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KING'S

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KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

JAMES A. WHYTE

Here is fresh matter, poet,
Matter for old age meet;
Might of the Church and the State,
Their mobs put under their feet.
O but heart's wine shall run pure
Mind's bread grow sweet.

That were a cowardly song,
Wander in dreams no more:
What if the Church and the State
Are the mob that howls at the door!
Wine shall run thick to the end,
Bread taste sour.¹

"What if the Church and the State are the mob that howls at the door!"

Yeats poses the problem of authority in terms that are political as well as theological, and these terms would be congenial to many of the liberation theologies current today. It is clear that there is a danger in this attitude, the danger of cynicism, as well as a healthy and necessary realism. I preface this paper with Yeats' poem as a reminder that if there is in some quarters a desire to reassert authority today, the context of that is the profound and widespread scepticism of our age concerning authority in church and state.

I suppose it is with most theologians as it is with me, that the problem of authority has been around, in the background of my thought, for a long time. I can remember at the age of nineteen, as a convinced Christian and a candidate for the ministry, beginning the study of philosophy and having to ask myself "How open-minded am I prepared to be?" I came then to a simple answer, as follows: "My ultimate commitment is to the truth. I believe that Christianity is true, and I shall not lightly abandon it. But if I did not allow my beliefs to be challenged and criticised, and, if necessary, changed, then I would be afraid of the truth, and such an attitude is not faith, but unbelief." I would still hold to that answer, though I am perhaps more aware of the dangers of self-deception than I was at nineteen.

More recently the problem has come into the foreground, partly because the work of a research student led me to read again some of the studies of the '50s and '60s on *The Authoritarian Personality*; partly because the publication of the ARCIC Report in 1976 and again in its final form in 1982 led me to reflect on Authority in the Church; and partly because the business of practical theology leads one constantly to question systematic theology from the point of view of practice: that is, to use Ian Ramsey's terms, it leads away from a deductive theology towards a contextual theology.² I want in this paper to try to relate these three things – the psychological studies, the question of authority in the church and the question of authority in theology – and to see if out of these reflections any theory of authority begins to emerge.

I

Erich Fromm's book *The Fear of Freedom* was published in the United States in 1941 and in Britain the following

year.³ Fromm was a Freudian analyst, but of a singularly independent mind. He owed much to Marx as well to Freud, but was critical of both. He was particularly concerned with the relationship between psychology and sociology. The problem to which he was seeking an answer in 1941 was why it is that individuals and societies, given the increase in human freedom that has come with widespread democracy, should decide to throw that freedom away and submit to authoritarian regimes. He saw this tendency exemplified typically, but not exclusively, in Fascism and Nazism, and asked what are the tendencies in ourselves, and the conditions in any society, which encourage this "fear of freedom".

Fromm explains the emergence of what he calls "the authoritarian character" in accordance with a psycho-dynamic theory of his own. As a child grows and develops, he or she becomes able to differentiate the self from the rest of the universe: the "primary ties" that have bound the individual to the environment are broken. This process is a process of growth in strength and capability, but also in aloneness and separation. This isolation is a source of great anxiety, because however much self-strength the individual discovers the self is still powerless and isolated before a powerful world. There are two ways, says Fromm, of dealing with this anxiety. One is the impulse to give up one's individuality by submission to the external world. The other is the way of "spontaneous relationship", that is, to enter into relationships of love and co-operation with others. The first Fromm sees as self-defeating, for the primary ties can never be renewed, and the submission only masks and increases the anxiety and the more deeply repressed hostility which the individual feels towards the authority to which he or she submits. The second way, however, is genuinely creative, allowing for continued individual growth and fostering the growth of others.

Fromm sees a parallel between the individual development as he has described it and the development of freedom in human society.

"We see that the process of growing human freedom has the same dialectic character that we have noticed in the process of individual growth. On the one hand it is a process of strength and integration, mastery of nature, growing power of human reason, and growing solidarity with other human beings. But on the other hand this growing individuation means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual." (p. 29)

Fromm speaks of three mechanisms of escape from this dilemma: Authoritarianism, Destructiveness and Automaton Conformity. There is little doubt that in *The Fear of Freedom* the most important of these, the basic mechanism of escape, is Authoritarianism.

Fromm outlines the "authoritarian character" which results from "the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking." (pp.121-122)

The powerless, isolated self which seeks escape from its intolerable anxiety by submission to a powerful authority thereby comes to participate in the power of that authority. "The authoritarian character wins his strength to act through his leaning on superior power. This power is never assailable or changeable. For him lack of power is always an unmistakable sign of guilt and inferiority, and if the authority in which he believes shows signs of weakness, his love and respect change into contempt and hatred." (p.148)

I do not know how plausible psycho-analytic explanations are when they invoke supposed experiences of early childhood to account for the attitudes which humans display in adult life. I am not concerned to defend Fromm's aetiology of the authoritarian character. I find much insight, however, in his description of it. The authoritarian submits to the authority above, abases himself before that authority, indeed, annihilates himself before that authority, proclaiming himself a nothing, worthless, of no account. He is the servant of the cause, nothing more. Yet he can also be the aggressive agent of that powerful cause, sharing in its power. All the hostility against the world, against society, against the angry God whom he fears, which is repressed in his submissiveness, emerges in hostility against the enemies of the cause, in crusades and holy wars, in the extermination of the Jew or the persecution of the heretic or the destruction of the weak. It may be that because of the repressed hostility within, the authoritarian *needs* enemies without, on whom he can project that hostility.

In 1950 the American Jewish Committee published a volume called *The Authoritarian Personality*, by T. W. Adorno and others. The approach was that of experimental psychology rather than psycho-analysis, and the main initial focus was anti-Semitism. This led the researchers to consider what they called "the potentially fascist individual."⁴ Their conclusions were not altogether surprising, and, given the difference in their approaches, remarkably similar to those of Fromm. They found that there was likely to be a close correspondence in the attitudes someone showed in the different areas of their life – to family and sex, to outsiders, to religion and political philosophy.

"Thus a basically hierarchical authoritarian exploitive parent-child relationship is apt to carry over into a power-oriented exploitively dependent attitude towards one's sex partner and one's God, and may well culminate in a political philosophy and social outlook which has no room for anything but a desperate clinging to what appears to be strong and disdainful rejection of whatever is relegated to the bottom."

"Conventionality, rigidity, repressive denial and the ensuing breakthrough of one's weakness, fear and dependency are but other aspects of the same fundamental personality pattern, and they can be observed in personal life as well as in attitudes towards religion and social issues."

At the opposite end from this rigid authoritarian personality they find that "there is a pattern characterized chiefly by affectionate, basically equalitarian and permissive interpersonal relationships. This pattern encompasses attitudes within the family and toward the opposite sex as well as an internalization of religious and social values. Greater flexibility and the potential for more genuine satisfactions appear as results of this basic attitude."

The researchers go on to note that what they have

described are extreme types, and that the majority of people are not in the extremes, but somewhere in the middle.

In 1960 Milton Rokeach and his collaborators published a study entitled *The Open and Closed Mind*⁵. It was a study of belief systems and personality systems. What they called "the dogmatic or closed mind" was "a closed way of thinking which could be associated with an ideology regardless of content, an authoritarian outlook on life, an intolerance towards those with opposing beliefs and a sufferance of those with similar beliefs."

They departed from the "conventional wisdom" in two ways. First, the conventional view is that we categorise people on ethnic or racial grounds, whereas these researchers concluded that the basic criterion is belief, i.e. whether someone's belief system is congruent to ours or not. Racial differences may be no more than handy indicators of this. Second, previous studies, perhaps because they were studies of racial prejudice (but perhaps also because of the bias of the researchers) had assumed that the authoritarian personality is a right-wing phenomenon. Rokeach showed that this is not so. One finds left-wing intolerance as well as right-wing intolerance, authoritarianism of the left as well as of the right.

With these differences, the closed and open mind of Rokeach corresponds to the authoritarian and tolerant characters of Fromm and Adorno, and there is a similar thought of a continuum between two extremes. Authoritarianism at one end is characterised by "fear of aloneness and isolation, anxiety and self-hate", whereas the open mind enjoys the new and unfamiliar. But most people are in the middle.

They acknowledge also, and this seems to me to be an important addendum, that we respond not only according to character types, but according to situation. The more threatening the situation, the more likely we are to respond in an authoritarian manner. In a study of Church Councils, they suggested that the number, the dogmatism and the punitiveness of the Canons of Councils varied in proportion to the perceived threat to the church in the heresy or schism that was being faced.. (During the student troubles of the late 1960s the observable technique of the agitators – who have now moved on to higher things – was to provoke liberal academics into uncharacteristically repressive and authoritarian behaviour by creating situations that were totally irrational and utterly frustrating. The technique usually succeeded.)

I mention one other study, which can act as a bridge to the second part of the paper. In 1976 Jack Dominian published a little book called simply *Authority*.⁶ It promptly went out of print, and for a time I feared that authority had done its worst, but happily it has reappeared. Dominian distinguishes between authority and authoritarianism. He sees authoritarianism in terms similar to those outlined above, and understands it as "the failure of growth of the personality". (p.10) He points out how commonly it is to be found within the Christian church. "It does not require much imagination to see that Christianity as popularly conceived and misinterpreted by its most zealous and ardent adherents would include in its ranks such authoritarian personalities. Whether such ardent advocates of Christianity belong to the hot-gospeller variety or the sophisticated intellectual version, they use Christ as a symbol to support

just about everything that would have been repudiated as a proper Christian attitude by the originator of that faith.” (p.12) “The Christian community has fostered ideals which have encouraged the characteristics of early childhood immaturity, and have perpetuated that immaturity in its various structures, particularly the priesthood.” (p.82)

Genuine authority Dominian understands as enabling rather than disabling, encouraging growth to maturity rather than regression to immaturity. “Service is the key to authority. But service means personal availability, and the authority of Christ, as indeed of every Christian, is to be identified in the rendering of service which makes the self available to others.” (p.92) Whether in church or in state, authority should act as a “source of service to the community and not as a source of irresponsible power which moves from service to coercion, from care to subjugation, from encouragement of maturity to that of immaturity.” (p.84) Hence, “mature evaluation of the actions of legitimate authority, not blind obedience to authority, is what Christianity must foster.” (p.83)

As a loyal Roman Catholic, Dominian believes that the structures of the church can serve such an ideal. “Far from wishing to dismiss or destroy its hierarchical structure of Pope, bishops, priests, nuns and laity, I am sure that its basic structure in terms of these offices is an appropriate one, provided they are all seen, lived and offered as models of service and not copies of a secular power structure, operating on the principles of power, coercion, fear, guilt and massive impersonality.” (p.84)

It seems, indeed, that Dominian is looking for a more profound revolution than any structural change would involve, but whether such a revolution in attitudes would not also destroy or radically alter the structures of authority in the church is another question.

II

In 1977 there was published an agreed statement on *Authority in the Church* (Venice, 1976) by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. This was followed in 1981 by an *Elucidation* and a further statement on outstanding issues, *Authority in the Church II*, and all these documents formed part of the *Final Report* of the Commission, published in 1982.⁷

The Introduction to Venice 1976 begins with an unexceptionable statement of the authority of Christ. “The confession of Christ as Lord is the heart of the Christian faith. To him God has given all authority in heaven and on earth.” The statement then proceeds in a section on Christian authority to trace a line of authority through the apostolic preaching to the New Testament witness and to the Christian community today. “Consequently the inspired documents in which this is related came to be accepted by the Church as a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith . . . Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed.” Through the Spirit of God who “maintains the people of God in obedience” and “safeguards their faithfulness to the revelation of Jesus Christ” “the authority of the Lord is active in the Church.” “This is Christian authority: when Christians so act and speak, men perceive the authoritative word of Christ.”

The second section, on Authority in the Church, begins by referring to those in the Church who, because of the quality of their personal commitment, are recognised as having personal authority. It then proceeds immediately to the authority of the ordained ministry. “There are some whom the Holy Spirit commissions through ordination for service to the whole community. . . . This pastoral authority belongs primarily to the bishop . . . He can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in daily life.” The statement then goes on to consider Authority in the Communion of Churches, Authority in Matters of Faith and Conciliar and Primatial Authority.

I think I have given enough of the argument to show that this is a very bland statement, which moves smoothly from the authority of Christ, through the authority of Scripture and on to the official authority of the bishop, and finally to the Primatial see, without any apparent awareness that the nature of authority has radically changed as the argument proceeds. This is because of a one-sided view of the church. One might call it Docetic, or even Monophysite, or perhaps simply triumphalist. The human nature of the church is not taken seriously enough for it in any way to affect the divine. The development of the church’s hierarchical organisation and the exercise of its authority are seen as the triumphal progress of the Holy Spirit. There is no need for any discernment of the Spirit. It is, to be sure, acknowledged (Para. 7) that “the authorities in the Church cannot adequately reflect Christ’s authority because they are still subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature. Awareness of this inadequacy is a constant summons to reform.” But such awareness is qualified by the comforting thought that “the Holy Spirit keeps the Church under the Lordship of Christ who, taking full account of human weakness, has promised never to abandon his people.” So the inadequacy of human beings in the church is never allowed to become serious. The Holy Spirit protects them from error.⁸

“The historical mythology”, as Edward Farley has called it, of a historic episcopate receiving its authority ultimately from Christ, is, of course, unquestioned here. Yet there are points where it could be questioned in the argument of the statement itself. First, when the authority of Christ passes over into the authority of Scripture. Here a Barthian view of the relation between the Incarnate Word and the Written Word (as historical testimony to the Incarnate Word) is used, with all its excessive christocentrism. (It is not made clear how the Old Testament becomes authoritative.) Questions about the diversity of the New Testament witness and its historical unreliability (the type of question dealt with by Richard Hanson in his essay on “The Authority of the Christian Faith”) do not appear here. A single form of official ministry, exercising authority in the church, is assumed to be original and universal; an assumption which, as writers such as Von Campenhausen and Eduard Schweizer have shown, is simply not borne out by a study of the New Testament itself, especially the letters of Paul or of John. Second, at the point where one passes from personal to official authority, there is no recognition that authority here may have changed character. (Nor is there recognition that there may be degrees of authority: it seems that authority requires to be absolute, totally reliable, able to command compliance.) It is, of course, recognised that authority in the church ought to be modelled on Christ’s loving service, but in this document, as in so many ecumenical statements about the church, what ought to be is

assumed to be what is. The discrepancy between the church as it ought to be and the church as it is is not allowed to interrupt the free flow of the argument.

This confusion of the ideal and the real is, as I have said, very common in ecclesiastical and ecumenical pronouncements. In the matter of official authority, however, I would argue that the ideal itself is unrealistic. It is a feature of all official authority, whether in church or in state, that it has a tendency to become dominating and disabling authority rather than serving and enabling authority, no matter what the good intentions of its authors are. Authority requires to be constantly open to challenge, to criticism and to correction.

According to the Statement, authority in matters of faith is exercised both by councils and by the primatial see. "In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgments, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative. When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous." "This binding authority does not belong to every conciliar decree, but only to those which formulate the central truths of salvation. This authority is ascribed in both our traditions to decisions of the ecumenical councils of the first centuries." In the second statement the church's teaching authority seems to be a little more circumscribed, when it is stated that "the assurance of the truthfulness of its teaching rests ultimately rather upon its fidelity to the Gospel than upon the character or office of the person by whom it is expressed. The Church's teaching is proclaimed because it is true; it is not true simply because it has been proclaimed." It is comforting to know that the members of the Commission are not nominalists. But what they give us is in fact a circular argument, which is the characteristic form of the argument from authority. The argument might be expressed in this way. "The decisions of councils or pope on fundamental matters of faith are not true because they are authoritative. They are authoritative because they are true. They are true because they are authentic interpretations of apostolic faith and witness. They are authentic interpretations of apostolic faith and witness because the Holy Spirit guards from error those who have been given the authority to make such pronouncements."

I am aware that my fundamental disagreement with the understanding of the church and of the Holy Spirit contained in the ARCIC Report makes it difficult for me to be entirely fair, and I hope that I have not been unduly unfair. It is not that these positions and arguments are new. They are familiar to most of us from Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic writing. What is new is their appearance in a succinct form in an agreed statement. What is to be noted is the central importance of the question of authority for this view of the church. The church, on this view, is essentially a structure of authority.

III

When one looks seriously at the question of authority in theology, it seems as if theologians addressed themselves to little else. Robert Clyde Johnson's study, *Authority in Protestant Theology* becomes a survey of Protestant theology from Luther to Barth.⁹ I have found recent contributions by W. A. Whitehouse, Richard Hanson and Nicholas Lash

helpful, the last named especially.¹⁰ Edward Farley's book *Ecclesial Reflection* is perplexing in many ways, but also stimulating with its thesis that "theological thinking in the classical criteriology is a method of authority", and his insistence that the house of authority has collapsed. "In spite of enormous efforts to keep the house propped up, what remains is a verbal house, occurring in both the rhetorical and the up-to-date language of church gatherings, writing and even official declarations."¹¹

We do, of course, believe many things on authority in our everyday life. When I was ill, I accepted the authority of my doctor, believed his diagnosis and followed the treatment prescribed. I had good reason for this, both in the general reputation of the medical profession in this country and in my own previous experience of this particular doctor.¹² We accept the authority of doctors, scientists and specialists of many kinds, because there is good evidence that they know what they are talking about. But part of the evidence is that they themselves do not hold their knowledge simply on authority, but are continually questioning, testing, exploring, constructing new hypotheses in order to correct as well as to expand their knowledge and competence. And even I, as far as my own competence extends, may question the authorities on the basis of evidence available to me. If the medicine my doctor prescribes leaves my symptoms unabated and produces a few extra on the side, I may, after a decent interval (if I survive) begin to doubt his competence. If I don't my bereaved relatives will.

Theology based on authority is different from this, however, for it does not and should not require or desire evidence. Once you admit the relevance of evidence that might confirm your beliefs, you are bound to admit the possibility of evidence that could refute them. This is to step outside the house of authority. Basil Mitchell has observed "If factual investigation can be appealed to in support of theological insights – if the proven evils of broken homes can be adduced in support of 'the divinely ordained harmony of marriage' – then, were this support to be lacking, or were evidence to the contrary to accumulate, the theological position would to that extent be weakened and might, in principle, even be refuted. There is a marked reluctance on the part of some people to expose religious doctrines to this sort of test."¹³

The argument from authority is always circular. It is therefore insulated from the danger of challenge or refutation from any world outside of itself, but it has difficulty in establishing any relationship at all to such a world. Authority makes evidence unnecessary. Theology becomes hermeneutic, the interpretation of the authoritative texts, that is, dogmatic theology. Theology's rationality is demonstrated in the creation of a system, in which all parts can be shown to cohere, that is systematic theology. There is a strong and persistent tradition of this kind in Protestant theology. Within the system there is, of course, a place for Apologetics or the Philosophy of Religion, and a place also for Practical Theology. But the former is expected to make its way back to the dogmatics from which it has implicitly begun, and the latter is misunderstood as Applied Theology, the application to the life of the church of the doctrines provided for it by dogmatic theology.

It could be claimed that this theological circle is not vicious, but virtuous. In philosophy it is necessary to distinguish between a theory of truth and a criterion of

truth, and it is possible to claim that whatever one's theory of truth (correspondence with reality, whatever that means?), the only available criterion of truth is coherence. Why should it not be so in theology, where we do not have direct experience of the realities of which we speak, and where the coherence of the system may therefore be the best available criterion of its truth? The answer, I think, is that if I use coherence as a criterion of truth it is in relation to my experience as a whole. (And it is thus, I believe.) But the theological circle, so long as one remains in "the house of authority" seems to me to be always limited. If you become open to the whole of experience, you leave the house of authority. And you are then constrained to ask whether the house itself is part of the real world, or is a fantasy world.

There are some today who are trying to maintain and even repair the house of authority, to make it a decent place to live in; some are looking for a respectable and not too dangerous way out; while some onlookers and some ecclesiastics are terrified of what people will do if they are allowed out.

Modern Biblicism or Fundamentalism remains quite frankly and happily, it seems, within the house. At a very simple level the argument is circular. If I ask a fundamentalist student how he knows that what he believes about the Bible is true, he is almost certain to quote to me 2 Tim. 3:16, in the Authorised version. The authority of the Bible establishes the authority of the Bible.

Traditionalism, if I may use that term to describe the location of authority in a particular reconstruction of the development of the early church, similarly seeks to remain within the house of authority. The "three-fold ministry", apostolic succession, the early councils and the Nicene Creed provide the locus of authority. But there is in fact no one single tradition, within the New Testament or in the early Christian writings. The understanding of Christianity and the church in the Pastoral epistles is markedly different from that in the Johannine letters. When Clement of Rome writes to the Corinthians his concept of authority in the church is widely different from that of Paul in his letters to the same destination. Between the Didache and the letter to the Romans there is a world of difference.¹⁴ Traditionalism seems plausible only if you make the assumption that whatever prevails in the church is the work of the Holy Spirit, who has promised to preserve the church infallible in essential faith and morals. This view certainly remains within the house of authority, for it is not supported by evidence, nor does there seem to be any reason other than a decision of authority which gives such a radically different status to certain developments in certain periods of the early church.

The structure of authority may also be maintained through Confessionalism. The first time I was involved in discussions with Scandinavian Lutheran theologians I was struck by the way in which some of them would seek to clinch every argument with a quotation from the Augsburg Confession. "Augustana locuta est, causa finita est" seemed to be the principle.

The place and use of confessions of faith in the Reformed churches is a tempting subject. The Reformed principle was *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*. If, as I believe, that "by grace alone, by faith alone" is the heart of the Reformation, and the heart of the Gospel, the Reformers

would have contended that the priority and sufficiency of grace and faith, which had been obscured in the structure of authority of the Roman church, could be maintained and defended only *sola scriptura*, by scripture alone. The third principle was necessary to protect the other two. But this was not exactly a simple solution to the problem of authority. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, even when you have shed the Apocrypha, remain a confused and confusing literature when you are looking for a clear and authoritative basis for theology.

So the Reformed churches felt the need for confessions of faith, manifestos of the movement by which they showed the sense in which they understood the scripture. They were that and nothing more. The authors of the Scots Confession invited anyone who found in it anything "repugnant to God's halie word" to let them know, and promised satisfaction or reformation. The confessions were many, because they were written to their time, and no one of them claimed to be a complete, permanent or uniquely authoritative statement of the faith. The Church of Scotland had the Scots Confession of 1560; but the General Assembly could later receive the Second Helvetic Confession, and commend it to the church, and approve also Craig's Negative Confession, which was to become the basis of the National Covenant.

This seems to me to be a healthy situation. As regards creeds and confessions our principle should be "The more, the merrier", or "There's safety in numbers." It is when we reduce them to one alone, and when that human document begins to claim divine authority, that there is the devil to pay. A. N. Whitehead said "Wherever there is a creed, there is a heretic round the corner, or in his grave." This is not only because creeds are produced in an attempt to counter and silence heresy, but because thereafter the development of critical and questioning thought becomes heresy. Creeds create heresy.

In Scotland in the 17th century, while Scripture was dutifully regarded as the supreme rule of faith and life, the Westminster Confession of 1645 was adopted as the subordinate standard, and attained legal status. Thereafter in the theological controversy within the church – over the Marrow Men in the 18th century or over the Atonement in the 19th – the real issue was not one of ultimate truth, or of conformity to scripture, but of agreement with the Confession of Faith. The question was not whether or not a theological opinion was true, or whether or not it was biblical, if it was not in accordance with the Confession it might not be preached in the church and those who taught it might not retain office and (most important) might not draw their stipends.

The main Presbyterian churches in Scotland eventually extricated themselves from this situation, and allowed the development of theology, by modifying their subscription to the Confession, and allowing a deliberately undefined "liberty of opinion". (It was assumed that there was in the Confession something called "the substance of the faith", which one must believe, but no one ever defined what it was.) This happy state of affairs, which had about it the touch of genius, is soon, alas, to come to an end. From the 1960s on there have been complaints in the General Assembly that the church no longer has an instrument to counter heresy. In many recent debates in the General Assembly about the Westminster Confession and about

what should take its place, I do not remember anyone questioning the place of the Scriptures as “the supreme rule of faith and life”, but I do not remember anyone seriously suggesting that the Scriptures themselves might be sufficient as the standard of faith. So much for the principle of *sola scriptura*.

It has been noted that theology within the circle of authority becomes hermeneutic. Indeed, hermeneutic problems become important because when you have an authoritative document, be it biblical text, Council decree or Confession of Faith, with which you are not allowed to disagree, in the sense of saying bluntly that on this or that point it is false, your only room for manoeuvre lies in the possibility of interpreting it in a new way. Only through interpretation does one have any freedom to develop theology. Such interpretation may sometimes be stretched up to the limit of human ingenuity and beyond that of credibility, as when the Thirty-Nine Articles are interpreted in a catholic sense in spite of their apparent Calvinistic meaning. But one can sympathise with this necessity, since if you are within the circle of authority it is interpretation alone which can give you room to breathe.

But apart from that necessity, we recognise today that interpretation is necessary when you are dealing with any document, especially an ancient document. The original meaning of the Thirty-Nine Articles is not necessarily obvious today, and the things which they say to us may not be what was intended in the 16th century. But once you recognise the necessity of interpretation, the existence of a hermeneutic problem, the question of authority becomes open once more, and we are being pushed out of the house, out of the circle. The text has undoubted authority, we say, if only we knew what it really meant. But can we give that same authority to our interpretation of the text, which, after all, is only one possible interpretation among many? Those who require an authority that will give them certainties must find some way of doing this. This is why Fundamentalists deny that they are interpreting. Otherwise they would have to admit the truth of James Barr’s contention that what they claim to be the authority of the Word of God is really the authority of a particular tradition of interpretation.

One can deal with the problem of the authority of written documents by making it clear that one’s ultimate authority lies behind the documents, whether these are the Bible or the Creeds. Barth’s three-fold form of the Word of God does this, but Barth uses it simply to rebuild the house of authority. The ARCIC document does this too, and then moves without a hiccup to the reassertion of ecclesiastical authority. But supposing we agree, as I would, with W. A. Whitehouse that “to attribute absolute authority to anything which is not God is blasphemous.”¹⁵ All other authority, therefore, must be regarded as relative. To say that all human authority, including that of the Bible writers, the Early Fathers, Church Councils, the Pope, and even the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is human and relative is not to say that it is nugatory. It is possible to accord to such authorities a high degree of respect, without ceasing to regard them as relative.

The question then to be asked of such relative authorities is “Do they, and if so, how do they relate to the authority of God?” P. T. Forsyth expresses the conviction “that an authority of any practical kind draws its meaning and its right only from the soul’s relation to its God, that this

is so not only for religion strictly so called, nor for a church, but for public life, social life, and the whole history and career of humanity.”¹⁶ Forsyth’s concern is to show that all human authority, in social life as well as in religion, is relative and conditional, and carries weight in so far as it is itself a response to the moral claim that God makes on human life. “All questions run up into moral questions; and all moral questions centre in the religious, in man’s attitude to the supreme ethic, which is the action of the Holy One.” If this is so then the relation of the divine authority to human authority is not so much to establish it as to limit it. On the other hand, those who by a smooth progression derive ecclesiastical authority from the authority of God do so not to limit it but to claim (sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly) that the human authority partakes of the divine infallibility. Human beings often seek to divinise their own authority, claiming in their own sphere the Divine Right of Kings. But it need not always be so. John Baillie spoke of how in his childhood, he was under the authority of the older members of the household. “Yet my earliest memories clearly contain the knowledge that these elders did but transmit and administer an authority of which they were not themselves the ultimate source.”¹⁷ Those who understand aright the relation between their human authority and the ultimate authority see it as limit and responsibility.

Forsyth wrote in strong reaction to the view that placed the locus of authority in religious experience. But if we are to move out of the house of authority, and keep the question-mark which puts a limit to all human authority, theological, ecclesiastical, political, it will not be by finding some other source of authority (which will turn out to be another human authority in disguise), but by taking seriously the reality of human experience – not, however, religious experience alone, but human experience.

In 1972 Ian Ramsey read a paper to a conference of Church Leaders in which he said that theology could no longer be deductive but contextual. By deductive theology he meant what I have called theology within the circle of authority, whereby you deduce your doctrines from the text and then apply them to the human situation. Contextual theology, on the other hand, is theology in the context of human life as it is today. In the years that have followed I have, I confess, grown a little tired of those who call on us to “do” theology in all sorts of unlikely places – the only really unsuitable place, it seems, being the theologian’s study. If contextual theology is not to be the slave of rapidly changing social and political fads, and is to exercise a genuinely critical function on human (and that includes ecclesiastical) life, we need to define better the relation between contextual theology and the Christian tradition or traditions. Perhaps a Christian contextual theology must have two starting points, not one. The first is the Christian datum, however we express it, as something which we have not invented, and do not need to discover as though we knew nothing of it already. The second is the context of our life and our time. Sometimes this will be as specific as a particular pastoral interview or a particular social injustice, but even then, and always, it must have in view, as far as we are able, the integrity of our experience as human beings in this particular time. The conversation between the context and the tradition must be one in which each side is free to criticise the other.

In order to bring together the different parts of this paper I conclude with a possible conversation between context and tradition on the subject of authority. A theologian considering the subject of authority might begin with the tradition and ponder, as we have done, the place of authority in Biblical, ecclesiastical and theological tradition, and the problems, the antinomies of authority. He might then consider the context, including what is known about authority in psychological study and human experience today, and he might use the material to which I drew attention in the first section of this paper. This understanding of the authoritarian character as something which exists in all of us (for we are all somewhere in the middle), but exists as a failure to grow into maturity, an expression of our weakness, not our strength, of our fear and not our faith, might lead our theologian back to the Christian tradition, to the saying of Jesus reported by Matthew and Luke. In Matthew it is "You know that in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority; but it shall not be so with you. Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all – like the Son of Man; he did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:25ff. cf. Luke 22:25ff.)

He might find here a new view of authority, as serving rather than dominating, as enabling rather than disabling, a service of others which encourages them to grow rather than a domination which keeps them as children. He might then chance to read Gordon Dunstan's essay in which he says that both Jesus and Paul were not just authoritative but authoritarians and that authoritarianism is strongly present in the Christian tradition.¹⁸ Returning, somewhat puzzled, to the New Testament, he could decide that Dunstan was wrong about Jesus and Paul, but right about the Christian tradition. He might wonder whether one reason for this is that the tradition has never applied to God the saying of Jesus about authority, and still thinks of God's authority as in the line of the rulers of the Gentiles, rather than in the line of Jesus.

It is quite possible that at this point our theologian might become quite cynical about all authority in church and in state, and he will not be short of evidence in the contemporary world to support such cynicism. But if he happens to have lying around somewhere in his understanding of the Christian tradition some form of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, he may reflect that under the conditions of this world we need some kind of order, some structures of authority. That is a sociological and psychological necessity. And if our contextual theologian has also in his knapsack somewhere some kind of doctrine of sin, and especially if he has read Reinhold Niebuhr, he will not need Shakespeare to tell him that

"man, proud man,
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence like the angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before the high heaven
As make the angels weep."

And there is evidence enough for that in our contemporary world. He may also reflect that the tendency for all official authority to become dominating authority, whatever

the good intentions of the authors, is not simply because authority feeds the pride of those who exercise it, but because it encourages the regression of those who are under it, who readily invest their leaders with magic powers, and sit back waiting for miracles to happen. In particular, the strong regressive tendency in religion is a constant temptation to authoritarianism. But authoritarianism represents the uncreative (if not positively destructive) way of dealing with our regressive needs. Therefore a healthy religion is threatened by authoritarianism more than by anything else. Those who seem to believe that the Christian church is exempt from the conditions of this world, and who wish to invest it with absolute, unassailable, infallible authority have done the church and the world no service. If the church and the state are not to be the mob that howls at the door, their authority needs to be limited, controlled, criticised, scrutinised and not simply respected, obeyed and maintained.

Notes

1. "Church and State" (August 1934), from *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London, Macmillan, 1961) p. 327.
2. The reference is to a paper read by Dr. Ramsey to the Church Leaders' Conference, Birmingham, 1972.
3. It is still in print. E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1942, 17th imp. 1980).
4. T. W. Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, Wiley, 1950, 1964).
5. M. Rokeach *et al.*, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York, Basic Books, 1960).
6. J. Dominion, *Authority* (London, Burns Oates, 1976).
7. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (London, CTS/SPCK, 1982). See also E. J. Yarnold, S. J. & Henry Chadwick, *Truth and Authority* (London, CTS/SPCK, 1977).
8. The recent World Council of Churches report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* states the same view in almost the same terms. "The Holy Spirit keeps the church in the truth and guides it despite the frailty of its members." (III, 1, 3).
9. R. C. Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1959).
10. W. A. Whitehouse, "Authority, Human and Divine" in *The Authority of Grace*, A. H. Loades (ed.) (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1981).
R. Hanson, "The Authority of the Christian Faith" in *Theology and Change*, R. H. Preston (ed.) (London, SCM, 1975), N. Lash, *Voices of Authority* (London, Sheed & Ward, 1976).
11. E. Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982), p. 108 and pp. 165f.
12. Thomas, of course, held that it is reason which establishes the authority, faith which believes it.
13. B. Mitchell, *Law, Morality and Religion in a Secular Society* (London, OUP, 1970) p. 118. cf. W. Keller, *The Bible as History* (ET, W. Neil, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1956). Keller's sub-title "Archaeology confirms the Book of Books" is a claim not quite substantiated by his text. But if archaeology can confirm the Bible, it can, conceivably, disprove it.
14. cf. H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (ET, J. A. Baker, London, A. & C. Black, 1969) and E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (ET, F. Clarke, London, SCM, 1961).
15. *op. cit.* p. 240.
16. P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority* (London, Independent Press, 1913, 1952), pp. 2-3.
17. J. Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (London, OUP, 1942), p. 37.
18. G. R. Dunstan, "Authority and Personality in the Christian Tradition", I. T. Ramsey and R. Porter (eds.), *Personality and Science* (Edinburgh, Churchill Livingstone, 1971).

MEMORY, TIME AND INCARNATION IN THE POETRY OF EDWIN MUIR

CHRISTOPHER MOODY

When Edwin Muir died in 1958, his widow found the poem, "I have been taught" in one of his notebooks. It begins:

I have been taught by dreams and fantasies
Learned from the friendly and darker phantoms
And got great knowledge and courtesy from the dead
Kinsmen and kinswomen, ancestors and friends
But from two mainly
Who gave me birth.¹

That opening verse shows immediately the importance that memory had for Muir, both in his life and in his verse, and in particular how important to him was the memory of his childhood.

It had not always been so. For though on the surface, Muir's life was comparatively uneventful, intellectually he went through many changes, adopting and discarding various philosophies and ideologies. It was not until he married Willa Muir and turned to psychoanalysis to help him deal with his inner sense of futility and frustration, that memory became important to him. At that point, he began to dream again after years of being unaware of his unconscious life, and to remember the intense dreams and experiences he had had as a child. That marked the first stage in his recovery of a sense of meaning and purpose in his life through memory. The second stage began eighteen or so years later, when he began writing the first version of his autobiography entitled significantly, "The Story and the Fable". That book was written out of personal need, not for self-exposure or confession but, in his words, "to find out what a human being is in this extraordinary age which depersonalises everything".²

In his autobiography Muir gives us a most vivid portrayal of his life as a child in the Orkney society which had hardly changed since the middle ages. He remembered how easy it was for him as a child to become absorbed into two parallel realities; the external world of nature and events and the internal world of dreams and stories. He also remembered how easy it was to pass from the one to the other, both because of the flexibility of his own childhood imagination and because, in a society where conditions of life had not changed significantly for centuries, events in the ordinary world still linked in naturally with the ancestral world preserved in ballad and story. He came to realise that his childhood imaginations and the ancestral stories held the clue to a picture of human nature and human destiny which was more profound than the philosophies he had alternately adopted and rejected as a young man. He celebrated this traditional picture of life in his poem "Outside Eden".

Such is the country of this clan
Haunted by guilt and innocence.
There is a sweetness in the air
That blossomed as soon as time began.
But now is dying everywhere.³

In particular, he mentions the importance of ancestral memory:

The simple have long memories.
Memory makes simple all that is.⁴

The power of memory as he experienced it as a child both in his own dreams and in the ballads and stories which were told him, lay in the marriage it made between the conscious and the unconscious mind. Muir accepted the Jungian assessment of dreams as messages from the unconscious which balanced and corrected the images and opinions drawn from observations of the external world. Their connection with the collective unconscious and its archetypes meant that in many ways dreams were a more powerful pointer to deeper realities than reasoning from external reality. In his poem, "Day and Night", he contrasts the two forms of consciousness and ways of thinking derived from them and declares his aim:

to fit that world to this,
*The hidden to the visible play.*⁵

Out of dreams grow myths which touch on the mystery of our existence. Without these myths we lose a sense of our roots and identity. Each man's life has a surface meaning made up of what has happened to him and what he has done – the story – and participates in a deeper meaning which we touch in dreams – the fable. In his autobiography Muir wrote, "If I were recreating my life in an autobiographical novel, I could bring out these correspondences (between dream and reality) freely, and show how our first intuitions of the world expand into vaster and vaster images, *creating a myth we act almost without knowing it.*"⁶

Thus in Muir's thought, two worlds exist side by side in the mind of man, the world of dream and the world of day-time activity; the world of images and emblems and the world of rational thought; the eternal world glimpsed in the innocence and freshness of a child's vision and the adult world of change and decay; the world of story and explanation and the inner world of fable and myth. But these two worlds are, in fact, the same world seen from different vantage points. Thus by bringing the two together one can touch obliquely on the Reality behind them both. Muir was a natural Platonist. In his poetry one can trace the dualities inherent in Platonism between the many and One, the image and reality, time and eternity, good and evil. Through these dualities he glimpsed God as the Eternal Mystery. Both mind and nature were penetrated by a higher reality and source of value which could not be named:

I've been in love for long
With what I cannot tell
And will contrive a song
For the intangible
That has no mould or shape
From which there's no escape.

It is not anything
And yet all being is;
Being, being, being,
Its burden and its bliss.
How can I ever prove
What it is I love?⁷

The only way these dualities could be brought into relationship with one another in the mind was by the use of memory and reflection. That was why the task of writing his autobiography was so important to Muir. It was while

writing his autobiography at the age of 52 that he first became consciously aware of the presence of God.⁸

At the same time that he was finishing his autobiography, Muir was reading Augustine's "Confessions" and became particularly impressed by Augustine's discussion of time in Book XI. There Augustine argues that time does not exist outside the mind. There is no past, present and future; only a present of things past, a present of things present and a present of things future, existing in the mind in the mode of memory, sight and expectation.

"Time is certainly extendedness", argues Augustine, "but extendedness of the mind itself." As our minds are created and upheld by God whose mind is eternally present, so time is but one mode of eternity. "Past and present alike are wholly created and upheld in their passage by that which is always present." Thus it became possible, in time, to use myth and story in order to reveal "Eternity's secret script, the saving proof".⁹ One's view of the world is capable of transformation at any moment by the use of sight, memory and expectation.

Time shall cancel time's deceits,
And you shall weep for grief and joy
To see the whole world perishing
Into everlasting spring.¹⁰

Armed with this notion of the relation between time and eternity Muir was able to come to a positive evaluation of the moral struggle between good and evil inherent in man's nature. In time this struggle may seem endless. But time is only one mode of eternity, and in eternity there exists a mysterious reconciliation between the two. This reconciliation - "All things shall be well and all manner of things shall be well" - can be dimly anticipated by the man who strives to cling to the good. Thus time can be conquered through time. On this basis Muir moved on in late life to an acceptance of the Incarnation as the embodiment of man's predicament and his salvation through time. Time runs on and all things alone, good or bad, are lost eventually, unless

in some way everything is retrieved in the eternal pattern of which Christ is the symbol. Christ in Muir's late poems would become the "Image of man, from whom all have diverged".

The decisive move into belief in the Incarnation occurred for Muir when he stopped looking for the meaning of life in terms of his own autobiography and began to look for it in the life of Christ seen as including the life of every man. In his autobiography Muir speaks of the life of every individual as participating in some way in a universal fable endlessly repeated which included a primal innocence and a sense of fallenness. He goes on to say, "I should like to write that fable but I cannot even live it; and all I could do if I related the outward part of my life would be to show how far I had deviated from it."¹¹ For a long time Muir sought for the meaning of the fable in his own unconscious, his dreams and guesses, and intimations of immortality. These, through the action of memory and reflection, mediated to him a sense of the presence of God in the world, but they could not embody it. But when in Italy Muir encountered a religion which dared to show the Incarnation in images and works of art so plentiful and so commonplace that they were accepted as part of everyday life, he began to accept it as the full embodiment of "what we are not and can never be, our fable."¹²

Muir describes in his autobiography how he came across a plaque representing the Annunciation in a Roman street. The attitudes of the girl and the angel bending towards each other seemed to him as "the representation of a human love so intense that it could not reach farther . . . the perfect earthly symbol of the love that passes understanding."¹³ In the poem inspired by this experience the angel comes "feathered through time" to meet the girl.

The angel and the girl are met.
*Earth was the only meeting place.*¹⁴

No longer is Muir looking for the fulfilment of hints and guesses in a life beyond this one. He sees it embodied in

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life *now*, in the story of the Incarnation and in all human life of which it is the Image.

See, they have come together, see,
While the destroying minutes flow,
Each reflects the other's face
Till heaven in hers and earth in his
*Shine steady there.*¹⁵

The same sense of God and man meeting in time through the mystery of the Incarnation is expressed again in the poem, "The Killing", albeit in a more tentative form. There while "the sun revolved, the shadows wheeled" Christ on the cross is seen as accomplishing a journey which we all must take in our own way. The poem ends:

. Did a God
Indeed in dying cross my life that day
By chance, he on his road and I on mine?¹⁶

With this growing belief in the Incarnation as the focus of meaning for human life came a new confidence that the moral and spiritual struggle against evil was worthwhile and that something was actually achieved in the process of man's journey through time. This is expressed in the poems in the collection 'One Foot in Eden' – concerning Adam and the Fall, Abraham and the journey in faith. Like the patriarchs we tread a road full of pitfalls, but:

. . . our songs and legends call
The hazard and the danger good;
For our fathers understood
That danger was by hope begot . . .¹⁷

Muir saw the Fall and the Incarnation as part of the same mystery because with his view of time, he did not see them in order of succession, but as simultaneous events potentially present to the memory of man. "O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam that won for us so great a Redeemer." This becomes Muir's song too in poems like 'One Foot in Eden' and 'Adam's Dream'. In both poems time plays an important part. In 'One Foot in Eden':

Time's handiworks by time are haunted,
And nothing now can separate
The corn and tares compactly grown . . .
. . . Evil and good stand thick around
In the fields of charity and sin
Where we shall lead our harvest in.¹⁸

Time destroys the beauty of Eden, the innocence of childhood, but in this destruction produces "flowers in Eden never known" which man's memory makes permanent.

What had Eden ever to say
Of hope and faith and pity and love
Until was buried all its day
And memory found its treasure trove?
Strange blessings never in Paradise,
Fall from these beclouded skies.

No longer in these poems is Muir's poetry dominated by ideas of return and eternal recurrence. Instead there is some positive progress made through time, even though "the road is scarce begun".¹⁹ In 'Adam's Dream', the first man dreams of the generations yet to come as a rabble moving without apparent order:

. . . 'This is time'
Thought Adam in his dream, and time was strange
To one lately in Eden.²⁰

But as the dream changes he sees that all the frenzied movement has a form and sequence past the knowledge of the participants. This is the stage of understanding Muir had reached when he began his autobiography, the stage of 'fable'. But:

. . . Adam longed
For more, not this mere moving pattern, not
This illustrated storybook of mankind
Always a-making, improvised on nothing.
At that he was among them, and saw each face
Was like his face, so that he would have hailed them
As sons of God but that something restrained him.
And he remembered all, Eden, the Fall,
*The Promise, and his place, and took their hands . . .*²¹

The spell of innocence had to be broken if the greater reality, the promise of the Incarnation, which Adam *remembers* as something already there (just as before he had half-remembered time as something which was not just a consequence of his Fall) is to break through.

What weight are we to give to the view of the Incarnation which emerges from these poems of Muir's late maturity? It is clear from tracing the emergence of the idea that it owes as much to his reflection on his own life, his dreams as well as his everyday experience, his meditations on time and memory, as it does to a direct response to the Christ of the New Testament. In a letter written to George Barker before his last conversion, he had written: "In a way it may be argued that religion has been destroyed by being turned into poetry". Is that what has happened to the doctrine of the Incarnation as it emerges in this very personal form in his late poetry? For as, he remarked in this letter, there is a 'difference between the kind of belief on which religion is founded, and the kind of imaginative assent we give to poetry . . . For poetry the actual Christ is not necessary, but for religion he is. The religious Christ, theoretically at any rate, can be taken away by historical research, science etc; or if not taken away can at any rate be modified. But it is hard to see what can be done with the imaginative Christ, since he is quite inside the mind.'²² How far did this remain Muir's view and how far can we agree with the original distinction here laid down?

This is a very difficult area to which Edwin Muir gives us very little clue directly. He was frightened of turning the Incarnation from a mystery mediated and experienced in our daily lives into a bloodless concept, the property of theologians. In his poem "The Incarnate One" he wrote:

The Word made flesh here is made word again,
A word made word in flourish and arrogant crook.
See there King Calvin with his iron pen,
And God three angry letters in a book,
And there the logical hook
On which the Mystery is impaled and bent
Into an ideological instrument.²³

Edwin Muir's whole life and work was a protest against the prevailing trend of his times towards ideology. In so far as doctrine became a means of manipulation and control, cutting men off from the roots of their existence in

tradition, myth and moral choice, he saw it as being essentially no different from the totalitarian ideologies he had attacked in poems like 'The Usurpers'. He drew the inspiration for his approach to the Incarnation more from works of art than the direct teaching of the Church. His own poems are not didactic, but at best become icons in words, to which one makes an immediate response of the imagination. His approach to the Incarnation, therefore, was entirely open. He saw the story of the Incarnation opening out to history in the story of his own life and the whole history of mankind as it moved on into the future. He accepted Christ's divine status only as the image of wholeness for all mankind as it would be revealed when time and history were brought to a close in God, the eternal present.

So far therefore Muir seems to come down on the side of the 'imaginative Christ'. On the other hand there can be no doubt that in his late poetry the Incarnation had become a controlling concept which gave him renewed inspiration and confidence in grappling with the themes which had dominated his poetry for years. There had been a decisive shift away from dream images drawn from his own unconscious towards a more public form of utterance. In these poems, even when he uses images drawn from classical mythology, these images are shaped by Christian belief.

There seem to me to be close parallels between Muir's thought as revealed in late poetry and his autobiography and Austin Farrer's in the *Glass of Vision*. In that book, Farrer asserts, "The martyrdom of a virtuous rabbi and his miraculous return are not in themselves the redemption of the world." The Incarnation can only be understood *in toto*, as a divine process within the Godhead, the manhood of Christ and the whole mystical Body which includes the history of all mankind. This mystery is apprehended by us in Scripture, in the doctrine of the Church and in our own lives as individuals. Through the sacred images and symbols we receive a foretaste of the whole substance of the saving mystery. In his letter to George Barker, Muir could find no deeper source for the images which he used in his poetry than his own unconscious and the communal memory of his ancestors. But in his autobiography he calls the works of art which provoked his assent to the Incarnation as "new incarnations sprung from the inexhaustible source of metaphysical felicity."²⁴ In other words he had become aware of an agency at work in them other than the free play of the artist's imagination. By implication he had begun to realise that the same agency was at work in his own poetry. With this realisation the rigid distinction between the imaginative Christ of poetry and the Christ of religion began to break down. It became harder for him to draw a line between the imaginative assent he had given to these works of art and faith in the mystery which lay behind them. He ended his autobiography with the words: "As I look back on the part of the mystery which is my own life, 'my own fable', what I am most aware of is that we receive more than we can ever give; we receive from the past, on which we draw every breath, but also – and this is a point of faith – from the Source of the mystery itself, by means which religious people call Grace". And, writing about his parents in a rough draft for a poem found after his death, he confesses:

How could they have been what they were
but for Incarnation?²⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. *Collected Poems*, p. 301.
2. Letter to Sydney Schiff, 17 May 1938, *Selected Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. by P. H. Butler, p. 100.
3. *Collected Poems*, pp. 212-3.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Collected Poems*, p. 240.
6. Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 48.
7. 'In Love for Long', *Collected Poems*, p. 159.
8. Letter to David Peat, 28 February 1940, *Selected Letters*, p. 117.
9. 'To Franz Kafka', *Collected Poems*, p. 233.
10. 'Into Thirty Centuries Born', *Collected Poems*, p. 249.
11. *Autobiography*, p. 49.
12. *Autobiography*, p. 49.
13. *Autobiography*, p. 278.
14. *Collected Poems*, p. 223.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Collected Poems*, p. 224.
17. 'The Succession', *Collected Poems*, p. 221.
18. *Collected Poems*, p. 227.
19. 'The Succession', *Collected Poems*, p. 221.
20. *Collected Poems*, p. 210.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Selected Letters*, pp. 94-5.
23. *Collected Poems*, p. 228.
24. p. 279.
25. p. 281.
26. *Selected Letters*, p. 210.

BIBLICAL LANGUAGE AND EXEGESIS – HOW FAR DOES STRUCTURALISM HELP US?¹

JAMES BARR

Perhaps this paper should be entitled 'Confessions of a Repentant Structuralist' – and yet it seems uncertain whether the repentance is sufficiently sincere, and indeed whether the sin repented of was ever committed. For I must take some blame – or credit, as the case may be – for having introduced some concepts of structuralism to the biblical and theological scene. For how many scholars on that scene had heard of structural linguistics or the like before *The Semantics of Biblical Language* was published in 1961?² How many had even heard the name of Saussure? Yet if I ever became a structuralist – and I am not sure whether that is the case or not – it must have happened by accident, for I had no great experience, so far as I can recall, in the sources out of which structuralism appears to have grown. The one and only book which I can remember having read in my student days, and this before I became involved in biblical studies at all, was Jespersen's *The Philosophy of Grammar*, which, I suppose one might say, formed an introduction to the study of language on a basis something like a structuralist one. On the one hand it showed that languages can and must be seen as a system of elements co-existing at one time and interacting on one another, alongside the seeing of the elements historically on the basis of what they might have been before. On the other hand it showed the inadequacy of the traditional school grammar on which one had been brought up, with its naively conceptual base for categorization, e.g. the simple idea that a noun is 'the name of a person, animal, place or thing'. Another thing one heard about was Gestalt psychology, and the idea that one must look at the form of something as a whole rather than analyse it into different parts and measurements; the idea seemed good but I do not remember studying it beyond the general conception.

Nevertheless in the course of time I seem to have got into a position where I could be labelled as a structuralist, and I suppose the most distinguished person to have made this identification is Professor Gerhard Friedrich, who became editor of the theological dictionary to the New Testament after Kittel himself, and who once asked me, I think, whether I really 'identified myself with (the verb used was *sich bekennen zu*) the structuralist view of language as completely as it appeared from my writings'. And, to quote from a fairly recent article from his pen:³

Was Barr in grosser Einseitigkeit vertritt, ist die Forderung des amerikanischen Strukturalismus, der auf kontextuelle Bindung entscheidenden Wert legt, den Wortbedeutungen aber keine Aufmerksamkeit zuwendet.

This however is an odd judgement. Looking back at *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, I do see that I quoted standard American structuralists like Bloomfield a few times, and not surprisingly, for they uncovered many aspects of language in an excellent way. But the aspect to which Friedrich alludes, i.e. the tendency of Bloomfieldian linguistics to regard semantics as lying without its purview, was exactly the opposite of my own opinion;⁴ and indeed it is difficult to see how anyone who held that Bloomfieldian view would have been interested enough to attempt to write

a book on semantics in biblical language.

There were, however, two other roots in the history of ideas, other than the reading of actual structuralist works, that, I think, produced in the minds of persons of my generation a certain tendency towards a nascent structuralist outlook. The first of these was a certain dissatisfaction with purely historical explanation as a statement of the meaning of texts. Some of this came from fundamentalism and that sort of thinking, which had always rebelled against the *free* historical explanation of texts – 'free' meaning an explanation that was open to results that would conflict with standard evangelical doctrines including those of biblical inspiration and inerrancy.

But this reaction did not necessarily come from that sort of dogmatically conservative position. It came also from the feeling that, even if all the critical analyses and divisions were correct, they did not furnish a proper account of the meaning of the texts. This was, I think, a difference from some of the men of an earlier generation, who had left the impression, whether they meant it so or not, that the historical analysis into circumstances and sources *was* the ultimate expression of meaning in the material. As against this sort of thing, we felt that there must be another level on which we might speak of the meaning of texts *as they are*. This is one of the foundations of the interest in structuralism in biblical studies, just as it leads also to – for instance – the emphasis on the canonical form as pioneered by B. S. Childs.⁵

And the second force that, within Old Testament scholarship at any rate, conduced to a kind of proto-structuralism was the primary response to exactly that problem, namely the rise of Old Testament theology in its modern form, especially as it was worked out by Eichrodt in his massive and informative work, still basic to the entire subject. Eichrodt's approach can be described as a structural one, if not a structuralist one. Given the variety of history and of sources, and granting the historical development of ideas, he wanted to detach a comprehensive picture of the world of faith of the Old Testament, a cross-section through the historical development, which would distinguish the central from the peripheral and provide a base of reference for the understanding of the outlying elements. Individual elements made sense, Eichrodt thought, only through their relation to the whole; and that relation to the whole gave them a meaning that they might not have had if they were related to some other scheme, e.g. to ancient Canaanite myth or to animistic origins and the like. In this sense Eichrodt's Old Testament theology, and other works in the same pattern, were distinctly structural in style. The vast mass of highly variable detail made sense when it was seen in relation to a comparatively simple inner structure.

Later on, other types of Old Testament theology, and in particular von Rad's, seemed to repudiate that approach; yet it seems likely to remain as a central insight of the total twentieth-century approach to the subject. This understanding of biblical theology, then, formed a certain *praeparatio evangelica* for the arrival of structuralism. In what, then, did it differ from the truly structuralist understanding?

In two ways, I think. First of all, Old Testament theology of Eichrodt's kind did not use the scheme, built upon a linguistic base, that modern structuralism has made

customary. The structure was conceptual: it was a system of theological ideas, and later suffered criticism for exactly that, namely that it was too systematic. It was not a code, a sign system; it was content, and content meant conceptual content. Exactly this feature of course brought the criticism that such biblical theologies assimilated the Bible excessively to the nature of systematic theology, and not without some reason: on the other hand they could be defended on the same ground, with the argument that the Bible did in fact have a theological core and that there was no reason why this should not be disengaged and stated. And, secondly, it could be argued that this sort of theology did not really provide an adequate key to the understanding of *texts*. It said: taking the Old Testament as a whole, there is an underlying structure against which and through which you can see everything. But from this there did not seem to emerge any clear vision of a way in which one might read a particular text, e.g. the story of the Flood or of Samson and Delilah, in and for itself. The only thing you were instructed to do was to read them against the background of this comprehensive view of the world of faith of the Old Testament as a whole. It was this weakness, no doubt, more than any other factor that caused many scholars to prefer von Rad's very different, and less structural, mode of reading the texts.

In these ways, then, the Old Testament theology of the thirties and forties both prepared the way for a structural reading and left open gaps which a structuralist approach might in due time fill up. Where then is the difference? What is it that the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss or of Greimas offers that is radically new in relation to these older approaches? Perhaps, let us say, it is the adoption of the structure of *language* as the model for the structures of culture, society and literature. 'Roland Barthes once defined structuralism as a method for the study of cultural artefacts which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics'.⁶ Such a basis for the structure of the Israelite world of faith was certainly not present in the mind of Eichrodt. The model upon which his Old Testament theology was constructed was not that of linguistics, but that of more traditional theology. This is so whether or not we agree with the criticism that Eichrodt excessively made a systematic theology out of the Old Testament. For our present purposes, and whether or not that criticism is valid, we cannot doubt that he saw his structure as a theology rather than as a semiotic code.

First of all, however, we may usefully go back to a point mentioned earlier: undoubtedly one of the reasons that has attracted attention to structuralism as a framework for scriptural exegesis is the idea that it provides a way of escape from the historical problems which have been so central in much modern study. A text, it may be argued, has its meaning in itself and in its own internal relations of meaning, and not in the historical process out of which it emerged, not even in the intentions of the writer. From a structuralist point of view, therefore, it may be supposed, historical relations may be irrelevant. Thus, as suggested, one strong source of interest in structuralism, at least in the English-speaking world, has lain in the influence of a conservative background with its repudiation of modern critical perspectives and results.

It is a moot question, however, whether this is a right evaluation of the structuralist contribution. First of all, even if such a structuralist reading, independent of historical perspectives, is possible, it does not seem clear that it cannot

be combined with, and mutually illuminated by, the historical perspectives which arise from a different approach. Secondly, if a structuralist reading is really independent of historical perspectives, it must be clearly stated that this is so, and that the text therefore provides *no* reliable historical information at all, just as its reading is independent of historically critical considerations. In other words, if a historically neutral structuralist reading is possible, it should be made clear that it provides no support whatever to the traditional conservative modes of understanding, just as it does not depend on support from the historically critical approach. Where structuralism has been welcomed by currents of opinion that are theologically conservative, this has often been because they were ready to read into the structuralist approach elements that derived from their own historical conservatism about the Bible. On the other hand, even apart from this, it may be that the conservative will reason thus: the historical-critical approach has been maintained largely on the grounds that it is *the one* necessary approach: but, even if one accepts the validity of historical criticism, the fact that there does exist somewhere, in structuralism or something related to it, another approach, and one that works in independence of historical questions, must mean that the claims of historical-critical reading to validity are greatly relativized.⁷

This only brings us, however, to the more important question, whether structuralism is really a non-historical method or approach in the first place. I don't think it should be accepted that it is so. The characteristic structuralist affirmation of the synchronic axis as against the diachronic axis should not be taken to mean that the diachronic axis is insignificant and may be neglected: on the contrary, it means that the synchronic axis, the understanding of relations within a culture or a system *at one time*, is essential for the understanding of the diachronic axis, the relations of change between a state at one time and a state at another. In the realm of language, which is after all the basic paradigm, this is particularly evident. The fault of much older 'historical' study was that it sought to trace through time the changes in the individual items; while the change of individual items can be seen and assessed only as part of the total structure of the language before and after. Thus the more purely 'historical' approach failed to be historical, and the synchronic view made it possible to be more fully historical.⁸ Again, one main criticism of the use of etymology is: not that it is wrong in itself to seek to trace back meanings and forms of a word into the past, but that, even if this can be done, one no longer knows how it functioned, and therefore what it meant, unless one also knows – or can reconstruct – how all the other words at that time also functioned and what they then meant. And etymology as usually practised has never even attempted to do that.

But the same is true of political history and other history such as the history of theological ideas: one cannot trace, for instance, the history of the doctrine of the trinity over several centuries as if it was a stream of consciousness about the trinity in particular existing in itself. Rather, various stages of that doctrine have to be seen in the conspectus of the total configuration of church life and doctrine and society, each in a particular time. Thus the essential defence of the synchronic vision is not that it is superior to and can displace the diachronic, but that it is the essential basis for diachronic vision also. Certainly in language study it is easy to see how the purely historical vision, separated from adequate synchronic anchorage, both

in the general functioning of language and in the synchrony of this or that particular language, has in the event deeply failed to be accurately historical, and has tended to lapse into a historicism that is in fact profoundly speculative. Thus a historically-oriented structuralism is not only quite possible but is salutary and basically necessary.

Structuralism, then, cannot legitimately be pressed into the service of a historically conservative view of the Bible. On the contrary, it can with reason be argued that the basic historical-critical impulses arose from a sort of primitive structuralist vision. Polzin, for instance, in a recent study of structuralism in its application to biblical studies – a study which may not need to be wholly accepted, but which nevertheless remains a significant pointer – has argued that the fundamental approach of Wellhausen has a close affinity to structuralist principles:⁹ ‘I have little hesitation in viewing [Wellhausen’s] chapter one as a good example of diachronic structural analysis.’¹⁰ In any case, leaving Polzin and speaking for myself now, it seems to me that the basic traditional critical methods can well be seen as structural in character, and can be explained and accounted for in structuralist terms. Starting from the texts as they are, but finding difficulty in establishing intelligible structure on the basis of the present surface form of the text, the critical movement proceeds to identify structures which are present within the text but which do not appear on the surface, because they are related genetically or generatively to the text as it is. The structures so discerned then form a framework for the understanding of the main contours of the text. The basis of historical-critical reading is, and always was, the form of the text as it now stands. Unfortunately, as the critical results became more established and familiar, the perception of the existing text from which the critics had started came to be less and less evident; and for this reason, if for no other, it is salutary that people are looking today at fresh possibilities in all this area. In general, then, the structuralist perspective is not so antithetical to historical reading as has often been supposed, and it may well be thought that the two are interlinked and complement one another, with the structural vision actually forming the foundation for the best historical understanding.

But now let us look at the subject from another angle and one that is more critical of the direction in which much structuralist work has developed. Let us grant the base in linguistics from which, according to many thinkers, structuralism started out – though shortly I shall raise some questions about even that. But, granting the validity of this base, the question must follow: is it really probable that a conception of structure that is valid for language – and, as we shall see, valid particularly for certain special areas of language – will also, more or less without change, be extensible so as to apply to the workings of society, the character of myth, the criticism of literature, and the understanding of religion? Can this really be so?

And let us first of all record the impression that, in the study of the Bible, in spite of a large body of theory and some often fearsome terminology, structuralist exegesis has thus far produced no large body of profound and convincing results.¹¹ Sometimes the results produced seem rather paltry, insubstantial, and such as could in any case have been perceived by any imaginative reader even if not possessed of the structuralist equipment upon which they are theoretically based. Dr Polzin, whose interesting observations about Wellhausen we have just quoted, has in the same book a

chapter on ‘The Code of the Book of Job’ which is highly mathematical, diagrammatic and arcane to a degree. The story is taken as a series of ‘transformations’ in which, for instance, $+X+Y$ becomes $-X+Y$ for Job himself but $+X-Y$ for his friends, X being the sphere of belief and Y the sphere of personal experience (p. 94); and this is a very simple instance extracted from a much more complicated representation. But when the author goes on in the next chapter to apply this algebra to the actual Book of Job, what emerges, though plausible and perhaps even probable, is not so exceptional. The book is ‘about a man who has everything that life has to offer and loses it all in a brief series of disasters’ (p. 102). Again:

The message of the book centers around a conflict between God, who affirms life however cruel, and Job, who wanted death to avoid that cruelty; it is the story of how God won.

In short, Job is portrayed throughout the book as a man who always recognizes the power of God and his subordination to him, and for this very reason rejects life as God has constituted it. Nowhere in the book is Job the unbeliever; rather he is the supreme realist who rejects not God but life as God has shaped it for man.¹²

Excellent, one must say: good sentiments in every way; but in what way do they differ from that which might have been conceived by any imaginative observer who was quite innocent of all knowledge of the ‘code’ of Job? And this is no isolated example. Structuralist explications of parables of Jesus, or of miracle stories like his walking on the water, often leave the reader with a sense of disappointment: he asks himself, what has actually been clearly and firmly discovered here, that is different from what we might have known before? Is structuralism really a way that will lead to a new set of powerful insights and results in biblical study, or is it rather an expression of a new outlook of scholars, who are going to express themselves in a new way but will have essentially banal things to say?

Where then is the source of this weakness? Rather tentatively and cautiously I will reassert the position already mentioned. Granting that a firm structural approach is essential to the study of language – and even here it is far from certain that structuralism is the last word – is it the case that this model can serve throughout the range of human studies, including society, culture, religion and literature? Is it not the case that when we move into (say) literature we move into another genus, so that a model based strictly on what happens in language no longer works? Moreover, the linguistic model adopted as the base for much cultural and literary structuralism is a model taken (often expressly) primarily from one particular department of linguistics, namely the phonology. In language the phonology is the most clearly and simply structured and systematic element. You have a small and closed system: a language has, shall we say, thirty phonemes, which can be defined as having certain precise contrasts as against each other, and fairly simple relations of opposition prevail. It is to this department of linguistics that structuralist theory continually appeals. See for example Culler, who quotes Trubetzkoy maintaining that the study of distinctive or differential features that make objects socially significant is closely analogous to work in phonology.¹³ And thus, to use in paraphrase an example that Culler actually cites from Trubetzkoy, the difference in the length or shortness of a woman’s skirt is a social sign closely analogous to the difference between *b* and *p* in English, i.e. to the difference between *bin* and *pin*.

Now this may be true of women's skirts, at least so long as one sticks to the simple matter of length, which must be either shorter or longer – though it becomes much more complicated when one comes to colour and still more so when one comes to design. And this is the question as I see it. Structuralism seems to have decided that essentially *simple* oppositions are the base for social life, communication and literary meaning. Binary oppositions are much in favour, where the alternatives are 0 or 1, light or dark, up or down. Lévi-Strauss's famous 'The Raw and the Cooked' is a classic example. Not surprisingly, therefore, structuralist books and articles on the Bible can commonly be recognized, even before the reader has read a word, by the presence of *diagrams* – a line down the middle of the page, terms on one side matched by terms on the other side, arrows at decisive points leading from one side to the other. 'And Moses said' can be thus represented: from the state zero (silence) we pass to the state 1 (speech). Jesus getting into a boat is an event of the same order: one moment he is on the land (1), the next he is on the sea, which might be expressed as 0. Blinding flashes of illumination of this kind are not infrequently to be met with.¹⁴

Now it seems to me that – whatever the case with social life and anthropology – not very much of religion or of biblical literature lends itself to this sort of categorization. We are dealing with relations which are not simple but highly complicated, with choices which are not between one and another out of two but between a multitude of possibilities. If we affirm this, then it does not necessarily mean that we are rejecting the model of language, for it may mean simply that we are moving from one department of language, the phonology, to another. I would suspect that social, literary and religious substance is more akin to semantics and to syntax than to phonology. This is a subject that has much occupied me as a lexicographer of Hebrew. Hebrew words, like the words of any other language, have meaning through relation to the other words with which they are collocated in a phrase or longer utterance (the 'syntagmatic' dimension) and through relation with the other words which might conceivably take the place of the word we are talking about (the 'paradigmatic' dimension). In this sense contrasts, oppositions and syntactic relations are the substance of meaning and communication. But only in certain cases do these relations take the form of simple or binary oppositions, and only in certain cases can they be reduced to combinations of simple or binary oppositions. In most cases we are dealing with a continuum of vaguely related, partly overlapping, terms, and with a greatly extensible series of possibilities rather than a closed matrix. No matter how long a sentence is, you can add something more. If you take a group of words in a semantic field, e.g. the different Hebrew words for 'man', you don't find clear and simple oppositions but rather vague and fluid ones. And this is how the literature works. In certain examples of biblical Hebrew one can indeed state a very neat and simple system of contrasts, to which there may perhaps be no exception, such as this one, which I published a few years ago:¹⁵



But I published this expressly as an exception: most sets of terms do not fit into so neat a scheme. If we take the

vocabulary of the field 'to hide', as Balentine has recently shown in an exemplary study,¹⁶ we find about seven different primary verbs, which form not a system but a sort of loose set or collection, and they have all sorts of unsystematic and unpredictable lines of interchangeability running between one and another. Only one of them, however, is used in the phrase, 'to hide the face', which is a very important religious expression. But there is no great distance from the group that means 'hide' to a further loose grouping of words, such as the words for 'cover', or again to the words for 'turn away', which have a close relationship to the hiding (or turning away) of the face. In the original planning of the Oxford Hebrew Dictionary we had the idea of stating in each entry the other words that functioned in the same semantic field, but except in obvious cases it turned out to be too difficult to do this, not because it is hard to make a list, but because it is hard to put a clear and definite end to it. The terms which seem to fit well into a rather simple structure, like that of 'holy/unholy' and 'clean/unclean' as stated above, seem to be those that are *institutionalized*: these are terms for some distinction that is powerfully marked out and defined by institutional practices, deeply rooted in the culture and more or less universally so stated and expressed. But such terms, though they are common in the literature, do not form more than a small part of its diction. I therefore wonder whether a structuralism that is too much guided by such examples – which for certain fields, like anthropology, may be of the first importance – can really hope to deal with the character of a literature like the Old Testament. Thus, as I say, if one had to state a linguistic analogue for the structures of literature or religion, I would see it in semantics and syntax rather than in phonology.

But fundamentally I do not feel sure that these relations should be analogical at all. Even within linguistics syntax is not built upon a structure analogical to that of phonology; and literature, which is *used language* and not just language (*parole* as against *langue* in Saussure's terms: German is not the same thing as German literature) stands on a different level from language, just as syntax stands on a different level from phonology. Language and culture are thus not symmorphous. It is of course easy to point to *some* elements in both which *may* be symmorphous: these are often our institutionalized terms just referred to. Again, it might be significant if it should prove to be true that all languages form their sets of colour terms in the same order – and it has recently been ably argued that Hebrew fits into this pattern – and that this order is related to fundamental physiological and social universals in man.¹⁷ There may, then, indeed be cases of such symmorphousness, but that proves nothing, for one would have to show that such symmorphousness prevails all along the line, and this is what cannot be proved, for there are great amounts of contrary evidence.

One other instance in the realm of religion: it may be that Dumézil might be right in his reconstruction of Indo-European mythology as based on a tripartite scheme, with a structure of the three great gods related to the three classes, in India the *brahmana*, the *ksatriya* or warrior class, and the *vaiśya* or farming class.¹⁸ This account has often been set forth as an example of how structuralism might provide a good account of a mythology.¹⁹ This may be so. But in the Semitic world I find it difficult to believe that the pantheons had this simple structured shape; consider what we know of Ugarit, or of Philo of Byblos and his picture of Phoenician

religion.²⁰ If in fact the reality is not structured but is a loose collection, or is lop-sided, haphazardly shaped, then too simple a structuralist approach will misrepresent it.

In conclusion I turn to a further question. Let us suppose that a fully structuralist approach to scripture should come to prevail: in what way will its results relate to theology? Though I have argued that structuralism and historical perspective are not contradictory, let us imagine the extreme case, that we in our structuralist future, rejecting the historicist past, more or less ignore historical questions and read the Bible as a text with its meaning in itself, as it stands, seeking to identify the codes and structures with which it operates. How will such a reading relate to Christian theology? The question is a relevant one, for quite apart from structuralism there are plenty of experts in literary criticism who have strong views on how the Bible should be understood and who are not backward in telling biblical scholars that they, through their almost total ignorance of literature and literary criticism, are going about things in the wrong way, their interest in historical origins and historical meanings being a major part of that wrong way. Certainly not all these men and women of letters would admit to being structuralists, and many of them are doubtless rather unfavourable to structuralism. Nevertheless the advent of structuralism on the scene of biblical studies is likely to merge to a large extent with that general current of literary opinion, so that each will derive some support from the existence of the other.

Now it seems to me clear that such a structural and literary reading of the Bible is a possibility, and indeed a viable possibility. It might also – by accident – fit in with certain currents in theology and correct certain misunderstandings which our critical practice has inflicted on theology. Nevertheless I doubt whether such a structural reading could provide the understanding of the Bible that theology needs: because, while such a reading might fit with the nature of the Bible as a literature, it does not therefore and for that reason alone fit with the nature of the Christian faith as a religion. The Christian faith, as a religion, is not purely an understanding of the Bible: rather, it is a relation to really existing persons, a relation which is communicated, enriched and controlled through the Bible. The reading of the Bible in relation to that extra-textual actuality seems to be a necessity for faith, and therefore for theology; but if extra-textual persons and events are thus essential for theology, then the addition of a historical element, which must in fact be a critical historical element, is also essential. Thus the structuralism that worked purely on the level of the Bible as a text would be ambiguous in its relation to theology and the codes that it uncovered might be the codes of biblical society rather than the lineaments of the affirmations of the faith. In fact, where literary critics make judgements upon biblical exegesis and seek to influence it, which in itself may be entirely right and wholesome, I think they are commonly using their literary expertise, which may be fully admirable and salutary in itself, as a vehicle into which they read something quite else, which literary procedure neither entails nor requires – namely, their own sets of religious convictions.

To sum up, then, if structuralism means that we see human life as a network of relations, where things have meaning not in themselves but as they stand within that network, then this seems to me to be fundamentally right, and for theology very important. Whether, however, all

that has been set forth as structuralist interpretation should therefore count very high in our esteem is another matter. The fact remains that structuralist interpretation of the Bible is as yet far from having to its credit anything comparable with the great body of material and insights that the older philological and historical study has provided.

1. A paper read in King's College on 26th February 1980, in the course of a series of seminars on the general subject of structuralism.
2. Edmund Leach's articles on biblical subjects, which made the public aware of structuralism in another sense, appeared mainly later in the 1960s.
3. G. Friedrich, "Begriffsgeschichtliche" Untersuchungen im Theologischen Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* (Mainz Academy of Sciences) 20, 1976, 151-77; quotation from p. 174.
4. Bloomfield himself did not actually maintain this view in such stark terms, but his influence led in this direction: see, for example, R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 208, 220.
5. Leach states the position admirably: 'this kind of analysis rests on a presumption that the whole of the text as we now have it *regardless of the varying historical origins of its component parts* may properly be treated as a unity. This contrasts very sharply with the method of orthodox scholarship'. So in 'The Legitimacy of Solomon', in M. Lane, ed., *Structuralism: a Reader* (London: Cape, 1970), pp. 290f.
6. So Jonathan Culler in D. Robey, ed., *Structuralism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 21; his entire essay is on 'The Linguistic Basis of Structuralism'.
7. It should perhaps be added that there is no real or inner affinity between structuralism and the rather conservative religious trends that tend to cherish it for these values. In fact structuralism can be, and often is, rather atheistic, and as contemptuous of traditional religion as it is of accepted biblical scholarship. This does not alter the fact that *within biblical scholarship* structuralism may have considerable appeal for the more pious and conservative mind.
8. Examples such as Saussure himself, and Dumézil (see below), illustrate how deeply much work that turned out to be structuralist was rooted in, and arose from the assumptions of, the older historical-philological sort of research.
9. R. M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, and Missoula, Scholars Press, 1977).
10. Polzin, *ibid.*, p. 148.
11. The work that is likely to occur to the mind of the informed reader as the most profound and comprehensive specimen of biblical exegesis on a more or less structuralist basis yet produced is Paul Beauchamp's *Création et séparation* (Paris, 1969); see my short notice in the *Book List* of the Society for Old Testament Studies, 1973, p. 33. But it would be unwise to place too much emphasis on this work for two reasons: firstly, because it is devoted to the first chapter of Genesis, which might well be the most obviously 'structuralized' piece of writing in the entire Bible and which invites explanation along the lines of structure, opposition and separation in a way that scarcely applies to other texts; secondly, because Beauchamp himself did not consider his book to be really structuralist at all, although it contained certain sections that were 'related to structural analysis' – see his 'L'Analyse structurale et l'exégèse', *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 22, 1972 (Uppsala Congress Volume), 113-128, and on this point p. 117n.
12. Polzin, *ibid.*, pp. 104f.
13. Culler in Robey, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
14. Sometimes these very simple categorizations can be understood if one concentrates on the point that they represent *structures* upon which meaning is based but not actual *meanings*; but if this is so then one must say that many writings give the impression, perhaps unintentionally, that the detection of these structures is the detection of meanings.
15. 'Semantics and Biblical Theology', in *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 22, 1972, 11-19, quotation from p. 15f.
16. S. E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: the Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1983).
17. See Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplementary Series, 21, 1982).
18. See G. Dumézil, *Les Dieux des Indo-Européens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952).
19. Cf. E. Haugen, 'The mythical structure of the ancient Scandinavians: some thoughts on reading Dumézil', in M. Lane, *Structuralism: a Reader* (London: Cape, 1970), 170-83.
20. Cf. my 'Philo of Byblos and his "Phoenician History"', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 57, 1974-5, 17-68, with literature there cited, plus the more recent works of Troiani, Baumgartner, and Attridge and Oden.

REINCARNATION: THE DOCTRINE OF HEREDITY AND HOPE IN URHOB BELIEF

M. Y. NABOFA

The Urhobo people of the Southern part of Nigeria describe the rhythm of human existence as being in a cyclic form. One is born, grows old and dies to be brought into life again by his offspring and/or his relations to repeat the same process as many more times as possible. Their idea is that man's normal transitional cycle of life involves decorporation and incorporation. Those who died here on earth and thus decorporated from the physical sections of their extended paternal and maternal family groups with elaborate burial rites, are reborn and incorporated into the stocks of these same families in the spiritual realm. It is the firm belief and hope of every adherent of Urhobo indigenous religion that when he dies he will join the members of his family groups who had gone before him and he would be reborn here on earth either by his offspring or his other affins. The purpose of this paper is to attempt a discussion of this cyclic pattern of existence, a doctrine which tries to resolve the problem of existence after death, and character traces and physical resemblance of the departed found in the newly born ones into the lineage. They try to explain this issue by the doctrine of reincarnation whose main theories hinge on the fact of heredity and hope. The materials for this study are drawn mainly from the information which I gathered during my field work among the Urhobo between 1973 and 1982.

In the Urhobo concept of man it is stated that every human being is composed of two principal entities which are referred to as *Erhi* and *Ugboma*, which could be roughly translated as Soul/Spirit and body.¹ In referring to these two halves of man at the same time the people first mention *Erhi* before *Ugboma* (Soul and body) because it is the former that gives meaning and expression or reality to the latter. In the people's cosmology these two entities were supposed to have lived forever, but something happened whereby man has been caused to die. God's primeval plan was that when human beings grew really old they would regenerate by sloughing off their skins like snakes, including the renewal of their physical nature and vigour. They were to become fresh and young human beings. This process was to be repeated, so man was to live for ever (Nabofa, in Adegbola 1983, p. 297); but they lost this mythical eternity. They explain the loss with a myth which states that misunderstanding arose among human beings and animals at the cradle of their lives over the fate and duration of all creatures' stay on earth. In order to resolve this issue they sent the dog and the toad to God for final determination. Each of these emissaries was given a different message to deliver to God as the choice of his creatures. It was agreed that whichever message out of the two got to God first He would ratify as a choice they made out of their free will. The dog was asked to tell God that all creatures have chosen to live forever, in accordance with the primordial plan; while the toad bore the message which states that they were not to live forever, but to return to God, that is, die after a while.² At the start of the race to God the dog outran his rival but its attention was diverted to the human faeces and its other favourite foods that lay along the path they were running. It stopped and started to eat; it over-helped itself and fell asleep. The toad caught up with the dog, passed it where it was snoring in a deep slumber and got to God first with its message just before the dog sped to

the finishing point. God ratified the toad's message and death came to be among all creatures. They all came to accept it as God's decree resulting from their decision which cannot be altered.³

As time went on men started to reflect on the nature and purpose of human life and they came to develop the hope that death does not write *finis* to human life; a hope that is built on what Arthur Schopenhauer refers to as Palingenesis (1974, 276) or partial reincarnation.

It has been suggested that the more clearly conscious a man is of the frailty, vanity and dreamlike nature of all things, the more clearly aware also of the eternity of his own true inner nature (Schopenhauer 1974, 271). This is very true of the Urhobo person, because he is very aware of the temporary nature of his physical existence hence he does not regard this earthly life as his permanent home. He looks upon death as a going home. His metaphysical teaching relates that as soon as man breathes his last breath his *Erhi* gets out of him, visits his beloved ones in distant places and haunts all places where he had lived and worked before it returns quickly to the place where the death occurred. The *Erhi* is said to accomplish all these distant activities within a split second. It is believed to be able to do all these within a short time because having been released out of the physical body it will no longer be affected nor restricted by time and space. It is during this period of its visitation that the beloved ones of the dead, who had not heard of the death are said to experience some awkward signs and uneasy feelings; and those who are capable of interpreting such feelings would decipher at once that some one very close to them has passed away.

The soul of the departed is said to stand near the body or hover around the premises where the corpse lies, watching over all the burial and funeral performances on its physical part. It remains there for about ninety days before it finally expires into the land of the dead⁴ to be fully incorporated into the happy folds of the ancestors, if he is considered worthy to be among them, otherwise, he will be driven out to lament his fate. This is one of the main reasons why full burial rites among the Urhobo are spread over such a period. The descendants of the deceased, especially those who are supposed to take over his erstwhile responsibilities, both in the home and in the community are required to remain in his home, where, in most cases, he is buried, for at least three months. They are required to remain there so that the soul of the newly departed may not feel lonely while still hovering around; rather it is believed to make the living-dead feel happy in the midst of his descendants. Such practice is said to give the departed an assurance that though he is dead his place in the society has not become empty. This is an aspect of immortality that every Urhobo craves for and those who have no offspring from their own loins are said to lament their fate in their death-bed and while on their journey to the land of the dead. There is an aspect of every Urhobo funeral rites which eloquently reveals the idea of the presence of the deceased's soul where such rituals may be taking place. The first few drops from each bottle of drink opened for the rites are poured out. They are for the departed and his invisible spiritual companions who have come to rejoice his home-coming with him and receive him into their fold. Not to pour out such libations is believed to result in the breaking of drinking glasses and bottles, and fights among the celebrants. It is as a result of the above belief and practices that the deceased are said not to be really

in the grave that the Urhobo have no doctrine of the resurrection of the body, that is, to use Idowu's words, "not in the dramatic eschatological sense of the grave giving up their dead at the consummation of all things" (E. B. Idowu, 1970 p. 196). To them, what takes place happens immediately after death. The dead pass through the gates to the spiritual realm when all the necessary rituals have been performed. As the departed are never regarded as being really dead in the grave, their offspring and other relations still refer to them as their fathers, mothers, brothers or sisters which they were before their transition. They are believed to be still capable of exercising their parental roles or so, though now in a more powerful and unrestricted way, over their survivors.

While the Urhobo do not believe that the dead remain in the grave nor in the eschatological resurrection, they have the doctrine of reincarnation. Theirs is not metempsychosis or total reincarnation, in which it is believed that the soul passes from one body to another, whereby the lot of the soul in each being is determined by its behaviour in a former life as it is explained in some oriental religions.⁵ An aspect of their doctrine of reincarnation states that before birth the reincarnating soul goes through a process of self-predestination whereby it declares a more propitious destiny for itself, taking into consideration the reverses or otherwise it suffered or enjoyed in the previous life, to lead a more successful one. The belief is that the person will really live according to the scheme of life which he mapped out for himself during this process of self-predestination.

When confronted as to whether they have an empirical evidence for this belief, or a mere wishful thinking, they say categorically that it is not a mere hallucination, and those whom I interviewed often gave three broad based areas of proof in their bid to validate their stand. The first is that nine days after a child's birth the parents find out through divination processes which of the departed member of the extended family groups has reincarnated in the new baby. The diviner identifies one of the either recently or long dead members of their lineage as the one who has just returned to earth, and as they so much have confidence in their divination processes they accept the diviner's declaration to be true and as a good proof for this doctrine under review.

Secondly, a reincarnated person is said to be easily identified through the bodily signs and behaviour of the child as he/she grows up. If there are conspicuous identical marks and behaviour the departed who is believed to have returned would be easily known. The orthodox Urhobo belief is that no soul goes to other families other than its own to reincarnate. The movement of souls is said to be always within the extended family groups both into the physical and the spiritual spheres.

Once it is revealed that a known person has come back to life, libations are poured to the ancestors and the original members of the family who bore such marks and characteristics, praying them to guard and guide the new child. If such a person had not been accorded proper and full burial rites these would be quickly carried out under the sponsorship of the parents of the newly born-babe so as to ensure peace and harmony for their child. This is one of the major reasons why the deceased is usually well arranged in the coffin before burial. Even if he were lame, or disfigured somehow, the disfigured part is straightened or well arranged as much as possible, before interment. Such is done so that no child

may take after him or her in such an ugly manner. It is in this area of physical resemblance, character traces and behavioural attitudes that the people mostly draw concrete examples from in trying to prove the reality of rebirth.

Thirdly, which is somehow related to the preceding one, is the phenomenon of the born-to-die children. The belief is that there are wandering souls who enter some women's wombs only to be born and die soon after. There are many stories and practical instances of such children who are said to have died and been born again bearing the marks that were made on them in their previous incarnation. From careful observations the people have come to believe that such children, who eventually survive and live up to old age as a result of preventive measures taken by the parents, usually behave quite funny. One of their common characteristics is that they easily feel moody with quick outburst of anger without any justifiable reason. Children who are suspected to be in this category of freaks are given derogatory and supplicatory names such as: *Oji*, meaning a thief who has come to exploit and squander the parents' resources and to die at last. Children of this nature are believed to fall sick as soon as they are born, only to die when their parents had expended so much on them. Identifiable incisions are usually made on the faces of such sadistic tricksters before they are buried. When a child is born bearing such marks the people would quickly come to the conclusion that it is one of such children that has come back and it would be given one of such humiliating names which is believed to make the soul of the child recoil on the realization that its tricks have been discovered and such may serve as a deterrent. *Mudiake* is another of such names. It means stay with your earthly parents. The soul of the child is thus being pleaded with not to allow the child die again and avoid causing the parent grief. This common occurrence among the Urhobo has strongly buttressed the people's belief in the doctrine that the dead are the ones who are reborn.

It is stated in the conventional Urhobo concept of eschatology that once a person is dead he enters the after-life, there he remains and there his offspring can keep unbroken relationship with him as an ancestor, especially if he had been a good individual while on earth and was ripe enough before he died. Yet we are confronted with a contradiction in the belief that the deceased do reincarnate in grand-children and great grand-children. In the first place the doctrine implies that in spite of this reincarnation the departed continue to live in the spiritual world, and those who are still in the earth-plane can have communion with them, and they are there with all their ancestral qualities unaffected. Secondly, it is said that they do reincarnate not only in one grand-child or great grand-child, but also in several contemporary grand-children who are members of the same extended family. Yet in spite of all these repeated "births" which should be rather exhausting, the deceased continue to remain in full life and vigour in the land of the dead receiving the sacrifices and other peculiar services of their descendants. If the departed are the ones who reincarnate, who then constitute the cult of the ancestors? How is it possible for one person to reincarnate in several contemporary persons?

In an attempt to resolve this contradiction there is a theory that only those who are not qualified to join the ancestors reincarnate with the view to fulfil such conditions as would enable them to enter into the group of the blessed.

While there is no concept of a father or mother coming back in a particular child, as the Yoruba concept of *Babtunde*, meaning the recently dead father has returned, and *Yetunde* which is the feminine gender of the former⁶, the Urhobo believe that even those who are qualified to join the ancestral folds reincarnate. That is why even those who are very old and believed to have fulfilled all conditions that would enable them to be incorporated into the group of the ancestors are still urged with dirges and funerary prayers and recitals during their burial rites to improve upon their previous lives and live better in their next incarnation than they had done while on earth; therefore the above theory does not help us so much out of this contradictions. Here is really a paradox.

What this doctrine tries to establish is the belief that there are certain dominant lineage characteristics which keep recurring through births and thus ensuring the continuity of the vital existence of every family. The Urhobo people thus have a firm belief that the dead are the ones who go into the loins of their offspring and are brought back into life in several contemporary grand- and great grand-children. The scientists may try to explain this phenomenon of heredity and characteristic resemblance by saying that every person starts life as a fertilized egg which is formed by the union of a sperm from his father with an egg from his mother. Present within this egg or zygote are genes which are the blueprints according to which the zygote develops. The inherited characteristics of an individual are determined by the chromosome content of his zygote and consequently all other cells in his body because they are derived from this zygote (D. E. James 1980, 233). Every lineage or family has its own chromosome numbers and arrangements of chromosomes and each child born into the lineage is governed by his parents' genes, which they also inherited from their forebears.

In other words what the scientist is saying is that the children inherit the genes but not the souls of their ancestors; and that these inherited genes are what the Urhobo regard as the spiritual qualities which are numberless. Thus it is only partial reincarnation in the sense that only some characteristics of the departed are manifest in the reincarnate. The Urhobo do not accept the above scientific view as "the total explanation" for this everyday evident occurrence of reincarnation among them. However they see it as throwing some light on what they believe to be the work of God, the ancestors and fertility divinities who are the guiding powers behind all human reproductions and who also have control over the movement and incarnation of human souls. The scientific explanations only illuminate this belief. I am inclined to agree with Mbiti that this belief is partly the result of externalizing people's awareness of the nearness of their living-dead, and partly an attempt to explain what is otherwise a biological phenomenon which applies not only to human beings but also animals (Mbiti 1970 p. 150). Those who hold someone in a state of personal immortality see biological or character resemblance in a young child and immediately feel that since the particular living-dead has not yet sunk into the oblivion he has returned to them. It pains the community, therefore, that someone should die without getting married, since this causes to dwindle the chances of his being reborn. It is a mechanism of hope which assures the quick that death will not be the end of his life. He hopes to be remembered by his offspring and through them he would come back to life.

Although the belief in partial reincarnation is quite

common among the Urhobo it is not expected that it is everybody who will automatically reincarnate. Those who suffered bad death as a result of their bad behaviour and humiliating sicknesses like leprosy and small-pox, which seemed to have brought disrepute and humiliation to the family groups, and whose burial rites were conducted in such a way as to exorcise their souls from the lineage, are not believed to be reborn. It is in this sense that the doctrine in no small measure influences the people's behaviour for good. As only those who have lived well and died well are accorded appropriate burial rites, and thus are qualified to reincarnate, they tend to watch their ethical behaviour and faithfulness to their religious practices. The souls of those whose behaviour and lot while on earth tend to bring shame and ridicule into the lineage are exorcised from both the spiritual and physical groups of his extended families. He will not be allowed to join the ancestors nor welcomed into any other lineage. He has no hope of coming back to life and nowhere to go for repose⁷. His soul is thus believed to roam about restlessly and without a goal, lamenting his fate. Such a soul is considered to be in a hell because he has been decorporated from where he rightly belongs. No Urhobo person would like to be in such a pitiable state when he dies, hence this doctrine serves as a major factor in checking people's excesses, especially within the lineage group. It also helps to cement the unity between the families in both physical and spiritual worlds.

The foregoing are not necessarily aimed at finding a solution to the problem of partial reincarnation, but rather to show that there is a problem about this doctrine among the Urhobo, and that it is too complex to warrant easy generalization. Although we cannot resolve the contradictions contained in it, there is one basic fact about it, and that is, like all other such related doctrines dealing with eschatology, it is an attempt to calm human fears and anxieties generated by the constant harassment that human beings receive from death and other vicissitudes of life. It is a part of man's continuous struggle against the loss of his original immortality. There has been a constant struggle between man and death, but however hard he tries, victory appears to be a mirage to him. He therefore came up with this sort of psychological therapy to boost his morale and hope on hopes. It is also an attempt to explain the influence of heredity upon human behaviour, a subject which the scientists claimed to rightly belong to psychology and biological studies, overlooking the fact that the spiritual qualities contained in genes cannot be successfully examined scientifically. While the Urhobo may accept the idea that biologically both husband and wife are reproduced in their children thus perpetuating the chain of humanity, his major preoccupation when he is getting old and is thus drawing nearer the grave is an expectation of a blissful reunion with the members of his own lineage in the great beyond, and a hope of continuous existence here on earth among his descendants; and as a man of faith he does not see any contradiction in these two ways of conquering death.

FOOTNOTES

1. In my other studies I identify five entities which the Urhobo consider to make up a human being and these are:-
 - (a) Erhi - the Human Double or the Soul;
 - (b) Ugboma - the physical body;
 - (c) Enhwen - the breath of life,
 - (d) Udu - the essence of the human heart and
 - (e) Uhoho - the ethereal body.

Among all these Erhi and Ugboma are considered to be more vital. For more details on this see Nabofa, M. Y., *ERHI: The concept of the Human Double and the Paradox of self-predestination in the Religion of the Urhobo*, University of Ibadan Ph.D. Thesis, 1978 Pages 72-78.

2. The Urhobo name for toad is Owokpo which, etymologically and literally means, "he who dies should go home". This name arose out of the myth which states that it was the one whose message brought death to mankind.
3. For more details on the Urhobo myth on the origin of death, *vide* Nabofa, M. Y. "Erhi and Eschatology", in Adegbola, E. A. Ade, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Day Star Press, Ibadan, 1983, p. 297.
4. On the geographical location of the abode of the dead *vide* *ibid.* p. 298ff.
5. For more information on this see the Buddhist concept of life after death in Whitfield Toy (ed.), *Man's Religious Quest*, Croom Helm, London, 1982 pp. 194-197.
6. On the Yoruba concept of reincarnation see E. B. Idowu, *OLODUMARE, God in Yoruba Belief*, Longman, 1970 p. 195f.
7. For more details on the Urhobo concept of the state of Ghosts see Otite, O. J. (ed.), *The Urhobo People*, Heinemann, Ibadan, 1982 p. 229.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol I: Seeing the Form

Hans Urs von Balthasar. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Edited by Joseph Fessio, S. J., and John Riches. T.&T. Clark, 1982. Pp. 691. £19.95.

Hans Urs von Balthasar belongs to the very top flight of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, but his work is not nearly so well-known to English-speaking readers as it ought to be. Now a beginning has been made toward providing an English version of this scholar's *magnum opus*, called in German *Herrlichkeit*. It is only a beginning, for although the present volume is a very large one, six more are to follow. The small team of American and British scholars who have undertaken such a heavy task are to be congratulated, as are also the publishers. The translation is very well done, and for the most part the reader is not conscious of its being a translation at all, it goes along so smoothly and naturally. Inevitably, in a work of this size and complexity, there are a few slips – for instance, on p. 534 a meaningless 'whereby' is used to translate *wobei*, signifying 'in connection with which.'

The first question to ask is: 'What does the author mean by "theological aesthetics"?' The question is perhaps best answered by distinguishing the aesthetic approach from other possible approaches. Thus, while philosophical theology is concerned with the truth of the Christian revelation and moral theology with its implications for the good life, a theological aesthetics is concerned with its beauty, and this means, in turn with its form. Of course, these approaches all impinge on one another. To perceive the perfect form of the Christian revelation, the fittingness and even the necessity of its proportions and structure, is at the same time to have a new perception of its truth and its meaning for human life. So within this book we find themes that are treated also by theologians, writers on spirituality, and biblical expositors, though all are treated here from the point of view of one who has a sensibility for form.

The lengthy introduction sets forth the fundamental problems of theological aesthetics. Dr von Balthasar is anxious that it should not be confused with the so-called 'aesthetic theology' of Schleiermacher and others, a type of theology in which feeling and experience were given a determinative role. A true theological aesthetics has been very much neglected by Catholic theologians and even more by Protestants. Already in the Introduction we meet the first of a series of rather sharp criticisms of Protestantism. In these days of ecumenical politeness, this may surprise us, but there is a refreshing honesty in our author, and we are reminded that many issues arising from the Reformation remain unsettled. Aesthetics has never been one of Protestantism's strong points, and it would be hard to dissent from the author's judgment that 'after [Christianity] had been denuded by the iconoclasm of Luther and Calvin, it had to take refuge in naked pietistic interiority' (p. 80). On the other hand, the eccentric Hamann receives some praise. He is the first in a series of thinkers of the past to each of whom Dr von Balthasar devotes a few pages of critical comment in his Introduction. The others are the Romantics Herder and Chateaubriand, and two later writers who are not likely to be known to most English-speaking readers, Gügler,

described as 'the inspired theologian from Lucerne who died all too young' (p. 94) and Scheeben.

The decks having been cleared, there follows a long chapter on 'The Subjective Evidence.' This is an examination of the experience of faith, as seen from the human side. In faith we perceive the form of revelation, which points to an invisible, unfathomable mystery. 'Form is the apparition of this mystery and reveals it, while naturally at the same time veiling and protecting it' (p. 151). Not only seeing the form but the ultimate mystery and incomprehensibility have their parallels in aesthetic experience: 'The more a great work of art is known and grasped, the more concretely are we dazzled by its "ungraspable" greatness' (p. 186). The parallel emerges again in the claim that 'the aesthetic experience is the union of the greatest possible concreteness of the individual form and the greatest possible universality of meaning' (p. 234). The same might be said of the revelation in Jesus Christ.

An interesting part of von Balthasar's discussion in this chapter is his treatment of what he calls the 'spiritual senses.' He gives a brief history of a doctrine of the spiritual senses, tracing its beginnings back to Origen, then following its development through the Middle Ages, and ending with the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola. In these exercises, Ignatius bids the retreatant at the end of each day to 'apply his senses' to the mysteries of faith – an imaginative act in which he summons before himself everything from the sight of the glowing fires of hell to the sweet fragrance of the Godhead. These spiritual senses are said to be a mean between the physical senses and mystical apprehension. Like aesthetic perception, they take us beyond what is superficially visible or tangible to the form. 'The God who became man begins with the external senses and move back to the interior senses' (p. 403). This is not 'naked mystical sense' but is a 'supernatural and, at the same time, sensory perceptive faculty that can sense the specific quality of the divine Eassence because it is founded upon God's incarnation and upon the Eucharist.' These are large claims to make, but we must listen with respect, because they are made by someone who has obviously advanced far along spiritual paths. But the form is sometimes more, sometimes less, visible. There is an echo of the mystics in von Balthasar's remarks about the alternation of consolation and desolation, described as 'God's great educative process.'

There follows an even longer chapter on 'The Objective Evidence.' Jesus Christ himself is, of course, the great objective datum of revelation. He is the measure of all things, and cannot be measured by anything other than himself. At the same time, the form of Christ is mediated to us through certain agencies. Among these is the Bible, and the reader cannot help noticing that when von Balthasar mentions the historical-critical approach to the Bible, he almost always does so in a hostile manner. The reason for this hostility, however, is not a fundamentalist attachment to the words of scripture but his belief (surely not unfounded) that our concern with the factual data uncovered by the critical method have made us increasingly insensitive to the spiritual teaching. His treatment of the sacraments is interesting. It is the eucharist above all which mediates the form of Christ and 'impresses' it (a favourite expression) on the Church. Von Balthasar is considered rather conservative among Roman Catholics, so it is somewhat surprising to find him claiming the communion is the essence of the eucharist – the 'transubstantiation' of persons rather than of the gifts.

So he is critical of the RC requirement of attendance at mass, regardless of whether or not communion is made.

Many scholars, however, have held that the essence of the mass is the *anamnesis* – such was the view of the great Anglican liturgist, Bishop Frere. We may in fact wonder whether Dr von Balthasar is not becoming too subjective and individualist at this point, and the suspicion grows when we read what he says about baptism. For now we find him deploring infant baptism and, still more, the custom (now common in the American Episcopal Church) of giving communion to young children. These things, he holds, should not happen 'before the age of reason' (p. 580). The only other sacrament he treats in detail is penance, and he sees its advantage in the fact that the penitent must act for himself as a conscious, responsible individual! (ibid.)

Is this very long book worth the effort which it requires from the reader? The answer is surely Yes. Dr von Balthasar is not (like some continental theologians) repetitious or long-winded. He gives good value on every page, and new ideas keep coming till the end. The criticism must rather be that the book is too rich and too densely packed. An ironical consequence is that the reader may feel that it is extremely difficult to see the form of this work as a whole. He may feel that he is wandering through a forest of a million trees, each one beautiful and interesting, but that it is hard to see the shape of the whole forest. Perhaps the volumes still to come will help.

John Macquarrie

Christian Theism: A Study in its Basic Principles

Huw Parri Owen. T.&T. Clark, 1984. Pp. viii+152. £8.95.

"I have attempted", Professor Owen tells us in the Preface to this book, "to state as concisely as possible what I consider to be the basic Christian beliefs concerning God and his relation to the world." And he is quite explicit as to what he considers those beliefs to be. "God, who exists in the threefold form of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who created us out of nothing, so loved us that he became man for us in Christ in order that we, by our free, consent, might share in the eternal life that Christ won for us by his victory over evil on the Cross. Interpretations of this substance differ; but the substance itself will always remain; and it differentiates Christianity from all other religions."

Such a conviction as this, so uncompromisingly stated, cannot be taken for granted among professional theologians today, but Professor Owen is quite deliberate in expressing it. "I am convinced", he writes, "that the theological substance of Christian tradition is no less rationally acceptable today than it was in previous ages"; and this book, written on his retirement from the chair of Christian Doctrine at King's College, is his vindication of this claim. The treatment is admirable, in both scope and execution. Creation, the Incarnation and the Trinity; providence, evil and salvation; and finally, grace, free will and immortality, are successively expounded and defended in less than one hundred and fifty pages, and this with a clarity and elegance which is all too rare in modern theological writing. The exclusion of certain doctrines, such as those of the Church and the Sacraments, does not imply that they are considered as of minor importance; they are Professor Owen insists,

essential to Christianity (p. 3); they are secondary only in the sense that they presuppose and largely derive from those with which he deals. And he rightly stresses that the questions most prominent in theological discussion today are that of the status and nature of belief in the Incarnation and that of the relation between Christianity and the truth claims made by non-Christian religions. In an important appendix he examines Professor John Hick's proposal for "a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centred or Jesus-centred to a God-centred model of the universe of faiths" and shows in contrast that the uniqueness and specificity of Christianity as the only world-religion which asserts a genuine incarnation of a genuinely transcendent God make it the paradigm for the interpretation of all the rest.

There are a few matters on which I wish Professor Owen had written at greater length. The remarkable recent agreement of theologians of the "Chalcedonian" and "non-Chalcedonian" churches on the substance of orthodox Christology¹ and the equally striking, if less developed, convergence between Easterns and Westerns on the Procession of the Holy Spirit² are examples of topics on which his flair for discriminating between real issues of truth and falsehood and merely verbal or conceptual differences would have been highly illuminating. I find his discussion of grace (pp. 113ff) disappointing. The notion of grace as a *substance* intermediate between the Creator and the creature is indeed ridiculous, but that there can be a real and not merely a notional *relation* between them, however mysterious, is involved in the very notion of creation, as Professor Owen himself has made clear. I may perhaps mention the appendix on "Grace and Nature in East and West" in my Gifford Lectures *The Openness of Being*.³ Finally, I would suggest that a more explicit recognition that, in St Augustine's phrase, God created the world not *in time* but *with time*⁴, so that time is a derivative from, or an aspect of, the existence of finite beings and is not an antecedently existing medium into which they are launched, would have been relevant to the chapter on the Soul and Immortality and in particular to the discussion of purgatory and hell. However, these comparatively minor criticisms do not in any way reduce my admiration for Professor Owen's splendid work. It should be made compulsory reading for all theological students and ordinands, but it will be of inestimable value to any thoughtful and intelligent Christian who, in this time of theological confusion and uncertainty, wishes to find a wider understanding and firmer foundations for his faith.

1. Cf *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite?* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1981.)

2. Cf *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ* (ibid.).

3. London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1971, pp. 216ff.

4. *De Civitate Dei*, XI, vi.

E. L. Mascall

The Christian Experience of God as Trinity

James P. Mackey. SCM Press, 1983. Pp. viii+310. £7.50.

Since the publication in 1980 of Moltmann's book on the Trinity, the topic has begun to come to the centre of attention. In this study, which is by an author who knows the tradition well but is very critical of it, the doctrine is discussed in the light of the problems facing Christian theology in the context of both secular culture and the growing awareness of other religions. The whole book is dominated by a post-Kantian mentality which is deeply suspicious of any proposal to transcend in thought or doctrine that which is immediately given to experience.

Mackey is accordingly suspicious of any doctrines which attempt to conceive the doctrine of the Trinity as a proposal to say something about what God is in himself in distinction from what we experience of him in time. Thus Moltmann is criticised for failing to live up in practice to his own theoretical rejection of the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity, in producing like Rahner a parallelism between persons and activities of God in himself and in the world.

The Fathers of the church come in for even more savage criticism. The weakness of the Cappadocian Fathers is held to consist in their having recourse to models of God which in their original usage were intrinsically subordinationist. Torn from their old context, they appear to lack any intelligible meaning: perhaps, therefore, Arius was nearer to the truth. Similarly, Augulstine is criticised – with some justification – for tearing apart the Trinity and the life and death of Jesus in this world, and for using desperate exegesis in an attempt to find scriptural justification for his characterisation of the Spirit as love and gift. These are perhaps the salient points to be observed in a varied and sometimes difficult terrain. (Those who wish to read a more sympathetic if also critical account of the same tradition are directed to Christopher Kaiser's recent *Doctrine of God* in the Marshall, Morgan and Scott Foundations for Faith series).

Mackey's conclusion is correspondingly sceptical. 'We may guess at self-differentiation in God, but it is not the business of trinitarian doctrine to describe this . . . Economic trinities or binities are the only ones we possess . . .' (pp. 241f). Your reviewer continues, however, to be one who believes this relativistic conclusion to be unjustified. The church may differ in the precise way in which its representatives at different times formulate the doctrine of the Trinity, but that is not to say that it is a matter of indifference whether and which 'binities and trinities' it chooses to affirm. We may not be in the business of describing what has sometimes been described as the social life of the blessed Trinity, but we are concerned with finding the concepts which are the most true to the God who makes himself known in Jesus, and therefore with drawing some kind of distinction between God as he is in eternity and God as he makes himself known in time and space. It is not merely a matter of our experience, but of whether we experience what is really there.

Colin Gunton

The Church and the Bomb. Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience

The Report of a working party under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Salisbury. Hodder and Stoughton, 1982. Pp. xii+190. £4.50.

The Church and the Bomb remains a valuable piece of work, despite the inevitable criticism made of it, beginning with the 'first strike' remark that it leaves a number of important questions unanswered – as useful a disabling tactic as one is likely to find. Such a criticism could probably be made of other reports produced by interdisciplinary groups hard pressed for time to assimilate the details of their topic as well as to think constructively from those details to a series of proposals. No report on a problem requiring attention to different intellectual skills and a variety of political and military matters and the relation between all these could possibly be regarded as 'final', nor would its authors expect it so to be regarded. They are to be commended for expending considerable stamina and courage to see it through, since the matter at stake engages those who take it seriously at the deepest levels of their being. Here, if anywhere, one has to pay attention to where one's trust ultimately lies, and ask the question as to whether and how that trust can engage with hideous possibility and shift us to a focus on peace and life.

The writers of the report could not be sustained by working within a shared tradition of theological ethics. A group that included a Quaker, as well as an Anglican pacifist, a Roman Catholic expert in moral theology, and a lecturer in war studies, working with other Anglicans lacking a shared theological perspective were not likely to find it an easy matter to struggle through to a set of recommendations. Yet they could well have been supported to some degree by the knowledge that the Churches as an international group of institutions have rediscovered a common cause here, despite deep cultural and political differences. The cause, after all, is not whether, if, in what circumstances *nuclear* weapons might be used, but the elimination of *war* from the human agenda (p. 163). One of the problems associated with the debate about nuclear weapons is that it may encourage people to suppose that 'conventional' weapons are somehow 'all right' to use – but hardly, if one looks at the gross figures, say 10M people killed since 1945, with some 20M wounded, and the ghastly range of armoury available, from polystyrene napalm, phosphoros grenades, dum-dum bullets, 'Agent Orange' and so on. We are faced with indisputable evidence of our own ferocity to other species as well as to our own, and need all our resources of instinct, emotion and intelligence to find the balance to solve the problem of how to cope with it.

The question is how to move out of the apparent impasse to face a future in which children can be born, and political and other institutions provide an environment in which those children will flourish, an environment which conceivably mediates divine reality to us. (An important expression of this view is currently associated with Canon Peter Selby of Newcastle upon Tyne Cathedral, and a former pupil of Christopher Evans at King's College). The writers of the Report wanted to show that 'the Christian gospel sets those who can accept it free from paralysing fear and commits them to the complex task of bridge-building and peacemaking in the midst of security' (p. 74). Notoriously, the Report proposed the unilateral renunciation by the UK

of its independent nuclear deterrent, though not enough attention has been paid to the point that this was a means of encouraging *multilateral* negotiations, and of restraining nuclear proliferation. In response, General Sir Hugh Beach (in *The Cross and the Bomb* 1983) has made the point that to propose unilateral renunciation of the Polaris/Trident programme, for instance, was to miss an opportunity to drive a hard bargain, obtaining a keen 'price' for the scaling down of comparable weaponry on 'the other side'. Argument about what will or will not contribute to effective negotiation, to the instability or stability of the overall system, remains a matter of political and military judgement where the stakes are indeed high.

To one feature of the debate, however, the closest attention needs to be paid, to what seems to be the central element of moral argument in its interconnections with those military and political judgements. John Langan, SJ of the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington D.C. has recently argued (*Modern Churchman* New Series 25:3, 1983) that whilst it may well be the case that the USA would hardly be distressed by the British renunciation of nuclear weapons, neither the USA nor other governments in NATO could tolerate a renunciation which called into question the basic legitimacy of the deterrent *as such* (see the Report, pp. 126-142, using the analogy of the conscientious objector; and pp. 150-154). Langan suggests that the Report overlooks the morally central task of renegotiating the western alliance *before* unilateral disarmament, since there is a question to be asked about how firmly British and other European states want the USA to be committed to their defence and *how* this would be carried out. As the Report says, British policy has been determined to emphasise its 'deep and durable intimacy within the Americans' (p. 37) but it is unclear as to how this intimacy could be sustained in the presence of such a question about the basic legitimacy of the nuclear deterrent. In the UK, Gerard Hughes SJ has been the most considerable exponent of the view that the morality of deterrence cannot be settled by moral logic alone but in interrelationship with a complexity of beliefs about the results of possible policies. On the other hand, Roger Ruston OP is an advocate of the view that we will never find a way out of our present predicament without renouncing a moral justification of deterrence. And Donald MacKinnon's Boutwood Lectures (*Creon and Antigone*, 1982) will not let us escape from this issue which perhaps runs even deeper than morality. He has drawn attention to the metaphorical character of 'deterrence', which has its home as it were in the discussion of punishment in the context of a framework of law, having to do with the sorts of conditions which inhibit human action, in accordance with law. In its location in the debate about nuclear weapons, it is a metaphor for a kind of check or restraint exercised by a profoundly unstable system, and of crucial importance, a metaphor which becomes a source of 'profound degradation' to us in that it has to do with the willingness to perpetrate horrors of a sort prohibited by any ethics.

What is left of an 'acceptable' expression of a 'deterrence' may well be the position now associated with the present Pope but which appeared at least as early as the publication of the 1981 Evangelical Church in Germany Bulletin on *The Preservation, Promotion and Renewal of Peace* – that deterrence may be morally acceptable in the context in which major political efforts are directed towards reducing the causes of war. This view may ease the predicament of those professionally engaged in one way or another in the defence of their countries. Further, both the Report (p. 82, p. 160) and

the USA Catholic Bishops' statement on (*The Challenge of Peace* 1983 paras. 311-314) draw attention to the issue of what is and is not permitted in *existing* military codes. It may well be, as in Holland, that some military personnel will decide that to refrain from participating in nuclear weapons training programmes is an act of courage and patriotism. In the meantime, we can forget the illusory comfort of a 'no first use' proposal in case it encourages a supposed enemy to imagine that really determined aggression will pay off, whatever that might mean. Nor is there comfort to be found in judgements about the likelihood or not of escalation. As MacKinnon has drawn attention to the metaphorical quality of 'deterrence', so Beach has to the metaphorical quality of 'escalation' – it presumably depends upon how fast the moving staircase is going *up* (minus emergency stop button) as to whether one can get back down and off it relatively unscathed, apart, perhaps, from a torn garment or shoe. What this might mean in a war context is again (perhaps mercifully) debatable though no doubt the sane course is to fear the worst.

The whole complex of issues has been raised to the level of 'status confessionis', the equivalent of a spiritual emergency for some of West Germany's Protestants, members of the Reformed Calvinist Church. It is held that one's view about both the possession and the use of nuclear weapons has a direct relationship to one's fidelity to or betrayal of the gospel. In the USA, though not alone in its stance, the Mennonite Church has found a powerful theological voice to speak independently of official ecclesiastical pronouncements in John Howard Yoder. The Mennonite Church informs Christians that they must renounce the false god of nuclear weaponry, and some of the things allegedly secured by the arms race, such as business opportunities, consumer goods, the imported wealth of other nations, and religious freedom. Yet it is also worth noticing the proposed statement of the Lutheran Church in America (*Peace and Politics*, 1983, para. 3.16) which advised that it was preferable to minimize the deliberate linkage of weapons and other issues, since there is no neat, readily phased way of addressing the variety of international questions. There can be an aggravation of tensions within alliances as well as between rivals through such linkages, and political prudence remains an important norm. As Yoder insists, the central focus of the gospel remains the point of contention, and N. American critics of the Report see as a major defect what others have seen as a merit, that is, that the Report's conclusions rest not only on an acknowledged ignorance of the possible prospects (pp. 12-14) necessarily shared even by the best informed, whoever they may be, but on a *non*-theological assessment of the complexities (though see pp. 104-118).

American Catholics and others can recall their Dorothy Day as summarised by Daniel Berrigan in his introduction to her *The Long Loneliness*: 'into the fury of the murderous crosswinds went her simple word: no'. One of Yoder's Protestant colleagues in the Theology department at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, is Stanley Hauerwas, the writer on theological ethics, who makes the point that the Report provides no argument why the 'just war' tradition should be normative for Christians, allowing only that some who do not subscribe to that tradition may be legitimately pacifist (pp. 119-125). Hauerwas readily acknowledges that the Report properly appreciates the point of the 'just war' tradition (pp. 82-84), that it has to do with the defence of the innocent, or the re-establishment of

violated justice, and is only acceptable *as an evil* if it can contribute to such a goal. The developed tradition may remain an important set of principles to discipline war. Yet it is not evident that there are connections between the tradition and specifically Christian belief, whereas in his view, agreeing with R. Yoder, there are undeniable connections between that belief and the total renunciation of reliance on the weapons of modern war. To consider the case of Pilate v. Jesus is both to acknowledge the immense cost of siding with the latter, and to have to make up one's mind, if one can, about the origins and disposal of the power which may extricate us from our present impasse. (And see Roger White's essay in B. Hebblethwaite and S. Sutherland, *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*, 1982, essays presented to MacKinnon). Hauerwas sees that the issue is not merely moral and political but theological and spiritual, thus, to his discomfort as an American Methodist, making common cause with Archbishop Stuart Blanch at the Synod discussion. Despite his differences with them, Hauerwas agrees with the writers of the Report that 'We need to be continually on our guard against the unthinking and unfounded phrases and attitudes that bolster our own self-value by dehumanising our opponents' (p. 156) and that we need to keep firmly before us 'our duty to the whole human family whom God took as his own children by coming among us and sharing our life in Jesus' (p. 164). Hauerwas fears the murder of our fellow creatures in the name of false ideologies, fellow Christians defined for us as enemies, at whom our missiles point. At the very least, we can refuse to begin to entertain that definition.

The United Presbyterian Church in the USA in *Peacemaking: the Believer's Calling*, 1980) has been particularly eloquent in attempting to remedy the disastrous lack of a tradition in Christianity about the convictions, processes and styles of life that must underlie the positive task of peacemaking. The Report offers only an indication about the obligation of the Christian community here (p. 158) as compared with the American Presbyterians, though does usefully mention the importance of learning 'crisis management' (pp. 30-31). The USA Catholic Bishops' *The Challenge for Peace* also contributes usefully to the task, arguing for reverence for life as opposed to the dulled sensitivities which take violence for granted (paras. 284-289); the practice of prayer, including contemplative prayer and attendance at Mass (paras. 290-296); and the practice of penance, charity and service (paras. 297-300). Anyone not a Christian, and not totally overwhelmed by the gravity of the matter could still work for an important political change, to which the Catholic Bishops (paras. 279-283) and the Report draw attention (pp. 155-157). Both urge the necessity of accessible information and debate in public about defence policy so that everyone can understand the issues better, with exploration of the way in which emotion and imagination can be manipulated by government – a task easily overlooked, but not without significance for those seeking an enlightened if not a quietened conscience. We could already do with more information about the fate of those who live in the neighbourhood of the Nevada desert, of unprotected Australian aboriginal people, and inadequately protected servicemen, if we are to begin to comprehend something of what it is to be a victim of the human arrogance that has brought us to our present pass. Where is the enemy, and who can be the victors? The Report remains an important challenge to self-examination and to right action.

Ann Loades

A Model of Making

Ruth Etchells. Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1983, 124pp., £7.95

Miss Etchells proposes a search for a specifically Christian, theological, method of literary criticism. She recognises the pitfall of such an enterprise. Such a criticism, she says, must attempt not 'the inferring of Christian belief or theme in writers who will in most cases be non-Christian', but, rather, 'the exploring of the creative laws under which writers operate' as these may be peculiarly appreciated by a Christian theologian. She has no intention of accommodating others' writing for her Christian purpose. No one is to suffer like shock with the King of Sodom when he heard to what use John Carmel Heenan had turned *Da mihi animas*. Miss Etchells' delicate proceeding with writings and writers is not, however, always paralleled by her consideration of general matters of literature and literary theory.

'It has become increasingly clear', Miss Etchells says, 'that the insights of modern theologians could be particularly important for an understanding of the craft of writing and its attendant criticism, at the present time'. Her primary suggestion is that from the contemplation of God as 'maker' of heaven and earth, we may be able to appreciate what is meant by our saying that the poet is the 'maker' of the poem. It must be a surprise to most readers, pleasant or otherwise according to a reader's temperament, that Miss Etchells should be confident that theological usage elucidates aesthetic usage, rather than t'other way round. But Miss Etchells goes bravely on. 'If such a theological grounding of the writer's creative act is available and proves itself able to accommodate such questions as the new radical critics, or the "formalists", are raising, then we have here a way of approaching literature exposed by the shaking of foundations they have caused, but in no way dominated or over-ruled by them'.

The main part of Miss Etchells' book consists of a sequence of quotations from authors and critics, each quite interesting in itself, and each accompanied by an intelligent comment that forwards Miss Etchells' thesis. The cumulative effect is rather wearying. Especially by the time we reach Mr Solzhenitsyn's talk of art offering 'a single system of evaluation' for our actions, and a means to 'straighten the twisted paths of man's history'. And there is some danger that the reader will suppose Miss Etchells has abandoned her original investigation of the 'maker' and the general theory of literature, for at the close of her catalogue of authorities, Miss Etchells is found examining the use of a particular theory of language in the exegesis of a particular piece of writing.

From Saussure's analysis of linguistic units, through Jakobson's account of language disorders, and Professor Lodge's exposition of metonymy and metaphor, Miss Etchells comes to an account of the parable of the 'Prodigal Son'. 'Metonymy', here, is a means of displaying the coherence within a single situation. 'Metaphor', here, is a means of identifying 'essential similarities' between disparate situations. 'Lodge points out, for instance, that the "realistic" novel is largely metonymic while drama is largely metaphorical'. In the telling of his story of the younger son, Jesus builds up an instantly recognisable picture of a contemporary farm, and then, in order to suggest what in the farm is 'like'

the Kingdom, appropriates a language from the quite different cultural context of myth and ritual: 'this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found'. Miss Etchells sees a way, in this metaphor's intrusion upon metonymy in the story, into talking of Christ as the metaphor of God in the metonymy of our existence. It is too late in her book, however, for even a reference to that great and still unresolved nineteenth-century question about 'the Christ of Faith' and 'the Jesus of History'. Miss Etchells has time only for some statements about the metonymy of our dereliction and the crucifixion as a metaphor of judgement, before making a quick return to her original topic.

The crucifixion is a putting right, an ordering, a making. It is, therefore, a realisation of that divine creativity in which 'the literary maker's highest art' finds its 'proper basis'. The Creator is revealed as essentially a giver whose giving enables the creature's making. All this is managed, and this is another of Miss Etchell's surprises, without any reference to Pauline talk of a 'new creation' or philippian celebration of the Lord who did not think divinity consisted in grabbing. But perhaps such scriptural texts would have spoilt the impression of sweet theological reasonableness, and might even have set the reader wondering whether Miss Etchells, having noticed the pitfall, had not deliberately fallen into it.

Hamish F. G. Swanston

The Prophets. Vol. 2. The Babylonian and Persian Periods

Klaus Koch. English translation by M. Kohl. SCM Press, 1983. Pp. vi+217. £7.95.

This second volume on the Old Testament prophets from Professor Klaus Koch of Hamburg covers the figures from Jeremiah to Zechariah and Malachi, finishing with a short, and interesting, treatment of the book of Jonah. An opening chapter sets out the main teaching of the book of Deuteronomy and the way in which it contributed an ideal of Law which had a significant bearing upon the subsequent development of prophecy, especially in the book of Jeremiah. A concluding chapter, all too brief on account of the number of interesting points that it raises, provides what the author describes as a "Retrospect and Prospect" in the study of prophecy.

The two volumes together are evidently designed to provide a student text-book, and they are thoroughly commendable on this score. Koch's writing is clear, well set out in short sections, and provides a thoroughly readable combination of historical background, literary introduction to the individual books, and a brief outline of the main religious ideas. The work, viewed as a whole will undoubtedly claim full attention as an up-to-date introduction to the Prophets. Yet they do not contain very much which is particularly new, at least so far as specific contentious issues of interpretation. By and large Koch adopts a rather cautious and conservative line, for instance over the "Deuteronomistic" material in the book of Jeremiah, or over the preaching of a "Deutero-Isaiah" during the Babylonian Exile. No doubt this is justified in a work that seeks to give expression to some sort of scholarly consensus, rather than to opt for more idiosyncratic positions which might quickly forfeit scholarly confidence. Yet the study of the Old Testament prophetic

literature is undergoing a very considerable change, as Koch's own comments in his concluding chapter show. In expressing a good deal of caution over whether scholars have not been too confident of their own abilities in locating the historical setting of each prophecy, this is nonetheless the main feature of the approach that is set out.

Koch himself, who has written on the rise of apocalyptic, recognises that prophecy ultimately experienced a kind of exotic "final fling" in the contribution that it made to Jewish apocalyptic. Yet he expresses great caution over whether very much of lasting theological gain accrued from this. Rather he avows his own greater sense of theological gain regard for, and enlightenment from, the work of the great prophets of the Old Testament. In this many will certainly follow him, even though it raises some very deep issues about the Bible and the history of its interpretation. Koch's own assessment of what those features are in prophecy which deserve our continued attention have a strikingly modern, and even abstract, ring about them. It must also be questioned whether the prophetic writings would have retained their place in the biblical canon were it not for the apocalyptic interpretations which came to be derived from them. Yet this is simply to raise questions which move beyond the limits of what is in all respects a very useful student text-book.

R. E. Clements

The Origins of Christianity. A Historical Introduction to the New Testament

Schuyler Brown. Oxford University Press, 1984. Pp. x+169. £3.95.

Part of the Oxford Bible Series, this volume is intended as an introduction to the history of Christian Origins. It succeeds admirably. With clarity and simplicity, Brown describes both the story of the sources and the story in the sources. He shows very well how the history of Christian Origins is the history of the tradition.

The book begins with a chapter on what is involved in approaching the New Testament from the viewpoint of modern historiography. We are made sensitive to the normative and legitimising features of stories of origins and their canonisation; to the problems created by asking the kinds of historical questions the sources were not intended to answer; and to the hermeneutical, literary and sociological influences which affected the formation of the tradition. Along the way, we are provided with a critical response to Bultmann's 'extreme historical scepticism' and an excellent account of form criticism and the Scandinavian alternative proposed by Riesenfeld and Gerhardtsson. At several points in the book, the author delineates the limits of historical investigation as well as its possibilities. In particular, the limits of form criticism are shown to be: its focus on the typical and recurrent rather than the particular, its concern with the communal product rather than the individual effect, and its assumption that the dynamics of oral transmission directly correspond with those of literary tradition.

The chapter on Jesus of Nazareth is brief but suggestive. Brown rejects the criterion of dissimilarity as unhelpful: 'Since the historian claims nothing beyond probability for his reconstruction, he will prefer to make use of all material which is probably authentic, rather than to exclude what is possibly inauthentic' (p. 47). He also plays down the creative influence of community controversies on the formation of the Synoptic controversy stories. Similarly, the creative influence of Christian prophecy is restricted to instances where the post-resurrection character of a dominical saying is indicated explicitly. Instead, Brown, argues that 'the Jesus tradition originated in the impact made on Jesus' followers by his person, his teaching, and his actions. It is quite untrue to say that the historian is interested in who Jesus *was* but the Jesus tradition is only interested in who he *is*'. (p. 690).

The origins of the Christian mission are sought in the resurrection appearances and in the experience of the Spirit at Pentecost. There is no mention here of Gager's use of cognitive dissonance theory which Brown, I think, would find reductionist. Instead, emphasis is placed on the common, ecstatic nature of these experiences and on the claim that these were experiences of Jesus and his Spirit.

An excellent chapter on the factors involved in the formation of a distinctive Christian identity takes as case-studies Paul, the Matthean community and the Johannine communities. The radical relativisation of the law by Paul, the reinterpretation of tradition in the direction of mission to the Gentiles in Matthew, the experience of hostility from synagogue leaders reflected in Matthew and the Fourth Gospel, and the increasingly high christological claims reflected especially in John – these are described quite convincingly. The important effects of the Jewish War on Jewish and Christian self-definition is a recurring theme also.

The book ends with a chapter on NT ecclesiology and, in particular, the quest for authority and continuity. Brown makes some noteworthy points. For example, claims to apostolic foundation (as in Matthew and Ephesians) are often no more than that. Further, the NT contains a variety of conceptions of apostleship itself. Again, the attempt to limit the number of resurrection appearances may reflect a polemical effort to counter Gnostic claims to continuing revelations of the risen Christ. The author also traces developments in the second generation. Especially interesting is his suggestion that the Johannine community was distinctive in appealing for authority, not to an apostolic figure of the past, but to the Spirit to whom the true believer had direct access. The schismatic tendencies of this approach are reflected in the corrective attempt in 1 John to strengthen community ties and in the efforts of the 'ecclesiastical redactor' of the Gospel to provide a more adequate sacramental basis for community life.

We have, therefore, a study modest in size – and price! – and yet wide-ranging, imaginative and up-to-date in content. It would be ideal for introductory courses in Christian Origins and would inform a more general audience on recent developments in scholarly study of the New Testament.

Stephen C. Barton

Priesthood and Ministry

Max Thurian. Mowbrays, 1983. Pp. 195. £3.75.

The importance of the position occupied by Max Thurian in the field of ecumenical dialogue and, in particular, his involvement in the preparation of the Lima document of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches make this a significant book. It has threefold value. First, it provides a careful historical study of the biblical and post-apostolic foundations of ministry. Second, it provides an exposition of at least one theology of that ministry. Third, it sheds light on Brother Thurian's own theology and suggests why it has been so influential. The source of its power is its apparent understanding of diverse traditions, theological positions and church structures. This book sheds light on the process by which 'substantial agreement' and 'doctrinal convergence' are reached. And it remains valuable for ecumenists and theologians despite the fact that it is now thirteen years old; the translation of a book first published in French in 1970. As such, it cannot be expected to take account of the liturgical and theological developments of the last ten years or so which have accompanied the preparation of new prayer books in the major churches. It cannot be expected to take account of the diversification of ministry and the emphasis on charisms and lay participation in all aspects of ministry. Now with these far from minor reservations, we must ask the more significant question: does this study actually contribute to the current development of an ecumenical theology of ministry, priesthood and ordination? I fear that the only answer is that it has come too late and lost much of its relevance and its importance stems only from the status and subsequent contributions of its author.

In the same way that churches receive ecumenical reports, we might ask also if Thurian's irenic position presents a theology of a ministry – in this case, priesthood – that is recognisable as mine and, if so, whether this presentation makes it easier to understand that priesthood both for me and for those of other ministerial traditions. To answer this, one must read this book – like all carefully-worded ecumenical statements – several times. Here the problem is linguistic. It has seemed helpful to ecumenical dialogue that the participants should avoid polemic and polemical language. They have therefore made an attempt to get behind the fixed lines – historical and doctrinal – by using a neutral language. Rooted, according to the claims of its advocates, in biblical and patristic thought (and not in Greek philosophy and scholastic theology), its fundamental terms, when dealing with the Church and the ministry, seem to be *koinonia*, *presbyterum*, and *episcopo*. Certainly, in developing (or retrieving) this language, ecumenical theologians have performed valuable service in retrieving what Rahner would call 'forgotten truths'. Yet they can also create a superficial agreement that conceals significant disagreement.

A study of the theology of priesthood as found in the several ordinals, e.g. of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, would be very valuable. It would surely show that, even where the title 'presbyter' is used, it is still the intention that 'priests' should be ordained. Thurian's theology of the presbyterate does not do justice to his high doctrine of the priesthood. Personally, I do not find that he represents the order of ministry into which I was ordained (using the experimental Ordinal of the Anglican Church in

Wales), that is the priesthood, in a way that does justice to its component parts. I cannot agree with him, or incidentally with Jean Tillard, in his denigration of the Christian *sacerdos*. The description found in the Lima text, a description with which both Thurian and Tillard seem to agree, of presbyters as those who 'serve as pastoral ministers of Word and sacraments in a local eucharistic community', even after careful unpacking, fails to do justice to the full ecclesial and sacramental nature of Christian priesthood. It is not sufficient for the ecumenical theologian to cite points of apparent agreement between different traditions. He must grapple with real doctrinal problems. Thurian's failure to do that, with regard to priesthood leads him into other difficult situations. Even after stressing the special relationship between presbyteral ministry and eucharistic celebration, he suggests that deacon monks should preside at the community eucharist. He finds it impossible, it seems, to make sense of the doctrine of ordination character. He confuses Calvin's sacrament of laying-on of hands with the Catholic sacrament of Orders. It appears that agreement in ecumenical dialogue is reached, at least occasionally, by jettisoning the difficult and unpalatable.

The fully developed Catholic theology of priesthood may have been somewhat lopsided, stressing too much the priestly, and not nearly enough the prophetic and pastoral. Ignoring the priestly, or ruling it invalid, according to some contemporary theological criterion, will not redress the balance. There is some evidence that this book represents an interim expression of Max Thurian's theology. Whilst it has theological and historical value, it lacks the power that a more recent statement must have. What we should look for is something from his pen that deals effectively with the problems and questions mentioned here, and others, in the light of ecumenical advances.

Martin Dudley

The Hope of Happiness

Helen Oppenheimer. S.C.M. Press, 1983. Pp. xi+208. £5.95 (paperback).

The authoress defines her purpose as that of taking 'a fresh look at the place of happiness in the Christian gospel.' She has no doubt that its place is central. She writes with the intention of giving her readers a sense of the *importance* of happiness. Her aim may, I think, be taken as twofold – theoretical and practical. On the one hand, she writes as a moral philosopher and, in that capacity, seeks to present, from the Christian point of view, a convincing teleological account of morality. On the other hand, she speaks as a contemporary believer and, in that capacity, tries to quicken the pulses and lift the hearts of her fellow-Christians in these gloomy times. To have combined these two objectives in one book as clearly and gracefully as Lady Oppenheimer has done seems to me to be a considerable *tour de force*.

Within moral philosophy there has been something of a revival of teleological – or as it is often called, Neo-aristotelian – ethics in recent years. A. C. MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) is an impressive example. The basic idea is, of course, that, if you wish to know what people ought to do, you must first consider what they are *for*. What, in Aristotelian terminology, is their *telos*, or 'final end'? This functional conception of human nature may find religious or secular expression; but it is not surprising that it has, in

recent times, proved particularly attractive to religious believers. Basil Mitchell, in his *Morality: Religious and Secular* (1980), tentatively puts forward a version of it. Helen Oppenheimer is working in the same vein. A word which frequently recurs in her book is 'fulfilment'. The Utilitarian goal of the greatest happiness of the greatest number needs, in her opinion, to be enriched by the Christian hope. In a scholarly, elegant and persuasive manner this book spells out what such fulfilment amounts to. 'The fulfilment of human beings . . . is wanted by God' may be said to sum up its message. Every kind of sympathetic reader from the wisest to the most simple will find here insights into the blessedness of Christian fulfilment which enlarge and enrich his understanding of it.

Lady Oppenheimer is perhaps a little hard on the Church. She thinks Christians have an irritating habit of suggesting that happiness is not important. This, she feels, can only be for two reasons – because they 'have lost the art of expressing our faith in a way that gives people anything to be happy about'; and because they are afraid of 'forgetting that Christianity is supposed to be about self-sacrifice.' Perhaps she is thinking of the Church's official representatives. As for its ordinary members, what strikes me, in the provincial university where I work, is how much happier those of my colleagues or students, who are Christians, seem to be than the others. However, that is not a point of much substance; I make it only to assure Lady Oppenheimer that church people will find what she has to say more congenial than she might imagine.

There is a point about teleological conceptions of morality which ought perhaps to be made. Namely, this. It is one thing to say that moral judgments do not make sense, or have any meaning, unless they are logically deduced from some beliefs about man's final end; but it is another thing to say that if anyone has some beliefs about man's final end, these may well give a force and liveness to his moral judgments which they would otherwise lack. If the latter of these two hypotheses is taken for a *psychological* point, then I would have thought it indisputable. But if the former of them is taken for a *logical* point, then I would say that one must still have some anxieties about it. Two, in particular, viz. (i) we may all have some beliefs about man's final end, but have we any way of knowing whose beliefs about this are correct? and (ii) even if we knew that, would any moral (ought) judgments necessarily follow from any teleological (is) beliefs? These two questions are, of course, familiar troublemakers. It would be too much to expect one book to get rid of them once and for all. However, I am sure that this book will succeed in its practical purpose of giving those who already believe the Christian account of man's final end a deepened appreciation of the place of happiness within it. And if it has not altogether succeeded in the theoretical purpose of showing that teleological ethics (in a Christian version) is logically viable, I am sure it will make some readers wish that such a view were logically viable. Perhaps among them there will be a young philosopher who can, in due course, convince us all that it is.

W. D. Hudson

Consent in medicine. Convergence and divergence in tradition

Edited by G. R. Dunstan and Mary J. Sellars. King Edward's Hospital Fund for London and OUP, 1983. Pp. 128. £8.50.

The granting or withholding of personal or proxy consent to medical treatment has in recent years become an important factor of the relationship between patient and doctor. And the place of consent is also a sensitive one in the areas of experimentation, organ-transplantation and *in vitro* fertilisation. This study, then, by a multi-disciplinary group on the ethics of consent in medicine is a timely contribution to a subject which is today increasing in importance and beset by medical, psychological, emotional, religious, legal and ethical difficulties. The group began its enquiry five years ago, to enquire into possible differences between the Jewish and other approaches to medical practice, and to explore their implications. Representing as it did the Jewish and Christian faiths, medicine and philosophy, it no doubt derived from its meetings a mutual enrichment of its several views, and it has also produced for the public a selection of six of its working papers in revised form, a legal note, and an editorial commentary siting the papers within the group's orientation and deliberations.

The core of the work comprises a historical study by Professor P. E. Polani, which might have come earlier, showing the emergence of consent only in this century as an important constitutive factor in medical work and practice, and three other chapters in which the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth and Father Brendan Soane expound the views on consent held in their respective religious traditions, and Mr Peter Byrne analyses and contrasts these views against the backcloth of the classical European philosophical tradition. Polani shows, in a richly documented essay, that from earliest times until only a few decades ago the relationship between a patient and his doctor was characterised by the patient's trust and the doctor's devotedness. The importance of consent as a crucial factor developed only with the political emergence of the autonomous individual and his rights since the seventeenth century, growing (as Professor Ian Kennedy shows in an interesting legal note) through legal actions since the nineteenth century applying the law against 'unconsented touching', to encounter in this century, on the one hand, a diversity of medical options and increased expectations, and, on the other, a rapid, and sometimes inhuman, expansion in medical experimentation.

Byrne, in an equally satisfying contribution, shows how, from Plato onwards, the intrinsic worth ascribed to the human person and his moral integrity (as in the death of Socrates) has established a priority over his sheer physical existence, and how this gives grounds for an independence of personal judgement where simply bodily wellbeing is at stake. It is this view of the person which enables Byrne, in an earlier chapter on patient-expectations, to require 'a genuine adult relationship' (p. 29) between doctor and patient, with corresponding implications for both, including that of communicating the truth. And it also leads him to suggest that the Catholic tradition of qualifying the importance of physical wellbeing, as expressed by the need for consent, finds its origin in this classical philosophy, by contrast with the stress in Judaism on the supremacy of physically embodied existence and the correspondingly dominant role of the physician in regard to his patient.

As Soane makes clear in his wide-ranging chapter, the Catholic attitude in such matters is based upon 'the respect due to the freedom and dignity of the person' (p. 37) called to co-operate with God in his personal decisions. Thus, while the doctor in prescribing or suggesting treatment may

reasonably be expected to have weighed up all the objective factors 'only the patient can appreciate the subjective ones' (p. 42). And indeed there is a strongly subjective element to be recognised in applying the now standard distinction between ordinary and extraordinary, i.e., obligatory and voluntary, means of preserving life. For Jakobovits, however 'human life enjoys an absolute, intrinsic and infinite value' (p. 32), with man only the custodian of his body and having a duty to preserve his life, which devolves upon others in default of the individual's acknowledging and respecting this. In some cases, then, suppression by the doctor of the truth of the patient's condition is entirely justified, while in others the patient's own judgement of what is positively life-sustaining for him must be respected. Generally, however, 'the patient need not be consulted' (p. 34), and he has 'no right to refuse medical treatment deemed essential by competent medical opinion' (p. 35).

In a concluding chapter on 'Considerations governing a doctor's advice to his patient' Dr E. S. Johnson and Mr E. E. Philipp rapidly but comprehensively survey a variety of situations in which doctors may be involved, and offer pieces of practical advice as well as pointing to the moral dilemmas which may arise. And in his introductory chapter Professor G. R. Dunstan not only provides a useful guide to all that follows but also at times reinforces points made by the other authors, and introduces fresh considerations, to indicate that editorial work is not simply a matter of arranging and dovetailing.

Jean Guilton wrote somewhere that an author should not try to say everything, but should always leave something for the reviewer to add. And the observations are offered in that spirit. It is salutary for Christians to be reminded, and occasionally warned, that elements of their religious moral tradition originate elsewhere, and that the Churches are not particularly noted historically for having been in the forefront of moral perception or social improvement. And Peter Byrne does well to illustrate the influence of classical philosophy on the Catholic tradition of the autonomous dignity of the individual. Gordon Dunstan, on the other hand, brings to this a necessary corrective, or at least a qualification, in showing the New Testament witness to human dignity and personal moral autonomy in society. And, in deed, more might have been made of this by a chapter on the Christian, rather than just the Catholic and humanist, tradition. The Christian concept of man's stewardship of life, which appears more creative than the Jewish idea of man as custodian of his bodily life, allots to man a measure of responsible choice - what Aquinas called a sharing in God's providence; and this in turn gives positive scope, within a holistic view of the moral agent, for individual alternatives in response to an adjustable scale of values. Such an approach, it may be noted, is not just subscribing to a fashionable fidelity to conscience, but asserting the duty and the right to react loyally to truth as perceived. Nor does it, of course, of itself solve moral dilemmas, whether social or individual; but it does accord them reality and respect, not simply dismissing them, or the agent-steward, as simply erroneous or misguided.

It is respect for the individual, both patient and doctor, in their full humanity, which appears to underlie the occasional description of their relationship as one of covenant rather than contract. And it would ill befit a Roman Catholic whose Church has recently expressed a preference for covenant language as doing full justice to the

marriage relationship to 'depreciate the richness of that concept. But I think its mainly biblical richness is largely its undoing in medico-moral discourse. Popularised significantly by Paul Ramsey in his 1970 *The Patient as Person* (Yale), it is the expressed preference of Polani (p. 80), and despite some acknowledged difficulties it is developed by Dunstan as a term which the group found 'more ample' than 'contract' (p. 23). Yet it is not used by Jakobovits, Soane or Byrne; and when the Medical Defence Union replied to Philipp's query on the subject it gave short shrift to 'covenant' in its judgement, 'we do not think the word "covenant" would be at all appropriate in the context of relations between doctor and patient' (p. 111).

No doubt such an answer might be expected from a legal body, but my sympathies in this case are with the MDU. I see no difficulty in supposing that the doctor, on qualifying, has given an implicit undertaking to society to help individuals in need wherever possible, and that in specific cases he enters into a contract to focus his skills upon particular individuals or groups of individuals. To describe this as a covenant is to theologise and to incur the risk of imposing that theology upon others on pain of their bewilderment. Moreover, to appeal to it on the ground 'it can express much when considered in the light of theological tradition', as Dunstan does (p. 23), is to ignore that Judaism took an originally political term to invest it with religious significance, and that in Scripture its primary significance, and therefore the *analogatum princeps*, is the relationship between God and his people. And that relationship is one of radical inequality, however gracious, long-suffering and patient the superior party may prove to be. I suspect, in other words, that the emergence of personal consent as crucial and the advantages of covenant language to describe the doctor-patient (or should it be patient-doctor?) relationship are in inverse proportion, and that 'covenant' language today may on occasion be a religious cloak for discreet and residual paternalism. Admittedly, contractual language may be arid and impersonal, missing the delicate texture of essentially intersubject transactions, but it need not be. If the

Concise Oxford Dictionary can define 'covenant' as, inter alia, a compact, bargain, or 'contract under seal', then in medical discourse it would prove more beneficial to explore the implications of 'contract' in the provision of medical services than to impose a laboured religious term.

Many of the contributors stress the standard considerations that for consent to be genuinely personal it has to be free and informed, while acknowledging that the complexities of modern medicine, its very richness in remedies of perhaps limited success, make the provision of relevant information both increasingly difficult and subject to the doctor's own perception of the patient. So far as it goes, this analysis of consent is one which calls for frequent repetition to those who are busy, preoccupied and powerful. What I miss in the book as a whole, however, is a sustained study of what I would call the fringes of consent. As mentioned, the final chapter surveys various of the dilemmas and conflicts in modern medicine and experimentation in a manner which shows their difficulty and which appears tantamount on occasion to throwing up its hands in despair at their moral intractability. One occasion the comment is made, 'each case has to be decided by the doctor on its own merits' (105). True, but *entirely* on its own merits? If so, then a general study such as this is otiose. And if not, the challenge is to identify in 'each case' what more general reflection might be helpful and to what moral analysis even its 'unique' features might be submitted. It is to these sorts of areas today, when at least fairly general lip-service or general agreement is accorded to the canons of consent, that multidisciplinary resources most need to be directed: in treatment and experimentation on the incapable, in fetal and embryonic research, and in the prerequisite of ignorance for successful experimentation. Had this thoughtful book or the group producing it begun with its agenda drawn from the last chapter, the work would have been quite different. Those who, like the reviewer, have read it with interest and appreciation would welcome a sequel.

John Mahoney, S.J.

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James Whyte is Professor of Practical Theology and Christian Ethics at the University of St. Andrews. The paper printed here was his address as President of the Society for the Study of Theology.

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