

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

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

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



Buy me a coffee

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



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

**THE
SCOTTISH
BULLETIN
OF
EVANGELICAL
THEOLOGY**

Volume 6 Number 2

Autumn 1988

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- 69 SIMPLICITY OF THE HIGHEST CUNNING: NARRATIVE ART IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (The Finlayson Lecture for 1986)
Robert P. Gordon, University of Cambridge.
- 81 HEILSGEOGRAPHIE: GEOGRAPHY AS A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT
G. W. Grogan, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow.
- 95 UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION
Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Rutherford House, Edinburgh.

REVIEW ARTICLE

- 112 A REHABILITATION OF SCHOLASTICISM? A REVIEW ARTICLE ON RICHARD A. MULLER'S *POST-REFORMATION REFORMED DOGMATICS*, VOL. I, *PROLEGOMENA TO THEOLOGY*
Douglas F. Kelly, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi.

BOOK REVIEWS

- 123 David L. Edwards with John Stott: *Essentials. A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, by The Review Editor.
- 124 John McIntyre: *Faith Theology and Imagination*, by John Wilson, Motherwell.
- 125 Charles P. Henderson Jr.: *God and Science: The Death and Rebirth of Theism*, by John C. Sharp, South Church of Scotland, East Kilbride.
- 126 Basil Meeking and John Stott (eds): *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977 - 1984: A Report*, by Charles M. Cameron, St Ninian's Parish Church, Dunfermline.
- 127 Hugh Montefiore: *So Near and Yet So Far*, by The Review Editor.
- 128 Rex Gardner: *Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates*, by John Wilkinson, Edinburgh.
- 129 Maurice Wiles: *God's Action in the World*, by Roy Kearsley, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow.
- 130 Ralph L. Underwood: *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care*, by Derek Tidball, Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth.

SIMPLICITY OF THE HIGHEST CUNNING: NARRATIVE ART IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

The Finlayson Lecture for 1986

ROBERT P. GORDON
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

David L. Edwards observed some years ago that the Israelite monotheistic ban on images 'was the ruin of their art, but the making of their religion'¹. He was talking about the plastic arts, which was as well since the book in which he expressed this opinion itself comes close to being an anthology of Old Testament poetry and prose. Moreover, one of the theses of Robert Alter's already influential volume on biblical narrative is that Hebrew narrative writing owes its existence to the Israelite monotheistic 'discovery'.² For if Yahweh is sovereign in all history then that history may express unity and a sense of directness. In short, there is a story to be told: there is historiographical potential around. And if Yahweh is free and innovative and not always predictable in his actions, so too, to a degree, are the human beings whom he has made. 'I will be what I will be' may also be predicated of them. Thus Hebrew narrative characterization may not be reduced to the level of the 'flat' and 'static', as at least one generalizing comment from outside the world of Old Testament study would encourage us to believe.³ In the Old Testament, as Alter has noted, there is no room for the Homeric-type fixed epithet, for Hebrew characteristics cannot be pinned down like that.⁴ Such fixity ('the wicked Esau said') is characteristic of Targum, but that is pro-

* Delivered at the 1986 conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theological Society. The title of the paper is inspired by a diary entry of Thomas Hardy for 1885 in which he observes of biblical narratives, 'They are written with a watchful attention (though disguised) as to their effect on their reader. Their so-called simplicity is, in fact, the simplicity of the highest cunning.' See J. Moynahan, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge and The Old Testament's First Book of Samuel: A Study of Some Literary Relationships', in R. Bartel *et al* (eds.), *Biblical Images in Literature*, Nashville/New York, 1975, p. 85. An earlier form of this lecture was delivered in an Open Lecture series in the University of Cambridge in 1985.

1. *A Key to the Old Testament*, London, 1976, p. 35.

2. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, London, 1981.

3. See R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, New York, 1966, pp. 164, 166.

4. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 127ff.

nouncedly in the post-biblical period when, for whatever reason, jejune-ness became a virtue in the rendering of Scripture.

The contrast with Homer runs much deeper, for the Old Testament has no place for epic, even though that might at first seem a natural vehicle for some of what now appears as narrative. Nor is it simply a question of genre suitability or flexibility. So often Hebrew laws, institutions and modes of expression have to be seen as reactions against prevalent norms and forms. There is a kind of 'unsaying' going on, as in the general account of creation in Genesis 1, or in the concept of after-life represented in shadowy Sheol, which appears to derive some of its shadowiness, not from a lack of ideas or speculation, but because in the religious tradition crystallized in Scripture there is a moratorium placed on prying into the after-life in the manner of other peoples. It may be, then that the same outlook is at work in the Hebrew preference for narrative, as Shemaryahu Talmon has argued.⁵ Epic in the Levant was associated with polytheism, crudity and bestiality (Ugarit is an obvious provider of examples), it featured in the ritual re-enactment of cosmic events, and it was basically ahistorical. Talmon concludes:

In the process of total rejection of the polytheistic religions and their ritual expressions in the cult, epic songs and also the epic genre were purged from the literary repertoire of the Hebrew authors. Together with the content, its foremost literary concretisation fell into disrepute and was banished from the Israelite culture. The epic elements which did survive – preponderantly in the literature of the monarchic period, *i.e.* from a time when the prophets were active – were permitted to infiltrate as building blocks of other forms of biblical literature, because they had lost their pagan import and had been neutralised (p. 354)

When, therefore, an Old Testament narrative begins to lilt, exhibiting poetic structure and rhythm, we should not assume that we are reading (hearing) vestigial epic. What is more likely is that we have versifying in the strict sense, of prose tending to verse, in order to emphasise, formalise or heighten effect.⁶

So a good proportion of the Old Testament is story-telling in prose; it is narration and it is accessible to inquiry by the methods and approaches appropriate to the study of narrative prose. This last point bears repetition since some readers of the Old Testament, while able to appreciate such an obvious literary feature as the repetition of key words, have reservations about applying the ordinary rules of literary criticism to sa-

5. "The "comparative method" in biblical interpretation – principles and problems", in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, XXIX, 1978, pp. 352-6.

6. On this aspect of Hebrew prose see J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History*, London, 1981, pp. 59-95.

SIMPLICITY OF THE HIGHEST CUNNING

cred scriptures. And if we run our eye over a hundred years of Old Testament scholarship we may conclude that here too 'blindness in part is happened to Israel'. Concerns about units of tradition, sources, English-speakers looking for information about history, German-speakers for information about Israelite beliefs⁷ – all this has meant that too little attention has been paid to the finished literary artefact. There is substance to this criticism, but it is not the whole story, for the quality of the literature keeps asserting itself despite the fissive effects of some of the 'critical' approaches. Moreover, even under critical examination and the demands of doctoral dissertations it remains the case that not all the narratives of the Old Testament have taken on the appearance of smashed mirrors. The so-called 'Succession Narrative' in II Samuel 9 – I Kings 2 is a case in point.

In discussion of this sort notice should also be taken of what might simply be called a 'psychological factor' which impinges upon the awareness of both the scholarly and the general (or 'lay') reader of the Old Testament. We have difficulty in deciding how imaginatively a text should be read. How seriously should we take the presence or absence of a detailed narrative? It is a question which often presses itself upon writers of biblical commentaries, if my experience permits that kind of generalization. Nowadays when imaginative reading of biblical texts is widely practised and commended by those who emphasize the literary character of the Bible, even the biblical critic whose interests extend beyond mere textual stratigraphy may still be left bewildered by the uninhibited display of the outright literary practitioners. It is not necessarily the case that the biblical critic did not notice what his literary colleague proudly holds up to view. It may be that he has noticed and has immediately repented of his consorting with that underworld of undisciplined typology and allegory, and of limp parallelism, which it is his life's ambition to avoid. Again, the tendency of modern literary criticism to talk of levels of meaning, to the extent of playing down authorial intention,⁸ may alienate the biblical critic who, while aware of the significance of ambiguity and polyvalence in (some) Old Testament texts, knows well that there is usually an intended and, for the most part, recoverable meaning in what lies before him. He may even be using genre-terms, like 'apology', 'apologetic' or 'propaganda' in relation to some of the texts which he is studying.

Even so, it is widely acknowledged that much more could have been done for Old Testament narrative by modern critical scholarship. The historical-critical approach, its shortcomings notwithstanding, has yielded

7. J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study*, London, 1984, p. 162.

8. Cf. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 147-151 (discussing 'New Criticism').

much that is good and positive and will continue to do so, but there is obvious need for other approaches, including the literary, to be exploited more fully. It is also a fact that in the last twenty years or so, a steady flow of books and articles has appeared to fill the gap.⁹ Interestingly, the point is made often enough in such writings that there are many literary insights to be culled from writings of the pre-critical period (which, after all, is most of human history). Writers who 'consorted with the underworld' might better do justice to aspects of narrative which have tended to be overlooked by modern excavative activities. Alter, in illustration, reports the observation of the Jewish mediaeval commentator Rashi on the irony of 'We are all sons of one man' (Genesis 42:11), spoken by Joseph's brothers to their as yet unrecognized sibling when they appeared before him in Egypt with a request for corn.¹⁰ 'The holy spirit was kindled within them, and they included him with themselves as also being a son of their father,' says Rashi. Perhaps we shall wish to banish this observation to the underworld, or perhaps not. Certainly, of the several commentaries which I have consulted none has anything to say on the matter.

The foregoing comments will suffice by way of Lucan prologue. In what follows I want to say something about several of those features or techniques of Hebrew narrative-writing which justify the use of the word 'art' in the lecture title. I take 'art' to imply the self-conscious and intentional, even if that is a limiting definition. On the encephalographic probings of structuralism I shall have nothing to say. The gamut from 'soft' to 'hard' may be experienced with profit in, for example, David Jobling's *The Sense of Biblical Narrative* (1978).¹¹ At the same time it is true that, 'much that goes under the name of 'biblical structuralism' could be paraphrased without using any structuralist terminology, to everyone's gain'.¹² 'Structure' in what immediately follows is, of course, used with a very different (architectonic) sense.

1. Structure

It is the Old Testament that gives us such an artificial construction as the alphabetical psalm, most conspicuously in the case of Ps 119 which consists of twenty-two octaves each of which begins its lines with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The same concern for form and structure is apparent, even if not normally so emphatically, in Hebrew prose writing, from Genesis 1 onwards. The first chapter of Genesis has

9. In addition to the works mentioned in this article see in particular M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Bloomington, 1985.

10. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 164.

11. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series VII, Sheffield, 1978.

12. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 134.

SIMPLICITY OF THE HIGHEST CUNNING

been subjected to much structural analysis, and rightly so. In the first place there is the division of the divine activity among six days; there are the punctuating occurrences of 'And God said'; and it is evident that there is an internal correspondence between days one to three on the one hand, and days four to six on the other, so that, for example, day one corresponds to day four as light corresponds to luminaries. The chief effect of such a telling of the story of creation is to show that indeed God did not make the world a chaos (*cf.* Is. 45:18). The ordered character of creation is reflected in the structured nature of the account. And given the rival cosmogonies and cosmologies developed in the ancient near east, this is a point of considerable theological import. How much further the structural dimension should be pursued becomes, however, a moot point. Michael Fishbane claims that the chapter is pyramidal in construction, with each day having more space allocated to it than the preceding. On this reading day six is climactic because of word-count, apart from anything else. But not only is Fishbane's an inverted pyramid, it is apparent that it is more like an unsuccessful attempt at a step pyramid since day five is described with fewer words (57) than day four (69).¹³

Another approach to the structuring of Genesis 1 is presented by Paul Beauchamp, who is impressed by the fact that days four and six talk about 'rule'.¹⁴ He concludes that day four, referring to the rule of the heavenly bodies, marks a high point in the progression of the creation narrative. Thus it is 'astres gouvernant' and 'hommes dominant' in Genesis 1.¹⁵ This treatment of the days in the creation narrative is greatly influenced by Beauchamp's view of the priestly calendar and the importance therein of the fourth day, but that is not our present concern. What is of interest is that this reading of the creation of sun, moon and stars conflicts with another which is more familiar and more convincing, namely that the failure to call the sun and moon by their usual names (rather than 'greater light' and 'lesser light'), in a chapter which has naming as one of its more significant features (see vv. 5,8,10), is probably deliberate and even polemical in intent. These heavenly bodies, of whose supposedly divine status Israel's neighbours made so much, are here restricted to their proper function of light-bearing. As for the stars, they are mentioned almost as if they are an afterthought, and as if the author's intention is to strike a blow against near eastern astral worship. It will be obvious that this anti-mythical interpretation, favoured by, for example, Gerhard von Rad in his commentary on Genesis, does not easily coexist

13. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, New York, 1979, pp. 8f. Fishbane (p.9) claims that the 'minimal aberration' between the word totals for the fourth and fifth days is of no account.
14. *Création et séparation: étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Paris, 1969.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 68 (*cf.* p. 116, etc).

with the more individualist explanation by Beauchamp.¹⁶ We may even begin to see the makings of chaos out of the cosmos that the narrative of Genesis 1 is patently intended to be.

Genesis 1 apart, the search for structures exhibiting internal coherence has become a major industry within the world of Old Testament study. 'Concentric', 'ring-structured', 'introverted' are the kinds of terms that are used to describe what structure-conscious critics bring to light. Chiasmus – the correspondence of items one and four and two and three in a verse such as

To you, O men, / I call out
I raise my voice / to all mankind (Proverbs 8:4)

is often highlighted at the microtextual level, and was evidently as much a feature of biblical compositional style as of other literature ancient and modern. At the macrotextual level chapters and whole books are now, virtually as a matter of course, subjected to analysis of this sort. Some times the result is reasonably satisfactory, and as a possible example of such 'purposeful symmetry' II Samuel 21-24 could be cited. There the accounts of famine and plague in chapters. 21 and 24 respectively, form the outer layer; lists of heroes and heroic deeds the subcutaneous layer (21:15-22; 23:8-39); while making up the 'core' are two poetic pieces glorifying the God of David (22:2-51; 23:1-7). The effect of this symmetry, once it is discerned and interpreted, is to give prominence to the psalm and poem at the centre, and thereby to God and his beneficent activity on behalf of the David who is harassed and threatened in the flanking sections of this 'Samuel Appendix'.

Unfortunately in most such exercises there is a high degree of subjectivity involved and the discovery of patterns in the text can depend in substantial measure on the discoverer's decisions as to what is, and what is not, significant. There are also questions of a practical nature that require airing. What do we know about 'essay planning' by ancient writers? And how practicable or effective were macrotextual structures likely to be, given that the ancient writers were normally writing on scrolls, and that without the use of the headings and such like that are characteristic of modern narrative writing? There is also a problem on the side of the biblical interpreter who, having discovered a pattern which accounts for a portion of text, may be seduced into thinking that he has in some sense gained control of the text. Whereas, if the truth be acknowledged, one of the most unsatisfactory aspects of the pattern quest is, for all the appearance of science and *savoir-faire*, its level of cerebral engagement with the biblical text.

16. *Genesis: A Commentary* (Eng. tr.; revd ed), London, 1972, pp. 55ff. Beauchamp (p. 102) explicitly rejects such an anti-mythical view.

2. *Inclusio(n)*

One of the set texts for Hebrew Paper III in the Cambridge University Theological and Religious Studies Tripos ends at II Samuel 19:9 (Eng. 8), until recently, indeed, at v.9a (Eng. 8a). This point marks the end of the Absalom rebellion. David has lamented Absalom's death, has been rebuked for his excessive grieving, and then we read: 'Then the King arose, and took his seat *in the gate*. And the people were all told, 'behold, the king is sitting *in the gate*'; and all the people came before the king.'

This examination prescription, which, for aught I know, may go back to the 'pre-literary' days of Old Testament study, exhibits a sound instinct. If we look at II Samuel 15 and the account of the beginning of the rebellion, we shall find that the trouble started in the gate, where Absalom used to stand in the early morning and sow seeds of disaffection in the minds of those who had come to Jerusalem seeking redress for wrongs suffered. And furthermore, the weakness in David's administration, according to Absalom at least, was neglect of the business of the gate, the administration of justice for aggrieved citizens. David's sitting in the gate in chapter 19 therefore takes us back to the beginning; it is an '*inclusio(n)*' rounding off a narrative segment by taking the reader back to the beginning of the story. Sometimes the repetition of a word used at the beginning will suffice to round off and refer back, sometimes words and themes, as in the present case, may be involved. In II Samuel, then, David's sitting in the gate has a symbolic function in that it marks the end of the rebellion and return to normality. Which city gate is not stated; presumably it was the gate of Mahanaim, David's headquarters during the rebellion. That it was not the gate of Jerusalem is immaterial; what matters is that David was *sitting in the gate*.

Anyone with an interest in the English essayists may well be reminded of Thomas de Quincey's 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth', the point of which is that this mundane detail of the knocking at the gate represents a return to normality:

It makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish: the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

These words have an aptness in relation to the Absalom rebellion and the king's sitting in the gate at the rebellion's end. But the biblical narrative has the added factor of *inclusio(n)* to reinforce this idea of return to normality. De Quincey's discovery inspires him to doxology ('Oh! mighty poet! Thy works are not those of other men . . .'). Presumably some praiseful conclusion about the biblical writer's skill would not be out of place!

3. Narrative Analogy

Narrative analogy is a technique whereby episodes which may be basically unrelated are made to resonate with each other through the reprise in one of words or ideas which belong in the first instance to the other. In this way it is possible to draw comparisons or contrasts between one character or situation and another, or between the responses of the same character in different sets of circumstances. Sometimes a relatively minor event may assume unsuspected significance by association with one of greater moment, while still more complex goings-on are also possible through the use of this technique of writing.¹⁷

Abraham Malamat's study of the Danite migration in the book of Judges provides a good example of the relatively minor being drawn into the orbit of the comparatively major.¹⁸ Malamat argues that in various points of detail the story of the Danite tribe's migration to the Laish area, as told in Judges 18, corresponds to the account of the *national* conquest and settlement as it is reported elsewhere in the Old Testament. Malamat himself speaks of a typology of conquest accounts, but the usefulness of this particular term is questionable since we are restricted (by definition) to two conquest accounts. Thus narrative analogy seems a better description of what Malamat has observed. The enhancing of a tribal tradition by presenting it *sub specie totius gentis* would be very much in keeping with the general approach in the book of Judges.

Three examples of the same phenomenon from the book of Exodus deserve brief comment. When we read in Exodus 1:7 that the Israelites living in Egypt 'were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied' the collocation of verbs used suggests a comparison with the creation ordinance ('Be fruitful and multiply', Gen. 1:28), which may indeed have influenced the Exodus narrator's choice of words. As the human family is to 'fill the earth' (Gen. 1:28), so the Israelites fill 'the land', whether the land of Goshen or the whole land of Egypt (Ex. 1:7). If in Exodus 1 we can see the influence of Genesis 1, then the verbal echoes may be intended to suggest that the Hebrews' prolificity in Egypt is a sign of divine blessing, no matter the reaction of the Pharaoh and his people.¹⁹

There may be a second instance of narrative analogy in Exodus 1, for, in a section which talks of cities, mortar and bricks, the Pharaoh says, 'Come let us . . . lest' (v.10), using the uncommon expression which comes in Genesis 11:7 in another section about a city, mortar and bricks. In both cases the issue is self-preservation, whether by the Babel-builders

17. Cf. the author's 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in I Samuel 24-26', *Tyndale Bulletin* XXXI, 1980, pp. 37-64 (42ff.)

18. 'The Danite Migration and the Pan-Israelite Exodus-Conquest: a Biblical Narrative Pattern', *Biblica* LI, 1970, pp. 1-16.

19. In source-critical terms both Gen. 1 and Ex. 1:1-7 are 'Priestly', so that the analogical comparison is valid from either a 'final form' or a 'source-critical' point of view.

concerned with overcoming the centrifugal effects of appearing in the 'primeval history' or by the Egyptians in the face of Israelite proliferation. The oblique commentary of the Genesis story may also encourage the reader to see the assault on the Hebrew community as being on a par with the Babel-builders' implied rebellion against God.

At the far end of the book of Exodus the influence of Genesis, or strictly of the cosmic creation narrative therein, is again in evidence. As the tabernacle construction is brought to its conclusion we read, 'Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished' (Ex. 39:32 // Gen. 2:1), and then we are told that Moses looked on all that the Israelites had done and blessed them (Ex. 39:43 // Gen. 1:28, 31). A comparison is thus made between the making of the earth for man and the making of the tabernacle for God. Much more may be involved, of course. Are we being informed that the man-made tabernacle is up to standard? Do we now have an established order of things as basic to (Israelite) life as the original creation? There is scope for reflection here. Others see a hint of the old mythic connection between creation-from-chaos and sanctuary-building, with the 'message' that the divine presence is not merely of the ethereal, cosmic order but is historically present to Israel.

4. Word-play

Word-play features in the Old Testament narrative in Shakespearian proportions. It is impossible to do justice to all that might be included under this catch-all title, but there are three variations on the theme to which attention will be drawn.

a. *Leitwort*. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig used the term to describe situations in which a word or root recurs, in any of its possible grammatical forms or derivatives, throughout a narrative.²⁰ By this means a theme is introduced and sustained as the key-word echoes at one point and another in the developing story. One of the best-known examples is the occurrence of *b^earakâ* ('blessing') and the root *barak* ('bless'), as also of *b^ekorâ* ('birthright'), in the Jacob cycle in Genesis. The occurrences of the word *nagîd* ('prince, leader') and of the apparently cognate verb *higgîd* ('tell') in the account of Saul's anointing as *nagîd* by Samuel (I Samuel 9-10) are of a similar order.²¹ There is thereby produced a stereo-phonetic effect: we remain aware that the sinuous story is first and

20. On this see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 92f.

21. Cf. M. Buber, 'Die Erzählung von Sauls Königswahl', *Vetus Testamentum*, VI, 1956, pp. 6, 142; S. Shaviv, '*nabi* and *nagîd* in I Samuel ix 1-x 16', *Vetus Testamentum*, XXXIV, 1984, pp. 108-113.

foremost about the appointing of a *nagid* for Israel threatened by the Philistines.

b. *Pun*. There are puns in plenty in the Old Testament. Pun is responsible for a kind of 'gallows humour' creeping into the account of the interpretation of the dreams of the butler and baker in Genesis 40. The butler is assured that the Pharaoh will 'lift up his head' and restore him to his former position, but to the doubtless optimistic baker who (presumably) has heard this comforting message Joseph says that the Pharaoh will also 'lift up his head' – from off him! Another pun in similarly playful vein comes in I Samuel 25 in the story of Nabal who celebrated his sheep-shearing with excessive zeal. There is serious word-play on his name in the chapter (v.25), but a less-observed – and less serious instance of the same occurs in v.37 in reference to Nabal's recovery from his indulgence: 'And in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal. . . .' Since Hebrew has a noun *nebel* meaning 'wine-skin, bottle', it is not difficult to appreciate that here Nabal is being treated as a wine-skin. Moreover, the verb is well suited to the pun, for if bread may be said 'to go from the bag' (*i.e.* 'run out', I Samuel 9:7) it seems idiomatically correct to say that wine 'goes out' from the wine-skin.

c. *Ironic repetition*. The ironic repetition of words or phrases is relatively common in the Old Testament and is a kind of word-play easily distinguished from *Leitwort* and pun. An example from II Samuel 11 will make the point clear. As a result of David's instructions to Joab, Uriah the Hittite has been put in a position of danger and has lost his life. When the report reaches David he replies (literally): 'Do not let this matter be evil in your eyes' (v.25). Of course not, for now the king is able to take Bathsheba as his wife. Two verses later, however, it is disclosed that 'the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord'. The contrast is pronounced and deliberate. Now, granted that if the two statements were not in such a close relationship we might well render them by idiomatically distinct English equivalents, nevertheless is there not a case here for preserving the literal correspondence of the Hebrew? Is not some of the force of the concluding statement lost if with, for example, RSV we read in the one verse, 'Do not let this matter trouble you', and in the other, 'But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord'?

We have already heard the Babel-builders of Genesis 11 rouse themselves with 'Come let us . . .', which expression they utter twice, in vv. 3 and 4 of this compact, mordant satire on Babylon and what it represented to Israelite minds. But how ironical that when God decides to give the project its quietus, he stirs himself with the same rallying-call, 'Come let us . . . (lest)' (v.7).

The Babel-builders' attempt to 'make a name' for themselves is treated even more derisively in the Genesis narrative. A name? But the name

SIMPLICITY OF THE HIGHEST CUNNING

which they acquired for themselves was 'Babel', derived for the purposes of the narrative from the Hebrew verb *balal*, meaning 'confuse'. And the sense of irony is increased when so soon afterwards we read of God's promise to make Abram's name great in pursuance of a divine initiative which emerges against the background of the chaos of Babel. No ultrasound is needed to detect such ironies, and they are far more decisive for our reading and interpretation of the story than are any structural patterns which are suggested for it.²²

Finally, we shall consider the possibility that ironic repetition is a factor in a problem passage in I Samuel 16. At the end of chapter 15 the prophet Samuel has announced God's rejection of Saul, and he has the task of anointing a successor even while Saul is still *de facto* king. Samuel, aware of the risk involved in this enterprise, points out that Saul will kill him if he goes to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons, as God has commanded him; and then comes the problematical sentence which is a certain contributor to most discussions of Old Testament ethics: 'And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord' ". ' Which is what Samuel did; a sacrifice was arranged. Even so, the real business of the story is the choosing of one of Jesse's sons. Is God then encouraging Samuel to tell a half-truth? That is the problem. One recently published volume on Old Testament ethics expresses well the dilemma in noting that, whereas Saul had forfeited his right to know all the truth, Samuel did not have the right to deliver himself of an untruth.²³

It may be, however, that the mention of the sacrifice involves ironic repetition of a key element in Saul's own self-defence before Samuel in the narrative immediately preceding in chapter 15. There prophet and king are found in serious disagreement as to whether Saul has discharged his responsibility to prosecute the exterminatory 'ban' on the Amalekites. Samuel says that the king has disregarded his instructions, and Saul insists that he has complied with them. The weakness in Saul's case consists, in part, of the animal noises in the background. 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?', asks Samuel in lilting Hebrew (v.14). Saul has an explanation:

They have brought them from the Amalekites;
for the people spared the best of the sheep
and of the oxen, *to sacrifice to the Lord your God.* (v.15)

Samuel does not accept this self-regarding account of what has taken place, so Saul repeats his defence a few verses later:

22. E.g. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis. Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, Assen, 1975, p. 22.

23. W. C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 95.

The people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, *to sacrifice to the Lord your God* in Gilgal (v.21).

Is it possible, then, that when dealing with I Samuel 16:2 we should be looking the verse up under 'irony' rather than 'ethics'? That in this case the fool is being answered according to his folly, in a manner which recalls the 'deceiver deceived' motif that appears elsewhere in the Old Testament? Perhaps we can occasionally be too solemn in our discussion of Old Testament problem texts.

One of the great benefits of the 'literary approach', and one which its exponents early appreciated, is its ability to make common ground for readers of whatever theological persuasion as they encounter the biblical text. For the orthodox believer a 'docetic' view of Scripture is something of an occupational hazard, and is exemplified in an extreme manner in the conviction in 'pre-papyri' days that the non-classical Greek of the New Testament was a special 'language of the Holy Ghost'. The 'literary approach' is a gentle pointer to the advantages to be found in a more realistic view of Scripture. The 'kenoticist', on the other hand, finds that in order to hear and interpret Scripture aright he must suspend disbelief, reading the narrative both sympathetically and imaginatively. On issues of historicity or hermeneutic paths may thereafter diverge, but we can at least be thankful for small mercies.

HEILSGEOGRAPHIE GEOGRAPHY AS A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT

G. W. GROGAN
BIBLE TRAINING INSTITUTE, GLASGOW

Introduction

1. Geography and History in the Bible

For many years now serious students of the Bible and Theology have been familiar with the word *Heilsgeschichte*. It is fundamental to an understanding of the Bible that it be seen as the inspired record of God's saving deeds in the history of his people, culminating in and finding their ultimate significance in the death and resurrection of Christ.

If the historical dimension of the revelation of God is seen to be so important, should we not recognise also the vital place of the geographical? God has given us a place in a universe of space and time and we need to recognise both. Every biblical event took place in a particular location as well as at a particular time. We may not be able to assign latitude and longitude to them all but then neither can we always give date and time. An event always took place at a particular place and time and our own imprecision of knowledge does not affect that at all.

I am not suggesting that this dimension of Biblical truth has ever been totally ignored. This would be very difficult to do. It is very doubtful, however, whether it has been given its due weight in a great deal of Christian thought.¹ In doing a crossword puzzle we need to examine both the clues across and the clues down. History and geography together are the warp and woof of the Bible.

2. The Particular and the General in the Bible

The particularity of the Bible is a major and inescapable factor in it. The Christian gospel is for ever rooted in the particular. It was in a particular event (the Cross) in the life of a particular man (Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God), who belonged to a particular race (Israel), recorded in a particular book (the Bible) that God's redeeming act for mankind was accomplished. We may not like this, but we can only reject it by rejecting also God's salvation in Christ.

There is however something missing from the above paragraph. These things also took place in a particular land. J. M. Houston has well said, 'People live more comfortably with universals than with particular con-

1. See the complaint of W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, Los Angeles, 1974, pp. 3-5. This is perhaps the most important book, at least on the New Testament section on the subject.

crete realities. The geography of the Bible is relevant to biblical study because the acts of God with men are dealt with in a particular geographical setting and a specific historical context . . . Geography shares with history a concern for the particular – for places as well as events.²

3. The Part and the Whole in the Bible

In writing of the destiny of Israel and the world, the apostle Paul says, 'If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump' (Rom. 11:16). This is a principle found in several different forms within the Old Testament legal system. If a sacrificial animal was not totally consumed on the altar (as in the Burnt-offering) part of it was always to be offered to God. Thus the whole offering was sanctified. Likewise the Sabbath was a kind of tithe on time. The right approach to the Decalogue was to obey it, not only outwardly, but from the heart (as our Lord made abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount), and so, as Paul discovered (Rom 7:7), one of the commandments related specifically to the attitude of the heart. The redemption of the firstborn applies the principle to people and the legislation about the Levites both to people and place. They were separated for God from the other tribes and (although of course provision was made for them to live somewhere) no allotment of land was made to them. They were told that the Lord was their inheritance. As we shall see later, this has great significance for our theme in this paper.

4. The Physical and the Spiritual in the Bible

The salvation God gives us in Christ is spiritual in nature, but it is related to the physical in many ways. It is typified by many acts of physical salvation within the Old Testament economy. It is rooted in a physical crucifixion and a physical resurrection. The risen body of the believer is a spiritual body but it involves the glorification of the physical body. The new creation emerges out of the cleansing of the old.

In the gospel sacraments physical elements are employed for spiritual ends. The sacramental principle is deeply embedded in the whole Old Testament economy and much of it has a geographical dimension. In the feasts of the sacred calendar the fruit of the land was employed and was the subject of much thanksgiving. Altars set up by the patriarchs would be reminders of the way God revealed himself at such places. Jerusalem and its temple were eloquent with truth about God.

In addition to all this, of course, there is the principle of analogy, in which spiritual realities are constantly described in terms of earthly things, and again some of the latter are geographical. For instance, the

2. The 'Geographical Setting of the Bible' in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. I, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 83.

church of Christ is spoken of as God's city in the New Testament, as we shall see later.

The Old Testament

1. *Literal Geography*

a. *The earth as the scene of saving history.* The Bible commences with cosmology which is itself the foundation for geography: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' The earth as humanity's God-given environment and as the scene of the whole human story is the centre of interest in much of Genesis chapter 1, and in chapter 2 there is even a section which has more local geographical interest, with its reference to rivers and lands by name. When man is brought into being, the very mode of his creation is a reminder of the nature of his environment. He was appropriately named Adam, for he was taken from the ground, the *adamah*. Thus the scene is set and the human story commences. So then the cosmological and the geographical are the preconditions of the historical.

b. *The land of Canaan as God's gift to Israel.* This is a major theme in the Old Testament. It is perhaps particularly emphasised in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Yahweh promised it to them and swore to their fathers to give it to them (Deut. 1:8; Josh. 1:6). Indeed because God has it in his heart to give it, it can be said, even before the Conquest, to have been given already (Deut. 3:2; Josh. 1:13-15). Both in Joshua and in the psalms the land is said to have been given to them as an inheritance (Josh. 1:6; Ps. 105:11, 44). Just as a man, and in some circumstances a woman (Num. 36), would inherit land from parents, so Israel inherited her land from God. Moreover this is not simply analogy. Clearly there is no exact parallel, for inheritance is normally received on the death of the father, and God does not die. Nevertheless every piece of land inherited by an Israelite was to be viewed as part of that gift of God to his people as a whole at the entry into the land of Canaan. It therefore ties up with the Old Testament thought of Israel as collectively God's son (Exod. 4:22-24; Hos. 11:1ff) and of the people distributively as his children (Deut. 14:1; Is. 1:2).

Because Israel inherits the land as the promised gift of God to her, she knows blessing (Josh. 14:13) in it, for it is a good land (Deut 1:25; 3:25). There are passages in the Old Testament where the writers wax lyrical about the qualities of the land (e.g. Deut. 8:7-10; 11:9-12; Jer 2:7; Hos. 2). One of the leading blessings the people receive is rest and this word in fact occurs quite frequently from Deuteronomy onwards (e.g. Deut. 3:20; Josh. 1:12-15; Is. 63:14). S. Kistemaker says, 'It is the Book of Deuteronomy which equates the promise to rest with the inheritance of the Promised Land (cf. Deut. 3:2; 12:9; 25:19). Nothing is said

about spiritual rest in this book. The promise is *hic et nunc*. That the promise of receiving rest was fulfilled is testified in the Former Prophets and Writings.³

Rest and peace are, of course, kindred ideas, for both relate very much in the Old Testament to protection from or victory over enemies. The people are said to have peace in the land, and Jerusalem especially is celebrated as the place of peace under Divine protection (*e.g.* Ps. 122:7). G. A. F. Knight draws attention to Psalm 11:7, 'Shalom be within thy walls, O Yerush-Shalom'.⁴

As the people of Israel emerge from the wilderness wanderings and stand on the borders of the land of promise, God sets that land before them as a land to enter and possess. As a whole they are to go up into it, and the particular tribes are exhorted to go up and take it (Judges 1). It is then divided among them by lot, each tribe having a portion, with the exception of the Levites, who lived among the other tribes in specially designated cities. The references to the portions of land given to Joshua (Josh. 19:49, 50) and to Caleb (Josh. 14) suggest that each family had its allotted portion within the tribal allotment. This is probably assumed both in the legislation of Leviticus 25 and in the story of Naboth's vineyard in I Kings 21. The land had to be personally appropriated at the Conquest. They were to walk up and down in it and so to make it their own. Jabez apparently felt the need of more than was originally allotted to him and his request was not turned away (I Chron. 4:9, 10).

It seems to have been assumed that the people, once settled in the land would remain in it. Was Abraham wrong to go down to Egypt? Certainly Isaac was told explicitly that he was to remain in Canaan (Gen. 26:2, 3), and Jacob was given specific permission to go to Egypt (Gen. 46:3,4). Were Elimelech and Naomi right to go to Moab in time of famine? (Ruth 1:1, 2). We are not told enough to enable us to answer these questions categorically. Certainly Jacob asked to be buried in Canaan (Gen. 47:29-31), just as Sarah had been (Gen. 23) and Joseph asked the Israelites to return his bones to that land when God fulfilled his promise and took them back there (Gen. 50:24-26; *cf.* Josh. 24:32).

The book of Deuteronomy has much to say about the land of promise and it is made clear there that Israel's occupancy of the land had definite conditions attached to it. If they persisted in apostasy and disobedience they would be exiled (*e.g.* Deut. 28). There is little doubt that one of the main purposes of the books of Kings is to show that such a fate was in fact thoroughly deserved both by Israel and Judah (2 Kings 17:24). This suggests that divine blessing and occupation of the land were very much linked, although we should not over-emphasise this. We must remember

3. *Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Amsterdam, 1961, p. 115.

4. *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, Richmond, 1959, p. 297.

that Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leaving the temple and moving eastwards to be with his people in Babylon (Ezek. 11:23). In Acts 7, Stephen criticises the Jews of his day for their inclination to settle down with the too solid temple and not to move on with the purpose of God, which had now advanced to its point of consummation in Christ.

Removal from the land and a period of exile would be followed by restoration to the land and the gift of a spirit of penitence (e.g. Jer. 32). The land itself would experience new blessing, which would show itself in a new beauty and fruitfulness. There are suggestions of a blessing that went beyond the physical, for the Spirit of God was to be poured out (e.g. Ezek. 36), but this is to anticipate other aspects of our theme.

c. *Jerusalem/Zion in the purpose of God.* A great deal of attention has been directed in recent years to the Jerusalem theology in the Old Testament.⁵ Although questions relating to the origin and development of this are important, they need not be taken up in this paper, for our concern is much more with the concept itself and with its influence on the New Testament.

Historically Jerusalem owes its place as the capital, both political and religious, to the enterprise of David, but the Old Testament writers see behind this the directing hand of God, who chose Zion and founded it (e.g. Ps. 87:1-3; Is. 14:32). He has made its temple his dwelling-place. Psalm 87 emphasises that God has a special love for this city even above his love for other cities in Israel's land, and Psalm 78 goes further: 'He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which he loves.' Many of the psalms feature Jerusalem and its temple as the centre of God's purposes.

The actual historical reality was however very different. Isaiah writes of the many evils of the city, made all the more nauseating by the excessive attention to religious ritual which characterised its people in his day (Is. 1). He declared the judgement of God on it, although when a godly king put his trust in the Lord the city was protected from the fierce Assyrians (Is. 36-37). Jeremiah knew however that by his time the city was ripe for judgement and he and Ezekiel both spoke frequently about its certain destruction along with the very temple itself (e.g. Jer. 7; Ezek. 7-9).

Alongside this emphasis on the certainty of judgement however the prophets stressed that God had a continuing purpose for Zion and that this purpose would be put into effect when he had purged it (e.g. Is. 4). Isaiah 40 ff. contains many promises addressed to devastated Zion. It would rise again from its ruins, God would again bless it with his presence, and it would be populated by those who would return from their

5. For a recent study of this, see B. C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, Sheffield, 1987.

dispersion among the nations (*e.g.* Is. 49). Ezekiel describes Jerusalem as the centre of the nations and the navel of the earth (Ezek. 5:5; 38:2). In a judged world Zion will stand as the one sure place of refuge for God's people (*e.g.* Is. 24-27). She will have new names which will express God's purpose for her and his delight in her (Is. 62:1-5). It is interesting to note that the prophetic emphasis on future blessing for the city did not end with the return from exile. Zechariah, for example, is very much concerned with God's future plans for the city.

Some features of the Jerusalem psalms and kindred prophecies appear to go beyond the purely geographical and so will be dealt with later in the paper.

d. *The wider geographical purpose of God.* Some passages in the Old Testament define the land as being 'from Dan to Beersheba' (*e.g.* Jud. 20:1), but the promises of God always speak in wider terms. The Abrahamic covenant spoke of territory 'from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates' (Gen. 15:18-21). In the story of the Old Testament there was no actual approximation to this, except during the reigns of David and Solomon. The emphasis on Judah and Jerusalem should not mislead us into thinking that the northern kingdom was no longer regarded as part of the people of God. Yahweh sent his prophets both to the south and the north, and Hezekiah invited northerners to attend the passover at Jerusalem (II Chron. 30:1ff). Obadiah's prophetic anticipation includes lands like Philistia, Phoenicia and Edom, as well as the territories of the northern kingdom to be united with Judah in the kingdom of the Lord.

The eschatological teaching of the prophets and psalmists often includes a picture of a universe at worship (*e.g.* Ps. 86:9, 10; Is 11:9; 66:23). The psalms often call the whole world to worship the Lord (Pss. 96:1; 99:1-3; 150:6). This suggests that God's final purposes were often kept in view during the worship in the temple.

It is important though to note that this universalism does not involve a repudiation of Old Testament particularism. The Gentiles are pictured as drawn to the holy land, attracted by God's revelation to Israel, and worshipping him at the temple in Jerusalem (Is. 60; Mic. 4:1-5). An apparent exception to this is the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah 19, where Egypt, Israel's former great enemy, will be united with another major foe, Assyria, in worship with Israel, and there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt.

A close examination of this chapter reveals the interesting fact that it employs much language reminiscent of Exodus, Joshua and Judges.⁶ The Egyptians, who had known the Lord at the Exodus as their Judge, would

6. For detailed comment, see G. W. Grogan, 'Isaiah', in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. VI, Grand Rapids, 1986, *ad loc.*

now, like Israel, know him as Saviour. Not Canaan now but Egypt would be conquered for the Lord, and the Egyptians would worship him there. Clearly the implications of this chapter require further study. Athanasius saw the triumphs of the gospel within his diocese of Alexandria as a fulfilment of the chapter.⁷

2. *Symbolic Geography*

The Old Testament writers sometimes transcend the strictly geographical in making reference to particular cities. Micah moves a little in this direction when he sees symbolism in the names of the cities of Judah and draws a message for each from its name (Mic. 1:10-16). To Isaiah Sodom has a double symbolism, standing both for a city under judgement and for the evil nature of the community which made judgement necessary and inevitable (Is. 1:9-10). There are a number of passages which verge on the symbolic. For example, the references to Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah 19, while undoubtedly intended literally, perhaps also are meant to suggest that if such wicked nations can be converted to the worship and service of the true God, this will in fact be true of the whole world. Moreover, in several passages Edom's judgement is probably intended to indicate, not only the literal judgement on a traditionally antagonistic foe of Israel and of Yahweh, but also the fact that no people, no matter how apparently insignificant, will escape divine judgement (see especially Is. 34). Note also that when Hosea speaks of a return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5) he may not be speaking literally but rather indicating in this way that God's judgement will again mean that his people will become subject to a foreign power.

Jerusalem/Zion certainly seems at times to stand, not simply for the actual city itself, but for the people of Israel as God's own community. Here the strictly geographical and the symbolic run into each other, for the immediately post-exilic community extended only a short distance beyond Jerusalem itself. Some such modern term as 'Greater Jerusalem' would certainly have done justice to the historical reality at that time. Quite apart, however, from any question of its city limits, Jerusalem stands for the godly community of Israel. W. H. Schmidt is right when he says, 'Zion, once a geographical term for the hill upon which Jerusalem stands, now becomes, like the name of the city itself, a (salvation-) title for the community.'⁸

In some passages of the Old Testament the implications of this are developed in a way which may be thought to transcend the geographical altogether, although opinion among evangelical interpreters of prophecy is divided on this. Zechariah pictures a man with a ruler in his hand for

7. *St Athanasius on the Incarnation*, London, 1970, p. 65.

8. *The Faith of the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1983, p. 219.

measuring the city, and God tells him that he purposes a much greater city than could be so measured (Zech. 2). Ezekiel spends the closing nine chapters of his book describing the vast Jerusalem temple of the future. In some ways, Psalm 87 is even more interesting. Members of other nations, like Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia will be enrolled among its citizens, and it is even said that they were born there. Derek Kidner comments, 'In its enigmatic, staccato phrases this remarkable psalm speaks of Zion as the destined metropolis of Jew and Gentile alike. Nothing is explained with any fullness, yet by the end there remains no doubt of the coming conversion of old enemies and their full incorporation in the city of God.'⁹

3. *Spiritual Geography*

Israel was in covenant relationship with Yahweh, and that relationship was largely enjoyed by the people within the land of promise. There was one tribe, however, which had no share in the apportionment of the land after the Conquest. The Levites had cities to live in, scattered among the areas allotted to the other tribes, but although their inheritance was not geographical it is never suggested that they had none at all. Sometimes what they were given was spoken of in material terms, *i.e.*, in terms of offerings and tithes from the people (Num. 18:21-26; Jos. 13:14). The most significant references, however, are to the fact that the Lord was their inheritance (Deut. 18:1ff; Josh. 13:33, Ezek. 44:28). Could anything be more wonderful than that!

The thought of an inheritance in God himself is taken a step further in a number of the psalms where the psalmist uses language familiar to us from such books as Deuteronomy and Joshua in connection with inheritance of sections of the land of promise and applies it to his relationship with God. For instance, the psalmist declares in Psalm 16:5, 6, 'The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage'. Here a man who presumably had an allotment of land which had come down to him from the Conquest asserts that he has a spiritual inheritance in God himself. It is only if we deny the Davidic authorship of a psalm like that and see it as a Levitical product that we can avoid seeing that the principle of a spiritual inheritance is now being widened beyond those to whom it is given in the Mosaic Law. Perhaps it was through his association with the Levites in the house of God that David learned to value spiritual inheritance above material.

In some ways more remarkable still is the use of this kind of language in reverse, so that God is said to have his inheritance in Israel (*e.g.* Deut. 9:26; Ps. 94:5, 14). Here is accommodation indeed, and it strik-

9. *Psalms 73-150* (Tyndale O.T. Commentary), Leicester, 1975, ad loc.

ingly anticipates the use together of these two complementary ideas in the Epistle to the Ephesians. God is the dwelling-place of his people (Ps. 90:1). He is their 'land' as well as their Lord. Here geographical categories are being employed, but their literal geographical reference has completely disappeared. The geographical has become the servant of the spiritual.

The New Testament

1. *Literal Geography*

a. *References to the Old Testament in geographical terms.* There are quite a number of these but they are of comparatively little interest in terms of our theme. They do, however, demonstrate that where events took place as well as the events themselves was of real interest to the New Testament writers. The reference in John 4 to the debate between the Jews and Samaritans about the correct place for worship is of course connected with the interpretation of the Old Testament in both communities.

b. *The Life of Jesus* There are geographical references in plenty in all four gospels, for the Saviour's ministry involved extensive travelling, especially in the northern part of the country. Each of the four evangelists has his own particular interests and this is reflected in his treatment of geographical details.

Mark does not make frequent reference to place names, although there is a strong sense of constant movement in his narrative. He treats Capernaum as the home and base of Jesus during the Galilean ministry (Mk. 2:1; 3:19, *et al.*) and this possibly reflects an emphasis made by Peter in his communication of facts about that ministry.

Matthew's interest in the fulfilment of prophecy has a geographical dimension. Each of the four most significant places in his life is connected with Old Testament Scripture, Bethlehem with Micah, Nazareth with the Branch prophecies in the prophets, Capernaum with Isaiah's reference to Galilee and Jerusalem with Zechariah's declaration that Zion's king would come to her riding on an ass (Matt. 2:5, 6, 23; 4:13-16; 21:4, 5).

A distinctive feature of Luke's Gospel is the long section he devotes to the journey to Jerusalem, and his reference in this connection to Samaria and Peraea (Lk. 17:11). Until Jesus reaches the environs of the capital city, however, he makes comparatively little reference to particular places by name, although he often notes that he was passing through or ministering in cities or towns or villages. This perhaps tends to highlight even more the great stress he lays on Jerusalem, to which he refers by name about as frequently as the other three evangelists combined. Jerusalem is

the place of destiny, for the whole story is to reach its climax there. The destiny both of Jesus and of the people of Israel will be settled there.

Place name references in John are of particular interest because of the possibility of symbolic interpretation of them by the writer, and this will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

c. The geographical spread of the gospel. Christ's great commission for the evangelisation of the world occurs in different forms in all four gospels. The Johannine form of it is perhaps the simplest of all, with the universal nature of the commission left to be inferred from the universal factor which is so strong elsewhere in the Gospel. So Jesus simply says, 'As the Father has sent me, so send I you' (Jn. 20:21).

The longer ending of the Received Text of Mark presents Jesus as telling the disciples to 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation', while even the shorter ending says that eternal salvation was proclaimed 'from east to west'.

In the last chapter of Matthew, Jesus asserts that he has been given all authority both in heaven and on earth. It is in view of this that he sends his disciples out to make disciples of all the nations! So the most particularist of the four gospels comes to its end, like the others, with a universal commission, and, of course, this has been prepared for earlier (*e.g.* in Matt. 8:11).

It is thoroughly characteristic of Luke that he should present Jesus as saying 'that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Lk. 24:47). The place of destiny was to become the base for world mission, and the other Lucan version, in Acts 1:8, spells this out with more explicit geographical reference than we find elsewhere. 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.'

The Day of Pentecost sees the gospel being preached to a large gathering representing a considerable geographical spread, even though all present were either Jews or proselytes. The tongues both of speech and of fire which were a feature of that day's events remind us that the good news was to be declared to people of every language. Luke's account is necessarily selective, but Acts 9:31 seems to function as a kind of marker: 'So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up'.¹⁰ We are therefore assured that a significant part of Christ's commission has been fulfilled before Luke takes the story on into the wider world of the Gentiles.

The first church historian brings his account, not only to its end but to its climax at Rome. Scattered references to a Roman destination for

10. It is possible that there is an intended parallel here with the references to rest from enemies in Joshua, especially as it occurs just after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a former persecutor of the church.

Paul (Acts 19:21; 23:11; 26:32) and therefore for the gospel entrusted to him would certainly suggest that this was an event of some importance, even though some of the Roman Jews and proselytes converted at Pentecost may well have gone home to found a church in the capital of the empire. The epistle to the Romans also confirms the apostle's great concern to declare the gospel there (Rom. 1:8ff; 15:22ff). Presumably this was on the understanding that, like Jerusalem and Antioch earlier in the book, Rome, with its special communication advantages, was to become another major centre for the further spread of the gospel. Luke has, of course, hinted that he has simply been giving us a selective account of the gospel's progress both by recording the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, but also showing Paul, on his final journey to Jerusalem, finding Christians in a number of places not mentioned earlier in the book (Acts 21).

2. *Symbolic Geography*

Place name symbolism certainly has some place in the Gospel of John, for the evangelist implies that the name of the Pool of Siloam ('Sent') now has deeper significance through its association with the miracle of Jesus (Jn. 9:7). W. D. Davies says, 'The Fourth Gospel reveals a well-marked practice of ascribing two meanings or even more to certain phenomena. . . . In a Gospel where such double meanings occur it is not unnatural to ask whether spatial or geographical terms, like others, might have a double significance'.¹¹ He finds such phenomena in passages like John 2:13-22; 8:59 and in a number of other places, and he argues that we are being taught that, 'in the Fourth Gospel the Person of Jesus Christ replaces "holy places"'.¹² To pursue this now would be too space-consuming, but the reader is encouraged to consult Davies.

In Matthew 11:20ff, Sodom and Tyre and Sidon seem to have been chosen for comment by Jesus because of their sinful associations, while in Revelation 11:8 this is certainly true of Sodom and Egypt. In fact, the whole description of the city in this verse reads, 'the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified'. Elsewhere in the book Babylon is called 'the great city'. Alan Johnson says,

If, as most commentators believe, John also has Rome in mind in mentioning the 'great city', then there are at least five places all seen by John as one - Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem, and

11. *Op. cit.*, p. 289.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

Rome. . . . Wherever God is opposed and his servants harassed and killed, there is the "great city".¹³

In Revelation 16 also Armageddon, mentioned in close connection with the Euphrates, may symbolise martial conflict. The Euphrates, of course, suggests Babylon, and Armageddon is in the 'cockpit' of Israel, being adjacent to the valley of Esdraelon, the scene of so many conflicts because of its strategic position. Some interpreters of Revelation, while recognising perhaps the symbolic fitness of the reference to Armageddon, also contend for a literal interpretation.

Mount Sinai symbolises the Old Covenant and the Law in two passages in the New Testament (Gal. 4:24ff and Heb. 12:18ff) and in each of these it is set over against the heavenly Jerusalem. In the Galatian passage Paul equates Mount Sinai and the present Jerusalem, which itself stands for 1st Century legalistic Judaism. In both passages therefore the Jerusalem that is above indicates the true New Covenant people of God, and this theme comes to its grand climax in the picture of the New Jerusalem, associated with the new heaven and new earth, in the two closing chapters of the Book of the Revelation. We will examine this more closely later.

3. *Spiritual Geography*

a. *The heavenly Canaan.* For a Jew the word 'inheritance' would immediately suggest two thoughts – fatherhood and land. It is true that movable goods will always have found some place in inheritance customs and procedures in human society, but it is mostly where societies have developed a large merchant class that inheritance has come to be thought of chiefly in terms of movable goods and/or their financial equivalent.

In view of this, it is not surprising to find in the New Testament that passages which have inheritance as a leading thought also major on the Christian's sonship. This is certainly true of Ephesians 1:1-14 and it is even more the case with I Peter 1.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a text of major importance for this whole idea. It locates the sphere of God's blessing for the church as 'in Christ . . . in the heavenly places'. Here is our heavenly Canaan, into which we have already been brought through Christ's death and exaltation. God 'blessed' his people Israel by giving them the land of Canaan. He blesses the church by bestowing Christ in all his fulness on them, and Christ is now exalted in heaven. So he is the repository of all the manifold blessings of God. Here is a concept of the standing of the church in Christ which is rooted in geographical as well as filial cate-

13. 'The Book of the Revelation' in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. XII, Grand Rapids, 1981, *ad loc.*

gories. Just as the Old Testament speaks also of Israel as God's own inheritance, so Ephesians takes this up in relation to the church (Eph. 1:18). What is true positionally is made real experientially through the Holy Spirit, who as both seal and guarantee, is the assurance of his inheritance in us and of ours in him (Eph. 1:12-14). This is the lofty and yet practical perspective from which the whole Christian life is viewed in that letter. The kindred epistle to the Colossians spells out important practical implications of this when Paul exhorts the church to seek and set her mind on the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-4).

That which is already ours in Christ and is known in experience through the Spirit's work, is also reserved for us as our eternal inheritance, and it is this aspect of the theme which features in I Peter 1. As we take Ephesians and 1 Peter together, we find the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' which so much characterises New Testament eschatology and the experience of the Christian in this present evil world.

Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4 also handles our theme, but in this case by explicit comparison and contrast with the Old Testament. The story of the Exodus from Egypt under Moses and the Conquest of Canaan under Joshua furnishes an instructive type and the readers are exhorted to learn important lessons from it. In one sense, of course, they did find rest in Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, but the writer is keen to impress on them that God purposed a deeper rest, his own rest, based on nothing less than his own rest from his labours on the seventh day of creation. This rest is now ours in Christ, although paradoxically we must 'strive to enter that rest'. Donald Guthrie says, 'God's people share his rest. What he did, they do. By becoming identified with him, they enter into his experiences. There is no doubt that the writer is implying that the believer's present sabbath rest is as much a reality as God's rest. It is not some remote hope, but a hope immediately realisable. Nevertheless the writer still fears that some of his readers will miss the promised rest altogether, hence the exhortation in verse 11.'¹⁴

b. *The heavenly city.* We have already noted that Galatians and Hebrews both speak of a Jerusalem that is above, a heavenly city. The Epistle to the Hebrews has just one passage, albeit a long one, which focuses on the entry into the land, but it has a number of references to God's city. Christians have come to the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22) and in this world they have no continuing city but they seek one to come (Heb. 13:14).

What is particularly interesting and intriguing in Hebrews however is a passage in chapter 11 (verses 8-16) in the section dealing with the faith

14. *Hebrews* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary), Leicester, 1983, *ad loc.*

of the patriarchs, where the writer says that Abraham 'looked forward to the city which has foundations' and declares that God 'has prepared for them a city'. The language of the land as well as of the city is found in this passage. The country is a heavenly one, so we can assume that this is true also of the city. What does it mean? We can hardly explain this language in terms of a hope for an urban dwelling on earth instead of residence in tents, for, even if we can think of God as the ultimate builder of Jerusalem, it can hardly be thought of as heavenly. It must be the heavenly Jerusalem of which chapter 12 speaks. So the writer has great confidence in the spiritual perception of the patriarchs. To them the land appears to have been sacramental, suggesting and pledging life with God in a sphere transcending the earthly.

We should not overlook Paul's use of the city as a picture of the church (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20) suggesting perhaps another feature of his realised eschatology. Already in Christ we are citizens of God's city of the future, the Jerusalem above, our mother, which, he declares, is the fulfilment of the prophet's vision in Isaiah 54:1 (Gal. 4:26,27).

As the Book of the Revelation proceeds towards its close it becomes more and more evident that every human being belongs ultimately to one or other of two cities, the great city or the beloved city, Babylon or the new Jerusalem. These are the only two societies there are. Babylon will suffer the judgment of God and all who belong to her will share that judgment, while the new Jerusalem will descend from God, its gates for ever open wide and every trace of the curse and its effects will be done away. Its nature is expounded in the context of the new cosmos, the new heavens and the new earth. So, just as the Bible opens with cosmology as the setting for geography, which then becomes itself the setting for history, it ends on a geographical and cosmological note, with God's purposes in history coming to their consummation in the new Jerusalem and the new creation.

4. *The Relationship between the various levels of reference*
Geographical references occur, as we have seen, at three levels. First there is straightforward literal reference, then symbolic reference arising from particular associations of the literal place, and finally spiritual reference where a spiritual entity is designated by a geographical term.

Symbolism is a familiar literary device in which, for instance, 'Sodom' may stand for 'sin' and/or 'judgment'. We need, however, to explore much more deeply the relationship between the literal and the spiritual.

a. Israel and the church are distinguishable but not entirely distinct realities. Israel existed in the Bible as a nation, located for much of its
(continued on page 132)

(continued from page 94)

history within the Promised Land. Most of the spiritual geography of the Bible is based on terms used literally of the nation and/or its land.

If Israel and the church were entirely distinct, we could assume that the coming of the spiritual would abolish the literal (as is certainly the case with the O.T. sacrifices). This is not the case, however, as there have always been Christian Jews within the church. In them there is continuity between the old order and the new. They are both literal and spiritual Israelites.

b. *The N.T. sometimes presents prophecies in which geographical terms appear to be used literally.* Certainly such passages are infrequent, but they exist. Luke 21:20-24 (especially v. 24) and Romans 11 (especially vv. 25,26) appear to be cases in point. Here it looks as if God still has a purpose of some special kind for geographical Jerusalem and literal Israel. The Olive Tree analogy of Romans 11 indicates that this is not a purpose disconnected with God's purpose for the church, but most intimately related to it. The conversion of Israel as a nation will be of great significance for God's purposes in his church.

c. *This suggests an eschatological pattern in which the new order implies a transfiguration, not an abolition, of the old.* The N.T. contains not only geographical but cosmic and individual language. Indeed the geographical stands midway between the cosmic and the individual, for Israel comes within the cosmos and consists of individual people.

The New Creation is not an entirely different reality from the Old, for it emerges from the cleansing of the Old. Likewise the 'spiritual body' is not independent of the physical body but its transfiguration. The risen Christ was Jesus of Nazareth restored to life but with a glorified body.

Perhaps then the ultimate order is, in its every sphere, a perfect wedding of the physical and the spiritual in such a way that the spiritual involves the glorification of the physical. God did not create the visible universe merely as the temporary scene of human life, to be abolished without trace in his ultimate order, but rather to enjoy 'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God', *i.e.* to be glorified as they will be. How the spiritual will transform the geographical is not spelled out for us in the Bible, but the analogy of the cosmic and the individual points strongly towards such divine denouement. A premillennial understanding of Revelation 20 would suggest that a millennial reign of Christ on earth will be an important stage on the way to that ultimate order.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION*

NIGEL M. DE S. CAMERON,
RUTHERFORD HOUSE, EDINBURGH

The subject before us is one which is largely ignored. However important we acknowledge it to be, it has long tended to be left out of our active theological consideration; and the reason for that may be thought to lie in the close relations which must always exist between any discussions of Universalism and that doctrine which, above all other, Universalism denies, the doctrine of hell – a subject which is considered only rarely in orthodox circles: and that despite the vital connections which run between the fate of the lost and seemingly every theological *locus*, including at least the church, mission and redemption, and also, putatively, the nature of God himself.

To say this is immediately to set the Universalist thesis in the context of its significance. It would be hard to aver of any doctrine that it could be abandoned, or subject to radical re-interpretation, without implications for other aspects of the Christian faith. That is part of the problem with the piece-meal approach to the revision of Christian doctrine with which much of the Church has been pre-occupied for too long. But that principle applies to this doctrine more than to most, and as much as to any. For Universalism is an attack on that nexus of doctrines which lie at the heart of faith, on questions of revelation, redemption, mission, the doctrine of the church, and we have still not named the Last Things themselves. The claim of universal salvation is not congruent with any of these, in any form in which they are recognised by Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition. As we shall see, the distortions which are required in order to accommodate Universalism are fundamental.

So a second reason why Universalism has tended to be denounced rather than discussed lies in the far-reaching ramifications of the undertaking. It partakes of an altogether different character to the preferred subjects of evangelical apologetic. Once we take seriously the challenge which it poses, we find that the foundations are being shaken and we are forced into a re-assessment of large areas of Christian doctrine. The Universalist challenge proves not so much a threat to the doctrine of judgement and hell as a threat to the faith as an integrated whole. It is

* This was the opening paper of the 1986 Conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians, held at Wolmersen, West Germany. The theme of the conference was *Modern Universalism and the Universality of the Gospel*. A shortened form of this paper appeared in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* II: 4 (1987).

perhaps for this reason that the major Christian denominations, in which the notion of damnation is so distinctly unpopular, have fought shy of the formal adoption of its alternative.

One of the fruits of neglect lies in the area of terminology, and in the interests of clarity, for the purposes of this paper at least, a word is needed to identify that which Universalism opposes. Its antonym 'Particularism' is also, of course, a theological term already, freighted with the connotations of another debate. That one thing which the Universalists deny is the fact of a final separation, which provides a better indicator of the minimal requirement of orthodoxy. What Universalism denies let Separationism assert: that *some* men (to leave angels out of account!) will finally not be saved. The central conflict with Universalism is not about how many they shall be, nor the kind of retribution which awaits them. In this context it appears that Conditionalism and Annihilationism are deviations from orthodoxy rather than denials of it. For the key question is not, 'What awaits the lost?' but, 'Are there those who will be lost?'. Which is not to suggest that the destiny of the lost is unimportant, but that its importance is secondary, and must not obscure the first-order significance of the final separation. It is this that Universalism, in asserting the final salvation of all men, denies. Conditionalism and Annihilationism are definitely Separationist rather than Universalist in character.¹

Despite its connections with Christian doctrines other than that of damnation, the assessment of Universalism within an evangelical framework has an appearance of simplicity. 'Is it only Christians who will be saved, or everyone else too?', we are asked. That is a valid statement of the question, and if it is thus posed the only valid answer is, of course, 'only Christians'. But it is also a potentially misleading statement of the question, and can therefore lead to a potentially misleading answer. The individualistic tendency of modern evangelicalism, partly, perhaps largely, the fruit of practical emphasis on the conversion of the individual to the exclusion of other ways of understanding the membership of the church of God, leads to a preference for asking questions about 'Christians' over questions about the church. This is encouraged by another evangelical convention. Out of a commendable, but perhaps short-sighted, concern for practical unity, there is a disinclination to confront

1. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Annihilationism is the belief that God will extinguish the lives of those whom he finally rejects, Conditionalism that he will grant immortality to some, conditional upon this being acceptable to him. The result is the same, but the former assumes an immortality in man which God chooses to deny in particular cases, the latter a mortality which he over-rides in others. For this and other matters see the most helpful survey by Richard J. Bauckham, 'Universalism: a Historical Survey', in *Themelios* 4:2 (1979), pp. 48 ff, to which further reference is made below.

disagreements over ecclesiology, and it has led to a neglect of this crucial subject and its effective downgrading almost into insignificance. It is hard to see how, without a fresh perception of its importance, the questions which the Universalist thesis raises for us will be finally resolved. For the point at which Universalism impinges most plainly upon Separationist orthodoxy is that at which our perception of the church begins to extend beyond the company of gathered believers who have entered it by what we may reasonably see as the normal means.

Several examples may be given. Not every evangelical will agree with them all. But it is hard to believe that any evangelical could disagree with each of these and every other such possibility. So taken together these examples raise a principle of fundamental importance, whatever our convictions on individual questions.

The first concerns the salvation of the children of believers who die in infancy. There are few who would argue that the umbrella of salvation does not extend to them, and opinion does not fall neatly onto either side of the paedobaptist line. The strictest construction of justification by faith would, of course, render salvation impossible to any below a certain age, irrevocably closing to babes and sucklings the kingdom of heaven. Short of the adoption of a partial Conditionalism it is plain where this leaves the dead children of believers. For most of us they have a happier destiny vouchsafed by their early death.

This raises, secondly, the broader question of infant salvation. There is a highly respectable pedigree in the church – including especially, but not only, the Reformed church – for the view that infant salvation is universal. In his *Systematic Theology* Charles Hodge puts a slightly optimistic gloss on the state of opinion when he declares that this is the general view of the Protestant churches (in contrast to that of the Roman).²

2. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, i, pp. 26f. Hodge is unequivocal, 'What the Scriptures teach on this subject (salvation), according to the common doctrine of evangelical Protestants is first:-

1. All who die in infancy are saved. This is inferred from what the Bible teaches of the analogy between Adam and Christ. 'As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.' . . . We have no right to put any limit on these general terms, except what the Bible itself places upon them. The Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ. All the descendants of Adam, except Christ, are under condemnation; all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved. This appears to be the clear meaning of the Apostle, and therefore he does not hesitate to say that where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded, that the benefits of redemption far exceed the evils of the fall; that the number of the saved far exceeds the number of the lost. . . . It is, therefore, the general belief of Protestants . . . that all who die in infancy are saved.

Since infant mortality rates have always been high outside modern Western society, a belief in universal infant salvation immediately brings the greater part of mankind within the number of the saved; much the more so if infants dying *in utero* are treated as infants and included. Within the Reformed tradition this case has not depended on any notion of the exclusion of infants from original sin and guilt, but has rather been argued on the ground of election. Perhaps its best statement is to be found in B. B. Warfield, who avers that 'today few Calvinists can be found who do not hold . . . that all who die in infancy are the children of God and enter at once into His glory'; not *because* they die in infancy, but because 'by a loving foreordination' they have been chosen; 'that they die in infancy is not the cause but the effect of God's mercy toward them'.³ But the sense in which the children of unbelievers who die in infancy can be called 'Christians' is distinctly extended. It is a fruit of their election and thereby of their incorporation into the church of God, but it is not by baptism, profession of faith or other association with the church visible.

A third category of persons whose salvation, if actual, must needs be unusual is that of those who are seriously mentally retarded. They may be considered as falling into one of the two categories we have just discussed, and as remaining there throughout their lives, long or short; that is, in the status of children of believers or of unbelievers. Alternatively, they too may be held to be elect as a class, both by those who accept universal infant salvation and also, perhaps, by others.

There are other possible categories, and those who accept these three may be predisposed to regard them with a seriousness with which others will not. This is not the place to speak of them at length. Suffice to say that among those who have made no profession of faith in Christ, whether they are diligent adherents of other religions or simply manifest particular personal qualities, writers have identified various classes of person who might be regarded as included unknowingly in the kingdom of God. A typical example is that of Rahner's 'anonymous Christian', but there are others, and those who have raised this possibility have included responsible evangelicals, although they have tended to see it as a matter for hope rather than dogma.⁴

Cf. also W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, repr. Edinburgh, 1986, pp. 114ff, who follows Toplady.

3. B. B. Warfield, 'The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation', in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols, New York, 1932; repr. Grand Rapids, 1981, ix, pp. 411ff; p. 438.
4. The present writer well recalls an occasion when a well-known evangelical academic who had once been a missionary suggested after a lecture that he often wondered about the fate of the pious Muslim. Many others have entertained similar, unsystematised hopes.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

It is important to distinguish each of these possibilities of an abnormal salvation from Universalism, which they are not. The question of salvation outside of the gathered congregation of baptised and adult believers is not simply a question for apology *vis-a-vis* the liberal theological establishment. It would, of course, be possible to argue that these questions have been raised within orthodoxy only under the malevolent influence of Universalism outside. But some of them plainly have a proper lineage within evangelical orthodoxy, and while we may be concerned that they could provide (indeed, have begun to provide) a Trojan horse for Universalism within the orthodox tradition, it is difficult to avoid facing the questions which they raise.⁵ The interface of Universalism and Separationist orthodoxy is already distinctly ragged.

Modern Universalism

Our concern here is with what has been called 'modern universalism', and it is important to identify the particular character of the Universalism which we face today. There have been Universalisms before. There was the Origenist doctrine of *apokatastasis* which introduced a stream of Universalist thinking into the church from its very early days.⁶ Here, as elsewhere, the church generally departed from Origen's thinking; and though it was possible for others to revive it, only a sparse tradition may be traced through the Middle Ages into post-Reformation times.⁷

But the flowering of Universalist thinking before our own day is to be found in the nineteenth century, and particularly in England. It took its cue from the broad moral revolt against the God of the Bible which sought to convert him into one more acceptable to contemporary *mores*, and was less an espousal of universal salvation than a growing unease about its alternative, hell.⁸ It was of a piece with the widespread revulsion at the more gruesome Old Testament passages which reveals itself in the commentaries of the period.⁹ At the same time, the orthodox doctrine was maintained by many and asserted by some with vigour; with much less self-consciousness than their orthodox successors today.¹⁰ The

5. It is also true that heresy so often consists of an exaggerated emphasis on neglected truth; and the orthodox must sometimes learn from that which they also condemn.

6. See Bauckham, *art. cit.*

7. See L. E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*, Washington DC, 2 vols, 1965-66. This writer makes the very best of the evidence from the Conditionalist perspective.

8. See, for example, H. R. Murphy, 'The Ethical Revolt against Christian Orthodoxy in Early Victorian England', in *American Historical Review* 60 (1955), pp. 800 ff; and James C. Livingston, *The Ethics of Belief: an Essay on the Victorian Religious Conscience*, Tallahassee, Florida, 1974.

9. See, for example, the present writer's *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Lewiston, New York, 1987, pp. 197ff.

10. *E.g.*, Hodge, *op. cit.*, vol iii.

detractors of orthodoxy, working in the very conservative theological context provided by English Christianity, found it necessary to be circumspect in their assertion of universal salvation, and to treat the relevant Biblical texts with particular caution. Typical discussions contain lengthy excursions into exegesis which are generally considered to be of the essence of the argument.¹¹

There are two principal differences between the Universalism of the nineteenth century (and the early twentieth) and that of our own time. First, it is differently established. In a characteristically helpful taxonomy of Universalist arguments, Richard Bauckham draws our attention to the fact that, in the twentieth century, 'exegesis has turned decisively against the universalist case'.¹² As in other areas, the effect of this has not been to bring the argument to an end. But it has made it increasingly necessary for consistent Universalists to make their case outside the pale of the authority of Holy Scripture. Yet as those who claim to work within the Christian tradition they cannot simply abandon its teaching. On the one hand they disagree with the NT writers' teaching about a final division of mankind, which can be said to be merely taken over from their contemporary Jewish environment, while the texts which could be held to support universalism represent a deeper insight into the meaning of God's revelation in Christ.¹³

That is to say, contemporary Universalists have generally ceased to claim that their doctrine rather than the traditional one is that which is taught in Holy Scripture. It has become necessary (and also possible) for them to argue in a different fashion.

The second distinction between Universalism today and that of the last century lies in the scope and significance of what is 'universal'. The concept of 'universality' has broadened, and the challenge to Christian orthodoxy became at one and the same time more distant from its original and more coherent as an alternative scheme. That is to say, the traditional Universalist doctrine was almost exclusively concerned with salvation *post mortem*. It took its character from the general revolt against hell and damnation, and it sought to offer in its place a general blessedness, whether come to by some purgatorial process or immediately after death. Eternal life was to be universal rather than particular, available to all and not merely to some. But the general structure of Christian theology, and in particular the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, were left intact; or such, at least, was the Universalists' declared intention.

11. The contrast between the place accorded to exegesis in, e.g. Gore and Hick is striking. V. C. G. Gore, *The Religion of the Church*, Oxford, 1916, and John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, London, 1976.

12. *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

13. *Ibid.*

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

For a number of reasons this position has been altered. For one thing, the general abandonment of anything other than a notional assent to life after death has removed much of the original drive of *post mortem* Universalism. With few exceptions, not even the orthodox preach about hell and damnation, and none but the orthodox retain an interest (and that often only passing) in eternal blessedness. The centre of attention has moved from the world to come to the world of today. Again, the general new interest in non-Christian religion has burgeoned and significantly affected thinking within the churches, forcing Christians to give an account of themselves in the wider religious context and in an atmosphere of *laissez-faire*. Most important, perhaps, the impossibility of arguing the universality of salvation from Holy Scripture (along with the other *shibboleths* of twentieth-century theology) has led to an increasingly frank abandonment of the Christian tradition as the context in which fundamental religious thinking is to be done. That is, the insurmountably Separationist character of not simply *post mortem* soteriology but every other element in the Biblical religion has led to a general relativising not simply of its teaching on the final separation but of its character as a particular revelation with inherent universal claims. To put it another way: the Universalism of an earlier day sought to live in harmony with the universality of the Gospel. The new Universalism seeks rather to dispense with it. In especial it has therefore to relativise its character as a purported revelation with universal, normative validity. In this process of metamorphosis in the Universalist tradition much has become evident that was previously implicit. What passed as a disagreement about one doctrine has been revealed as a challenge to the integrity of the faith itself.

The Universalism of John Hick

This is nowhere more evident than in the work of John Hick, who has used the doctrine of universal salvation *post mortem* as a tool for the re-fashioning of the Christian (and with it every other) religion. He has turned it into his fundamental interpretative principle of religious truth. In so doing he has, we may feel, correctly perceived its significance for the Christian tradition, as a pivotal doctrine, a crucial element in that nexus of doctrines which make up orthodox Christianity. It is interesting to note his candid acknowledgement that his approach to the validity of non-Christian religion arose out of his concern for universal *post mortem* salvation; and that this in turn derived from his interest in the question of theodicy.¹⁴ In both these moves Hick is acting in many ways more as a thinker of the nineteenth century than of the twentieth. He acknowledges the general abandonment of theological interest in the after-life, but is

14. John Hick, *God has Many Names*, London, 1980, p. 5.

less obviously aware of the degree to which his interest in theodicy as, in effect, a regulative principle in theology has a ready context in the profoundly moral character of nineteenth-century re-interpretation of Christianity.¹⁵ Hick's conservatism in this and other matters is curious, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that part of its explanation lies in the acknowledged origin of his own faith in a conversion to evangelicalism. It is hard to see how anyone could come to his present position *de novo*. More than that of many other liberal thinkers it bears the vestiges of its derivation from orthodoxy.

Hick's essentially moral approach to theology, and to this question in particular, may be shown with reference to a sermon which he takes to be typical of the old approach to the final separation and the doctrine of hell. Interestingly, his citation is not of an evangelical but of Edward Bouverie Pusey, the Tractarian leader, in illustration of the fact that this was the general mid-Victorian approach to the question. 'Between', Hick writes, 'the moral outlook' of Pusey's sermon on hell,

and the general ethical outlook of today, both inside and outside the Christian church, there is a great gulf fixed. On Pusey's side of the gulf theology was exempted from moral criticism and the theologian could with a good conscience attribute to God an unappeasable vindictiveness and insatiable cruelty which would be regarded as demonic if applied analogously to a human being; whereas today theological ideas are subject to an ethical and rational criticism which forbids (this) kind of moral perversity. . . .¹⁶

As a result, 'contemporary theologians who do not accept the doctrine of universal salvation usually speak of the finally lost as passing out of existence rather than as endlessly enduring the torments of hell-fire'.¹⁷

So his moral criticism of the doctrine of hell, itself a product of his concern for theodicy, leads Hick to repudiate the Separationism of orthodoxy.

On the broader question of revelation, Hick sets out his position in this typical fashion. A 'major challenge to religious faith' is

posed by the diversity of apparent revelations. If what Christianity says is true, must not what all the other world religions say be in varying degrees false? But this would mean that the large majority of mankind, consisting of everyone except the adherents of one particular religion, are walking in darkness. Such a conclusion would be accept-

15. See above, n. 8.

16. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, p. 200.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

able within a Calvinist theology, according to which much, perhaps most, of the human race is already doomed to eternal damnation (*Westminster Confession*, III.7). But in wrestling with the problem of evil I had concluded that any viable Christian theodicy must affirm the ultimate salvation of all God's creatures. How then to reconcile the notion of there being one, and only one, true religion with a belief in God's universal saving activity?¹⁸

Hick's theological method is characterised by two related principles which together enable him to work out his theology, although it should be noted that his theology is essentially shaped – as he says in this passage – by the requirements of his theodicy. He is eclectic toward Christianity, and syncretistic toward religions in general. His eclecticism enables him to work from a Christianity suitably emasculated of the Separationism which would make it an unwilling partner in the syncretist venture. His syncretism enables him to treat other unwilling partners similarly and to exploit in the widest possible context the principle inherent in his rejection of the universality of the Gospel. We can look at these in turn.

First, his eclecticism. This is evident especially in the manner in which he seeks to show that his repudiation of the Separationism generally associated with the teaching of Holy Scripture can in fact find some support in Holy Scripture itself. What is unclear is the nature of the standing which he will give to a putative Biblical position once it is isolated, although it is hard not to conclude that Hick's use of Scripture is essentially syncretistic also. That is, he expects to find in Holy Scripture a variety of views on a given matter (in this case the extent of salvation), and to seek within them, by his own dialectic, the view which he will take up. So in his major work *Death and Eternal Life* there is only a passing discussion of the teaching of the New Testament on the subject. He suggests, unconvincingly, that most of our Lord's references are to a judgement which is not final and eternal. He asks whether those that are specific may not be later and therefore not dominical.¹⁹ It is important to note that this attempt to whittle away at the Separationism of our Lord's teaching implicitly acknowledges that the gospels as we have them are incapable of a Universalist reading. Of Paul he writes:

I would not in fact claim with confidence that he was a universalist; though I suggest that sometimes as he wrote of the saving activity of God the inner logic of that about which he wrote inevitably unfolded itself into the thought of universal salvation.²⁰

18. John Hick, *God has Many Names*, pp. 4, 5.

19. *Death and Eternal Life*, pp. 243-7.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

Thus in both the gospels and the Pauline corpus there are general statements which, taken alone, could be interpreted on Universalist lines; and more specific statements, which demand a Separationist interpretation. Hick claims that he can 'harmonise' these two sets of statements, and attempts such harmony by means of the 'unfulfilled threat' hypothesis:

It may well be true at a given point within the temporal process that unless you repent you will surely perish, and yet also true as a statement arrived at on other grounds, about human existence as a whole, that in the end all will turn from their wickedness and live. The two truths are formally compatible with one another because the one asserts that something will happen if a certain condition is fulfilled (namely, permanent non-repentance) while the other asserts that this same thing will not happen because that condition will not in fact be fulfilled.²¹

This exercise in argument bears an air of disingenuousness, since Hick is himself the author of the problem he is setting out to solve. The general statements which he cites are only capable of a Universalist construction when they are sundered from their context of specific statements about judgement and separation. Left where they are found (chiefly in the mind of Paul) they are qualified and interpreted otherwise. Hick makes out that he has solved a problem, but it has been specifically devised to give the impression of a double tradition within Scripture. The problem he cannot solve is that of the irreducibly Separationist character of, at worst, *some of the Biblical material*. Moreover, Hick's argument is not really about eternal separation at all. It is with the claim of the New Testament writers that they bear a unique and final revelation from God, and in this most fundamental matter Hick attempts no facile harmony of his own view with theirs. The small place which Biblical interpretation occupies in his discussions is a truer indicator of the relative importance of these arguments when they are compared with his general purpose. There is no necessity for Holy Scripture to back up his theological proposals. Is he perhaps, here as elsewhere, betraying the conservative roots of his theology? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that his excursions into Biblical exegesis are at heart no more than a palliative offered with affection to a Christian tradition from which he has departed. After all, this is the man who holds, among other things, a doctrine of purgatorial re-incarnation.

So what is his fundamental approach to the teaching of the New Testament? By selecting certain statements from Paul, and then arranging

21. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

the rest of Paul's own sayings and others around them, he stands in the eclectic tradition of Procrustes.

The second methodological principle which we find in Hick is in his approach to different religious-theological systems. In this case he is more candid. His fundamental conviction is of the equivalent validity of all religions.

To realise that God is being worshipped through different but overlapping mental images of him not only in churches and chapels but also in synagogues and mosques, temples and gurdwaras, is to realise in a new way that he is the God of all mankind and not only of our own familiar tribe.²²

Does this mean that a single world religion is in prospect, or indeed is desirable? Hick does not think so:

the different religious traditions, with their complex internal differentiations, have developed to meet the needs of the range of mentalities expressed in the different human cultures . . . there will be different traditions of religious faith . . . The concrete particularities forming a spiritual home in which people can live – the revered scriptures, the familiar liturgical words and actions, the stirring music, the framework of credal belief, the much-loved stories of founder, saints and heroes – must continue in their separate streams of living tradition: for in losing their particularity they would lose their life and their power to nourish.²³

But at the level of theology Hick's perception of the validity of the variety of religious revelations can be put to use:

whilst there cannot be a world religion, there can be approaches to a world theology. . . a global theology would consist of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind, as it occurs not only within Christianity, but also within the other great streams of religious life, and indeed in the great non-religious faiths also, Marxism and Maoism and perhaps – according to one's definition of 'religion' – Confucianism and certain forms of Buddhism.²⁴

Hick's work on *Death and Eternal Life* is intended as a pioneering venture in this field, though he has himself already made more limited use of particular ideas from non-Christian religions in other works.

22. *God has Many Names*, pp. vii, viii.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

We do not have opportunity here to engage in a full discussion of this book or the theological method which underlies it. Suffice to say that Hick has openly taken the path of syncretism as the way to theological truth. His statement just quoted about, 'theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind' (with its odd automatic inclusion of communism and uncertainty about some non-theistic eastern religion) is a manifesto for what looks uncommonly like the old 'comparative religion' approach which has been largely abandoned adapted as the way to religious truth. The speculative and arbitrary character of the exercise on which Hick has embarked can be readily and reasonably imagined. The combination of an eclectic approach to his own religion and syncretism in his handling of others leads Hick to the formulation of what he calls 'theories and hypotheses' which are effectively isolated from evaluation within any particular religious tradition. It is difficult not to conclude that his original approach to theological method has led him into a logical quagmire out of which he will be unable to escape onto the dry land which would be afforded by either the Christian theology which he has left behind, or for that matter by any one of the alternative religious-theological systems in whose general direction he has set off.

It is difficult not to conclude that Hick has journeyed from the premises supplied by his theodicy to an ultimate Universalism which, by accepting every claim to religious (and non-religious) experience and every reflection upon it as 'revelation', is the *reductio ad absurdum* of its kind.

The Logic of Authority

This brief sketch of Hick's Universalism provides a useful starting-point for reflection on the logic of authority which underlies the Universalist case. Since Hick is willing to press further than many others in re-assessment of the uniqueness of the Christian revelation he well illustrates the direction of all Universalist thinking. In his move away from the Christian tradition toward the use of other religious materials in the construction of a 'global theology' Hick is also particularly candid, certainly more than the generality of modern Christian thinkers who are nevertheless Universalists *de facto*, and who implicitly share his essential position.

The crucial question which is raised is one which may be held to lie behind much of the theological debate of today. It is the question of authority, which may be seen as the obverse of that of theological method. Specifically, it is the question of the competence of the human mind to make the judgements which are required for the eclecticism which Hick evidences in his use of Holy Scripture, and the cognate syncreticism by means of which he has begun to construct his 'global theology'. The fact that few have ventured as far as he in this direction does not detract from the general importance of these principles for Universalist thinking as a

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

whole. As will emerge in the following discussion, it is impossible for any consistent or dogmatic Universalism to resort to any other method than eclectic use of Biblical data and, implicitly or otherwise, a synthetic approach to other pretended revelations.²⁵

Whether or not this is a coherent possibility for Christian theology was penetratingly and lucidly assessed in a volume which, though celebrated in its day, has since been largely ignored. This is partly because it had the misfortune to be published in 1858, one year before Darwin's *Origin of Species* and (in some ways more significantly in English theology) two years before *Essays and Reviews*, which together radically altered the terms of theological debate in England and marked the death-knell of the consensus conservatism of the English churches.

Henry Longueville Mansel's Bampton Lectures, delivered and also published in the year 1858, bore the inauspicious title *The Limits of Religious Thought*. His starting-point is contained in the question, 'Is the revelation of God open to assessment and evaluation by man?' This can be so only insofar as it is possible for the unaided human reason to construct its own philosophical knowledge of God, apart from his revelation. It is unreasonable to believe, on the one hand, that a comprehensive knowledge of God apart from his revelation is impossible, and on the other to consider it appropriate for the human mind to criticise particular elements within the revelation itself. In Mansel's words,

If Revelation is a communication from an infinite to a finite intelligence, the conditions of a criticism of Revelation on philosophical grounds must be identical with those which are required for constructing a Philosophy of the Infinite . . . Whatever impediments, therefore, exist to prevent the formation of such a Philosophy, the same impediments must likewise prevent the accomplishment of a complete Criticism of Revelation.²⁶

So: 'If the teaching of Christ is in any one thing not the teaching of God, it is in all things the teaching of man: its doctrines are subject to all the imperfections inseparable from man's sinfulness and ignorance . . .'.²⁷

25. As is evident, we have not addressed the distinctive approach which Barth and Brunner have taken to this question, which is not Universalist in a dogmatic sense, but which some have seen as incipiently so. Bauckham briefly and usefully considers their position, *art. cit.*, pp. 52, 3.
26. H. L. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, London, 1958, pp. 27, 8. The present writer has discussed further the significance of Mansel's argument for the evangelical understanding of Scripture in 'The Logic of Biblical Authority', *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology*, edited by himself, Edinburgh, 1987, pp. 1ff; and *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism*, pp. 283 ff.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 246, 7.

That is to say, the human mind is not equipped to 'divide God's Revelation'. Indeed, Mansel writes, 'Many who would shrink with horror from the idea of rejecting Christ altogether, will yet speak and act as if they were at liberty to set up for themselves an eclectic Christianity.'²⁸ Conversely,

Many a man who rejects isolated portions of Christian doctrine, on the ground that they are repugnant to his reason, would hesitate to avow broadly and unconditionally that reason is the supreme arbiter of all religious truth; though at the same time he would find it hard to point out any particular in which the position of reason, in relation to the truths which he still retains, differs from that which it occupies in relation to those which he rejects.²⁹

Since a 'direct intuition of the infinite is unattainable by human consciousness'³⁰ the human mind is incompetent to make any such distinctions within the body of revelation itself.

The conclusion which an examination of the conditions of human thought unavoidably forces upon us is this:

There can be no such thing as a positive science of Speculative Theology; for such a science must necessarily be based on an apprehension of the Infinite; and the Infinite . . . cannot be positively apprehended in any mode of the human Consciousness . . . We can test the progress of knowledge, only by comparing its successive representations with the objects which they profess to represent: and as the object in this case is inaccessible to human faculties, we have no criterion (by which to judge . . . Such a criterion) can obviously have no place in relation to those truths, if such there be, which human reason is incapable of discovering for itself.³¹

An Assessment

Hick's eclectic approach to the teaching of Holy Scripture is required for two distinct, though related, reasons. First, his maintenance of *post mortem* universal salvation, if it is to stand within the Christian tradition from which he works, must be shown to have some connection with Holy Scripture. As David H. Kelsey has shown,³² and indeed as is our common experience, every strand of Christian theology seeks authorisation of its theological proposals in Scripture. So it is with Hick and the Universalists, and since the consistent teaching of Scripture is against

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 50.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

30. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi, introduction to fourth edition, 1859.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

32. David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, London, 1975.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

them they resort to the attempted use of some texts as a basis for the criticism of others. The Separationist character of Biblical theology leaves them with no option. We may note in passing that this approach to Scripture is the converse of that which assumes the analogy of faith.³³

The second reason is only indirectly connected with the question of *post mortem* Universalism, since it is the consequence of Hick's general view of the status of the Christian and other revelations. Syncretism as theological method must always be eclectic in the use that it makes of the particular religious revelations which are being drawn together into harmony. If more than one seemingly distinct revelation is authentic, and unless one kind of analogy of faith may be presumed to operate among them all, there are choices to be made. The choices that Hick makes in his divide-and-rule approach to Holy Scripture are therefore inherent in his approach to all 'revelations'. That is, an eclectic approach to particular 'revelations' is a requirement of the wider Universalism (whose focus of interest is universal *validity* before it is universal *salvation*) to which Hick has come.

But such an approach to revelation is only possible on the assumption that human reason is competent to judge the adequacy of the particulars of divine revelation. As Mansel argues, a general competency of this kind can only be predicated of a reason capable without the aid of revelation of arriving at its own comprehensive knowledge of God. Of course, such a view of human reason would render revelation superfluous, unless, of course, in Mansel's nineteenth-century reference to earlier debate, 'Revelation *cannot be* anything more than a republication of Natural Religion'.³⁴ That is to say, the eclectic handling of revelation rests on the assumptions of natural religion. Only if a merely natural knowledge of God is possible, and insofar as his revelation comprises its 'republication', can such an approach to revelation be justified. Revealed religion which is necessarily revealed – that is, which is anything other than the 'republication' of natural religion – entails both coherence and integrity within the compass of its revelation, since its premise is that human reason is incompetent to construct what Mansel calls 'Speculative Theology', and therefore, by extension, to engage in critical evaluation of the theology that has been revealed.

This criticism applies, of course, not simply to Hick's Universalism, but to any Universalism which goes beyond the question of *post mortem* salvation to the prior question of the validity of competing revelations or, as it might better be put, to the question of the universality of any single revelation. This idea of revelation in religion which we have out-

33. The most useful and recent discussion of the analogy of faith is to be found in the essay on 'The Analogy of Faith and the Interpretation of Scripture' by Henri Blocher in *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology*, edited by the present writer, Edinburgh, 1987.

34. Mansel, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

lined entails not simply the inability of human reason to sit as its judge, but, with that inability and to meet it, its own universality. That is to say, universality is not simply an accident of the particular character of the Biblical revelation, it is a necessary feature of the character of any possible revelation. No revelation which fails to carry a claim, explicit or not, to unique and universal significance, is suited to the condition of the human reason. The Universalist approach to religion in general must depend upon an altogether distinct concept in which religion is inherently natural rather than revealed. But thereby the myth of 'revelation' as the foundation of 'global theology' is exploded. The Universalistic, 'global theologian' has abandoned revealed religion and returned to man's ancient natural quest for God by way of alternative.

The question remains of Universalisms which are less thorough-going than that of John Hick. Their adherents' chief interest remains the question of man's destiny *post mortem*, and their conviction that there will be no final separation is formally independent of any interest in the validity of other pretended divine revelations, whether in Islam, Hinduism or even (where Hick seems to find one) the writings of Mao. Yet the same critique can be shown to apply, for every repudiation of the teaching of Holy Scripture entails the self-same assumption of the competence of the human reason in matters of religion which, were it justified, would not simply enable critical assessment of revelation to take place; it would in fact make any such revelation redundant and superfluous to the exercise of reason itself. Which is another way of saying that in venturing to disagree with what Scripture says one is implicitly and perhaps unknowingly adopting another religion, inherently Universalist in the broader sense, and natural rather than revealed. As Mansel writes, in his highest ascription of authority to Holy Scripture, which sets its teaching finally beyond the pale of human assessment:

If there is sufficient evidence, on other grounds, to show that the Scripture, in which this doctrine is received, is a Revelation from God, the doctrine itself must be unconditionally received, not as reasonable, nor as unreasonable, but as scriptural.³⁵

The Evangelical Position

Finally, we may briefly delineate the minimum which is required for the maintenance of the universality of the Gospel. The doctrine of a final separation is cognate with the normative status of the revelation in Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture. Any denial of the one undermines the other. There is scope for more and less positive assessments of the degree to which non-Christian religion perceives the truth, and also for consider-

35. *Ibid.*, p. 118, fourth edition.

UNIVERSALISM AND THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

able difference (some of it related to the assessment of non-Christian religion and the possibility of 'anonymous Christianity' of some kind, some not) as to the classes of person who will be found on each side of the final divide. And, of course, there is particular scope for disagreement as to the comparative numbers involved. Our contention is that these and others are entirely 'proper' questions, indeed that they are questions we have no option but to ask. Our arbiter, of course, must be Holy Scripture. What is crucial is to maintain the integrity and the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, since it is this which is in doubt; and not to forget that the religion which is seeking to take its place is ultimately that of natural man. We know that such religion is 'natural' not merely in repudiating the supernatural, but in repudiating the spiritual too, and with it the very principle of a revelation to man from God as its foundation. And it is not finally a religion which comes from man, but from elsewhere.

'Has God said?', asked the serpent, initiating this self-same debate in which we are currently engaged; and as he has persisted his question has gained him a hearing.

A REHABILITATION OF SCHOLASTICISM?

A REVIEW ARTICLE ON RICHARD A. MULLER'S
POST-REFORMATION REFORMED DOGMATICS,
VOL. I, *PROLEGOMENA TO THEOLOGY**

DOUGLAS F. KELLY
REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

For decades the idea of scholastic theology has tended to raise very negative images, especially among Protestants. The very words 'Protestant scholasticism' or 'seventeenth-century Orthodoxy' conjure up mental pictures of decaying calf-bound Latin folios covered with thick dust. Of forced and inappropriate proof-texting inside, of abstract and boring syllogisms, far removed from the dynamism of biblical history and concerns of modern life, of harsh logic, a polemical spirit and an almost arrogant propensity to answer questions which the ages have had to leave open. The 'Biblical Theology' movement inspired by Barth and Brunner earlier this century, and the great flowering of sixteenth-century Reformation studies since World War II have given seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism very poor marks when compared with the theology of the original Reformers. The fresh emphasis on the dynamic development of the theology in the Scriptures among Evangelicals (post-Vos) and various approaches to the 'New Hermeneutics' among those in the more liberal camp have raised serious questions about the scriptural balance (if not validity) of the more traditional Protestant text-book theology. R. T. Kendall, for instance, has quite negatively evaluated the seventeenth-century Westminster confessional theology in light of the very Calvin whom the Westminster divines certainly thought they were following.¹ Can anything good, therefore, be said these days about Protestant scholasticism? Is it even legitimate to reopen this subject in a serious way?

Richard A. Muller in what is merely the first in a whole series of volumes on the subject of *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, answers these questions with a resounding 'yes'. Muller, a professor at Fuller Seminary in California, has – for one thing – read the original sources in massive proportions. His erudition and command of the material are remarkable. He combines with his broad and deep knowledge an histori-

* Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1987; 365pp., \$9.95.

1. See R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford, 1979, and the answer to it by Paul Helm, *Calvin and Calvinists*, Edinburgh, 1982.

cally well informed and judiciously balanced critical spirit, which is in contact with major epistemological and scientific questions of our own day. It seems very likely that all competent future studies of the theological tradition lying between the close of the Reformation period and the beginning of the secularist Enlightenment will have to proceed by way of Muller. If Muller's succeeding volumes live up to this first one (he has already composed *A Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*), then negative evaluations of Protestant Orthodoxy which may be based on slight knowledge of the actual material will experience an ever decreasing likelihood of maintaining scholarly credibility. This, of course, is not to imply that scholastic Orthodoxy is – or should be – above criticism. But we will come to that later.

Muller's definition of scholastic theology merits an extended quotation, as it is useful in clearing away some misunderstandings of the subject:

The development of Protestant doctrine, therefore, in the great confessions of the mid-sixteenth century and in the orthodox systems of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not a development from kerygma to dogma but rather a development consisting in the adjustment of a received body of doctrine and its systematic relations to the needs of Protestantism, in terms dictated by the teachings of the Reformers on Scripture, grace, justification and the sacraments.

The term *scholasticism* well describes the technical and academic side of this process of the institutionalization of Protestant doctrine. The theology of the great systems written in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like the theology of the thirteenth-century teachers, is preeminently a school-theology. It is a theology designed to develop system on a highly technical level and in an extremely precise manner by means of the careful identification of topics, division of these topics into their basic parts, definition of the parts, and doctrinal or logical argumentation concerning the divisions and definitions. In addition, this school-method is characterized by a thorough use and a technical mastery of the tools of linguistic, philosophical, logical and traditional thought. The Protestant orthodox themselves use the term 'scholastic theology' as a specific designation for detailed, disputative system, as distinct from biblical or exegetical theology, catechetical theology and discursive, ecclesial theology. The term 'scholastic' is, therefore, applicable particularly to the large-scale systematic development of seventeenth-century Protestant theology. This approach to Protestant scholasticism, based directly on the definitions and the methods evidenced in the seventeenth century systems explicitly opposes the view of several recent scholars according to which *scholasticism* can be identified specifically with a use of Aristotelian

philosophy, a pronounced metaphysical interest and the use of predestination as an organizing principle in theological system.²

Throughout his volume, Muller takes pains to clarify what 'systematic' and 'scholastic' do not mean. In a discussion of the intentions of the seventeenth-century theologians, he states:

In the first place, the terms *system* and *systematic*, when applied to theology did not, in the seventeenth century, imply anything like the monistic syntheses designated 'system' by theologians and philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead, *system* here simply indicates the basic body of doctrine in its proper organization, as found in a catechism: a seventeenth-century *systema*, like a *compendium* or a *medulla*, was likely to be a basic survey as distinct from an elaborate system. Second, and more important, the term 'scholastic' – contrary to the attempt of several modern authors to define it in terms of an allegiance to Aristotelian philosophy and a use of predestination as a central dogma – indicates neither a philosophical nor a doctrinal position but rather the topical approach of the *loci communes* or 'commonplaces' and the method of exposition by definition, division, argument and answer that we have already seen utilized in the Protestant scholastic theological prolegomena. . . .

It is also worth noting that, as evidenced by Leigh's description of methods, the term 'scholastic' could be used by Protestants in the mid-seventeenth century in a positive, nonpolemic sense which reflected the etymological meaning of the word – a method or teaching 'of the schools' – rather than the continued Protestant distaste for the metaphysical speculations of the medievals.³

But even if we place the best interpretation on the words 'scholastic' and 'systematic', questions may still be raised by many: why did Protestant scholasticism have to arise at the close of the great Reformation period? Even at best, was not Protestant Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century a cooling of the evangelical fervour of the sixteenth-century Reformation? Did it not serve to fossilize and domesticate a formerly vital and dynamic religious movement?

Some fifteen years ago, Professor John Leith answered these questions with clarity and brevity:

After the 1560's Protestant theology faced a new task, namely one of consolidation, clarification, and elaboration. The necessity of this task

2. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. I, *Prolegomena to Theology*, Grand Rapids, 1987, pp. 17-18.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

A REHABILITATION OF SCHOLASTICISM?

arose out of the nature of the theology itself. During the initial religious experience, words may be used loosely and without careful definition, but if a movement is to survive, it must sooner or later formulate precisely what it is saying or believing. It must ask how one affirmation fits with other affirmations, how the total experience holds together. There are dangers in this process, for when any great experience of life is analyzed, precisely defined, and described, there is the risk that the living reality will be destroyed. But in many areas of life, as psychology demonstrates, this process is necessary for the sake of the health of living experience itself. The new task that theology faced after 1560 was inevitable and ought not to be judged as good or bad in itself, but as a necessary stage in the development of any community or theology.⁴

Muller feels that this necessity for more precise development within the Reformed (and Lutheran) communities has not been appreciated by many nineteenth-and twentieth-century scholars:

The changes and developments that took place within Protestantism in the two centuries after the Reformation need to be viewed as belonging to a living tradition which needed to adapt and to reformulate its teachings as the historical context demanded. Quite simply, the fact that theological systems in 1659 did not look like Calvin's *Institutes* of 1559, or even maintain all of the definitions provided by Calvin, does not in itself indicate discontinuity. The issue is to examine the course of development, to study the reasons for change, and then to make judgments concerning continuity and discontinuity in light of something more than a facile contrast or juxtaposition.

A fundamental misunderstanding of this set of historical relationships, particularly of the relationship between the theology of the Reformers and the theology of post-Reformation orthodoxy lies at the root of most of the contemporary complaints against both Protestant orthodoxy and its nineteenth and early twentieth century descendants. To very little purpose, a series of studies have set 'Calvin against the Calvinists' – as if Calvin were the only source of post-reformation Reformed theology and as if the theology of the mid-seventeenth ought for some reason to be measured against and judged by the theology of the mid-sixteenth century. Because the orthodox systems do not mirror Calvin's 1559 *Institutes*, they are labelled 'distortions' of the Reformation. The genuine historical and theological issue, of course, is one of development and change within a broad tradition, of continu-

4. John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making*, Richmond, Va., 1973, p. 65.

ity and discontinuity with the thought, not only of Calvin, but also of Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, Musculus and Vermigli.⁵

Muller deals openly and clearly with those interpreters of the last two centuries – in many cases world-renowned theologians – who, he believes, have fallen into this 'fundamental misunderstanding' of the relationship between the Reformers and the scholastics. He criticises the interpretation of such distinguished Reformation scholars as Heinrich Heppe and Ernst Bizer,⁶ Karl Barth,⁷ T. H. L. Parker⁸ and others. This part of his work is clearly controversial and will by no means command universal assent within the Reformed theological community. Nonetheless, even those who may strongly dissent from Muller's conclusions will be likely to agree that his arguments are weighty, and that an appropriate response to them will require serious research, hard thinking, and careful formulation.

Reformation scholars today will be far more likely to agree with Muller's critique of the nineteenth-century propensity (already pointed out by James Orr in *The Progress of Dogma* in 1897) to attempt to reduce the theology of Calvin (and the later Calvinists) to some one architectonic principle such as predestination or the sovereignty of God.

The analysis of prolegomena and *principia* in post-Reformation Reformed dogmatics provides a partial answer to the claim of much earlier scholarship that the Reformed, following the death of Calvin, ignored the essentially Christologically, soteriologically and epistemologically controlled doctrinal perspective of the *Institutes* and, in its place, introduced a *predestinarian metaphysic* as the controlling element of Reformed system, in effect, the 'central dogma' and fundamental principle of Christian doctrine . . . the doctrine of predestination is shown to be one doctrinal focus among others and not a central pivot of system or overarching motif controlling other doctrines

The attempt to describe Protestant scholasticism as the systematic development of central dogmas – predestination in the case of the Reformed, justification in the case of the Lutherans – was, at best, a theological reinterpretation of the Protestant scholastic systems by the constructive theologians of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they attempted to rebuild theological system in the wake of the Kantian critique of rational metaphysics The monistic systematizers of the nineteenth century – Alexander Schweizer, Gottfried

5. Muller, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-95, 101, 83-87.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 117-118, 119, 170, 185, 349.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

A REHABILITATION OF SCHOLASTICISM?

Thomasius and Albrecht Ritschi – simply read their own method back into the Protestant tradition.⁹

Muller's work will certainly demonstrate that no fair reading of seventeenth-century Orthodoxy will allow it to be reduced to one overriding (and hence impoverishing and distorting) principle. But even granted that, perhaps a more crucial question arises concerning the validity of this kind of theological enterprise: is Protestant scholasticism (not to mention Roman Catholic scholasticism) ultimately rationalist, or is it exegetical (based on a fair interpretation of Biblical texts)? Muller argues strongly for the latter.

Predestinarianism and Rationalism are hardly identical. On the one hand, Reformed predestinarianism rests on an exegetical, not on a philosophical basis and has little in common with the development of a monistic or pantheistic Rationalism such as can be found in the seventeenth-century Rationalist system of Spinoza.¹⁰

The rationalization and intellectualization of theology into system characteristic of the orthodox or scholastic phase of Protestantism never set the standards of scriptural revelation and rational proof on an equal par and certainly never viewed either evidential demonstration or rational necessity as grounds of faith. Quite the contrary, the Protestant orthodox disavow evidentialism and identify theological certainty as something quite distinct from mathematical and rational or philosophical certainty. They also argue quite pointedly that reason has an instrumental function within the bounds of faith and not a magisterial function. Reason never proves faith, but only elaborates faith toward understanding

In other words, Protestant scholasticism was no more conducive to a truly rationalistic philosophy than were the Augustinian, Thomist and Scotist theologies of the later Middle Ages. . . .

Any use of philosophical concepts by the Protestant scholastics involved the rejection of views noticeably at variance with Christian doctrine. Just as their medieval predecessors had disavowed the Aristotelian notions of the eternity of the world and the destructibility of the soul, so did the Protestant scholastics refuse these particular tenets and any other rational deductions at odds with revealed doctrine – such as the curious cosmology of Descartes or the occasionalism of Geulincx.¹¹

9. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 94.

Not everyone will be prepared to agree with Muller's high assessment of the fair exegetical procedure of the Orthodox (as opposed to the artificiality of proof-texting of which they are generally understood to be guilty). He speaks of 'the accusation of 'proof-texting' typically levelled against the Protestant Orthodox by modern writers.'¹²

It is quite true that the orthodox systems cite *dicta probantia* for every dogmatic statement – and it is also the case that some of these biblical *dicta*, because of modern critical scholarship, can no longer be used as the seventeenth century orthodox used them. Nonetheless, it was never the intention or the practice of the Protestant scholastics to wrench biblical texts out of their context in Scripture or to dispense with careful biblical exegesis in the original languages. Many seventeenth century dogmatic theologians began their teaching careers as professors of Old or New Testament and virtually all of them, whether or not they taught exegesis, were well versed in the biblical languages

[T]he *locus*-method itself was designed to move from biblical and exegetical study of key passages to the collection of exegetical observations and dogmatic conclusions into a body of Christian doctrine. The *dicta probantia* appear in the orthodox systems, not as texts torn from their biblical context but as references to either the exegetical labors of the theologian himself or, as was more broadly and generally the case, to a received tradition of biblical interpretation. It was the intention of the authors of the orthodox systems and compendia to direct their readers, by the citation of texts, to the exegetical labors that undergirded theological system. The twentieth century may not accept all of the results of seventeenth-century exegesis, but it ought to recognize that the older theology, whatever its faults, did not fail to appropriate the best exegetical conclusions of its day.¹³

A careful reading of the seventeenth century orthodox writers will confirm Muller's point: these theologians were not, at their best, simplistic proof-texters. The way Turretin (in many *loci* of *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*) and John Owen (particularly in the second half of *Death of Death*) wrestle with Biblical passages in their context in light of the original languages is an illustration of their concern for faithful exegesis. Yet, in this reviewer's opinion, some important critical questions remain in this area that have not been dealt with by the author of this volume. Granted much faithful biblical work by the seventeenth century orthodox, is there not still all too much 'proofing' of theological propositions by texts that do not really apply? Is there not a tendency in a good deal of

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 94.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

their writings towards abstraction (as T. F. Torrance, for instance, has suggested, in the area of predestination¹⁴)? Have not many of them tended to submerge the Biblical idea of covenant into the Western European concept of contract?¹⁵ Have many of these theologians of the seventeenth century dealt as adequately as did Calvin with the vital concept of union with Christ?¹⁶ Of course, in fairness to Professor Muller, a number of other volumes are planned in this series, and undoubtedly they will carefully address these concerns. This first volume is only intended to deal with the concept of the relationship of prologomena to the theological system as a whole, and it has accomplished that task with insight and precision. We gladly look forward to later volumes which will address such matters as covenant, election, union with Christ, nature and grace.

One of the many strong points of Muller's work is his sense of the catholicity of Orthodox Protestantism:

The language used by Paraeus here also reflects a crucial element of the orthodox theological enterprise: the desire for and emphasis upon catholicity. Protestantism had, from its very beginnings – as witnessed by Luther's stance as a *doctor ecclesiae*, a doctor of the church, bound to reform its doctrine, and by Calvin's profoundly catholic claims in his response to Sadoleto – assumed its identity as the true church. The Protestant orthodox systems, searching out and defending the proper formulation of 'right teaching', had as the goal of their formulation a universally valid statement of Christian truth.¹⁷

Muller helps place Orthodox Protestantism in its ancient catholic setting as he discusses the scholastic continuity between twelfth- and seventeenth-century Christian thought,¹⁸ specifically through the perennial influence of 'Christian Aristotelianism':

This continuity of Reformed orthodoxy with the Reformation in and through the use of modified medieval models for system was possible because of the continuity of Christian Aristotelianism, its dialectical method, and because of the training of many of the Reformers in the old systems . . . the Reformation cannot be seen as a total break with the Middle Ages. . . . Instead, we must think in terms of the larger

14. Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, London, 1959, pp. lxxvii ff.

15. James B. Torrance discusses this matter in an article: 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy' in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 34, pp. 225-243. Muller does mention the importance of the idea of the covenant of works in the theology of Cocceius (p. 264).

16. Muller argues, with considerable evidence, that the doctrine of predestination in the seventeenth century orthodox teaching is christological. See p. 85.

17. Muller, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262. Muller, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

18. *E.g. ibid.*, pp. 81, 94.

continuities of theological and philosophical method – the trajectory of scholasticism from the late twelfth to the late seventeenth century – and in terms of the doctrinal continuity, not without development and change, that took place within Protestantism itself¹⁹

We must also stress the genuine and positive relationship between Protestant scholasticism and the Christian Aristotelianism of earlier centuries. This relationship, as manifest in the Protestant scholastic use of medieval paradigms for the discussion of the genus and object of theology and, to a lesser or at least less explicit extent, for the establishment of a theological epistemology in which faith and reason both had a place, in fact provided a barrier to the use of seventeenth century rationalist philosophy in Protestant orthodox system.²⁰

After admitting that 'Luther and Calvin had argued pointedly against the use of philosophical concepts – particularly Aristotelian concepts – in the construction of theology',²¹ he adds:

This discontinuity, however, is not nearly as pronounced as the views of Luther and Calvin would make it seem. It is quite easy to trace a continuous flow of fundamentally Aristotelian philosophical training from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Philip Melancthon, the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, as he was called, taught courses in Aristotelian logic and rhetoric at Wittenberg throughout the era of the Reformation On the Reformed side, the philosophical career of the Marburg professor, Andreas Hyperius was as noteworthy as his theological efforts. He not only wrote the influential *Methodus theologiae* but also a highly respected *Compendium librorum physicorum Aristotelis*. Examples like this can be easily multiplied to demonstrate the continuity of Aristotelianism in the sixteenth century.²²

Though stressing the continuities between medieval and Protestant scholasticism Muller certainly recognizes that there are also discontinuities. Some years ago, John Leith pointed out that the evangelical Protestant form of scholasticism was 'always qualified by the Protestant doctrines of Holy Scripture and justification by faith, which however modified by seventeenth century developments, also modify the method.'²³

The difference most frequently referred to by Muller is epistemological:

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

23. Leith, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

A REHABILITATION OF SCHOLASTICISM?

These early Reformed statements concerning theological presuppositions focus, virtually without exception, on the problem of the knowledge of God given the fact not only of human finitude but also of human sin. In other words, the critique levelled by the Reformation at medieval theological presuppositions added a soteriological dimension to the epistemological problem. Whereas the medieval doctors had assumed that the fall affected primarily the will and its affections and not the reason, the Reformers assumed also the fallenness of the rational faculty: natural theology, according to the Reformers, was not merely limited to non-saving knowledge of God – it was also bound in idolatry. This view of the problem is the single most important contribution of the early Reformed writers to the theological prolegomena of orthodox Protestantism. Indeed, it is the doctrinal issue that most forcibly presses the Protestant scholastics toward the modification of the medieval models for theological prolegomena.²⁴

He also points out, perhaps less important, methodological differences:

Despite the relative infrequency of direct citation of the medieval scholastics in the early orthodox systems, the first Reformed prolegomena tend to appropriate and adopt medieval definitions while those of the high orthodox period tend to add topics that reflect specifically Protestant concerns, such as the identification of *principia*, the relationship of nonsaving natural theology to the Christian theological enterprise, and the identification of fundamental doctrines.²⁵

Whether one stresses the differences or the continuities between these two phases of scholastic theology pales into relative insignificance beside a more fundamental question: why are we modern Christians generally so antipathetic to our scholastic forefathers? Is it because we are more truly humble and open than they before the hard questions of life, revelation and the meaning of it all? or is it because we are more relativistic, eclectic and thus too unsure of ourselves to be comfortable with the bold precision of their all-encompassing system of thought? Or could our negative attitude be explained rather more simply (if unflatteringly) in terms suggested by Muller:

A similar emphasis, harking back to the medieval 'trivium', was laid on the mastery of grammar, logic and rhetoric prior to further theological (or philosophical) study. Part of the modern antipathy to

24. Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 72. See also pp. 126, 184, 189, 201.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

scholastic method probably arises from a lack of education in and appreciation of these latter skills!²⁶

Well, who knows? The reasons are undoubtedly many: some good, some bad. Yet like it or not, seventeenth-century Scholastic theology is a rich resource of Christian truth which we neglect to our own impoverishment. And if Muller is even partially right, that our access to this rich resource is impeded by our lack of 'trivium' skills, then would we not do well to heed the surprising suggestion of Dorothy Sayers' 1947 essay which advocates a pedagogical return to the disciplines of the Trivium in order to retrieve 'the lost tools of learning'²⁷

26. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

27. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, London, 1948. This essay has been reprinted in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Valecito, California, Vol. IV, No. 1.

REVIEWS

Essentials. A Liberal–Evangelical Dialogue

David L. Edwards with John Stott

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1988; 354 pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 340 42623 3

It is perhaps a sign of the times that whereas in 1977, barely more than a decade ago, James Barr assailed 'fundamentalism' with no quarter given, in 1988 David Edwards set up a calm respectful dialogue, full of coolness and light, with the doyen of British (or at least English) Evangelicals – whom he cannot altogether acquit of being 'fundamentalist'. The exchange takes the form of six extended critical appreciations by Edwards of areas of belief on which Stott has written – the power of the gospel, the authority of the Scriptures, the cross of Christ, the miraculous Christ, the Bible and behaviour, and the gospel for the world, followed by briefer responses from Stott. Although this procedure allows Edwards to choose the ground for debate (as Stott civilly remarks more than once) Stott has the last word, as well as an epilogue to round off the volume.

The courteous tone of both writers has not placed sharpness of convictions at a discount. Stott is provoked into spelling out for the first time in print his annihilationist understanding of hell – but tentatively, for he is conscious of parting company with a venerable evangelical belief. At the same time he unambiguously rebuts any kind of universalism, while remaining agnostic about the fate of the unevangelised. But this agnosticism has hardly softened his evangelistic passion! One of the few occasions when a little 'needle' barbs his response occurs when Edwards proposes a trimming of the Evangelicals' gospel to facilitate effective communication of the faith in the contemporary world.

From time to time Edwards' presentation loses sight of Stott's works and becomes a general critique of evangelical teaching, which might have been tough on the respondent. It may be significant that the topic on which Stott feels that Edwards has done him least justice is the cross of Christ. At the end of the day, Stott identifies authority and salvation as the key issues, on which a wide gulf still yawns – and is probably, for all the irenicism of dialogue, growing ever wider. It seems to me that the question of Scripture remains the most acute for Evangelicals. Edwards is able to make effective capital out of 'our domestic Evangelical debate over inerrancy', but Stott does well on this sticky wicket. His list of 'eight tendencies of the mind-set styled "fundamentalism"' is good value, but there is little evidence of a meeting of minds on the authority of the Bible.

At more than one juncture the cruciality of the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 comes to the fore. Stott effectively maintains the historicity of Adam and Eve, and the reader glimpses something of the significance of the disagreement over the fall and original sin. It is a weakness at this point that ultimately lies behind Edwards' alarmingly loose justification of homosexual partnerships. (It could also be claimed that the lack of a doctrine of original sin is the single most damaging aberration of the go-getting, self-service theology currently fashionable in high circles in Britain. Liberalism may be more responsible for new-right religion than is often realised.)

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The debate will go on – as cordially as in these pages, one hopes. It seems the fate of conservative varieties of Christianity is subjected to periodic anatomy by their critics. In the USA today departments of religion are rushing to mount courses on fundamentalism, lumping together the televangelists and the ayatollahs. It is perhaps time to reverse the roles – time for the dissecting knife to be applied to the pervasive liberalism that presides over our declining churches in the West. It is arguable that it has a great deal more to answer for than contemporary Evangelicalism. One could perhaps choose no better starting point than the gospel itself.

Do the dominant liberal brands of Christianity still have a gospel – rather than a programme, or a therapy, or a manifesto? There cannot be a more basic essential than the gospel. By their fruits we shall know them. No evangelism, no evangel.

The Review Editor

Faith Theology and Imagination

John McIntyre

The Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1987; 176 pp., no price;
ISBN 0 905 312 65 1.

I have long suspected that the Reformed tradition has neglected the realm of imagination. But, so I believe, imagination is part of our humanness and is a gift of God.

So I welcomed this book by the Professor Emeritus of Divinity at Edinburgh University. As he tells us, he has thought long on the use of imagination, and he is obviously aware of the problems of the subject. His aim is 'Not to invent some new theology which is designed to replace the old, but rather, by using the concept of imagination to work over much of the familiar theological material, to view it from a different angle, in the hope that we would gain fresh understanding of our faith' (p.4). In the Introduction Professor McIntyre briefly discusses why imagination has been suspect. He then considers an essay by George MacDonald: 'The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture'. This little known essay raised questions which have been largely ignored. This book is a response to some of MacDonald's ideas.

In an examination of the biblical material there is an interesting chapter on 'The Parabolic Imagination'. It concentrates mainly on the Gospels and, obviously, the parables and images used by Jesus. There can be no doubt that Jesus stimulated the imagination, and challenged the hearts of his hearers, with his parables. The same is true of his enacted parables which are described as 'Realistic Imagination'. I found some fresh insights in this chapter.

In discussing 'Imagination as a Theological Category' Professor McIntyre shows how imagination can help our understanding in many areas of our faith, including the attributes of God, creation, incarnation, atonement and the Holy Spirit.

Imagination is then considered in the 'Ethical Dimension'. An imaginative approach can help in the tensions which our ethical principles hold, such as those between persons and principles, freedom and necessity, and authority and freedom.

Then there is imagination in the 'Philosophical Dimension'. This chapter gives a helpful outline of various views on imagination and what can be learned from them. Philosophers discussed include Plato, Hume and, among the more modern, Sartre, Collingwood, Warnock and Murdoch. I found this to be a helpful summary

of various philosophical viewpoints. This is then carried into a chapter on methodology and epistemology. The final chapter summarises the characteristics of imagination and images. In all this, Professor McIntyre sees imagination, not as one specific part of the mind but 'the whole mind working in identifiable ways' (p. 59).

I found this an interesting and stimulating book. It reinforced my suspicions that 'whether we acknowledge it or not, we have been employing imagination in our religion and in our theology, ever since we first became involved in these practices' (pp. 175f.).

It is a book of scholarship, as we would expect, and not for light reading. There are areas where I would tend to differ and, as we need our minds renewed, I would have liked something on the question of sanctified imagination. But, on the whole, I found it a challenging and thought-provoking book.

*John Wilson
Motherwell*

God and Science: The Death and Rebirth of Theism

Charles P. Henderson Jr.

John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1986; 186pp., £10, paperback;

ISBN 0 8042 0668 6

This book seeks to trace the rise and fall of scientific atheism, attempting to invert the major arguments against religion and use them to defend God. In pursuit of this objective Henderson examines the work of Einstein, Freud, Darwin and Marx and seeks to develop what he calls a 'new biblical theism'. Central to his thesis is the argument that the historical dualism between fact and faith is no longer tenable in the light of contemporary science. This is helpful but needs to be much more clearly developed than it is here. The last chapter - 'Towards a New Theism' - reviews the work of Tillich, Küng, Macquarrie and Torrance, with the last taking us full circle back to Einstein. In earlier chapters the author sees a real reconciling of science and God in the work of Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin. There is an adequate index and bibliography.

I found this a puzzling book because the central thesis often disappears under irrelevant biographical cameos. Chapter One is entitled: 'Albert Einstein - New Proof for the Existence of God.' But Einstein's thought is not explored in any depth and we are treated to a history of twentieth-century physics - in which Einstein certainly played a critical role. Similarly in the third chapter, on Darwin, we find ourselves more caught up in a discussion of Paley. This chapter assumes that the Bible is inaccurate and evolution true. It is also puzzling to learn that de Chardin and Tillich are the theologians who have rescued God from the clutches of scientific atheism. Overall the work lacks an awareness of contemporary philosophy of science - an area one would have thought essential in a work of this nature. Indeed apart from a few references to Torrance and Küng this book is curiously out of date.

Finally, in a book concerned with the rebirth of theism the concept of God is crucial. In the end the fusion Henderson achieves between God and science is with the God, not of the Bible, but of Tillich. With approval he notes that Tillich 'concedes that the concept of a supernatural being who intervenes in history and interferes with natural events is incompatible with science' (p.126). The word

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

'G-o-d' is seen as simply a 'papier mache' symbol of deeper reality. On p.137 Phil.2:6-7 is used to negate any idea that God rules over his creation – surely a strange extrapolation from a passage dealing with the humiliation of our Lord Jesus! In fact God is not even lawgiver: 'as we reflect back upon the biblical roots of western theism, we know that God is not fundamentally a lawgiver at all' (p.150).

This is an intriguing and easily read book. It is intriguing because of the puzzling characteristics I have hinted at, and the sweeping way in which the Bible is assumed to be inaccurate. It is easily read, however, and there are some interesting details concerning the lives with which it deals.

*John C. Sharp
South Church of Scotland, East Kilbride*

The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977 – 1984: A Report

Basil Meeking and John Stott (eds),

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1986; 96pp., £2.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 85364 437 3.

ERCDOM consisted of three meetings: Venice (1977), Cambridge (1982) and Landevennec, France (1984). The Evangelical participants numbered eight (1977), eight (1982) and six (1984). The RC participants numbered eight (1977), ten (1982) and nine (1984), and were appointed by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The Evangelicals came from various churches and Christian organisations but did not officially represent any international body.

ERCDOM built on the 1974 Evangelical 'Lausanne Covenant' and the 1975 Papal document, 'Evangelization in the Modern World'. ERCDOM was not seen as 'a step towards Church unity negotiations' but as 'a search for such common ground as might be discovered between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics as they each try to be more faithful in their obedience to mission.... Neither compromise nor the quest for lowest common denominators had a place; a patient search for truth and a respect for each other's integrity did' (pp. 10-11).

The Report is not an agreed statement but 'a faithful record of ideas shared' (p. 11). Only three participants from each side attended all three meetings. Responsibility for the final form of the Report rests with the 1984 participants. It contains seven chapters: Revelation and Authority; The Nature of Mission; The Gospel of Salvation; Our Response in the Holy Spirit to the Gospel; The Church and the Gospel; The Gospel and Culture; The Possibilities of Common Witness.

Defining 'witness' in the broad sense of 'any Christian activity which points to Christ' (p. 83), ERCDOM discusses common witness in relation to (a) Bible translation and publishing; (b) the use of media; (c) community service; (d) social thought and action; (e) dialogue; (f) worship; (g) evangelism. The negative tone of the discussion of common witness in evangelism is particularly disconcerting, especially if one tends to relate 'witness' more directly to 'evangelism'.

When 'mission' is defined with direct reference to the gospel preached, it must be acknowledged that 'missionary activity is differently understood' (p. 30). Vatican II defines the Church as 'the sacrament of salvation, the sign and promise of redemption to each and every person without exception', asserting that 'the whole of humanity is in a collective history which God makes to be a history of

salvation' (pp. 30-31). This view is highlighted in the Papal statement: 'Every person, without exception, has been redeemed by Christ, and with each person, without exception, Christ is in some way united, even when that person is not aware of it' (p. 45). Evangelicals would be generally unhappy with this outlook, strongly emphasizing 'the necessity of a personal response to, and experience of, God's saving grace' (p. 47). Cataloguing areas of common witness must not be permitted to obscure this fundamental difference.

In our confused world, it is vital that the Church proclaims Christ clearly. In the face of both despair and complacency, the Church must proclaim both the gracious promise and the urgent challenge of the gospel. Significant progress in mission demands that we learn to 'read, study, believe and obey' God's Word. 'We believe that the most fruitful kind of Evangelical-Roman Catholic dialogue arises out of joint Bible study' (p. 86).

Charles M. Cameron
St Ninian's Parish Church, Dunfermline

So Near and Yet So Far

Hugh Montefiore

SCM Press, London, 1986; 154pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 334 01517 0

The work of ARCIC (Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission), which has embarked on a new programme of discussions, including the topic of justification, is arguably one of the most significant of contemporary ecumenical dialogues. That representatives of the two communions (including at least one true-blue evangelical on the Anglican side) were able to formulate Agreed Statements on the eucharist, ministry and ordination and (with qualifications) authority in the church cannot be ignored by anyone who is concerned for the well-being of Christ's church.

The book under review, by an *enfant terrible* of the Anglican episcopal bench (who retires on – what other day? – April 1), has a bark that is worse than its bite. It is scarcely the douche of cold water that the title and foreword lead one to expect. The first chapter is called 'The Miracle of Convergence', and the author frequently pays tribute to the remarkable degree of rapprochement already achieved. The book sounds a warning bell, from the vantage point of broad-church, liberal Anglicanism, against the authoritarianism of much (official) Roman Catholicism. It performs a useful service, not least for Scottish churchmen, in surveying the divisive issues, which for Montefiore include ethics, particularly in the sexual realm, and the ordination of women, of which he is an ardent advocate. Many a reader will find the book informative about recent Anglican and Roman developments in various fields.

The bishop plainly wants to focus the hard questions as sharply as possible. The Marian dogmas could never become *de fide* for Anglicans, but how could they be made optional for Romans? ARCIC makes inadequate provision for the laity's participation in decision-making. (On this point the new ARCIC must take the WCC's Lima consensus, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, more seriously - and also *God's Reign and Our Unity*, from an ARCIC without the middle C - the Anglican-Reformed International Commission.) A much fuller acceptance of the Church of England as truly 'catholic church' is called for than Vatican II granted.

Many other differences in faith and morals are raised in a book that seeks to be honest and rigorous. Evangelicals will read it with mixed feelings, concluding that on some things Rome may have got it more right than this bishop's brand of Anglicanism. They will also be puzzled that other issues are not pressed harder, such as Communion in both kinds, which was after all a central protest of the Reformers. And how odd it is that, in ARCIC and here, authority in the church can be extensively discussed without grasping the nettle of the Vatican as a state, with ambassadors and other features of one of the kingdoms of this world.

The Review Editor

Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates

Rex Gardner

Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1986; 214 pp., £4.95, paperback;
ISBN 0 232 51640 5.

Christian health care professionals are already indebted to Dr Rex Gardner for his magisterial survey of the ethical problems of abortion in his *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma* (1972). An indication that he was turning his attention to another area of health care came when the Christmas number of the *British Medical Journal* in 1983 contained a study by him of healing miracles in medieval Northumbria. He has now followed this up with a book, *Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates*.

In any approach to this subject certain questions must be asked and answered: 1. What is miraculous healing? 2. Does miraculous healing occur? 3. How can we know that it has occurred?

Let us look at how Dr Gardner answers these questions. He defines miraculous healing as 'the healing of organic disease by means, or at a speed, inexplicable medically and preceded by prayer in the name of Jesus Christ' (p. 1). His answer to the second question is found in the records he includes of twenty-four people who were all healed of disease in modern times in a miraculous way. Some of these cases he knew personally; the details of the rest were supplied and vouched for by others. In each case, healing occurred which was inexplicable according to modern medical knowledge and experience. The answer to the third question lies in the medically inexplicable change in the condition of the sick person which coincided with active Christian prayer made on his or her behalf.

In the course of his consideration of miraculous healing, Dr Gardner discusses its nature and its occurrence and ranges through the Bible and Church history in search of guidance for the situation today. He has a long discussion of the gifts of the Spirit with special reference to the gift of healing. He concludes that this gift was not withdrawn at the close of the apostolic age as Warfield and others maintained, but is still available in the Church today. The modern Christian is entitled to ask for physical healing from God, but it may not always be forthcoming as we see from the cases of Joni Eareckson and David Watson.

Dr Gardner has written a racy and a stimulating book. His knowledge of the relevant literature is extensive and his conclusions are sensible and responsible. Miraculous healing does occur and a belief in such healing is intellectually respectable. However, not all those for whom physical healing is sought from God receive it. Nevertheless, we should pray for it although we shall not know complete healing in our earthly life. He sums up the matter in the final sentences

of his book: 'The conclusion seems inescapable, in the light of the evidence presented in this work, that we have a living God, intimately interested in our affairs, prepared to intervene in a specific practical way in response to prayer. This being the case it is logical to pray about our health, and that of our patients and friends'.

This is a book to read and to study – and to enjoy.

John Wilkinson
Edinburgh

God's Action in the World

Maurice Wiles

SCM Press, London, 1986; 118 pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 334 62028 X.

Professor Maurice Wiles fully justifies his decision to break with recent tradition and retain the original form of his Bampton lectures for publication rather than revising and expanding them. The book, as we might expect, is a model of jargon-free clarity with an absorbing intellectual appeal to a wide variety of readers. The work is also freer from the *spirit* of studied iconoclasm than Wiles's previous radical writings, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* and *Working Papers in Doctrine*.

The radical revision of traditional notions of divine providence remains, however, in response to the old problems of reconciling divine providence and human freedom and of knowing 'what sense to give the concept of an arranged contingency' (p. 19). The difficulty, he rightly adds, is not confined to Calvin's followers but inherited by the whole Western Christian tradition. It is highlighted every time God is petitioned to act in the human situation.

Wiles retains the anchor doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*, but goes on to argue that God has voluntarily qualified his omnipotence by conferring on parts at least of his creation a genuine independency. The revised view of God's action which follows is far-reaching. Divine action, consisting simply in (continuous) creation, is only 'in relation to the world as a whole rather than particular occurrences within it' (p.28). But the original dilemma has not here been solved but merely bundled into one package instead of many. The problem now is: how can God's one act of creation fulfil the divinely intended purpose if in its deepest reaches it involves independent beings? Wiles is admitting the difficulty when finally he reduces the prospect of fulfilment to no more than this: '... the work of that creation will not come to an end unless or until it is fulfilled' (p. 52). The 'unless or' is revealing. Perhaps the work of creation will *not* come to an end. The old dilemma of divine sovereignty and human freedom is in fact 'solved' here only by the old-fashioned remedy of making the divine will hostage to human choice and God's enabling or 'grace' into little more than a reassuring presence external to the specifics of human life. The result resembles a quasi-deism.

As Wiles recognises, the chief problem of the Christian faith is the existence of evil, and this difficulty, he acknowledges, remains even under his own radical reconstruction. It all seems meagre gain for a costly surrender by reductionism of such key Christian convictions in their traditional form as the incarnation and resurrection, the believer's strengthening by the Holy Spirit, answers to prayer and all miracles. Moreover it is achieved by a very selective recognition of biblical

material, uncongenial texts being seemingly dismissed on the basis of no established objective criteria and a mass of material, say on prayer, being ignored.

It is impossible in a brief review to do justice to such an ambitious and accomplished piece of work but Wiles's satisfaction on the last page that his scheme's problems are not as severe as those contained in other accounts of divine agency will not be shared by all.

Roy Kearsley

Bible Training Institute, Glasgow

Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care

Ralph L. Underwood

Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986; £6.50, paperback;

ISBN 0 8006 173 1

Every counsellor will welcome a discussion of the subject of this book. For many years non-directive counselling was in vogue with a concomitant stress on counselling as empathy. Many would have seen confrontation as a major indiscretion in counselling. Others, however, most notably Jay Adams, have argued that confrontation is not only a legitimate strategy in counselling but the only authentic biblical strategy. Underwood sets out to explore the issue in depth and see if they can be seen in a reconciled relationship to each other rather than in contrast.

In a complex opening chapter he discusses the proliferation of techniques which are current in counselling and sets out his understanding of ministry as communication. This he develops by using the root metaphor of the 'ministry of the word' as the basic imagery behind ministry. He believes the time is ripe for this perspective to assume greater prominence in ministry. 'Pastoral care is the communication of the gospel verbally, dynamically, and symbolically in interpersonal relationships that refer however implicitly, to the community of faith.' After fully expounding his definition, he uses it in the second chapter to offer a critique of other theories of communication in pastoral care. Here he fairly assesses the approach of Thurneysen, Ruel Howe, whose work was inspired by Buber, Faber and van der Schoot and Paul Johnson.

After his two theoretical chapters, which would make some demands on the average pastor, he turns to the application of his perspective to the question of empathy and confrontation. Both approaches are fully set out and any pastor would benefit from his exposition of them. Throughout these chapters he illustrates his argument by quoting snatches of pastoral conversations, many of which strike very close to home.

But how do empathy and confrontation relate? Empathy refers to one's ability to take in another's viewpoint, to understand their outlook, holding one's own views in check, whilst maintaining one's viewpoint. In confrontation one is challenging the person to be open to another view - a fresh perspective is being introduced. The pastor is saying, 'Having gained some understanding of you, I now trust you to deal openly with some things you have not considered'. There is no fundamental contradiction between the two approaches, Underwood argues, so long as there is respect. Both stem from the ministry of the Word and both, when sound in spirit, are expressions of respect.

REVIEWS

This is a worthy addition to the 'Theology and Pastoral Care Series'. It is a work of scholarship, but deals with a very real tension that many ordinary pastors face, and does so in a way which is balanced and perceptive. To a great extent it is convincing in its attempt to resolve the tension between empathy and confrontation and would liberate many a pastor from unnecessary conflicts of interest in their counselling.

*Derek Tidball
Mutley Baptist Church,
Plymouth*