

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

- 50 See Wilkinson, *Confutation of certaine articles*, Preface to the reader, sig l r, v; John Rogers, *Displaying on an horribe secte* (1579 ed.), second sig A e r, sig D 3 v.

J. W. MARTIN

## IN THE STUDY

From Scripture through the historical tradition to the theological enterprise, its neo-orthodox and liberation expressions, and its pastoral outworking. It should be an interesting journey. Six books claim to offer assistance on the way.

At 9p a page the first study<sup>1</sup> has to be unusually worthwhile to justify itself. Its central theme - the nature of discipleship/"following" in relation to Jesus - is clearly of significance for Christian origins and might be held to have implications for the contemporary church. What then can be said by way of positive assessment?

It need hardly be emphasised that the scholarship is meticulous. Discussion begins with close exegesis of the saying, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead", leading to the conclusion that we are dealing with so radical a reversal of law, piety and custom that the proclamation of the imminent kingdom of God must be in issue. Investigation proceeds to expound the motif of "following" in terms of Israel's story, of messianic figures in first century Palestine, of Hellenistic wonderworkers or philosophers. It is argued that the discipleship of total renunciation is found to belong to extra-establishment situations where old forms are disintegrating and charismatic leaders emerge. Such a one was John Baptist. Is it in such a succession that Jesus is properly located?

So to the examination of the central figure of the gospels. He does not seem to fit within the teaching tradition of Judaism. He is more akin to the Cynic preacher than the Jewish rabbi. Following him means committal to a dangerous destiny rather than entrance into the conventional pupil-teacher relationship. Political messianic leadership frames do not fit either. It is the charismatic and prophetic features that obtrude. They point to a unique eschatological messianic authority and mission in which, in some sense, the disciple is called to participate as he enters the service of the dawning kingdom of God.

Now the mouse brought forth by this mountainous travail is surely a familiar one. The interest lies in the spadework rather than the product. Even there I am not sure how far the use of the adjective "charismatic" - with a throwaway reference to Max Weber - really assists precision. Perhaps perplexity is illumined by the recognition that this study dates from 1967. As a partial counterblast to Hans Dieter Betz it may have been

timely. But it remains an expensive way of demonstrating that Montefiore (1930) was right.

For long enough there has been a "received" understanding of Arianism. It goes something like this. At its heart Arianism conveyed a cosmology with a philosophical hue. The overriding concern of Arius was to protect the singularity and "monarchy" of God. One is one and all alone and evermore must be so! Hence the downgrading of the Logos, the advancement of a hierarchical version of the Trinity, and the presentation of a Christ who achieved divinity. Pelikan as usual put it succinctly: "God was interpreted deistically, man moralistically and Christ mythologically".

Enter then Gregg and Groh<sup>2</sup> who indicate that the real story is quite other. Or do they? For this re-examination of the period of early Arianism in the first half of the fourth century, marked as it is by careful scrutiny of the relatively sparse documentary evidence, produces no substantially fresh picture of the Arian position. The result is not "Arius rehabilitated" or "Arius, maligned champion of orthodoxy". I suppose that if you take later Arian developments as governing it becomes perfectly proper for a modern examiner to ask confused novices: "Was Arius an Arian?". But then it always was. Only the unoriginality of examiners makes the question sound novel.

What Gregg and Groh have done is not to repaint the picture but to position it in a different and arguably more appropriate frame. The perspective has altered. Things hidden in shadow begin to impose themselves. What if the controlling concern of the early Arians was really with the dynamics of salvation? What if their model of divine-human relationship was covenantal rather than ontological? And what if a fundamental reason for the Arian near-victory over the mind of Eastern Christendom was their position's mighty resonance in the depths of scripture and Christian experience?

Our authors are not intent on redefining orthodoxy. Their concern is to probe history. In that field advance comes either from the appearance of new evidence or by the deployment of some different model of understanding. The Gregg/Groh model is a fruitful one. Among its strengths is that, recognising orthodoxy's inveterate weakness for establishing guilt by association, it forsakes the drawing of explanatory lines from a past heretic or a pervasive philosophical tradition to an emerging doctrinal emphasis, preferring to plot from within the essential configuration of the theology under discussion and expose its centre and circumference, its balance and cohesion.

Nevertheless, at some point a reconciliation of perspectives will have to be effected. Certainly Arius is not just Paul of Samosata with a twist in the tail. Certainly both he and the Athanasian party were saying new things, however much both might claim faithfulness to the normative roots of Christian understanding. Yet no theology can fully be understood by

reference to the immediate questions and concerns it seeks to engage. To locate its ancestry will continue to be important; and to trace its progeny equally so. This book provides a helpful angle of vision, and should prompt keener questioning in both directions.

How is Christian theology to be done in an age of pluralism? Such is one way of stating the question with which an American Roman Catholic is preoccupied. The answer<sup>3</sup> takes the form of a theological map, with landmarks, highways, and a bridge or two. Let me try a summary.

The only theology that is true to its theme is theology which recognises that it is and must be more than a sharing of private stories by an in-group. There are indeed three distinguishable publics to which broadly correspond three distinguishable types of theology. Fundamental theology, with its philosophical/apologetic concern, appeals to rationality and experience, and relates to the academy. Systematic theology, framed from a confessional perspective, seeks the re-presentation of tradition, and relates to the church. Practical theology, moving from an understanding of truth as transformation, affirms praxis as the criterion for theological truth and meaning, and relates to society. Across the whole spectrum two constants arise. There is always involved interpretation both of the religious tradition and of the religious dimension of the contemporary situation.

At this point, systematic theology becomes the immediate focus of concern. Here, an understanding of the theological task will come from attention to the paradigmatic significance of the "classic" - whether it be classical event, text, image, symbol, person. Classics are creations accorded normative status in that they disclose compelling truth. They are marked by permanence and excess of meaning. They have transformative power. A "religious" classic is recognisable where the dimension present in limit-questions is met by limiting Reality, where "the power of the whole" discloses itself. The Christian classic is the event and person of Jesus Christ.

Welcome then the systematic theologian as interpreter of religious classics. His creative movement is that appropriate to any and all classics, as outlined by Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur. The classic text evokes an originary enveloping "understanding". The crucial movement is from that initial "understanding" via "explanation" involving a pluralism of readings, methods and investigation, to a fresh "informed" understanding of the vision of reality which the text thrusts forward for acceptance or rejection. This is the path the systematic theologian is mandated to tread. He begins with an originary understanding of the fundamental questions and answers that his religious classic attracts; he plunges into critical engagement on the broadest possible front; he emerges with a new retrieval for the current horizon.

As Christian theologian he remains captive to the event of Jesus Christ, of which tradition (and primarily the apostolic tradition) is the major constitutive mediating reality. For to say Jesus Christ is to point to the Jesus remembered as the

Christ by the tradition in fidelity to its originating apostolic witness. In the movement of theological construction the public correctives - historical-critical, literary-critical, social scientific methods - are deployed. These deal with problems of appropriateness and problems of intelligibility. The goal must be new interpretations appropriate to the New Testament tradition with its fruitful diversity and intelligible for the contemporary situation.

In all this, due attention must be paid to the "classical" forms of religious expression. These, in Ricoeur's terms, are manifestation and proclamation. In "manifestation", participation is primary and mystical and sacramental emphases dominate. In "proclamation", the sense of non-participation controls and the emphasis falls on prophecy and the Word. But the two are ultimately complementary, and must remain so if the proper Christian tension between "already" and "not yet" is to be preserved.

This whole argument is worked out with a wealth of footnotes, a rigour of examination, and a vigour of language that impress. The process theology orientation which surfaced in Tracy's previous book "Blessed Rage for Order" (more concerned with fundamental theology) is still present, though not obtrusive. Still, there are some questions to be asked, particularly at the points where preoccupation with method gives way to affirmation about content and (for example) we emerge (somewhat arbitrarily?) with a "working canon" of the New Testament and a quick distinction between genres that are basic and genres that are corrective.

The publishers acclaim "one of the most important theological studies likely to appear in the 1980s". We need not follow them in entering this arena of faintly pessimistic prophecy. It is enough to recognise a rich and weighty "proposal" which can profitably be read in counterpoint to Lonergan's "Method in Theology" and which, as an unintentional bonus, may be found to be indirectly telling the preacher something about the methodology of sermon preparation.

So to "Christology and Cultural Criticism" - the more sober descriptive heading to a snappily-titled series of lectures.<sup>4</sup> The author takes the four issues of political commitment to liberation, anti-semitism, sexism, ecology, and seeks to demonstrate the pivotal significance of christology for attitude and action, whether for weal or for woe. It is a good deal of ground to cover in 70 pages. The inevitable limitations scarcely need to be underlined.

Assessment can proceed from at least two vantage points. We may attempt to evaluate the discussion of each individual issue. Alternatively, we may adjudicate on the christological thread that purports to bind all together. From the former point of view it is arguably the final chapter that is the most successful. It is valuable to be reminded that the ecological crisis has more than a little to do with structures of social domina-

tion and that so much of the contemporary response, whether it be liberal progressive, Marxist revolutionary, or reactionary romantic, fails firmly to grasp that crucial nettle. It is also promising to be offered the Old Testament picture of the "Jubilee" (Leviticus 25) rather than the Eschaton as a model of restoration and renewal - surely a paradigm more modest and more usable, in this regard. It is this same mixture of historical assessment and contemporary suggestion that is applied with markedly varying degrees of success - to the other issues on Reuther's agenda.

So what of the overarching christological concern? It emerges in fairly predictable fashion. Jesus is presented in the context of the messianic tradition - a tradition that is judged to be always political as well as religious. In the teaching and practice of Jesus is focussed the scriptural redeeming vision of an alternative world. In the Ministry of Jesus the Kingdom is both present and absent. In the Cross of Jesus is tabled the cost of liberation. In the Resurrection of the crucified prophet is given the assurance of God's victory and the pledge of life and freedom. The total role of Jesus is a proleptic and anticipatory one. The ongoing Christian task of moving society closer to the Kingdom remains. Nor is Jesus the exclusive way for all. He is relative to a particular historical community: the only name *for us*.

In all this, familiar notes of liberation theology sound clear. Theology can be done only by those who stand foursquare in the realities of oppression which mark today's world. Reuther freely admits that where you stand has a determinative influence on your christology but wishes to affirm that the Gospel in scripture sets limits to what might otherwise become an unbounded and arbitrary freedom of stance. Here she is a good deal more clear-sighted than those who speak as though they stand in some presuppositionless scriptural objectivity. Picking and choosing is an occupational hazard of the theologian. Nothing is to be gained by refusal to face the inevitable tendency to let certain facets of scripture dictate a preferred portrait of Jesus. Yet, before capitulating, we are entitled to ask whether this single-minded concentration on *certain* aspects of the *praxis* of the ministering Jesus found in the *Synoptic* gospels really provides a satisfactory undergirding for a christology which still claims to appeal to its foundational title-deeds.

A comprehensive study of the pneumatology of Karl Barth has been long in coming but at last, by courtesy of a young Jesuit, it is here.<sup>5</sup> It is a model of patient listening and sympathetic discernment. At its heart it is a compressed but sustained exposition of the pneumatology of the Church Dogmatics. It is undergirded by reference to the earlier years of the Barthian pilgrimage. It issues in an attempt to sketch a Spirit theology corrective of yet faithful to the essential Barthian concerns. The result is a valuable attempt "to trace the genesis, to summarize the content and to analyze the import of Barth's pneumatology".

It seems to take a Roman Catholic to understand Barth. Certainly there is here an accurate and perceptive portrayal of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the Dogmatics unfolds it. It comes as a shock, a strange reversal, when in the concluding chapters Rosato gently but firmly inserts the critical scalpel and the whole edifice begins to crumble as foundation pillar after foundation pillar suffers incision. As gracious a hatchet job as it has ever been my privilege to witness.

But the whole operation aims to be not destructive but life-giving. Did not Barth himself write that he could conceive his total work as a theology of the Holy Spirit? Are there not constant hints of something like it trying to force through the soil to the light? Did not his undeviating refusal *finally* to write off Schleiermacher, his *ever-renewed* engagement with Christian existentialism, his *enduring* love-hate relationship with Roman Catholicism, stem from the haunting realization that covert theologies of the Holy Spirit were struggling to be born? And does not fidelity to Barth's deepest intention drive theology on to the pneumatological reframing wherein alone his truest insights can stand and flourish?

Rosato's presentation prompts such fruitful questions. It also raises powerfully the prior issue of where the flaws in Barth's magnificent structure really lie. Perhaps we can put it like this. The battleground in which Barth operated was a given. As such it inevitably affected the theological word to be spoken and the way of its speaking. Did it just as inevitably distort the Barthian proclamation? Subjectivism threatened to dissolve revelation. A total theological volte-face was necessary.

Yet was there not a heavy price to be paid? The ontological structure of man himself bids fair to disappear. Humanity is so enfolded by Jesus Christ as to be throttled out of proper existence or at best relegated to the shadowy role of passive bystander. The associated rape of natural theology violates what could become a pulsating pneumatology of creation and history, culture and reason. In turn the Holy Spirit himself is constricted to the christological channel and confined to a merely noetic function. Essentially everything has happened in Christ in eternity. Nothing truly new lies ahead. The conjurer whips off the silk handkerchief at the Parousia to reveal the rabbit that has been there all the time.

And still the questions press. What forced the Barthian architecture to such a mould? Perhaps the fateful choice was to go for a Logos christology and an insulated intra-Trinitarian control. And what prompted that? Perhaps not merely the foe to be fought but the deep imperatives of a segmented tradition. For is this not the legacy of *Western* theology, the substructure of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin alike? At least we may begin to understand the curious Barthian juxtaposition of a christological near-universalism and a church-confined pneumatology.

I hope I have not misrepresented Rosato by such impressionistic comment. What is clear is that he would have us look back to the pneuma-sarx christology of Jewish christianity and outward to the trinitarianism and pneumatology more characteristic of the Eastern church, so that thereby the *man* Jesus might be restored to his properly pivotal role in the dynamics of salvation, the Father and the Spirit be given equal significance with the Son, and all created life and history be granted reality for *man* and for *God*. It is an important summons.

Has Rosato understood Barth's deepest intention better than the master himself? Would he have elicited an approving nod? Not altogether, I suspect. But the need for a Christian theology of the Spirit as the Lord of all created life remains urgent, not least amid contemporary charismatic meanderings. The seeds here scattered should not be allowed to blow away in the wind. Already many are preparing the soil, and Rosato merits his place among them. I fancy that behind him lurks as *éminence grise* the brooding figure of Barth's first substantial engager Hans Ur von Balthasar. If so, he casts a beneficent shadow.

Edgar Jackson shows signs of becoming the S.C.M. Press replacement for Paul Tournier. This latest book<sup>6</sup> is in some ways the most ambitious. It ranges widely; indeed so widely that any overall coherence of presentation is slow in emerging.

The opening chapter is entitled "Health is up to you". That might stand as a summary slogan encapsulating the entire thrust of the argument being purveyed. Faith is the human weapon in the enterprise. There are inner and outer resources to be tapped. The secret is to release, develop, maximise, lay hold upon them.

How is this to be done? The broad answer covers familiar ground. It might be described as a mixture of attitude and technique. There are depths of consciousness to be plumbed. There are laws to be obeyed. We hear of telepathy and clairvoyance, of prayer and meditation, of psychology and mysticism, of the unconscious, the conscious, and the superconscious. An air of excitement pervades it all. Endless possibilities seem just within our grasp.

I ask myself why I surface from this immersion with such uneasiness. For two thirds of the book there was the curious feeling of reading an updated version of *The Power of Positive Thinking*; but in the end such a verdict proved unfair. Nor was it antagonism bred of constant disagreement. After all, the general thesis is neither new nor particularly controversial. We all agree that there are more things in heaven and earth... We all agree that the psychosomatic understanding of wide ranges of ill-health has truth on its side. We all agree that man is fearfully and wonderfully made, related to the cosmos at all levels, part of a vast directed enterprise which has its own subtle order that we contradict at our peril.



Yet the uneasiness persists; a nagging feeling that we are off down a blind alley. It is a thought-provoking phenomenon, this contemporary preoccupation with healing. The ironic question that may need to be asked is this: Is it a healthy preoccupation? Does it bid fair to become an obsession? No one who encounters illness and the mixture of destructiveness and impairment it can unleash will do other than prize health and seek the key to it with urgency and unending concern. In this search Edgar Jackson, with so many other guides, says things we need to hear. Yet it has still to be asked whether too much of the contemporary wisdom comes at the whole question from an angle that produces significant distortion. The drive for superhealth, for the fulfilment of the enormous human potential, verges so perilously on that preoccupation with one's individuality which may in the event constitute the greatest threat to real wholeness. I am not reassured when I find that the nod to a "broken society" on this book's final page seems to put most of the weight on self-development as providing an injection of health into the ailing world.

#### NOTES

- 1 *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, by M. Hengel. T & T Clark. £7.95. 1981.
- 2 *Early Arianism* by R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh. S.C.M.Press. £12.50. 1981.
- 3 *The Analogical Imagination*, by David Tracy. S.C.M.Press. £12.50. 1981.
- 4 *To Change the World*, by R. R. Reuther. S.C.M.Press. pa. £2.95. 1981.
- 5 *The Spirit as Lord*, by P. J. Rosato. T & T Clark. £8.95. 1981.
- 6 *The Role of Faith in the Process of Healing*, by Edgar N. Jackson. S.C.M. Press. £5.95. 1981.

NEVILLE CLARK

#### REVIEWS

*The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief* by Bryan W. Ball. James Clarke & Co. 1981. Pp.247 and indices. £7.50.

Dr Ball has previously put students of the period in his debt by a study of eschatological thought in English protestantism to 1660 entitled *A Great Expectation* (1975). The present work is of a somewhat different character being a curious combination of wide scholarship in the general field of Puritanism and tunnel vision of a most narrow denominational kind. It is somewhat reminiscent of a sermon preached, some years ago at the Baptist Union Assembly, which, if I recall its drift correctly, traced the line of the Divine Election from Abraham to the Regent's Park College ministerial admissions of the previous autumn. In a word, Dr Ball's work is selective: the selection seems to be in the interest of providing a doctrinal family tree for the Seventh Day Adventists.