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**THE  
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OF  
EVANGELICAL  
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## REDISCOVERING A (SCOTTISH) EVANGELICAL HERITAGE

DAVID F. WRIGHT

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The theology of the twentieth-century evangelical movement in Scotland has been for the most part Calvinist. Although, as with virtually all generalizations, exceptions are not hard to find (the Baptists being the most obvious denominational one), most theologically-literate evangelicals would identify themselves with the broad current of Protestantism known as Reformed (to distinguish it from the Lutheran, Anglican and Anabaptist versions of Reformation Christianity) and deriving ultimately from Geneva and other centres like Zürich and Strasbourg.

But when evangelical Scots characterize their theological stance as Calvinist, they often seem to do so somewhat selectively. They probably have in mind a particular understanding of *topoi* such as election, grace and the effects of the Adamic Fall, and perhaps also of others like the nature of Christ's presence in the Supper, the sense in which the atonement is limited, and the ecclesiological crown rights of Christ, the king and head of the Church. But how commonly does the designation 'Calvinist' imply for the modern evangelical in Scotland the particular theological perspective which most obviously distinguished the Reformed from other varieties of sixteenth-century Protestantism? This was, of course, its vision of the godly ordering of the whole of society. It is likely to be a poor history of the Reformation that fails to single out the shaping of the total life of the community according to the will of God as perhaps the most distinctive mark of Calvinism. It is to Calvin, not Luther, that scholars apply titles such as 'the founder of a civilization'.

This should be familiar territory for most readers of this *Bulletin*. Such a commitment to 'the Christian society' placed a high premium on the Christian calling of the agents of government — the magistrates of the sixteenth century, the MP's, councillors and politicians of today. God in Scripture even calls them 'gods', says Calvin (referring to Exod. 22:8, Ps.82:1).

'Their judgement seat is like the throne of the living God — they are vicars of God', and hence must 'present to men through themselves some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence and justice.'

'There should be no doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also *the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings* in the whole life of mortal men' (*Institute* 4:20:4,6).

How often, one wonders, has such a quintessentially Calvinist note sounded from the evangelical pulpits of modern Scotland?

Such authorities were charged with a more positive remit than the restraint of evil. Augustine had assigned to civil power the limited role of restricting the damaging consequences of human sinfulness, and Luther never really outgrew his Augustinianism in this respect. But Zwingli and Calvin prophetically summoned the corporate life of ordered human society to acknowledge the kingly rule of God. Social justice was more important than peace. Like the prophets of Israel, Calvin would have led a quieter existence if absence of strife had been his goal rather than communal righteousness.

Twentieth-century Scotland is, of course, a far cry from the cities of the Reformation, and the past never carries all the keys to the present and the future. But do we deserve the honoured name of 'Calvinist' or 'Reformed' if we have fallen so far short of this central Calvinist distinctive? That this is a fair judgment on our contemporary evangelicalism (with the qualifications attendant upon all bold generalizations) is suggested by the following considerations:

(i) *the paucity of evangelical contributions on the broad front of Christian socio-political responsibility*

The Scottish Shaftesbury Project's newsletter *Advent* is a welcome exception to the lack of published material, but the dearth of articulate Scottish evangelical figures in so many areas of public life will take years to remedy. (It must have something to do with the low profile of prominent Christian laity, which is so marked a feature of the Scottish Church scene.)

(ii) *our non-involvement with wider evangelical developments in this field*

The major landmark in modern evangelicalism in this territory is the Lausanne Covenant's affirmation in 1974:

'Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ.'

The Congress expressed 'penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive'. Lausanne was a powerful catalyst, and has stimulated a remarkable volume of evangelical thought, consultation and writing on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility within the one mission of the Church. One important outcome was the report of a conference at Grand Rapids in 1982, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*. (The conference papers have recently been published in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. Bruce Nicholls, Paternoster, 1985. They provide a very useful conspectus of recent evangelical thinking on the subject.)

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Although there was a Scottish contingent at Lausanne, it is difficult to discern any Scottish contribution to or involvement in this highly significant movement in world evangelicalism — for it has been essentially international, inter-confessional, and cross-cultural, with a major input from Third World evangelicals.

(iii) *the inadequacy of our common evangelical 'line' on socio-political issues*

We may not have been directly involved in post-Lausanne developments, but we could still have been aware of them. That by and large we have not been is suggested by several weaknesses in our standard posture on social and political questions:

— *a tendency to speak out only when there is something to protest against*, and normally when this is a matter of 'sin' rather than of the unjust ordering of society (cf. David Bebbington's article in *Third Way* for May 1983 for nineteenth-century precedents).

— *a reductionist approach to social and economic problems*, which regards them *really* as spiritual problems, and assumes that if the parties involved were godly Christians the problems would go away. This failure to recognize the integrity of politics and economics easily leads to voting for candidates rather than for policies. This individualizing fits in, of course, with the pervasive individualism of our piety. The naive assumption that changed individuals produce a changed society ignores the evidence of South Africa, the southern USA (read the writings of earlier evangelical leaders on slavery and votes for women!) and even Ulster.

— *a preoccupation with peace and 'law and order'* to the neglect of justice. We have largely forgotten that it was the Calvinists among the Protestants who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries vindicated the right to resist and overthrow unjust governments. The Calvinist case for the just rebellion was advanced in France, the Netherlands, England and not least Scotland, where Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (1644) was one of its most forthright statements.

— *a persistent spiritualizing* in our interpretation of Scripture. Partly under the continuing influence of the AV (cf., for example, its misleading use of 'soul'), we instinctively spiritualize biblical references to the poor, oppression, judgment, the fruits of the earth, etc.

This critique will seem to some too harshly drawn. Its summary nature may have entailed an element of unfair simplification. It remains for us to examine ourselves, whether we be in the Reformed faith. The criticisms given above, if sound, carry their own prescription for the way forward. But to sharpen our common reflection, a few specific recommendations may be in order:

(a) we need to *encourage Christian vocations* to the political arena, local government, the world of the media, etc. Ministers might ask

themselves, for example, whether any vocation other than that of minister or missionary is ever commended to congregations from the pulpit.

(b) thought must be given to recognizing in congregational life *the special demands* made on Christians working in such frontline situations in social and political life.

(c) the evangelical movement has to complement its Church-centred renaissance with *a society-focussed commitment*. On the growing strength of renewed evangelical congregational life must be built a new openness to service in the local and national community.

(d) greater attention must be given to *applied theology*. We are surely stronger in doctrinal exposition than in applying Scripture to contemporary issues. Calvinism will not allow us to forget the relevance of the Old Testament! Remember that Lutherans accused Calvin of 'Judaizing' because his interpretation of the Old Testament was insufficiently Christocentric! What has the Bible to say about wealth and poverty, or about aspirations for Scottish nationhood, or about a host of other present-day questions?

The causes of modern evangelicalism's social and political quietism (which is often more Lutheran or Anabaptist than Reformed) are complex. In Scotland it will not be overcome without 'A Call to Historic Roots and Continuity' (the first summons in the Chicago Call of 1977). Donald Dayton's book *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* is a wonderful eye-opener on forgotten and suppressed episodes in American evangelical history. In a day of recurrent educational crises, we could do worse than return to the Scottish Reformers' *First Book of Discipline*.

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPHECY AND TYPOLOGY

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The Bible Training Institute<sup>1</sup> stands for biblical Christianity, for the full authority of Scripture and for its great evangelical doctrines.

The most obvious feature of the Bible for a new reader is its two-fold division. This means that one of the most important items for research must always be the relationship between the two testaments. This paper seeks to explore two of the more important ways in which they are related and to consider whether these ways are completely different or whether, in fact, there are links between them.

## Christ in the Old Testament

The distinction between grammatico-historical and theological interpretation is an important one. The first seeks to discover the meaning of the text for the Old Testament writer himself, setting his book in its historical context. The second considers the text in the light of the whole Bible as the word of God. When it is viewed in this way in the context of all Scripture it is obviously of importance to take much account of New Testament comments on Old Testament passages.

A study of these comments makes it clear that the New Testament writers saw Christ in the Old Testament in a wide variety of ways. Their concept of fulfilment is a very varied one, as can be seen, for example, by a study of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> The fulfilment of an Old Testament passage in the New Testament means that a New Testament event provides an appropriate counterpart to the Old Testament passage in such a way as to go beyond it, giving the reader a deeper understanding of the significance of the passage. Appropriateness and progression are therefore the two leading ideas in the concept of fulfilment. We will now seek to explore some of this variety.

### 1. *Employing Old Testament Terminology*

The New Testament takes up certain Old Testament terms and applies them to Christ, thus filling them with fuller meaning. In the Old Testament, God's word created the universe and revealed God to men through the Law and the Prophets. In Christ, that Word has become

1. This paper is, in written form, the Seventh Annual Lecture of the Glasgow Bible Training Institute, delivered on Monday June 18th 1984.
2. cf. G. W. Grogan 'The New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament' in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 18 (1967), pp 54-76.



incarnate (John 1:1-18).

The Divine Wisdom, extolled and personified in Proverbs 1 and 9, is also seen to be incarnate in Christ (Colossians 2:2-3).

There is a New Testament passage where even a relationship of sound between a New Testament and an Old Testament word is described in terms of fulfilment. Matthew 2:23, alone among Matthaean references to the fulfilment of prophecy, speaks of 'prophets' rather than 'the prophet', and this might well suggest to us that Matthew has a prophetic theme rather than one passage in his mind. Just as Micah, in chapter 1, verses 10-16 of his prophecy, draws message after message for particular towns from the names they bear, so Matthew here may well be seeing significance in the fact that Jesus the Branch (Hebrew, *nēšer*) grew up in a place called Nazareth.

## 2. *Endorsing Old Testament Teaching*

The New Testament does this on a most extensive scale and makes frequent use of quotation formulae such as 'it is written' and 'thus says the scripture'; such formulae clearly imply recognition of the authority of the material quoted.

## 3. *Focussing Old Testament Demands*

The 8th and 10th commandments are in some ways similar to each other, for the 8th deals with stealing and the 10th with covetousness; outward act and inward motive respectively. In this way, the Decalogue reveals that God is concerned not only with our actions but with our hearts. This concern is shown by Christ, in relation to the 6th and 7th commandments, in his treatment of them in Matthew 5. This means that the New Testament does not let man 'off the hook' of the Law. It reveals Christ as the answer to his need only after showing, in an even more penetrating way than the Old Testament itself, how deep that need is.

## 4. *Exhibiting Old Testament Principles*

The Old Testament speaks, for example, of love as an important principle of godly living. Contemporary Judaism recognised this by the place it gave to the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). This is emphasised also in the New Testament, both in our Lord's reference to the Shema (Mark 12:29-30) and in Paul's teaching that love fulfils the law (Romans 13:8-10).

## 5. *Embodying Old Testament Ideals*

There are passages in the Old Testament which present ideal godliness. We might take Psalm 1:1-3 and Psalm 40:6-8 as examples of this. Christ is the most perfect fulfilment of such an ideal picture as that given in Psalm 1.<sup>3</sup> The passage in Psalm 40 occurs in a Psalm where the Psalmist, although committed to his God, nevertheless confesses personal sin (verse 12). Christ, of course, fulfils the Psalm in terms of his absolute commitment to God's will (Hebrews 10:4-10), but is in contrast with the

3. There is however no quotation from this psalm in the New Testament.

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Psalmist in his perfect sinlessness.

### 6. *Answering Old Testament Questions*

The Old Testament raises questions, either explicitly or implicitly, which are not answered within that body of literature itself. In many cases, the New Testament revelation complements the Old, providing answers to its deepest questions. In Psalm 89:49 the Psalmist expresses in a question his bewilderment at the ways of God with the dynasty of David. He has extolled the great faithfulness of God to the covenant promise of 2 Samuel 7, but current events seem to be calling God's faithfulness into question. The New Testament shows that these covenant promises are completely fulfilled and forever established in the eternal kingdom of Christ, the great Son of David. G. C. Morgan in *The Answers of Jesus to Job*<sup>4</sup> demonstrates that the many questions raised in and by the book of Job are answered in the New Testament revelation of Christ.

### 7. *Identified within Old Testament History*

A. T. Hanson, in his book, *Jesus Christ and the Old Testament*<sup>5</sup>, maintained that the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament economy was mostly in terms of personal appearances, Christophanies, as far as the New Testament writers are concerned. His thesis has been considered somewhat eccentric by other scholars, but there is an element of truth in it. Certainly, Melchizedek is not to be regarded as a Christophany. The writer to the Hebrews says that he is like the Son of God, but does not identify him with him (Hebrews 7:3). It is, however, clear from John 12:37-41, that the Gospel writer saw Christ, not only in Isaiah 53, but also in Isaiah 6. Although the former could not be dubbed a Christophany, he must have held the latter to be so. A full study of the Old Testament phenomenon of the Angel of Yahweh is not possible within the limits of this paper, but it is possible to argue, not only that the Angel is both identified with and yet distinguished from God in many Old Testament contexts, but also that there are possible links with Old Testament Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2 and Malachi 3:1.

### 8. *Gives Substance to Old Testament Shadows*

This typological element will be considered later in this paper.

### 9. *Realising Old Testament Predictions*

The question of predictive prophecy in the Old Testament will also be taken up later in this paper.

## **The Nature of Typology**

George Adam Smith in 'The Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament'<sup>6</sup> pointed out the lack of definition in the use of terms like 'Typology' and

4. London, 1950.

5. London, 1965.

6. A chapter in his *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, London, 1901, pp 145-176.

‘Messianic prophecy’ by many writers and the fact that terminological vagueness is serious, because it can lead to artificial or even arbitrary interpretation.

There can be no doubt that interest in Typology went into eclipse for a time due to its widespread abuse. Some who wished still to make use of the idea felt it desirable to employ a different term, such as homology<sup>7</sup>, in order to emphasise their repudiation of *undisciplined* typology. The publication of *Essays on Typology* by G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe<sup>8</sup> in 1957, however, heralded the re-birth of Typology as a legitimate study, and its renewed interest has continued to the present day.

The term ‘Typology’ is derived from the Greek *tupos*. This word originally meant ‘a mark made by a blow’, then the impression made by a stamping device, then an image, and finally a pattern or example. So, in these last two senses, a type relates to something else; there is similarity, analogy, continuity between the type and that to which it points, its antitype. The term itself is little used in the New Testament, but without doubt the idea is much more extensive than the term. We shall see that in fact the concept even occurs within the Old Testament. Although we notice its explicit use in a verse like Romans 5:14 we also take note of James Barr’s reminder<sup>9</sup> that an idea might be present where its most characteristic terminology is not.

Without doubt the concept of typology is widespread in the Bible, and its constituent elements must now be set forth in such a way as to distinguish it from other ideas some times confused with it.

1. *It involves resemblance*

In Typology, two persons, events or institutions resemble each other in some way or ways; e.g. the Exodus is a type of Christ’s Cross in Luke 9:31, where the Greek word *exodos* ‘departure’ is used. Both are redemptive, in both God saves his people, although the nature of the salvation differs, for it is physical in the type and spiritual in the antitype. David is a type of Christ because he is a king, and, moreover, one appointed by God, although the nature of the kingship is different, at least in some respects. In Romans 5:12ff, Adam is a type of Christ for, like his great Antitype, his actions profoundly affected others, although the results of the actions were of course quite different.

More than resemblance, however, is needed to establish a type. In Psalm 1:3 a righteous man is likened to a tree, and lessons about godliness are drawn from the roots, resources and fruit of the tree. This analogy is not, however, historical. An illustration from nature rather than history is not a type.

7. e.g. W. J. Phythian-Adams, *The Way of At-one-ment*, London, 1944, pp. 10,11.

8. London, 1957.

9. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford, 1961.

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Types and symbols are not the same, although they are close. The prophecy of Zechariah is full of symbols and the prophet is given visions in which, for example, horsemen symbolise acts of God, his judgments in death, war and famine. This is true also of the Book of the Revelation. Visionary material is not typological, because the contents of the visions are not, at least yet, part of history.

A kind of symbol which is a little nearer to a type is the acted prophecy. Zechariah for example, acted the part of two shepherds, one good, the other evil. The first of these is seen in Matthew 26:31, to be Christ. It is true that the prophet Zechariah himself belonged to history, but he was of course not really a shepherd but a prophet. As a prophet he *typified* Christ the Prophet, but as a shepherd he *symbolised* Christ the Shepherd. We need to make this distinction.

### 2. *It involves history*

This has, of course, come out in the preceding discussion. It is of great importance that we hold on to the fact that the revelation in Scripture is historical, although it is not possible for us to explore the reasons for this too fully in this present paper.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible contains a certain amount of fable, parable and allegory; e.g. Jotham's fable, the parables of our Lord and the allegories of the Good Shepherd and the True Vine. Much has been written about Galatians 4:21-26, but this also cannot be considered in detail now.

Type has, in fact, often been confused with allegory, and undisciplined use of Typology comes very close to it. Allegory dispenses with history. An allegory could be based on an historical event, but its historicity would have no bearing on its significance. Greek philosophers, for example, employed the works of Homer to teach philosophical and moral truths. They would have been undisturbed by the theory that the siege of Troy was unhistorical and that Odysseus never wandered through the Mediterranean. History is, however, of vital importance to Typology, because the types reveal God to be consistent. There is a kind of repetition in redemptive history because God is unchanging.

### 3. *It involves anticipation*

The term Typology, as normally employed, refers to persons, events, offices or institutions which have a future reference, so that the substance of the antitype casts its typical shadow before it. In Isaiah 40ff, the Exodus foreshadows the New Exodus; in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the Mosaic Covenant foreshadows the New Covenant. Even though the New Covenant is said to be 'not like' the Old, the very fact that the same word ("covenant") is employed of both means that there is also resemblance. Thus type and antitype form part of an ongoing purpose of God, in which the earlier points to the later.

10. See. P. K. Jewett, 'Special Revelation as Historical and Personal' in C. F. H. Henry (ed), *Revelation and the Bible*, London, 1959, pp 43-57.

This element of anticipation, of course, finds its fulfilment in Christ, who effected the New Exodus and established the New Covenant in his blood, as he himself declared at the Last Supper.

4. *It involves consummation*

This is emphasised particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its use of the adjective 'better'. We should also note, however, the phrase 'in these *last days*' in Hebrews 1:2, which indicates that the 'better' is really the Best. Comparisons may be odious because they are human, but superlatives are beautiful because they are divine. When applied to Christ all the comparatives of the New Testament turn out to be also superlatives.

We should note, however, that types, in themselves and considered in isolation from each other, do not designate him as unique. In the nature of the case they cannot do this, for they point to resemblance, and resemblance and uniqueness are mutually exclusive. Christ is, of course, unique, but not in terms of any one of those qualities which are typified in the Old Testament, but rather in the combination of them all, and the fact that in his deity, he goes even beyond all the types taken together.

5. *It involves retrospective recognition*

For our theme, this is important, for it involves a distinction from prediction. The latter is often easily identified, with its frequent use of future tenses, at least in English translation! Even if the prophetic perfect is used, it is normally evident that the prophet intends a future reference. Type, however, is usually recognised only in retrospect. We have to see its fulfilment first before we can recognise its typical quality.

This means that Typology is not normally to be thought of as exegesis. Exegesis of the Old Testament, as of the New Testament, is concerned with the meaning of the text for its human author and for its first readers. What did they understand by what was written? New Testament Typology, on the other hand, is the New Testament writer seeing theological significance in Old Testament persons, events and institutions. Exegesis and Typology are therefore two different ways of handling the Old Testament. The first sees its meaning within itself, in grammatico-historical terms, the second its significance within the whole word of God. Walter Kaiser Junior has emphasised this in recent years.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the recognition of this distinction goes back to the Reformers, especially Calvin, and before them to the School of Antioch in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., being emphasised by such writers as Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom, both of them taught the principles of exegesis by the great but badly neglected father, Diodore of Tarsus.

It could be argued, perhaps, that retrospective recognition of a type is

11. 'Legitimate Hermeneutics' in N. L. Geisler (ed), *Inerrancy*, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 133-138.

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involved in Isaiah's New Exodus<sup>12</sup> and Jeremiah's New Covenant<sup>13</sup> themes, as both of these imply a type/antitype relationship within the Old Testament itself. This is, however, not entirely true. Isaiah and Jeremiah did not recognise the fulfilment of a type in an antitype within the history of their own time, but rather they predict it in the Advent of a New Exodus and New Covenant in the future. The New Testament makes it clear to us that the historical fulfilment of these types is to be found in Christ<sup>14</sup>. It is, however, interesting to find here that Typology is taken up into prophecy.

### 6. *It involves Divine Revelation*

The resemblance between the type and the antitype must be attested by God himself, at least in principle. It would certainly seem best to insist that there must at least be general New Testament warrant for the recognition of a type. It is vital that some principle of discipline should be established in this area of biblical interpretation. If exegesis needs discipline (and this is certainly widely recognised), so does theology, and typology is a mode of theological interpretation of the Bible. This must be governed by the way the New Testament handles the Old.

This really means that theology is governed by exegesis, for it is from New Testament exegesis that the theological principles of the interpretation of the Old Testament are to be obtained. Sober, disciplined, exegesis of the New Testament makes it clear that its writers have a theology of the relationship of the Old Testament to Christ, and that this is largely typological. Here then is Divine design.

It would be very profitable to ask how far away from *explicit* New Testament warrant theological interpretation, Christological interpretation, typological interpretation of the Old Testament may go. This cannot be taken up in this paper. It cannot, however, be too strongly maintained, that in interpretation, just as in inspiration, we must accept the *given*, otherwise we are at the mercy of subjective principles which may lead us and others through us far away from God's truth. If we accept God's word as true, we must accept his own revealed principles of understanding that word.

### **The Nature of Prophecy**

This also must be carefully explored.

#### 1. *It is God's message through human spokesmen*

The prophet speaks for God. Conservative writers have sometimes contested the idea that prophecy is essentially forthtelling and not foretelling, but it would certainly seem, in its essence, to be the former. This does not mean, however, that foretelling is excluded from it, but

12. Isaiah 11:11ff; 35:10; 43:16ff, *et al.*

13. Jeremiah 31:31-34.

14. e.g. in Luke 9:31; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

rather than foretelling is an even more general characteristic of prophecy than foretelling.

We do not know all the means used by the Divine Spirit in communicating God's message to the prophet, nor can we analyse completely the psychology of prophecy. What matters is that, in its utterance, it is the word, the words, of God. B. B. Warfield's magisterial exposition of biblical inspiration<sup>15</sup> has been attacked, but there can be little doubt that it is at its strongest when the writer is dealing with biblical prophecy. He has emphasised that the Biblical prophets thought of their utterances as the verbal communication of divine truth.

This message is, of course, still prophecy when it has been committed to writing, for 2 Peter 1:20-21 deals with prophecies of *Scripture*.

We must also find a place for the fascinating phenomenon of acted prophecy, in which the word is illustrated and complemented in certain respects. Here it is the action which conveys the message, although, of course, this is often not a complete message until it has been interpreted.<sup>16</sup> In some ways, acted prophecy is rather like God's interpretation of objective phenomena (e.g. a boiling pot — Jeremiah 1:7) and the contents of visions and dreams, except that the phenomena are not presented objectively to the prophet but rather are provided by him at God's command.

## 2. *It relates to history*

The prophet himself is an historical phenomenon. So too are his original hearers who also belong to history. It is not surprising therefore to discover that much in the prophecies relates to the times in which the first hearers lived. The message of the prophet, however, also relates to past history. It is not without significance that the Jews referred to the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings as the Former Prophets. The writers of these books gave a word of God which was an interpretation of the past, his verdict on it. This was given to enable men of the present to learn lessons about the ways of God from the past. Prophecy occupies a place within history and surveys it in both directions.

## 3. *It relates especially to the future*

The God of the Bible is the God of the future as well as of the past. This fact is sometimes given special emphasis, especially in Isaiah 40-48, with its polemic against idolatry and its stress upon the fact that the true God, the God of Israel, is the God who speaks, and speaks especially about the future.<sup>17</sup>

An examination of the prophetic literature reveals that a great deal of it is concerned with the future, not only in terms of the way the New Testament interprets it, but in terms of a proper understanding of it

15. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, London, 1951.

16. e.g. see Ezekiel 5:1-12.

17. Isaiah 41:21-24; 43:8-13, *et al.*

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within its Old Testament setting. The prophets profess to declare God's future purposes, sometimes the immediate future or at least the short-term future. They deal also, however, with much lying beyond their own day. There is also much material that is undefined as to its time, although its future bearing is evident on the face of it. The concept of futurity is therefore of great importance in relation to prophecy.

### 4. *It relates most of all to Christ's Person and Work*

The idea of a special coming era of fulfilment is found in the technical language of Old Testament prophecy, in phrases like 'in that day' and 'in the last days'. The Christian Church believed itself to be the people of the Christ. The New Testament documents therefore interpret Old Testament prophecy in terms of its reference to Christ.

It is not, of course, unique in this, for Rabbinic Judaism also believed that the Christ is the great theme of O.T. prophecy.

What therefore particularly distinguished the Christian Church was its identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. It recognised in him the true historical terminus of Old Testament prediction.

In terms of our distinctions between exegesis (the grammatico-historical approach) and theological interpretation, exegesis identifies prediction as such when it occurs in the Old Testament. New Testament exegesis identifies it as fulfilled in Jesus, because the New Testament presents a theological interpretation of the Old.

### **Typology and Prophecy**

#### 1. *They possess a number of similarities*

Both relate to history and to the future, and both point to the consummation of God's purposes in Christ. They are subjects of divine revelation.

#### 2. *They exhibit important differences*

Typology involves retrospective recognition, for the antitype reveals the presence of the type. This is true even of prophecy as far as its content is concerned, for the Christ of the New Testament is really the great content of prophecy. In its Old Testament setting, the prophecy does not identify the exact nature of the fulfilment nor of the time of it. Its form, however, is often clear. We can tell that it is a prophecy, but not in whom or when it will be fulfilled. Retrospective recognition therefore involves both form and content as far as typology is concerned, but content only in relation to prophecy.

It is not easy always to say which psalms are typical and which are prophetic. David is a prophet (Acts 2:30), as the Old Testament itself makes clear (2 Samuel 23:2). He is also a type of Christ as King. When is he prophetic and when typical in his psalms? Does he always speak of himself, so that his experiences typify Christ's experiences, e.g. his rejection as God's anointed by his enemies — or does he sometimes speak of Christ directly in prophetic fashion?



Psalms 22 and 69 are both quoted extensively in the New Testament in relation to the sufferings of Christ. Although an examination of them shows many similarities, there is an important difference, for the speaker in Psalm 69 confesses personal sin (Psalm 69:5), which is excluded completely from Psalm 22. We must therefore designate Psalm 69 as typical rather than prophetic. It may well be that we shall never know for certain whether Psalm 22 is to be identified as type or prophecy. Does it in any way echo an experience of David? It is not impossible that he could have been guided by the Spirit in such a way as to describe his sufferings so that they would fit also the experiences of the Christ, which were, of course, much more profound than his own. On the other hand, he could be speaking of Christ alone.

Perhaps the major difference between typology and prophecy lies in the matter of resemblance and identity. In prophecy, prediction and fulfilment are identical; they relate to the same person, the same event. In type, however, there is similarity, not identity. David is not Christ, Moses is not Christ, the Old Testament sin-offering is not Christ, and yet they all typify him in their differing ways. This would seem to establish that Melchizedek was a type, for the writer to the Hebrews refers to him as 'make like the Son of God' (Hebrews 7:3).

### 3. *Prophecies sometimes shows typological awareness*

Sometimes a prophecy will incorporate a type within itself. Isaiah 53:10, for example, speaks of the Suffering Servant as 'an offering for sin'. When prediction uses sacrificial language it employs typology to serve its purpose. Here then are prophecy and typology together within the Old Testament, but finding fulfilment in Christ.

### 4. *Prophecy sometimes refers to past or present phenomena*

The prophetic books do not, of course, consist entirely of predictions. There are, for example, quite a number of references to past history and some of these are employed typologically in the New Testament. A good example of this is to be found in the use made of Hosea 11:1, which in its original setting clearly refers to Israel (cf. Exodus 4:22,23), but is employed of Christ in Matthew 2:15. In emerging from Egypt, the greater, perfect and individual Son repeats in his experience that of the lesser, imperfect, collective son.

Matthew 13:14-15 takes up Isaiah 6:9,10, which, in its original setting, applied to the unbelief of Israel in Isaiah's own day. Israel's supreme act of unbelief was its rejection of Christ when he came. This means that Isaiah was himself a type of Christ as a mouthpiece of God whose message was rejected.

### 5. *Prophecy sometimes predicts future phenomena which typify Christ*

There are times when Old Testament prophecy itself focusses on a person or event which proves to be typical of Christ. A New Testament passage will help us to understand this. 1 John 2:18 reads, 'you have heard

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that antichrist comes and even now there are many antichrists.' It is true that in this verse John links the present and the future rather than the future and the more remote future, but the passage is helpful in that it suggests the presence in history of many figures falling short of and yet anticipating the final antichrist, and therefore foreshadowing him and partaking of his qualities. Over-enthusiastic students of prophecy have, in their own day, identified many figures of history as the antichrist. All such identifications were, of course, incorrect, and yet many of them contained a grain of truth, for the figures thus identified typified the ultimate antichrist.

Turning now to the Old Testament, we see in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, the promise of the whole sequence of the prophets. This certainly seems to be the implication of the passage. Not one of these, of course, was the perfect embodiment of the prophetic ideal, as is recognised within the book itself (Deuteronomy 34:9-12), but the promise was completely fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:22). The long line of Old Testament prophets typified the ultimate Prophet and were themselves the objects of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18.

In 2 Samuel 7, it is made clear that God would regard David's son as his son. Was this fulfilled in Solomon and his successors? Yes, in terms of the Divine attitude, for God looked after them, loved them and, of course, because they were sinners, chastised them, but Christ, as the New Testament shows (Hebrews 1:5), fulfils the promise of a son of David who would also be Son of God in the most perfect way.

Every true prophet, every Davidic king, in fact was a fulfilment of prophecy but also a type of Christ.

6. *In this way God so orders history that it points to Christ, finding in him its climax and true significance.*

The God of the Bible is Lord of all history. His greatest concern in the Scriptures was to reveal Christ. We see him, therefore, as the end and purpose of that great history partly described and partly predicted in the Bible. Everything moves towards its climax in him.

The Old Testament predicts the coming of the seed of the woman, not Seth, as Eve appears mistakenly to have thought (Genesis 4:25), but Christ. The Old Testament predicts the seed of Abraham, not Isaac, although this son of Abraham foreshadowed him. The Old Testament predicts the coming of the son of David, not Solomon, although he points to him. The prophet like Moses, was not Samuel nor Elijah nor Jeremiah, although each of these anticipated him, the ultimate and perfect Prophet. The ultimate Priest was not Aaron nor even Melchizedek, although both foreshadowed him as did every true Old Testament priest of the Lord. The first Exodus from Egypt foreshadows the great Exodus from sin effected by Christ, and the Old Covenant through Moses foreshadows the New Covenant in Christ. The first Adam in his far-reaching act

foreshadowed the greatest event in the world history, the far-reaching atonement in Christ's act of obedience to death.

Christ in his two comings is the climax of the ages and all redemptive history points to him. This means that in our reading of the Old Testament our knowledge of him is greatly enriched, and we are the better able to trust, obey and worship him.

# HEALING IN SEMANTICS, CREATION AND REDEMPTION\*

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Healing is a weasel word, a word of convenient ambiguity whose meaning can vary with its context and lead to endless confusion unless we first decide its meaning for our particular context. This is why any study of healing must begin with semantics.

## Healing in Semantics

Let us then begin our search for the meaning of healing. Where shall we begin? The natural place to begin would be with the doctors, so let us look at the usage of the word healing in the textbooks of medicine.

The first thing we shall notice is that the word healing is a rare word in standard medical textbooks. We shall discover that it is confined to the introductory pages of textbooks of pathology and surgery. There it is applied to the process of repair of wounds, ulcers and fractures. In each of these injuries there has been a loss of continuity of a body tissue such as skin or bone, and healing is the word used to describe the restoration of this continuity brought about by the normal restorative powers of the body.

If we now turn to the more ephemeral medical literature such as medical journals and books written on medical subjects for lay consumption, we shall find the word healing in bad company. We shall find chapters on healing in books about alternative medicine and references to healing in articles written by doctors whose medical orthodoxy is often in doubt. So much so, that for many doctors healing is synonymous with quackery. In other words, healing is to be distinguished from the orthodox practice of medicine and the word is not used in polite medical circles. If it is used, then it is on the basis that at least it will not do the patient any harm if that is what he insists on trying.

Actually, of course, we all know what we mean by healing, for any dictionary will tell us that healing is the restoration of a sick person to health. The ambiguity or the weasel-ness we have referred to, belongs not to the general meaning of the word healing, but to the kind of health to which healing is intended to restore man, and to the means by which this kind of health is restored. We need therefore to look at these two sources of ambiguity.

\* A version of this paper was read at the 1985 Conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.

We begin by looking at what we mean by health. If we look first at the derivation of the word we find that it was brought to our island by the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the fifth century AD and was first used in writing in the homilies written on the eighth-century translations of the Psalms and the Gospels into Anglo-Saxon or Old English as it is now called.<sup>1</sup> It was used in the first translation of the whole Bible into English which is associated with the name of John Wycliffe (1329-84). This translation was made from the Latin Vulgate, and in the *Nunc Dimittis* of Luke 2.29-32 it makes the aged Simon say:

‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy health which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples’.

The Latin word translated health in this passage is the word *salutare*.

Health is one of a group of words in English which are all derived from the Old English root *hal* which means whole or sound.<sup>2</sup> The other words are wholeness, haleness and holiness. Haleness is now obsolete except in the phrase ‘hale and hearty’. Notice that health, wholeness and holiness are cognate words only in English and the Teutonic languages and not in the biblical languages. So by derivation, health means wholeness or soundness. What is its meaning in usage?

Let us once again ask the doctors. Once again we shall be disappointed. Modern medicine can define disease and sickness (especially of the body) with increasing precision, but it cannot define health except as the absence of disease or disability. This is because disease or disability is a disorder of function or structure which can be measured in fairly exact terms which demonstrate its departure from the normal state. You can measure the size of a tumour with a tape measure. The height of a fever can be measured with a thermometer. The amount of sugar in the blood can be determined by chemical analysis. These measurements, of course, are all physical or chemical measurements, and most of the measurements used in clinical medicine are of a physical or chemical nature. Modern medicine is mainly concerned with disease rather than with health, and with disease which can be measured in physical or chemical units, and that means, of course, disease of the body.

The most significant attempt to define health in recent times is that which was made by the World Health Organisation at its inception in 1948. This definition has since become famous.

‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1971, compact edition, vol. 1, p. 1273, s.v. *health*.
2. E. Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, John Murray, London, 1921, column 699, s.v. *heal*.

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and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’<sup>3</sup>

There are several things to notice about this definition. The *first* is that it reminds us that health is not a merely physical phenomenon. It is not simply a description of the state of the body, but also of the mind and society to which man belongs. From a Christian point of view we would want to add a spiritual dimension too, and say that ‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. The *second* thing to note is that the definition is positive rather than negative. Health is not simply the absence of disease or infirmity, but it is the presence of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being. The merit of this concept is that the absence of disease does not exhaust the meaning of health. The *third* point is that the definition is the expression of an ideal. It speaks of complete well-being in all spheres of life. It has been severely criticised for this and dismissed as unrealistic and impractical. But such criticism is misplaced, for health is the goal at which we aim, and there is nothing to be gained by having an aim which is less than the highest. The *fourth* matter arises out of the third and has to do with the ideal of health. Having described health as the ideal of complete well-being, the definition then fails us. It should have gone on to spell out what it meant by complete well-being, but it did not. By not doing so, it betrays the limitations of its origin. You will recall that it was the product of a multinational conference concerned with the establishment of a new international body to be called the World Health Organisation.<sup>4</sup> It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for such a conference to have obtained agreement on what constitutes true human well-being. So all the definition tells us when we analyse it, is that health is well-being. We have to look elsewhere to find out what well-being consists of.

Our view of what constitutes health or the complete well-being of man obviously depends on what we believe about the nature and destiny of man himself. We shall therefore find that there are as many definitions of health as there are views of the origin, nature and purpose of man. Because the Christian faith has a very specific doctrine of man, it also has a very specific understanding of what constitutes his health or his complete well-being.

With this concept of health as the complete well-being of man in our minds, a concept which has come from an unimpeachable but nevertheless secular source, let us turn to Scripture and see if we can reach a Christian understanding of the meaning of human health and well-being.

3. *Basic Documents*, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1948, p. 1.

4. This conference was attended by fifty-one nations and was held in New York in 1946 to consider and approve a constitution for the proposed World Health Organisation.

At first sight it would appear that the Bible is not very interested in health, at least as far as the English versions are concerned. The word health appears fifteen times in the Authorised Version, eight times in the Revised Standard Version, eleven times in the New International Version and twelve times in Moffatt's translation. The word health then is not very common in Scripture. Does this mean that the Bible has no real interest in health? Or does it mean that our translators have misled us? Surely we cannot believe that God has no interest in the health of his people, if by health we mean their well-being, soundness or wholeness?

If we analyse a little further the occurrences of the word health in Scripture, a very interesting fact emerges. Of the fifteen occurrences of the word in the whole Authorised Version, thirteen occur in the Old Testament. Similarly in the case of the other versions, by far the majority of occurrences are in the Old Testament. In fact, all twelve examples in Moffat are in the Old Testament. It appears that, so far as the usage of the word in English translations of the Bible is concerned, the Old Testament is more interested in health than is the New Testament.

There is another interesting fact about biblical usage which we should note. Although the word *body* occurs in English in the Revised Standard Version on one hundred and two occasions in the Old Testament, with eighty-five occasions in the New International Version, there is no word for body in Hebrew, unless it be a dead body. The significance of this is not that the Old Testament is uninterested in the health of the body, but that the Old Testament does not think of health primarily in physical terms. It thinks of health as the well-being, the wholeness of the whole man.

There is a word in Hebrew which exactly expresses this idea of health as completeness, soundness, wholeness, both by derivation and by usage. It is the word *shalōm* which today is the common Israeli greeting, 'May you be well!' or 'Peace be with you!' Von Rad in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives the root meaning of *shalōm* as well-being.<sup>5</sup> It is commonly translated as *peace* in the English versions, but this is a secondary meaning arising from the sense of the harmony which is part of well-being. Peace is harmony between persons and peoples, a freedom from war and strife which is a necessary condition and an essential part of well-being. Such *shalōm* comes from God for, as the prophet Isaiah reminds us, there is no *shalōm* for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22 and 57:21).

How then shall we characterise the Old Testament understanding of health? I suggest that we might do so in the following four propositions:

1. *Health is basically a state of wholeness and the fulfilment of man's being and life considered as a complete and undivided entity.*

5. G. von Rad in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, vol. 2, p. 402, s.v. *eirēnē*.

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This is what we mean by *shalōm*.

2. *Health on its ethical side consists of complete obedience to God's law.*

Obedience to God's law is the best form of preventive medicine. This was one of the first lessons for the Children of Israel as they turned their back on Egypt and set out on their desert trek. At Marah, their first stop on their journey, they had been three days without water and there God made the bitter water from which the place got its name into sweet water they could drink. But he also gave them what Karl Barth called 'the divine Magna Carta in the matter of health'.<sup>6</sup> We read in Exodus 15:25-26: 'There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you"' (NIV).

God's laws, of course, include the laws of hygiene as well as the moral law. We readily see the significance of the laws of hygiene to the prevention of disease, but God wants our obedience to all his laws if we are to enjoy health as the Old Testament understands it.

3. *Health on its spiritual side consists of righteousness which is basically a right relationship to God.*

The Hebrew word for righteousness is *tsedeq* which has the root meaning of straightness.<sup>7</sup> It means that which conforms to a norm and therefore it describes a relationship. To be righteous is to be in a right relationship to God, and that is the basis of man's well-being. As Isaiah reminds us, 'the fruit of righteousness will be *shalōm*, and the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence for ever' (Isa. 32:17 NIV).

4. *Health on its physical side is manifested by strength and long life.*

As the psalmist says, 'The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with *shalōm*' (Psalm 29:11). Strength is the gift of God and those to whom he gives it die in a ripe old age. Thus we read of Abraham that he 'breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people' (Genesis 25:8). The previous verse tells us that he was 175 years old when he died. It is interesting to find that this is the aspect of health which appeals to Karl Barth. He defines health in terms of strength when he speaks of it as 'the strength to be as man'.<sup>8</sup>

Although we have distinguished four aspects of health in this description of the meaning of health in the Old Testament, these are but four strands in a single whole. They are not four parts which we add

6. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1961, vol. III, 4, p. 369.

7. Norman H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, Epworth Press, London, 1944, p. 73.

8. Karl Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 357.



together to make a whole, but four facets of what can only exist as a whole.

If we wanted to summarise the Old Testament understanding of health it would be in the two words *wholeness* and *holiness*. Health is the wholeness of man's being and personality together with the holiness of his character and actions, which are expressed in righteousness and obedience to God's law.

The basic idea of health in the Old Testament is that of relationship. Wholeness and holiness, righteousness and well-being or *shalōm* are all words of relationship. They imply a standard and that standard is the perfection of the being and character of God. For the Old Testament, the important thing about a man was his relationship to God. That is what the Old Testament is all about. 'Be ye holy for I the Lord your God am holy' (Leviticus 19:2).

We now turn on from the Old Testament to the New Testament and remind ourselves of the remark that the Old Testament is the lexicon of the New.<sup>9</sup> It is in the Old that so often the words of the New are defined and its concepts described and illustrated. The word health is no exception to this, for we have already seen how infrequently it occurs in the English versions of the New Testament as compared with those of the Old Testament. The New Testament assumes the teaching of the Old in the matter of human well-being.

The word in *Koinē* or Hellenistic Greek which exactly translated *shalōm* was *sōtēria*. This was the word which in the papyri preserved in the sands of Egypt was used for health and well-being.<sup>10</sup> In New Testament usage, especially that of the apostle Paul, it was mainly appropriated for man's spiritual well-being and the word is usually translated salvation in the English versions, but we must not lose sight of the fact that salvation includes the whole of man's being.

The New Testament is just as interested in those components of health which we found in the Old Testament. It is concerned with the wholeness and soundness of man's being, the need for his obedience of God's law and the righteousness of his character. The main extension of the idea of man's well-being is in the physical sphere where as a result of the resurrection, man's body will be renewed, and death will become but the entrance to a new and abundant life.

We may summarise the Christian understanding of health in the following terms: Health is the state of a man who is in a right relationship to God, a right relationship to himself, a right relationship to his fellows, and a right relationship to his environment.

If we want a shorter definition, then we may use that of Jesus himself

9. This remark is attributed to Albrecht Ritschl.

10. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1949, p. 622, s.v. *sōtēria*.

when he said, 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10 AV). Elsewhere, Jesus calls this eternal life (*zōē aiōnios*, John 17:3 etc.). This is life which is the gift of God; whose basis is a knowledge of God and the enjoyment of fellowship with him; whose duration is not measured by time, and whose quality is that of the life of God himself. This is what constitutes man's true well-being. This is what the Bible means by health, a condition of well-being of the whole man in every part of his being and life whether physical, mental, spiritual or social. When we speak of healing as the restoration of a person to health in a Christian context, this is the kind of health we mean. It is a condition which includes the whole of man and not just his body or his mind.

The other ambiguity in the use of the word *healing* concerns the means of healing, and we propose to deal with this ambiguity by looking at healing in creation and healing in redemption or, as we prefer to call them, healing on the basis of creation and healing on the basis of redemption.

### Healing in Creation

The first point to make about healing in creation is that God created the body with the power to heal itself. The body can defend itself against infection and finally destroy itself when death supervenes upon life. Much of the structure and function of the body is designed to prevent body tissues from being damaged, to repair them when they have been damaged, and to resist their decay. These are the basic reasons why we have blood in our bodies and a transport system of heart, arteries and veins to carry it to every part of our bodies. In the first century AD, long before the time that William Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood, the Roman medical author Celsus described the signs of the self-healing of the body.<sup>11</sup> He called it *inflammatio*, inflammation, which means a setting on fire, which was a very apt description. He said that the signs of an inflammation were four in number and he described them in the words that every medical student learns, even today: *rubor, calor, tumor et dolor* — redness, heat, swelling and pain. These are all due to blood. The redness and the heat appear because of the increased blood supply to the part brought about by the opening up of local blood vessels to their maximum capacity, and the swelling and pain occur due to the increased amount of fluid and white blood cells being poured out into the damaged tissue. What Celsus was describing were the signs of the process of self-healing of the tissues of the body.

This self-healing property of the body comes into play automatically. The cells and substances which defend the body and promote healing are on permanent alert. The study of these healing processes has become a

11. Celsus, *De Medicina*, book III, 10, 3.

subject of its own which is called immunology. Immunology is a subject of increasing importance in the surgery of organ transplantation and with the appearance of such conditions as the acquired immune deficiency syndrome or AIDS. In AIDS the healing processes of the body appear to break down and the condition carries a mortality of about fifty per cent.

Not only did God create the body able to heal itself, he also placed healing agents in his creation. One of these healing agents is the sun with whose tonic effect we are all familiar for it often determines where and when we shall spend our holidays. Not only does the sun have a tonic effect on our bodies, it also has a lethal effect on the bacteria which cause our diseases. Exposure to its rays will often kill bacteria which are very difficult to kill by other means. One example of these bacteria is that which causes tuberculosis. It is also to the sun that we owe the supply of vitamin D which we need for the proper growth and development of our bones. In countries where the local custom is to keep women and children indoors away from the sun's rays, the disease called rickets is common because the bones do not form normally because vitamin D is not formed as it should be by the action of the sun's rays on the chemical precursor of the vitamin which is present in the skin. This normal mechanism for the manufacture of the vitamin is entirely dependent on the effect of the sun's rays on the skin.

God also placed healing agents in the plant kingdom. Those which man discovered first of all were the agents which had a purely symptomatic effect. Examples of these include opium, the dried juice of the white poppy, used for the relief of pain from prehistoric times, and also digitalis from the common foxglove which was discovered to be an effective remedy for the dropsy by William Withering of Birmingham in 1785. This drug had been used as a folk remedy in a tea made from foxglove leaves before Withering brought it into medical practice.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, man has discovered healing agents which will actually kill the bacteria which cause infectious disease. In 1935 the sulphonamide drugs were introduced into medicine, and shown to be effective in the treatment of infections such as lobar pneumonia which up to that time had been a very serious disease. Then in 1941 came penicillin, in time to save the lives of many soldiers wounded in the battles of the Second World War. Since then many other healing agents have been discovered, mostly derived from fungi, as the original penicillin was.

So far we have spoken of the self-healing of the body and of the healing agents which affect the body and its diseases, but the same is true of the mind. God created the mind self-healing like the body, and placed in his creation healing agents which could affect the mind and restore it to health when it became disordered. We are all too familiar with these psychotropic agents today, for they are far too frequently used and even

12. Douglas Guthrie, *A History of Medicine*, Nelson, Edinburgh, 1945, p. 257.

more abused in our modern civilisation.

All this that we have described, is healing on the basis of creation. It is an indication of God's intention that man should be healthy. To this end he created man's body and mind self-healing and provided healing agents in his environment for man to discover and use.

There are references to natural healing or healing on the basis of creation in Scripture, but they are not very many. In the Old Testament we may recall the fig poultice which the prophet Isaiah prescribed for King Hezekiah's boil in 2 Kings 20:7 (cp. Isaiah 38:21). The application of a poultice is a well-recognised way of stimulating the process of inflammation. It produces *rubor* and *calor*, if not *tumor* and *dolor*. Isaiah seems to have had some medical knowledge for it is to him that we owe a short description of how wounds were dealt with in Old Testament times. In Isaiah 1:6 we read of the kingdom of Judah that 'from the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness — only bruises, septic sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been cleansed, bandaged or soothed with oil.'

In the New Testament we have another reference to the treatment of wounds in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke chapter ten. There we are told that the Samaritan went to the injured man he found on the road to Jericho and 'bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine' (v.34). We still use the same principles of wound treatment today, but for the antiseptic wine we use an antibiotic and for the oil we use vaseline. Also in the New Testament we have examples of people who were left to the natural processes of healing when they fell sick. In Philippians chapter two we are told how Epaphroditus was visiting Paul in Rome and during his visit he contracted some serious disease, which might have been typhoid fever, from which he almost died. The passage suggests that he was left to the natural processes of healing to recover from his illness. Then Paul's young assistant Timothy had a chronic dyspepsia from which he was left to recover naturally, though Paul did prescribe a little wine for his condition (1 Timothy 5:23).

You will notice that so far we have not mentioned doctors and their place in healing. This is because most of the healing that occurs in the world occurs without the intervention of doctors or any of the health care professions. If doctors were essential for healing, there would not be enough doctors to go round. In the United Kingdom there is one doctor to less than a thousand people, but in developing countries especially in rural areas, the ratio is more in the region of one doctor to ten thousand people. It cannot therefore be maintained that doctors are essential for healing. As Hippocrates said long ago, medicine is a subject in which no man is a layman.<sup>13</sup>

Medical healing, or the type of healing practised by the medical

13. Hippocrates, *On Ancient Medicine*, chapter 4, 3.

profession, is healing on the basis of creation. Doctors of former times were very conscious that they were only assisting nature in their work of healing. They spoke of the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing power of nature, which they sought to assist. A famous French surgeon of Reformation times expressed his faith in the healing power of nature by saying, 'I dressed the wound, but God healed it'.<sup>14</sup>

The practice of medicine was built up out of diligent observation, experience and experiment. Out of these emerged a body of knowledge which, as it increased, made that practice more and more effective. We need to remember, however, that until recently the great improvements in the health of the people of Western Europe and indeed of the world, have come not from medicine, but from improved agriculture and environmental engineering. Improvements in the quality of food, the purity of water, the cleanliness of the air and in the state of housing and the environment have done more for the health of the populations of the world throughout history than the practice of medicine. However, now that these improvements have come, medicine is able to make its own special contribution, and by the use of antibiotics, the introduction of immunisation, and the encouragement of a healthier life-style it can play its part in the betterment of the health of the people. Today the task of medicine is to promote health, to prevent disease, to treat sickness and to minimise disability. All this it does on the basis of creation.

There are one or two aspects of healing on the basis of creation which are worth noting. Natural healing is of course part of natural theology. No doctor who understands the real significance of his practice of healing and how much it depends on the healing power of nature, could possibly deny the reality of natural theology, the reality of what God has provided for man's healing in his creation.

Then there are gifts of healing in nature which are often overlooked. It is a matter of common experience that some people are more successful in healing than others in everyday life. Some of these people become doctors and nurses, but others do not. We all know people to whom we would readily turn if we needed help or healing because we feel that they could help us more than others could. Have we not heard people say of others that simply to be in their presence made them feel better?

Another phenomenon which is not always acknowledged is that even on the basis of natural healing, serious and even fatal diseases can undergo spontaneous remission and even disappear. We remember some years ago, attending a lecture in the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh by an eminent Professor of Pathology who was the author of

14. This was Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) whose original statement was, 'Je le pansay et Dieu le guarit'. These words are inscribed on his statue in the École de Médecine in Paris. He is often called the father of modern surgery.

several successful textbooks of his subject.<sup>15</sup> The lecture was on the spontaneous remission of tumours. He described a number of cases in which tumours which were normally malignant and usually fatal, had undergone spontaneous remission and finally disappeared altogether. He showed series of photographs illustrating how this had happened. He went on to say that he rarely gave this lecture without someone coming up to him afterwards and saying that they too had had a patient who showed a spontaneous recovery just like one of the cases he had shown. He said that he always asked them the same question, 'Did you publish the details of the case?' He always got the same answer, 'No I didn't, because I thought no one would believe me'. So even in healing on the basis of creation, malignant tumours which normally prove fatal can disappear.

There are, of course, several chronic and disabling diseases which are known to show various degrees of spontaneous remission. One well-known example of such a disease is multiple sclerosis. This is one of the diseases which 'healers' often claim to have cured, when usually what has happened is that their activity coincided with the onset of a natural remission of the disease. This means that we must be very careful in claiming success in the healing of any disease which shows this pattern of spontaneous remission.

The final matter I want to consider about healing on the basis of creation is its limitations.

Although God created the body and the mind with the power of self-healing, this power was limited. The damage to the body or the mind resulting from disease or injury may be so extensive that self-healing cannot cope with it. The wound of the tissues may be so large that the normal body processes of healing cannot close it. The mental state may be so disordered that no amount of rest or treatment can restore it to normal. In many of these cases the medical profession, either by the skill of the surgeon or the experience of the psychiatrist, may be able to help, and by applying the principles of healing which men have discovered in creation may promote that restoration to normality which is healing. However, in many cases full restoration to normality is not possible and permanent scarring and disability are the result. The power of self-healing of the body and of the mind is a limited one.

The next limitation of healing on the basis of creation is that which is imposed by the way in which the knowledge of the principles of such healing and its application is acquired. Such knowledge is discovered by man and not revealed to him. The result is that we can never claim that this knowledge is complete for new facts, new healing methods and new healing agents are constantly being discovered. This is why our ideas about disease and its treatment are always changing and can never be final.

15. His name was Professor William Boyd.

The most serious limitations of healing on the basis of creation still remain. We have seen that its scope is restricted and its content of knowledge incomplete, but it has two far more serious limitations. The first is that it has no remedy for the sickness of the human spirit. It has nothing but a negative answer to Macbeth's anxious question to the doctor about his treatment of Lady Macbeth:

'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?'<sup>16</sup>

Healing on the basis of creation has no remedy for sin, no balm for guilt. Those who try to deal with sin and guilt on the basis of creation end up by trying to dismiss them as feelings and not facts, and endeavour to persuade their patients that they have no objective existence. Therefore the sooner they forget about them, and the religious delusions from which they arise, the better. But we know that sin and guilt are not to be dealt with as easily as that.

The second limitation of healing on the basis of creation is its inadequacy in the face of death. It cannot of course deny the fact of death as it sought to deny the fact of sin, but it has no explanation for it. If you look up any textbook or dictionary of psychiatry and read the entry for death, you will find it mainly taken up with an account of Freud's theory that within man there is a death instinct or a group of death instincts whose object is the destruction of his life and being. There is no explanation of where these instincts came from. Freud admitted that very little was known about them except that they invariably and inevitably accomplish their objective. It is not surprising that most of Freud's followers have not been very keen on his idea of a death instinct. There is no doubt that death inevitably accomplishes its objective, not because it is an instinct, but because it is the wages of sin and the result of man's rebellion against God.

Why is it that healing on the basis of creation is so limited? The answer to this question must be because of the Fall of man. Man was created before the Fall and his body and his mind were not designed to deal with the physical and mental effects of that event. It is an intriguing question whether if there had been no Fall, healing would have been necessary today. We may assume that, quite apart from the effects of the Fall, men would still be liable to have accidents and break bones. Therefore there would need to be provision for the treatment and healing of fractures. As well as fractures there would also be wounds from accidents and they would need to be healed. Would there also be degenerative diseases of

16. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act V, scene iii, lines 40-44.

man's body which had been created subject to time, and would perhaps therefore wear out with the passage of time? We do not, of course, know the answers to these intriguing questions, but it seems reasonable to suppose that man was created with the potentiality of self-healing, and that this property would be necessary even if there had been no Fall.

But, of course, there was a Fall, and man and the rest of creation were made subject to the bonds of decay, corruption and death.<sup>17</sup> The whole picture changed and man now faced a hostile world in which he was attacked by disease and condemned eventually to die. His body and his mind were able to develop some defences and were able to heal themselves to some extent, but this response was inadequate because they had not been created to cope with such a devastating change in their situation. This is why healing on the basis of creation alone suffers from the various limitations which we have described.

### **Healing in Redemption**

When we come to consider healing on the basis of redemption, the first question which arises is about its relationship to healing on the basis of creation.

In answer to this question, we would maintain in the first place that healing on the basis of redemption embraces and includes healing on the basis of creation. The fact that God has now revealed to us the details of his plan to restore man to complete well-being which is health, does not mean that we are no longer to use penicillin for the treatment of lobar pneumonia or insulin for the treatment of diabetes mellitus, or to operate on someone who develops acute appendicitis. We are not to abandon the knowledge or methods of healing on the basis of creation now that we know healing on the basis of redemption. Some Christian groups, especially those in the Pentecostalist tradition, have taught that once we have become Christians we have no need of medical aid of any kind, for natural healing has now been replaced by supernatural healing. There is no basis for this attitude in Scripture, experience or common sense.

In the second place, healing on the basis of redemption takes healing on the basis of creation and places it in a new and larger context. In this context what could not be explained is now explicable, and what was hidden is now revealed. The origin of man's dis-ease in the world of God's creation is shown to be his rejection of God's will and purpose. It is from this rejection that evil, disease and death have come. These were recognised as problems by those who sought to heal on the basis of creation but they failed to resolve them for they sought their solution on a purely naturalistic basis. Healing on the basis of redemption showed that the origin of the problems of man's health and disease, whether physical, mental or spiritual, was his rebellion against God. Furthermore, it placed

17. Romans 8. 19-21.



these problems and their solution not simply in the context of nature and time, but in the context of God's purpose for man and of eternity.

Finally, healing on the basis of redemption completes the task which healing on the basis of creation had been unable to complete. It does what healing by creation could not do; it deals with the root causes of disease and death. It adds a new dimension to healing. To natural healing it adds supernatural healing which transcends, but does not replace the natural process. To healing in time, it adds the dimension of eternity.

We conclude, therefore, that healing on the basis of redemption does not make healing on the basis of creation superfluous. On the contrary, it takes natural healing up into itself and puts it into a larger and more efficient and effective context.

Where then do we go to find out about healing on the basis of redemption? We go to the Bible as the inspired record of God's revelation to man, and there we learn of the manner and method of our redemption by which we are restored to that well-being which God intended us to enjoy.

We have already looked briefly into the pages of the Old Testament and have seen there the delineation and characterisation of the health that is God's purpose for us, and the wholeness which he requires of us. There is a great deal about preventive medicine in the Old Testament which receives its sanction in God's demand for man's holiness in his character and his life. If we follow the advice which is set out in what has been called 'The Sanitary Code of the Pentateuch'<sup>18</sup> we shall find it will produce a healthy life-style even in the circumstances of our modern life. Alongside this sanitary code is the extensive sacrificial system of the Old Testament testifying by its detail to the holiness of God and the seriousness of man's sin, and serving in its observance as what we might call God's first-aid treatment for sin until the definitive treatment of Christ's death on the cross as the full and final sacrifice, could be provided and applied. By its insistence on sanitation and sacrifice, the Old Testament reminds us that health in the biblical concept consists of wholeness and holiness.

The Old Testament may have much to tell us about health, but it is not so successful in promoting effective healing. After centuries of divine discipline, the Children of Israel had still to find complete healing and perfect wholeness. Their disobedience of God's law and the formalism of their worship left them at the close of the Old Testament still in need of healing. So it is that the Old Testament closes with the promise of the prophet Malachi that the sun of righteousness would one day rise with healing in its rays, as the Jerusalem Bible translates it (Malachi 4:2). The

18. This is the title of a little-known book by an ordained sanitary inspector which was published by the Religious Tract Society in 1894. The author was the Rev. C. G. K. Gillespie.

reference is, of course, to the astronomical sun, but who shall say that the early Christian Fathers were wrong when they saw in this verse a prophecy of the healer and the saviour who was to come in the person of Jesus Christ?

So we turn over to the New Testament and begin with the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. There is no doubt that healing has a significant place in the pages of the Gospels. If we look at the Gospel of Mark we find that no less than 20% of its 661 verses are taken up with descriptions of the healing miracles of Jesus. If we exclude the discourse element of the Gospel we find that the miracles occupy 40% of the narrative part, and if we exclude the Passion narrative, the proportion is even greater. We cannot deny the place of healing in any adequate account of the ministry of Jesus. We are, of course, thinking mainly of the healing of physical disease.

Nevertheless it is clear from John's account of the healing of the paralysed man by the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-9, that the primary purpose of Jesus' ministry was not the healing of man's physical ailments. You will recall there was a great multitude of sick folk in the five porches of Bethesda, and the word John uses for a multitude is that which describes the catch of 153 fish which he records in verse eleven of his chapter twenty-one. But the significant thing is that only one of this great multitude was healed, and he was not the most grateful of patients. If our Lord had been primarily interested in physical healing, would he not have healed the whole multitude? Another indication that Jesus did not come to earth primarily to heal men's bodies is the fact that only rarely did he take the initiative in healing. Out of the twenty-six healing miracles recorded in detail, he took the initiative in only four. We do not know exactly how many sick people Jesus did heal during his earthly ministry, but it must have been only a fraction of the total number of those who were sick in the Palestine of his day.

He did not, of course, confine his healing activity to the physical disease of those whom he healed. This is illustrated by the healing of the paralytic brought by four men to him at Capernaum as recorded in Mark 2:1-12 and its parallel passages. Jesus' first remark to him was, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'. This has sometimes been taken to mean that his paralysis was due to his sin, but this is not necessarily so. The remark provokes a charge of blasphemy from the scribes present. To this Jesus replies with a question, 'Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Rise, take up your pallet and walk"?' As Mark tells us, he did both and we believe that both were effective, in other words the whole man was healed, and not just his paralysed limbs.

There are a number of features which characterise the healing activity of Jesus which are worth noting. His healing was complete, that is to say that the disease or the disability was totally removed. His healing was immediate. There was only one exception to this, the blind man of

Bethsaida on whom Jesus had to lay his hands twice before he saw everything clearly (Mark 8:22-26). On the other hand, his healing did not confer immunity to disease in general or death in particular. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he died a natural death again in the course of time.

When we turn on to the book of the Acts we find more examples of healing which are similar to those recorded in the Gospels, but they are less frequent. The Gospels cover a period of three years and record twenty-six cases in detail and describe twelve occasions when groups were healed. The Acts on the other hand covers a period of thirty years and records only eight cases in detail and the healing of four groups.

The situation in the epistles is very different. Here, there is no mention of healing incidents such as we find in the Acts, although Paul does speak of performing signs and wonders and mighty works and he regards these as the signs of a true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12; cp. Romans 15:19). Although there are no accounts of supernatural healing in the epistles, there are references to cases of natural healing as we have already seen. There are also two references to healing matters which we may more properly include under the heading of healing on the basis of redemption.

The first reference is in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians in the twelfth chapter where we read of gifts of healing, or more strictly, gifts of healings. Some have suggested that the use of the plural *iamatōn* means that there was some degree of specialisation amongst the gifts. The nature of the gifts is not defined, but they are distinguished from the gift of miraculous powers in verse ten. The question arises of whether these gifts were an enhancement by the Holy Spirit of a natural gift of healing which the individual already possessed, or were new supernatural gifts unrelated to the previous natural gifts already possessed. This question is very relevant to our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the believer. There is also a further question, Do these gifts still continue in the Church today? The answer to this second question depends to some extent on our answer to the first one about the nature of the gifts of healing.

There are many tantalising questions which arise from this chapter and its mention of the gifts of healing, and they are tantalising just because they are unanswerable. We cannot explain, for instance, why these gifts of healing are mentioned only in the lists of gifts in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and omitted from the lists given in Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Equally tantalising are the questions which are raised by the second passage about healing which is found in the fifth chapter of the Epistle of James, the brother of our Lord. This passage knows nothing of a special gift of healing, but only of the role of elders in sickness. The first thing to notice is that it is the sick who are to take the initiative. 'Is any one of you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church . . .' (v.14). This speaks of

the elders in the plural which suggests healing was a corporate activity, not an individual one. The second thing to note is what the elders are to do. They are to do three things: To visit him, to pray over him and to anoint him with oil. There are two possible interpretations of this last instruction — the ritual and the medical. The verb used for anoint is not *chriō* which is the ritual term, but *aleiphō* which is used for the application of oil or ointment to the skin for toilet or medicinal purposes. In other words, what James is saying is that the elders should pray over the sick person and give him his medicine in the name of the Lord.<sup>19</sup> The third thing to notice is that in verse sixteen what has been described as the function of the elders in verse fourteen is now said to be possible for any members of the Church, although the anointing with oil is not now mentioned. The most important thing to notice, however, is that the main interest of this passage is in prayer. Prayer is mentioned in every verse and the passage ends by speaking of Elijah as an example of one who prayed and God answered his prayer. You will have noticed, of course, that there is no mention of laying on of hands, only of prayer and of the giving of medicine, if our interpretation of the reference to anointing with oil is correct.

One way to avoid the problems raised by this passage in James is to deny that it applies to the Church as a whole. This is done by Merrill Unger, who formerly taught Old Testament at Dallas Theological College.<sup>20</sup> He maintains that since the Epistle of James was addressed to 'the twelve tribes in the Dispersion' (James 1:1 RSV) it does not apply to the Gentiles. He claims that the promises about healing in James were based on the healing covenant made by God with the Children of Israel at Marah and recorded in Exodus 15:26. This healing covenant guaranteed instantaneous and complete healing to *Hebrew* Christians, but only until the time when Israel was set aside in unbelief and rejection of the Messiah. Unger supports these suggestions by saying that anointing with oil was a common Jewish practice and this is why it is not mentioned in any of the epistles which were addressed to Gentile Churches such as those to the Church in Corinth. This is an interesting suggestion, but not one which can be regarded as serious hermeneutics, even though it would explain the references to anointing with oil in Mark 6:13 and James 5:14 as applied to healing.

There we must leave our consideration of healing on the basis of redemption as we find it set out in Scripture. We leave it with many questions unanswered and many details unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Church has a vital concern for the restoration of complete well-being as the purpose of God for man.

19. B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Scribners, New York, 1918, pp. 171-2.

20. M. F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1971, pp. 127-9.

## Healing in the Church today

Healing is a matter of perennial concern to everybody and not merely of antiquarian interest to the specialist. In this final section we consider healing in the Church today in the light of what we know of the practice of the apostolic Church.

We suggested earlier that there were two sources of ambiguity about the term healing. The first arose from the concept of health, and the second from the method or means employed in healing. It should be clear by now what we mean by health and healing. Healing is the restoration of the whole man to a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being which is what we mean by health. It includes the salvation of the soul and the redemption of the body, and extends to the whole of man's being and life in this world and in the world to come. The means by which such healing is achieved are provided by God in creation and redemption, so that we can truly say that all healing is of God on whatever basis it is obtained.

When people speak of healing today in a Christian context they usually mean healing in its physical aspect. We shall therefore confine our attention to this aspect of healing in this final section. We are taking for granted, however, that this physical aspect cannot be separated from the complete healing of the whole man, and that no healing is complete which is concerned solely with disease of the body, or of the mind, in isolation from the rest of man.

From the point of view of physical healing there are three models which we can identify in the experience of the apostolic Church which are relevant to the practice of healing in the Church today. We may designate these three models as follows:

The Timothy model.

The Aeneas model.

The Pauline model.

### 1. *The Timothy model*

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul writes to his true son in the faith, 'You ought to take a little wine sometimes as medicine for your stomach because you are sick so often' (*The Living Bible* version). Timothy had a chronic dyspepsia and Paul was prescribing fermented grape juice (*oinos*) for him to take for this condition. It is well-known that alcohol stimulates the secretion of gastric juice and will benefit some forms of dyspepsia. This was apparently known to Paul.

Here then we have an example of treatment or healing on the basis of creation. We have already mentioned another case of this kind which is recorded in the epistles. This was Epaphroditus, left to recover from his near fatal disease when he visited Paul in prison in Rome (Philippians 2:27). There was also Trophimus of Ephesus left at Miletus sick when Paul moved on (2 Timothy 4:20). The implication is that Paul left

Trophimus at Miletus to recover by the natural process of healing from whatever disease he had, and also that Timothy would not be surprised at Paul's doing this. These cases mean that a Christian approach to healing does not necessarily involve the exercise of a special gift of healing or the expectation of a supernatural cure. We shall never know why Paul did not exercise his gift of healing to heal his fellow-workers but left them to be healed on the basis of creation.

### 2. *The Aeneas model*

In Acts 9:32-34 we have the account of how a man called Aeneas was healed by the apostle Peter at Lydda, the modern Lod. Aeneas has a pagan name, that of the hero of Troy whose story was told by the Roman poet Virgil. He is usually supposed to have been a Christian in view of the reference in verse thirty-one to Peter coming to the saints in Lydda amongst whom he found Aeneas, a man whose legs had been paralysed for eight years. Peter goes to his home and to his bedside and says quite simply, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed' (v.34). Luke tells us that he got up immediately, something that he had not done for eight years.

This was a miracle of healing, a supernatural cure. It is quite impossible to explain cures like this on the basis of hysteria, where the person is just waiting for someone to come along and tell him to get up and snap out of it. This psychological theory for the explanation of the healing miracles of the New Testament arose out of the medical experience of shell-shock and its effects in the First World War.<sup>21</sup> It was adopted by various authors, notably Leslie Weatherhead in his book, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (1951),<sup>22</sup> but it is quite untenable. A man like Aeneas who had been paralysed for eight years, even if the original cause of the paralysis had been hysterical, would by then have contracted joints and muscles wasted by disuse. It would have been quite impossible for him to respond immediately to a command to get up and resume his normal activity. The immediate and complete removal of his disability could not have occurred from natural causes. It was what the New Testament calls a mighty work (*dunamis*).

### 3. *The Pauline model*

The third model is that provided by Paul's thorn in the flesh which he refers to in 2 Corinthians 12:7. The most probable diagnosis in this case is a chronic relapsing disease, of which benign tertian or vivax malaria is the most probable as Sir William Ramsay originally suggested.<sup>23</sup>

21. E. R. Micklem, *Miracles and the New Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 1922.

22. L. D. Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1952, second edition, section one, chapter 1, 'Christ's Healing Miracles'.

23. W. M. Ramsay, *St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1902, sixth edition, p. 94.

For a full discussion of the identity of the thorn in the flesh see John Wilkinson, *Health and Healing: Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1980, chap. 11.

There are a number of things which are worth noting about this thorn in the flesh and its treatment. Paul tells us that it was given to him by God and for a specific purpose. That purpose was to keep him from being too proud of his special spiritual experiences. In other words it was an antidote to spiritual pride. Although it was given by God, it was provided by Satan (v.7). Paul goes on to tell how he prayed three times for its removal, but it was not removed. God treated it in another way. Instead of removing the disease, God increased Paul's resistance to it. In well-known words, God told him, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power (*dunamis*) is made perfect in weakness'. In other words, God did not remove Paul's disease, he increased his resistance to it and changed his attitude to it. The result was that when the weakness caused by the disease came upon him, then he experienced the power of God mobilising in his support, so that when he was weakened by the disease, he was in fact strengthened by God. Therefore, he was content to continue to suffer from the disease knowing that God would support him during its attacks upon him.

The question arises, Can we say that Paul was healed if his disease was not removed but continued to attack him? Let us ask another question. Can we say that Paul was saved when sin was still present in him? He had been forgiven the penalty of sin. He had been given the Holy Spirit to overcome the power of sin, but he was not yet free from the presence of sin. If we can say that Paul was saved, then can we not equally say that he was healed? He would not be fully saved until he was glorified, and he would not be fully healed until he assumed his imperishable resurrection body. Nevertheless, can we not say that he was saved and healed as far as he could be during his earthly life?

Paul's experience shows that healing on the basis of redemption in this life does not necessarily mean the removal of disease. What it does mean is a change of attitude towards disease and the promise of the provision of God's strength when disease causes weakness.

These three models are still to be met with in the experience of the Church today, and even within our own experience.

The case of Timothy represents healing on the basis of creation and we all have experience of that, whether it be self-healing or healing which results from the advice and skill of others. There can be no doubt that by far the majority of the sicknesses of Christian people are healed on this basis.

The case of Aeneas is more difficult, for such cases of healing are outside the experience of most of us. We would not, however, deny their possibility on that basis. If malignant disease, for instance, can disappear on the basis of creation, then it may be expected to do so on the basis of redemption also.

The more experience we have of disease amongst Christian people, the

more relevant does the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh become. For Paul the curtain was temporarily lifted to enable him to understand something of the purpose behind his disease and God's method of dealing with it. We can profit from his experience. When we are confronted with some disease, we can pray as Paul did and leave God to answer our prayer in his own way, which may not be by the removal of the disease. God does not deliver us from the experience of death, but he does change the character of that experience from one of defeat and fear to one of victory and joy. In the same way he may not deliver us from disease, but he will help us to understand its purpose and to withstand its suffering.



# CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE BELIEF IN EVIL SPIRITS: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE\*

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## Introduction

*Theologia* as a term which means 'reasoned discourse about God'<sup>1</sup> or 'the doctrine of God'<sup>2</sup> was probably invented by Plato<sup>3</sup> and has been adopted into Christianity for the systematic study and presentation of topics relating to God. But in its wider connotations 'theology' is the systematic and scientific study of religion generally.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper attention is focussed on Christian theology in its relation to the belief in evil spirits, particularly from an African perspective. It has been fashionable of late for influential theologians like R. Bultmann and R. H. Fuller to disavow the existence and influence of the evil spirits spoken of in the New Testament. This is supposedly because of their modern 'scientific' or positivistic outlook, which asserts that only that which is scientifically verifiable by any of the five senses may be said to exist. Evil spirits do not belong to this category, therefore they do not exist.

We shall employ the inductive method of investigation in exploring the New Testament evidence which sustains belief in the existence of preter-natural forces known as evil spirits. We shall then parallel this with African religious beliefs and experiences, in support of the New Testament evidence. The main thesis of this paper is that if the Christian faith is to remain dynamic and relevant to 'modern man' anywhere, but particularly to the African, the belief in the existence of evil spirits against which Jesus Christ has (as Christians believe) won a decisive victory cannot easily be thrown overboard.

What then is Christian theology? As Brandon points out, the subject is so vast and many-sided, embracing such branches as dogmatic, biblical, moral, ascetical, mystical, symbolic, sacramental, apologetical, liturgical

\* A version of this paper was read at the Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1985.

1. See Maurice Wiles, *What is Theology?*, London: Oxford: New York, OUP, 1976, p 1.
2. M. G. Cambron, *Bible Doctrines*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1954; cf. 1974 reprint, p 13.
3. Plato, *Republic*, ii, 379a.
4. D. H. Smith in S.G.F. Brandon, ed., *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970, p 610.

and natural theology.<sup>5</sup> Our main concern however will be with the source or sources of Christian theology, and to state that a study of evil spirits is a legitimate theme of Christian theology. When M. Wiles set out to write *What is Theology?* he was actually attempting to throw light on the sources, the nature and the methods for the study of Christian theology.<sup>6</sup> Such a study would include a critical and detailed study of the Bible in its cultural, historical and literary milieux. It would pay due attention to Church history, the philosophy, the sociology and the phenomenology of religion — and much more besides. The picture is complex, but Christian theology cannot side-track or under-estimate what the Bible teaches on any subject. Though Wiles believes that biblical studies certainly have a vitally important place in Christian theology, he feels however that there are two fundamental reasons why the Bible alone cannot provide a definition of the subject-matter of theology. First of all, according to him, there is no such a thing as a 'coherent account of the teaching of the Bible' which does not draw its criterion of coherence from outside the Bible itself. He writes, 'not only are there obvious differences of belief between the Old and New Testaments, but also within the New Testament itself'.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, in his view, even insofar as there is a coherent unit of biblical teaching, that teaching cannot simply be taken over as it stands and treated as an end-product of theology. He notes that the biblical writers share various cultural assumptions characteristic of the ancient world which are foreign to almost any modern *Weltanschauung*. To clinch his point, he gives two examples, the first of which we may refer to because of its relevance: 'The theologian cannot simply be committed in advance to belief in demonic possession. . . . Some form of interpretation is called for, and once again the criteria for that interpretative task are not provided by the Bible itself.'<sup>8</sup>

Wiles' position appears to be full of distortion and prejudice. Though it is true that the biblical writers had various cultural assumptions which were characteristic of the ancient world, it is unfair to conclude hastily that their views were erroneous in everything, especially as it concerns belief in the existence of evil spirits or demonic possession. Such an *a priori* position results from the reductionist stance of theological liberalism and scepticism which totally undermines spiritual realities. Secondly, Wiles is unnecessarily capitalising on the so-called 'obvious differences of belief' on the Bible. The impression he gives is that these 'differences' are absolutely contradictory and totally irreconcilable. This is not true. As pointed out by R. Martin, the principle of the harmony of the Scriptures 'goes right to the heart of the Christian concern with the

5. S. G. F. Brandon, *ibid.*

6. M. Wiles, *op. cit.*

7. *Ibid.*, pp 5-6.

8. *Ibid.*

Scripture, particularly the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> This principle emphasises the unity of the Bible as the word of God, rather than seeing the Bible as a symposium of discordant contributors. If God cannot contradict himself, then a diligent study and interpretation of Scripture with Scripture will eliminate apparent contradictions. Contrary to Wiles' view, the basic principles of interpreting the Scripture ought to be derived primarily from the Scriptures themselves, and not *a priori*, or philosophically superimposed from outside. Though the Bible is not the only source of Christian theology, it is primary.

Any subject-matter which is appreciably mentioned in Scripture qualifies for diligent investigation in its known historico-cultural and grammatical context, and evaluation in the light of experience. It is in this light that the belief in the existence and influence of evil spirits ought to claim adequate and unprejudiced attention in Christian theology.

### Arguing about Spirits

The existence of Satan and evil spirits was generally accepted until the *Aufklärung* (c. 1650-1780). From then on positivistic intellectualism and general scepticism have made the Bible appear strange, incomprehensible and unfamiliar. The existence of spiritual entities like angels, demons, heaven, hell, and so on, are held to be unscientific and misleading. Bultmann categorically stated, 'It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless, and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits.'<sup>10</sup> Bultmann's position has support in many other writers. Michael Wilson, for example, writes, 'I personally feel under no pressure to believe in . . . evil spirits because Jesus believed in them. . .'<sup>11</sup> And Brian Hebblethwaite finds 'grave incoherence in the idea that God might be thought to be sustaining a created universe containing fallen irredeemable non-human spirits and allowing them to interfere in the human world.'<sup>12</sup> R. H. Fuller had no hesitation in coming to the conclusion, 'we no more believe in demons.'<sup>13</sup>

The belief in Satan and other evil spirits is thus consigned to the realm of myth and superstition. Such wholesale denials of the existence of the demonic realm ignore the overall biblical evidence and contemporary pointers in that direction, and rob the Christian faith of its continuing relevance and dynamism. The very fact that Satan, demons — and even God — are beyond the awareness of the five senses is not enough reason

9. R. P. Martin, *Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1977, p 225.
10. R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', in H. W. Bartsch, ed., *Kerygma and Myth*, ET, London, SPCK, 1953, p 5.
11. Michael Wilson, 'Exorcism', *Expository Times*, LXXXVI, July 1975, p 293.
12. Brian Hebblethwaite in his letter to the *Church Times*, 6th June 1975, p 12.
13. R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles*, London, SCM Press, 1963, p 120.

to reject their existence *a priori*. So Roy Lawrence writes:

the fact that the devil and demons are normally beyond the awareness of our senses is not a conclusive reason for rejecting them. Science has shown that there are colours we cannot see with our human eye, sounds we cannot hear, concepts we cannot encompass with the human mind. It is a mysterious universe in which we live. We know only a small fraction of it. Furthermore there is an increasing amount of attested evidence which strongly suggests the existence of the demonic. Some of it comes from psychological studies or psychical research, and some from the more baffling areas of ordinary pastoral experience.<sup>14</sup>

Analogies seldom work perfectly. It is doubtful if demonic forces could be placed on the same level as the colours and sounds which are beyond ordinary human perception. However, the Bible talks of the invisible God having created all things, both visible and invisible (Col. 1:15,16).

### The Biblical Viewpoint

The Old Testament appears none too fertile a ground of information for belief in evil spirits. Yahweh was the acknowledged source of all things, so much so that even the lying spirit that spoke through the prophet Zedekiah was among 'all the host of heaven' that stood before Yahweh in the celestial court (1 Kg. 22:19-23). The only reference to a tormenting evil spirit in the Old Testament is in connection with King Saul. This evil spirit (*rûach rā'âh*) was from Yahweh (1 Sam. 16:14). Even the popular names for the acknowledged head of the world of evil spirits, *viz* 'Satan' or 'the devil', are sparingly used in the Old Testament. Two words are translated into 'devil' in the Old Testament, *Sā'ir* (Lev. 17:7; 2 Chr. 11:15; Isa. 13:21, 34:14) and *sêd* (spoiler, destroyer, cf. Dt. 32:17; Psa. 106:37). The word 'Satan' (hater, accuser, adversary, opposing spirit) is found some sixteen times in the Old Testament, in 1 Chr. 21:18; Psa. 109:6; Zech. 3:1-2, and in Job chapters 1-2 which account for twelve of those times. It is clear from the preceding that the doctrine of Satan and of evil spirits is not well developed in the Old Testament. It was in post-exilic Judaism that the belief in evil spirits became prominent, as a result of the greater interaction of the Jews with the outside world. The angel Raphael reportedly instructed Tobit to ban evil spirits from a bridal chamber by burning the heart and liver of fish in fire (Tobit 6:7, 16:17, 8:3). Neither the Jewish writer and historian Josephus,<sup>15</sup> nor the scribe Johanan ben Zakkai,<sup>16</sup> nor the secluded Essenes<sup>17</sup> were insulated from the popular belief in evil spirits.

14. Roy Lawrence, *Invitation to Healing*, Eastbourne, Kingsway Publications, p 63.

15. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:11:5; 8:47; etc. For greater details cf. James Dunn and Graham Twelftree, 'Demon Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament', *Churchman*, Vol 94, No 3, 1980, pp 210ff.

16. Cf. *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol 2, p 199, citing Pesik dRK 406.

17. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 15, pp 118-119.

From the available evidence, belief in evil spirits in later Judaism, important thought it was, was peripheral as far as official religion was concerned.<sup>18</sup> But this can hardly be said of primitive Christianity. Not only was the belief in evil spirits, with the corresponding practice of exorcism, important in the early Church, it was very much central; and this centrality probably goes back to Jesus himself. It is perhaps significant that the very first miracle Jesus performed (as recorded by Mark, widely believed to be the oldest Gospel in our possession) was the exorcism of an unclean spirit (*pneuma akatharton*)<sup>19</sup>. 'Of the thirteen healing stories in Mark's Gospel, the largest single category is that of exorcisms. . . .'<sup>20</sup> Mark uses *pneuma* with or without qualification no less than fourteen times to refer to foul spirits. Matthew has four such usages, while Luke has twelve. In the Acts there are nine instances while the Apocalypse has three.<sup>21</sup> An evil spirit could be known by the affliction or condition it causes, or the extraordinary power it conferred on a person, hence there are deaf and dumb spirits, or spirits of divination.<sup>22</sup> These spirits are portrayed as wicked, with some more wicked than others.<sup>23</sup> Their sole aim is to ensnare man and thereby thwart God's purpose of salvation.

Another conspicuous word-group used for, or in connection with, evil spirits is made up of *daimonion*, *daimōn* and the verb *daimonizomai*. The noun *daimonion* (a demon or evil spirit in the New Testament) appears ten times in Matthew, twelve times in Mark (if we include the textually doubtful ending of Mk 16:17), and twenty-one times in Luke. The word appears six times in John's Gospel and not at all in Acts. Paul uses it four times in 1 Cor. 10:20-22 (cf. e.g., 'what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons (*daimoniois*) and not to God'). *Daimonion* is used three times elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>24</sup> The equivalent *daimōn* is very rare in the New Testament, appearing once each in Matthew, Mark and Luke.<sup>25</sup> The other occurrences are at Rev. 16:14 and 18:2. The verb *daimonizomai* (to be possessed or oppressed by a demon) is used seven times in the New Testament, but exclusively in the Gospels.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to ordinary demons that afflict people here on earth, Paul apparently recognised another category or hierarchy of spirit-beings which he called *archai* (singular *archē*, i.e. principalities or princes of

18. See *The Encyclopaedia of Jewish Religion*, London, Phoenix House, 1965, p 112.

19. See Mark 1:21-29.

20. Cf. Dunn and Twelftree, *op. cit.*, p 211.

21. Those calculations have been done from Robert Young's *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, Iowa Falls, Riverside Book and Bible House, n.d.

22. Cf. Mark 9:17,25; Acts 16:16.

23. Acts 19:12-16; Luke 11:26 and Matthew 12:45.

24. That is, at 1 Tim. 4:1; Jas 2:19; and Rev. 9:20.

25. Mt 8:31; Mk 5:21 and Lk. 8:29.

26. That is, three times each in Matthew and Mark and once in John's Gospel, in debunking those who accused Jesus of being demon-possessed.

spiritual existence), *exousiai* (authorities), *kosmokratores* (world-sovereigns) and *ta pneumatika tēs ponērias* (spiritual hosts of wickedness) whose abode is in 'the heavenly places'.<sup>27</sup> R. P. Martin writes,

The enemies Paul has in mind are however not simply the human agents which oppress the churches; behind them he sees malign forces of evil. . . the spiritual hierarchy of evil are thought of here as having detached themselves in rebellion against the cosmic Lord and so as being in active opposition to Him and His people.<sup>28</sup>

### The African Perspective

When the Evangelist wrote that Jesus and the apostles cast out evil spirits, or when Paul talked of spiritual forces in the heavenly places, they may have been the victims of their cultural background. But such an explanation is becoming less satisfactory. Not without justification, many people who cannot be said to be ignorant accept the belief in the existence of 'personal spirit-beings or demons acting as agents of the supremely evil one'.<sup>29</sup> In his informative submission on the subject, Dow advances a number of reasons in defence of this position. First of all, he points to what he calls the correspondence between descriptions of alleged demonic phenomena as encountered in contemporary exorcisms, and the descriptions of exorcisms in the New Testament.<sup>30</sup> This suggests *prima facie* that we are dealing with the same behavioural reality. Observation and investigation show that those believed to be victims of spiritual bondage experience complete and immediate release after a commanding prayer of exorcism where other methods appear to have failed. This not only applies to pathological, psychosomatic or psychiatric conditions, but also to certain moral aberrations.<sup>31</sup>

Another corroborative correspondence lies in unusual and super-human manifestations like inordinate strength (as in Mk 5:3-4; Acts 19:13-20), the power to divine or predict the future (as in Acts 16:16-19), the power to become invisible, levitate, metamorphose into an animal or some other object, immunity to hurt from fire, machet cuts, piercing with sharp instruments and even bullets. But, surprisingly, these abilities are said to disappear completely after conversion. A former witch called Doreen Irvine, for example, has described an occasion on which she

27. Cf. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, London, Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd, 1967 reprint, p 53, etc.

28. R. P. Martin, 'Ephesians', in D. Guthrie, *et al*, eds., *New Bible Commentary*, IVP, 1970, p 1122.

29. See Graham Dow, 'The Case for the Existence of Demons', in *Churchman*, Vol 94, No. 3, 1980, pp 199-208.

30. *Ibid*.

31. See Don Basham, *Deliver us from Evil*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1972, pp 63,119; Francis MacNutt, *Healing*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria, 1974, 1979, p 195.

made herself invisible and walked through fire.<sup>32</sup> In the course of research in August 1980, I met a preacher who was visiting Jattu in Bendel State, Nigeria, who claimed that he had the power to become invisible, or to be immune to machet cuts or bullets while he was still a magician and political thug before his conversion. Stories abound in Africa of how the ancient fathers who were steeped in traditional magic and sorcery became invisible, disappeared or changed into non-human objects during wars. This is not to say that those powers always worked for them; they failed at times, especially when confronted with a higher power. Hence such people had to observe taboos, keep strictly to prescribed formulae, and continue searching for higher sources of power. Demonic existence is often the best explanation for the manifestation of such extraordinary abilities. Thus Doreen Irvine and Raphael Gasson, a former medium, had no doubts that their abilities to levitate or become invisible were solely attributable to the evil spirits whom they invoked.<sup>33</sup>

The correspondence between the New Testament phenomena and their present-day counterparts extends to the categories in which such phenomena are perceived. It is doubtful whether the Evangelists were merely naive and superstitious, such that they always interpreted pathological disorder in demonic terms because of the prevailing cultural circumstances.<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, these writers often exhibited considerable discernment in describing similar disorders on certain occasions in demonic terms, and, on other occasions as normal illnesses. For example, a dumb and blind person was reportedly cured by exorcism (Mt. 12:22-23; 9:32), whereas the laying on of hands, with no hint of exorcism, is used for the cure of a dumb man (Mk 7:32-33) and a blind man (Mt. 8:22-25). It was recognised in the ancient world that mental disorders could arise from purely organic or pathological causes, or alternatively from demonic.<sup>35</sup> This is also applicable to the traditional African position. Professor T. Ranger has indicated that, in pre-colonial times, the African had a cosmology of health which put diseases into two categories, the 'Diseases of God' which were natural, avoidable and only treated with herbs; and the 'Diseases of Man' which were caused by wickedness. The latter category were afflictions produced by the malice of sorcerers or

32. Doreen Irvine, *From Witchcraft to Christ*, St Louis, Concordia, 1973, pp 95-98.

33. Irvine, *ibid.*, p 94; Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*, Plainfield, New Jersey, Logos, 1966, p 132.

34. For example *vide* the claim of Michael Wilson, 'Exorcism', in the *Expository Times*, Vol LXXXVI, July 1975, p 293.

35. See G. Dow, *op. cit.*, citing Herodotus, *History*, 2:173; 6:84; and Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease*. Both K. McAll, 'The 'Ministry of Deliverance'', in the *Expository Times*, LXXXVI, July 1975, pp 296-298 and John Richards, *But Deliver us from Evil*, London, DLT, 1974, ch 6, make similar distinctions in modern times.

witches, or afflictions caused by offences against ancestral spirits.<sup>36</sup> The treatment of such diseases lay in the spiritual sphere since they were caused by the actions of spirits.

In a 1980 survey conducted in Nigeria, I observed that belief in the spiritual causation of illness is still very strong in post-colonial Africa, even among the highly educated. According to one of my respondents, demonic or witchcraft activities are beyond scientific investigation. Unexplainable situations, like not being able to diagnose the cause of, or medically treat, a certain ailment, even in the best-equipped hospitals, tend to convince many Africans that evil spiritual agencies exist. It is not true to say that such beliefs disappear with advancement in education, or that they mark primitiveness as against civilisation. According to E. L. Mascall, apart from Christian tradition, the invoking of evil spirits has existed in far too vast a variety of different cultures, classes and social conditions to be simply an example of childish credulity.<sup>37</sup> What education may do is to remove the grossly superstitious elements in tradition. The informed African need not believe, for example, that it is the spirit of his dead grandfather that has re-incarnated in his son just because there are physical or behavioural resemblances. Many African pastors with whom I have discussed these matters have no doubts about the existence of evil spirits. They often give examples to buttress their conviction.<sup>38</sup> Franklin Donaldson has reported that the Revd Simon Mundeta of Zimbabwe within his African cultural milieu believes that the spirits are there 'just as we read in the New Testament.'<sup>39</sup> But Mundeta departs from his traditional African culture by not worshipping the ancestral spirits. He is fully convinced that 'only God, revealed through Jesus deserves our worship, and the Holy Spirit alive and working in us is stronger than the evil spirits'.<sup>40</sup>

The full import of discussion thus far is that the assertions of Bultmann, Fuller, and others that evil spirits do not exist are not to be taken seriously. Thomson Jay Hudson, a noted spiritualist, has been cited as

36. Terence Ranger, 'Medical Science and Pentecost: The Dilemma of Anglicanism in Africa' — a paper at the Ecclesiastical History Society conference in Bangor, July 15-18 1981.
37. E. L. Mascall, *The Christian Universe*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, cf. pp 118-119.
38. Such pastors include the Revd Joseph Kurewa, a Methodist minister from Zimbabwe, in a private interview at Château de Bossey in Switzerland, 17 June 1979; the Ven. Archdeacon G. K. Ajomo, a retired Nigerian Anglican clergyman, private interview at Okape in Akoko-Edo, Bendel State, Nigeria, 11 August 1980; the Revd J. B. S. Coker of the Church of God Mission, Benin City, Nigeria in response to a questionnaire item in August 1980.
39. Franklin Donaldson, *The Sister Buck Memorial Hospital: Project in Spiritual Hospital*, 1966-67, p 7. (I owe knowledge of this source to Dr J. Masamba whom I met at the World Council of Churches Headquarters in Geneva, 1979.)
40. *Ibid.*



saying, 'The man who denies the phenomena of spiritism is not entitled to be called a sceptic, he is simply ignorant.'<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

The belief in the existence of rebellious evil spirits opposed to God's plan of salvation and hostile to the people of God (*ton laon tou Theou*) has positive implications for Christian theology. Christianity under such an assumption cannot afford to be complacent. It is neither contradictory nor dualistic to believe in a good God who is spirit; in his incarnate and risen Son; and in his Holy Spirit who indwells believers; and at the same time to believe in the existence of malevolent spirits as affirmed in the New Testament. In fact, contrary to Michael Wilson's assertion, such belief provides a satisfactory *raison d'être* for the incarnation.<sup>42</sup> According to the Johannine school of thought, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). As Dow rightly points out, Jesus is recorded as viewing his mission in terms of a struggle with Satan, and it is difficult to treat this as culturally relative while continuing to recognise as true his claim to the divine authority of his mission.<sup>43</sup> By the appearance of his Son, and through the Son's total mission on earth, God disarmed 'all principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them. . . .' (Col. 2:15).

The New Testament conceives of Christians as involved in spiritual warfare. So Paul enjoins the believer to arm himself with the panoply of God (Eph. 6:10-18). In such spiritual and moral seriousness, in other words, Christianity in its full vitality, lie the success and the effectiveness of the indigenous *Aladura* churches in Africa whose members, following the Pauline exhortation to pray at all times in the Spirit, 'rise up daily, morning and night, and pray for hours.'<sup>44</sup> They also carry out the ministry of healing, exorcism and the discernment of spirits. To wish evil spirits out of existence because it is no longer 'scientific' to hold such a belief does a great disservice to Christian theology, which ought to seek to be faithful to the New Testament. The result of such an attitude is usually spiritual coldness, apathy and disillusionment. The better alternative is to create what Irving Hexham calls a 'dynamic theology' which proclaims the triumph of Christ over all powers of evil, and his ability to liberate the tormented soul.<sup>45</sup>

41. Victor Ernest, *I Talked with Spirits*, Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers and London, Coverdale House Publishers, 1970, preface, citing T. J. Hudson, *The Law of Psychic Phenomena*.
42. Michael Wilson had said that the reason he felt free not to believe in evil spirits is 'because I believe in the Incarnation', *cf. op. cit.*, p 293.
43. G. Dow, *op. cit.*, p 204.
44. See N. I. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution*, London, SPCK, 1981, p 279.
45. Irving Hexham, 'Theology, Exorcism and the Amplification of Deviancy', in *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol XLIX, 1972, *cf. pp* 111-116.

The Jews believed that the sure protection against evil forces was obedience to the Torah and a life of prayer. From the Christian perspective, Victor Ernest writes,

There is only one way to cope with the spiritual realities surging beneath the visible surfaces of life: know the revelations in God's word and live by them. This requires primarily diligent Bible study and prayer.<sup>46</sup>

46. Ernest, *op. cit.*, p 76.

# WILLIAM WILLIAMS PANTYCELYN'S ESCHATOLOGY AS SEEN ESPECIALLY IN HIS *AURORA BOREALIS* OF 1774\*

DEWI ARWEL HUGHES  
POLYTECHNIC OF WALES, PONTYPRIDD

William Williams of Pantycelyn is little known outside Wales despite his immense contribution to the progress of the Evangelical Revival in the Principality. His heart set on a career in medicine, he was converted when he accidentally heard Howell Harris preaching in Talgarth church-yard and dedicated his considerable abilities to spreading the gospel. He was an indefatigable itinerant preacher and was famous as a leader of society meetings. His enormous literary output includes over 3000 hymns, books on the running of the 'experience meetings' and marriage, a large volume on the religions of the world and a host of various pamphlets among which is the one on the *Aurora Borealis* discussed in this article. Some idea of his work may be had from his two collections of English hymns (see N. Cynhafa Jones (ed), *Gweithiau Williams Pantycelyn*, Newport 1891, vol 2), a poor translation of one of his epic poems (*A View of the Kingdom of Christ*, trans. R. Jones, London 1878), and a recent translation of his work on the Society meetings (*The Experience Meeting*, trans. B. Lloyd Jones, Evangelical Movement of Wales 1973).

'My brother Agrupnus,

About 10 o'clock last night, I, and a myriad others saw what I believe to be one of the greatest wonders of nature; one of the most difficult things for philosophers to understand; they have much to say about the nature of lightning, thunder, earthquakes, volcanoes and a variety of frightening phenomena in heaven and earth, but concerning what I am now discussing what light they have is perfect darkness; empty and groundless reasonings. I was invited out of my house with haste and fright; the whole sky was red, greyish blue, yellow, a deep red and crimson; the colour of blood, the colour of the dawn, the colour of purple, and the colour of amber; all the colours of the rainbow, and like it but with this difference, that the whole sky was dancing and in constant movement as if intended to shock and terrify the guilty part of the world, but to create joy unspeakable and full of glory in the inheritors of eternal life. This marvellous phenomenon is called these days, *Aurora Borealis*, because it

\* A version of this paper was read at the Historical Theology Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship at Cambridge in July 1985.

is a light in the north. But now it has spread over the zenith of the whole heaven; it has not yet completely encircled the sky, but there are only a few degrees between south and east which it has not yet filled.<sup>1</sup>

This is how William Williams begins his discussion of what must have been very dramatic appearances of the Northern Lights over Wales in the early 1770s.<sup>2</sup> Having described the phenomenon he then goes on to discuss some of the theories put forward to explain it by the philosophers. All these efforts, despite their obvious interest to Williams, he considered entirely groundless. He was fully convinced in his own mind that these appearances of the Northern Lights were in fact a sign from God that certain great events were about to take place:

‘. . . for I cannot but look upon it as one of the greatest wonders ever seen in God’s heaven, and some special sign of some great events that are about to come to pass, not a sign of some changes in the natural world, such as tumults between the kings of the earth, wars, the destruction of cities and great nations, but some special sign of the extending of the borders of Christ’s Gospel, and of the success of the Word in the last days, the fall of antichrist, the calling of the Jews, the complete destruction of paganism and Mohametanism, the setting up of Christ’s kingdom over the face of the whole world, when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”.’<sup>3</sup>

He then goes on to justify such a conclusion by referring first of all to the heavenly signs, of blessing in particular, in the Bible. In this context he discusses the sign of the rainbow given to Noah, the plagues of Egypt, the darkness noise and earthquake at Sinai and the pillar of cloud and fire. This is how he describes the latter sign, which is a favourite symbol in his hymns:

‘But behold, chiefly, the remarkable sign, the symbol of His presence, shadow of things to come in the church, the pillar of cloud and fire, which led Israel through the desert forty years, which reached from the earth to the clouds; fire by night and cloud by day; this column stretching into the sky was so high that it was probably visible to the whole land of Egypt, the whole of stony Arabia, the land of Moab, Midian, Ammon, Amalek and Philistia; beyond the Jordan also in Syria, Palestine and all the land of the Hivites and Jebusites where twenty-four kings reigned, so that all the nations could see the wonders of God to these people. Which makes quite clear that God does give wonders on earth, and in heaven, of some great

1. Translated from *Gweithiau William Williams, Pantycelyn*, Vol 2 ed. Garfield H Hughes, Cardiff 1967 p 163.
2. Interestingly John Wesley also mentions a sighting of the Aurora in his Journal for Mon. Oct. 23rd 1769: ‘This evening there was such an Aurora Borealis as I never saw before: the colours, both the white, the flame colour, and the scarlet, were so exceedingly strong and beautiful. But they were awful too; so that abundance of people were frightened into many good resolutions’.
3. *Gweithiau William Williams, op.cit.* p 164.

blessing that he is going to give his people.<sup>4</sup>

Having discussed the signs given at the birth and death of Jesus he naturally goes on to discuss the eschatological signs of the New Testament. He begins with the discourse recorded in Matthew 24. After he had prophesied that the temple was going to be completely destroyed the disciples came to Jesus asking 'when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming, and the end of the age?':<sup>5</sup>

'He, firstly, gives them signs of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, together with the breaking down of the whole Jewish dispensation, which event was to be so awful and tremendous as to be a fitting symbol of the end of the world; and that the signs which were to precede the destruction of Jerusalem were very similar to those that would precede His coming to call the Jews, and the millennium; and the same signs again like those that will precede His last coming to judge the world.'<sup>6</sup>

Williams believed that Jesus was prophesying three 'comings' in Matthew 24, that is, firstly, his coming to destroy the temple, secondly to restore the Jews and to destroy the antichrist, and thirdly his final appearing to judge the world. All or most of the signs referred to by Jesus he believed were relevant to each of these 'comings' because Jesus states in Matthew 24:34 that 'this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.' That such an understanding of prophecy is necessary or possible he further illustrates by reference to Joel 2:28ff. Parts of this prophecy (vss.30, 31) are very similar to what Jesus includes among the signs of the end in the Gospels, whereas in the Acts the prophecies are seen as being fulfilled in the blessings of Pentecost. This is further confirmation that the same prophecy can refer to different events. And since the heavenly signs refer generally to events in the church, whereas signs on earth refer to coming events among the ungodly, Williams believed that the Northern Lights, as a dramatic heavenly event must prefigure some great happening in the life of the church, which he calls 'the latter days of the gospel.' At this point he turns his attention to the prophecies of Revelation 18-20:

'The fall of Babylon the great, of all the errant churches in the world, in the Rev. xviii, together with the reign of our Lord for a thousand years, xx, is one of the most wonderful things in the Old Testament and the New . . . . . ; the gospel of salvation, the word of life, will go forward with success through the command and authority of King Jesus, to enlighten and convict all the countries which have been in darkness, and every church which has prostituted from the faith, in life, spirit and doctrine. This is the dawn of the Millennium when hosts of ministers of

4. *Ibid.* p. 167.

5. Mt 24:3 (NIV).

6. *Gweithiau William Williams, op.cit.* p 169.

the gospel will appear, following in the footsteps of their glorious Teacher; dressed in white, and pure in life, spirit and principles; and going forward successfully in the victory of the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Williams believed that New Testament prophecy pointed to a period of unparalleled success for the gospel and he thought it reasonable to expect some sign of the coming of such a glorious time:

‘This will be a great transformation in the world; and there is no suggestion that there will not be some great signs in heaven and earth before these things come to pass. Is it not very likely that the lights which began to appear in the north about seventy years ago, as the greatest wonder seen during this time, have been given by the Mediator of the New Testament as a sign to the world of his coming to establish his kingdom upon earth in a more glorious manner than ever before?’<sup>8</sup>

To justify this assertion he then gives various reasons why he believes the Aurora to be a sign of a period of great blessing rather than any other event. For example, he argues that it cannot be a sign of the end of the world since ‘the fullness of the Gentiles’ has not yet been gathered in, and the Jews have not been converted as a nation. Again, it cannot be a sign of the destruction of a city or nation because it is not localized above a particular city or nation. Finally it cannot be a sign of a period of persecution or martyrdom because it would have preceded other such periods in church history. With such arguments, which are typical of much apocalyptic reasoning, he moves on to his positive arguments for believing that the Northern Lights were a portent of a great extension of the kingdom of Christ. Unlike many other apocalyptists, however, Williams includes a very important proviso before going any further. His prophetic speculations were not of the essence of his faith:

‘Even though I do not believe it as a matter of salvation or as a part of the fundamental principles of faith, or press it upon anyone in that way, but as something which is according to reason very likely to be as I suggest . . . .’

He gives six reasons why he believes the Northern Lights to be a sign of the great blessing of the end-times:

‘Firstly, the Lord has never given such an excellent, continuous and glorious sign as this in the heavens before any human destruction, death or fall, but before something that is for the good and peace of man . . . .’

‘Secondly, the times are drawing near to the Millennium . . . .’ The evidence he adduces for this assertion is the weakening he sees in the power of the Church of Rome and Islam.

‘Thirdly, there is in the colours seen in these lights something which bears a resemblance to the suffering of the Messiah, and so we can

7. *Ibid.* pp.172-3.

8. *Ibid.* p.173.

suppose that it is a sign, or at least one of the signs, of the Son of Man.' Then follows a discussion of the colours of the chief priest's garments as described in Exodus 28 and Leviticus 8 with their typological fulfilment in the Son of Man. He notes that the colours of the Lights are also the same as the colours of the rainbow and he has already argued that the rainbow was a sign of the covenant that was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ.

'Fourthly, the powerful, bold and swift appearance of these lights make it a very apt sign of the confident, courageous and fearless spirit that believers are to have . . . .'

'But fifthly, the most remarkable thing about these Lights is its playfulness; the way it dances and weaves in and out; and that not as if it signified wrath, destruction, . . . . men under arms, . . . . the burning of cities, . . . .; but to the contrary there is in it a lively, peaceful playfulness; a white column drives itself into a black cloud, just as an enlightened sermon causes the darkness in the understanding to flee; and in half a minute a red column takes the place of the white one, as if to signify that men have just been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see the eternal righteousness, and sin defeated in the blood of the Lamb. Again in a moment, blue, red, crimson, white and yellow can be seen dancing through each other as if to signify a company of believers rejoicing, exulting, blessing and praising the Author of the salvation of wretched sinners . . . . What better sign could the Lord give of the spiritual exultation and joy of the last days, than a bright light in the sky, to appear in the night and made up of a variety of colours, and these to dance and play among each other without harming heaven or earth, land or sea, sun or moon, star or planet, and without one column harming another either, like men in a feast of love and unity; and even if the Holy Spirit will not work so strongly on men's spirits so that they will sing, laugh, jump, shout and dance with their bodies, yet the Lord borrows these comparisons as the best to convey the inward joy of the saints in the last days . . . .'

'But the last reason of all that has convinced me of these thoughts is the revival which came to the churches shortly after the first appearance of these Lights. Whoever has taken careful note of the Lord's work these last forty years can see that the word of the kingdom is as seed sown in a field; and at the beginning of that time it broke out, sprouted and grew until it became a great tree, so that now the birds of the air can nest in its branches.'<sup>9</sup> Williams fully expected that the revival which had broken out in the Northern hemisphere, in Britain and North America, would spread over the whole world — just as the Northern Lights having appeared in the North spread over the whole sky. 'I am ready to believe,' he concludes his booklet, 'that summer is at hand.'

Many of the hopeful themes of the *Aurora Borealis* were not in fact new to William Williams in 1774. Many of the themes were touched upon, for

9. *Ibid.* p 174-76.

example, in a letter which he wrote in English to Howell Harris in December 1745 during the disturbance caused by the Young Pretender:

‘Many here now a days longs to know the art of believing; for tis little more we have to go against sin Satan yea the french and Popish Pretender — the wars and tumults abroad and at home especialy the rebellion in Scotland and ye fear of an invasion hath Destroyd great eal of our carnal confidence self security lukewarmness and wilrdly-mindedness and stird up faith watchfullness Diligence with pure zeal for God and his interest Xt and his Gospel — king George and his peacable government — . . . . . here are some fears by reason of the rebellion in the north but it wd fill your soul with Love to God to see how fervent the poor Despised Methodist Pray for King George the Second and the present government — we had a Society last week to fast, and Pray with our Arms Certainly God was there I doubt not but many Prayers went to Heaven and shall be answered in God’s time — I expect Dayly to hear of the fall of our enemies — we have very many here and in Cardiganshire that is willing to wear arms as soon as Called for — Certainly this Disproves their Illoyalty as was accused by some . . . . . in the midst of wars and tumults my Dear Br stand still and you shall see the salvation of God how long before this rebellion cease or how far God will permit em to go I know not I am apt to belive a popish pretender will not prevail long — the church of God will be more glorious in the time to come — Glorious promises are not fillfilled — is the Gospel preachd thro the whole world as promised in ye Gospel by our Saviour himself — no no all America as yet never herd such thing — has ye great Babilon fallen no no its time I hope is at hand — as ye poor ignorant sinfull and reproachfull jews ben calld Rom 11 no but tis certain to come has the Devil been bound for 1000 years Rev 19 I suppose not — has the fullness of ye gentills come in — has the glorious promises of Esay Esekiel Revel: been fillfilled — no no Dr Br pray for em — we have great reason to Expect these things in short — Dark cloud in the morning is no proof ye Day is far — hard travelling pain is no sign ye Delivery is far, wars famine pestilene kings rageing one against another is no sign ye Glorious Day of ye Gospel is far off — who knows but Xs kingdom of peace may come of the shakeing Empires kindoms states &c many Prayers are gone up now of late and formerly that the Idolatrous church of Rome shd be pulled Down — jews converted — and Mohamentanism rooted up — May these come to pass Amen Amen Amen — . . . . .’<sup>10</sup>

Of course, William Williams is best remembered in Wales as a hymn writer and this theme does appear, albeit as a very minor one, from very early on in his career as a hymn writer. The earliest is to be found in the

10. ‘Un o lythrau anghyoeddedig Williams, Pantycelyn’ gol G Tibbot, *Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfinaid*, vol xx p 131ff.



fourth part of his first collection entitled *Aleluia* published in 1746. This hymn was later given the heading 'Promises' with a reference to Isaiah 11:6-9 which is a favourite text for those who believe that there will be a great extension of Christ's kingdom before the end. Fortunately from the point of view of this paper Williams composed his most famous hymn on this theme in English! It was composed in 1772 and has since become one of the best known missionary hymns and deserves to be quoted in full:

O'er those gloomy hills of darkness  
Look, my soul, be still and gaze;  
All the promises do travail  
With a glorious day of grace.  
    Blessed jubilee,  
Let Thy glorious morning dawn.

Let the Indian, let the Negro,  
Let the rude barbarian see  
That divine and glorious conquest  
Once obtained on Calvary;  
    Let the Gospel  
Loud resound from pole to pole.

Kingdoms wide that sit in darkness,  
Let them have the glorious light,  
And from Eastern coast to Western  
May the morning chase the night;  
    And redemption,  
Freely purchased, win the day.

May the glorious days approaching,  
From eternal darkness dawn,  
And the everlasting Gospel  
Spread abroad Thy holy Name;  
    Thousand years  
Soon appear, make no delay.

Lord I long to see that morning,  
When Thy gospel shall abound,  
And Thy grace get full possession  
Of the happy promis'd ground;  
    All the borders  
Of the great Immanuel's land.

Fly abroad, eternal Gospel,  
Win and conquer, never cease;  
May Thy eternal wide dominions

Multiply, and still increase;  
May Thy sceptre  
Sway the enlighten'd world around.

O let Moab yield and tremble,  
Let Philistia never boast,  
And let India proud be scattered  
With its innumerable host;  
And the glory  
Jesus, only be to Thee.<sup>11</sup>

In 1757 William Williams published a poem entitled 'On the earthquakes that occurred in various extensive kingdoms in the year 1755 and 1756.' Among the earthquakes referred to in this poem, of course, is the famous Lisbon earthquake of 1755. News of earthquakes inevitably turn the minds of the godly to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:7 and thus to thoughts of the end. It is not at all that surprising, therefore, to find Williams beginning his poem with the question, 'Is the end drawing nigh?' His conclusion, however, is that the end cannot come since some other great events have not yet occurred:

God, if you intend to end the world,  
First fulfil all in Thy word,  
Call Thy elect together  
From around the great earth;  
May Thy Gospel sound abroad to every land,  
And cleanse the myriads in your blood  
And grant them true healing,  
And then come down.

In 1762 William Williams began publishing one of the most remarkable volumes produced by any of the Methodist leaders of the 18th century. The book was entitled *Pantheologia or The History of all the Religions of the World*. It was published in seven parts, the last part appearing probably in 1778, and the completed work runs to 654 pages. This volume deserves a study in its own right<sup>12</sup> but one would expect some reference at least to eschatological themes in a volume much of which is dedicated to non-Protestant religion. Williams' hopes for the 'pagans' can be seen in the following, fairly extensive, quotation. It comes from the section in which the American Indians are being discussed — a section which refers

11. N Cynhafal Jones (ed.) *Gweithiau Williams Pantycelyn*, Vol. 2, Newport 1891.p.428. This famous hymn comes from William's second collection of English hymns entitled *Gloria in Excelsis* which was composed at the request of Lady Huntingdon and published in 1772. For other hymns on the same theme cf pp. 100, 123, 213, 218, 346, 369.
12. See C G Williams 'The Unfeigned Faith and an Eighteenth Century Pantheologia', *Numen*, vol 15, Nov 1968, pp.208-217.

to Cotton Mather's account of John Eliot's missionary endeavours. The whole volume is written in the form of a dialogue between Apodemus the inveterate traveller and Eusebius who is keen to learn from his experiences abroad. Having heard the account of the religion of the American Indians Eusebius asks:

'Once again, do you think that the gospel in all its purity must go into every part of this immense land, before the Son of man returns in his glory?' Apodemus has no doubt whatsoever that this question must be answered in the affirmative:

'Not one corner of it will be left, even if it were three times the size it is, into which the light of the gospel will not shine with indescribable and glorious brightness, and it may be that proselytes being made there by the Church of Rome and other churches is but preparing the way for the great Sun of Righteousness, the true light of the Gospel, which must rise with healing in its wings, and there is little room to censure one who thinks that the time will come when the Gospel will encompass the earth as the great sun does now; and that this natural sun has never seen a country or island, that the light of the Gospel will not also see, if there are any inhabitants there. Both the Sun and the Gospel have travelled from East to West thus far; who knows but that the Sun of Righteousness will not encircle the earth until it shine again on the land of the East, on old Jerusalem? and so that in this way the righteousness of the Gentiles will be brought in, and then all Israel, the word of the kingdom having appeared in their country for the second time, should be saved.'

There follows a section showing how historically Christianity did expand from East to West leaving in darkness many lands to the East (Asia) and to the South (Africa). He eventually returns to the story of the entrance of the gospel into America:

'But now, in the last two hundred years, it (i.e. the Gospel) leapt over the Atlantic ocean, three or four thousand miles to the West, into the midst of the Indians and has clothed some of them in fine linen, white and pure; the name of Christ has spread abroad there, the orthodox teaching of the Gospel has subdued a number of districts, and especially those under the jurisdiction of the king of England; and the Papal religion has subdued even more, which only serves to disentangle the spirits of the Indians from paganism, and ripen them to receive the true religion of Christ; and perhaps their land will be given as spoil to Protestant kings, so that the light of the word will go from one part of America to another some seven thousand miles, and then if it is true that it will encompass the world, who knows but that it will not journey on to the other side of the world, to enlighten the island and kingdoms in Asia that have ever lain in darkness; it does not have many thousands of miles to travel from America before it meets the lands of Asia . . . . . and if merchants can discover this route, who can tell but that the Gospel will discover it also

and come . . . . . to Japan, Borneo, China, India, . . . . . and pull down the whole edifice of Mahomet and his followers, and to make even the Turk a true Christian, and so the Jews that are now scattered into every corner of the world, seeing such wonders as this, should be made ripe to accept this teaching, that the Messiah has come, so that there would be fulfilled the Scriptures found in Is. xi, 11, 12, 13; and in Ezek.xxxvii 21, 22, 23; and in Hosea iii 4,5; and in Zech.x 6, 7, 8.<sup>13</sup>

Not surprisingly in the section dealing with the Jewish religion Williams returns to the references listed at the end of this passage, and adds Rom.11:25 which is the critical New Testament passage for those who believe in the eventual salvation of the Jewish nation. It is apparent from this latter passage that Williams also believed in the return of the Jews to Israel as an unified and reconstituted nation which would then turn to Christ and accept him as the Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

So much for the evidence for William Williams' eschatological ideas. The first point to be made by way of comment is that he had inherited these ideas from the 17th century and from 17th-century Puritanism in particular. This is not surprising since he had been brought up the son of a ruling elder in a Nonconformist congregation and sent to finish his education at the Nonconformist Academy of Llwyn-llwyd which was near Hay-on-Wye. It was during his time at Llwyn-llwyd that he came into contact with Howell Harris, was converted, became a Methodist and eventually forsook his Nonconformity to become an Anglican cleric. But he never forsook the theology that he had absorbed as a Nonconformist, as his eschatological ideas prove. It was not until the middle of the 17th century that it came to be commonly believed among the descendants of the Protestant Reformers that the church would experience a period of unparalleled success before the last judgment<sup>15</sup>, but for Williams this is a basic axiom in all his eschatological thinking. For example, the Northern Lights could not be a sign of the end of the world because the great expansion in the church which he calls the bringing in of the 'fullness of the Gentiles' had not yet occurred. Again in his letter to Howell Harris, in which he discusses the threat of the Pretender, Charles Stuart, he is not despondent because, however great the threat to the church in Britain from a Roman Catholic prince, he looks forward to the time when the Church of Rome will be completely destroyed and the pure gospel will prevail world-wide. Finally, in the poem which he wrote on the earthquakes of 1755-6 he almost presumptuously reminds the Almighty that, even though earthquakes were to be among the signs of the end, he

13. William Williams, *Pantheologia*,,,, Caerfyrddin, 1762, pp.95-98.

14. *Ibid.* pp. 353-4.

15. Cf. Iain H Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, London, 1971 pp 38-55, cf R Bauckham *Tudor Apocalypse*, Sutton Courtenay, 1978, p208 ff for a study of the origins of 17th century eschatological optimism; cf also pp 173-180.

must fulfil his promises to call a great host of his elect from every nation before he comes in his Son to judge finally the living and the dead. Williams never doubts but that there will be a world-wide spiritual awakening before the end of the world.

But then we may ask precisely what form this hope took in Williams' thought. From the *Aurora* in particular we glean the conviction that the following events would occur in the end times:

1. There will be a dramatic extension of Christ's kingdom, by which is meant that many will come to believe through hearing the gospel proclaimed. This great expansion in the success of the gospel will either usher in or be accompanied by three other events, viz:
  2. The fall of antichrist.
  3. The conversion of the Jews as a nation.
  4. The complete destruction of Islam and paganism.
- It is in the context of discussing one or other of these three events that he usually mentions the millennium. They are the events that will usher in what he describes as:
5. 'The setting up of Christ's kingdom over the face of the whole world.'
  6. After a considerable length of time, not necessarily a literal thousand years, this period of kingly rule on Christ's part will culminate in the personal coming of Christ to judge the world.

All these eschatological ideas were a part of Williams' Puritan or Nonconformist inheritance and contain nothing original whatsoever.<sup>16</sup> There was, however, one important difference between him and his Puritan forbears; whereas many of the Puritans were writing in the context of persecution or even decline in the cause of true religion as they saw it, William Williams was writing in the context of the Great Awakening. Having accepted the idea that the church would see its greatest success in the last days his conviction was very much confirmed by the events occurring around him. Of the six reasons he gives for believing that the *Aurora* was a sign of the great blessing of the end times it is possible to argue that the last three were very much influenced by Williams' own experience of revival. His fourth reason, which is that the appearance of the Northern Lights are 'a very apt sign of the confident, courageous and fearless spirit that believers are to have,' reminds one of his description of the impact of the revival in the first dialogue of his book on the society meetings. He begins by describing a lifeless and hopeless group of despairing believers meeting for prayer upon whom the Spirit of God suddenly comes in power. The transformation in their worship and life was quite dramatic:

'. . . and now some were weeping, some praising, some singing, some filled with heavenly laughter, and all full of wonder and love and

16. Cf *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms . . .* Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976, p 274; Iain H Murray *op.cit.* p. 53-55.

amazement at the Lord's work — to my mind like the time of the Apostles, when the Spirit descended from on high on a handful of fearful people, and strengthened them mightily to come out of their secret hiding place into the midst of the streets of Jerusalem, and to declare the Name of the Lord before every tribe, tongue and nation that had gathered together there from the uttermost parts of the earth. As it was then, so it was here now.<sup>17</sup> It is possible to suggest that it was because he had seen with his own eyes the fearful being made fearless with the coming of the Holy Spirit that he was able to see in the Northern Lights a sign of a similar, if greater blessing. The same could be said of his fifth reason. This reason, particularly the latter part where he describes the corporate influence of the gospel proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, unquestionably arises out of Williams' own experience. In his *Letter of Martha Philopur*, published in 1762, he describes the ebullient expression of some of those who had been influenced by the powerful religious awakening that had begun at Llangeitho in that year. The fictional Martha describes her experience to her spiritual counsellor:

'The moment I have an opportunity, with the love of the Lord burning within me, I give free rein to my spiritual passions; it is natural for me to shout the Lord's praise, to bless and praise my God, to leap and jump with gladness in such a great salvation as this, which I had never known before.'<sup>18</sup> It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the sixth reason for believing the Aurora to be a sign of the great blessings of the latter days is explicitly the revival that had broken out in the 1730s in various parts of the world. Williams was confident that the Great Awakening was the beginning of the blessings of the end times, even though as things stood in 1774 there was no suggestion that the blessing of the revival was going to spread over the whole world. There is nothing like actual success in hand to confirm the belief in a future success in hope.

The second great event of the last days according to the Puritan tradition espoused by William Williams was the fall of antichrist, and his Puritan teachers were generally in no doubt whatsoever as to his identity — the antichrist was the pope, the head of the great erroneous institution that held so many in bondage. This continued to be the opinion of most Protestants throughout the 18th century, and Williams also shared it,<sup>19</sup> although he does not make a simple equation between the pope and antichrist.<sup>20</sup> To him antichrist is a spiritual principle manifested in the

17. William Williams, *The Experience Meeting*, trans. B. Lloyd Jones, The Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1973, p 9.

18. Trans from G. H. Hughes (ed) *Gweithiau William Williams Pantycelyn* Cardiff, 1967, vol. 2, p 3. cf R Geraint Gruffydd 'The Revival of 1762 and William Williams Pantycelyn' in *Revival and its Fruit*, Evangelical Library of Wales, 1981 p 27ff.

19. J R Kilsby Jones (ed) *Holl Weithiau Prydyddawl a Rhyddiaethol . . . William Williams*, London n.d. p 587.

20. Somewhat similar to John Owen in this respect, cf. *Works*, ed W H Goold, London and Edinburgh 1852, vol. 3, p 63.

papacy and also in other erroneous Christian churches and non-Christian religions. Referring to Revelation 18-20 he states:

“This all shows that the antichrist, which is variously described here as “the false prophet”, “the great whore”, . . . . “the red dragon”, or by any other name, is to be defeated by the Lord Jesus; and the gospel of life will overrun the places, kingdoms, and extensive countries that this antichrist has ruled; such as Europe which is now ruled by the Church of Rome, and other formal, lifeless churches; Asia, and a great part of Africa, which is today under the authority of Mohametanism; together with the remotest parts of the world in Asia, Africa and America, which paganism covers as a flood.’ Here Islam and other non-Christian religions are included as manifestations of the spirit of antichrist which is an identification not usually made in the 17th century. For example, John Owen identifies ‘the beast’ and ‘false prophet’ of Revelation with the ‘antichristian power’ of 1 John which is the papacy, while paganism (by which Owen seems to mean classical Roman paganism), is identified with ‘the dragon’ of Revelation.<sup>21</sup> In the 17th century, also, there was a distinct political dimension to the hope of the destruction of antichrist, because it was believed that in the last days devout Protestant princes would destroy the power of the papacy by force of arms. Something of this approach clearly remains in William Williams as seen in his letter to Howell Harris. He was confident that the popish Pretender would not prevail for long against the Protestant King George and he goes on to write of the pulling down of the idolatrous church of Rome in the context of writing about the shaking of empires, states and kingdoms. In the passage from the *Pantheologia* he also speculates that the spread of the gospel across America may be accompanied by the annexation of lands by Protestant kings, which suggests that he was thinking of the dramatic spread of the gospel in the latter days as an event with a secular as well as a spiritual dimension. Even when he comes to speculate about the spread of the gospel into Asia he foresees that the Christian missionaries will go out in the wake of the merchant. But in the *Aurora* the emphasis does seem to be rather more spiritual and the impression is created that the antichrist will be defeated by the word rather than by the sword — though what he says in the *Aurora* does not preclude the possibility that the sword will also have a place in the great drama. What we see in Williams are the remnants of the Reformers’ unfortunate approach to the relationship between the word and the sword developed in the apocalyptic of the sixteenth century which made possible the Christian justification of 19th-century colonialism and caused untold damage to the missionary

21. *Ibid.* vol. 9, p 507.

movement.<sup>22</sup>

As for the conversion of the Jews, R. Bauckham points out that the belief that they would eventually be converted was not part and parcel of the ideas about the last days developed by the 17th century, but an idea going as far back as Beza and Peter Martyr among the Reformers, and beyond them into the Middle Ages.<sup>23</sup> It was in the 17th century that this idea was incorporated into the 'millennialist' views then developed. In the *Pantheologia* Williams clearly implies that the conversion of the Jews would follow or accompany their return to Israel where they would be reconstituted as a nation. There is no suggestion, however, of the idea that Christ would come to reign personally in Jerusalem for a thousand years at that time, and neither does he mention the resurrection of the just in conjunction with the conversion of the Jews which was a common belief among premillennialists.<sup>24</sup> In his discussion of Matthew 24 he showed that Jesus could be said to 'come' in a non-personal as well as in a personal sense. There can be no doubt whatsoever that his 'coming' to destroy the temple was a 'coming' in a non-personal sense and that his final coming to judge the world will be a personal 'coming'. As far as the 'coming' to restore the Jews etc is concerned there is no suggestion that it is like the final 'coming' and much to suggest that it will be a 'coming' similar to the one to dismantle the old Jewish dispensation. Whenever Williams writes of this 'coming' to restore the Jews etc there is always a reference to some means by which it is to be effected such as 'the success of the Word', or 'the word of life will go forward', or 'hosts of ministers of the gospel will appear'. The 'coming' which he has in mind is unquestionably a time when the ordinary means of grace, in particular the proclaiming of the gospel, will be accompanied by extraordinary success.<sup>25</sup> He is not very clear as to precisely what will be the relationship

22. In the 18th century the secular power which was believed to be most likely to aid the gospel was commerial rather than military though the *two* are obviously very closely related:

Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Banner of Truth, London, 1974 p 309; William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of Heathens*, Leicester, 1792, p 68; W Monk (ed), *Livingstone's Cambridge Lectures*, 2nd ed, London, 1860, pp 151, 158, 162, 168; D Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, London, John Murray, 1857, p 28.

23. R Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978, p. 225.

24. Cf. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, London, 1815, pp. 320ff, 464ff. *The Body of Doctrinal Divinity* was first published in 1769 and is strongly pre-millennialist. Gill looked forward to 'the Spiritual Reign of Christ' (Book V, chap 12) when Christ would destroy the power of antichrist, call the Jews and subdue the nations by means of the arms of Protestant princes. Then will come 'the Millennium, or Personal Reign of Christ' (Book VII, chap. 8) when Christ will return in person, bind Satan, raise the just and then rule for a 1000 years over the renewed earth etc. It would be interesting to know how common Gill's views were in the 18th century, since Iain H Murray is of the opinion that pre-millennialism only survived in that century in 'some backwaters of Nonconformity' (*op.cit.* p.187).

25. Cf. Thomas Goodwin, *Works*, Edinburgh, 1866, vol xii, p76.



between this spiritual success and political events, but what he means by the thousand year rule of Jesus before the last judgement is a period of great success for the church along the normal channels brought about by a completely extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit. Before the last judgement Christ will rule for a long time by his Word and sacraments in the hearts of myriads as the church will enjoy a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity. His position is very clearly expressed in the chapter 'Of the Church' in The Savoy Declaration of 1658:

'We expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken, the Churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.'

Like the Independents William Williams was a type of post-millennialist but there was one major difference between them — writing from the midst of the Great Awakening Williams was 'ready to believe that summer is at hand.'

## REVIEWS

### **Aquinas, Calvin and Contemporary Protestant Thought**

Arvin Vos

Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1985, xviii + 178 pp., £9.95

This is a careful, clear exposition of a historical issue which lies at the heart of the philosophy of religion, the nature of Christian apologetics and the history of Christian thought — the intellectual relationship between Aquinas, the central figure of mediaeval Catholicism, and John Calvin the Reformer, who rarely mentions him.

Most Protestants believe that Aquinas bases all theology on the ability to prove God's existence by reason apart from revelation whereas Calvin was a fideist; that Aquinas believed in a realm of 'autonomous' nature with grace superadded and lost at the Fall. Such grace returns in Christ but nature retains her autonomy and bids to be completely secular, while grace is an irrational 'frosting'. Popular presenters of the Christian faith such as Francis Schaeffer believed this is what has actually happened, in a pervasive way, in modern culture, and that there can only be reintegration when culture is placed once again on a fully Christian, that is, biblical basis. Vos is convinced that much of this is caricature, the result of word of mouth tradition rather than of a proper appreciation of the sources.

Like a good lawyer, by patient and clear exposition of Aquinas (less so of Calvin), Vos casts reasonable doubt on these and other traditional and influential claims. He shows, for example, that Aquinas' proofs of the existence of God, extracted from his texts and given great prominence in every philosophy of religion anthology and seminar-room, in fact play a subsidiary and subordinate role in Aquinas' system of thought. While Aquinas holds that it is *possible* for those who have the necessary capability to prove the existence of God, and so to know that God exists, such proof is not necessary for faith, which is founded upon the word of God and falls short of knowledge (55-6). This makes Aquinas almost as much a fideist as Calvin for both of whom faith is based upon evidence yet goes beyond evidence, trusting where it cannot see. (Yet since Aquinas holds that some knowledge of God is gained by philosophers he is not a fideist in the sense of someone who believes that faith alone provides us with whatever knowledge of God there is).

Those contemporary philosophers such as Plantinga and Wolterstorff who argue that Aquinas is an evidentialist but Calvin is not and that a consistently Reformed view of faith and reason requires that one *begin* with God's existence are in Vos's view highlighting an antithesis which is not there, not, at least, in the great historical figures to which they appeal. Their position is unwittingly that of Aquinas (93) who far from exalting natural theology stresses its limitations (96).

Or take the question of the relation between nature and grace. How frequently has it been said that according to the 'mediaeval synthesis' grace perfects (autonomous) nature. Vos provides evidence to cast doubt on the view that this is Aquinas' position. Far from nature being autonomous it is God's creation and man, made in the image of God, has a natural desire to know God (Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*?) The Fall makes man incapable of true virtue, though according to

Aquinas he is capable of 'virtue in a limited sense', a view akin to what the Reformers, e.g. Luther, referred to as 'civic righteousness'. According to Aquinas fallen man remains a rational animal and in this he is unaffected by the Fall, but he cannot by his own powers gain his true end, but needs grace. Man without grace is inclined to virtue but impotent to carry out his inclinations (145), a distinction which is echoed in Calvin (*Inst.* 2.2.15). Vos does not say it, but does not the Calvinist distinction, prominent since Abraham Kuyper, between common and special grace, differ only semantically from Aquinas' distinction between nature and grace, granted his fideism?

Whether the disability that according to Aquinas results from the Fall corresponds to the full Pauline and Augustinian position of the bondage of the will to sin, re-emphasised at the Reformation, is something into which Vos understandably does not go, any more than he questions Aquinas' (and Augustine's) view that justification consists in the infusing of righteousness into the soul and not the imputation of righteousness for Christ's sake. But following Henri de Lubac he does conjecture that the conventional Protestant view is more an account of Cajetan than of Aquinas (154), a product of the Counter-Reformation.

Vos more than once alludes to Calvin's distinction between earlier mediaeval and later scholastic philosophy and theology (37,169; see *Inst.* 2.2.6, 3.11/15). In a study which shows command not only of the relevant texts but also of contemporary philosophical issues — a rare combination — there is reason to think that Vos has provided an estimate of Thomas in line with Calvin's distinction.

Those who have argued that what follows Calvin, namely Puritanism and scholastic Reformed theology, is doctrinally in accord with Calvin himself, have in Vos an unexpected ally. For if it is reasonable to argue that Calvin's relation to the Angelic Doctor is more continuous than has been thought then this is another reason to suppose a natural continuity after Calvin when, after a humanist and biblical interlude, theology is once again deployed using an Aristotelian outlook. On this view what Calvin objected to (and was in any case, by training and temperament, unable to provide) was not the use of Aristotelian categories but the obscuring of the biblical message of God's grace in Christ by the later scholastic writers, and the resulting powerlessness of the church to bind up the brokenhearted.

This book is an exercise in ecumenical theology of the best kind. It is written in a plain, direct style, free of jargon and of the impedimenta of scholarship. A book to be read and pondered.

*Paul Helm  
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### **The Covenants of Promise: a Theology of the Old Testament Covenants**

T. E. McComiskey

Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1985, 259 pp. \$10-95.

The central thesis of this book, which stands, and is well-read, in the tradition of conservative Reformed theology, is that redemptive history is marked by the ratification of a succession of covenants, namely the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the New Covenant. There is in each covenant a 'bicoventantal' structure. This

is constructed on the one hand by the promise-covenant made with Abraham and his offspring, which is 'an eternal covenant that never loses its force or integrity', and on the other by a series of 'administrative' covenants (Mosaic law etc.). These function together to govern human obedience and administer the inheritance promised to God's people (p.10). The promissory covenant (which the author also calls the covenant of grace) is held to be still (and eternally) valid, while the New Covenant, as expressed chiefly in Jeremiah and Hebrews, is the administrative covenant which is currently in force. The argument of the book proceeds by tracing the elements in God's covenant with Abraham through the sequence of administrative covenants. The promise of offspring, for example, is treated at length, as it is found in the promise to David (2 Sam. 7) and in the prophetic corpus, where it issues in Messianic expectation, until it is finally interpreted of Christ in the New Testament. Gal. 3:16-18 is found to be of crucial importance here. In interpreting it, McComiskey rejects Hodge's distinction between a covenant of grace (that of God with his people) and a covenant of redemption (that of the Father with the Son), preferring to see Christ (like Abraham) as both recipient and mediator of the promise (p. 186). For McComiskey the category of promise renders what he sees as Hodge's bifurcation of the covenant unnecessary.

The other elements of the promise to Abraham are similarly treated, most interestingly in the case of the land, where Romans 4:13 is said to furnish grounds for a residual territorial dimension to this aspect of the promise. Nevertheless the author comes close to spiritualizing the Christian's 'landedness' (p.206), while on the other hand (and on little or no exegetical grounds) the existence of a Jewish state today is said to be 'an earnest of the future conquest of the world by Christ' (p.208). As will be clear the author is not afraid to carry his argument deep into the New Testament, and this is most obvious in two appendices, embodied in the work (pp.94-137) and presented as integral, on the law in the teaching of Jesus and Paul respectively.

I found the general stance and many individual arguments (e.g. on the meaning of the promise of blessing to the Gentiles and on the New Covenant) congenial and interesting. I have some reservations about the book. First, it is unnecessarily lengthy and repetitive (and therefore not an enjoyable read). Secondly, there is a tendency in the exegesis to overload certain texts. An example is the brief treatment of Gen. 3:14-19, where with no discussion the serpent is taken to represent Satan and the seed of the woman the godly line (p.191). This is certainly traditional orthodox theology, but the idea that that, and that alone, is what the text really 'means', misses much of what it has to say. Texts are thus sometimes seen as ciphers for meanings which are actually provided by a grander theological system. This is not always so, but there is a curious unevenness here.

Finally, and most importantly, I am not convinced by the distinction, fundamental to the argument, between promissory and administrative covenants. The intention which inspires the distinction is to accommodate both the permanency and the conditionality of covenant. The promissory covenant is thus unconditional, while the administrative covenants provide stipulations. However, the basic argument for the unconditionality of promissory covenants is circular — they are identified by the absence of stipulations (p.140) — and the distinction sometimes produces forced exegesis. This is nowhere more evident than in the treatment of the 'covenant of works', where, while the basic idea is accepted, it is

not called a covenant, because Adam is given no promise (except that of death in case of disobedience). The author opts therefore for an 'administration' of works — though this seems to introduce confusion into his general nomenclature (p.219). It seems to me to be pedantic to reject the idea of promise to Adam, since the whole world evidently lay at his feet. This is not the only place where the distinction is forced (cf. pp.152 f.). It is better to see covenant as an undivided concept, having elements of both promise and condition. These elements often produce deep tension, even agony (cf. Hosea 11:8ff). There is little sense of this in McComiskey's rather clinical treatment, in which he has done precisely what he accused Hodge of doing, namely bifurcated the concept of covenant.

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### **Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans**

**Martin Luther**

trans. J. Theodore Mueller

Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1982; 223 pp., n.p.

This is a reprint of a work first published in 1954, and consists of a popular, abridged translation of Luther's university lectures on Romans. These were delivered in 1515-16, but were not accessible to the world until they were published in 1908. Their importance was immediately acknowledged, and they became a major stimulus of a renaissance of Luther studies. They constitute perhaps the most significant source for a study of Luther's early theological development. Luther had by this time already attained his pivotal new understanding of justification by faith. Indeed, the brevity of his comment in these lectures on Romans 1:17 suggests that his new insight had come to him somewhat earlier. While rooted in the world of mediaeval hermeneutics, the lectures amply attest the revolution in the teaching of theology that Luther was bringing to the birth.

This digest is unfortunately not much help to any study of Luther's developing thought. For this purpose Wilhelm Pauck's translation in the *Library of Christian Classics* (vol. XV, 1961) remains the only English version. Professor Mueller has prefaced his abridgement with Luther's Preface to Romans in his German New Testament of 1522 (here wrongly dated as 1552. The back cover confuses this Preface with the lectures themselves.) But he nowhere indicates the criteria he followed in his abridgement, and all one can regard it as offering is his version of 'the fundamentals of Luther's evangelical teachings', as he puts it, with no particular reference to 1515-16. Mueller has inserted in brackets in italic words, phrases and sentences with the aim of 'bringing out Luther's meaning more clearly'. While many such additions do thus clarify, others seem unnecessary or even misleading, and they often serve to soften the sharpness of Luther's own statements. A further strange feature of the book is the unexplained inclusion of the AV (KJV) as the biblical text Luther is apparently explaining. The end result is a volume which has value as an account of Luther's evangelical biblical interpretation but which cannot give us access to the Luther of 1515-16.

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