth, there is no such guarantee. Perhaps both would claim that this is a virtue in theology.

⁹ Cf. J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds), *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1976). I shall note below, *en passant*, several of the thirty articles, all of which are in German except for two English ones. The volume as a whole is a magnificent collection of work, and a worthy tribute.

¹⁰ See too my forthcoming brief review (complementary to this one) in *Churchman*. For other important reviews of the commentary, see e.g. J. K. Riches in *SJT* 29, 1976, pp. 557-574; G. Sauter in *Verkündigung und Forschung* (Beihefte zu *Evangelische Theologie*) 21, 1976, pp. 80-94; K. P. Donfried in *Religious Studies Review*, 7, 1981, pp. 226-228. See too G. A. Lewandowski, 'An Introduction to Ernst Käsemann's Theology' in *Encounter* (Indianapolis, Indiana) 35, 1974, pp. 222-242.

Texts, ET London, 1976, pp. 224-227, 257, 271, 273; the whole of ch. 5, pp. 199-262, provides interesting background for this theme).

⁷ *Freedom*, p. 29; see too e.g. pp. 46ff., 64, 81, etc.

⁸ See the remarks of John Barton in *JTS* n.s. 31, 1980, pp. 572f.

At the same time, the book is an exegetical tool of great value. Its grasp of detail, as well as of whole arguments, is massively impressive: Käsemann has not only wrestled with Paul but also with a wide range of commentators ancient and modern, as witnessed by the very full bibliographies at the head of each section (with English translations, where available, duly noted). The translation is not flawless, but Bromiley, who must be now vying with John Bowden for the *Guinness Book of Records* entry under 'Quantity of German Translation', has done a wickedly difficult job as well, perhaps, as anybody could have hoped.¹¹ For those who wish to discover what technical term underlies such peculiarities as 'his cosmic fallenness to the world' (p. 199), the page numbers of the German original are conveniently printed in the inner margin (the answer in this case is *Weltverfallenheit*). It is to be expected that the book will make a lasting mark on New Testament studies, raising new questions and re-opening old ones in fresh and helpful ways. However much one might disagree, one will find (as T. W. Manson said of Bultmann) that we learn not least when we are forced to articulate *why* we disagree.¹² And taking on Käsemann is like disagreeing with a mountain: there is a grandeur, a stature, an integrity about this total theological scheme. It will not do to niggle about details here and there, as though a few cheap exegetical disagreements or theological question-marks would undermine the whole thing. We must deal, as Käsemann himself emphatically does (in contrast with many English-speaking writers on Paul) with the large issues and their correlation.

The background: apocalyptic

The over-all task which Käsemann has set himself, both in his commentary and his other writings on Paul, is clear: to place the apostle against the proper background in the history of religions, in such a way that his theological emphases stand out and can be heard afresh today. And as soon as we ask what the 'proper background' is, we realize just what a change has come over historical critical orthodoxy in the last generation. Paul used to be regarded as the great hellenizer, the man who found Christianity Jewish and left it Greek, the apostle who translated the gospel into terms that

the non-Jewish world could understand, into concepts that broke free from legalistic Jewish shackles. This model dominated German research all through the '20s and '30s (providing incidentally a silent support for quite different movements of thought), and continued to do so until W. D. Davies registered his protest in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*.¹³ Since then the lines have not been so easy to draw. Already, however, Albert Schweitzer had attempted to set Paul against a background neither hellenistic nor rabbinic, but strictly *apocalyptic*. This suggestion, scorned at the time, has now come to roost in the work of the new Tübingen school, namely Käsemann and his followers. Though some of Paul's ideas (e.g. his baptism-theology in Rom. 6) are still held to derive from the mystery-religions, the great emphases can only be understood in terms of apocalyptic. Käsemann has already outlined this position;¹⁴ now the commentary shows us just what it means in practice, namely that 'Christianity is not just a Jewish sect which believes in Jesus as the Messiah. It is the breaking in of the new world of God characterized by the lordship of the Spirit' (p. 191). Käsemann finds in the apocalyptic writings a vision of God's triumph over the rebellious world, and of God's righteousness as *both* his saving power *and* his gift of salvation; and this understanding provides the key with which he unlocks the main theological problems of Romans.

Before developing this, it is important to note how the picture of early Christianity is thus modified. The problem remains as it ever did ('How could the doctrinal system of Paul arise on the basis of the life and work of Jesus and the beliefs of the primitive community: and how did the early Greek theology arise out of Paulinism?');¹⁵ but instead of the old answer, that Paul *hellenized* the early Jewish kerygma (and so provided a bridge between Jesus and second-century Christianity) Käsemann is offering a new solution, that Paul exploited hidden depths in Jewish apocalyptic to break out of the early Jewish-Christian mould and create a gospel for the world. Unlike Schweitzer, who from an apocalyptic background deduced that 'being in Christ' (which he called, perhaps misleadingly, 'Christ-mysticism')

¹³ 1st edn., 1948; 4th edn., with new introduction, 1980.

¹¹ I have my doubts about words like 'noninterchangeable' (p. 384) (especially as applied to God!); and, though it may sound somewhat incongruous to describe a Greek word as a barbarism, that is how I feel about 'exhomologesis' (pp. 386, 394).

¹² Quoted (from a review in *The Guardian*) on the back of the 1965 paperback edition of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, 1 (London: SCM).

¹⁴ See particularly 'The Beginnings of Christian Theology' and 'On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic' in *NTQT*, pp. 82-107, 108-137. For the immediate controversy these writings and others aroused, see the papers in *ZThK* 58, 1961, translated in *JThCh* 6, 1969. For Schweitzer's classic statement, see his *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (ET, London, 1931, and next note).

¹⁵ A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters* (ET, London, 1912), p. v.

was the centre of Paul's thought, Käsemann from the same background puts forward a view of 'God's righteousness', focused on the crucified Christ, as the chief point in the whole scheme.¹⁶ The link with the post-Pauline church then requires a toning down of Paul's polemic, and Käsemann finds this in the 'deutero-Pauline' and 'early Catholic' writings.¹⁷ Questions remain about the viability of this whole outline; but there should be no doubt that it is a thesis of this scope and breadth, and originality, which is being advanced.

The righteousness of God

The most striking result of Käsemann's position is the reinterpretation of *dikaiousunē theou*. Just as he initiated a new phase of gospel study with his essay on the historical Jesus, so Käsemann launched a whole research programme with his short paper on 'The Righteousness of God', originally delivered in Oxford on 14 September 1961.¹⁸ Teaching experience suggests that, even though several accounts of Käsemann's position are available,¹⁹ English-speaking students still find it difficult to grasp. Yet another attempt at explanation may therefore be in order.

Käsemann develops his view in sharp contrast to the more usual one. This latter, associated with Bultmann, Conzelmann, Cranfield and others, holds that *dikaiousunē theou* in Paul usually refers to that 'righteousness', i.e. that righteous status, which the believer has as a result of God's action in Christ and on the basis of faith. The 'righteousness' is predicated of the believer, and *theou* is either a genitive of origin (righteousness *from God*) or an objective genitive (the righteousness *which counts before God*). Käsemann rejects this, along with the whole individualistic soteriology which he sees as its context. In its place he suggests a new meaning for *dikaiousunē* and a new understanding of *theou*, based (quite consistently with his soteriology) on an apocalyptic phrase now reinterpreted by Paul in the light of Christology. This phrase, found in the Scrolls and elsewhere (e.g.

1QS 11.12; CD 20.20; Test. Dan 6.10) is, according to Käsemann and his followers,²⁰ a technical term, and refers neither to a moral quality of God nor to a status or relationship which someone now has from God or with God, but to God's 'salvation-creating power'. This somewhat compressed phrase denotes God's saving activity seen both as *power* (God's own power with which he conquers evil and establishes his rule over the whole cosmos) and as *gift* (the same power, now given to the believer so that he is recaptured for radical obedience to God). *Dikaiousunē* is thus basically an activity of God, and *theou* is therefore a *subjective genitive*.

This leads inevitably to a new view of justification²¹ and faith. If 'The revelation of God's righteousness' means God's triumph over the world in the cross of Christ, faith is the (liberating)²² acknowledgment of that triumph and of the consequent Lordship of Christ.²³ As for Bultmann, faith and radical obedience are really the same thing; though, in sharp contrast to Bultmann, the meaning of that faith and obedience is understood in the context of cosmic, apocalyptic theology rather than that of individualistic existentialism. 'Justification' is therefore that action of God by which the believer is brought into this new position of faith/obedience.

Christology

Underneath all this is Christology. Käsemann uses this word not primarily to refer to the question of Jesus' 'divinity' and/or 'humanity', but rather as a shorthand for the *theologia crucis*, the revelation of God's righteousness in the cross, by which the world is defeated, and because of which the believer is challenged, and enabled, to live by faith rather than in the false confidence of piety and religious respectability. Just as the cross was, for Luther, the weapon to be used against all human righteousness and cleverness, so for Käsemann it

¹⁶ On Schweitzer's achievement, see W. G. Kümmel in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 269-289, and A. C. Thiselton in *ExpT* 90, 1979, pp. 132-137.

¹⁷ See *Freedom*, pp. 122ff., etc.: 'An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology' in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London, 1964), pp. 169-195 (hereafter *ENTT*). (ET of articles from *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1960.) Also 'Paul and Early Catholicism' in *NTQT*, pp. 236-251.

¹⁸ Now published in *NTQT*, pp. 168-182.

¹⁹ Especially M. T. Brauch's appendix on 'God's Righteousness in Recent German Discussion' in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977), pp. 523-542. See too Riches, *op. cit.* (n. 10 above) and my 1980 doctoral thesis *The Messiah and the People of God* (copies in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and Tyndale Library, Cambridge), pp. 56-85.

²⁰ Such as Müller, Stuhlmacher, etc.; see Brauch, *op. cit.*

²¹ See O. Betz in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 17-36, on justification at Qumran: an interesting discussion of law and grace, and present and future justification, in the Scrolls.

²² See U. Wilckens, *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit: Paulusstudien* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974); and G. Strecker in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 479-508 — a traditio-historical analysis of justification ideas in pre-Pauline and Pauline thought. Strecker finds different layers embedded in Paul, and (to my mind unsuccessfully) proposes to differentiate between them critically, emphasizing the centrality of justification as *liberation*.

²³ See the work of H. H. Schmid, represented in *Rechtfertigung* by an essay on the Old Testament entitled, characteristically, 'Rechtfertigung als Schöpfungsgeschehen' ('Justification as Creation-Event'), pp. 403-414.

becomes the centre of his whole polemical position.²⁴

Christology stands over against anthropology and ecclesiology. By 'anthropology', Käsemann refers to Bultmann's reduction of Paul's message to the analysis of 'how one is justified/saved': by 'ecclesiology' he seems to mean theological positions which move towards Roman Catholicism. Here again a certain amount of background knowledge may help. Käsemann is very conscious of the fact that some of his fellow-pupils under Bultmann have made a different pilgrimage to his own, and have found Roman Catholicism the only alternative to Bultmann's version of Protestantism. Heinrich Schlier, himself the author of a large recent commentary on Romans, is the most obvious example.²⁵ Käsemann sets out a third alternative which enables him — indeed, requires him — to remain a radical Protestant while avoiding the many dangers which he, like Schlier, sees in Bultmann. Here we encounter Käsemann's characteristic Reformation battle-cries: his understanding of the modern theological situation in Germany is that the radical historical critics such as himself represent the genuine Lutheran tradition, protesting against a *theologia gloriae*, a theology of the church triumphant, of worthy devotional practices, of bourgeois religiosity such as Käsemann sees not only in Catholicism but also in many churches — not least those which in England would be called 'evangelical' — which like to consider themselves within the Reformation heritage.²⁶

Thus the basic human problem, which in Käsemann's theology takes the place occupied, in Bultmann, by the analysis of man's inauthenticity, is that man *precisely in his religion* is in rebellion against God:

Here is the heart of Paul's teaching. It is not just that

²⁴ This theme crops up frequently in *Rechtfertigung*. See particularly D. Lührmann, 'Christologie und Rechtfertigung' (pp. 351-364) and P. Stuhlmacher's 'Eighteen Theses' on Paul's theology of the cross (pp. 509-526). M. Hengel's massive article 'Mors Turpissima Crucis' (pp. 125-184) has now been amplified still further and translated as a separate book (*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, London: SCM, 1977), all the more harrowing for its sober historical tone. It is dedicated, significantly, to the memory of Käsemann's daughter Elisabeth, who died in 1977, aged 30, as a 'freedom fighter' in the Argentine.

²⁵ See the typically cryptic *Freedom*, p. 91. Schlier's best known commentaries are his works on Ephesians (1957: he holds the epistle to be Pauline and indeed representative of true Pauline thought), Galatians (1965), and now Romans (1977). Sadly, none of these works is available in English.

²⁶ See *Freedom*, ch. 3; J. Barr in his *Explorations in Theology* (no. 7 in the SCM series of that title, 1980), pp. 30-51, and his introduction to the British edition of P. Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 9-12.

the creature repeatedly comes up against its limits after the fall, but precisely the religious person crashes and the pathway under man fails . . . he becomes entangled in his own desire for life which tries to snatch what can only be given and thus falls subject to the powers of the world. The pious person typifies as no one else can the nature of self-willed, rebellious, perverted and lost creation.²⁷

This radical stance has not a little in common with the Barthian view of Christianity as something other than a religion, and with the protest of Bonhoeffer (and J. A. T. Robinson) in favour of 'religionless Christianity'. Indeed, it could be seen as an attempt to give this theological position a firm grounding in exegesis. This is the clue not only to much of Käsemann's exegesis but also to further broad issues in his theological position. Most significantly, it enables him to bring back into the picture Paul's discussions of Israel, which Bultmann's scheme had simply squeezed out. For Käsemann, Israel's problem is that she is a type — perhaps *the type* — of *homo religiosus*. Romans 9-11 then becomes important in that Israel provides (not a main theme in herself, but nevertheless) the crowning example of God's strange dealings with 'religious man', characterized by judgment and grace which in turn are of course grounded in Christology. Only at the end of Romans 11 is this picture distorted by 'apocalyptic dreaming' which allows Paul to imagine a final conversion of Israel at the parousia.²⁸

Paul is thus made to fight, like Luther, against 'nomism', against the great victorious religious establishment, against human righteousness of all sorts. This is why, though Käsemann is far too good an exegete to deny any place to 'salvation-history' in Paul, that perspective is to be seen very definitely in the light of Christology, and of the justification (not of those who stand in the 'right' tradition or succession, but) of the ungodly. And (also suspiciously like Luther) Paul has a second running battle on his hands: that against the 'enthusiasts'. This convenient category, with its German overtones of the radical reformation, is perhaps as hard to transfer to the English-speaking world as the word *enthusiasmus* is to translate. It would be very interesting to find out just which English Christians, if any, Käsemann would put in this category. I suspect it would be a sort of

²⁷ P. 209, *ad Rom.* 7: 14ff.

²⁸ See the argument of O. Kuss, in his article on Romans 9: 5 (*Rechtfertigung*, pp. 291-303), regarding the whole argument of chs. 9-11 as significant for the meaning of the verse. Passages in Galatians also become important in this discussion: C. K. Barrett provides a very useful fresh study of Galatians 4: 21-31 in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 1-16. (Barrett and his wife are the dedicatees of the ET of the Romans commentary.)

blend of 'fundamentalists' and 'charismatics': the characteristic marks of his 'enthusiasts' are not merely outward things such as glossolalia but the more fundamental belief that salvation is a present possession to be enjoyed in triumph as though all battles, including that with sin and death, can be regarded as past.²⁹ Against this triumphalism, just as against the 'pious' or 'ecclesiastical' sort, the *theologia crucis* must be used ruthlessly, by Paul in the first century and by Käsemann in the twentieth. (We might raise the question at this point, whether there is in the last analysis any theological difference between being a 'nomist' and being an 'enthusiast'; and, if the answer is that they do indeed appear to be different varieties of the same breed, how Käsemann can justify this in terms of a history-of-religions analysis of both positions.)

The Spirit and the letter

This analysis of Christology and the battles to which it commits the theologian goes some way towards explaining a constant theme of Käsemann which often puzzles those brought up in a different sort of Protestantism. For Käsemann, as we have already hinted, radical historical criticism is not a necessary evil, undertaken in response to the apologetic need to trim one's sails to modern thought or out of a desire to eliminate the supernatural elements in Christianity. It makes a virtue out of the demolition of 'historical grounds for faith', seeing such grounds as the attempt to base faith on history and so turn it into a 'work', or as the claim of the 'devout' to stand within a particular historical tradition and thus to be automatically justified. The 'acid bath of criticism' (into which young theological students are to be plunged) is a *purifying* baptism, a death to 'pious' or 'secure' theological positions — not least a high view of the whole of Scripture, which Käsemann sees as attempting to imprison God's word, to shut up the Spirit in the letter.

This emerges particularly in Käsemann's exposition of God's answer to the human plight. On the one hand, God justifies the *ungodly* — those who, like Abraham, simply hear and believe the bare word of the promise in the teeth of the evidence. No attempt must be made to base faith elsewhere. On the other hand, the Spirit gives true and radical freedom, freedom under the sign of the cross, freedom for radical obedience which sits loose to all ecclesiastical pressures and comforting structures, freedom from reading the Scriptures as

gramma, 'letter'. With this last move, the whole scheme ties some of its own loose ends together: the Jewish scriptures are read by Paul as a radical historical critic would have them read, with a healthy dose of *sachkritik* ('material criticism', *i.e.* the sifting of the material on the basis of a central theme, a *sachmitte*).³⁰ In one of his most significant non-excurses, placed under the heading of 10: 5-13, Käsemann states his position at some length. These pages (284-288) would be a good passage to study closely if one wishes to make a start in understanding the writer and his thought; here we see how, for him, Paul's hermeneutic of the Old Testament functions *both* as one aspect of his whole critique of Israel and the law *and* as part of his view of the freedom of faith and the Spirit:

We stand here at the commencement of a theologically reflected Christian hermeneutics. Its mark is that it is not satisfied with the 'it is written'. It demands critical exposition, with the message of justification as the decisive criterion. . . . Since what is at issue in [the message of justification] is not just the salvation of the individual but the lordship of God over the world, Israel's history is also seen from this standpoint.³¹

And the antithesis of the last sentence is further expanded in another passage, this time in exposition of 8: 18-22, speaking of 'the pledge of eschatological liberation':

If Marcion was forced by the inner logic of his theology to cut out vv. 18-22, he is followed today by an existentialism which individualizes salvation and thereby truncates Paul's message by describing freedom formally as openness to the future. In fact it is a term for the earthly reality of Christ's lordship. . . . The truth in the existential interpretation is that it recognizes in pride and despair the powers which most deeply enslave mankind. Its theological reduction derives from a world view which no longer knows what to do with Pauline apocalyptic, allows anthropological historicity to conceal the world's history, obscures the antithesis of the aeons in 1.20ff by natural theology and here through the assertion of mythology, and for this reason can no longer speak adequately of the dominion of Christ in its worldwide dimension.³²

Here is the issue between Käsemann and Bultmann (and, with Bultmann, a good deal of what in English we call evangelicalism, though it would use different language). And here, too, is Käsemann's basic theological position. In the cross of Jesus Christ God has triumphed over the

³⁰ See particularly Morgan, *op. cit.* (n. 4 above), pp. 42ff., and W. Schrage's review of 'The Canon in the Canon' in recent German discussion, in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 415-442.

³¹ Pp. 287f. See too the article 'The Spirit and the Letter' in *PP*, pp. 138-168, and the articles by J. Blank and F. Lang in *Rechtfertigung* (pp. 37-56, 305-320). *Cf.* too n. 26 above.

³² P. 236.

²⁹ See J. Jervell's article on Paul as the 'Weak Charismatic' in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 185-198.

world: on that basis the ungodly can be justified and set free to hear God's word in a new way and to serve him in a new sort of obedience.

The coherence of Romans

Possibly the most striking exegetical achievement to result from this theological understanding of Paul is that Käsemann integrates the Epistle to the Romans in a way quite impossible from a strictly Bultmannian position. Even if we may conclude that the job is still not complete, it is good to see programmatic statements like these:

Until I have proof to the contrary I proceed on the assumption that the text has a central concern and a remarkable inner logic that may no longer be entirely comprehensible to us. . . . Viewed as a whole, the Epistle to the Romans reveals a closely knit argumentation which is hidden only to those who do not exert enough effort over it.³³

We have already seen how this is worked out in relation to the question of Israel, which becomes relevant for justification because Israel is the classic example of 'religious man'. The same holistic approach, characterized by the apocalyptic interpretation of Paul, enables Käsemann to integrate the Adam-Christ framework of thought into the whole scheme of chs. 1-4, and to incorporate also the sacramental language of ch. 6;³⁴ and the apocalyptic vision of ch. 8 clearly belongs in the same world of thought. In particular, this hermeneutical key gives Käsemann a base on which to build his version of the Kummel-Bultmann view of ch. 7. This view, often misunderstood by English critics who think that the main question the Germans are asking is 'who is here being spoken of', holds that the 'I' of Romans 7 is the typical *homo religiosus*, the Jew-as-the-typical-Adam, thinking to find life in 'religion', in the law, and finding instead only death. The 'good' and 'evil' spoken of in the passage, including even the 'passions of the flesh' in 7:5, are not 'morally right and wrong actions': the 'good I want' is life, or salvation, and the 'passions of the flesh' are the desires for self-justification which lead the religious man to attempt to earn that justification by doing what the law requires (pp. 194-204).

According to this view, chs. 9-11 then recapitulate the train of thought of the first eight

chapters, in order to show in the case of Israel how God deals with the problem of religious man.³⁵ Chs. 12-16 apply the theological positions thus outlined to problems in the community — not least the danger of self-assertive 'enthusiasm', which according to Käsemann is the real theme of 12:3ff.

Within this framework, Käsemann gives a positive wealth of detailed exegesis. In the absence of an index, my own home-made one runs to several hundred entries of passages to refer back to for useful discussions. Among the particularly interesting passages we can only indicate a handful. The proposal of a liturgical and an anti-enthusiastic background for parts of 8: 13-30 will surprise many: and, if Dodd found the Achilles heel of Romans in 9: 19ff., for Käsemann the weak spot is 10: 18, where Paul (he thinks) has deceived himself into constructing a salvation-historical programme as the framework for his own mission — a programme which was never carried out and which, consequently, indicates theological misjudgments which cannot be adopted by those who come after him. Here is the paradox both of Paul and of Käsemann's exposition of him: Pauline theology must itself be treated critically, since it contains profound inconsistencies — and yet even when this is done it remains a dynamic thing. 'Paul has left us a theological concept which cannot be maintained as a unity but whose parts, even when they have fallen apart, have again and again had an impact on world history.'³⁶ Thus the Adam-Christ picture of 5: 12-21, and the vision of the final restoration of 'all Israel', are the remains of pre-Pauline apocalyptic speculation which the apostle should, for the sake of consistency, have forsworn — just as the (hypothetical) formulae in 1: 3f.; 3: 24f. reflect a pre-Pauline understanding which the apostle has now radically modified by supplying both internal alterations and a new context. Exegetical details thus reflect, at point after point, the basic history-of-religions thesis and polemical theological position. Paul's theology is only comprehensible, for Käsemann, in terms of Jewish apocalyptic thought now radically reworked in the light of the cross. Glimpses of that process of rethinking are visible within the epistle itself, and indicate both the fragile nature of the solutions which Paul himself propounded and the need for *sachkritik* in present-day exegesis of his writings.

³⁵ See especially G. Klein's article on Paul and the Jews in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 229-243. Klein strongly re-asserts the standard view of Paul's anti-Jewish polemic against those who, since the Second World War, have been trying to see Paul in a different light.

³⁶ P. 296.

³³ Pp. viii, 324.

³⁴ See also the article on Baptism and Justification by F. Hahn (*Rechtfertigung*, pp. 95-124). Hahn, like Strecker (above, n. 22) fails to convince me with his traditio-historical analysis which, in the nature of the case, is inevitably highly speculative. Ch. 6 also raises, of course, the question of the integration of the Pauline ethic with the doctrine of justification: on this, see the useful article (in English, keeping Barrett company) of L. E. Keck in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 199-209.

Questions and problems

It would not be difficult to point to exegetical details which lay themselves open to challenge. But more important, and more interesting, are the pressing questions which Käsemann's large ideas force upon us — not least in their *effect upon* exegetical details.³⁷

To begin with, there are all sorts of questions to be asked about Käsemann's use of the term 'apocalyptic' itself. It becomes clear (though only gradually) that this word has a particular *theological* meaning for Käsemann: it is, in fact, more a hermeneutical term than an historical one.³⁸ That is, it does not refer to a literary form, nor to the belief (shared by most Jewish apocalyptists) that God would act soon and decisively *on behalf of the Jews*. Nor does it include such well-known features of 'apocalyptic' as visions and interpretations, or metaphysical dualism (except in the sense implied by the 'two ages' doctrine). Rather, in Käsemann's writings it comes to mean a particular belief about God, namely, that he is the Lord of the world and is establishing that lordship in and through the cross of Christ. But in asserting this theological position, and in labelling it 'apocalyptic', intending thus to use it as a means of demonstrating Paul's world-wide vision over against a particularist or covenantal Jewish idea, Käsemann has in fact thoroughly demythologized the very background literature to which he is appealing (just as Bultmann's demythologizing programme was the servant of a larger hermeneutical concern). In so doing he invites the question: what if a central, *and non-negotiable*, feature of 'apocalyptic' as it actually was was in fact just such a nationalistic hope? What if the vision of God as Lord of the world in the apocalyptic literature was invoked precisely in order to guarantee *Israel's* eventual triumph over her national enemies? The question has only to be put for the answer to be clear. It was just such a vision, and hope, that motivated the Jewish writers of 'apocalypses'. If Paul shared the apocalyptic hope, the question of God's plan for Israel cannot be merely an example of something else. It begins to look as if Käsemann has pressed the idea of 'apocalyptic' into service in order to perform the same task that the earlier Bultmann school had undertaken with the help of the category 'hellenism' — namely, that task of showing how Paul's theology transformed a

Jewish-Christian message into a gospel for the world. And the apparent rationale behind this — the vision of God as not only Israel's Lord but also the world's — is in fact irrelevant for this, because it belonged specifically in a nationalistic context. God's sovereign lordship is not revealed (according to the apocalyptists) in order to *save* the world, but precisely to condemn it and to deliver Israel. The very history-of-religions background to which Käsemann appeals in fact tells heavily against him. It begins to look as if his 'cosmic' theology is simply Bultmann's anthropology writ large. The actual concerns of first-century Jews are in both cases pushed into the margin.

This becomes especially apparent in Käsemann's interpretation of *dikaio sunē theou*. He is well aware that a natural meaning of the phrase in early Christianity would include God's covenant faithfulness; and he thinks that Paul deliberately altered the sense of the phrase so as to exclude that element, appealing to a supposed 'technical' use of the concept in the apocalyptic writings. But precisely this meaning of 'God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel' was (arguably) uppermost in the many instances cited by Käsemann and others in the background literature as evidence of the meaning 'God's salvation-creating power'; in fact, God's righteousness is that because of which he is seen to be in the right in his strange dealings with Israel and with the world, *and* that to which Israel can appeal for help in time of need. And Paul, in rejecting the *nationalist* view of the covenant, does not reject covenant theology itself. On the contrary, the purpose of Romans 4 is not merely 'proof from scripture of justification by faith'; it is a re-examination of the meaning of the covenant, aimed at demonstrating that God is faithful to his Word precisely in calling Gentile and Jew alike, on the basis of faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, into true membership in Abraham's family.³⁹ The difference between Paul and the Jewish writers who appeal to the same concept is that Paul claims to understand the covenant correctly now that he sees it in the light of Christ. I agree with Käsemann that the 'apocalyptic' background is all-important, and that it has been vitally modified by Christology: but I think that this suggests a richer view than his, a view which treats Israel and the covenant with continuing seriousness. And within this context the way is opened for a rather different exposition of

³⁷ I have explored several of the relevant areas in my doctoral thesis (above, n. 19).

³⁸ See Sauter, *op. cit.* (above, n. 10), p. 86.

³⁹ See G. B. Caird's review of Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in *JTS* n.s. 29, 1978, pp. 538ff.

justification and of Paul's whole critique of Israel.⁴⁰ Can it be that Käsemann, when he uses the phrase 'God's righteousness', is really referring to something else? God's sovereign and saving rule over the world is surely his *kingdom*, not his righteousness (and however closely the two are correlated, as in Matthew 6: 33, they are hardly to be identified); and the gift, and power, that *creates* salvation is surely, for Paul, the Spirit. Käsemann has perhaps been using a Pauline phrase to refer to a *different* (Pauline) concept, or even two different concepts. Hence there follow both the initial plausibility and appeal, and the subsequent puzzles, in his account.

A fuller understanding of the apocalyptic background would have also pointed towards a more satisfactory solution of the *religionsgeschichte*, theological and exegetical problems of 5: 12-21. The point about Adam is that, in Jewish writings such as the Scrolls, *Adam's* glory would be inherited by the true *Israel*.⁴¹ By saying that it is in *Christ* that Adam's sin and its effects are undone, Paul is saying that God's plan for Israel has been fulfilled in the achievement of Jesus. Abraham's people (Rom. 4) have indeed been the place, and the means, of God's dealing with the problem of Adam's sin (3: 23): but this people of Abraham are now to be understood not *kata sarka* but as the people who believe in Jesus Christ. And from this perspective the difficult and complex blend of 'anthropology', 'sacramentalism' and the problem of the law in Romans 6-8 all fall into place. Ch. 7 deals, not with the 'pious' man whose fault is attempting to keep the law, but with the Jew who, despite the great privilege of possessing the law, finds, like Adam, that the commandment is the place where sin gains a foothold (*cf.* 5: 13f.). The problem is not 'the hidden Jew in all of us' (there are, perhaps, some ghosts of pre-war Germany that even now need to be exorcized here), but rather the hidden 'Adam' in Israel.

Thus Romans 5-8, by transferring to the Messiah and thence to his people all that the apocalyptists hoped would be true of Israel (notice how this, unlike Käsemann's analysis, provides a unifying theme for 8: 12-30), complete Paul's argument about God's dealings with humanity's sin and death, and precisely in so doing raise the question: what, then, about Israel? (The same sequence of

thought occurs in 2: 17-29 and 3: 1-9.) And from that perspective new solutions to the problems of 9-11 become apparent. The conclusion of the argument (11: 25-27) is no apocalyptic dream (nor, I believe, does it refer to the parousia);⁴² Paul is arguing from the premise that Israel is still the people of the Messiah, even though 'according to the flesh' (9: 5), and that she must follow her Messiah through the 'death' of the flesh to *zōē ek nekron*. Once more, Israel is not merely an example of *homo religiosus*: she is the bearer of God's promises, in whose paradoxical fate we see, reflected on a large screen, both the problems of Adam (as Käsemann sees) and the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which perhaps he does not see). And, just as the world will be renewed when Adam is renewed (8: 18ff.), so Israel's re-acceptance (whatever that means) will signal untold blessing for the Gentiles (11: 11ff). This view arguably ties the whole epistle together much more tightly than Käsemann is able to do.

Conclusion

It is a measure of the stature of Käsemann's achievement that it has succeeded in raising, in a new form, almost all the basic questions about Pauline theology. I have indicated that I disagree with many of his detailed solutions; but that he has posed the questions in the right way — by seeing Paul against the background of Jewish apocalyptic thought, and by placing the cross, and the revelation of God's righteousness, at the centre — seems to me now beyond dispute. The largest question, for me, is whether Käsemann has in fact done justice to his own statement, itself admirable as a programme for exegesis: 'History is the field of reconstructions, and whether these are right or not depends on how far they overcome the problem posed.' I have suggested that the loose ends which remain in Käsemann's scheme are there because he has not carried through his apocalyptic understanding to its natural conclusion. Seeking to make Paul relevant by abstracting him from the context of *Israel's* hope, Käsemann (like Bultmann) has laid himself open to the charge of letting Paul say only what the exegete wishes to hear. To restore the 'Israel' dimension, both in the background material and in Paul, will not make the apostle less relevant for the twentieth century, but more. Nor will the 'cosmic' vision be lost, or even modified, since it is precisely Israel's hope for herself (that the world will be renewed with herself in the position of Adam, under God and over the world)

⁴⁰ See my article in G. Reid (ed.), *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (London: Collins, 1980), pp. 13-37.

⁴¹ See, e.g., 1QS 4: 23; CD 3: 20; 1QH 1: 15; 17: 15; 4QPpPs37 3: 1f.; for the whole position, see my thesis, pp. 34f.

⁴² See *ibid.*, pp. 200-210.

which has now been transferred to, and fulfilled in, Jesus Christ. And within this new, and old, vision we can hold together, as Käsemann never quite does, both the characteristically Pauline critique of Israel and the law, and the equally characteristic

affirmation that, in the revelation of the righteousness of God, the law itself — the charter of God's true covenant purposes for Israel — is not abolished, but rather (though always under the sign of the cross) fulfilled.

Towards a mutual understanding of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation

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The Christian looking at the Qur'an will naturally approach it with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Bible; and the Muslim will approach the Bible with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Qur'an. Because there exist similarities between the two religions, and in particular because of the Muslim contention that Islam is a continuation and completion of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is sometimes assumed that similar criteria can be validly used in considering the two revelations. It is my contention, however, that there is a wide gulf between understandings of revelation in these two faiths, so that such an assumption leads inevitably to misunderstandings.

The Muslim affirms that the message of Jesus was similar in content to that in the Qur'an. Yet when he comes to the New Testament he finds a violation of his idea of a revealed book, and finds it difficult to understand how the Christian can accept it as such. The Christian, on the other hand, finds the Qur'an something of a puzzle. It differs widely from the New Testament in structure and approach, and yet it bears some resemblance to other parts of what he recognizes as revealed writing: namely, parts of the law, psalms and prophetic writings in the Old Testament. Accustomed to analytical thinking, he is likely to concentrate on discussing and criticizing the content of the Qur'an, avoiding as far as possible consideration of its form.

It seems to me that an understanding of the form of a revelation — how it was revealed as well as its present written form — is prerequisite to an under-

standing of its content. More importantly, the form of the revelation will be consistent with its origin and content, and will be itself indicative of that origin and content. If we use such a proposal as the basis for study of any purported revelation, we shall have some hope of understanding the revelation in its own terms.

I am fully aware that many who adhere to one revelation prefer to judge another in their own terms — and in such terms it will inevitably fall short. However, I am concerned here with understanding rather than assessment or criticism, since it seems to me of enormous importance that we understand a thing before we assess it. We are otherwise likely to be guilty of assessing a figment of our own imagination, and not what we claim to be studying.

Here follows a brief explanation of forms of revelation in Islam and Christianity, and a discussion of their implications. A paper of this length inevitably includes over-simplifications, and many of the statements below would require some balancing comment for completeness. However, since my main aim is to compare the two systems, and to indicate the strangeness of each to adherents of the other, I consider the simplifications not only to be necessary for brevity, but also to be useful in comparison.

A. FORMS OF REVELATION

1. Islam

In Islam, revelation is embodied in the Qur'an, which came as a direct message from God to man through the prophet Muhammed. The key here is that God's words came to man, the prophet being

only the channel for communication. His title is 'the Messenger of God', which well describes him as one who takes the message and relays it to the recipients.

The mechanism of communication is simple: the Qur'an is considered to have been written in Heaven from eternity. Books have been given to many prophets in different languages and cultures from Adam onwards, but all have, it is said, been lost or distorted. The final revelation of the eternal Qur'an in the Arabic language was given to Muhammed, to be preserved in all its purity for the remainder of human history. The story of the beginning of the revelation is best told in the words of the Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari 1, 3:

The first revelation that was granted to the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him) was the true vision of sleep, so that he never saw a vision but the truth of it shone forth like the bright gleam of dawn. Then solitude became dear to him and he used to seclude himself in the cave of Hira, where he would devote himself to Divine worship for several nights before coming back to his family. He would take provisions for this purpose, then he would return to Khadijah¹ and get some more provisions for a similar (period), until the Truth² came to him while he was in the cave of Hira. The Angel came to him and said, 'Read'. He said, 'I am not one of those who can read.'

And he continued 'Then he (the Angel) took hold of me and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more, after which he let me go and said, 'Read'. When I replied, 'I am not one of those who can read', he took hold of me and pressed me a second time so hard that I could not bear it any more, then he let me go again and said, 'Read'. I said, 'I am not one of those who can read'.

The Prophet continued: 'Then he took hold of me and pressed me a third time, then he let me go and said, "Read in the name of thy Lord who creates — creates man from a clot. Read, and thy Lord is most Generous"' (Surah 96: 1-3).

The Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him) returned with this (message), his heart trembling, and he went to Khadijah, daughter of Khuwailid and said, 'Wrap me up, wrap me up'. So they wrapped him up until the awe had left him.

The mechanism of revelation is further clarified in al-Bukhari 1, 2:

Aishah, the mother of the faithful (God be pleased with her) reported that Harith ibn Hisham asked the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him), 'O Messenger of God, how does the revelation come to thee?' The Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him) said, 'Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell, and that is the type

¹ Muhammed's first wife. Qur'anic quotations are from M. M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (Mentor), unless otherwise stated.

² The Truth means the Spirit of Truth, or the Holy Spirit. This title refers to the Angel Gabriel.

which is the hardest on me; then he (the Angel) departs from me and I retain in memory from him what he said. At times the Angel comes to me in the likeness of a man and speaks to me and I retain in memory what he says.' Aishah (God be pleased with her) said: 'And I saw him when revelation descended on him on a severely cold day; when it departed from him his forehead dripped with sweat.'

There are various points of interest here. Firstly we see a direct mode of revelation, where the angel Gabriel was sent from God to give the exact words of the message. Muhammed then transmitted it to his disciples, who later committed it to writing.

Secondly, we notice Muhammed's insistence that he could not read. This is taken by many to symbolize and ensure the purity of the message — as the virginity of Mary can be seen as symbolizing and ensuring the divine purity of Christ. Some would even consider Muhammed's purported illiteracy necessary to the faithful transmission of the message: the message must be entirely of God, and not of Muhammed. In a sense, then, the nature of the messenger is unimportant: it is necessary only that his personality does not affect the message in any way. (Of course, Muslims consider Muhammed as much more than a passive messenger. His position as prophet gives his life-style and words a high, and even an authoritative, value. Many put the traditions about his speech and actions on a level second only to the Qur'an, and see his example as binding, and even inspired.)

Muhammed's illiteracy exemplifies a third emphasis in the record of revelation: that of the miraculous. The Qur'an is in the highest style of Arabic poetry so that its very language rejoices the heart of the reader. In fact, Qur'anic language is considered the highest form of Arabic, and so lofty is the style that it is seen in itself to be sufficient proof of the miraculous nature of the revelation. When asked what miracle he wrought to validate his prophethood, Muhammed pointed only to the Qur'an; and the stress on his own illiteracy implies the divine origin of the miracle.

Finally, we can notice a stylized form of language in the above quotations, and see this as an example of the centrality of language in the Islamic revelation. If the wording of the traditions is important, how much more is the wording of the Qur'an itself! It contains the exact words given by God through Gabriel, and represents the eternal Word written in heaven. There is therefore virtue in using its exact wording in prayer, and in reading it aloud or memorizing it: in Christian terms, the Quranic language is itself a means of grace, and takes on an almost sacramental significance. The role of the Arabic language has even been compared to that of

the body of Jesus in revelation.³ The language, the words, and even the letters have importance in themselves, so that Arabic grammar and calligraphy have been extensively studied and developed by the faithful. It is hardly necessary to say that it is therefore impossible to translate the Qur'an. The best translation must be a human interpretation of the divine message, and there is no possible substitute for the sacred language.

2. Christianity

The origin of the biblical writings is much more complex than that of the Qur'an, and not so evidently divine. There are, of course, portions of the Bible that approximate to the Qur'anic picture of revelation, being presented as direct messages from God. Examples include much of the Mosaic law and parts of the prophets. However, such a manner of revelation is comparatively rare. Most of the Bible is clearly written by men, and bears the stamp of their personalities and cultural contexts; and it is largely devoted to records of events in human history, together with human responses, feelings and reflections on those events.

It is hardly surprising that many people find it difficult to equate such a motley collection of human writings with divine revelation. The mode of production of the Qur'an seems much more appropriate! And yet Christians insist on the divine authority of their Scriptures. How are we to understand this?

Perhaps the key is that it is not the Bible itself that is the essential revelation. It might be clearer to consider it as a revelatory expression of something else that is the primary revelation. The nature of the primary revelation would then determine the mode of production of the Scriptures.

The primary revelation comes in various forms, but it is not perhaps too much of a simplification to say that it is essentially God acting in history: his interaction with his creation and particularly with man. The supreme point of this interaction is in the person of Jesus Christ — the ultimate interaction of God with man, and therefore the ultimate revelation of God and his relationship with man.

The biblical writings represent records of these interactions, together with reflections on their significance. They are produced through interaction between God and man, and are therefore necessarily thoroughly human as well as being thoroughly divine. It has been pointed out⁴ that, in the Christian faith, divine activity and human

activity do not grow in inverse proportion, but in direct proportion. Thus the biblical writers were not merely channels whose will and intellect were overruled by God, but rather consciously used their human faculties to co-operate with God in the context of their relationship with him.

B. IMPLICATIONS

The above discussion indicates enormous differences in attitudes and expectations regarding revelation in the two systems. Perhaps the reader is already coming to realize why Muslims and Christians may find each other's sacred books unacceptable. We now need to seek reasons for their divergent views.

In each case, we are considering a process of communication by God to man through man. We have already explored something of the 'through man' aspect, as this is the part of the process most easily studied. But the mechanism of communication through man is likely to be dependent on other factors, namely, the nature of God, the nature of man, and what is communicated. The dependency here is hierarchical: what is to be communicated depends on the natures of man and of God, and the nature of man is determined by God himself.

It would be possible to start from the base of this hierarchy, discussing the nature of God in Islam and in Christianity and thence arguing to an understanding of revelation in the two systems. However, I prefer what the computer scientists call a 'top-down' approach: to begin with the situations which we can see and wish to analyse (*i.e.* the forms of the revelations), and work from them to an understanding of the fundamentals. We shall use the forms of revelation discussed above as our springboard, rather than seeking answers to our questions from the content of the texts — although it will also be necessary to look at the texts themselves.

There are several advantages to such an approach. Firstly, it is likely to give a deeper understanding and a broader picture than a more fragmented approach; and secondly, it allows questions and answers to arise in the context of the revelation under consideration. It is unlikely that one religion will give clear answers to the questions asked by another, since the two will consider different matters important. The questions seen as fundamental by one may be considered peripheral by the other, or may be understood differently.

Finally, I would suggest that the major common factor of Islam and Judaeo-Christianity (after their

³ See S. H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities in Islam* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975), pp. 43ff.

⁴ K. Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* (Freiburg and New York: Herder and Herder, 1961).

monotheism) is their claim to be revealed. Revelation would therefore seem a sensible starting-point for comparison.

1. What is communicated?

a. *Islam*

As we have seen, the communication in Islam is essentially a message. That is, it contains information relayed from God to man: information that God has chosen to give to man. The Qur'an is seen as God's greatest mercy towards man, so that the information in it is beneficial to him.

What kind of information is given? The Qur'an is characterized as a warning (18, 4), a reminder (81, 27), a guide and a witness (46, 12). It warns of the judgment to come, reminds of sacred history and present responsibility, gives guidance for conduct, and witnesses to God and his messengers.

Perhaps the essential description of the Qur'an is as a book of guidance for mankind: a guidance for all aspects of life. Together with the Traditions, it gives a basis for guidance not only in religious matters, but also in matters of personal and family lifestyle and in social, political and economic affairs. Every aspect of human life comes under this guidance from God.

The Qur'an then, informs man of all he needs to know about God, and reveals the way God wills man to live, together with witness and warning that urge obedience to that will.

b. *Christianity*

The biblical writings are seen as having been produced in the context of the writers' relationship with God, and are therefore an expression of that relationship. In few cases do they represent dictated messages from God: they rather express God's relationship with his creatures, and their response to him. This, we have suggested, is the essential revelation. It is not so much a revelation of what God wills man to do, as a revelation of God himself in what he has done, and of how man can relate to him.

This emphasis can be seen even in those portions of Scripture that are concerned largely with instruction or with historical records. Two examples will suffice.

The first is the Mosaic law, which certainly represents a guidance for living. It is given in the context of the covenant relationship between God and his people and his saving acts on their behalf, and is laced with appeals to the nature of God. In fact, the reason given for acting in a particular way is sometimes that God would also act in that way: it

is expected that man should in some measure conform to the moral character of God.

Secondly, we consider the records of Jesus Christ. The gospels do record much of his teaching, but even this — although said to be derived from God — is taught by Jesus in his own way and words. It is of interest that the gospel writers do not even record Jesus' words in their original language, and, judging by the variations between the gospels, they are not particularly concerned with recording precise wording. Moreover, most of the gospel writings are concerned with Jesus' actions as well as his words; and this is not so much to give us an example to follow as to indicate his nature and the response of people to him. Finally, there is great stress on the crucifixion and resurrection.

All this suggests that it is not so much the message of Jesus that is being communicated as the person of Jesus, and his work which makes possible relationship between God and man. Jesus himself shows us the essential content of Christian revelation. He shows us God himself is the supreme relationship between God and man, and is also the way to relationship with God for other human beings.

We have suggested that Islamic revelation is essentially concerned with how man should live, whilst Christian revelation is centred in relationship between man and God. We should note that the Bible also gives instruction about living, and that the Qur'an also records God's dealings with man in history. However, the emphases are different and, as we shall see, the notions have different foundations.

2. What is man like?

a. *Islam*

Man is God's creature, to whom God condescends to communicate. However, the communication must occur in such a way that man does not alter it in any way. His action on the divine Word would invalidate it: so we see that man is completely other than God.

Further, we have seen that what is communicated is essentially information which shows man the will of God and encourages him to submit to him. This has two important implications. Firstly, it implies that what man needs is essentially to be informed.⁵ His major predicament is that he is ignorant of God and of his will and mercy. He has

⁵ Man is also seen as weak, and in need of strengthening, but this is not particularly obvious from the form of the revelation.

forgotten what he perhaps knew at first concerning God's unity and the coming judgment, and needs to be warned and reminded about these things. He then needs to be told how he should act in order to serve God and to avoid judgment.

Secondly, it implies that man is able to obey God's commandments. God would never demand the impossible of man. Hence Islam's vehement rejection of any idea of original sin, however interpreted. In the Qur'anic accounts, Adam and Eve were forgiven as soon as they realized that they have wronged themselves (2, 35ff; 7, 10ff). Sin is seen as something that hurts the sinner, and not as hurting God; and God can forgive directly, without mediation or sacrifice.

Thus Islam gives man a very high position: by God's mercy he has the possibility of obeying God as far as he demands, and needs only to be given the right guidance to be able to please God and to be forgiven, if God so wills. On the other hand, God's demands on the individual are never greater than he is able, with God's help and by God's will, to fulfil.

b. Christianity

Here we see a lower view of man's abilities, but a higher view of God's demands on him. We have already noted that specific commands in the Bible are often based on the idea that man should reflect something of the moral character of God. This seems a strange demand: it implies either that God requires the impossible of man, or that man is in some way able to be like God. The former suggests injustice, but the latter might appear to border on blasphemy; and it is anyway obvious to most of us that man is not normally capable of reaching such sublime moral heights.

Let us return to our discussion of revelation, to seek clues to an understanding of this problematic view of man and his responsibility towards God. We remember that the Christian view of revelation is centred in the idea of relationship between man and God – which immediately eases the difficulty. If God and man can relate, then there must be some similarity between them. Man, although a creature, must reflect something of the nature of God; and God, although uncreated, must be in some sense a 'person'.

However, this removes only half the difficulty. It is still painfully obvious that man does not meet God's demands. In fact, it was necessary for God to reveal himself, and to reveal also a way for man's relationship with him to be established. In other words, man is only *potentially* related to God. Outside of the revelation, the relationship is

broken, and man cannot satisfactorily respond to a message from God. The revelation leads to relationship between God and man, and gives guidance that can be followed only in the context of that relationship.

Man's predicament outside this relationship is not, then, essentially one of ignorance – or even of weakness. It is not knowledge but blood that makes relationships. Man's predicament is that he is out of relationship with God; but the Bible teaches that this was not man's original state. At the beginning, the relationship was there, but it has been broken by man's rebellion: a rebellion which not only harmed man, but also severed him from God. Therefore, man needs not information, but restoration; and that can be achieved only by God himself.

In Islam, then, man has no need of salvation: he has already the capability of obeying God, and needs only to be guided and strengthened in order to fulfil his responsibility towards his Creator. He is not potentially related to God, in the biblical understanding of relationship, since he is completely other than God.⁶ The Christian, on the other hand, sees man as greater in potential, but – until he is restored – debased in actuality. Unless he is saved through Jesus Christ, he realizes only a glimmer of his potential, and can never by his own efforts please God.

3. What is God like?

a. Islam

There is much said about God in the Qur'an, and his creation is said to give an indication of him; but the essential nature of God is other than that of his creatures, and cannot be grasped by man. We know that God is one, that he has certain names and attributes, and that he is all-powerful to do whatever he wills. But we see only what he has chosen to reveal in his message through the prophets.

Say: Allah is One,
The eternal God.
He begot none, nor was He begotten.
None is equal to Him

(Surah 112, The Unity, Penguin translation).

God in himself is great, and infinitely other than what he has made. At the centre of his attributes appears to be his great power, and his will. These

⁶ Although no equivalent to the biblical relationship between God and man is envisaged – the Qur'anic relationship is essentially that of slave and lord – God is nevertheless very close to man. A famous verse tells us, 'We verily created a man and we know what his soul whispereth to him, and we are nearer to him than his jugular vein' (50, 16). Notice that the closeness here implies knowledge rather than relationship.

imply that he is also the Knower of all, the Wise, the Hearing, the Aware, the Judge, the Glorious, the Rich, the Independent, the Unique and the Supreme Lord.

Such a picture makes sense of our previous discussion. This God would not relate to man as a friend, a brother or a father, and could not be in any way affected by man's actions. The idea that he might be hurt by man's sin is ludicrous, if not blasphemous; the biblical idea of the fall in such a context is nonsensical, and that of salvation superfluous. Since the main effect of sin is to hurt man, and not to sever his relationship with God, no restoration of relationship is required. The God of all power can forgive as he chooses: no mediation is necessary, and indeed none is possible, since nothing and nobody can be associated with God.⁷

This, however, is not a complete picture of God. God has not remained totally aloof from his creation, but has chosen to speak to man through the prophets. Without this revelation, man would be in ignorance and under judgment; but God has shown mercy to him in his predicament. He has revealed not only the certainty of the judgment day, but also how man should act in order to live well on earth and hope to gain paradise after death.

So we see that God, in his power and wisdom, has chosen also to be the Speaker, the Guardian and True Guide of man, the Generous and Benevolent, the Loving and Provider, the Forgiving and the Merciful. In his beneficence and mercy, he has not only created man and provided for all his needs: he has also given him his revelation and guidance in the Qur'an. It is this beneficence and mercy that the Muslim remembers repeatedly in his prayers, as he declares that God is Ruler of creation and Lord of judgment, and beseeches his guidance.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.
The Beneficent, the Merciful.
Owner of the Day of Judgment,
Thee alone we worship; Thee alone we ask for help.
Show us the straight path,
The path of those whom Thou has favoured;
Not the path of those who earn Thine anger nor of
those who go astray (Surah 1; the opening).

b. Christianity

We have noted above the stupendous claim that the biblical writings record the revelation of God himself in relationship with man, and supremely in Christ. This implies that we should be able to say much about God, but it also implies great mystery

concerning him. It is the mystery of an infinite God in relationship with finite man. Here follows an attempt to understand something of the mystery of our above discussion in terms of what God must be like if it is true.

Firstly, God must be in some sense like man if the two are to relate. In biblical language, man is made in the image of God. Of course, that image has been distorted by sin, but we should be able to understand something of God from our knowledge of man. The characteristics of man necessary for relationship include abilities to love and hate, moral consciousness, emotion and language, and all of these are seen as reflections of corresponding characteristics of God. The Christian God is a personal God.

Secondly, the essence of God includes relationship. How can this be, if God is one, and yet existed before he had created anyone to relate to? The answer is that from eternity God has related to himself, loved himself, communicated with himself. This is certainly a mystery, which the Christian describes in terms of the Trinity. The Bible speaks of Jesus Christ as one with God, as existing from eternity, and as active in creation; and it speaks of the Holy Spirit⁸ as existing with and being of one nature with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. To say that the three are one accurately summarizes the biblical material, but brings problems in itself. Other writers have discussed these: here, we note only the insight it gives to the eternal love, communication and relationship in God.

Next, God is the one who is revealed in history. Thus we can see what God is like from what he has done. He is more often described as the God of Israel or the Father of Jesus Christ than in terms of his characteristics, so we can expect to understand him best through accounts of his actions and through personal experience of his actions towards us. Thus it will often be more appropriate to describe God as one who *does* something rather than one who *is* something. Supremely, God is a God who creates, who loves, and who saves. He is also a God who judges and destroys wickedness.

The supreme revelation of God in history is in Jesus Christ. 'No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known' (Jn. 1: 18). The question, 'What is God like?' is ultimately to be answered through a study of the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament records, which is left to the reader.

⁷ Among some Muslims, Muhammed or Ali or various people considered as saints, are given a mediatorial position. This is not, however, accepted by the more orthodox.

⁸ The Holy Spirit here refers to the third person of the Trinity (*cf.* n. 2).

This has been the most difficult section to write. A discussion of the nature of God in a few pages of human writing is no mean undertaking. I have sought only to bring out the main emphases and trust that the reader will proceed to a deeper understanding through his own study of the Qur'an and the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Doubtless, many criticisms can and will be levelled at what I have written. In particular, many statements require further elaboration and balancing comments, as has been noted already. This paper has been but an attempt to throw some light onto the question of why Christians and Muslims seem so often to misunderstand, and thus misrepresent, each other's Books.

To the Christian, the Qur'an has a monotonous and stylized form. He is not accustomed to the idea of a sacred language, and anyway does not usually have sufficient Arabic to be able to appreciate its poetry. More importantly, it fails completely to do what he expects a revelation to do: it does not relate to man's need for forgiveness, salvation and relationship with God as he understands it. And, of course, it also contains denials of some of his fundamental beliefs, including the death of Jesus Christ, his deity, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

To the Muslim, on the other hand, most of the biblical writings are of obviously human origin,

and do not resemble what he recognizes as divine revelation. They look more like the Traditions, but even here they fall short of expectation by their failure to give clear guidelines on life-style. They do not record details of Jesus' manner of life that can be used to regulate everyday living, and do not even give the original language of his message. Moreover, the position given to Jesus in the New Testament amounts to blasphemy, and the emphasis on salvation through his death is at best superfluous.⁹

It is my contention that, if Christians and Muslims are to understand each other's Book, they cannot do it only by concentrating on points of similarity. Neither can they do it by applying their own criteria to the other's revelation. They must rather seek to recognize and understand fundamental differences in ways of thinking and then — and this is important — take the different way of thinking seriously.

I am not suggesting that this is likely to bring Christians and Muslims to agree with each other. The two religions are different, and disagreement is inevitable. But let it be a disagreement based on understanding and respect, and not on ignorance.

⁹ For a critical Islamic approach to the gospels, see M. Bucaille, *The Bible the Qur'an and Science* (American Trust Publications, 1978), or Muhammed 'Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus, a Prophet of Islam* (London: MWH, 1979).

Some Thoughts on the History of the New Testament Canon

Theo Donner

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Introduction: the usual approach to the subject

Discussions of the history of the New Testament canon tend to concentrate on the question of when for the first time the early church had an accepted list of Christian books that it set alongside the Old Testament Bible. Von Campenhausen puts it like this,

by the beginning of the canon I do not understand the emergence and dissemination, nor even the ecclesiastical use and influence of what were later the canonical writings. One can, in my view, speak of a 'canon' only where of set purpose such a document is given a special normative position, by virtue of which it takes its place alongside the existing Old Testament 'Scriptures'.¹

Understood in this sense, the first time our New Testament canon can be said to have emerged in complete form is in AD 367 in the Easter letter of Athanasius,² but it was not until some considerable time after that that this list was generally recognized in the church.

Although we can no longer speak with confidence of a *communis opinio* with regard to the question of how the canon evolved (contrast W. Schneemelcher some twenty years ago),³ broadly speaking we can sum up the usual understanding as follows.

The only Scriptures for the apostolic and early post-apostolic church consisted of the Old Testament. Apostolic writings were obviously known, but did not have the peculiar 'scriptural' authority of the Old Testament writings. They existed side by side with an oral tradition which was at least as, if not more, important for the church. Only gradually did the church become aware of the need to have some agreed list of books—a gradual awareness in which the

¹ H.V. Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Tübingen, 1968; ET London, 1972), p. 103. Campenhausen is more rigorous than R. M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (London, 1965). (For a brief statement of Grant's position see his article 'The New Testament Canon' in the *Cambridge History of the Bible*, I, pp. 284ff.) D. E. Groh (*Interpretation* 28, 1974, pp. 331-343) and A. C. Sundberg (e.g. *Interpretation* 29, 1975, pp. 352-371) feel that Campenhausen is not rigorous enough and that he dates the emergence of the canon still too early. See also D. L. Dungan in 'The New Testament Canon in recent study', *Interpretation* 29, 1975, pp. 339-351. Conservative scholars seem to touch upon the subject only rarely. E. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1969) is one exception, but the book leaves much to be desired. Short treatments of the subject will be found in introductions to commentaries and general New Testament introductions. D. Guthrie gives a short but useful statement in the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (unfortunately he does not deal with the subject comprehensively in his *New Testament Introduction*).

² See *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, IV, pp. 551f

³ E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Tübingen, 1959; ET London, 1963), p. 29.

appearance of Marcion's canon may have played a greater or lesser role. By the end of the second century the question of the canon was vigorously debated. (The Muratorian Canon, which is usually assigned to this period⁴ is shown as evidence of this debate.) By this time there was no longer any question about the bulk of the New Testament: the four gospels, Acts, the epistles of Paul and some of the Catholic epistles. Doubts about the seven 'disputed books' (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation) continued until the fourth century and even after in some regions. This is, of course, no more than a broad outline of the conclusions that are usually obtained with regard to the New Testament canon. There is considerable variation in the details of the argument in the various authors.

Within one article we cannot hope to deal comprehensively with the whole question of the history of the New Testament canon, or to take issue with all the arguments put forward on this subject. It is possible however to raise a few questions on the way in which the subject is usually treated.

1. Early evidence of NT books seen as having scriptural authority

It should be pointed out first of all that the

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evidence we have from earliest Christianity does not always support the assumptions or conclusions we have mentioned above.

As regards the statement that the New Testament writings do not have 'scriptural' authority until the late second century, the evidence is, to say the least, ambiguous. Anyone wishing to make such a claim has to explain the following facts:

- a. In 1 Timothy 5: 18 an Old Testament passage and a gospel quotation are put side by side and introduced by the phrase 'the Scripture says'. Even if Paul is not referring to a written gospel, it certainly means that he puts a saying of the Lord on the same level as Old Testament Scripture.
- b. In 2 Peter 3: 16 the epistles of Paul are referred to and it is said that some people would twist these 'as they also do the other Scriptures'. Here Paul's epistles are certainly seen as equal to Old Testament Scripture.
- c. We should be careful about drawing any firm conclusions from the Didache as long as there is considerable doubt about the exact date (somewhere between AD 70 and 150) and composition of this document, but it is clear (i) that it regards the commandments of the Lord as of the highest authority, (ii) that it uses a written gospel (*cf.* Did. 8. 2 and 15. 3, 4) and (iii) that it enjoins its readers concerning the commandments of the Lord 'Not to add to it, and to take nothing away

⁴ A. C. Sundberg, 'Canon Muratori: a 4th Century List', *Harvard Theological Review* 66, 1973, pp. 1-41, questions this dating.

from it' (Did. 4.13 quoting Dt. 4:2 and 12:32), thus putting these commandments on a level with the law of Moses.

d. The same quotation from Deuteronomy is also found in the Epistle of Barnabas (first quarter of the second century), in Barnabas 19. 11.⁵ In the same work we read 'let us take heed, lest, as it was written, we be found "Many called but few chosen" ' (Barn. 4. 14). A passage from Matthew seems to be referred to as Scripture (Mt. 20: 16 and 22: 14).

e. Ignatius (martyred between AD 98 and 117) names in one breath the gospel, the apostles and the prophets (a customary way of referring to the Old Testament).

f. The Gnostic Basilides (AD 125-150) introduces quotations from Paul's epistles as follows: 'in accordance with what has been written' (followed by Rom. 8: 19, 22) and 'concerning which the Scripture uses the following expressions' (followed by 1 Cor. 2:13). (See Hippolytus Ref. VII 13, 14 in ANF.)

g. Polycarp of Smyrna (martyred probably in AD 155) exhorts the Philippians (PolPhil. 12. 1), 'as it is said in these Scriptures "Be ye angry and sin not" and "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath"'. In the same epistle (6. 3) we also find Christ, the apostles and the prophets named together.

h. 2 Clement (written perhaps around AD 150) in chapter 2. 4 first quotes Isaiah 54: 1 and then says 'and another Scripture also says "I come not to call righteous but sinners" ' (Mk. 2: 17 and parallels)

With regard to the sort of evidence we have produced, R. P. C. Hanson⁶ has argued that it does not prove the point. He claims that only the expression 'the Holy Scriptures' is a reliable indication of the status which the writers of the second Century assigned to the books of the New Testament'; and he finds no example of this usage until shortly after the middle of the second century (in Aristides' Apology 16). But to focus on this particular expression which is used to refer to the Old Testament only once in the New Testament itself (Rom. 1: 2) and which does not reappear until Justin Martyr (writing around AD 160) uses it twice (in more than 70 references to the Old Testament as 'the Scriptures'), is unjustifiable. So long as we find passages from New Testament writings introduced by the same formula as passages from the Old Testament it will be necessary to give good reasons for distinguishing between the authority assigned to each.

2. Oral tradition not seen as in competition with written tradition

⁵ W. C. van Unnik, 'De la règle *mēte prostheinai mēte aphelein* dans l'histoire du canon', *Vig Christ* 3, 1949, pp. 10ff., does not in fact deny that the instance of this phrase in Didache and Barnabas referred to written commandments, but merely notes the difference with the use of the same phrase in later writings.

⁶ *Tradition in the Early Church* (London, 1962), pp. 205ff.

Another issue on which the evidence is ambiguous is the question of oral tradition. There is, of course, no doubt about the existence of an oral tradition, but this fact in itself appears to be taken as somehow diminishing the authority of the written tradition.

It is unfortunate that Campenhausen⁷ should still see Papias (writing perhaps between AD 110-130) as believing in the 'superiority of the oral tradition', because Papias writes 'That which comes from books seems to me not to be of such service as that which begins as living speech and remains so' (Eus. E.H. III 39. 4, Campenhausen's translation). That this is not the most obvious reading of the text in Eusebius has been shown some time ago by J. B. Lightfoot⁸ and more

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recently by others (named by Campenhausen). It seems that Papias was in fact relying upon oral tradition only for his commentary on the words of the Lord, not for the actual content of the words of the Lord themselves. The disparaging remark about books may well be a reference to heretical documents which, we know, sought at this time to do the same thing as Papias, *i.e.* elucidate the sayings of the Lord from their own perspective. From what Eusebius says about him, the picture we get of Papias seems to be one of a second century fundamentalist, who not only holds to pre-millennialism, but also to the inerrancy of the New Testament gospels, in that he argues strongly that the lack of chronology in Mark's Gospel does not imply error on the part of the author. (An odd thing to say for someone who prefers oral over written tradition.)

Although there is evidence of the continued existence of some oral tradition, we certainly find no evidence that oral tradition was competing for authority with written tradition.⁹

3. The important question one of authority, not of canonical listing

More important than these points regarding the use of evidence by those who have written on the subject of the canon is the question of their methodology. Are they asking the right kind of questions in their investigation of the history of the canon?

The question that is usually asked seems to be: when do we find the earliest evidence for the existence of an agreed list of books of binding authority for the church? The quotation from Campenhausen we gave at the beginning of this article puts it rather well. One can speak of a canon only where of set purpose a document or group of documents is given a special normative position, by virtue of which it takes its place alongside the existing Old Testament Scriptures. (The assumption that the Old Testament canon was in fact firmly established during the period with which we are concerned is not shared by all scholars.)

⁷ Campenhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 130ff. Cf. also R. M. Grant in *CHB*, p. 291.

⁸ *Essays on the work entitled Supernatural Religion* (London, 1893), pp. 156ff.

⁹ An extremely useful work on the relation between tradition and Scripture in the early church is the book of that title by E. Flesseman-Van Leer (Assen, 1953).

This means in fact that we take our present understanding of 'canon' and seek to find evidence for the existence of such a thing in the early church. We are then particularly interested in finding, or proving that one cannot find (as Campenhausen wishes to do),¹⁰ longer or shorter lists of accepted books in certain periods of the history of the early church.

But is the question of official lists really the most important question at issue? It is true that the word 'canon' means list, and therefore that in a strict sense canonization may have been relatively late. But it is quite misleading to suggest that the point of drawing up lists was the first time that the books of the New Testament came to be regarded as authoritative.

When Campenhausen tells us that, 'In the Early Church the term "christian bible" signifies... simply the Old Testament taken over from the synagogue and given a Christian interpretation. As yet there is no mention of a New Testament canon, for the thing itself does not exist...,"¹¹ he may technically speaking be correct. But at the same time he shows the inadequacy of his whole methodology. The real issue is that of authority and if Campenhausen were to claim that the only, or even the highest, authority for the early church was 'simply the Old Testament' the absurdity of such a position would be immediately apparent. At no time since the day of Pentecost has it been true in the church that the Old Testament constituted the only or even the highest authority.

In Acts 2 Luke describes the first church for us as a community of people who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The authority of the apostles and the teaching of Christ mediated through them was of a higher order than the authority of the Old Testament, in that the Old Testament now had to be understood in the light of the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Outside the New Testament writings themselves this comes out clearly in a debate Ignatius records for us (Philad. 8. 2), in which some men (probably Judaizers) said to him, 'Unless I can find a thing in our ancient records (the Old Testament?), I refuse to believe it in the gospel.' When Ignatius assured them that it was indeed in the ancient Scriptures, they replied, 'That has got to be proved', to which Ignatius says 'But for my part, my records are Jesus Christ, for me the sacred records are his cross and death and resurrection and the faith that comes through him.' That the authority of the apostles was regarded as paramount by the early Christians, even set above the Old Testament, can hardly be questioned. There is no reason to suppose that this authority only attached to their spoken teaching; it will almost certainly have attached to their writings from the beginning.

This means that our questions concerning the history of the canon have to be formulated rather differently. Our concern is not to track down early

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¹⁰ Campenhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

lists of approved books, but is to find out whether the writings which later came to be listed were regarded as apostolic and authoritative before then, *i.e.* whether they were practically, though perhaps not officially, canonized. This is in many ways a more difficult thing to ascertain than tracing lists of authoritative books; but certain observations may be made.

a. Authority reflected in early use of NT writings

We have already seen some early evidence for the New Testament being regarded as having scriptural authority (point 1, above). We may here add further evidence about the usage of the New Testament in the early church.

Campanhausen states that the fact that New Testament writings are echoed or utilized or alluded to is not 'canonization'.¹² This is true, given Campanhausen's understanding of 'canonization', but, if he means that echoes, allusions and quotations do not tell us something about the authority of the books thus referred to, his statement needs to be justified in view of some obvious objections.

His statement would be valid if it could be shown that the early Christian authors echoed, alluded to and quoted texts which we know with certainty were not regarded as authoritative in the same way. As it is, this use of New Testament writings accurately mirrors the way in which the Old Testament is echoed and alluded to in the New Testament writings themselves and in early Christian writings generally. Such allusions and veiled references are found far more frequently than formal quotations.

Is it not legitimate to see this manner of referring to New Testament writings in the way in which Westcott saw it, when he said concerning the apostolic fathers,

The words of Scripture (*i.e.* of the New Testament) are inwrought into the texture of the books, and not parcelled out into formal quotations. They are not arranged with argumentative effect, but used as the natural expression of Christian truths. Now this use of the Holy Scriptures shews at least that they were even then widely known and therefore guarded by a host of witnesses; that their language was transferred into the common dialect; that it was as familiar to those first Christians as to us who use it unconsciously as they did in writing or in conversation¹³?

Even in the attempt to ascertain which New Testament writings were known and used by the post-apostolic Christian authors, there has been too little of that close analysis by which such echoes, allusions and veiled references might be discovered. The search has all too often focused on explicit quotations instead. There is room here not only for a much deeper literary examination, to detect similarity of language, vocabulary and grammatical construction, but also for an inquiry into similarity of thought and theology.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ B. F. Westcott, *A general survey of the history of the canon of the New Testament* (London, 1896), p. 49.

The apparent authority of the New Testament books used by the early Christian writers is strikingly confirmed by the use made of the same books by the second-century heretics.

We have already mentioned above that the Gnostic Basilides, in the first half of the second century quoted Paul's epistles as Scripture. When Marcion, around the same time, set up his own 'canon', this was obviously not meant to give certain books a higher authority, but rather to reject the authority of the other apostolic writings. The Gnostic Valentinus (mid-second century), according to Tertullian,¹⁴ did not invent new Scriptures, but rather distorted the meaning of the accepted Scriptures by his own expositions. W. C. van Unnik¹⁵ argues that the Valentinian 'Gospel of Truth' in the Jung Codex tends to confirm the statement of Tertullian. Elsewhere Tertullian argues that '(the heretics) actually treat of the Scriptures and recommend (their opinions) out of the Scriptures. To be sure they do. From what other source could they derive arguments concerning the things of the faith except from the records of the faith?'¹⁶ Irenaeus speaks of the four gospels as follows: 'So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these (documents), each one of them endeavours to establish his own particular doctrine.'¹⁷

b. The disputed books: also authoritative from an early date

To focus on the question of the authority and use of the New Testament writings, rather than on the question of formal lists of authoritative books, may also help to put one particular problem with regard to the history of the canon in a different perspective.

We know that the debates on the extent of the

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canon in the third and fourth centuries were particularly concerned with the status of seven books, the Antilegomena or 'disputed books' (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation) which were not universally accepted by the church. It is usually argued that the exact status of these books was in doubt until the fourth-century church decided to include them in the New Testament canon. The evidence does not necessarily bear out this claim. It would appear rather that allusions and references to these books can be found up to the middle of the second century and that their authority is not challenged until the end of the second century, by which time the flood of heretical literature demanded a conscious reflection upon the authority of certain books over against others. All the evidence points to their acceptance before the end of the second century in those regions where they were known (it is important to stress this point,

¹⁴ *De Praescr. Haer.* 38 (in the Ante-Nicene Fathers).

¹⁵ W. C. van Unnik, 'The "Gospel of Truth" and the New Testament' in F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Jung Codex* (London, 1955), pp. 79ff.

¹⁶ *De Praescr. Haer.* 14 (in ANF).

¹⁷ *Adv. Haer.* II 11. 7 (in ANF). Westcott, *op. cit.*, pp. 278f, 404ff. devotes two chapters to the testimony borne by the heretics to the canonical books. Cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Livres de Poche, p. 260): 'Les hérétiques au commencement de l'Église servent à prouver les canoniques.'

since it helps to explain the doubts that were voiced about them at a later stage). We can only briefly mention here the following facts:

(a) Hebrews is quoted extensively in 1 Clement (AD 90-110) and is used by various writers. It is only at the beginning of the third century that we find from Tertullian that the North African church did not have it in its list of New Testament books.

(b) James is attested by 1 Clement and Hermias (mid-second century) among others.

(c) It is my opinion that Jude 18 quotes 2 Peter 3: 3 and there are traces of 2 Peter in some of the apostolic fathers (1 Clem. 9: 3; 11: 1; 23: 3; Hermas Vis. IV 3: 4; Sim. VIII 11: 1). It is generally recognized to be the least well attested of the Antilegomena.

(d) 2 and 3 John present a difficulty of their own. Although there are some traces of them in early Christian writings, it would appear from the records of the 7th Council of Carthage (AD 256) and from two passages in Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I 16: 3; III 16: 8)¹⁸ that at least the First and Second Epistles of John may have been known as one epistle, since we have quotations from 2 John introduced as 'from the epistle of John'. As long as we do not know in what form the three epistles were known, and the evidence is ambiguous, we can only say that there appear to have been no doubts about the authenticity of these epistles until the end of the second century.

(e) We find traces of Jude in the apostolic fathers, and the way in which Tertullian quotes the book (in *De Cult. Fem.* 3) suggests that it had long been accepted as authentic and authoritative in North Africa.

The book of Revelation appears to have been accepted widely until well into the third century. The fact that the authenticity and authority of these books were doubted when the extent of the canon began to be debated at the end of the second century is largely explained by the fact that they were known in certain regions only and were hardly known in other regions. The other reason for these doubts may be found in the attempt at that time to limit the concept of apostolicity to mean no more than apostolic authorship. Since the exact authorship of these books (except for 2 Peter) was unknown or ambiguous, it was natural that questions should be raised with regard to them, while the place of Mark, Luke and Acts was already firmly enough established not to cause any difficulty.

Conclusion

It is obvious that all this provides no more than a sketchy outline of the way in which the subject of the history of the canon might be approached. Certain points we have mentioned may also help to show the weakness of some standard presentations on the subject.

¹⁸ See Westcott, *op. cit.*, pp. 372, 380, 390.

Theo Donner, "Some Thoughts On The History Of The New Testament Canon," Themelios 7.3 (April 1982): 23-27.

It is clear that any discussion on the authority of New Testament writings in the post-apostolic church needs to take into account the wider question of authority in the church at this time. It is also clear that an inquiry along the lines we have suggested by no means diminishes the importance of the investigation into the gradual emergence of a 'canon' of New Testament writings; it rather seeks to widen the scope of that investigation and put it in its proper framework.

Our 'bird's-eye' view on the authority of the New Testament writings in the early church suggests that it is by no means impossible, or intrinsically unlikely, that all the apostolic writings which today make up our New Testament were accepted as apostolic and therefore as authoritative by the post-apostolic church and that their authenticity only came to be doubted at a later date for certain recognizable reasons, which do not cast doubt on their acceptance as apostolic by the post-apostolic church. A much more thorough analysis of all the evidence is necessary to confirm whether the evidence supports this suggestion. As yet such an analysis does not seem to be available.

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Talking points

Genesis and evolution

Nigel M. de S. Cameron

'Talking Points' is a new series of short articles surveying issues of current theological debate; the idea is not to break new ground, but to provide readers with a bird's-eye view of the debate in question. Our first contribution is by the Rev. Nigel Cameron, who has just been appointed warden of a new evangelical study centre in Scotland, and is author of a forthcoming Paternoster book, Evolution and the Authority of the Bible.

The background

A recent issue of *The Times* newspaper of London carried lengthy letters from two well-known evangelical scientists on the question of evolution. One wrote disparagingly of the creationists as believing in 'Paley's divine Watchmaker who retired above the bright blue sky after a week of frenzied activity in 4004 BC'. The other, who happens to be the President of the Biblical Creation Society,¹ suggested that the creationist view had much to commend it, particularly in the light of recent doubt expressed by the scientific community in its traditional belief in evolution.²

What are we to make of this debate? In the USA for many years now creationism has been gathering in strength, and recently mounting disquiet in scientific circles the world over as to the adequacy of neo-Darwinism in purely scientific terms has lent new credence to traditional creationist positions. For example, Stephen Jan Gould of Harvard has developed a theory of 'punctuated equilibrium' which, although thoroughly evolutionary (and Gould is a vigorous opponent of creationism), accepts that the traditional reading of the fossil record as indicating gradual evolutionary change may no longer be sustained. Gould's answer, which has gained increasing acceptance among his professional colleagues, is to suggest an

evolution that proceeds by relatively sudden 'jumps' rather than the slow processes of (neo-) Darwinian orthodoxy. Creationists, of course, have maintained all along that the fossil record does not support gradual change.³ In Britain considerable controversy has been generated within the scientific community by an exhibition mounted at the British Museum (Natural History) in London which suggested that evolution was only *one way* of explaining the biological order. It has been motivated by 'cladism', which is a new and complex way of categorizing organisms, and whose supporters are prepared to be agnostic about the origins of living things since they do not believe the theory of evolution to be any help to them in their work of taxonomy. A vigorous controversy has raged in scientific journals in Britain during 1981 on account of this exhibition, and it has naturally brought creationists to the fore.⁴ One further factor may be mentioned, again by way of illustration. Sir Fred Hoyle and Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, the British astronomers, have published a remarkable book entitled *Evolution from Space*,⁵ which concludes that there must be an intelligence behind evolution, as it *could not* (in mathematical terms) have happened on its own. Wickramasinghe was criticized for testifying at the Arkansas case in the USA, in which judgment was given in January of this year, where a state law insisting on the teaching of both theories (creation and evolution) in schools was struck down as violating the church-state separation principle of the US Constitution.

Of course, in all this it must be said that the great majority of scientists remain convinced of evolution. But their confidence in the traditional understanding of *how it happened* has been shaken. Some of the old creationist contentions (on matters like reading of the fossil record) have been

³ See, e.g., Duane Gish, *Evolution: the Fossils say No!* (San Diego, 1974).

⁴ For a useful summary of this debate which one of the chief evolutionists involved acknowledged to be fair, see D. Tyler, 'Establishment Science and the British Museum', in *Biblical Creation* 3: 10, pp. 68-75. The journal *Nature*, Tyler notes, carried three editorials and over thirty letters on the subject, beginning on 20 November 1980.

⁵ London, 1981.

¹ The Biblical Creation Society is one of the British groupings of Christians opposed to the theology of evolution. It publishes *Biblical Creation* (a journal for students and others) and *Rainbow* (a popular broadsheet), as well as monograph series and various pamphlets. Information may be obtained from the Secretary, 51 Cloan Crescent, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow G64 2HN, Scotland.

² *The Times*, London, 16 December 1981. The correspondents cited are, respectively, Prof. R. J. Berry and Prof. E. H. Andrews.

vindicated, to a significant degree, in the new theories vying to succeed neo-Darwinism. For better or for worse, creationism has found itself on the agenda of public debate.

The differing Christian positions

There are problems in the very definition of terms. 'Creationists' are so called because they believe in creation rather than evolution. But it may be very properly objected that Christians who believe in evolution believe in creation as well. 'Theistic evolution' is an option taken by many evangelicals who believe that creation was brought about, in part at least, by means of organic evolution. They maintain that the debate is not 'Creation v. Evolution', but between believers in creation working through evolution, and believers in creation who for some reason reject evolution as the *modus operandi*. Christians are all, necessarily, 'creationists'.

In fact at this point a whole spectrum of possible options is opened up, and most possible positions find actual proponents within the camp of evangelical belief. On the 'creationist' side, since the publication twenty years ago of Whitcomb and Morris' *The Genesis Flood* there has been an increasingly strong tide of 'young earth' opinion, holding to a date of somewhere in the region of 10 or 20,000 BC for the creation of the world. Whitcomb and Morris sought to re-establish what had been known as flood geology, a revised version of the 'catastrophism' which reigned in historical geology prior to the work of Lyell in the 1830s.⁶ Not all, however, go along with their stress on the Noahic flood as a primary geological agent, responsible for most of the fossil strata. Another position, fathered in the early days of geological controversy well before Darwin, is that of the 'gap theory'. A lengthy time-gap is posited between Genesis 1: 1 and 1: 2, long enough for the depositing of the fossils and much else besides, such that what follows is in effect an account not of creation but of re-creation. This theory had a wide following in an earlier generation, but today is in decline. Its classic expression was in G. H. Pember's *Earth's Earliest Ages* (New York, 1876). Others wish to preserve man as a special creation without at the same time overthrowing historical geology. One such is Davis Young's *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids, 1977).

A typical exposition of 'theistic evolution' is that of Victor Pearce in his *Who was Adam?* Pearce

⁶ C. C. Gillispie's *Genesis and Geology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951) charts the course of the early nineteenth-century debates.

accepts both the long age of the earth and the evolutionary origin of man, seeking a place for 'Adam' as New Stone Age man. He reads the six days of Genesis 1 as ages in the history of the earth, and remarks that thus understood they broadly follow the ages of historical geology. He understands the Genesis narrative therefore to be compatible with the consensus of modern scientific thought. Another writer in the same school makes the 'suggestion' that 'when God made man in His own image, what He did was to stamp His own likeness on one of the many "hominids" which appear to have been living at the time.'⁷ That is to say, something happened to transform a 'hominid' (who was not human, in the sense of not possessing the divine image) into a 'man'; and that something was the creative act of God.

Two different fundamental positions lie behind these particular attempts to harmonize Scripture and science, and for that reason although one could wish for a more precise vocabulary the terms 'creation' and 'evolution' do have definite *loci* despite the variety of opinion which they encompass. Evangelical evolutionists accept the infallible authority of Scripture, as do creationists. But they also believe that there is no contradiction between such an acceptance and belief in the theories that are the consensus of modern scientific thinking about the origin of man and the world. They consider that it is not necessary to interpret Scripture in a manner which would call evolution in question. They believe that Genesis does not teach 'science' but rather focuses on the Creator and the fact of his having created; the 'how' questions which scientists are trained to ask are left undiscussed in the narrative. Creationists, by contrast, find themselves compelled by the statements in the early chapters of Genesis radically to disagree with the modern scientific consensus. On the one hand, Genesis teaches that human death had its origin in human sin (and Romans 5, for instance, supports such a reading), that God made a first couple directly and without intermediate agency, that the original world was perfect and without the results of sin which have since overrun it; and, on the other, evolution is a necessary element in secular man's self-understanding, bound up with his refusal to acknowledge God as his Creator. We must, they conclude, strike out afresh and seek an understanding of the data of science which is faithful to this biblical view of things. And they point to the number of very distinguished men of science who stand with them.

⁷ John Stott, cited in C. Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 2 (Berkhamsted, 1974), p. 115.

Creationists are keen to argue that, though they may end up taking 'literal' positions on matters like the 'days' of Genesis 1, their rejection of evolution does not *require* such readings. Further, they maintain that they are faithful to the intentions of the original authors of Scripture, whereas modern evangelical evolutionists have tended to override original intentions and to treat the Genesis narratives as mythical, *i.e.* as not referring to real events in this world of time and space. On the other hand it is contended that we must be wary of imposing 'literal' or any other categories of interpretation upon Scripture, since all kinds of literature are contained within the canon and used there by the Spirit of God.⁸

Issues arising

A number of issues arise out of this debate. First, *what is the status of Holy Scripture?* This is, of course, itself hotly debated. Those who admit there to be actual *errors* in the Bible presumably find no difficulty in rejecting elements in Genesis with which they may disagree. The question is whether, given a belief in a fully *infallible* Scripture, Genesis can be shown to be in harmony with evolution and consensus historical geology. Those who believe in infallibility must in principle admit that Scripture *might* disagree with what most scientists think, and that if that were the case they would be bound by its teaching. That much must be common ground among orthodox Christians.

Secondly we face the distinct question, *what is the teaching of Holy Scripture?* It is, presumably, common ground that the principle focus of the teaching of the Bible lies in what we may ascertain of the intentions of the original (human) author of any given book. What he meant to say, using whatever literary form he chose, is what the Bible says and therefore what God says. We need to use all possible literary and linguistic tools to obtain as near an understanding as possible of what the writer(s) of Genesis wished to purvey. We must avoid the twin dangers of permitting scientific orthodoxy or a certain theological tradition to determine our reading of Holy Scripture. How Genesis is understood elsewhere in Scripture will weigh heavily with us in our reading of it, but we must be wary, in turn, of reading back traditional understandings into these other texts. The Christian is of course committed to the integrity of scientific and theological endeavour. We must expect both these fields of study to yield true

⁸ Both sides of the argument featured in *Themelios* 4:1 (September 1978) where Noel Weekes, 'The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1-11' and Paul Helm, 'Arguing about Origins', are both worth consulting for concise statements.

results and results that can be harmonised with each other. We must never turn our backs upon facts, biblical or scientific. The essential principle is that we must distinguish what are facts and what are impositions upon them that they do not *require*. There can ultimately be no difference between God's revelation in Scripture and the facts of his creation.

Thirdly we must ask ourselves about *the status and significance of the contending theories today*. For example, are the scientific credentials of evolution as valid as most of us have been led to believe?⁹ Is evolution integral to secular man's understanding of himself and his world? If that is true, it does not make it wrong, but it raises a question-mark against the Christian acceptance of it. By the same token, it has been asked, what is the connection between creationism in the USA and right-wing politics? What is its connection with the anti-science movement of our times which is tied up with a general anti-intellectualism? We must face these questions, whatever their answers may be. Not that any such connection would make either theory wrong. It would, however, suggest that the 'objectivity' so often claimed for scientific theories needs to be understood alongside the subjective experience of the scientists who hold these theories. Man is an irreducibly religious being, and all his thoughts and actions have religious implications.

The interpretation of Scripture in an area of historical and contemporary disagreement is no easy task. We must strip away both our own presuppositions and those of our culture, and endeavour to listen to the words of revelation afresh, if we are to be ruled by the Scripture and not to impose ourselves and our preferences upon it. The danger of hearing only what we wish to hear, or what is convenient and acceptable, is ever real. At the same time, it is needful for Christians who differ about controversial questions to do so in a spirit of brotherhood and mutual tolerance; but these matters will not be decided by their being ignored, and their implications are such that we can hardly leave them unresolved. Some reading for those who would pursue them further is suggested overleaf.

⁹ There has been much discussion of the philosopher of science Karl Popper's suggestion that because evolution deals with something we cannot repeat, it cannot properly be called a 'theory' at all. K. A. Kerut's *Implications of Evolution* (London, 1961) questions many of the assumptions evolutionists tend to make (from a non-Christian perspective). E. H. Andrews' booklet *Is Evolution Scientific?* sets out a more popular (and creationist) assessment of the question (Welwyn, 1979).

Further reading

For a general and informative survey of many of the issues in this and related debates, see Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Exeter, 1955), though especially in his discussion of Creationist geology Ramm is now badly dated.

J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris' *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia, 1961) has been referred to above; it is the most significant creationist work of the present generation, though it too is now somewhat dated. Many scientific works have come from creationist pens, including Evan Shute's *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution* (Nutley, NJ, 1961) and a number of books by A. E. Wilder-Smith, especially *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny* (Stuttgart, 1974), *The Basis for a New Biology* (Stuttgart, 1976), and most recently *The Natural Sciences Know Nothing of Evolution* (San Diego, 1981). For a startling attack on evolution from a non-Christian source, Fred Hoyle and C. Wickramasinghe's *Evolution from Space* (London, 1981) is the most recent in a line of questionings from outside of creationism.

On biblical questions, two useful papers are to be found in *In the Beginning . . .*, edited by the present writer (Glasgow, 1980), by D. A. Carson ('Adam in the Epistles of Paul') and J. G. McConville ('Interpreting Genesis 1-11'). The *Themelios* article on 'The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1-11' referred to above (in 4:1) briefly sets out the more 'literal' interpretative case. E. H. Andrews usefully discusses exegetical/philosophical issues in his

God, Science and Evolution (Welwyn, 1980).

Theistic evolutionists have been less productive. Commentaries suggest harmonistic readings, e.g. Derek Kidner's *Genesis* in the Tyndale series (London, 1967), pp. 26ff. Various volumes on science and faith advert to this debate, e.g. M. A. Jeeves, *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith* (London, 1969), pp. 98ff. E. K. Victor Pearce's *Who was Adam?* (Exeter, 1969) gives a fuller discussion. Paul Helm's *Themelios* article referred to above (4:1) raises some of the methodological and exegetical issues. See also F. Schaeffer's *Genesis in Space and Time* (Illinois, 1972; London, 1973). Books by non-evangelicals are of course legion, with several volumes by I. G. Barbour touching on these questions, the speculative works of Teilhard de Chardin endeavouring to think out the implications of evolution for theology, and studies like John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966) taking account of evolution in their discussion of related theological issues.

Finally, we may draw attention to two major historical works which set the modern discussion in its context. Reference has already been made to C. C. Gillispie's *Genesis and Geology*, dealing with the pre-Darwinian debates which in some ways were more important than those which Darwin himself initiated; and James R. Moore's *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (Cambridge, 1979) is a major assessment of the theological response to Darwin (though it is largely uninterested in the vital exegetical questions).