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Editorial: Serving Christ through Theological Study

Why bother studying theology? Some people would argue that there are many more useful ways of serving Christ in a needy world. But that is not true: Christians believe that the world's greatest need is to find God and his will, and that God and his will have been revealed supremely in Jesus Christ. That revelation has been transmitted to us through the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and there is therefore no more important or practically useful way of serving Christ and his world than by studying the biblical revelation and seeking to apply it faithfully to today's world.

That is not to say that theological study is always useful. Unfortunately theologians often confuse and mislead. Theological study can turn us into today's false prophets, which is why many Christians are suspicious of theology and theologians. As theological students we must recognize this real danger; we must beware of the strong and subtle temptation to modify our commitment, and we must seek to ensure that we are serving Christ in our theological studies.

Serving Christ in our theological studies means many things: it means seeking to please him by the faithfulness, humility and honesty of our work—we must be 'open' in the sense of being humble and honest, not in the sense that we pretend we don't believe what we do believe! It means prayerful dependence on Christ, since we know how easily we fall into error. It means caring for other students around us, and seeing all our studies as service. It means basing our theological thinking on God's revelation of himself in Jesus—on the Jesus of the New Testament, not on some more convenient or contemporary Jesus of our own choosing.

Two articles in this *Themelios* look at questions of Christology. The old questions of the divinity and humanity of Christ are still very much with us; and, as in the early church, there are those today who neglect the real humanity of Jesus, and there are others who emphasize Jesus' humanity in such a way as to exclude his divinity. Probably the most serious feature of much modern theology is its loss of a belief in Jesus as truly divine—witness the doubts about his miracles and the questioning of his teaching. Not that it is always easy for us, any more than it was for the early church, to be clear exactly what is true and biblical in the matter of Christology. But we must be as determined as they were to hold fast to the revelation of God in Christ: to honour Jesus as Lord, and to follow his teaching.

Defending orthodoxy is not a very popular activity in some theological circles, and our concern should certainly not only be to defend the truth, but also to grow in understanding it. Nevertheless for the Christian the truth is in Jesus, and that truth must at all costs be preserved, proclaimed and lived out. Paul sums it up when he declares that 'No other foundation (*themelios*) can any one lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11).

The Old Testament and Christian faith: Jesus and the Old Testament in Matthew 1-5 Part 1

John Goldingay

This article is based on an address given to a staff conference of the British UCCF in 1980; it is being published in two parts. For bibliography on the subject see the author's Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation (Leicester/Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981). The author is on the staff of St John's College, Nottingham.

Christian faith is focused on Jesus Christ, and we learn of him from the New Testament. So what significance attaches to what we call the Old Testament, the scriptures accepted by the Jewish religious community to which Jesus belonged?

Within the New Testament there are variations in the extent to which the Old Testament is referred to in different books, and there is also some variety in the way in which the Old Testament is used. As it happens, however, the opening pages of the New Testament offer a particularly instructive set of concrete illustrations of what the Old Testament meant in the context of the gospel of Christ.

1. Matthew 1:1-17 The Old Testament tells the story of which Christ is the climax

To the eyes of most modern readers, the opening verses of the New Testament form an unpromising beginning, with their unexciting list of bare names. Our attention soon moves on to the inviting stories of 1:18-2:23. But the young Jewish reader who came to faith in Christ through reading precisely these verses responded to them in a way that Matthew would have appreciated. This reader had seen that the verses embody a particular assertion about Jesus. By relating his Jewish genealogy, they establish that he was in fact a Jew. Indeed, they establish that he has a genealogy of a particular kind: his ancestry not only goes back via the exile to Abraham, it also marks him as a member of the tribe of Judah and of the family of David, and thus gives him a formal claim to David's throne. Again, it is a genealogy which (unusually) includes the names of several women, names which draw attention to the contribution made by some rather questionable unions to this genealogy even before and during David's own time, so that the apparently questionable circumstances of Jesus' own birth (1:19) can hardly be deemed unworthy of someone who was reckoned to be David's successor.

It is a genealogy arranged into three sequences of fourteen names, a patterning which itself expresses the conviction that the Christ event comes about by a providence of God that has been at work throughout the history of the Jewish people but now comes to its climax.

One needs to note two features of this genealogy's appeal to the historical past. One is that it is an appeal to real history. Matthew assumes that a person has to be a descendant of David if he is to have a claim to David's throne; further, that a person has to be a descendant of Abraham if he is to have a 'natural' share in the promise to Abraham, still more if he is to be recognized as *the* seed of Abraham. Matthew has in mind legal descent, of course; you could be adopted into a certain family, and then you came to share that family's genealogy as fully as if you had been born into it. Thus Matthew probably assumes that Jesus has a claim to David's throne via his adoptive, legal father Joseph. But Matthew is talking about the real past, the real ancestry of Jesus, the real historical antecedents to the Christ event.

The other feature of Matthew's use of the historical past is that he schematizes the past when he appeals to it. There were not factually fourteen generations from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to the Christ (1:17). But by shaping the genealogy in this way, Matthew creates something which is more artistic and easier to remember than it might otherwise be, and something which gives explicit expression to the conviction that a providence of God had been at work in the ordering of Israelite history up to Jesus' time, as it was in his birth, life, death, and resurrection itself.

These two aspects of Matthew's appeal to the historical past are consistent features of the gospels and of Old Testament narratives. The evangelists are concerned with the real historical Jesus, but they tell his story in a schematized way, selecting and ordering material in order to make the points of central significance clear. Shortly we shall consider Matthew 4. Here Matthew tells us of three temptations Jesus experienced; Luke includes the same temptations, but orders them differently. Then Matthew tells us of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Capernaum; Luke precedes this by the account of his rejection at Nazareth, which comes rather later in

Matthew. Now it is not that either Matthew or Luke has made mistakes in his presentation. It is that sometimes a re-ordering or a rewriting will make the significance of a story clearer than a merely chronological account does.

In a similar way the Old Testament narratives which were among the evangelists' models — books such as Genesis and Exodus, Kings and Chronicles — were concerned with real historical events, but they, too, select, order, and rewrite their material so as to make the message of history clear for their contemporaries. Much of the material in the opening part of Matthew's genealogy comes from Chronicles, and Chronicles well illustrates this combination in the Old Testament of a concern for real people and events from the past with a concern for a presentation of them which makes explicit their significance for the writer's day. It is this latter interest which explains the substantial difference between Samuel-Kings' and Chronicles' presentation of the same story.

Matthew's example, then, directs us towards a two-fold interest in the Old Testament story. We are interested in the real events of Old Testament times which led up to Christ. It is this instinct, in part, that has made generations of students feel that their library is incomplete without a volume such as John Bright's *History of Israel* on their shelves. If the history of Israel is the background to the Christ event, we had better understand the actual history of Israel. But we are also interested in the way that history has been shaped as narrative by the writers of the Old Testament and of the New. We recognize that we are not reading mere chronicle or annal but a story whose message is expressed in the way it is told — like Matthew's genealogy. So as well as books like Bright which interpret for us the history of Israel itself, we need books like *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*¹ or D. J. A. Clines' *The Theme of the Pentateuch*² to help us interpret the story of Israel as the Old Testament actually tells it.

In practice, it is easy to let one interest exclude the other. 'Conservative' readers can assume that we are concerned only with the bare events, and they ignore the literary creativity which goes into biblical narrative. 'Liberal' readers can become so aware of this creativity that they cease to recognize the fact and/or the importance of the fundamental historicity of Israelite history. Like the Old Testament narratives themselves, Matthew implies that both matter.

Matthew assumes, then, that the reader needs to

know something of the history behind Jesus if he is to understand Jesus himself aright. In a sense, of course, he is only making an assumption which applies to every historical person or event. You will understand me aright only if you know something of my history, my experiences, and my background: it is these that have made me what I am. You will understand complex political problems such as those of Northern Ireland or the Middle East only if you understand their history. And you will understand the Christ event aright only if you see it as the climax to a story which reaches centuries back into pre-Christian times, the story of a relationship between the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Israelite people whom he chose to be his means of access to his world as a whole. One reason why the Old Testament story has an importance for Christians which (say) Indian or Chinese or Greek history does not is that *this* is the story of which the Christ event is the climax. A Christian, therefore, is committed to gaining as clear as possible a grasp of the Old Testament story, because that is an indispensable key to understanding the Christ event which constitutes that climax.

In relating Jesus' genealogy, Matthew himself gives us one instance of what is meant by understanding the coming of Christ in the light of the story of Israel. His example, however, encourages us to ask with regard to other aspects of the Christ event, what light is cast on this facet of it by the fact that it has its background in Abraham's leaving Ur, the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, David's capture of Jerusalem, Solomon's building the temple, northern Israel's fall in 722 and Judah's exile in 587, the Persians' allowing the exiles to return and Alexander's unleashing of Hellenistic culture in the Middle East, the events which were all part of a story which is the background to the coming of Christ. The Old Testament is Act I to the New Testament's Act II. And, as in any story, you understand the final scene aright only in the light of the ones that preceded it. For this reason, a Christian is interested in understanding the whole Old Testament story, in order that he can see as fully as possible its implications for understanding Christ.

The converse is also true. As well as understanding Christ in the light of the Old Testament story, Matthew understands the Old Testament story in the light of the Christ event. Matthew's claim is that the story from Abraham to David and from the exile on into the post-exilic period comes to its climax with the coming of Christ, and needs to be understood in the light of this denouement.

Now this is not the only way to read the history of Israel. A non-Christian Jew will understand it very differently. Whether you read Israel's story in this

¹K. R. R. Gros Louis (ed.), Nashville/London: Abingdon/SPCK, 1974.

²Sheffield/Winona Lake, IL: JSOT/Eisenbrauns, 1978.

way will depend on what you make of Jesus. If you believe he is the Christ, then you will believe that he is the climax of Old Testament history. If you do not, you won't. (On the other hand, whether you think Jesus is the Christ may depend on whether you think it is plausible to read Israel's history in this way. . . . A subtle dialectic is involved here!)

But once you do read Israel's history in this way, it makes a difference to the way you understand the events it relates. The significance of Abraham's leaving Ur; the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, David's capture of Jerusalem, and so on through the Old Testament story, emerges with fullest clarity only when you see these events in the light of each other and in the light of the Christ event which is their climax.

The interpretation of the exodus provides us with a useful example, both because of the intrinsic importance of the exodus event in the Old Testament and because of interest in this event in contemporary liberation theology. On the one hand, understanding the Christ event in the light of the Old Testament story indicates that the contemporary assertion that God is concerned for political and social liberation is quite justified. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is one who is concerned for the release of the oppressed from bondage; the nature of the Christ event does not change that. On the other hand, understanding the Old Testament story in the light of the Christ event highlights for us that concern with the spiritual liberation of the spiritually oppressed which is present in the exodus story itself and which becomes more pressing as the Old Testament story unfolds. Any concern with political and social liberation that does not recognize spiritual liberation as the more fundamental human problem has failed to take account of the development of the Old Testament story after the exodus via the exile to Christ's coming and his work of atonement.

Matthew himself later issues his own warning about misreading Israelite history. He tells us of the warning John the Baptist gave to his hearers: 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father". . . .' (3:9). Merely having the right history does nothing for you. It places you in a position of potential privilege, but requires that you respond to the God who has been active in that history if you are actually to enjoy that privilege. The story is quite capable of turning into a tragedy if you allow it to do so. 'The axe is laid to the root of the trees . . .' (3:10). That God has been working out his purpose in history is of crucial significance for Christian faith. But it effects nothing until it leads me to personal trust and obedience in relation to him.

2. Matthew 1:18 — 2:23 The Old Testament declares the promise of which Christ is the fulfilment

As I have suggested above, for most readers Matthew's Gospel really begins with the five scenes presented to us from the story of Jesus' birth in 1: 18—2:23. How do these relate to the Old Testament?

It is striking that each of these five paragraphs gives a key place to a passage of Old Testament prophecy which is said to be fulfilled in the event which is spoken of. In the first, Joseph is reassured that his fiancée's pregnancy is the result not of her promiscuity but of the Holy Spirit's activity which will bring about the birth of someone who will save his people. The point is clinched by a reference to the fulfilment of what the Lord had said by means of Isaiah concerning a virgin who would have a child called 'God with us' (1:18-25; cf. Is. 7:14). In the second, the place where 'the king of the Jews' is to be born is discovered to be Bethlehem, as a result of the priests and scribes referring Herod and the wise men to the prophecy in Micah concerning the birth there of a ruler over Israel (2: 1-12; cf. Mi. 5:2). In the third, the account of the departure of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt is brought to a climax by describing this event as the fulfilment of what the Lord had spoken by means of Hosea about his son having been called out of Egypt (2: 13-15; cf. Ho. 11:1). In the fourth, the story of Herod's massacre of baby boys in Bethlehem is brought to a climax by being described as a fulfilment of Jeremiah's words describing Rachel's mourning for her children (2: 16-18; cf. Je. 31: 15). Then in the fifth, the account of the family's move back from Egypt beyond Judaea to Nazareth is clinched by describing this as a fulfilment of the statement in the prophets that the Messiah was to be called a Nazarene (2:19-23).

The reference of this last passage is not clear, as there is no Old Testament prophecy which actually says 'he shall be called a Nazarene'. Three passages have been commonly suggested as perhaps in Matthew's mind. One is the description in Isaiah 11: 1 and elsewhere of a coming ruler as a 'branch' growing from the 'tree' of Jesse, which was 'felled' by the exile; 'branch' in Hebrew is *neser*, so to describe Jesus as a Nazarene or *nosri* could be taken as an unwitting description of him as the 'Branch-man'. The second passage is the description of the servant later in Isaiah as despised and rejected by men (Is. 52:13 — 53:12); Nazareth was a city in the despised and alien far north, Galilee of the Gentiles, the land of darkness (Mt. 4:14-16, quoting Is. 9:1-2), and Nazareth was specifically a city that was proverbially unlikely to produce anything that was any good (Jn. 1:46). So to be a Nazarene was likely to mean being

despised and rejected by men, as prophecy had described the servant of Yahweh. A third passage which might have been in Matthew's mind is the angel's description of what Samson was supposed to be, a Nazarite to God from birth (Jdg. 13:5); the events surrounding the birth of Jesus' forerunner also reflect the angelic visitation to Samson's mother (see Lk. 1:15; also 1:31 itself).

In each of these vignettes from the opening years of Jesus' life, then, a key place is taken by a reference to Old Testament prophecy, as if to say, 'You will understand Jesus aright only if you see him as the fulfilment of a gracious purpose of God contemplated and announced by him centuries before.' In particular, if you find it surprising that he should be conceived out of wedlock, born in a little town like Bethlehem rather than in Jerusalem, hurried off to Egypt at an early age, indirectly the cause of the death of scores of baby boys, and eventually brought up in unfashionable Nazareth, then consider the fact that all these features of his early years are spoken of by the prophets.

Now the utilization of Old Testament prophecy by Matthew and other New Testament writers in this way has been severely criticized. Is it not mere 'proof from prophecy', designed to remove the scandal from the story of Jesus and to win cheap debating points over against non-Christian Jews?

In actual fact, Matthew's use of Old Testament prophecy in this way is of a piece with his interest in other aspects of the Old Testament in Matthew 1-5 and elsewhere. He is concerned with understanding Jesus and understanding the Old Testament; as far as one can see he is not merely out to prove something to some unwilling hearer or to explain away something to some disciple of shallow faith. He simply believes that Jesus is to be understood in the light of the Old Testament promise of which he is the fulfilment, and he therefore seeks to interpret his significance in that light. Perhaps this understanding of Matthew's attitude is supported by a consideration of the next episode he relates, the ministry of John the Baptist (3: 1-12). Here the thesis that Matthew is utilizing apologetic 'proofs from prophecy' is even less plausible than it might be earlier; but in this story, too, a passage from Old Testament prophecy has a key place: John is the voice preaching in the wilderness which is spoken of in Isaiah 40:3.

This last passage, however, as much as the earlier ones, raises a problem about the way that Matthew interprets Old Testament prophecy, which contrasts with the approach to interpretation which characterizes modern scholarship. The modern instinct is to interpret prophecy, like other biblical material, by concentrating on the meaning that the original had

for its author and his readers. Now a passage such as Micah 5 is future-orientated in its original context, and it is possible to argue that Matthew's use of it is quite in accord with its original meaning. One cannot prove exegetically that Jesus is the coming ruler over Israel spoken of there; Matthew's use of his text goes beyond its statements, in the light of his faith in Jesus. Nevertheless, his use of his text is not alien to its statements. At another extreme, however, Matthew's appeal to Hosea 11 takes the text in a totally different way from the meaning it would have had for Hosea and his readers. Hosea 11 is a record of God's inner wrestling over whether he is to act in relation to Israel with love or with judgment. It opens by recalling the blessings God had given to his people — beginning with his calling them out of Egypt at the time of the exodus. Thus Hosea 11:1 is not prophecy (in the sense of a statement about the future, which could thus be capable of being 'fulfilled') at all. It is history.

In between these two extreme examples there are several passages among the ones Matthew appeals to which are future-orientated, but which relate to the fairly immediate future of the prophet's day. Perhaps Micah 5, too, had such a shorter-term future reference to an imminent King. Certainly Rachel's weeping (Je. 31:15) is the lament she will utter as the people of Judah trudge past her tomb on their way to exile. The voice in the wilderness (Is. 40:3) is one at the end of the exile commissioning Yahweh's servants to prepare the road for his return to Jerusalem (and for theirs with him). The child to be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14) is a more controversial figure. I take it that 'virgin' is the right translation of the Hebrew word '*almah*' but this does not necessarily mean that the girl in question will be a virgin when she conceives and gives birth. The Prince of Wales will one day rule Great Britain; this does not mean he will rule as a prince, rather that he will become king and will then rule. So in Isaiah 7 the prophet is promising that by the time a girl yet unmarried has had her first child, the crisis Ahaz so fears will be over; she will be able to call her child Immanuel, God is with us, in her rejoicing at what God has done for his people. Finally, if 'he will be called a Nazarene' refers to Judges 13, this reference, too, takes up a statement about a specific imminent event; if it is an allusion to Isaiah 11 or Isaiah 52:13—53:12, it more resembles the appeal to Micah 5.

In most if not all of these cases, then, Matthew attributes to these prophecies meanings that they would not have had for their authors. How can that be justified?

An interesting passage in John's Gospel suggests the principle which lies behind what Matthew is

doing. At a meeting of the Sanhedrin called to discuss what is to be done about Jesus, the high priest Caiaphas declares that 'it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish' (Jn. 11:50). Caiaphas means that Jesus must be killed lest he continue to arouse messianic expectations and ultimately cause a revolt which the Romans would have to crush violently. But John can see a hidden meaning in his words: 'He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation' (11:51). At one level, of course, Caiaphas did speak of his own accord, and he knew what he meant. But John intuits that he spoke the way he did by a divine prompting, and that his words had a second meaning that arose out of this. Jesus will die to avert from his people not merely the wrath of the Romans but the wrath of God.

John's conviction about the Israelite high priest suggests to us what was Matthew's similar assumption about Old Testament prophets. Whatever meaning prophecy may have had historically, he finds within it particular sentences which were (in a special sense) not spoken by the prophet 'of his own accord' but by a divine prompting which gave them a meaning that their original hearers could not have perceived but which is apparent in the light of the event they refer to. John can see a hidden providence of God in a high priest speaking in a certain way; Matthew can see into the back of God's mind in his giving words to a prophet which had a God-given historical meaning but also a God-given messianic meaning. It is this latter meaning to which 2 Peter 1:21 refers.

If Matthew ignores the Old Testament's historical meaning, however, does this not undermine our conventional emphasis on texts' historical meaning? A further consideration of John's approach to Caiaphas' 'prophecy' may be helpful. John does not suggest that every human statement, or even every statement by a high priest, or even every statement about the future by a high priest, or even every statement about the future by this particular high priest in this particular year, is to be assumed to have a double meaning. He rather indicates that occasionally the form of words that a particular person uses may be so striking in some other connection that the question of a second meaning in them arises. The way he is able to identify this second meaning is his own faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Matthew's interpretation of these passages from Old Testament prophecy, then, implies that when he looked back to the work of the prophets in the light of Christ, sometimes he found statements so appropriate to the circumstances of the Christ event that

this reference must have been present in them from the beginning by God's will, if not in the awareness of their human authors. But, like John, he moved at least as often from some aspect of the Christ event back to a passage which turned out to illumine it, as vice versa. (This, incidentally, reduces the plausibility of the theory that stories in the gospels were developed to provide fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies. The hermeneutical movement is *from* the puzzle of Jesus' flight to Egypt *to* a re-interpretation of Hosea 11, not *from* the natural meaning of Hosea 11 *to* a story which assures us that it has been fulfilled.)

So can we continue to interpret Old Testament prophecy in Matthew's way? A possible instance is Psalm 22:16. Psalm 22 is a lament of a man abandoned by God and attacked by his enemies; it is several times quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled in Christ. In verse 16 he says, 'they have pierced my hands and feet' (so RSV; the text and translation are problematic, but for the sake of argument we will assume a version that is most open to a prophetic interpretation). This verse is not quoted in the New Testament, but many Christians have found a prophecy of the crucifixion here.

Now there is no hint that the author of the psalm saw his lament as a messianic prophecy, nor that other Israelites of Old Testament times would have understood it so. The suggestion that it refers to Christ works back from the Christ event to the text and intuits that God must have had the facts of the crucifixion in the back of his mind when by his providence an afflicted Israelite expressed himself in these terms. It is, however, difficult to see how one can establish whether or not this was the case. Inspired interpretation of scripture of this kind is similar to other forms of inspired utterance; it is difficult to test, possible sometimes to disprove, but very hard to prove. I accept Matthew's intuitions about the Old Testament because I believe he was inspired; I could not ask you to accept mine on the same basis!

Herein lies the difficulty in the suggestion that we should follow Matthew's expository method. The advantage of a historical approach to interpretation is that it is generally much easier to argue for or against such a historical understanding of what a text will have meant for a human author in his particular context. Theologically, the basis for an emphasis on understanding Scripture in this way is the conviction that God himself spoke and acted in history. Some passages of Scripture may have an inspired second meaning, an extra level of significance in the back of God's mind which (as such) is difficult for us to identify. All Scripture has an inspired first meaning, its meaning as a communication between God and

his people in some particular historical context, to which we can have access by the usual methods for interpreting written texts.

Similar considerations apply to the study of the precise form of the biblical text. In Psalm 22:16, the Masoretic Text actually reads not 'they have pierced my hands and feet' but 'like a lion [at] my hands and feet'. The former translation follows the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions of the psalm. It may be that the difference between these two is no coincidence. Christian textual tradition preserves a reading which is amenable to a Christian interpretation, Jewish textual tradition one that is not. It is difficult to say which is right, because either could be arguing back from what they believe. (Jesus is the crucified Messiah, and the Old Testament text will be expected to hint at that; or he is not, and the text will not be expected to hint at it.) The preservation of the text can be influenced by the same factors as the interpretation of the text; the movement is *from* contemporary beliefs to the text itself, as well as *vice versa*.

This post-New Testament phenomenon is paralleled within the passages from Matthew which appeal to Old Testament prophecy. The quotation from Micah (Mt. 2:6) instances this most clearly, since Micah's 'insignificant Bethlehem' has become Matthew's 'by no means insignificant . . .' — which was indeed the result of Micah's prophecy being fulfilled. The way the Old Testament text is read is allowed to be influenced by the way it has now been fulfilled.

It is characteristic of textual work in New Testament times (within the New Testament itself and, for instance, at Qumran) to pay close attention to the text itself in the conviction that one is handling the very Word of God; and the conviction that one now sees him acting in fulfilment of his Word enables one to specify in the Word itself the nature of the fulfilment.

Now as with his way of interpreting prophecy, Matthew's way of handling the text of prophecy is probably not one we shall feel free to follow. But we will follow his concern for the details of the text as the inspired Word of God, even if we express that concern in a different way in making it our aim to establish a text of the Old Testament which is as near as we can to the one that issued, by God's providence and inspiration, from its human authors.

If our study of Old Testament prophecy is to concentrate initially on its meaning for its authors and their hearers, then our interpretation of passages such as the ones Matthew quotes will not be limited to noting the meaning he finds in them when he interprets them in the light of particular circumstances of Christ's coming. Isaiah 7, for

instance, belongs in a context of dire peril for pre-exilic Judah, and relates how Judah's king was challenged to a radical trust in God despite the reality of this threat. Such a trust would issue in doing the right thing before God and before man, despite the temptation either to yield to Syria and northern Israel's attempts to lean on him to join their rebellion against Assyria, or alternatively to react by seeking help against Syria and Israel from Assyria herself. The power of Syria and Israel threatens to destroy Judah; but within a year (says Isaiah) it will all be over, and you will know it is true, 'God-is-with-us'. That promise is reserved in Scripture for the impossible situations that most need it (see e.g. Gn. 28:15; Ex. 3:12; Je. 1:8; Ps. 46:7, 11; Mt. 28:20). In those contexts it lifts people back on their feet again, promising them that they do not face the future alone and that God will deal with whatever crisis threatens. So it does in Isaiah 7:14 (see also 8:8, 10), and so it does in that other situation of crisis in Matthew 1:18-25.

Isaiah 9, too, needs understanding in its own right. Its context speaks of the darkness, anguish, gloom and distress of war (Is. 8:21-22); but of more than that, for these are the darkness, anguish, gloom and distress of the Day of Yahweh's judgment (*cf.* Am. 5:18-20), embodied in historical events for northern Israel, now the despised 'Gentile Galilee'. But then it portrays darkness dispelled, anguish and distress comforted, the grief of a funeral replaced by the joy of a wedding (Is. 9:1-2). It goes on to speak of a son of David ruling the world in justice and righteousness (9:3-7): not a vision we yet see fulfilled, but one that must be fulfilled.

What of the branch, the *neser* (Is. 11:1)? If a branch can grow from the trunk of a tree that has been felled, then no-one or nothing is ever finished. If God says there will be new growth, there will be. For five centuries it must have seemed as if that promise was as dead as the trunk it referred to. But then there *was* new growth, in the person of the Nazarene.

To gain the full implications of prophecies such as these for the significance of the Christ event, we need to go back to those prophecies themselves. We also need to take Matthew's appeal to particular aspects of particular Old Testament prophecies as an encouragement to us to undertake a broader study of the over-all pattern of God's promises in the Old Testament so that we can learn more about Christ from them. Matthew's utilization of a number of specific passages (and the references elsewhere in the New Testament to other passages) hardly indicate the total range of Old Testament prophecies which are to illumine the Christ event for us. They only model the process of understanding Christ in the

light of Old Testament prophecy, and they invite us to look at the total range of these prophecies in order more fully to understand the One in whom all God's promises find their 'Yes' (2 Cor. 1:20). These extend right back even beyond God's promise to Abraham, of the blessing of family, land, and a secure relationship with him, to the words of God about blessing and removal of the curse in the opening chapters of Genesis.

In the story from Genesis to Kings these promises keep receiving fulfilments of a kind, yet no fulfilment is complete or final, and each experience of fulfilment or of loss stimulates renewed hope in God's over-all promise. This hope becomes more overt in the prophetic books themselves. What they offer is an updated version of the ancient promises of God to his people. Then it is this over-arching and ever reformulated promise which is fulfilled in Christ. So he is to be understood in the light of this ongoing Old Testament promise, and we are encouraged to look at those promises in order to understand what he came to achieve. At this point, as much interest attaches to aspects of those promises which did not obviously find their fulfilment in the Christ event as to aspects which did. For in so far as all the promises of God are reaffirmed in him, all of them reveal to us aspects of his significance and calling. So if, for instance, the hopes of a new world of justice and righteousness have not been fulfilled through Christ's first coming, they will be through his second coming. They must be, because (if one may put it this way) if Jesus is truly God's Messiah, he has no choice but to be the means of fulfilling all God's promises.

Matthew's example, however, also suggests a converse of this point. As well as understanding Christ in the light of Old Testament prophecy, we are invited to understand Old Testament prophecy in the light of Christ; if he *is* its fulfilment. The notion of 'God-with-us' points to a presence of a much fuller kind than one would have guessed from the words in their Old Testament context. The darkness into which God brings his light is not merely the darkness of this-worldly suffering but that of the absence of God. The growth from the felled tree is, in the person of the Branch-man, more extraordinary even than Isaiah pictured it.

The considerations we have been outlining above put question-marks alongside the approach to Old Testament prophecy taken by books such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In seeing prophecies in books such as Ezekiel or Daniel as referring to events of his own day, Lindsey ignores the meaning that his texts will have had for the prophet whom God inspired and for the readers to whom God spoke through them. We have acknowledged, however, that Matthew does that too. The question then is, can Lindsey's interpretation be acknowledged as inspired as Matthew's was? That it cannot is suggested by the fact that it fails one obvious test: Matthew begins from the Christ event and interprets the Old Testament in the light of it; his interpretation has part of its justification in its faithfulness to God's revelation in Christ. Lindsey interprets the Old Testament in the light of the newspaper, and it is doubtful whether this is as good a starting-point.

Dynamic Christology

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Christology, or what we think of Christ, is at the centre of theological discussion today, which is as it should be.¹ The literature is vast and varied, and so students often need help finding their way in modern Christology. What follows is a brief sketch map of one important area of the present debate.

'Dynamic Christology' can be defined as under-

¹'Dogmatics [is] . . . fundamentally Christology': K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2 (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 123.

standing Jesus of Nazareth as the focus of God's activity in the world, and believing that Jesus' divinity is best expressed in terms of this understanding, at least within our twentieth-century context.

This is now a well-established way of viewing Christ. Almost no modern scholar has remained uninfluenced by it. Their dynamic concept of the person of Christ is a major reason for the quarrel that the English writers of *The Myth of God Incarnate* have with traditional Christology; it lies behind much that is said of Christ by progressive Catholic theologians such as Schillebeeckx, Küng and Rahner; and it has

recently appeared in Latin American liberation theologians' discussions of Christ.² A large, important, group of scholars have taken it as the central, controlling motif of their Christology. The task of this article is to explain this modern approach, to discuss the main criticisms which have been levelled against it and then, from an evangelical perspective, to ask to what extent we can learn from this movement.

God in action

Friedrich Schleiermacher is the father of modern Christology, and this is particularly true of the dynamic approach. He planted the two crucial seeds out of which the present situation has grown. Firstly, he held that Chalcedonian³ language was inadequate to describe Christ's person to modern man. Secondly, he built his Christology 'from below' — starting with the full humanity of Christ and finding his deity in that.⁴

1. *Chalcedon*. The modern position therefore begins with an attack upon the traditional Christological formulae. Chalcedon's Definition, that Christ is made up of one hypostasis but two substances, expresses Christology in neo-Platonic thought forms. But why, it is said, should modern man have to talk of Jesus in the fifth century's outdated 'static' terms? Nowadays, we think in a dynamic, evolutionary and existential way.⁵ The task of the theologian is not just to repeat outdated meaningless formulae; it is to present the doctrine of the church to modern man. And so he must use the language of Whitehead and de Chardin, not of Aristotle and Plato.⁶ But this is not just to substitute twentieth-century philosophical categories for those of the fifth century. After all, these too will one day become out of date. It is to return to early New Testament thought forms.⁷ In the Bible, God reveals himself by

what he does, in terms of purpose and action. Dynamic Christology is just stating the New Testament's witness to Jesus in Hebraic rather than alien Hellenistic terms.⁸

2. *True humanity*. Chalcedon is dead. But so is Docetism. Traditional orthodoxy paid lip service to Chalcedon, but never took seriously Christ's full humanity. Christ was seen as a sort of 'Superman' only disguised as a man and only partially human despite appearances.⁹ This can be seen in the implicit anhypostasia¹⁰ of many orthodox constructions (including Chalcedon itself).¹¹ Impersonal humanity is not humanity. If Jesus was not human 'to the lowest depths of his conscious and sub-conscious life, he was not human at all'.¹²

Jesus must be a man, a person, in the sense in which we are persons — part of the 'organic human process', a product of our past, our social environment and our existential choices. To say he also had a divine nature violates his humanity, for then he would not be a man like us.¹³ It follows that the only way to do justice to his humanity is for his divinity to be expressed in dynamic terms — as the action of God in him and through him. God acts in us imperfectly. He acted in Jesus perfectly and fully.

Jesus is God; but not substantively (and of course not adjectively as Arius believed). He is God adverbially. The divinity of Jesus is the activity of God in him.¹⁴

3. *Names and views*. Desiring together to speak of God in Jesus, modern theologians are very much at odds in their expression of that activity. We will briefly sample the diversity.

a. N. Pittenger¹⁵ is well known for his application of the principles of Process Theology to the incarnation. Adopting the dynamic model of God and the universe propounded by Whitehead and Hartshorne, he defines manhood as partaking of the process of God's action in the world, of being formed by 'reciprocity' with reality. To say that an event in the world is above such a process is to deny it the adjective human. The whole 'event' of the incarna-

²J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London, 1977). Cf. a bibliography of the relevant English, and Continental Catholic, literature in K. Runia, 'The Present Christological Debate', unpublished paper delivered at the FEET conference on Christology, 1980, pp. 11ff. J. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads; a Latin American Approach* (London, 1978).

³The Council of Chalcedon was held in AD451 to define the church's Christology in the face of contemporary heresy. Text of the Definition is in H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London, 1967), p. 51.

⁴We have no space here to discuss the third constituent of modern Christology that he supplied — scepticism about the New Testament evidence, but this also underlies the modern approach. J. Macquarrie, 'Recent thinking on Christian beliefs — Christology', *Expository Times* 88 (1976), p. 36.

⁵J. A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (London, 1972), pp. 24f.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 114-117. Others are less convinced that we can speak of the twentieth century's philosophical language; J. Hick, 'Christology at the Crossroads' in F. G. Healey (ed.), *Prospect for Theology* (Welwyn, 1966), p. 151.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁸J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 58-61.

⁹See the discussion in D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ* (London, 1948), pp. 11-20. Docetism is the belief that Christ was not fully human, but that he only seemed to be so.

¹⁰Anhypostasia states that the Logos took impersonal humanity in the incarnation.

¹¹G. W. H. Lampe, 'The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ' in S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (eds.), *Christ, Faith and History* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 123f. N. Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 89.

¹²J. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹³N. Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered* (London, 1970), pp. 66ff.

¹⁴G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁵See *The Word Incarnate and Christology Reconsidered*.

tion (and here Pittenger means much more than the moment of birth itself) must be interpreted in this light.

Now the activity of God can be best expressed as God's love, so Jesus is the classic statement of God's love. But the love of God revealed through him cannot be of a different nature to that revealed through all of God's actions in the world, or even of a different nature to our love for each other and God. If that were so, Christ would not be human. Others like J. Hick also see the main forms of God's dynamic activity as love.¹⁶ Hick, however, argues for the full uniqueness of Christ.

b. D. M. Baillie¹⁷ uses the 'paradox of grace' as his summing up of the divine activity. Grace is the crucial concept to use in understanding the activity of God. The initiative in all God's actions comes from God himself, yet it is performed in and through human beings. 'I live, but not I, Christ lives in me.' Jesus was the one in whom the paradox became absolute. He lived (the humanity), but not he; God lived in him (the deity).

c. G. W. H. Lampe's¹⁸ well-known interest in the work of the Holy Spirit is the key to his dynamic interpretation of the incarnation. His is a 'Spirit Christology'. Jesus was the man in whom the activity of God, *by his Spirit*, is seen. The Spirit possesses Jesus utterly and this divine activity through the Spirit is the divinity of Christ.

d. E. Schillebeeckx adopts what he calls a 'functional Christology', which he sees, like Hick as more Jewish than one expressed in 'essential' categories. The function of Jesus is revelation. He reveals what God is like and he reveals what man can be like, both in one person, and this is his interpretation of the Chalcedonian Definition. H. Küng and some other modern Roman Catholic theologians also present their Christology in functional terms, expressed more in revelational than in ontological categories.²⁰

Further diversity could be illustrated in the constructions of J. A. T. Robinson, H. W. Montefiore, M. Wiles, N. Ferré and many others who allow dynamic principles to dominate their

discussion of the nature of Christ.²¹

An inadequate theme

This general standpoint has not been without its critics. We now look at two difficulties facing these theologians.

1. *Theodotus redivivus*? One charge which has been levelled against them is that their final position is akin to dynamic monarchianism,²² a blend of monistic and adoptionist thought alien to mainstream Christianity.

Critics have pointed out that it is very hard to talk meaningfully of the second person of the Trinity if the deity of Jesus is just the activity of God, or of God's Spirit, in a man. Furthermore, it seems that this Christology is only concerned with the period of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. So how can it support an adequate doctrine of pre-existence, or a satisfying post-existence as Lord?²³

a. For some of the men mentioned above, this difficulty is in fact one of the advantages of the theory. Lampe speaks appreciatively of 'monistic' as opposed to trinitarian theology (although he realizes that simple believers will feel the loss of the comfort brought by the traditional doctrines).²⁴

b. Many, however, make a limited attempt at re-interpretation of these classical doctrines in order to fit them with their Christology. Pittenger, following Wiles, wished, in presenting his views, 'to deal faithfully with the tradition of the Christian church' and fulfil the ancient fathers' 'objectives'.²⁵ But Wiles and Pittenger leave very little of the tradition of the church undamaged.

Knox's approach is typical of many. He tells us that Christ's pre-existence must be thought of in the sense that 'any human career is an integral part of an entire organic cosmic process'. On post-existence, he says that Jesus is still alive in that 'his humanity has become a divinely redeeming thing'. (However, we need not make any changes in our doctrine of the

²¹ J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*; H. W. Montefiore, 'Towards a Christology for Today' in A. R. Vidler (ed.), *Soundings* (Cambridge, 1962); M. Wiles, *The Re-making of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1974); N. Ferré, *Christ and the Christian* (London, 1958).

²² Dynamic monarchianism was a form of unitarian thinking in the early church, seeing the Father as the personal Godhead, and the Logos and the Spirit as extensions of him. Christ was adopted as the Son of God by the energizing of the Logos. Its main exponents were Theodotus and Paul of Samosata. For this charge, see B. A. Demarest 'Process Trinitarianism' in K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (eds.), *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1980).

²³ B. Hebblethwaite, 'The propriety of the doctrine of the incarnation as a way of interpreting Christ', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 33 (1980), pp. 217ff.

²⁴ *Op. cit.* (see n. 11), pp. 123ff.

²⁵ *Christology Reconsidered*, pp. 4f.

¹⁶ Hick, 'Christology at the Crossroads'.

¹⁷ Baillie, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Lampe, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ ET: *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (London, 1979); *Christ: The Christian Experience in the modern World* (London, 1980); *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ* (London, 1980).

²⁰ Cf. the discussion in K. Runia, *op. cit.*, pp. 11ff (see n. 2). For a useful discussion of the background to present-day Catholic progressive thought, see D. F. Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (London, 1973), pp. 46ff. *et passim*.

Trinity!)²⁶ Incarnational theology and all the 'myths' associated with it are often abandoned with a sigh of relief.²⁷

It seems to many that people taking this position, despite their professed intentions, do not make a serious attempt to be faithful to the witness of the New Testament and to that of the church.²⁸ It is a faithfulness on *their terms*, the case of Procrustes and his bed all over again: the bed must not be changed, but the content of the bed must be made to fit it. So they lop off pieces of the doctrine here and there to accommodate it to their ideas, then claim that they have fitted the 'essential truth' into their Christology.

c. A third group, including such Protestants as Baillie and, in general, the present-day Catholic progressives, are at pains to keep the new wine in the old wineskins, to remain within historic Christianity. But we have a right to ask how successful they have been; whether they halt before the momentum of the new thought carries them over the boundary of the permissible.

Baillie has been accused (with some justification) of producing a very inadequate view of Christ.²⁹ Schillebeeckx's Christology has been designated inadequate by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.³⁰ Küng, it seems, ends up with a functional, economic Trinity rather than an essential one.³¹

d. All argue vigorously against the charge of adoptionism. Baillie denies it, since there was no time in the earthly life of Christ when he was not 'God' in this dynamic sense.³² Lampe agrees and adds that it is an essential characteristic of adoptionism that the adoption takes place on the basis of the adopted person's merits, which is never implied in dynamic Christologies.³³ But, however different the present-day pattern is from that of the third century, the adoptionism is essentially the idea of a man being elevated to deity. When the divinity of Christ is explained as God's activity in him, we have a fundamentally adoptionist situation.³⁴

2. *Is Jesus unique?* One of the starting-points of dynamic Christology is that Christ must be a man *like us*; that the activity of God in him is of the same nature as the activity of God in every man, indeed, the world. So, a second accusation which these scholars have to meet is that the Jesus they present is

different from you or me only in degree and not absolutely, in kind. Many advocates of a dynamic Christology feel this accusation keenly and devote much space to its refutation.³⁵

a. Baillie's concept of grace was immediately attacked on this point. In reply, it has been said that for him the difference in degree was so absolute as to constitute a difference in kind. But that is playing with words.³⁶ Hick sees the uniqueness of Christ as at the heart of the present discussion. He notes that Pittenger and Ferré accept that we cannot speak of Christ as different in kind to us, but strongly disagrees with them, calling Pittenger a neo-Arian.³⁷ Nevertheless, his own solution that the *agapē* of Jesus is numerically identical with that of God is rightly condemned by Pittenger as neo-Apollinarianism!³⁸ Pittenger attacks Hick and Thornton for lacking the courage to draw the logical conclusion of their premise and so to deny the absolute 'otherness' of Christ.³⁹

b. Lampe, Pittenger and others concede the point; thus they move the debate on a stage further. If Christ is not fundamentally and absolutely different from us, why need he be *unique*? Could not God act similarly a second time in a man? Can we say that it is impossible that another man will one day arise (or has already arisen) who is completely open to the love and activity of God? The implication seems to be that there is such a theoretical possibility, even if it is normally denied as an actual possibility.

Baillie confirms this deduction when he says that the thing which limits this manifestation to Jesus is that grace is prevenient. In other words, the reason we have only one Christ is that God has decided that it should be so — otherwise, it is quite possible.⁴⁰ Lampe tells us that there can be only one Christ, since our experience of God is in some way derived from him.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is significant that dynamic Christology has been welcomed in some quarters as opening the possibility for mutual respect and dialogue between Christianity and other religions.⁴²

We conclude that modern theology is walking down a path that leads outside the city of God (to utilize Augustine's phrase for the historic church).

²⁶ Knox, *op. cit.* (see n. 8), pp. 108, 111, 109.

²⁷ Cf. J. A. T. Robinson's discussion of myth, *op. cit.* (see n. 5), pp. 117ff. M. Wiles in J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

²⁸ K. Runia, *op. cit.*, pp. 19ff.

²⁹ J. Hick, 'Christology', pp. 147f.

³⁰ The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith began proceedings against him early in 1979.

³¹ K. Runia, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³² Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 129ff.

³³ Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

³⁴ Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

³⁵ N. Pittenger and J. Hick in particular.

³⁶ Reported as a remark of his brother, J. Baillie. Source unknown.

³⁷ Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

³⁸ N. Pittenger, *Christology*, p. 18. Apollinarianism was the view of Apollinarius (c. 310-390) that the Logos took the place of the human soul in Christ.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18f.

⁴⁰ Baillie, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁴¹ Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁴² Cf. J. Hick's contribution to J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

Some theologians are halting at the gate, unwilling to follow the road that they have chosen to its logical end. Others are already walking free in the open countryside. But they are no longer specifically Christian theologians.

An evangelical response

Despite the criticisms noted above, the modern dynamic approach to Christology should not be dismissed by the evangelical as worthless. The following are a few thoughts on an evangelical attitude to this movement.

1. *The way of the world.* a. To begin with, the movement has drawn attention to the way our Christology is conditioned by our cultural world view. It is no use saying that Christians should have nothing to do with secular interpretations of the world. Kierkegaard and Whitehead have already influenced the way we think, whether we like it or not, and it is best to recognize the fact. Furthermore, our evangelistic duty requires that we understand modern man and present the gospel in a way that he can understand.

The issue is not between 'worldly' world views and 'godly' world views. It is between the fifth-century world view and the twentieth-century world view. Neither of them has a special claim to godliness.⁴³

b. However, we must be clear that the Christian is under no obligation to accommodate his faith to the current world view. Instead, the content of his faith must determine what he accepts and rejects from the thinking of his time. He is at perfect liberty to use modern thought forms and terminology when it can adequately express the truth encapsulated in the biblical terminology.

He is also at liberty to reject them when they prove inadequate. To say that the whole of Christology must be expressed in exclusively dynamic terms is to build a huge building on flimsy foundations that cannot bear the weight, and many dynamic Christologies are like that.⁴⁴

c. It has been pointed out that this movement, from ontological to dynamic terminology, is a return to the Bible,⁴⁵ that the Hebrew mind works in this way. But this is only a half-truth. Knox and others show that the development from a dynamic to an ontological, incarnational theology occurs *within* the New Testament canon as the writers reflect on the momentous act of God in Christ.⁴⁶ In the New

Testament, we have recorded the act of God, *and* John's and Paul's ontological conclusions drawn from that act.

O. Cullmann and C. F. D. Moule point out that in the New Testament, the disciples are grappling with a unique situation which, in the end, transcended their old Jewish thought forms, since these proved inadequate to express their Christology.⁴⁷ Why should we give up the freedom they won for us and return to a world of thought which the apostles found inadequate?

Why should their mature reflection be less reliable than their first impressions of Christ?⁴⁸ As K. Runia points out, behind modern speculation there is a fundamentally wrong attitude to Scripture.⁴⁹

d. However, it is evangelicals who have rejoiced in the past when scholars have stressed the Jewish background to John's and Paul's thought (over against Hellenistic influences). It would be inconsistent to ignore it in our Christology. Yet we have effectively done so in the past using the New Testament as a mine of proof-texts for Chalcedon. It is time to recognize the Jewish, dynamic elements in the New Testament picture of Christ.⁵⁰

2. *Christ the Saviour.* a. Greek Christological thinking (especially in its implied anhypostatic form) is all of a piece with much of Greek soteriological thought: Christ took *humanity* in general, so as to deify it, or restore in it the image of God.

b. The Reformers preferred to emphasize a more Hebrew idea of salvation from guilt by sacrifice. And yet they did not, with the possible exception of Luther,⁵¹ permit it to affect their whole-hearted support for the Greek Christological terminology of the early councils, since it was politically expedient to show a catholic face to the world. Their Christology was therefore expressed in Greek terms and their soteriology in Hebrew terms. They thus accentuated a tension in western theology which has contributed to the contemporary explosion of the radical new Christology.

c. Evangelicals perpetuate that tension by applauding Luther's exposé of the inadequacy of such

⁴⁷ O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (ET London, 1959), p. 5. Quoted with approval by C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 8.

⁴⁸ P. Chirico, 'Hans Küng's Christology: An Evaluation of its Presuppositions', *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp. 256ff.

⁴⁹ Runia, *op. cit.*, p. 21; cf. J. W. Montgomery, 'Why has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?' in K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (eds.), *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*.

⁵⁰ On functional or ontological Christology, R. T. France writes 'The answer must be to refuse the "either/or" and insist also on a "both/and". They are not opposites; rather each requires the other,' *op. cit.*, p. 15. Cf. J. Macquarrie's exposition of K. Rahner; *op. cit.* (see n. 4), p. 38.

⁵¹ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 236. J. A. T. Robinson makes the same point about Melancthon; *op. cit.*, p. 194, n. 75.

⁴³ G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half-Century of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 242ff.

⁴⁴ B. Hebblethwaite, *op. cit.* (see n. 23), pp. 216f.

⁴⁵ Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁴⁶ Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 60f.; R. T. France, 'The Biblical Basis for the Confession of the Uniqueness of Christ', unpublished paper delivered at the FEET conference on Christology, 1980, pp. 14f.

Aristotelian words as 'substance' to explain the mystery of the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper; yet, at the same time, become defensive when the validity of the fifth-century word 'substance' is questioned as applied to the mystery of the incarnation.

We should put Christmas and Easter together in a more thoughtful way. All of us are agreed that the significance and validity of Easter depends on the full deity and full humanity of Christ, being united at the first Christmas. But if, with the Reformers, we see fourth- and fifth-century Greek soteriology as inadequate, there is no great merit in swallowing whole, terminology and all, the Christological approach on which it depends. We must be willing to hold up Norman Pittenger *and* Chalcedon to the light of the Bible.⁵²

3. *Ultimate mystery.* To deny that we can fully explain how Christ is both true God and true man is not ducking the issue. It is preserving the mystery.

This conclusion, the full divinity and full humanity of Christ, is an essential part of Christian theology.⁵³ Chalcedon has been much maligned, but it was not trying to do more than defend this truth. And in that sense as Barth points out, it was not captive to any particular ontology.⁵⁴ We have to make our own defence, in our own situation, with our own terminology today.

We cannot use any concept to 'clear up the problems' posed by the incarnation. Such an approach shows an inadequate regard for the essential mystery of the act of *God* in Christ.⁵⁵ It is this mysteriousness in the fact of human reason which forces Christology, beyond a certain point, into a negatively defensive stance.⁵⁶

Dynamic Christologies have, in fact, helped us to a more adequate defence of this primary statement. They have shown us that more attention needs to be paid to defending the full humanity of Christ. We can never return to the semi-docetism of previous generations.⁵⁷ If we conclude that dynamic Christology's anhypostatic *divinity* is inadequate,⁵⁸ then anhypostatic *humanity* is also inadequate.

Reverent Christological speculation is a part of the theological task in all generations. Another part of that same task is to draw the boundaries of that speculation in the thought forms of the contemporary world as far as it is possible. This was what Chalcedon did for its day and it is what we must do for ours. Such a task makes no reputations in 'modern' theology, but is worthy of the 'well done' reserved for those who contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Let us never be ashamed of doing that.

⁵⁵ H. D. McDonald, following K. Barth, sees the very trinitarian nature of God as the starting point for Christological speculation 'The Person of Christ in Contemporary Speculation and Biblical Faith', *Vox Evangelica* XI (1979), pp. 12f.

⁵⁶ K. Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁵² E. M. B. Green, 'Jesus in the New Testament' in E. M. B. Green (ed.), *The Truth of God Incarnate* (London, 1977).

⁵³ W. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man* (ET London, 1968). K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, p. 125.

⁵⁷ J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (ET London, 1974), p. 89; Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 11ff.

⁵⁸ Runia (criticizing P. Schoonenberg), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129ff. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

The emergence of the doctrine of the incarnation

Review article

Leon Morris

Dr Leon Morris is well known as author and commentator. Until recently he was principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, in Australia.

There has been a spate of books on Christology in recent years and Dr. James D. G. Dunn has contributed a very significant addition in *Christology in the Making*.¹ He sees a shift of emphasis over the years. In the immediate post-World War II period

¹ London: SCM Press, 1980, xvii + 443 pp., £10.50.

people concentrated on a new quest of the historical Jesus or on an attempt to trace a continuity between what Jesus taught and what the early church taught. In more recent times the interest is in the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation and Dunn concerns himself with this problem. He agrees that many have taken up this topic but 'none of them has been able to investigate the questions raised in sufficient detail' (p. 5). He sets himself to do this. He is neither defending nor attacking the doctrine of the incarnation but looking for its origin. He is not facing

the question, 'Is it true?' but 'Where did it come from?'

Dunn pursues his inquiry by looking carefully at the way the New Testament writers use some important concepts: Son of God, Son of man, the last Adam, Spirit or Angel, the Wisdom of God, and the Word of God. In each case he makes a careful examination both of the New Testament evidence and of the relevant background material. It goes without saying that this is done most carefully and with a full consideration of the relevant literature. The breadth of the reading behind the book is shown by the eighty-five pages of footnotes and the fifty pages of bibliography. It is impossible to read the result of all this research without being informed, and prodded into some hard thinking on one of the most important subjects for the Christian. This will surely become one of the standard works on the subject.

One of the difficulties we face as we study the incarnation is that we stand at the end of a long process of Christian life and thought. The great Christological controversies took place centuries ago and the church's definitive statements have been with us all our lives. When we read the New Testament it is all too easy to do so with spectacles provided by the classic Christian formulations so that we read into the apostolic writings meanings that are not there. A principal value of this book is that Dunn puts us on our guard against such tendencies. He searches for the meaning for the early Christians of each of his chosen categories and warns us against going beyond that. His scholarly work keeps bringing us back to what the writers actually said and what the terms they used meant.

I must confess to some misgivings about Dunn's emphasis on the development of the doctrine in the New Testament. That there is development no-one will deny. But Dunn seems to me to make it altogether too tidy, with first the early believers, later Paul and then John as the summit of the process towards the end of the century. I doubt whether he has given sufficient attention to the possibility that John's Gospel is earlier (I find it hard to see it as later than AD 70). It is also important to notice that Paul has as developed a theology as any in the New Testament. Is there anywhere a more developed theology than that in Romans? But this must be dated in the fifties. It seems to me that development took place more quickly than Dunn allows and further that it was not development in a straight line. Development rarely is. One thinker makes great advances but the next in line is as likely to go back as to go forward. There are some quite advanced thoughts in the synoptics (e.g. Mt. 11:25-30) as well as

in John. The picture is untidy, but life, even New Testament life, is like that. Genius is not the result of building painstakingly on the work of predecessors.

Dunn relies a good deal on finding 'the most plausible context of thought' (p. 125) for what the New Testament writers have written. No-one is going to quarrel with the attempt to find the context in which the New Testament writers did their work (though few of us manage to do this in the detailed manner of Dr Dunn). That is a necessary preliminary to any serious attempt to study an ancient document. But at times Dunn writes as though, once we have discovered this 'most plausible context', we have discovered what the New Testament writer meant. For example, he is able to demonstrate that there was a good deal of interest in Adam in Jewish writings and that Paul inherited a wide range of application of imagery featuring the first man. This must be accepted. But it is quite another thing to say that the sense of Paul's words '*is determined by their role within the Adam christology, by their function in describing Adam or more generally God's purpose for man*' (p. 119; Dunn's italics; he is referring to Phil. 2).

It is a fallacy to hold that the New Testament must be explicable in terms of its background. There is a radical novelty in Christianity and it is always possible that the New Testament writers mean something different from others even when they adapt common matter. John, for example, makes use of the Logos concept but we cannot find his meaning in his literary predecessors. No great writer, biblical or non-biblical, ancient or modern, is completely explicable in terms of the context in which he writes. A great writer invariably outstrips his contemporaries and brings new meaning to light. It may be possible to discover the sources of a creative writer. But that does not dispose of his creativity. He goes beyond his source.

Dunn points this out. Thus he says, 'if the contemporary cosmologies of Hellenistic Judaism and Stoicism determined what *words* should be used in describing the cosmic significance of the Christ-event, the *meaning* of these words is determined by the Christ-event itself' (p. 211). But, though he recognizes this, I doubt whether he is keeping it in mind when he says things like, 'This language would almost certainly have been understood by Paul and his readers as ascribing to Christ the role in relation to the cosmos which pre-Christian Judaism ascribed to Wisdom' (pp. 209-210). It is apparently 'pre-Christian Judaism' and not 'the Christ-event' that determines the apostle's meaning.

Dunn often (and rightly) warns against 'an illegitimate transfer of twentieth-century presuppositions to the first century' (p. 195). The danger of such a

transfer is always present and probably none of us has always avoided the peril. Dunn confers a benefit on us when he warns us so vigorously against the process.

But it also illegitimate to transfer meaning from the background of the New Testament writers to the foreground. Because an idea, say pre-existence, does not occur in Paul's background, that does not mean that the language of pre-existence which he uses now and then may legitimately be understood only in the way the background writers would have meant had they used it. Once more I plead for a more thoroughgoing application of Dunn's own dictum that 'the meaning of these words is determined by the Christ-event itself'.

Dunn begins with an examination of the meaning of 'the Son of God'. He reminds us that heroes and kings were sometimes called gods in the ancient world and that the title was widely used of the Roman emperor. Such language was less common among Jewish writers, though even here we find occasional use of terms attributing deity to specific men, for example Moses (though this is done in such a way that it is clearly not meant to be taken literally). The question arises as to whether the New Testament writers, when they used such language of Jesus, meant any more than did their contemporaries. Dunn finds himself unable to say that they did. The way Jesus refers to God as 'Father' may involve a claim to a special place but he is not sure.

This is written compellingly. But I wonder whether sufficient weight is given to such a passage as Matthew 11:27. This Dunn sees as meaning that 'Jesus' sense of sonship was one of intimacy in the councils of God and of eschatological significance, unique in the degree and finality of the revelation and authority accorded to him (as compared with prophetic consciousness — Amos 3:7); but more than that we cannot say with any confidence' (p. 29; *cf.* also pp. 198-200). I realize that 'eschatological' is a blessed word in modern New Testament studies and that many scholars see it as relevant to this passage. But is it? Dunn's study is a very careful one. It is characterized by a refusal to go beyond what any passage actually says; we must not read things into sayings about Jesus as 'Son of God'. So I find myself asking, Where in this whole paragraph is there a reference to eschatology? I want to employ Dunn's principle that we do not go beyond the meaning of the words actually used. To say, 'No-one knows the Son except the Father' seems to me to say that in the present (whatever may happen eschatologically) the being of the Son is such that it is not known to people in general; it is known to God alone. Add to that that only the Son knows the Father and it is not easy for

me at any rate to see anything less than a claim to sonship in the present in the fullest sense.

I find a similar difficulty in other places, for example in the discussion of Hebrews 1: 2: God, having spoken in earlier times through prophets 'at the end of these days spoke to us in the Son . . . through whom he made the worlds'. Is it being quite fair to the writer to deny that this means pre-existence and to reduce it to 'an *ideal* pre-existence, the existence of an idea in the mind of God, his divine intention for the last days' (p. 54; Dunn's italics)?

Dunn criticizes a good deal of traditional exegesis. He is firm that we must not go beyond what the New Testament writers actually say. Fair enough. But we can't have it both ways. If the orthodox are not to be allowed to read meanings into sayings about Jesus as God's Son, then the less orthodox must not read meanings into sayings about the Son's making of the worlds. There is nothing in the majestic opening of Hebrews that leads us to think that the writer is talking about the ideal rather than the actual, about God's intention for the last days rather than God's past action in Christ.

When he comes to the section on 'the Son of man' Dunn has a very lucid summary of the state of the action. He argues that we must understand the use of the term in the gospels to go back to Jesus himself (p. 86). He sees the expression as essentially eschatological in meaning and finds no reason for taking it to point to Jesus' pre-existence. I gladly pay my tribute to this chapter, but there are a couple of points which concern me.

First, is the expression invariably eschatological? It certainly is quite often (*cf.* the coming of the Son of man 'in his glory'). But it is also used of suffering and death in an important group of passages (*e.g.* Mk. 8: 31). This part of the evidence seems to show that as Jesus used the term it did not invariably have eschatological significance.

Secondly, there are passages which say, 'the Son of man came . . .' or the like (Lk. 7: 34; 19: 10; Mk. 10: 45), and passages in which Jesus says 'I came . . .' (Mt. 5: 17; 9: 13; 10:34-35; Lk. 12:49, 51, *etc.*). Dunn classes such passages with those that speak of God as sending people (on p. 89 he refers the 'I came' passages to pp. 39f., but there he is discussing God's 'sending' of his agents). But there is a significant difference between saying 'God sent his prophets' and 'I came to call sinners'. How could Jesus 'come' unless he existed before he 'came'? An expression like 'The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost' (Lk. 19: 10) seems to mean more than that Jesus was conscious of a divine mission.

There is much of interest in the discussion of 'the

Last Adam', and there will be wide agreement with Dunn's rejection of Bultmann's idea that the Gnostic Redeemer myth lay behind the Christian idea of the incarnation. Dunn proceeds to show that Adam plays a much larger role in Paul's thought than is generally realized, though some may hesitate to accept a reference to Adam in all the passages where Dunn finds him. Occasionally our author goes a little beyond the evidence, as when, in dealing with Paul's use of the Adam imagery in Romans 1, he tells us that Genesis 3 'goes on to relate' that Adam 'believed the serpent's distortion of God's command' (p. 101). It is not said in Genesis 3 that Adam believed the serpent and according to 1 Timothy 2: 14 Paul held that Adam was not deceived. If the Pauline authorship of the statement be not accepted at least one early Christian understood the apostle to teach this.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this part of Dunn's argument is his explanation of Philippians 2: 5-11 in terms of Adam in such a way as to deny that the passage teaches incarnation. He holds that the interpretation in terms of a self-humbling from heaven to earth followed by a return to heaven 'has to assume that Christ's pre-existence was already taken for granted' (p. 114). I must confess that this had not occurred to me and now that Dunn points it out I cannot accept it. As I see the passage, the view that it means a descent from heaven depends on the words Paul uses, not on any prior assumption one brings to the text.

In this exegesis Dunn holds that the view that pre-existence is in mind 'depends to a surprising extent on the interpretation of two verbs', *huparchōn* (6a) and *genomenos* (7b). To this two things must be said: (a) the force of these two verbs is not to be minimized, and (b) they do not stand alone. We must also consider 'having taken the form of a slave' and 'having been found in form as a man'; perhaps also 'he emptied himself' (though this may refer to Christ's death rather than to his incarnation). With all respect, I cannot see that Dr Dunn has done justice to the language used in this passage. It is one thing to say, 'It is possible so to interpret Philippians 2 as to see no reference to pre-existence' and quite another to say that this is Paul's meaning. To most exegetes it seems that what Paul is saying has to do with Christ's leaving a heavenly state to come to earth.

Much the same must be said about 2 Corinthians 8:9. The argument that the words, 'though he was rich, for your sake he became poor' do not point to the incarnation seems incredible. With every desire to be fair to Dr Dunn's argument it does seem as though at this point he is evading rather than interpreting the force of the words used.

Dr Dunn has certainly shown that many passages in the New Testament which are unthinkingly assumed to speak of incarnation do not in fact do so. Over and over he compels us to think again and to modify our interpretation of familiar passages. But he has not shown that the idea of Christ's pre-existence is absent from Paul's thought and as Paul is probably the first Christian writer this is very significant. His discussions of Philippians 2 and 2 Corinthians 8:9 are among the least convincing sections of his book.

In the chapter, 'Spirit or Angel?', Dr Dunn has no great difficulty in showing that Jesus is not identified with either in the New Testament writings. But there are some small points that call for comment. Thus to say that John 'seems to understand the coming of the Spirit as fulfilling the promise of Christ's return' (pp. 147f.) is perhaps too simple. It is true that many scholars understand the relevant passages in that way, but many do not. I do not understand why Dr Dunn does not discuss the other view. We might perhaps see another inadequacy in the passage which refers to 'some OT texts which speak of "the Lord"' as being applied to Christ in the New Testament but cites only Romans 10:13 and Philippians 2:10f. (pp. 157f.). But there are several others (e.g. Mt. 3:3; Lk. 1:76; Acts 2:21; 1 Cor. 2:16; Heb. 1:10). The phenomenon is more widespread than one would gather from the discussion.

Further, we read, '*There is no evidence that any NT writer thought of Jesus as actually present in Israel's past*' (p. 158; Dunn's italics). But Paul wrote, 'the Rock was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:4). It is true that later Dunn tells us that 'rock = Christ in Christian typology' (p. 184). But most exegetes agree that when Paul says that Christ 'was' the rock he means that Christ existed at the time of the rock. Thus Conzelmann says explicitly, 'The "was" of the typological statement, of the interpretation of the rock as being Christ, means real pre-existence, not merely symbolic significance' (*ad loc.*).

When he comes to the Wisdom literature Dunn shows that the concept of wisdom was used widely. In the Old Testament, however, it does not go beyond a vivid personification and certainly does not denote anything like a 'hypostasis'. When the New Testament writers use this concept they often do so in ways we find strange but which do not carry with them the ideas, such as pre-existence, that we would most naturally understand of the words they use. Dunn reminds us that it is not a matter of determining the meaning we would have if we used these words but the meaning first-century writers had. We must whole-heartedly agree. But this does not mean that when Paul writes, 'one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things and we through him' (1 Cor.

8:6) he means, '*Christ who because he is now Lord now shares in God's rule over creation and believers, and therefore his Lordship is the continuation and fullest expression of God's own creative power*' (p. 182; Dunn's italics), that '*Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God*' (*ibid*; Dunn's italics).

In an important 'creation' passage in Colossians 1:15ff. Dunn takes the words, 'in him were created all things' (v. 16), to mean '*Christ now reveals the character of the power behind the world*' (p. 190; Dunn's italics). The passage says a little later, 'all things were created through him and to him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together'. Dunn finds this to mean, '*that the creation and Christ must be understood in relation to each other: now that Christ has been raised from the dead the power and purpose in creation cannot be fully understood except in terms of Christ*' (pp. 193f.; Dunn's italics). Even the depth of scholarship and the sincerity with which this is argued cannot make such an exegesis plausible. Traditional exegesis may require modification but it is asking too much that the plain meaning of words be modified in such a drastic fashion.

When he comes to deal with the Logos Dr Dunn has a valuable section on Philo. He goes on to argue that John's view of the Logos certainly includes the idea of pre-existence. He holds that in John 1:1-18 we have 'an explicit statement of *incarnation*, the first, and indeed only such statement in the NT' (p. 241). Many will wonder whether this can be justified. Further, Dunn does not seem to give sufficient attention to the possibility that John may be early. To agree that John's Logos Christology includes pre-existence does not mean that pre-existence comes into Christianity as a late doctrine. If John is early it does not. And if 'the Logos poem' is earlier than John (p. 241) it may be very early indeed. Further, it does seem that pre-existence is present in addition in

some of the Pauline writings and these are among the earliest in the New Testament.

In his conclusion Dunn makes it quite clear that there is no real precedent for the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. His close examination of developments in Judaism and other religions has made it plain that the Christian view is a new one. It may be indebted to others for this or that aspect, but its essential idea is new. His view is that Jesus did not himself explicitly claim incarnation: '*We cannot claim that Jesus believed himself to be the incarnate Son of God*'. But that is not the whole story. Dunn sees the incarnation as a fitting development of Jesus' teaching. He goes on, '*we can claim that the teaching to that effect as it came to expression in the later first-century Christian thought was, in the light of the whole Christ-event, an appropriate reflection on and elaboration of Jesus' own sense of sonship and eschatological mission*' (p. 254; Dunn's italics). That is an important conclusion.

It is interesting that at this point Dunn allows the possibility that some texts in Paul 'could be readily interpreted' of pre-existence as well as of a cosmic role for Christ from the resurrection (p. 255). I welcome this, but I wonder whether Dunn has made sufficient allowance for the possibility in his earlier discussion. He goes on to speak of the complexity in the thought of Paul (p. 266) and it would seem that a fair exegesis of what Paul says includes the thought of Christ's pre-existence within that complexity.

It will be obvious that I find some aspects of Dr Dunn's study unacceptable. But it would be churlish to finish on any other note than one of appreciation. He has written a great book and put us all very much in his debt. He has broken new ground and made us all think. The repercussions of his argument will be with us for a long time. We must be grateful for the information and the stimulation this book brings us.

Covenant, treaty, and prophecy

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Study of the covenant traditions in the Old Testament was given a new impetus by the publication in 1955 of *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* by G. E. Mendenhall. Basing his work on the study of Hittite vassal treaties made by V. Korošec¹ he argued that the Sinai covenant seems

¹ V. Korošec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge* (Leipzig, 1931).

to have been similar in form to the ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties of the fourteenth-thirteenth centuries BC. The pattern of these treaties is:

1. Preamble, introducing the sovereign.
2. Historical prologue outlining previous relations of the parties.
3. Stipulations: (a) basic, (b) detailed.
4. Document clause, providing for the deposition of a copy of the covenant in the vassal's sanctuary, and its periodic reading.

5. Witnesses, a long list of gods invoked to witness the covenant.

6. Curses and blessings.

In the Old Testament this pattern is clearest in the structure of the book of Deuteronomy, but can also be discerned in the covenant ceremony in Joshua 24, and partially in Exodus 20.

1. Dt. 1:1-5	Jos. 24:2a	Ex. 20:1
2. Dt. 1:6-3:29	Jos. 24:2b-13	Ex. 20:2
3a. Dt. 4:1-11:32	Jos. 24:14&15	Ex. 20:3-17
3b. Dt. 12:1-26:19	Jos. 24:16-25	
4. Dt. 27:1-26	Jos. 24:26a	Ex. 25:16; 34:1
5. Not appropriate	Jos. 14:26b&27	
6. Dt. 28:1-68 (order reversed)	Jos. 24:27 (implied)	

These parallels convinced many scholars that the Sinai covenant was indeed based on the vassal treaty form. This led to a blossoming of studies arguing that various features of the vassal treaty or the suzerain-vassal relationship illuminated aspects of Israel's history and religion.²

Mendenhall's thesis has never been without its critics, but opposition to it seems to be becoming increasingly fashionable. This opposition takes two variant forms:

1. There are those who argue that originally the Sinai covenant was not expressed in treaty form. The use of this form was a later development, arising in the seventh century BC.³

2. Some go even further, and argue that the very notion of a covenant was of little importance in Israel until the seventh century BC.⁴

The purpose of this paper is to examine the chief arguments put forward in support of the second, more radical, position, but in dealing with these we will in fact consider the evidence relevant to the less radical position.

The relevant arguments can be summarized as follows:

1. Mendenhall compared the Sinai covenant form with that of the fourteenth-thirteenth century Hittite vassal treaties. Other scholars have argued that an equally good parallel can be drawn with the Assyrian vassal treaties of the ninth-seventh century BC.

² Some examples are: G. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh, 1955). H. Huffmon, 'Covenant Lawsuit and the Prophets', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 286-295. W. Moran, 'The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy', *CBO* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87. D. Hillers, *Treaty - Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome, 1964). W. Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the oldest Sinai Traditions* (Oxford, 1965). W. Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets* (Oxford, 1965).

³ D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (revised edition, Rome, 1978). E. W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Oxford, 1973).

⁴ G. Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (London, 1973). R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* (Oxford, 1975).

2. The word *b'rit* ('covenant')⁵ is used only rarely by the eighth-century prophets (10 times of God-man relationship), but is much more common in the sixth-century prophets (39 times).

3. In the Pentateuch the occurrences of the word *b'rit* are nearly all in those passages that most scholars would attribute to the later sources D and P.⁶

4. The important covenant terms *bāhar* ('choose') and *āhab* ('love') are common in Deuteronomy (30 times and 19 times respectively), yet rare in Genesis-Numbers (3 times and once of the God-man relationship).

5. The clearest expression of the treaty form is found in Deuteronomy (held to be seventh century in date in its present form). The evidence for it in earlier passages (e.g. Ex. 20; Jos. 24) is debatable because the parallel here is limited.

As far as the first argument is concerned the plain fact seems to be that there are some basic differences between the vassal treaties of the first and second millennia BC. The six-fold form of the second-millennium treaty has been outlined above. Occasionally elements are omitted, but the order of elements is very rarely changed. The structure of the first-millennium treaties is simpler and more variable.⁷

1. Preamble or title.
2. } Stipulations and curses
3. } succeeded *or* preceded
4. } by witnesses.

Two points are particularly worth noting. Firstly, an historical prologue is typical of the second-millennium treaties but *very rare* in the first-millennium treaties (only one, disputed, example is known). Secondly, in the second-millennium treaties the curses are balanced by blessings, whereas in the first-millennium treaties the blessings are very brief or, more often, non-existent. In fact the tone of the treaty has changed from being a gracious endowment to being an instrument of naked force.

M. Weinfeld⁸ admits these differences but argues that the lengthy series of curses in Deuteronomy is more like the curses of the seventh-century treaties than the short, generalized, curses of the Hittite treaties. On this ground alone he asserts that

⁵ On the etymology and meaning of *b'rit* see the article on it in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II (revised edition, Grand Rapids, 1977).

⁶ Obviously the validity of this argument stands or falls with the validity of the usual source analysis of the Pentateuch. However, note the occurrence of *b'rit* in Gn. 15:18; Ex. 19:5; 24:7; 34 (5 times), which are usually assigned to J or E.

⁷ K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London, 1966), pp. 90-102. K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter, 1977), pp. 79-85. A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB) (London, 1979), pp. 31-33.

⁸ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist School* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 59-157.

Deuteronomy reflects the first-millennium treaty form. However, this is to treat the evidence selectively by emphasizing only one aspect of it. At the most what he might have shown is that the form of the curses in Deuteronomy could have been influenced by the later treaty form. This point has relevance for the dating of the final form of Deuteronomy, but does not undermine the argument that the book as a whole reflects the second-millennium treaty form.

Here it should be noted that G. J. Wenham has argued⁹ that the Old Testament covenant form is a distinctive one that occurs in the Old Testament alone. However, it bears some resemblance both to the form of ancient Near Eastern 'law codes' and that of ancient Near Eastern treaties. Moreover, and this is the main point as far as the present argument is concerned, the form that he puts forward for the Old Testament covenant is very much closer to that of the second-millennium treaties than that of the first-millennium treaties.

There can be little doubt, then, that the covenant form reflected in Deuteronomy is that of the second millennium BC, and not that of the first millennium. This does not necessarily prove that Deuteronomy itself dates from the second millennium, but does indicate that the covenant form was known and used for the Sinai covenant from the time of Moses onwards.¹⁰ The incompleteness of the form in the other passages does not weaken the argument. The nearest thing to a covenant document in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy itself. The other passages are narrative accounts of covenant ceremonies (Jos. 24) or *part* of a covenant document incorporated into such a narrative (Ex. 20). One could not expect complete correspondence with the treaty form in these cases — though the parallel in Joshua 24 is striking.

We must now turn to the eighth-century prophets and consider whether they show evidence of knowing the Sinai covenant, and if so whether they knew it in the vassal treaty form. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were many Old Testament scholars who argued that the ethical element in Israel's religion did not go back to Moses but was the legacy of the eighth-century prophets, who were the real originators, on the human side, of the Ten Commandments. This view no longer finds

much favour because:

1. The ethical element in the preaching of Israel's prophets clearly predates the eighth century, e.g. Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12), Elijah and Ahab (1 Ki. 21).

2. The eighth-century prophets themselves do not seem to be promulgating something new, but to be indicting the nation on the basis of generally accepted ethical norms — norms that are paralleled by laws in the Book of Covenant (e.g. Am. 2:6-16; cf. Ex. 21:8-9; 22:26) and the Decalogue (Ho. 4:2).¹¹

3. There is nothing in the Ten Commandments that would be out of place in the time of Moses.¹²

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the ethical preaching of the eighth-century prophets was based on, and a development of, an ethical code that was known and accepted in Israel from Mosaic times. But we can go further than that. Amos' preaching of judgment is based on the fact that Israel stands in a special relationship to Yahweh and so has a particular responsibility to keep his laws (Am. 3:1-2). This relationship is related to the exodus (Am. 9:7). Hosea is also aware of a special relationship between Yahweh and Israel resulting from the exodus (Ho. 11:1; 21:9; 13:4-5) — a relationship which is pictured in terms of the marriage bond (a type of covenant) in chs. 1-3. Micah also speaks of this relationship and its ethical demands (Mi. 6:1-8).¹³

Here, then, we have evidence from the eighth century of the concept of a special relationship between Israel and Yahweh, originating in the exodus/wilderness period and resulting in Israel being obligated to live by certain moral norms (which coincide with stipulations found in the Pentateuch). Yet the fact is that of these prophets only Hosea speaks of the relationship as a covenant, *b^crit* (Ho. 6:7; 8:1). Why is it that the other prophets (and indeed earlier sources too) do not make use of the term? Two answers are possible:

1. They avoid the term because they wanted to avoid the popular ideas that had come to be associated with it. Their contemporaries stressed the promises of God to care for and protect his people and played down the ethical demands of the relation-

¹¹ For example, on Hosea, D. Stuart 'The Old Testament Prophets self understanding of their prophecy' (*Themelios*, 6:1 Sept. 1980, pp. 11-12) asserts that, 'there is no passage in the book that does not have the Mosaic scripture as its basis', and presents some evidence to support this. Similarly F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1980), p. 75 observe 'Hosea's discourses are threaded with Deuteronomistic ideas in a way that shows they already were authoritative in Israel'.

¹² H. H. Rowley, *Men of God* (London, 1963), pp. 1-36. J. P. Hyatt, *Encounter* 26 (1965), pp. 199-206.

¹³ On the authenticity of this oracle see the NICOT commentary by L. Allen (London, 1976).

⁹ G. J. Wenham, 'The Structure and Date of Deuteronomy' (an unpublished thesis which is discussed briefly in J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (TOTC) (Leicester, 1979), pp. 18-20).

¹⁰ P. C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (NICOT) (London, 1976), Appendix II, suggests that Egyptian labour contracts had the same form as the Hittite vassal treaties, and that this is why the Sinai covenant reflects the same form — the Hebrew slaves exchanged one overlord (pharaoh) for another (Yahweh).

ship. An example of this attitude might be Micah 3:11.

2. The word became a common technical term for the Sinai covenant only with the rise of the Deuteronomic movement in the seventh century BC. This movement may have been sparked off by the finding of the long-lost book of Deuteronomy and by Josiah's reforms; the movement may possibly have put the book of Deuteronomy into its present form. In any case the movement may have been responsible for establishing a standardized terminology for covenant ideas — ideas that were themselves not new.¹⁴

Is there any evidence of the form in which the prophets knew the covenant concept, whatever term they used for it? There are two features of their preaching which are at least consistent with the view that they knew the treaty form.

Firstly, the prophets speak of certain disasters as punishment for breaking Yahweh's law. These are just the kind of things included in the treaty curses (e.g. Am. 4; cf. Dt. 28; Lv. 26). Thus it is possible to argue that the prophetic doom oracles are based on these curses.¹⁵

Secondly, there are in the prophets oracles which have the form of a law-suit (e.g. Ho. 4:1-3; Is. 1:2-3; 3:13-15; Mi. 6:1-5; cf. Dt. 16:32). These contain the following elements (not always all present):¹⁶

1. A call to witnesses to listen to the proceedings.
2. A statement of the case at issue by the divine Judge.
3. An account of the benevolent acts of Yahweh.
4. Indictment.
5. Sentence.

Now J. Harvey¹⁷ has pointed out that this form finds a parallel in the letters of accusation sent by a suzerain to a vassal accused of breaking a treaty. He suggests that these oracles therefore have a background in the treaty form. Even before Harvey's suggestion others had seen a probable link between these oracles and the covenant regarded as a vassal treaty.¹⁸

The case must not be over-stated. Neither of these features provides conclusive proof that the prophets knew the covenant in the vassal treaty form. After all, the curses in the treaties are only a special case of the

more general use of curses in the ancient Near East, and the law-suit oracles could be based on general law-court procedures. However, taken with the other evidence discussed above these two features help to build up a cumulative case in favour of the view that the Sinai covenant did originate in the second millennium BC and was modelled on the vassal treaty form of that era.

There is another issue concerning the covenant which we must consider briefly since it has some relevance to the preceding discussion. In Dt. 31:9-13 there is a command that there should be a reading of the covenant law every seven years at the Feast of Booths. Jos. 24 probably records such a ceremony (cf. 2 Ki. 23:1-3). Whether this was done regularly is unclear. A. Weiser¹⁹ claims that many of the psalms come from the liturgy of such an occasion (e.g. Ps. 50, 81, 105, 111). If there was such a ceremony held at intervals it would provide an explanation for the persistence and knowledge of the treaty form in Israel. Its liturgy would surely reflect this form (cf. Jos. 24), and liturgy is notably conservative.²⁰ The liturgy of such a festival has been suggested as the background for the prophetic law-suit and doom oracles. One would expect the liturgy to make provision for the indictment of the nation for failures to keep the covenant law in the period since the previous renewal. Psalm 50 could be such a liturgy. All this, however, is rather speculative since we have no clear evidence of how faithfully Deuteronomy 31:9-13 was obeyed.²¹

Finally, something needs to be said briefly about the significance of this discussion for the understanding of Old Testament history and theology. The historical significance is fairly obvious. If the evidence that the Sinai covenant was expressed in the form of the fourteenth/thirteenth-centuries BC treaties is sound, it supports the antiquity of the Mosaic covenant traditions within the Old Testament. The major, though by no means the only, theological significance of the treaty form is what it implies about the way we should view the covenant law and its curses and blessings. There is a danger (and it is one that the Israelites did not always avoid) of understanding them on a strict *quid pro quo* basis. Obedience will earn favour and guarantee a reward. However, this confuses covenant with contract. The Hittite treaties are not contracts. They are gifts of

¹⁴ Cf. the 'technical' vocabulary of the 'charismatic movement' re experiences of, and teaching about, the Holy Spirit which in themselves have not been unknown in Christianity before the 1950's.

¹⁵ F. C. Fensham, *ZAW* 74 (1962), pp. 1-19; *ZAW* 75 (1963), pp. 155-175. D. Hillers, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ G. E. Wright in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, eds. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (London, 1962), pp. 26-67.

¹⁷ J. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Paris-Montreal, 1967).

¹⁸ E.g. G. E. Wright, *op. cit.* and H. Huffmon, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ A. Weiser, *The Psalms* (London, 1962).

²⁰ Cf. the opposition to the revision of *The Book of Common Prayer in Britain!*

²¹ M. Weinfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-58, 158-178, argues that the covenant form was preserved in a literary tradition of covenant writing associated with scribes/wise men.

grace given by the overlord to define and confirm an existing relationship (hence the historical prologue). The vassal keeps the stipulations of the covenant not to earn favour but as a response of gratitude for the overlord's benefactions. The point of the blessings and curses is that the faithful vassal continues to enjoy these benefactions, whereas persistent

infidelity (which in the context of the treaty is seen as an expression of gross ingratitude) effectively puts an end to the relationship expressed by the covenant. However, the end is not necessarily definitive. The overlord could exercise mercy and renew the relationship with a repentant vassal.

Talking points

Science versus religion

Nigel M. de S. Cameron

Dr Cameron looked at 'Genesis and Evolution' in the previous issue of Themelios; this article completes his survey of recent debate about science and religion. Dr Cameron is now warden of Rutherford House, a newly founded evangelical research centre in Scotland.

The title and theme of A. D. White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*¹ have unfortunately set the tone for much modern discussion of the relations of Christian religion and scientific endeavour. In fact, as is now widely acknowledged, White's work was — like others of its day with a similar approach — selective and unbalanced in its treatment. Not that there has always been peace and harmony in the relations of scientists and theologians; but the issues on which they have differed have only rarely actually been those of 'science versus religion'. For example, the controversy over evolution in the aftermath of which White was writing was not between scientists on the one hand and theologians on the other. In his recent definitive study of *The Post-Darwinian Controversies*, James Moore can conclude thus:

There was not a polarization of 'science and religion' as the idea of opposing armies implies, but a large number of learned men, some scientists, some theologians, some indistinguishable, and almost all of them very religious, who experienced various differences among themselves. There [were] deep divisions among men of science, the majority of whom were at first hostile to Darwin's theory, and a corresponding and derivative division among Christians who were scientifically untrained, with a large proportion of leading theologians quite prepared to come to terms peacefully with Darwin . . . the military metaphor perverts historical understanding.²

In fact what makes the 'science v. religion' approach so mistaken as a reading of history is its

failure to appreciate the religious ingredients in the development of scientific method itself. For example, R. Hooykaas in his *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* 'poses the question why modern science arose in a particular place, in Europe, and at a particular time, and not elsewhere or in a different age'.³ He concludes that 'it was directed by . . . social and methodological conceptions, largely stemming from a biblical world view'.⁴ Once the method had taken off, 'anyone with the necessary talent may help to build up science on solidly established foundations' — whether they come from 'nations whose own culture did not give birth to anything like western science' or are 'western people who have lost all contact with the religion of their forebears' who 'continue in their scientific activities the tradition inherited from them'.⁵ The Reformers' concept of nature and their repudiation of the Mediaeval world-picture which the church largely adopted from classical antiquity were essential ingredients in the founding of modern science.

The work of Moore, Hooykaas and others sets welcome correctives to the popular assumption that science and religion are natural enemies (and that therefore one cannot be both religious and true to the facts of science at the same time). Indeed, many people would be surprised to learn, for instance, that the early members of the Royal Society (the founding fathers of modern science in Britain), which was so important in the development of scientific thinking, were 'preponderantly Puritan'.⁶ There can be no doubt that Christians, and Christian theology and ethics, contributed very substantially to the

³ Edinburgh, 1972, p. xi. The Gunning Lectures for 1969.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162. Emphasis ours.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁶ R. K. Merton, 'Puritanism, Pietism and Science', *Sociological Review* (old series) 28, part 1 (January 1936), reprinted in C. A. Russell (ed.), *Science and Religious Belief. A Selection of Recent Historical Studies* (London, 1973), p. 53. Emphasis original.

¹ London, 1896.

² J. R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 99.

beginnings of 'modern science', and it is of course well known that individual scientists such as Newton and Boyle were profoundly religious men. It was only in the nineteenth century, with the rising importance of historical geology (and later biology), that the modern question of the compatibility of Christian religion and natural science became the subject of broad debate.

The degree to which developments during that century altered our conceptions is revealed by a brief consideration of the *Bridgewater Treatises*. In 1829, the Earl of Bridgewater (a clergyman who had, as one writer notes, 'neglected his parish assiduously'⁷) left a will which required his executors (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the President of the Royal Society) to commission eight scientists to write a series of volumes which would demonstrate

the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God, as manifested in the Creation; illustrating such work by all reasonable arguments, as for instance, the variety and formation of God's creatures in the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms; the effect of digestion, and thereby of conversion; the construction of the hand of man, and an infinite variety of other arguments; as also by discoveries ancient and modern, in arts, sciences, and the whole extent of literature.⁸

The authors selected included Buckland, the leading geologist of the early decades of the century; Prout, 'a really important chemist';⁹ Sir Charles Bell, 'a very prominent physician', who wrote on design in the human hand;¹⁰ Whewell, one of the great thinkers of the day; and Chalmers, the Scottish churchman who was also 'a serious student of natural history, astronomy, mathematics and political economy'.¹¹ In fact they were all men of distinction in the world of science, and their participation in this massive effort at natural theology typified the concern of almost all their professional colleagues to hold together religion and science in a mutually supportive relation. But the storm-clouds were already gathering, and it was only the year after Bridgewater died (and three years before the first *Treatises* arrived on the scene) that volume one of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* appeared, signalling the beginning in earnest of the controversy that would finally divorce natural theology and natural science in the work of Darwin a generation later.

A number of specific issues arise in the modern debate about science and religion, and we may

⁷ C. C. Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 209.

⁸ Cited *ibid.*, pp. 209, 210.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

briefly touch upon some of them here.

1. The realms of science and religion

The nineteenth-century controversy about evolution (whose modern continuation is discussed in another article in this series¹²) has broader ramifications than often appears. As we have seen, in its context it was inter-connected with discussions of natural theology and natural revelation (and particularly with the arguments for and from design¹³), and these issues are important today, however much evangelicals have tended to overlook them. Don Cupitt, to take one example, in his *Worlds of Science and Religion*, reports that Darwin 'was well aware that his concept of Natural Selection . . . was strongly resistant to combination with belief in God';¹⁴ and continues with a reference to Jacques Monod's provocative *Chance and Necessity* which pursues that question, in the modern context.¹⁵ A thorough-going (neo-) Darwinist regards chance and natural selection as the agents of evolution. It is possible to regard God as the planner of what (within the system) appears as chance. It is also possible to regard God as the Creator of the system as a whole, no doubt foreknowing the end from the beginning, but with chance and necessity operating precisely as the atheist understands in bringing about the development of the higher forms of life. Is it legitimate to re-write the doctrine of creation in those terms? Or again, are Christians committed by that doctrine to seeing the universe as the product of an act by which it was originally made and set in motion, or may they concur with others in considering it to be eternal (in temporal terms, that is; without a beginning or an end) — with 'creation' understood as teaching the existential *createdness* of man (*i.e.* his dependence upon God)? Further, one factor which weighed with Darwin was the suffering and waste which are by-products of evolution. He conceived them to be problems for the theist. Others would so wish to divide the fields of interest of science and religion as to make any such inter-play impossible; that is to say, scientific and religious descriptions of reality are each complete in themselves, and therefore no scientific theory can have significance *pro* or *con* religious

¹² *Themelios*, April 1982, pp. 28ff.

¹³ It was of course at a philosophical level that the design argument was first undermined. David Hume maintained that it was improper to demand for the world, as a whole, the kind of explanation which we normally expect for elements within it. There is an undoubted validity in this argument, but Hume himself appeared to feel the force of design argument nonetheless (in his *Dialogues*).

¹⁴ Don Cupitt, *The Worlds of Science and Religion* (London, 1976), pp. 11, 12.

¹⁵ A critique of Monod from a Christian perspective is found in A. E. Wilder-Smith, *God: to be or not to be?* (Stuttgart, 1975).

belief (or *vice versa*). This position is the complete converse of that held in Britain in the early part of the last century. We may well feel that both are somewhat extreme. On the one hand, while the evidence of design in nature is real it should not be pressed in quite the detail of the *Bridgewater Treatises*. On the other hand, the facts of the natural world have at least to be *compatible* with our beliefs about the God who made it, or else it is irrational of us to hold them. If there is, for example, evil in nature, we should seek a biblical way of understanding it (*cf.* Gn. 3; Rom. 8). A problem without a potential solution would be a major (and entirely proper) stumbling-block to belief.

The doctrine of creation itself is what roots Christianity in the real world and demands that we take that world seriously. The observations and deductions of science concern that same world which God made and has redeemed. While it would be folly to treat the Bible as a science text-book or the natural order as a systematic theology, to a limited but definite degree nature does reveal God (*cf.* Rom. 1; Ps. 19), and where Scripture touches upon matters that relate to the natural order it retains its authority. The 'Book of Nature' and the 'Book of Scripture' (in the terminology of the nineteenth century) have the same Author.

2. Nature and supernature

Sceptics a generation ago were more likely than they are today to assert that 'science has proved that miracles can't happen', because scientists are increasingly reflective about their task, and see more clearly its limitations. That is, they see the world less as a closed system of predetermined cause and effect (on the billiard ball analogy), and they also recognize that 'science', in the sense of the methods and goals which they adopt, was never designed (nor is it suitable) to observe that which is essentially abnormal or unique. All that the sceptic (scientist or otherwise) can claim is that, because he has never had any experience of the miraculous, he is forced to regard it as so unlikely as to be impossible. That in essence was David Hume's famous argument against miracle, though he pressed it to the extent of making what was *normal* in our experience the test of what is *possible*; the normal became normative. That is a common fallacy. Clearly, if we believe the physical universe to be closed to intervention from outside, our personal non-experience of miracle may clinch our expectation that it cannot occur; and we shall accordingly dismiss accounts to the contrary (biblical and otherwise). But if we antecedently believe in the God of the Bible, the general regularity of nature (itself the consequence of his providential rule)

leaves room for occasional interventions in the form of miracles. If for other reasons we believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God, it is entirely reasonable for us to proceed to accept its testimony to the supernatural.

Disbelief in the miraculous is, therefore, nothing to do with 'science' at all, but the consequence of a particular philosophical position which refuses to accommodate the supernatural within its picture of reality. Moreover, it is important for Christians to see miracles within the context of their over-all picture of the world, since it has been the undue prominence given to them as isolated events (both in the evidential apologetic of a former generation, and in the 'scientific' scepticism which reacted against it) that has set the church in disarray on the matter. According to Scripture, while the regularity of nature is a witness to God's providential ordering of the universe, any interruption of that regularity emphasises his Lordship over creation, and the ultimate unity of nature and supernature in their Creator. It is when supernature breaks into nature that we see what we call a 'miracle'. But the whole 'supernatural' universe — of angels and demons, God and the devil, heaven and hell — exists alongside what we regard as the 'natural' order from the beginning. The Christian has an essentially supernatural view of reality, and within it his concept of what is normal must always have room for what is abnormal.¹⁶

3. Scientific and theological method

Finally, we may advert to another area of controversy thrown up at the interface of science and religion, the question of method. Is theology a 'science' like other sciences, or is theological method at heart distinct from scientific? This is a broad and complex question which we can only touch upon here. In the sense that theology, like the natural sciences, is an objective discipline which seeks ever to be controlled in its methods and conclusions by its object of study, then clearly there is an essential parallel between theological and other 'science'. This is one of the themes of the writings of T. F. Torrance, the distinguished Scottish theologian whose discussions of the relations of science and theology are highly respected in both circles. He writes in one place:

objective thinking lays itself open to the nature and reality of the object in order to take its shape from the structure of its own prescription. . . .

¹⁶ See C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London, 1947), for a very useful discussion of these issues. Bernard Ramm's *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Exeter, 1955), looks at both the Christian view of nature and particular biblical narratives that give rise to 'problems'.

Objectivity in theological science, like objectivity in every true science, is achieved through rigorous correlation of thought with its proper object and the self-renunciation, repentance and change of mind that it involves.¹⁷

Thus defined, there is a clear parallel between theological and natural science. The question which arises is whether it is merely an analogy, or whether its scope is such that 'science' may be predicated of the theological task in the same sense in which it is of, say, the physicist's or the chemist's.

Torrance speaks much of the 'revelatory' character of scientific truth. When the botanist studies a flower, it 'reveals' itself to him. It is only as the objects of our study, under the pressure of our interrogation of them, do 'reveal' themselves that we gain any actual knowledge of them at all. Three problems arise with this way of speaking. It is, surely, only metaphorically that the flower 'reveals' itself to the botanist. In reality it is wholly passive, and while the analogy of interrogation is itself striking and luminous, it is and remains an analogy. That is not the case with our knowledge of God. He specifically and actively reveals himself, and does so — in part at least — in the form of speech. Indeed, except in so far as he *does* specifically reveal himself, we may not observe him. He is not part of the natural order, and we are therefore wholly dependent upon his self-revelation.

Secondly, the object of the theologian's study is not, strange though it may seem, God himself; it is his 'Word', his self-revelation in Scripture and (in a different sense) in Christ. It is true that the closer and more adequately we study the Scripture, and the more we allow it to determine the form of our theology, the more nearly our thinking will conform to the truth about God himself. But, in order to study God, we look not at him (whom we cannot see, and may not), but at his image in Scripture. The paradox is that the more we revere and study the Book, the more we know its Author. This is other than the way in which we know the natural order. Thirdly, there is a moral and religious element in the qualification for theological study that is absent in natural science. The theologian who would successfully study God must be not only diligent and honest, he must be regenerate and justified. What to the non-believer would appear the essentially 'objective' quality of scientific knowledge — its availability to any and all who look — is absent in theology. Two responses might be made to this comment — that in natural science 'objectivity' is not as simple as it seems, since (e.g.) Newton and Einstein would look at one event

and each see something different, because of their different frameworks of understanding; and, secondly, that anyone *truly* examining the data of theology, and being corrected and conformed in his method by what they reveal, would thereby become regenerate. Both these factors are valid, but they serve to illustrate something of the complexity of the parallel of scientific and religious method, and thereby its limitation.

Conclusion

Religion and science are not at war, nor have they ever been. For the Christian, theology is a department of study whose concern is God in his revelation of his nature, his purpose and his acts; whereas science is man's systematic attempt to understand his creation. The methods of the two are distinct, in that one involves the reception of God's self-revelation and the other active observation of the natural order. Science has no claim to speak on broader questions, such as the existence or non-existence of the supernatural universe, and the possibility or actuality of its breaking through into our own in the form of miracle. These are religious and philosophical questions, and when the scientist pronounces upon them he has stepped outside the area of his expertise and has no more authority than any other man to deliver himself of religious and philosophical judgments.

The two Books of Scripture and Nature have one God as their Author, and while we may have difficulties from time to time in holding the two together, we can seek their resolution in the confidence that, given patience and diligence, he who seeks will find.

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I am grateful to the Rev. Dr John C. Sharp, Minister of the South Church, East Kilbride, Scotland, for the following bibliographical suggestions. In such a vast field they cannot claim to be comprehensive, but they will point those who are interested in the direction of further assistance. Dr Sharp, who entered the Church of Scotland ministry after work in industry and a degree in science, was awarded his PhD for a thesis on the philosophical, religious and theological foundations of the natural sciences. Asterisks mark the more important works.

The historical context

1. *Science and Belief from Copernicus to Darwin*. An Open University course, Very fair and balanced. The visiting lecturers were Dr Alan Richardson and Prof. R. Hooykaas.
- * 2. Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science 1300-1800* (G. Bell, 1973). This is one of the classics in the field.
- * 3. D. C. Goodman, *Science and Religious Belief 1600-1900*. A Selection of Primary Sources (John Wright, in association with the Open University, 1973).
- * 4. J. Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science* (Collins, 1961).
5. R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Scottish Academic Press, 1973).
- * 6. C. A. Russell (ed.), *Science and Religious Belief: A Selection of Recent Historical Studies* (University of London, 1973).
7. Eugene M. Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science* (Eerdmans, 1977).

¹⁷ T. F. Torrance, 'Theological Rationality' in *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicorum Lovaniensium*, XXVII, p. 460. For a general (though demanding) exposition of Torrance's position, see his *Theological Science* (London, 1969).

The secular background

It seems to me that much nonsense is talked because there is an insufficient awareness of the debates raging outside Christian circles. At least several of the following should be read if the Christian is to be properly orientated.

1. J. T. Davies, *The Scientific Approach* (Academic Press, 1975): this is à la Popper!

* 2. W. I. B. Beveridge, *The Art of Scientific Investigation* (Heinemann, 1961). A fascinating account of the different routes whereby theories have come about.

3. A. Eddington, several works including *The Nature of the Physical World* (CUP, 1930) and *The Philosophy of Physical Science* (CUP, 1949). Normally labelled an idealist, Eddington does not in fact fit quite so neatly into that position once you start to read him.

4. A. Einstein, e.g. *The World as I See It* (Bodley Head, 1935); *Ideas and Opinions* (Souvenir Press, 1973).

5. Rom Harré has written several books struggling against the acknowledged Christian basis of science as we have it. **An Introduction to the Logic of the Sciences* (Macmillan, 1967). *The Principle of Scientific Thinking* (Macmillan, 1970). *The Philosophies of Science* (OUP, 1972).

* 6. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (Allen and Unwin, 1971). Most interesting because his epistemological programme is quite explicit.

7. T. S. Kuhn has written extensively. I recommend **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1973); *The Essential Tension* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).

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9. Karl Popper. Again, many works are relevant, especially *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Hutchinson, 1972); **Conjectures and Refutations: the Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); *Objective Knowledge* (OUP, 1975).

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* 1. Ian G. Barbour, *Science and Religion* (SCM, 1968). *Myths, Models and Paradigms: the Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (SCM, 1974).

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* 3. The magazine *Anticipation* has carried innumerable articles from WCC meetings dealing with the topic of science and religion. Also in this context, the two volumes *Faith and Science in an Unjust World* (WCC, Geneva, 1980).

4. Langdon Gilkey. Again has written widely. *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Doubleday, 1959). *Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science and Theology* (SCM, 1970).

5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (ET F. McDonagh, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976).

6. Alan Richardson, Open University course units and *The Bible in the Age of Science* (SCM, 1968).

The T. F. Torrance viewpoint

This is really quite unique. While I fundamentally disagree with T.F.T., his contribution seems to be one of the most balanced. So his *Theological Science* (OUP, 1969) is a must, but it is not easy to read.

Other mainly conservative works

1. H. Cameron, 'Prayer in a Closed Universe', *International Reformed Bulletin* 67, (1976).

* 2. G. H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* (Craig Press, 1973).

* 3. R. B. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (OUP, 1965).

4. C. A. Coulson, *Science and Christian Belief* (Fontana, 1971).

5. J. H. Diemer, *Nature and Miracle* (Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1977). An intriguing book by a Dutch biologist who died in 1948.

6. D. L. Dye, *Faith and the Physical World: A Comprehensive View* (Paternoster, 1966). A typical evangelical work that often seems inadequate in its grasp of philosophical implications and therefore leaves holes in the argument.

7. A. Holmes, *Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century* (Craig Press, 1969). A good survey.

8. M. A. Jeeves, *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith* (Tyndale Press, 1969).

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