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# THE PROMISES MADE TO ABRAHAM AND THE DESTINY OF ISRAEL\*

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It is clear that the question of the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12-24 has always occupied a place of central importance in the thinking of any student of the Scriptures. Even the reader who feels no particular personal interest in the matter is obliged to recognise that they provide an unparalleled basis for that feeling of common identity which forms the indispensable foundation of the existence of any historic nation. It hardly matters if the events described in the narrative are historical or not; after all, mythology can sometimes exercise a magical power of attraction which real history fails to offer.

But for the believer, whether he is a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim, recognising the importance of these events goes far beyond defining their historicity – it becomes a matter which touches the content of his or her own personal faith. If one believes that one is a son and heir of Abraham, either by physical descent or by spiritual relationship, it is obvious that the content of these promises will matter in a very special way. The New Testament, and above all Romans and Galatians, recalls the religious importance of these promises, and the way in which St Paul interpreted their meaning constitutes one of the decisive elements of the separation between Jews and Christians which was taking place at the time

Later on, we realise how, with the Reformers, and above all with the followers of Calvin, the development of a Covenant theology and the new awareness of unity of the two testaments under the banner of the election of a particular people, inaugurated a period in the life of the Christian Church when it became quite natural to tie Christian spiritual experience in with that of the Jews of the Old Testament, going through Christ – perhaps – but ending up at the common source of both religious traditions – the faith of Abraham, and the promises which were made to him at the moment of the calling which determined his subsequent career.

It is to the legacy of this awareness of the unity of the Chosen People that we owe the special interest which we find among Christians today in the fate of the Jewish people. In the Middle Ages, for instance, or even today in a Catholic, Orthodox or even

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Lutheran environment, this interest is much less evident, although it does actually exist to some degree. By contrast, in those circles which have been affected by systematic Calvinism, there is a certain feeling of identity with the Jewish people which inclines us, in a very special way, towards a consideration of the possible application of these promises to the Jewish people today, and above all to the destiny of the State of Israel, which since 1948 has been established in the Holy Land.

The existence of this State, the imperialism of which it is accused, and above all the seemingly endless duration of a conflict concerning Israel in the nuclear age - and therefore in a time which many regard as apocalyptic - all this gives the promises recorded in Genesis a new relevance which goes beyond the purely religious dimension and affects the whole of modern political life.

The problem of the promises thus presents itself today in three dimensions which correspond to three different aspects, or hermeneutical levels, in dealing with the texts. The first of these dimensions is *exegesis*. What should we say about the texts themselves? What is (or was) the intention of those who redacted the cycle of the patriarchal narratives? Is it possible to discover in this redaction a particular tendency which has falsified the primitive facts in favour of what might have been called Israelite propaganda? What, in fact, are the links between history and the narrative?

The second dimension is that of *theology*. Having done the exegetical groundwork, can we find in it something of use for the practice of our faith today? How should we understand - or, better, receive - the element of God's revelation of his plan which in theory is the main point of the narrative? For the Christian there is yet another question - how can one link the teaching and the work of Christ to these promises? Does the theology of St Paul, as expounded in Romans and Galatians, exclude the modern Jews from any share in the promises made to Abraham? How far can or must the Christian support the position of the Zionist state, on the grounds that it is the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy?

The third dimension is that of *politics*. There is an extraordinary measure of agreement between fundamentalist dispensationalism, on the one hand, and Israeli strategic and political aims on the other, an agreement which goes so far as to exercise a considerable influence in American government circles. We must not forget that the feeling of kinship with the Jews which developed among seventeenth century Calvinists appears today in the form of two pressure groups, or lobbies, around the White House, which make common cause in favour of Israel, a fact which maintains the military strength of that state and, in the final analysis, guarantees its very existence. How can one explain this odd alliance of extremely conservative Christians

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and virtually atheistic Zionist Jews? Should the Biblical Christian be expected to subscribe to the almost fascist policies which these groups not infrequently adopt? And what about the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees, many of whom would call themselves Christians, and some of whom are evangelicals? Can we accept, for example, that a state which rejects Christian missionary work and which maintains only the correctest of diplomatic relations with the different churches is fulfilling the will of God to the point that Christians outside the country ought to support it even when it occupies the whole of Palestine and oppresses its Arab Christian population? And all this, let us not forget, because of a dispensationalist interpretation of the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12-24?

### The Evidence

Let us first consider the texts quoted as proofs of the promises, and see how they fit into the overall pattern of the covenant which God made with Abraham. There are in all about 20 Biblical verses, scattered over eight chapters of the Patriarchal narrative, which contain promises made to Abraham. There is no point listing them all here, since they are mostly formulaic in character and therefore highly repetitive, but it is useful to list their basic content and examine how they developed in the course of Abraham's lifetime.

We begin with Genesis 12: 2-3, at the very start of the narrative, which gives us the essential ingredients of the promises as a whole:

1. I shall make you a great nation
2. I shall bless you
3. I shall make your name great
4. You will be the source of blessing
5. I shall bless those who bless you
6. I shall curse those who curse you
7. All the families of the earth will be blessed in you.

By looking at the commentaries, it would be possible to find other ways of dividing up these verses, apart from the seven blessings proposed here. The number is not that important in itself, though it does, in fact, correspond to the formula of blessing which was in general use in the Near East during the period in question, and it also offers us the most detailed analysis of the text. The presence of the words *blessing/bless*, as well as of their opposites, *cursing/curse*, is very important, because it underlines the fact that the Covenant establishes, first and foremost, a personal relationship between God and Abraham. The exact content of this blessing/curse remains extremely vague, and ends up being little more substantial than a

promise of national grandeur – the concept of the name and the nation being more or less the same.

Nevertheless, I think we have to admit that there is a division of principle between the first three formulae, which affect only Abraham himself, and the last four, which introduce the dimension of inter-tribal and international relations. This double-sidedness is an aspect of the Covenant which marks its development right up to and including the New Testament period, and which retains a certain measure of relevance among Jews, and possibly even among Christians, right to the present day.

The personal and exclusive blessing is that of the greatness of the nation and of the name of Abraham. But what does that mean? The Judaeo-Christian reader, influenced by the reality of the development of the Jewish people, thinks immediately of the seed of Isaac, son of the promise, and of Jacob, who received the name of Israel. And certainly, the combination of these three names is repeated often enough in the Old Testament for us to feel perfectly justified in coming to this conclusion. But, in fact, the actual development of the Abrahamic narrative itself is much less clear about this. Quite apart from the son of the promise, God repeats this blessing in the case of Ishmael (Genesis 16:10) and – a great surprise – in Genesis 17:4-6 God says to Abraham: 'This is my Covenant which I shall make with you. You will become the father of many nations. You will no longer be called Abram, but you will be called Abraham, because I shall make you the father of many nations. I shall make you multiply without limit, I shall make nations of you and kings will come forth from you.'

Once more the grandeur of the nation is intimately linked to the personal name of Abraham. But note that the change in his name is also a change in the original promise. Abraham, as his new name makes plain, will be the father of *many* nations, each of which will receive a portion of the heavenly blessing. Of course, the priority given to the main line, the line of Isaac and Jacob, is in no way compromised by this change. Isaac remains the legitimate heir, the son to the promise, who will stay in his father's house and inherit the largest portion of his goods, whereas the others, Ishmael and the children of the concubines (Genesis 25:6) will be rejected and excluded from the patriarchal company, which will follow the main heirs right up until their descent into Egypt.

But in spite of all that, the descendants of Ishmael, whom we might perhaps call the secondary line (a kind of Stuart Pretender line which will enter into competition with the main line but never be recognised by it as in any way legitimate), not to speak of those other sons of Abraham whose exact identity remains something of a mystery – these other nations, according to the Abrahamic narrative,

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received and no doubt would continue to receive a portion of Abraham's blessing. Their exclusion should not be interpreted as a categorical refusal on God's part (or on Abraham's part) to consider them as brothers of Isaac and therefore also as supplementary heirs of the divine blessing.

The content of this blessing, like the nature of their exclusion, is revealed in the events associated with the inauguration of the Covenant. When God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision, at the moment when Isaac was born, as a sign of the promise, Abraham circumcised not only Isaac but also Ishmael, which means that from then on the two sons shared the sign of the Covenant which was to become the hallmark of Judaism and the *sine qua non* for anyone wishing to be recognised as belonging to the Chosen People. We should never forget that it was precisely this question at the time when the Gospel was first being preached to the Gentiles which provoked so much trouble in the Church. Converted Jews could scarcely accept uncircumcised Gentiles as members of God's people, but Ishmael, the rejected son, *was* circumcised! So, logically, these same Jews ought to have granted his descendants, if not full recognition, at least a certain tolerance with regard to the Covenant, which they were not prepared to accept in the case of the uncircumcised.

The promise of the multitude of children, which was a major element of the Covenant and really essential to it if it is conceived above all as the prolonging of the family line 'according to the flesh' – to use New Testament terminology – is also granted to Ishmael (Genesis 16:10), and in the same terms as those used for the posterity of the son of the promise. The effect of the exclusion is thus limited to two main elements. First, there is the gift of land. The fate of a large family without income or resources is always tragic, and makes fertility more of a curse than a blessing. We realise this perfectly well today when we look at the Third World, but the principle can be applied equally well to any society. Desert nomads are condemned to a migratory life and the more numerous they are the more often they have to move. They have neither the security of a fixed abode nor the opportunity to develop the rudiments of a civilised way of life. The sons of Isaac, firmly installed in the Promised Land, would later develop a culture which would eventually spread across the world, whereas the descendants of Ishmael would remain at the level of Bedouin, living now very much as their ancestors did 4000 years ago.

One should never underestimate the importance for the development of a people and the growth of its sense of identity of possessing territory, whether it is flowing with milk and honey or not. But the promise of the land is also tied up with the eschatological destiny of Israel, which brings us naturally to the



question of the blessing which the nation will bring to the world in general. In this promise of the land there is the seed of the future promise of a kingdom – remember that God says to Abraham that 'kings will come forth from you', and that it would be the hope of fulfilling this promise above all, which would draw the crowds to follow Jesus. This is therefore, in this promise of the land, a political element which was to play a not inconsiderable role in the ministry of Jesus Christ and which would finally be crowned with thorns when the King of the Jews was crucified. The promise of the kingdom to be established at Jerusalem is also the basis of the blessing on the nations, because it is from Zion that 'the law will go forth, and from Jerusalem, the word of the Lord' (Isaiah 2:3), and also from Zion that Israel's deliverance would come (Psalm 53:7). The nations would go there with joy, and there worship the true God, according to the eschatological vision of the Old Testament.

We can therefore sum up the promises made to Abraham and confirmed by the law as follows: the circumcision and the posterity (the one is tied to the other!) are given without distinction to Isaac and to Ishmael, and perhaps also to the other sons of Abraham mentioned in Genesis 26:5, but the ownership of the land and its resources, as well as the power to bless the nations, are reserved for the son of the promise alone.

### **The Obligations**

Before considering the possible interpretations of the promises in the light of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and modern times, I think it would be useful to recall that the revelation given to Abraham includes also certain obligations on his part, which would later become the obligations of the Covenant and form the spiritual and theoretical basis of the Jewish religion. At bottom there is the demand of *obedience*, the mainstay of all worship and of all spiritual life. This obligation is perhaps more implicit than explicit in Genesis 12: 1-2, when God calls Abraham to leave his country, his homeland and his father's house. But the implication becomes certainty a little later on, for example in Genesis 18:19, where the Lord says: 'I have chosen him in order that he might command his sons and his house after him to keep the way of the Lord, by practising righteousness and justice, and so the Lord will fulfil the promises which he made to Abraham. . . .'

The extent of this obedience is made clear a little later on, in chapter 22, when Abraham is called on to sacrifice his son Isaac, even though he knew perfectly well that Isaac represented the blessed seed (Genesis 22:17-18). We need hardly underline the importance of this subject, whose interest for the Christian is self-evident, but before thinking of Jesus in this context let us consider the role of sacrificial

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worship involved. First of all, in Genesis 12:7, the granting of the land is linked to the building of an altar. Same thing again in Genesis 13: 14-17, and again in Genesis 15:7. After that, it is the Covenant in general which takes the place of the altar and the sacrifice up to the moment where the identity of the two with each other is plainly revealed by the sacrifice of Isaac.

Let us remember also that this theme of obedience, which is tied to and manifested by the sacrifices of the Covenant, would later dominate not only the cultic life of Israel but also the preaching of the prophets, to whom would be given both the right and the responsibility to preserve the purity of the Jewish religion. It is astonishing to note that, apart from the Pentateuch, the name of Abraham occurs only 21 times in the whole of the Old Testament. Compare this with the gospels, where it occurs 34 times, or with Romans, Galatians and Hebrews (taken together) where it occurs 28 times, and you will see just how far the figure of Abraham faded out of post-Mosaic Jewish tradition. But who could begin to count the number of times some prophet or other denounces the disobedience of the people, where he more or less openly blames the periodic catastrophes which the people have to suffer on this disobedience, or where he criticises the corruption of the priests and the official cult?

The importance of this condition of obedience, which is so clearly stated in Genesis 18-19, grows as time goes on, whilst the figure of Abraham diminishes and even disappears behind that of Moses. And, above all, let us not forget that it is just this condition of obedience which will be recalled by Jesus in order to condemn the Jewish opposition to his own teaching, and which will be cited by the Apostle Paul as the main reason why Israel was subsequently abandoned in favour of the Gentiles.

We must, therefore, conclude that the obligation of obedience was not optional, or supplementary to the promises made to Abraham. On the contrary, obedience to the law of God manifested in a cult in which sacrifice was the main element, would provide the basis for the social and religious context in which the promises would be fulfilled.

### **The interpretations**

The importance of this last remark becomes clearer when we try to sort out which of the many interpretations which have appeared during the course of history is the best. First of all there are the exegetically-based interpretations, which scarcely go beyond the Old Testament text. By this I mean those interpretations of the promises which may have influenced either the process of redaction, either in its final form or at some intermediate stage, or the commentary

which we call the Prophets and Writings – the Old Testament apart from the Pentateuch.

Everyone knows that the liberal critics of the past century believed that propagandists of a later period – it scarcely matters whether they lived during the time of the monarchy, of the exile or even after the exile - placed their own political and theological ideas in the mouths of more or less mythical patriarchs who had supposedly lived in some remote and inaccessible past. Today, however, the research of specialists and archeological discoveries have shown almost conclusively that the Patriarchal Narratives have a historical basis which is not – and, more important, cannot be – the product of later propagandists. The formulae used to express the promises are typical of the period and had on the whole disappeared from common usage by the time the Davidic monarchy was established.

This more-or-less assured result of modern criticism has forced the vast majority of commentators to accept that the promises are primitive in origin, even though many would still say that there has been a certain redactional influence in the final formulation. For instance, one might say, as the American scholar Brevard Childs does, that the promises in their present form contain an eschatological element which was absent from the originals. According to this form of reasoning, Abraham would have understood that the promises were made to him and to his immediate family, but not necessarily beyond that. The fact that he moved from Ur to Canaan would guarantee, in Childs' mind, that the promises underwent subsequent modification as the nation realised that they had still not been fulfilled.

Childs outlines an argument which is interesting, but not particularly useful for contemporary interpretation. All we need retain from it is the eschatological emphasis which, by the time of Jesus, after innumerable defeats at the political level, had become the keystone of the messianic hope. Never during the political history of Israel can one say that the territorial limits defined in Genesis 13:14-15 were reached, because even at the time of David and Solomon there were still areas – Philistia, for example, the Phoenician coast and also a large part of Syria – which were not under the control of the king at Jerusalem. Moreover, the basic fragility of this crowned republic is well known. One might even say that the feeling of belonging to a single nation was not highly developed among the Hebrews at this period, and it was only the centralisation of the religious cult at Jerusalem, which was not finally achieved until the Samaritans were expelled from the nation after the return from the Exile, which produced this feeling of unity.

It is, therefore, clear that Jewish tradition did not regard the promises made to Abraham as having been fulfilled in the course of Israel's political development. One might even add that the idea of a

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future accomplishment of the promises became somewhat narrower as time went on, especially as regards the blessing on the nations. The cultural openness which was tolerated and even encouraged at the court of Solomon was already being condemned in the time of Ahab, and after the exile it virtually disappeared. New Testament Judaism is distinguished by its exclusiveness, which went even to the extent of snobbishness in its relations with the outside world, and the name 'Jew' had become scandalous among the Gentiles. The difficulties which St Paul encountered with his mission to the Gentiles would hardly have been conceivable had the Jews of the time really been conscious of their mission, and, in spite of the research of certain scholars who try to demonstrate the opposite, proselytism never played a role among the Jews comparable to the role it played and continues to play among both Christians and Muslims. One might say, as do certain modern apologists of Judaism, that the promise made to Abraham with respect to the nations is now being fulfilled by Judaism's daughter religions, but the involvement of the Jewish people itself in this is tiny, and this has been the case since the second generation of Christians.

In the time of Jesus, therefore, those who still believed in a future accomplishment of these promises tied to their belief to the coming of the Messiah. But we need to add that Jewish messianism was not really based exclusively on these promises, which are never mentioned in the Gospels, in spite of the discussions which Jesus had with the Pharisees on the subject of Abraham and their applicability after the events of the life of Jesus.

We shall return to this theme, but for the moment, let us just say that during the nineteen centuries of the Second Exile, the vast majority of Jews never thought of these promises as having a political dimension. 'Next year in Jerusalem' may have been the traditional Passover greeting, but almost nobody took it literally. The Jews had neither the convictions, nor the means, nor the sympathies of the world which they would have needed to succeed in such an enterprise. When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda went to live in Palestine in 1880, when he started speaking Hebrew to his children, when at last he succeeded in forming a small community of *aliyahs*, i.e., of Jews who had returned to Palestine, nobody paid him any attention. Palestine at that time was a virtually unknown country which had been impoverished by centuries of Ottoman rule, where the population was 99.9% Arabic-speaking (more or less equally divided between Muslims and Christians). A colony of idealistic Jews impressed nobody, and Ben-Yehuda's venture was thought of at the time as quite eccentric.

In reality though, his adventure might have found a certain response among a group of Evangelical Christians of the time, if only

they had been aware of it. Here we are speaking, of course, of the dispensationalists who followed the wave of apocalypticism, modified by a mildly Calvinistic theology, which followed on the French Revolution. We are not very aware of this nowadays, but the Revivals of the last century were part of a spiritual movement which, to some extent, was motivated by the fear of revolution. Of course, it would be wrong to deny their many positive achievements, but we must also recognise that in Restoration Europe there was a conservative climate which tended to fear any innovation. In the century of progress, one had to accept that the wave of technical and industrial development represented a force whose full potential was far from being exhausted or even understood. But, to many minds, it represented the destruction of those familiar values which had been accepted without question since the triumph of the Cross in the fourth century, and thus came to be regarded as a sign of the end of times.

This new apocalyptic awareness led some Christians to develop a new understanding of the Biblical prophecies. From medieval times it had been regarded as normal, in certain circles, to look at the events recorded in Daniel and in Revelation as prophecies of contemporary events. One could even say that millenarianism, before the time of Augustine, was the generally accepted eschatology of the Church as a whole. But this millenarianism saw little role for the Jewish people. The attitude of the majority of Christians is revealed by the 'Three Languages' controversy, in the ninth century. Faced with the missionary activity of Cyril and Methodius among the slaves, which included a translation of the Bible and the Liturgy into Slavonic, some Carolingian theologians reacted as follows.

According to them, the Bible recognised only three sacred languages, the languages inscribed on the cross of Christ. But Hebrew had fallen into disuse because of Jewish impiety; Greek had also been rejected because of the heresy of the eastern churches (to which Cyril and Methodius belonged, of course!). Only the Latin language continued to enjoy God's approval – a nonsense which continued to play a role in Roman Catholic circles until the 1960s!

A dispensationalism of this type had no room for contemporary Jews. It was only in Calvinist theology, the theology of the Covenant, that they were once more introduced into Christian eschatological thinking. The new dispensationalism of the last century thus regarded contemporary Jews as members of the Chosen People. The promises made to Abraham, not to speak of the other Old Testament promises, had not been fulfilled during the period of the old covenant, but the continued existence of the Jewish people in Christian times indicated that these promises had not been repealed. Some remarks of St Paul's in Romans 11, whose precise meaning is

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still a subject of debate, served as a pretext for the development of a complete eschatology, in which the Jewish people played a role of the first importance.

According to this eschatology, the Jewish people was destined to return to its ancestral homeland, understood as the territory delimited on Genesis 13: 14-15, where they would recreate the Davidic monarchy. After this was established, the Jews would undergo a mass conversion to Christ, the nations would rise up in arms against the restored Israel, and the crisis of the end times would culminate in the great battle of Armageddon, which was sited at Megiddo. Further details can be added to this picture, but they are extras to the main story and unimportant. The main thing is the general picture, with its own inherent theological presuppositions and methods of reasoning.

The main lines of this new dispensationalism soon began to penetrate Evangelical circles almost everywhere. Of course, there were extremists like John Nelson Darby, for example, but we must realise that the impact of these new ideas went far beyond the circles which gathered to form Plymouth Brethrenism. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, for example, were influenced by them, and the memoirs of people like Bismarck and Gladstone show that they, too, were interested in the subject. The end of the last century was a time when religious romanticism went hand in hand with the new industrial might of the Protestant countries of Europe and America – with results which are now obvious.

The coming to power of a generation of politicians influenced from childhood by Sunday School teaching is of the greatest importance for our understanding of the political development of Palestine in the early years of this century. The American writer, Barbara Tuchman, has documented the progress of Zionism in political circles in England in her book, *Bible and Sword* (New York, 1956). Speaking about David Lloyd George, she says that when he met the leader of the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, in December 1914, he realised that the names of places in Palestine were better known to him than the names of the battlefields of Flanders. Of Lord Balfour, the main architect of the Declaration of the British Government which, in 1917, permitted the Jews to establish a national homeland in Palestine, she adds that he acquired his interest in the Jewish people in childhood, when his mother read to him every night from the Bible. Apparently he was forced to recite the entire text aloud, chapter by chapter, before going to bed at night, and to cover the entire Bible in this way during the course of a single year.

This kind of education, which is reminiscent of the rabbinical schools, shaped an entire generation. Lord Shaftesbury, who is still honoured as a great social reformer, was also the president of an

Evangelical movement for the restoration of the Jewish State in Palestine, and the moral influence of his example extended to many circles which had little time or sympathy for his religious views. Given the fact that it was this milieu which, after 1917, became the instrument for achieving the aims of the Jewish Zionists, we can hardly ignore the role played by dispensationalist Evangelicalism in the history of events.

But Christian millenarianism could not have created a Jewish State in Palestine if it had not received the co-operation of Jews themselves. The nineteenth century had witnessed the emancipation of the Jews in most countries of Europe. They acquired all the rights of citizenship, and many of them came to occupy important positions in social circles. But the legal progress made by the Jews had no corresponding development in the minds of the majority of the population. The Dreyfus affair in France showed the Jews just how precarious their position really was, and in some places – Vienna, for instance – there were anti-Semitic riots long before 1914. We must never forget that it was in circles like these that the young Adolf Hitler learned his anti-Semitism! But in spite of all that, most official opinion accepted that this anti-Semitism was just an ultra-conservative reaction which would have to be fought by the forces of democracy. In France, for example, it was not the Jews but the forces of reaction – the monarchists, the ultra-Catholics, and so on – who were discredited by the Dreyfus affair, and the cultural life of Austria continued to produce its stream of Freuds and Kafkas.

The only country in which anti-Semitism could be called official government policy was Russia. There, the reaction which followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 quickly hit the Jewish population. This had always been strictly controlled, being limited to a Pale of Settlement on the Western Borders which was largely inhabited by Ukrainians, Poles, and even Germans – not by the Russians themselves. But, in spite of restrictions, they had managed to create, by their own efforts, a complete Russo-Jewish civilisation, and in some places, like Vilna, Kishinyov, Odessa and perhaps even Kiev, they formed the majority of the inhabitants.

The Tsarist persecutions, or *pogroms*, hit a population which was already divided over the question of religion. The Jews of Vilna had developed the mystical tendency which is known as Hasidim, and this soon became the receptacle for Jewish eschatological and messianic ideas. The Hasidism responded to earthly persecution by inward escape, a pattern of behaviour which would later lead them to reject Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Even now in Jerusalem there is a Hasidic community which does not accept the Israeli Government, and which is even said to have collaborated with the Arabs in 1948, to prevent the triumph of the Zionists!

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But the Hasidim were never more than a small minority of the Jews in Russia. Among the rest, it was a secularist ideology which was making the greatest progress towards the end of the last century. Exposed to Socialist ideas – let us remember that Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* was translated into Russian long before it appeared in English – these Jews looked for a political solution to their rather wretched condition. They organised themselves into a *Bund* (League) which became a revolutionary political party. But pure socialism rejected national and religious distinctions, and the *Bund* was not always made welcome in Russian revolutionary circles generally. Lenin struggled against it, and his promise of equality for all in an atheistic state attracted the support of some Jews – notably of Lev Bernstein, better known to us as Trotsky.

But the majority of Jews were not willing to abandon the concept of being a distinct nation. They knew that a large part of the contempt which they suffered was due to the fact that they were perceived to be a people without roots, without a national homeland they could call their own. In the climate of nineteenth-century nationalism, they were, therefore, seriously handicapped. The answer, however, was clear – it was necessary to find a place where they could settle as a nation-state, which would make them the equals of all the other peoples of the world. At a time when European domination stretched almost everywhere on the globe, and when mass emigration to virgin lands had become the social phenomenon of the century, this dream was not as fantastic as all that. Even the Bolsheviks eventually recognised it, and in their social programme of 1912 they granted to the Jews the right to establish a national homeland where their culture might develop freely. After the revolution they kept their promise by establishing, in 1934, a Jewish Autonomous Region in a distant corner of Soviet Manchuria, where the official language is Yiddish. The only problem is that the region contains almost no Jews – at last count they were barely 5% of the total population!

Most Russian Jews, however, had already begun to look in quite a different direction. In 1897, the Russian Jew, Theodor Herzl, founded the World Zionist Congress, whose aim was to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. General antipathy to Tsarist repression gave Herzl a sympathetic ear in many Western governments, and in 1905 Great Britain offered him Uganda as a potential colony. Herzl refused this offer, which would only have led to another South Africa, and said that only Palestine, which at that time was still under Turkish rule, could fulfil the conditions required for the foundation of a Jewish State. But why Palestine?

For the faithful reader of Scripture, the answer is obvious. But the Zionists were not religious – at most they were agnostics, and many



of them were openly atheistic. Their attachment to Palestine was therefore more romantic than theological, and their conception of Jewishness should be compared to ideas of Pan-Slavism. Pan-Germanism and even Pan-Celtism which were doing the rounds at the time. One might add that wherever this kind of racism has triumphed – in Germany, for example, or even in Ireland – the results have not been happy. It is true that before 1914 Zionism was not racist in the modern sense of that word, but the basis for the development of such a racism was already in place. One ought to compare the early Zionism not with Hitler, but with Patrick Pearse and the men of 1916 in Ireland, who later became the harbingers of a more widespread European Fascism in the 1930s.

Romantic, without practical consequences – that just about sums up Zionism as it was in 1914. As we now know, it was the entry of Turkey into the First World War, and its subsequent defeat, which created the conditions needed to fulfil the Zionist dream. And it was the alliance between the persecuted Jews of the Russian empire and the Biblical conscience of the leaders of the British Government which conquered the Holy Land, which produced the post-war situation in Palestine.

We cannot recount the entire history of the British mandate in Palestine, but we need to underline the fact that it was the period from 1918-1948 which prepared the way for all that has come since. The British had concluded an alliance with the Arabs in order to defeat the Turks, and had promised them their independence after the war. But neither Britain nor France wanted to see the creation of an Arab state which could serve as a model for the independence of their colonial territories in general. They tolerated Saudi Arabia which at that time was too remote and too poor to challenge European domination, but they carved up the rest of the Arab world into distinct territories, controlled in theory by the League of Nations, but in practice by the colonial power to whom the League's mandate was given.

In Palestine, the conflict between the idealism of the Balfour declaration and the demographic realities of the Near East produced a permanent crisis during the years 1930-45. After 1945, this crisis became a catastrophe. The revelation of Hitler's genocide created a wave of sympathy for the Jews among Western governments and peoples, which helped the Zionist cause. Then too, there was a mass of homeless Jews in Europe who needed somewhere to go. These people began to get to Palestine illegally, the government could not and often did not want to stop them, and intercommunal warfare broke out amid scenes of mounting chaos. On 14 May 1948, the British abandoned Palestine, and a new Jewish State was proclaimed in Tel Aviv. The next day it was at war with the Arabs.

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We know that the Jews won, but the land which they occupied covered only about two-thirds of British Palestine. In 1947 the Jewish population was still a minority in this territory, and it was only the expulsion of the Arabs, followed by a mass influx of Jews from other Arab countries which altered the balance. But even now, the proportion of Jews in Palestine is not above 67%, and it is probably more like 60% or even less. Moreover, the demographic trend favours the Arabs, which partly explains why Israel is so opposed to the repatriation of Arab refugees who fled abroad in 1948.

The new state enjoyed a honeymoon in the Western Press until the Six Day War in June 1967. Israeli propaganda spoke glowingly of the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland, of the transformation of the desert in the light of Biblical prophecy and of the rebirth of the Hebrew language. If anyone asked the question as to why the potentially rich Biblical land had become a desert, the answer was easy. It was the Arabs which made it like that after they destroyed the Graeco-Roman aqueducts and the irrigation systems, after they introduced the grazing of goats. The modern experience of decolonisation produced many unhappy memories which reinforced support for Israel. After Suez and Algeria, how could one not admire this European-style democracy which stood loyally by France and Great Britain in 1956, and which was to all intents and purposes an economic satellite of the United States?

The Six Day War was hailed as a miracle by the entire world. With the precision of a German blitzkrieg, the Israeli forces completely destroyed Arab armies which were several times larger than their own. They took the Old City of Jerusalem and the entire territory of Palestine. Fundamentalist Christians, as well as Zionists, were overjoyed. Now, they believed, the Biblical prophecies would be quickly fulfilled. One young zealot even decided to steal a march on events by setting fire to the Al Aqsa mosque, which together with the mosque of Omar, dominates the Temple Mount.

With greater historical distance we can now see that the events of 1967 signalled not the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham but a new period of political crisis which has endured to the present time. How, after all, can one justify Jewish occupation of territory which is 100% Arab? What should be done with those Jewish extremists who want to occupy the whole of Palestine by expelling, or even killing, the native inhabitants? How, in the final analysis, can the peace and security of Israel be guaranteed?

Up to 1967 it has to be said that the ideology of Israel was not religious. American fundamentalists were always embarrassed to realise that the Zionist leaders were practically atheists. The Old Testament, which gave the Jews their claim to Palestine, was considered to be a document of historic and cultural interest, no

more. But after 1967 the climate changed. World opinion, which until then had been pro-Jewish, started to have some understanding of the plight of the Palestinians. The occupation of the West Bank led to injustices, and even atrocities. Palestinian terrorism, as well as the rise in the price of oil, changed the political atmosphere. Egypt's partial victory in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 destroyed the myth of the invincibility of Israeli arms.

Faced with a new situation, the Israelis started to change. The immigration of Sephardi Jews from Arab countries added a more conservative element to the population, one which was religious and near-eastern in its thinking. Religion, which in the final analysis had been the only real justification for the occupation of Palestine in the first place, began to play an ever-increasing part in social life. The Law of Moses, interpreted and updated by the rabbis, more and more became the rule of everyday life. Israel thus became an ideologically Jewish State for the first time, with the result that freedom of worship for other religious groups was called into question and evangelism, for example, was declared illegal. At the same time, attitudes towards the Arabs hardened considerably. At the present time, even Christian fundamentalists are starting to ask themselves what the fate of this Jewish State will eventually be, and the future seems almost as uncertain as it did 40 years ago. The United States continues to support Israel, but for how much longer? And if this support should cease, what would happen to the Zionist state then?

### **The New Testament**

The Christian who wants to remain faithful to Biblical teaching must therefore ask himself certain fundamental questions about the place of Israel in the modern world. Can we really accept that this state represents the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham? I think our answer has to be NO, not only because we are not in favour of certain Israeli policies – that does not matter – but because the New Testament teaches us something else. It is remarkable, in fact, to what extent dispensationalists rely on certain Old Testament texts, and on Revelation, but more or less ignore the very clear teaching of the apostle Paul. Let us take a closer look at that teaching, which is found in Galatians 3-4 and in Romans 2-4 and 9-11. How did St Paul understand the promises made to Abraham?

First, he thought that the story of Abraham offers us a typological lesson. The two wives and their children are two Covenants, the covenant of law and flesh, and the covenant according to the promise and the Spirit. Paul does not mention that the Ishmaelites were identified with the Arabs (or with Muslims in general), although this identification was later to become the rule for

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Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. For him, the Ishmaelites were the Jews of his own time, who were preaching slavery to the law of Moses. In contrast to this, the sons of the promise and the brothers of Isaac are those who are justified by faith. This is what he says in Galatians 3:8: 'Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by their faith and announced the Good News beforehand to Abraham: All the nations will be blessed in you!, so that those who believe are blessed together with Abraham, who believed', and again, he says in Galatians 3:13-14: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us . . . so that the blessing of Abraham might be fulfilled towards the Gentiles in Jesus Christ.'

The centrality of Jesus is reinforced again in the following verses (Galatians 3:16): 'Now the promises were made to Abraham and his seed. It does not say, and to his seeds, as if there were many, but it refers to a single one, and to your seed, that is, to Christ.' A Judaism which is defined in terms of the law makes no sense any more – the function of the law has come to an end; the distinction between Jews and Gentiles has been abolished, Paul concludes in Galatians 3:29: 'If you belong to Christ you are the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise.'

It is clear that the main problem in all this discussion is the question of the right to share in the inheritance of Abraham. It is not just that Jews according to the flesh will inherit the promises, including the promise of land, and that Christians according to the spirit will inherit the same promises in another way – a heavenly kingdom instead of a Palestianian Holy Land. No! Paul does not agree that there are two types of covenant which are equally valid. If there really are two covenants, it is only because one of them is *false*. The fact that he places his emphasis on the salvation of the heathen by Christ does not mean that he is somehow excluding the Jews from this privilege. On the contrary, the Jew who follows the law is only following the schoolmaster who will lead him to Christ, so that he, too, may be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). If the Jew has some special status, it is only because he has had the privilege of hearing the Gospel in advance – to the Jew first – but his refusal to accept this Gospel makes him liable to an even greater condemnation. The Jew who does not accept the revelation of Jesus Christ is rejected by God because, in fact, he is not a son of Abraham by faith.

In saying this, Paul is only following the teaching of Jesus himself. Let us not forget that it was this same question – the right to the inheritance of Abraham – which divided Jesus and the Pharisees (John 8:39, 44): 'Jesus said to them: If you were the children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham . . . your father is the devil, and you want to do the works of your father.'

I think that it is clear from the texts that the Jewish people, apart from Christ, have no special right to the promises made to Abraham. It is surprising how, and to what extent, dispensationalist Biblical interpretation never considers the role of Jesus with regard to the Chosen People. The fulfilment of the promises in him, and their transformation into spiritual realities seems to escape their notice entirely. The marriage of convenience between them and the Zionists is thus due to the fact that it is the Christian fundamentalists who have betrayed the teaching of the New Testament by relying on certain texts of the Old Testament and interpreting them as if Christ had never existed.

The only New Testament text – apart from Revelation, of course – which they use, because it seems to fit their requirements, is the discussion of the fate of the Jews in Romans 9-11, and especially in chapter 11. Let us recall that the heart of this discussion takes us back to the principles which Paul had already expounded to the Galatians. For example, Romans 10:4: 'Christ is the end of the law, for the justification of all those who believe. there is no exception for Jews.' Romans 10-12: 'There is no difference, in fact, between the Jew and the Gentile, because they all have the same Lord, who is rich towards all those who call upon him.' Paul does not envisage any other type of salvation, or any fulfilment of the promises apart from the one which is offered to the Gentiles as well.

All that he seems to be prepared to recognise is that the rejection of the Jews is not final, that God has not yet said the last word on them. To make himself better understood, Paul quotes the example of the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Romans 11:4). He insists that 'in the present age there is a remnant, according to the election of grace' (Romans 11:5), and that 'if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again to their own olive tree' (Romans 11:23-4). For the moment, though, and until the ingathering of the Gentiles, a part of Israel has been hardened, but even this part is beloved by God for their fathers' sakes, because God does not go back on his gifts and his calling (Romans 11:25-29). At the end of time, says Paul, quoting Isaiah 59:20-1: 'the Deliverer will come from Zion and will turn away the impieties of Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'

This Deliverer is, of course, none other than Jesus Christ and his work among the Jews will be the same as it is among the Gentiles; his covenant will be the same covenant sealed with his blood. When Paul says in Romans 11:26 that all Israel will be saved, he means that the Jews according to the flesh and the believing Gentiles will share a common salvation, a common destiny in Jesus Christ.

The return to an earthly Zion, the reconstruction of the Temple, the re-establishment of the Old Testament state – all this has no

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meaning any more. Christians who think like that are nearer to Seventh Day Adventists and to Jehovah's Witnesses – two sects which do not accept that the law has been fulfilled in Christ – than they are to Biblical, and especially Pauline orthodoxy. The Evangelical Christian above all has no mandate to favour the Israelis against the Arabs on account of the Israelites of the Old Testament. It is not now the flesh but faith which makes us children of Abraham and heirs of his promises, whether we are Jews, Arabs, Europeans or whatever it may be.

# THE OLD TESTAMENT IN ITS ANCIENT WORLD: ASPECTS OF PROPHETIC WRITINGS<sup>1</sup>

*The Finlayson Lecture for 1988*

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Anyone who attends a service in a synagogue will notice the scrolls from which the lessons are read. They contrast sharply in their number and cumbersome form with the normal lectern Bible, however heavy. So accustomed are modern readers to books with pages, to a single volume Bible readily manipulated, that it is easy to forget no biblical character could ever have held the whole Bible in one hand. Indeed, the oldest single volume Bibles known to us are the great codices of the mid-fourth century, the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Taking the codex instead of the scroll as a vehicle for works of literature was apparently a Christian innovation, or at least a novelty which early Christians adopted, and is a move which has interesting implications for the study of Gospel origins.<sup>2</sup> Any New Testament person who wanted to read the whole of the Old Testament would have had an armful of scrolls. Their size and appearance is indicated by the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest biblical manuscripts in Hebrew available to us. The longest are the Temple Scroll and the Isaiah A Scroll, 28.7 feet/ 8.75m. and 24 feet/7.34m. respectively, made of nineteen and of ten leather sheets sewn together. The scroll retained its place for some time in pagan circles, and religious conservatism maintains it in Judaism. That continuing tradition means the scroll as a form of book has a history of five thousand years. The oldest examples are two papyrus scrolls found in an Egyptian tomb of the First Dynasty at Saqqara. They were put in the tomb about 2900 B.C. for the owner's use in the next world, so, to the Egyptologists' regret, they are blank!<sup>3</sup> Between those Egyptian specimens and the Old Testament scrolls of the Gospel period stretches the whole of

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1 Delivered at the 30th anniversary conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, in Crieff, Scotland, April 13, 1988.

2 See C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*, London, 1983; the steps from wax-tablets to folded leaves of parchment or papyrus as note-books, and from note-books containing words and works of Jesus to Gospels in codices deserve further explanation.

3 W. B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, Harmondsworth, 1961, 235 and pl. 47.

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the time in which the Hebrew scriptures were formed. Lacking any Hebrew manuscripts, what can other sources reveal about book forms of the Monarchy and later? In Egypt while short or temporary notes and school exercises were written on potsherds or flakes of stone, papyrus scrolls were the normal writing material for any text of length or importance that needed to be preserved. Leather scrolls served for taking notes in law-courts, for diaries of military campaigns, or for daily accounts. After the information had been transcribed at a central office, the ink could be sponged off and the leather used again. Since Egyptian influence was strong in Canaan, and Egyptian administrators there used their native writing system, papyrus became the common writing material. It was on papyrus, I am convinced, that the earliest forms of the alphabet were written, by scribes trained in Egyptian schools.<sup>4</sup> Papyrus, with the alphabet, outlasted the influences of Egyptian and Babylonian scripts, to be available to the Israelites when they settled in Caanan.

The evidence that papyrus documents were current in Israel and Judah is now incontrovertible. Although only one example has actually survived, a scrap from a cave near the Dead Sea, scores of clay bullae which once sealed official or legal deeds have come to light in Samaria, Jerusalem, Lachish, and other sites. On their fronts they bear the impressions of seals, many with Hebrew legends, on their backs the imprints of papyrus fibres. It is the damp soil of Palestine that has robbed us of the manuscripts themselves; examples from Egypt, of a later date, illustrate what is lost. These sealings were attached to deeds of sale like Jeremiah's (Jer. 32:10f.) or marriage and divorce (cf. Deut 24.1ff.), and so forth. They are witnesses, therefore, for documents of that sort, but not for written literature. Indeed, some scholars have claimed that writing was a specialist activity in Israel for the practical matters of administration and business, very little used for recording literature. Hebrew texts unearthed at Lachish, Samaria and elsewhere are contrasted with the tablets from Ugarit. Whereas the Hebrew are solely mundane clerical records and notes, Ugarit's archives include the famous myths and legends and other literary compositions. Oral tradition, it is concluded, preserved prophetic oracles and much else in Israel. The moment of writing came, it is argued, when a culture was under threat; a time of national crisis precipitated the committal to writing of material preserved orally. So far as the Old Testament is concerned, those moments were in the third quarter of the eighth century B.C. for Israel (before the Assyrians took Samaria), and at

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<sup>4</sup> A. R. Millard, 'The Infancy of the alphabet', *World Archeology* 17 (1986), pp. 390-98.



the end of the seventh century B.C. for Judah, as the Babylonians threatened Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

The view outlined is an extreme one which finds little favour today, although echoes of it linger.<sup>6</sup> Examination of the uses of writing elsewhere in the ancient Near East, and of the reasons for the survival and recovery of ancient documents, makes it clear that the absence of early Hebrew literary manuscripts is entirely accidental. Admittedly, where extensive collections of texts are discovered, as at Ugarit, they usually belong to the closing phases of occupation, so seeming to confirm the argument for committal to writing at moments of crisis. The phenomenon should not be interpreted in this way, however, for it is part of an archaeological commonplace that the majority of all finds belong to the final years of periods of occupation. The ancients, like us, threw out their refuse and superseded documents. Scribes were copying literature throughout the course of the urban cultures of the second and first millennia B.C., often as part of their education. There is no reason for supposing this was not also true in Israel and Judah. There is no indication at all that oral traditions were suddenly put into more permanent form when their bearers, or others, realized their society was in danger. In fact, a remarkable discovery in the Jordan valley provides an example of the sort of tale which oral tradition might preserve actually being written down. Lying face downwards on the floor of a building, perhaps a shrine, at Tell Deir 'Alla, Dutch archaeologists found the plaster fallen from a wall. When they lifted the fragments, they saw there was writing painted on the face. Painstaking treatment and reconstruction produced a panel bearing a column of writing. The letters are Aramaic and the language a local dialect. What can be read is a narrative about the prophet. Balaam son of Beor and a vision of doom the gods gave him. Large areas of damage prevent us from establishing a reliable, continuous text. Nevertheless, here is a sort of prophecy written on a wall about 700 B.C. The physical appearance is noteworthy, for it can be reasonably assumed to copy a column from a scroll. Here, then, is an illustration of part of a book from the age of Isaiah.<sup>7</sup>

Allowing that the Israelites could have written books, the question may be asked, Would they have been likely to do so?

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<sup>5</sup> E. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition*, London, 1954, 24f, 17f, 60f.

<sup>6</sup> See P. R. Ackroyd in D. A. Knight, ed., *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, London, 1977, p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic texts from Deir 'Alla*, Leiden, 1976; cf. A. Caquot, A. Lemaire, *Syria* 54, 1977, pp. 189-208; J. C. Greenfield, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 25, 1980, pp. 284-52; A. Lemaire in A. Biran, ed., *Biblical Archeology today*, Jerusalem, 1985, pp. 313-25.

Surveying the texts from other countries where chronicles, treaties, hymns and prayers, proverbs, myths and legends, magic spells, itineraries were all put into writing may predispose us to answer 'Yes'. The reasons for writing these various compositions may have differed, for one category they can be followed, and offer a profitable comparison with Hebrew counterparts. This is reports of prophecies. Several letters found in the ruined palace at Mari on the mid-Euphrates are reports to King Zimri-Lim (c.1780-57 B.C.) from officials in others towns. They contain messages the gods communicated to various people in dreams or ecstatic trances. Most of them are short instructions or requirements of the king about royal policies or temple affairs. Some have threats should the king not comply with the requests. The following translation illustrates the style: 'Say to my lord: 'This is the message of Shibtu your maid servant, "In the temple of Annunitum in the city, Akhatum, servant of Dagan-malik, went into a trance. He said thus, 'Zimri-Lim, even though you have neglected me, I shall embrace you. I shall give your enemies into your power, and I shall seize the men of Sharrakiya and bring them together for the destruction of Belet-ekallim'. On the day after, Akhum the priest brought this report to me... and I have written to my lord. . . ' ".<sup>8</sup>

The contents of this and similar letters now figure regularly in discussions of Hebrew prophecy. Doubts may be voiced about some of the comparisons made, and deductions drawn for the history of Hebrew prophecy, since the first example was published in 1948. Here we would stress the fact of the officials or royal dependents, stationed away from Mari, recording the inspired words in writing and sending them to their master. In the palace in the capital the clerks filed them with other letters of all kinds, and the sack of the palace shortly after preserved them for the twentieth century A.D. Had the palace continued to function as the centre of the kingdom for another century or more, it may be that these messages would have been discarded, having served their purpose. There is no hint that they were collected into a series or book of oracles.

A millennium later more prophecies were written in cuneiform and stored in a palace, this time in the Assyrian archives at Nineveh. (Records of oracles delivered during the intervening centuries are not known.) Again, several elements can be said to be common to these and to biblical oracles. Standard books on prophecy call attention especially to the deity's re-assuring 'Fear not', to the allusions to past blessings, and to the promises of future aid, which are also integral elements of the 'salvation oracles' (e.g. Is. 41:8-13). Some of the

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See H. B. Huffmon, 'Prophecy in the Mari Letters', *The Biblical Archaeologist* 31, 1968, pp. 101-24.

Nineveh texts reproach or reprimand the king and his court for lack of faith in the divinity, or for failing to obey a previous oracle.

"Esarhaddon, king of the lands, fear not!... I am the great lady, I am Ishtar of Arbela who has destroyed your enemies before you. What orders which I have given to you could you not rely upon? I am Ashtar of Arbela, I shall flay your enemies and give them to you. I am Ashtar of Arbela, I shall go in front of you and behind you. Fear not!..." From the mouth of Ishtar-la-tashiat, woman of Arbela!'

These Assyrian oracles are also pertinent to any discussion about recording and preserving inspired sayings. They were delivered by men and women from Arbela (modern Erbil in eastern Iraq) and other places in Assyria, in the name of Ishtar or Arbela, a leading goddess of the Assyrian royal pantheon, probably in her temple in Arbela. Two of the women were temple personnel, the other speakers are described only by their names and their home towns. All the messages concern the king and state affairs, that being the reason, we may assume, for reporting them to Nineveh.

The tablets bearing these reports are of two types. On the first a single oracle is entered. Only two tablets like this have been identified, one of 25 lines and one of 17, each incomplete. They appear to be the accounts sent by those who heard the oracles, for the longer one is written in the fashion of reports submitted to the king by astrologers throughout Assyria, while the shorter is rather roughly inscribed on clay of coarse texture, perhaps despatched in haste from Arbela.<sup>9</sup> The second type of tablet, of which three survive, collects several oracles, separating each from its neighbour with a ruled line, and in two of the three examples, documenting each prophecy 'from the mouth of x from town y.'<sup>10</sup> Here the clerks of the palace, or possibly at Arbela, have entered the individual sayings on larger tablets probably for easier handling, in the way their training taught them to gather separate yet related items together. Too little survives for any principle of collection to appear except that all utterances originate with Ishtar of Arbela and concern the king. Two were spoken by the same man, but were included in separate tablets. Some oracles occupy fifty lines or more, a few are much briefer, and one has only two lines.

' "I am rejoicing over Esarhaddon, my king; Arbela is rejoicing." From the mouth of Rimute-allate woman of Darahuya a town among the mountains.' We may suppose the words were copied on to these

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<sup>9</sup> An old translation of the first was given by R. H. Pfeiffer in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, NJ, p. 451.

<sup>10</sup> R. D. Biggs in J. B. Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 3rd ed., 1969, p. 605.

large tablets from smaller ones, each carrying a single oracle, in chronological order, or after a number had accumulated.

Relationship to the king determined the place of the Assyrian prophecies on the book-shelves of palaces in Nineveh. Arbela, modern Erbil, has not been excavated, so no records from the city itself are accessible. Oracles about local affairs addressed to the governor or the priests of the temple may have been written and stored there. Whether that were the case or not, what we have from Nineveh illustrates the writing of oracles for transmission to the kings, as the words of Amos were sent by Amaziah the priest of Bethel to Jeroboam II, king of Israel, when the prophet spoke against him (Amos 7:10,11). The Assyrian texts illustrate, in addition, the collecting of oracles into 'books', with care to preserve the identity of each speaker, even when the oracle was no more than a few words. Different though these are from the Hebrew books in naming several 'authors', they share the concept of keeping the inspired words safe for future reference, to verify the fulfilment of promises or threats and observe the past behaviour of the deity.

Written down, the prophecies could be preserved and copied for the author's contemporaries and successors to read. There is evidence for a widespread awareness of writing in seventh century Judah, at least. Other evidence suggests that oracular sayings were carefully distinguished from later interpretations or re-applications.<sup>11</sup>

The physical form of biblical books in the fifth century B.C., the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, can be judged from the Aramaic papyri found at Elephantine by Aswan in Egypt. Together with the famous letters and deeds there were recovered large parts of two papyrus scrolls containing works of literature. One is a version of Darius I's triumphal inscription better known from the Rock of Behistun in Persia. It had eleven columns of writing with seventeen or eighteen lines in each, spread over twenty-four sheets of papyrus, making a scroll about 8.2 feet or 2.5 metres long. The other scroll is a copy of the Story of Ahiqar, a story incorporated into the apocryphal book of Tobit. Fifteen columns remain, filling eleven sheets, but the amount missing is uncertain. These papyri from Egypt happen to preserve the oldest West Semitic book scrolls yet retrieved from the Near East. Both are apparently copies from older exemplars. On the one hand, errors can be detected in the copyists' work, on the other, remarkable accuracy can be traced in the writing of foreign names, a feature also evident in the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup>

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11 See further discussion in my study 'La prophétie et l'écriture: Israël, Aram., Assyria', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 202, 1985, pp. 143-54.

12 See 'In praise of ancient scribes', *The Biblical Archaeologist* 45, 1982, pp. 143-54.

The prophetic vocation had, of course, an immediate application to social, moral, and religious affairs as well as to government and politics. In dismal succession, the Old Testament prophets condemned their fellow-countrymen for their faithlessness. Some of God's spokesmen, like Elijah, combatted outright paganism, the majority faced the compromises of those who, recognizing the Lord as their national God, worshipped less demanding powers and indulged in all manner of magic and superstition in their daily lives. Recent discoveries bring physical and textual testimonies of the practices the prophets condemned. Excavators at Arad, in the Negev west of the Dead Sea, found the ruins of a fort built and occupied during the Monarchy. Particularly valuable are the ninety or so Hebrew ostraca unearthed in it, recording administrative and military matters. In one corner of the defended enclosure lay a shrine, which in its final form, centred on a niche approached by steps. At the top were two stone incense altars on either side, one with traces of burnt matter on it, possibly animal fat. In the niche itself was a smooth stone stele about a metre high, once painted red, while two other stelae had been hidden in the wall, presumably out of use. An altar of brick stood in the courtyard. What was the purpose of this shrine? Yohanan Aharoni, the excavator, had no doubt it was 'a Yahwistic-Israelite sanctuary', and he believed it was slighted in the time of king Josiah by the building of a fortification wall across it.<sup>13</sup> Without a written dedication or clearly identifiable statue or cult object, this cannot be certain, but it does seem to be very plausible. Although from a stratum later than the time of the shrine's use, an ostracon from Arad mentions 'the house of the Lord'. In the shrine at Arad, therefore, may be seen one of the illicit installations the prophets condemned.

Although the Arad shrine gave no clue to the deity worshipped there, texts from other sites disclose the confusion which existed. Far to the south of Arad, a hill-top building was explored in 1975. Lying on the way from Kadesh-Barnea to Elat, it was probably an inn or caravanserai. Certainly different groups of people stopped there, for inscriptions were found on plaster fallen from the walls, written in Phoenician letters, and others painted on pottery and scratched on stone in Hebrew. A large stone basin weighing about 200 kg. has on it the words 'Belonging to Obadiah son of 'Adnah; may he be blessed by the Lord'. Here is a Hebrew dedication in apparently orthodox form, written in the eighth century B.C. Obadiah provided the basin, perhaps for communal use, and sought divine favour for his generosity. The Phoenician writing in black and red ink on the walls includes the phrase 'the Lord favoured', then in another place

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<sup>13</sup> For a convenient description see Y. Aharoni, 'Arad' in M. Avi-Yonah, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* I. Oxford, 1975.

references to God and to Ba'al. The worshippers of the Lord were joined in this place by worshippers of the pagan Ba'al. There is more. Two large storage jars had served those who came to this inn as scribbling pads; they are covered with graffiti. There are some crude and some skilful drawings and a number of different texts. Some of these scribbles are no more than the letters of the alphabet written in order, others are the opening greetings of a letter. These are the most startling, for they read 'So and so said to so and so may you be blessed by the Lord who guards us' (or perhaps the 'Lord of Samaria') "and by his Asherah". The Asherah is known from the Old Testament as something forbidden to orthodox Israelites. Whether this graffito names it as the shrine of the Lord, an emblem, or as his consort is not clear. What is beyond doubt is the coupling with the Lord of an unorthodox entity.<sup>14</sup> Now it might be thought that in so remote a place where travellers met, such compromise might naturally occur, and be reckoned marginal to the real kingdoms of Israel and Judah. That would be to misrepresent the situation. In a rock-cut tomb near Hebron another Hebrew graffito was found, scratched into the limestone. Although it is hard to read, recent studies agree in seeing the same word 'his Asherah' in the text.<sup>15</sup> From these casual writings comes the first specific evidence for the beliefs the prophets fought.

The witness of an inn and a tomb is too little to tell the extent of reverence for the Asherah. A different class of evidence, taken by itself, would suggest most people in two kingdoms were loyal to the Mosaic faith. This is the evidence of personal names. Over two hundred Hebrew ostraca have been published and almost all the names that are built with divine elements have 'el or a form of the divine name (Yah, Yaw, Yahu). Only five or six names in the ostraca from the palace in Samaria have the element of Ba'al.<sup>16</sup> The same situation holds for the hundreds of Hebrew seals extant either on the stones themselves or on clay bullae. Names beginning or ending with a form of the divine name are numerous. A name such as Ba'alhanan, 'Ba'al is gracious', is very rare.<sup>17</sup> Hebrew seals are not unique in this respect.

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- 14 Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud. A Religious Centre from the time of the Judaeon Monarchy on the Border of Sinai*, Israel Museum Catalogue 175, Jerusalem, 1978, and J. Naveh; 'Graffiti and dedications', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 235, 1979, pp. 27-30.
- 15 A. Lemaire, 'Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Quom at l'asherad de YHWH', *Revue biblique* 84, 1977, pp. 595-608.
- 16 A. Lemaire, *Inscriptions hebraïques. I, Les ostraca*, Paris, 1977, lists the names. See also J> H. Tizay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods. Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions*, Atlanta, 1986.
- 17 See P. Bordreuil, *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-semitiques inscrits*, Paris, 1987, no. 50.

Seals from Ammon and Moab, though fewer in number, display a comparable concentration on the respective national deities Milkom and Chemosh to the virtual exclusion of others, except El. (Hebrew seals of the exilic period occasionally include Babylonian names, just as an Ammonite one includes an Assyrian name.<sup>18</sup>) Surely the onomastica demonstrate national fashions rather than personal religious devotion. It was proper to recognize the patron divinity of the people in the names given to children without implying single-hearted loyalty to that god. This was the cloak of respectability, the hypocrisy to which many oracles are directed.

Less specific but equally physical signs of superstition are uncovered on most sites of the Iron Age in Palestine. These are terracotta figurines. While it is possible the potters made them as children's toys, some are certainly fertility figurines. Placed by the bed, they might, one can imagine, be expected to induce conception or safe delivery. In a society where raising many children was every man's principle objective, and was a sign of God's blessing, it is easy to see how women would turn to any small superstition with might aid them. In addition, the physical risks of childbirth were great, so a little magic to allay fear could appear a harmless help. Clear written references to these things are not known in Hebrew, unless they be the teraphim set beside David's bed to show his illness (I Sam. 19:13).

One of the most remarkable discoveries relating to this theme was made about ten years ago, during excavations of a series of tombs on the edge of the Valley of Hinnom. These tombs had been cut and burials made in them about 600 B.C., the time of Jeremiah. At various times after that other burials were made disturbing the original ones and destroying parts of the tombs. In one tomb the deposit of bones and funerary offerings was preserved under fallen rock; in all the other tombs the deposits had been looted long ago. Amongst the bones of more than ninety people, over 250 pottery vessels, a number of arrowheads and other objects were several pieces of gold and silver jewellery. They illustrate the wealth of some citizens of Jerusalem at that time. Two silver objects caused particular difficulties for the technicians in the Israel Museum laboratory. They looked like tiny silver cylinders, in fact they were sheets of metal rolled up. Eventually they were unrolled. One is 9.7cms. long and 2.7 cms. wide, the other 3.9. cms/long and 1.1. cms wide. On the inner face of each are finely engraved lines of ancient Hebrew writing. Despite damage and cracking, an experienced artist was able to draw enough of the letters of each sheet to see that they

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18 *Ibid.*, nos. 54, 76.

contained forms of the so-called Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:23-26. On the smaller one can be read 'The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and set peace for you'. The silver sheets were evidently used as amulets, and recall Isaiah's list of female fripperies which he warned would be snatched away 'earrings and bracelets... headdresses and ankle chains... perfume bottles and charms, signet rings and nose rings' (Is.3:18-21). These charms are noteworthy, therefore, as relics of Judean superstition. They may be seen, too, as physical expressions of the concept mentioned in Proverbs where the parents' teachings are 'a garland to grace your head, a chain to adorn your neck' (Pr.1:6, cf 6:21). Possibly they are in line with the interpretation of verses in Exodus and Deuteronomy which led to the production of phylacteries (Ex. 13:9; Dt. 6:8).<sup>19</sup>

The Hebrew prophets castigate their fellows for their religious and their moral failures, calling them to repentance. Continuing in their sinful ways would lead, they warned, to disasters, to conquest, and to exile. Eventually the point arrived when these punishments became inescapable. History declares their fulfilment in the fall of Samaria and then the fall of Jerusalem. Deportation or exile was the ultimate threat, removal from the fatherland to resettlement in distant places. The towns to which the Assyrians took the men of Samaria are listed in 2 Kings 17:6, and the origins of those who replace them are also given (2 Ki. 17:24). Exile may have meant forced labour for some, straining in gangs to haul stone blocks for the Assyrian palaces, as the reliefs illustrate. For others the promises of the Rab-shakeh were true, 'I will take you away to a land... of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey' (2 Ki. 18:32). Assyrian policy was to transport rebellious peoples to other regions within her empire. Once resettled, the deportees suffered a single restriction: they were not permitted to return home. Exile was not a new idea to Israelites of the eighth century B.C., it was a common threat to all small states. Certainly it was not a novelty when Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin and the people of Judah to Babylon in 597 and 586 B.C. This is a fact that many modern writers fail to recognize, they give the impression that exile only entered Jewish consciousness when it happened. As Kenneth Kitchen demonstrated some years ago, deportation and exile were already old military practices in the days of Moses.<sup>20</sup> This deserves to be re-emphasized.

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19 The only description yet available is G. Barkay, *Ketef Hinnom. A Treasure facing Jerusalem's walls*, Israel Museum Catalogue 274, Jerusalem, 1986.

20 'Ancient Orient, "Deuteronomism", and the Old Testament' in J. B. Payne, ed., *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, Waco, Texas, 1970, pp. 1-24, especially pp. 5-7.



Their oracles of doom have given the Hebrew prophets a sombre reputation, yet their books assert that many of them saw beyond catastrophe to some sort of reconstitution for the people of God. Those prophecies of restoration are stumbling-blocks to many scholars. They cannot conceive of a man like Amos, who constantly forecast punishment, envisaging that David's fallen tent would be rebuilt (Amos 9:11-15), so they excise the verses and attribute them to a later, insensitive editor. On the other hand, a few have tried to retain such verses as part of the prophet's original oracles, adducing a pattern of bad and good, woe and weal, which they discern in the Old Testament and in other ancient compositions. Certain Egyptian prophecies set in times of disaster look forward to an idyllic future or to the advent of a messiah-like king. In Babylonia an alternation between good kings and bad kings occurs in so-called 'prophetic' texts, although there is a lack of regularity in some of them. Woe and weal was not exclusively a prophetic pattern from the first. It is claimed it arose in the cult where the basic opposition of chaos to cosmos was celebrated. *Enuma elish*, the famous Babylonian creation poem exhibits this most clearly with the struggle and triumph of the god Marduk over Tiamat, the ocean monster; cosmos overcame chaos. The Bible and the ancient Near East shared the same pattern.<sup>21</sup> Evaluating the biblical pattern against its ancient context in this way is laudable, and when the result favours the unity of some prophetic works, it is welcome to all who view Scripture positively. To find modes of expression common to the Bible and other texts does not detract from the uniqueness of the biblical message, rather, it stresses the fact that Scripture is phrased in forms intelligible to its audience and not in a strange, incomprehensible manner, and so focuses attention on the message itself. However, the pattern observed is not wholly convincing when the texts are read carefully. All of them state or imply a larger scheme than woe and weal. They commence, from, or understand as a prior stage, a period of order, of weal, then comes the disorder, the woe, then a new order of weal. The ancient extra-biblical texts display this. *Enuma elish* certainly starts with everything calm, and the Egyptian prophecies regret the former era of peace. This, too, is the constant scheme of the Hebrew prophets: God established Israel through the covenant at Sinai so that all could be well - as sometimes it was - though in the days of the prophets decline had brought disaster near, yet after that the mercy of God would bring renewal.

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21 For an early statement of the pattern see H. Gressman, 'Foreign Influences in Hebrew Prophecy', *Journal of Theological Studies* 27, 1926, pp. 241-54; later references are gathered by G. W. Ahlstrom, 'Isaiah VI 13', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19, 1974, pp. 169-72, n. 2.

## ASPECTS OF PROPHETIC WRITINGS

The prophets had no monopoly on the pattern weal-woe-weal. It occurs in the histories of individuals (like David) and of the nation of Israel, and in fact permeates the whole of the Bible. Eden was the initial weal and the site where woe began; Calvary was where the end of woe commenced and the new weal was introduced which the close of the Apocalypse portrays in eternal flower. Here is the truth of the pattern dimly glimpsed by ancient pagans. Their gods acted on whims and were unreliable. Their will was rarely declared, and even then the multiplicity of divinatory techniques could bring the Babylonians no real assurance about the future. Gods might leave cities to the mercy of enemies as a punishment for a king's errors, yet equally they might forsake their cities for no reason their worshippers could discover. How different was the God of Israel! He proved himself faithful and trustworthy in word and deed, and it is on that record that we stand in confidence today.

# COMMON GRACE AND ESCHATOLOGY\*

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## Introduction

Eschatology has to a great extent been ignored in the latter part of this century by mainstream evangelicals in Scotland. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, during the 20th century Reformed evangelicals have felt themselves caught between two opposing extremes when thinking of eschatology. There is the upper millstone of the revival of interest in eschatology as an important theme in theology generally. Continental theologians have taken this subject from the dusty cupboard of discarded theories and invested it with the greatest significance. This is perhaps best exemplified in Barth's oft quoted statement: 'If Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

However the men who have been involved in this revival of interest have been held at arms length by Scottish evangelicals for reasons other than their eschatology. Whilst endorsing the reawakened interest in Reformed theology we have been deeply suspicious of some of the forms which it has taken. As a result we have by and large tended to avoid involvement in such debate and have continued to plough our own furrow. With the strengthening of evangelical theology in Scotland we are thankfully beginning to recover confidence and are prepared to contribute to ongoing debate and to welcome insights from other theological streams.

Then there is the nether millstone of the fundamentalist concentration on differing interpretations of the *Revelation of John* and other apocalyptic passages of Scripture which has led to so much millenarian fortune-telling and numerical sleight of hand, especially in the U.S.A. Such supposedly theological activity is essentially alien to Scottish evangelical thought. Given the incompatibility of the two main centres of eschatological involvement, it is hardly surprising that evangelicals in Britain and especially Scotland have by

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<sup>1</sup> K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, London, 6th ed., reprint 1975, p. 314.

\*This paper was given at the Conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, 1989

and large kept their heads down and tried to ignore the noises from the trenches on either side.

There is however another and more fundamental reason for our lack of involvement in eschatological debate which is caused by the very nature of the subject itself and the way it must be approached. Our methods of study, the categories we use and the thought processes involved are determined by the object of study. It is my contention that in Scottish evangelical theology we tend to bring to the study of eschatology ways of thought which are not fully compatible with the subject and as a consequence we fail to appreciate the significance of eschatology and of its relationships with other doctrines.

Like conservatives in every field evangelicals exhibit a tendency to approach any subject expecting to find clearly defined pathways to resolved conclusions; in our theology this is seen in our general adherence to various forms of federal Calvinism. There is an emphasis on system in our theology sadly lacking elsewhere in the U.K. Unfortunately however our emphasis on system has too often degenerated into a systematisation of the doctrines of the Church rather than having developed as an attempt to open up in coherent fashion the interrelationships within the content of revelation. As Otto Weber warns us; 'We must also bear in mind that every comprehensive system, by virtue of the "power of the system", can close our ears very easily to the Word which we are supposed to hear continually.'<sup>2</sup>

The price which we sometimes pay for this misplaced emphasis is the loss of appreciation of the tensions within revelation. Instead of attempting to iron out all the logical difficulties and tension which confront us we should heed Cornelius Van Til when he tells us that for the theologian:

To be faithful to the system of truth as found in Scripture one must not take one doctrine and deduce from it by means of syllogistic procedure what he thinks follows from it. One must gather together all the facts and all the teaching of Scripture and organise then as best he can, always mindful of the fact that such ordering is the ordering of the revelation of God, who is never fully comprehensible to man.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> O. Webber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, Grand Rapids, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Grand Rapids, 1969, p. 38.

### Eschatological Perspective

The Bible makes no pretence of providing us with some all-encompassing historico-theological scheme by which we are able to logically apportion each and every event its place within the temporal and supra-temporal outworking of the divine decrees. Throughout Scriptural revelation we are confronted by significant tensions, tensions which are never more clearly evident than when we consider eschatology. In exploring this area of revelation we are forced to confront the gap between that which we know we are and have in Christ and that which we know in our fallen existence. Calvin makes the following comments with regard to what is already reality in Christ:

In the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things (*admirabilis rerum conversio*) - the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.<sup>4</sup>

Thus all is already completed in Christ, in that crucial point of history all has been renewed and restored, the eschatological pivotal point has already occurred.

For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col.1:19,20)

At that moment all that was necessary was completed in the cry 'It is finished.' However we still await the visible renewal and restoration of all things. Until then we live with the tension between the goal already achieved in the cross and the destiny yet to be achieved on his return to inaugurate the perfected kingdom already complete in Christ. We who remain to live out our lives in the midst of this tension can find meaning within the historical only by reference to that which has already occurred in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There can be no history independent of him.

This existential tension is implicit in the teaching of Christ that the Kingdom of God is both present and future. The chief characteristic of eschatological thought is the underlying tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' This we know in our own experience: although we are justified and right with God at this moment we still live as saints and as sinners, none of us are

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4 J. Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 13:21.

## COMMON GRACE AND ESCHATOLOGY

consistently Christian. The new life in Christ is a present reality in the life of the believer (II Cor.4:10,11) but that new life is provisional and imperfect within our experience and is yet to be revealed (Rom.8:19; Col.3:3.) Our imputed righteousness is truly real, but not yet realized. We now see through a mirror dimly and await the day when we see face to face, our wrestling is with that which is both revealed and hidden. John expresses the tension between the now and the not yet thus:

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:2).

A genuine biblical eschatological vision accepts this tension and sees eschatology and history as one. Eschatology is not purely a concern with the end times or the final moments of history. Rather it is a concern with the dynamic of human existence and development, with that continuing cosmic rule of God involving both the judgement and the renewal of our human life within the created structures. Eschatology is concerned with that sovereign work of God which gives meaning and destiny to our history and which is moving, to his ends, at the very centre of human history here and now.

Jesus' radicalising of the Mosaic law results from this eschatological perspective.<sup>5</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount he commands us as though we had newly come from God's hand into a creation which did not know the fall, and he refuses to listen to our excuse that 'reality' is not like that. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus refuses to allow the fallen and distorted forms of this present age a decisive role in our decision making. Rather the Kingdom of God breaks in with its uncompromising demands that in *our* world we live in the midst of the tension between the claims of our age and those of the age to come as God recreates in the establishment of his Kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount does not contain mere rhetorical declamations designed to spur us on to yet greater efforts to attain purity in our worldly existence. Rather it is a crushing indictment of our secularity within this present age.

Already amongst the redeemed Jesus takes a standpoint which enables us to clearly see our condition in the light of the Kingdom which is here and is yet to come. The absolute demands of the Beatitudes find their dynamic in the hope they minister to us as our gaze is drawn from the far country in which we live and is directed homewards as we long for the completion of that which has already begun.

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<sup>5</sup> H. Thielike, *The Evangelical Faith*, Grand Rapids.

The failure to accept, welcome and explore the tension inherent in any doctrine and particularly within the field of eschatology has led to a diminution of our theology generally and especially when we approach the subject of common grace. If we are to discern the dynamic of human existence and progress within history we must search for that which encompasses the judgement and renewal of all of human life and history.

### **Murray on Common Grace**

However in Scotland, as elsewhere, in our determination to harmonise tensions within the received doctrines of the Church we have seen common grace as the solution to a particular problem within our formulations. By stressing total depravity and the sovereignty of God in election we posit an absolute spiritual dichotomy between the elect and the reprobate; and yet the good works of the reprobate cannot be denied; that they produce works of mercy and understanding, artifacts of beauty and wonder and also prosper in their business ventures is plainly seen. More, it is evident that God is good to the reprobate, enabling them to perform such works even in the midst of their rebellion against him. The reprobate, in common with the elect, also receive gifts and favour from God; the sun and rain of Matt. 5:45, which although not given indiscriminately, are effective in the lives of the righteous and unrighteous alike. The generally accepted solution to this difficulty is that God has a particular enabling but non-saving grace which he extends to all of creation, including those who are unregenerate. Thus it is by God's grace that the reprobate can bring forth good within God's creation and receive good gifts from God despite their rebellion against him. In this way the reprobate who are at enmity with God and dead in sin can nevertheless do relative good and assist progress within the flow of history without necessitating a revision of the doctrine of total depravity.

Utilising common grace as a possible solution to a problem in harmonising doctrines leads to a distortion of the whole question of the relation of unbelievers to God and the progress of history towards its end. That such an approach even hinders us in investigating the question of common grace is clearly seen in the work of Scottish theologian John Murray. Murray<sup>6</sup> begins by asking the common grace question in the form usually employed by Reformed theologians of the Princeton school. 'How is it that this sin-cursed world enjoys so much favour and kindness at the hand of

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<sup>6</sup> J. Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Edinburgh. 1977, pp.93-113

its holy and ever-blessed Creator?<sup>7</sup> This formulation sees the question of common grace as a one-sided problem focusing on the manner by which the 'heirs of hell enjoy so many good gifts at the hand of God'.<sup>8</sup> Murray's particular field of reference, common to English-speaking federal theologians,<sup>9</sup> causes him to focus on only one aspect of the common grace question, thus laying down a restricted field of enquiry which determines the conclusions to be reached before the journey begins. Murray fails to reckon with the considerable cultural, epistemological and eschatological implications of such a generalised operation of grace.

The methodological weakness of this approach is that it treats the common grace question as though there is an absolute, observable divergence between the elect and the reprobate already existing in time. However whilst salvation is eternal and absolute, within created time we experience grace as fallen creatures unable to receive the coherence and fullness of meaning. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling, groping individually towards that divergence which exists in supra-historical time and which shall be ours on the Last Day. The antithesis is not as clearly discernible as Augustine would have us believe, neither is it as clear as Kuyper wished to emphasize with the establishment of Christian political and cultural organisations in the Netherlands. Such activity leads socially and politically to the too easy identification of the causes of Christians with God's cause. The eschatological salvific divergence between regenerate and unregenerate is not the only factor that comes into play when discussing commonality or otherwise in man's relationship to God. Whilst there is radical epistemic divergence there remains ontological and metaphysical commonality between regenerate and unregenerate. Throughout his discussion Murray ignores this and operates as though the *eschaton* had already occurred, time was at an end, and the ultimate differentiation between elect and reprobate had already been finalised in actuality.

This approach has been utilised since Augustine at least. In *De Civitate Dei* Augustine interprets the antithesis brought about by regeneration by the Holy Spirit as pertaining to identifiable groups or communities within humanity.<sup>10</sup> He concretises these in history as

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

9 C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 2, pp. 654-675;  
L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 432-446;  
A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. 189-202.

10 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 15:1.



for example placing the Assyrian and Roman empires<sup>11</sup> on the one side, Israel<sup>12</sup> and the Church<sup>13</sup> on the other. However in the outworking of history black and white exist only in principle. New Testament thought patterns and naive experience suggest that there is ever an area of mystery with regard to groups and individuals. The unfolding of the history of the world towards the eschaton is the working out of the tensions of the antithesis. However the antithesis does not show itself in the clearly discernible manner indicated by Augustine and others.

The first area of operation of common grace acknowledged by Murray is that of restraint; restraint of man's sin, restraint of God's wrath, restraint of evil. Whilst there is adequate biblical evidence to allow us to speak of the restraint of that which mars creation and God's judgment of it, if we accept Murray's position we are led to the conclusion that without this restraint of common grace sin would run its full course and there would be chaos or annihilation. However, is the restraint of sin whilst we await the Second Coming to be understood only within a framework of common grace? By failing to explore the possibility of other understandings of restraint as stemming from the creational structures themselves Murray verges on creating a situation in which we must understand the creation as existing, not just with an autonomous motivating principle, that is sinful rebellion, but also with an autonomous ontological principle, that it exists independently of God except where He actively intervenes with saving grace or common grace. Such cosmological dualism opens the door to Gnosticism.

As well as the negative or preventative activity of supposed common grace Murray also discerns a positive aspect in the bestowal of good upon and within creation considered as a whole and upon individuals as part of that undifferentiated whole. Murray splits this into several areas.

- i) Creation itself is the recipient of divine bounty.
- ii) The unregenerate are recipients of divine favour. The house of Potiphar was blessed for Joseph's sake; idol worshippers have a witness of God's presence and goodness in the rain from heaven and the fruitful seasons (Acts 14:16,17).
- iii) The unregenerate perform good actions as a result of the moral law written in their hearts.

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11 *Ibid.*, 18:2.

12 *Ibid.*, 18:47.

13 *Ibid.*, 20:9.

iv) The unregenerate receive goodness through the administration of the gospel although they may not be saved by it.

v) Civil government is instituted for the purpose of restraining evil and promoting good in the body politic .

It is to be noted that there are other and clearly applicable sources of these goods. Those goods which Murray sees as a result of common grace are either inherently part of the structures of creation (i, iii and v), in which case we are more accurate if we attribute these undoubted influences of God to common law rather than common grace; or they are the product of saving grace and God's care of his Church overflowing to the temporal benefit of unbelievers, ii and iv.

The blessing received by unbelievers as a result of the activity of believers ii are more easily explained by the working of special grace in the lives of believers than of supposedly common grace in the lives of unbelievers. Concerning group iv Murray writes: 'The administration of the gospel results in the experience of the power and glory of the gospel.'<sup>14</sup> This is true, but rejection of that power and glory leads to the eternal condemnation of the unbeliever. Along with Scots theologians of an earlier age such as Durham, Gillespie and Rutherford<sup>15</sup> we question whether it is a blessing to men who yet reject the Son of God, that they have purifying influences of Christianity. The preaching of the gospel is a savour of life to the saved and a savour of death to the unsaved. Although upholding the usual federal understanding of common graces, at this point Charles Hodge is more consistent:

So the gospel and its ministers are the causes of life to some, and the death to others, and to all they are either the one or the other. The word of God is quick and powerful either to save or to destroy. It cannot be neutral. If it does not save, it destroys.<sup>16</sup>

Is it realistic to describe as grace that which destroys and leads to increased condemnation for the unbeliever? If we continue to term such action *grace* then we must reassess the whole question of the relationship of God to fallen humanity.

Similarly with the implications of common grace for our understanding of the general culture of the nations. If we hold that the artistic abilities of men and women are gifts of God's common grace as understood in the federal *schema* we would have to recognise the God-denying work of men and women in rebellion against God as being inspired by or founded upon grace. Thus the works which lead to the condemnation of these children made in the image of God are

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14 J. Murray, *ibid.*

15 J. Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1982.

16 C. Hodge, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, 2:1.

supposedly examples of God's graciousness. How gracious is a 'grace' which leads to eternal condemnation?

### Commonality

Commonness does exist as part of our being and creaturely existence. There is an historical correlativity of the universal and the particular. The gospel offer comes to the generality, to sinners differentiated in the mind of God as elect or reprobate, but prior to their acceptance or rejection regarded as part of the undifferentiated historic generality. Within history there is genuine variation in the relation of individuals to God because God's unvarying counsel lies behind history; but also, for the same reason, there is genuine significance in the measure of generality through which God leads each group to its particular destiny at the Last Day.

We cannot properly investigate the question of common grace if we persist in thinking in terms of clearly delineated absolutes and doing our theology as though we operated at present with a differentiation which will be clear only in supra-historical time, complete only at the *eschaton*. We do not do theology in a laboratory, it is the activity of the Church, the body of Christ present in the midst of fallen creation. All are either elect or reprobate and the differentiation will be apparent on the Last Day. However we live in the between times. Creation was good, very good, and man willfully destroyed that harmony; in a response purely of grace God sent his only begotten Son to be our Saviour, to reclaim man and creation by making atonement in his blood. We live within that work, in the times between his first and second coming, wrestling with the tensions inevitable for saints living in a fallen creation.

All humans, whether covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking, live and move and have their being commonly, and this raises basic questions with regard to our epistemology and to our understanding of creation. In what manner do believer and unbeliever have the 'facts' in common? Does common grace create a neutral domain in which believer and unbeliever can labour side by side to God's glory? We can approach this in several ways. Firstly we can proceed as from a neutral area of naive knowledge available to natural and regenerate man alike, from which can be constructed a common area of fact before the antithesis distorts understanding. Secondly we can conceive of the unity of knowledge as being based upon a shared rationality by which all men can interpret the facts of the environment correctly, up to a point. Both these approaches, whilst maintaining the antithesis, indicate an area of identity without differentiation, an area of commonness without qualification. There is another approach however; that which proceeds on the basis of all

## COMMON GRACE AND ESCHATOLOGY

facts, the environment and man's own constitution as a rational and moral being, as being revelational of God and thus all men unavoidably know God, and know themselves as God's creatures, no matter how they may try to suppress this knowledge.

The structures for creation within which the children of God continue to live remain valid despite the fall. The fundamental conditioning laws which make possible the existence of things, events, social structures etc., remain in force. These laws are the structuring framework outside of which it is inconceivable that anything could exist. The rebel against God can never totally deny God; he cannot flee from reason into unreason, from logos into chaos; he cannot release himself from the law of gravity; if he is cut he still bleeds. The structural laws forming creation remain, what has changed due to the entrance of sin is the reaction of humans to God, the way we encounter, develop and utilize the structures for creation; this has resulted in the alienation of creation itself from God. (Gen 3:17, 18.)

### **Christless Grace?**

English-speaking federal Calvinism's greatest failing with common grace and one which distorts its entire concept of the doctrine, is that in its exposition this has become a grace divorced from Christ, a restraint of sin and sustaining of fallen man and creation, a part of the movement towards the consummation, which makes little if any reference to the Saviour. By attributing common grace entirely to the Creator and conceiving of a grace apart from Christ there is effectively created a split between creation and redemption. This quasi-Thomistic viewpoint has serious repercussions. As already noted, creation exists only in relation to God and not autonomously; how then does God relate to his creation except through the Son whom he has sent into the world to redeem the world? Can we even contemplate a grace which is not mediated through the cross? Common grace is a meaningless concept without Christ as the Head of the reborn human race. Without him it could be present only in a temporal cosmos supposedly divorced from Christ; yet creation apart from Christ as its root has no existence.

The entirety of creation is revelational and points towards its fullness of meaning which lies in Christ Jesus. All things in heaven and earth find their meaning in their relation to Christ, he by, for and through whom creation was brought into existence, he who 'is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' (Col.1:17). The development of the world finds its fulfilment in Christ alone. In Revelation 5 we find a vision of God sitting on the throne and in his hand lies the book of God's eternal decrees. Who is found worthy to unseal the book, to effectuate God's decrees? None answer the call.

John weeps bitterly, if the book remains unopened then earthly life remains without meaning and purpose, the Church has no future, creation will perish and there will be nothing but judgement. However one of the elders points to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God in the midst of the throne. He has the power, he is worthy to open the book. As the Lamb takes the book from God's right hand the elders break out in hymns of joy, the angels and creatures present join in singing praise to God and to the Lamb. It is the Christ who effectuates the meaning and purpose of the entirety of created reality. None other can.

Does God have differing grounds for being merciful to men, or is Christ the only Mediator between God and men? God upholds the creation ordinances with a view to their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. We shall come no closer to an understanding of the common grace problem until we look at it in the light of God's redemptive work in Christ Jesus leading the world through historical time to its culmination when he comes again and makes all things new. If we *must* speak of common grace let us speak of it in terms of the provision of an area for the operation of special grace. Not as preparation for regeneration but as providing a domain within which the regenerate can work out in their earthly activity that redemption which they already experience. *We must reject any concept of grace which is not rooted in Christ.* Any operation of grace must be rooted in saving grace.

Two hundred and fifty years ago Jonathan Edwards taught that all history is preparation for the coming of Christ, either the Incarnation or the Second Advent.<sup>17</sup> Obviously we have forgotten this in the meantime to such an extent that Berkhof has to remind us that:

The twentieth-century Church of Christ is spiritually unable to stand against the rapid changes that takes place around her because she has not learned to view history from the perspective of the reign of Christ. For that reason she thinks of the events of her own time in entirely secular terms. She is overcome with fear in a worldly manner, and in a worldly manner she tries to free herself from fear. In this process God functions as no more than a beneficent stop-gap.<sup>18</sup>

### Creation

The conception of common grace usually held by English-speaking federal theologians is open to the further and related charge of being anthropocentric and failing to comprehend the fullness of God's work

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<sup>17</sup> J. Edwards, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1974, p.536.

<sup>18</sup> H. Berkhof, *Christ, the Meaning of History*, Richmond, 1966, p. 15.

of salvation. A reading of the Book of Psalms would indicate that creation in itself is something more than merely the stage upon which is played out the divine drama of man's salvation. The work of Christ is not only the salvation of the innumerable throng of the elect. The work of Christ is nothing less than the redemption of the entire creation from the power and effects of sin. This will be fulfilled when God ushers in the new heaven and the new earth. God's redemptive work has a cosmic dimension and he will not be satisfied until the entire universe has been cleansed of the effects of the fall.

This redemption (wrought by Christ)... acquires the significance of an all-inclusive divine drama, of a cosmic struggle, in which is involved not only man in his sin and lost condition, but in which are also related the heavens and the earth, angels and demons and the goal of which is to bring back the entire created cosmos under God's dominion and rule.<sup>19</sup>

In II Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 the word used to designate the newness of the new cosmos is not *neos* but *kaivos*. The word *neos* means new in time or origin, whereas *kaivos* means new in nature or in quality. The expression *oupavov kaivov kai kaivev* (a new heaven and a new earth, Rev. 21:1) means therefore, not the emergence of a cosmos utterly different from the present cosmos, but the emergence of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present universe. The expression 'restore everything' (Acts 3:21) *apokatastaseos pantov* suggests that the return of Christ will be followed by the restoration of all God's creation to its original perfection - thus pointing to a renewal or restoration of all that was marred by the fall rather than the creation of an entirely new universe.

All of history moves towards this goal: the new heaven and the new earth. The ultimate meaning of transcendent purpose is centred in an expected future in Christ. The goal of Christ's redemption is the renewal of the entire cosmos. The fall affected not only man but brought low the entire creation (Gen. 3:17-18), redemption from sin must involve the totality of creation (Rom. 8:19-23). Calvin speaks of the 'sacramental' nature of the rainbow and the tree of life<sup>20</sup> and indicates that God speaks both to as well as through creation. The Church is itself a token of God's goodness to creation, and of his covenant with all mankind.

### The Eschatological Community

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19 H. Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, trans. D. H. Freeman, Philadelphia, 1958 (orig. pub. 1952). p. 77.

20 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4. XIV. 18.

It is imperative that we grasp that this age cannot manufacture from within its own fallen configurations the kingdom of God, neither can it receive the kingdom without being sundered and utterly remade (II Pet. 3:10). Whilst our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed (Rom. 13:11), the eschatological kingdom of God is not to be understood as the inevitable consummation of the history of this age. We do not resolve the tensions embedded in the Christian existence by hopefully participating in the progress of society in an endeavour to actualise the kingdom. The kingdom is not something achieved from within, it is something which is encountered from outwith in Christ Jesus. The kingdom of God is from above; it is supernatural and cannot be brought about by human endeavour or apart from God. The perfected kingdom of God is in heaven and must be sought there. We cannot wrench it from there prematurely. The kingdom of God is ever the kingdom of God, and is never the People's Republic of Mankind.

We live within this age and our every activity is marked by it. We never completely lift our feet out of the clinging mud which draws us back to the swamp, every step forward leaves its muddy trail. In our endeavour to fulfil the creation mandate we subdue the earth, but do so with the methods of fallen humanity. We try to provide cheap energy and in doing so create nuclear poisons which last more than a millenium. Our attempts to provide enough food result in monoculture with increased use of insecticides and also in Scottish farmers being paid for not producing food whilst elsewhere men, women and children, who bear the image of God starve to death. We continue in the line of Lamech (Gen. 4:19-24), the son of Methusela whose own sons brought forth the most important cultural achievements of their day: Jabal, the father of all who live in tents and raise livestock. Jubal, father of all who play the harp and flute. Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. From these cultural achievements we get 'Lamech's Sword Song', the first recorded poetry of mankind in which Lamech sings of the glory of personal revenge.

Brian Hebblethwaite forcefully reminds us:

History has a transcendent goal in the divine intention, and that in the end God's creative purpose will be finally realised.... Christianity does not teach that this goal will be achieved automatically through the outworking of processes built into the created order from the beginning. Rather the basis for Christian hope for the consummation of all things in God lies firmly in

God's own recreative, transforming, resurrecting power and action.<sup>21</sup>

The eschatological perspective of the New Testament embodies an unflinching condemnation of belief in an evolutionary progress towards a utopian society. The concretisation of the kingdom is spoken of as that which 'comes' not that which is 'reached'. We do not progress to the kingdom along a path of clearly marked-out steps using cultural building blocks to hasten the day when the light will dawn. The light indeed already shines into the darkness, but the brighter the light shines the deeper the shadow it casts (Jn. 1:4-5). Nowhere is this more clearly marked than in the ministry of our Lord. The coming of the light was welcomed by an unleashing of the powers of darkness on an unprecedented scale. Calvin realistically points out that:

The more pressingly God offers himself to the world in the gospel and invites men into his kingdom the more boldly will wicked men belch forth the poison of their impiety.<sup>22</sup>

Life between times is marked by the ongoing conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan.

For our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12)

The great eschatological events are not limited to the moment of consummation of human history. Rather, because Christ has died and risen again we are in the midst of these eschatological events at this moment. At the end, Christ will come again and utterly overthrow the forces of evil. Meanwhile we are involved in an anticipatory, continual defeating of Satan in the proclamation and living of the Word.

The believer, born again of the Spirit, experiencing the rule of Christ in his or her own life, does not exist and is not saved apart from the world. Rather the eschatological reordering of the world occurs at this moment – in embryo – in the believer and the Church, the community of those redeemed through God's special grace. Thus any cultural involvement or political activism on the part of the Christian cannot be based upon a concept of Christless grace. Rather it must be based on the concept of the Church as the body of Christ on earth, the pivotal expression of Christ's redeeming and renewal of creation standing at the cutting edge of history, the city set on a hill whose light beckons all who live in darkness. The Church is the

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21 B. Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*, Basingstoke, 1984, preface; cf. J. Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, Edinburgh, 1897, pp. 354-355.

22 J. Calvin, *Commentary on II Peter*, 3:3.



eschatological community dynamically exhibiting the future already possessed, pointing and calling the world to its destiny. Ephesians 1:10 does not say that all are the Church, but rather that Christ's headship over all creation is for the sake of the Church. And so that purpose of God in the election of special grace embraces the entire created order.

The eschatological discourses of Jesus and of Paul indicate a relentless conflict for the Church upon earth. Our eschatological teaching and reflection is not to find its centre in the use of pocket calculators nor in baptising the products of a supposedly Christless common grace in an effort to advance the kingdom of God, but in an active and patient hope. Calvin reminds us:

Not that the glory and majesty of Christ's kingdom will only appear at his final coming, but that the completion is delayed till that point – the completion of those things that started at the resurrection, of which God gave his people only a taste, to lead them further along the road of hope and patience.<sup>23</sup>

Calvin further assures us that: 'The kingdom of God increases, stage upon stage, to the end of the world.'<sup>24</sup> This does not, however, indicate an evolutionary cultural progress by which the fallen creation is recreated piece by piece in its original harmony. The meaning of the history of the world is contained within the history of salvation which is visible within the church. This is so clear that Abraham Kuyper, the foremost exponent of common grace, could write:

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with saying that all things occur for the sake of Christ, that therefore the *Body of Christ* constitutes the dominant element in history, and that this validates the confession that the Church of Christ is the pivot around which, in fact, the life of mankind turns. He who ignores or denies this can never discover unity in the course of history. . . Not *common* grace but the order of *particular* grace obtains.<sup>25</sup>

Believers are the 'first-fruits' of Christ's work. We are called to obedient action in prophetic proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. That kingdom of God is a spiritual reality showing itself in the inward renewal of the soul and the outward obedience of life.

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<sup>23</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*, 24:29.

<sup>24</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*, 6:10.

<sup>25</sup> A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. I (Leiden, 1902), 3rd impression, Kampen, 1931, p. 223.

Christian action is faith's anticipation of the age yet to come, a revelation of the miracle of special grace in the lives of God's elect. Cultural activity *pro Rege* flows from regeneration; only thus can we have Christian culture, politics, etc. The history of salvation which becomes visible in the church contains the kernel of the history of the world. Here it is that the renewal embracing the whole of creation emerges and becomes clear. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of special grace. That renewal which takes place in the church is the renewal of the creation. We cannot divorce the destiny of the cosmos from the destiny of the church.

T. F. Torrance reminds us that:

Through the church . . . the new humanity in Christ is already operative among men, and it is only through the operation of that new humanity that this world of ours can be saved from its own savagery and be called into the kingdom of Christ in peace and love.<sup>26</sup>

Our eschatology, if it is to be biblical, must be an activist eschatology because behind history lies God's decreeing will. To create a simplistic either/or polarization between pietism and social activism is to wrench the fullness of truth apart. False polarities result merely in mutual silence encountering mutual deafness. We are not given the choice of either a pietistic retreat from the world in cultural despair or of a Christianised social activism utilising the analysis of fallen humanity such as Marxism or the New Right. To raid the storehouse of the fallen as though it were an armoury stocked by God's common grace for our use is to misunderstand both the present reality and our final destination. In building a Christian understanding of creation, culture and history we can examine in depth the work of unbelievers, we can profit from the truths which they unavoidably uncover, but this must be done without falling prey to the lure of synthesising Christianity by common grace baptised. Action in the world must always be *pro Rege*, for Christ the King. New wine cannot be contained by old wineskins.

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<sup>26</sup> T. F. Torrance, Foreword to Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of Last Things*, p. 8.

## REVIEWS

### **The New Dictionary of Theology**

J. A. Komonchak, M. Collins, D. A. Lane (editors)

Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1987; 112 pp., £50

ISBN 0 7171 1552 6

It was a strange coincidence that this publication should precede, by less than a year, a work of the same title (but modestly lacking the initial definite article) from a Press of a very different complexion. The present one is 'a dictionary of Catholic theology', as the editors' preface helpfully makes clear, yet manifesting 'an acute ecumenical sensitivity'. For the Catholic theology it sets forth is emphatically of post-Vatican II vintage; it claims to be 'the first collaborative attempt in English to take stock of the remarkable developments in the church and in theology since the Council'. Citing the Council's reference to the 'hierarchy of truths', the Dictionary is constructed around 24 topics which 'constitute the principal themes of the Christian vision of faith'. Why these two dozen are not listed or otherwise identified is puzzling.

Virtually all the articles are thematic. No individual theologians are treated, although 'Thomism' is one of several movements of thought to be included. Among these are aberrations of the early centuries – gnosticism, Marcionism, donatism, etc – as well as a selection of later developments, such as Catholicism, scholasticism and neo-scholasticism, Gallicanism, and Ultramontanism, Marxism, existentialism and fundamentalism. The last is confined almost entirely to American Protestantism, but honestly recognizes a clear analogue in Archbishop Lefebvre's 'Roman Catholic Traditionalism' – and could have encompassed some of the Marian fundamentalism rife in different sectors of modern Catholicism. Missing are treatments of Jansenism, Protestantism itself and many other significant schools and traditions. Several councils are dealt with from Nicaea to Vatican II, but not Constantinople (381), which gave us the Nicene Creed, or the Fourth Lateran (1215), which gave us transubstantiation. Although, within each topic, biblical and historical-theological material is naturally given its place, the reader has no means, such as an index, of discovering the distinctive contribution to Catholic theology of, say, Leo the Great or Bernard, or even Karl Rahner. I for one would particularly have valued brief expert analyses of a range of modern Catholic theologians. Altar and lectern both have entries, but not pulpit or font.

The general tone of discussion may be characterized as open, provisional and relaxed. It is typified by the final sentence of 'Purgatory', after several 'modern interpretations' have been summarised: 'In their general orientation, they stand within the framework of theological possibilities set out by the church's official teaching, though particular aspects of the theories may be problematic'. In similar vein, 'Homosexuality' presents five 'moral theological positions' and ends up with a bland, uncritical recognition of pluralism. (This is a particularly unhappy article in its virtual discounting of the relevance of the biblical teaching (Romans 2: 25-27 do not condemn homosexual

behaviour merely 'as an expression of idolatry'), and in swallowing the absurd view that 'early Christian church moral theology took a somewhat tolerant, though not approving, stance towards homosexuality'.)

'Infallibility' also purveys different options without adjudicating between them, although the influence of K ung's 'indefectibility in truth' is seen in the suggestion that 'infallibility in believing' may hold more promise than 'infallibility in teaching'. The article on priesthood, in effect, starts and finishes with the presbyterate, with the development of strictly priestly notions almost a hiatus. As with so many reinterpretations of the priestly character of ministry, one is left wondering why the language of priesthood is retained at all.

In general, the contributors are sympathetic towards ecumenical rapprochement. Luther's and Trent's approaches to justification, so the article concludes, 'are being seen today more and more as different expressions of the one Christian faith. . . .' The American Catholic-Lutheran dialogue is frequently cited, less often the Anglican-Roman Catholic (ARCIC). Edmund Hill's 'Church' contains some astringent criticism of the dominant papal-hierarchical model of the church and moves towards giving 'the church as local community . . . a certain priority over the church as universal'. The papacy is affirmed to be above all a spiritual office – although this recognition is vacuous unless the Pope's position as 'Sovereign of the State of Vatican City' is, at the very least, called into question (as 'Liberty, religious' begins to do). Yet the sketch of the Papal office given here is essentially the one emerging in ecumenical dialogue with Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans.

In 'Eucharist', 'the new notion of memory', i.e., the interpretation of anamnesis as 'a re-calling, a making present' of the past, makes its influence powerfully felt in recasting the tradition's insistence on eucharistic sacrifice. (And there is a whole article on 'Memorial'.) It is regrettable that this accompanies a caricature of the Reformers: 'they reduce the eucharist simply to a subjective commemoration of the cross . . . a nostalgic calling to mind of an event of long ago'. Transubstantiation does not detain the writer very long: 'the eucharistic change' is now found in our imperfect gifts ('simply signs of ourselves, of our self-giving') being made 'the signs of Christ's self-giving'. The net result is altogether more suggestive and elusive than common pre-Vatican II teaching.

One area, however, seems to remain impervious to rethinking. Compared to many other articles, 'Mary, Mother of God' (sic!) is positively bullish. Michael O'Carroll does his best to minimise the Marian minimalism abroad in Rome during Vatican II. If popular Marian piety did suffer a setback, it was only temporary. In a somewhat cryptic tailpiece, Catholic authorities are rebuked for their lukewarmness towards the Marian apparitions that continue to multiply at her shrines new and old. There is not a hint here of the Mary of the new model Catholic theology – the image of believing and obedient discipleship, the archetype of the church. 'Virgin Birth' not only defends the virginal conception (but not on the basis of the scripture alone without the backing of the church tradition) but gives equal prominence to Mary's virginity in giving birth (found most improbable in Matthew 12:25) and in perpetuity. In Mariology, it seems, conservatism reigns – which may suggest that Mariology lies near Catholicism's inviolable heart.

On most issues, however, this Dictionary will provide a useful resource for those who seek a brief account of current trends in the less traditional reaches of Catholic theology. The level of writing is in the main accessible to readers with a good 'lay' theological awareness – although there are exceptions, such as 'Trinity' and the unnecessarily dense 'Order and Ordination'. If, however, a pervasive tortuousness remains an abiding impression, it arises from the fundamental task contemporary Catholic theology faces – of justifying the traditional teaching of the church's magisterium, by reinterpretation, reformulation, recasting, supplementation or by a hundred other devices. For Catholic theology does not enjoy the glorious liberty of Reformation theology to reject past teachings as erroneous. Hence the feeling too often generated by this Dictionary of an uncomfortable rationalisation of what really deserves to be discarded.

The book is attractively printed, but edited with inadequate consistency. And what is the rationale behind the curiously modest 'christian' – alongside the capitalized 'Jewish, Buddhist', etc, to say nothing of 'Catholic'?!  
*The Review Editor*

### **The Encyclopedia of Unbelief**

Gordon Stein (ed.)

Prometheus Press, Buffalo, NY, 1985, 2 vols., xvi+ 819 pp.,  
ISBN 0 87975 307 2

'Unbelief in what?' is bound to be one's first question, to which the Foreword's answer is 'in miracles and divine revelation, in life after death, and in any supernatural beings – gods, devils, and surrogate-deities like the Hegelian Absolute or Tillich's "Ground of Being".' Or, as the editor puts it, 'This is the history of heresy, blasphemy, rejection of belief, atheism, agnosticism, humanism and rationalism.' Nor is there any doubt where the work stands on the desirability of unbelief, although the occasional believing contributor, such as Martin Marty, has been allowed in. A more predictable author is G. A. Wells on 'Jesus, Historicity of', an article which is unparalleled in the Encyclopedia in that it argues against the historicity of Jesus rather than surveys the subject. (There is no article on, let alone against, the historicity of the Buddha, for example, or of Moses or Epicurus.) Editorial indiscipline is to blame.

The material gathered here will largely be found in other collections, such as the Encyclopedia Britannica, but surveys of unbelief in particular countries or regions are a special feature. The American focus is strong – e.g., in the article on 'Universalism', which is noteworthy for failing to mention Neoplatonism, perhaps the main inspiration of Christian universalisms for over a millennium, and for dealing only with Christian universalism. But summaries on unbelief in other religions are useful, as well as lists of organizations and literature in the appendixes. There is now even less excuse for believers not knowing the enemy.  
*The Review Editor*

### **The Free Church of Scotland: The Crisis of 1900**

Alexander Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron (1910)

## THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Knox Press, Edinburgh, 1989; no price given, paperback;  
ISBN 0 904422 305

In the 50 years from 1843 the Free Church was simply the Church in most Highland communities. From 1900 Highland Presbyterianism was damagingly divided between four organisations: the Free Presbyterian Church, the Free Church, the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland. Apart from the slight adjustment brought about by the union of the latter two in 1929, the situation remained the same until the very recent 'disruption' in the Free Presbyterian Church. The years around 1900 were, therefore, quite decisive for the denominational shape of the church in the Highlands during the 20th century. This book gives an account of the events of these years from an avowedly Free Church standpoint. It was first published shortly after the dust of battle had settled and while wounds were still fresh. The polemical tone is therefore not surprising and the book should be read as an apologia. As such it is an invaluable primary source and its republication will be welcomed by all students of Scottish ecclesiastical history and especially by members of the Free Church who wish to understand their denominational roots. Both classes of reader would have benefited from an introductory essay setting the events of these years in a wider historical context and assessing their significance for Christians today. Regrettably, apart from the explanatory subtitle, the publishers have satisfied themselves with a reproduction of the original.

The book begins with a brief review of the formation of the Free Church and its history up to 1890, highlighting the developments which were to prove most significant when it came to the 'crisis' of 1900. The Declaratory Act of 1893 and the Union of 1900 are treated in much more detail. There then follows an account of the organisation of the continuing Free Church after 1900 which will be a particularly valuable part of the book since the information is not readily available elsewhere. The lengthy synopsis of the legal proceedings is also helpful, though written with a certain smugness of tone. (It is one of the ironies of Scottish ecclesiastical history that the Free Church should have taken such high satisfaction in the judgment of a civil court regarding the nature of its constitution!) The details of the government intervention to divide the property form a significant part of the history of the relation between Parliament and the judiciary but recounted, as they are here, from a strictly ecclesiastical perspective, they will hold little interest for the general reader today.

The real value of the book is that it presents the theological and ecclesiastical rationale for the continuation of the Free Church in 1900: the determination of the minority not to be moved from the constitution of 1843 as they understood it. At a time of possible realignment in conservative Highland Presbyterianism it may be useful to know how the post-1900 Free Church regarded the three-way split of the old Constitutionalist party between those who formed the Free Presbyterian Church in 1893, those who entered the United Free Church in 1900, and those who formed the continuing Free Church at that time. Those within the 'mainstream' churches, while they may be unattracted by a rigid and immobile adherence to a 150-year-old constitution, might well ponder the advantages of doctrinal stability and

commitment to biblical authority at a time when the larger churches so often appear to be doctrinally at sea.

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**Circles of God: Theology and Science from the Greeks to Copernicus**

H. P. Nebelsick

Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1985, xxviii + 284 pp., £16, casebound (Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge General Editor T. F. Torrance).

This series of demanding volumes, issued under the editorship of Professor Thomas F. Torrance, is published by the Scottish Academic Press 'in association with' both the Center of Theological Inquiry (at Princeton) and the Templeton Foundation. It is essentially a series in exposition of Professor Torrance's long-held interest in the inter-relations of science and religion. The General Editor supplies a Preface which helpfully summarises his own concerns, and sets these volumes in perspective. Writing of the 'vast shift in the perspective of human knowledge' that is taking place, Professor Torrance introduces the series as addressing 'that situation where theology and science are found to have deep mutual relations, and increasingly cry out for each other'. 'The various books in this series are written by scientists and by theologians', in illustration of the need for 'cross-fertilisation between natural and theological science'.

Professor Nebelsick's particular aim is to trace the inter-relation of theological and scientific notions of the nature of the universe from ancient times up to the cosmology of Copernicus and Kepler. He argues that the main motivation of natural science was theological, and that right and wrong theological notions profoundly influenced the development and direction of scientific work and thinking. In particular – and this is where the Circles of God come in – mistaken notions of perfection led generations of scientists to insist on the circular motion of the heavenly bodies, so ensuring that observational astronomy remained in a cul-de-sac.

The story he tells is fascinating, in parts familiar, in parts not. Perhaps most fascinating of all is his treatment of Copernicus himself, so generally portrayed as the hero of the story, but – Professor Nebelsick argues – himself still the victim of the false notions he inherited. 'Copernicus sacrificed accuracy for the sake of desired elegance, an elegance that could not be substantiated either by observation or by the mathematics involved' (p. 242). That is to say, despite the revolution in cosmological thinking which his heliocentric model brought about, it was still a heliocentric model, and not – as Kepler succeeded in demonstrating – the heliofocussed, elliptical pattern that Copernicus' own observations actually required. Copernicus' failure to follow the logic of his own observations handicapped his hypothesis, and it was left to

## THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Kepler to rescue it by breaking with the Circles of God and acknowledging that they were not circles at all.

For theologians and scientists alike, this volume will make demanding but by no means unintelligible reading. This reviewer for one is going to return to it for a more thorough examination than has so far been possible, and is pleased to commend it to others whose interests span the inter-relation of what Professor Nebelsick simply terms the two sciences.

*Nigel M. de S. Cameron*  
*Rutherford House, Edinburgh*

### **Jesus in our Western Culture. Mysticism, Ethics and Politics**

Edward Schillebeeckx

SCM Press, London, 1987; 84 pp., £4.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 334 02098 0

The Abraham Kuyper lectures of 1986 in the free University of Amsterdam are here published in translation from the Dutch. The distinguished author and theologian presents us, in briefer than customary form, with reflections on Jesus as a man and historical figure, and some of the implications of that for theology and life today.

Convinced of the importance of Jesus as a historical figure for theology, yet not hidebound by that, the book is a rare mixture of theological writing and contemplation. Though the shortest of his books to be published, it is not a light or a quick read; indeed, it merits slow and careful reading to absorb as much as possible of the thoughts expressed.

After a brief treatment of the life and career of Jesus (though unlike any I have ever read before), the author explores some of the contemporary issues on which this has a bearing; in particular the nature and unity of the church, the church in the world, the Christian in a world of political power, and the challenge of a Christian ethic. Rejecting any reclusive, world-denying faith, yet also refusing to accept the church as the political power in the world, we read of a Christian church which interacts with the present world culture, and an ethic which runs in opposition to the prevailing spirit of the age.

This little book may be for some readers the ideal way to be introduced to the work of a theologian whose name has come to the fore in controversy within his own church. It is certainly stimulating and provocative in places, combining a perhaps deceptive orthodoxy with a semi-submerged radicalism.

*David J. Graham*  
*Bible Training Institute, Glasgow*

### **The Logic of Theology**

Dietrich Ritschl

SCM Press, London, 1986, 310 pp., £12.95, paperback, ISBN 0 334 00923 5

Dietrich Ritschl has had a fascinating career, spanning parish ministry in Scotland and America, senior academic positions in Germany and America, and teaching responsibilities across a broad spectrum from New Testament



and patristics to modern systematics and ethics. He is also, we are told, qualified in psychotherapy. In this book he attempts to draw from his varied experience and numerous publications an outline of the scope, nature and practical expression of the Christian faith. It is not a conventional book of theology, and it is even further from being concerned primarily with questions of method. Ritschl claims to find traditional academic theology tired, out of date - and even boring (p. xvi)). Anglicanism, Eastern Orthodoxy and theology from the Third World have helped this Reformed Theologian to such a conclusion!

Part I attempts a 'reconnaissance of the territory of theology'. Philosophically, the influence of modern analytical and linguistic philosophy, as exemplified by the later Wittgenstein, is very much in evidence, as Ritschl tries to cut down to size various aspects of what he discerns to be the reality of the Christian faith. He is anxious at this stage not to restrict theology to a specialism, and he ranges widely from assumptions about creation (and a consequential inter-disciplinary dialogue with natural and human science) to a digest of his earlier work upon the place of 'story' in the articulation of Christian existence. There is also a brief, and wholly inadequate, ten page discussion of biblical hermeneutics, and a concluding discussion of worship and openness to the Spirit as the basic criteria of the validity of Christian experience. The purpose of Part I is to uncover and, up to a point, identify, the 'implicit axioms' with which Church communities and individual Christians are necessarily equipped. These implicit axioms find expression in what Ritschl calls 'regulative statements'; they might include creeds and confessions, as the tip of a much larger iceberg of articulated and semi-articulated Christian claims.

The discussion in Part I is very wide-ranging and often the attempt to avoid academic precision leads only to obscurity. For example, Ritschl is convinced that the greatest mistake by the primitive Church was to separate from the life and worship of diaspora Judaism. For him Christians and Jews are equally to be considered as 'believers', and there can be no question of a mission of the Church to the Jews. These 'implicit axioms' of Ritschl's preferred theology may well have something important to say to us, but merely stated baldly they appear to beg many questions which are not addressed, let alone answered.

Part II has chapters on ecclesiology, Trinity, Christology and anthropology. Theology is seen here as an attempt to test for comprehensibility, coherence and flexibility the implicit axioms or regulative statements discussed in Part I. The focus is now upon the more scientific statements of theology as enshrined in creeds and confessions. The chapter on ecclesiology is dominated by a presentation of election along lines similar to that explored by Karl Barth and Leslie Newbigin. Following this, the Trinity is well discussed in relation to creation, but the chapter is marred by a somewhat naive, if fashionable, attack on the idea of divine omnipotence. Ritschl's Christology is centred around the claim that we must always start from the 'present Christ': Bultmann and Billy Graham are held to be at fault in starting with a past Christ who then needs to be made relevant to the present. He has a point, but over-states it, and one is left with a rather vague account of who this present Christ is, and how he might be recognised.

Part III returns to the extensive canvas of Part I, now viewed from the perspective of ethics and worship. Again, the discussion flows widely, and is very difficult to summarise: Ritschl maintains that there could never be an ecumenical consensus on ethics, and that the inevitable tensions generated in Christian living permit resolution only in worship. The discussion is rather this-worldly, which is not surprising given that the author is 'much less anxious about God's future judgment in the life after death than about the repetition of Auschwitz, Dresden and Hiroshima' (p. 253).

Although often frustrating and obscure, this book is sometimes impressive: the work of a distinguished theologian gladly whose underlying theme is the widespread failure of conventional Western theology and theological education. His concluding comment may prove to be his most important: 'I do not want to say anything to their detriment, but in the last resort I do not trust any theological teacher - except perhaps a professional in exegesis and history - who has not spent a long time as a pastor, visited the old and sick, buried children and young people and had to preach to the congregation every Sunday, even when he had no new ideas'.

*Peter Forster  
Durham*

### **When Jesus Confronts the World.**

#### **An Exposition of Matthew 8-10**

D. A. Carson

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988; 154 pp., £3.95 paperback;  
ISBN 0 85110 7834

Don Carson is one of the foremost and prolific of evangelical writers today, and his work spans the academic and the popular. This book belongs in the latter category, originating as a series of sermons. Although these were first preached in Cambridge, the book appeared in the USA (Baker Books) one year before the IVP edition, hence the American spellings. The sub-title is a little misleading, and although the text (in the NIV) is printed in full at the start of each section, the 'exposition' often sits very lightly to the text. This is not a detailed exegesis (Carson has already provided us with that in his Matthew commentary), but a practical homily. In places, questions of exegesis are raised and answered, but the book gives us more on the general import and significance of the passages than their meaning. Occasionally there are veiled references to scholars and their ideas, but this never makes for heavy reading. Indeed, the book will be most helpful to the beginner in Christian reading.

The cover tells us that here we will discover the teaching of Jesus on various practical issues. I doubt whether the book really is about his 'teaching', or rather Carson's opinions. Nevertheless, it contains some thought-provoking sections, such as those on miracles, and pluralism and tolerance (p. 119-123; 133-137). And the frequent quotations of hymns add a sense of worship to the whole.

*David J. Graham  
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**Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, VI)**

Donald Dean Smeeton

Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., Kirksville, Missouri, 1987, 286 pp., no price, hardback, ISBN 0 940 474 06 9

This well-researched study is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature about Tyndale. The first two chapters contain introductory material discussing succinctly the present state of Tyndale scholarship. The author then goes on to discuss Tyndale's views about the Bible, salvation, the Church and politics. There are also three appendices, an excellent bibliography and an index.

The multiplicity of references in the footnotes bear witness to the thoroughness of the research. In that respect it will cater for the interests of specialists in the field. At the same time the lucidity of the author's analysis and literary style will make a strong appeal to all readers who are interested in the development of Protestant thought.

Very different opinions have been expressed over the years about the nature and significance of William Tyndale's thought. Thomas More saw him quite simply as a follower of Luther. In the present century this view has been endorsed by such scholars as S. L. Greenslade, M. M. Knappen, Willis Egan and W. D. J. Cargill-Thompson. These writers found little that was original in his work. On the other hand, E. G. Rupp, following B. F. Westcott and John Eadie, had reservations about this standpoint. Then Leonard J. Trinterud launched a direct attack on the theory that Tyndale merely echoed Luther, and thus opened up the whole topic.

Then again there was the question of the relationship between Tyndale and Puritanism. Trinterud saw Puritanism and its covenant theology as a tradition stemming from the Rhineland theologians and entering English religious thought through Tyndale. Jerald C. Bauer and William Haller, as well as Christopher Hill, were sceptical about this thesis. John New argued for the 'non-Tyndalian' nature of Puritanism. William Clebsch, on the other hand, insisted that Tyndale 'founded English Puritanism', and A. G. Dickens and Claire Cross have endorsed this view. Then John Yost upset the apple-cart by arguing that Tyndale never accepted Luther's doctrine of justification. He was an Erasmian humanist and certainly not the father of Elizabethan Puritanism.

That is the point at which Professor Smeeton enters the fray. He believes that the discussion throughout has been vitiated by lack of attention to the English context of Tyndale's thinking and especially the relationship between him and the Lollards. He therefore studies closely both the relationship of Tyndale's theology to Luther's and to Wycliffe and the Lollards. His task is not an easy one because it is no simple matter to define 'Lollardy' and much of the relevant literature is still in manuscript and unprinted. Nevertheless, Smeeton is able to show the numerous convergences (as well as the differences) between Tyndale and the Wycliffite tradition.

His conclusions are of considerable interest. Tyndale asserted without qualification that justification is by faith alone. Yet he saw justification not only as a forensic change of status but also as a change of heart producing

moral regeneration. This, says Smeeton, 'is part of Tyndale's unique contribution to the theology of the Reformation'. Good works make no contribution to salvation but they are a necessary public expression of faith in the heart. And, again, Tyndale makes an original contribution in his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, Tyndale, although influenced by Luther, was no 'uncritical conduit' of his thought. And he certainly was not a Christian humanist after the style of Erasmus. But he was indebted to Wycliffism and the flavour of the older English dissent is obvious throughout his work. Not that Smeeton would make a Lollard of him but he does argue very cogently that he 'articulated his message in ways compatible with traditional English dissent to a degree far greater than has previously been suggested'.

As to Tyndale's originality, his conclusion is:- 'It was in the Reformation issue of soteriology that Tyndale made his most truly unique theological contribution. In this matter, Tyndale stood apart from Luther, Erasmus, Zwingli, and others of his day; here Tyndale also stood beyond traditional Wycliffism. His elaboration of the work of the Holy Spirit, his understanding of covenant, his insistence on the 'lust' for God's will, and his demands for moral living illustrate theological pioneering.'

In a word, this is an important and significant study.

R. Tudur Jones  
Coleg Bala-Bangor, Wales

### From Early Judaism to Early Church

D. S. Russell

SCM Press, London, 1986; 150 pp., £4.50, paperback; ISBN 0 334 00496 9

Dr Russell is well-known for his earlier works on the period between the Old and New Testaments. His first book was a helpful popular summary of this theme, *Between the Testaments*, and this was followed by a scholarly monograph on *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Now he has returned to this theme in yet another survey which is meant to complement and supplement his first book but which can easily stand on its own. He is particularly concerned with those areas of Judaism which are especially relevant to the rise of the Christian church. The emphasis, therefore, is less on history and more on the development of thought. After a discussion of cultural and religious developments, he considers the place of the Jewish Scriptures, dealing with their canonicity and interpretation and the concept of Torah. This leads on to discussion of Jewish theology under the headings of prayer and mediation, demonology and the problem of evil, the secret tradition of Jewish apocalyptic and the future hope. This is a judicious selection of topics, and the treatment of them is simple, clear and readable. There have been so many survey-type books and essays on this period that a reader might be pardoned for some experience of boredom as he reads yet another; let it be said with emphasis that this was in no way my experience with this book which somehow shows a delightful freshness of treatment. The book is meant for students, ministers and other interested persons, and it should suit its audience well. The author writes with the facility of one who is

thoroughly at home in his topic, and his judgments are generally sound. It is, of course, an area in which scholars have laboured much, and no book can be thoroughly up to date. So while one would rightly expect Dr Russell to be influenced (as he is) by C. Rowland's important book on the nature of apocalyptic, *The Open Heaven*, it is not his fault that the magisterial treatment of the Jewish canon by Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, appeared too late to be taken into his consideration. Nor again could he take into account the most recent discussion of biblical interpretation at Qumran given by G.J. Brooke in his *Exegesis at Qumran*, which might have led him to a different verdict on the rules ascribed to Rabbi Hillel. Dr Russell adopts a fairly conservative attitude in matters of biblical criticism, and he is concerned to present differing views fairly and impartially. But he has no doubts that for the full revelation of that which was only partially understood in Judaism we must turn to the light given in Jesus Christ, and it is good that he is not afraid to say so.

I. Howard Marshall  
University of Aberdeen

### **Creativity in Preaching**

J. Grant Howard

Ministry Resources Library of Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1987; 112 pp., n.p., paperback; ISBN 0 310 26251 8

In this short book, the author examines four essential elements in preaching; the text, the congregation, the preacher and the act of preaching. He attempts to show how creativity (the ability to use material in new and different ways) should be involved in the whole process from beginning to end. Scottish preachers will possibly find the chapter dealing with the life-setting of the text the most helpful, with several illuminating examples given. On the other hand, they will probably find much of the later material to be corny. For example, 'as people sit in the sanctuary waiting for the service to start, their thinking could be stimulated by a quote on the overhead projector screen that reads: "Doubts are ants in the pants of faith".' (p. 97).

Martin Allen,  
Chryston Church, Glasgow

### **Evangelistic Preaching**

Alan Walker

Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1988; 110 pp., n.p., paperback; ISBN 0 310 75261 5

This small book is described as a supplemental text book for an introductory course on preaching. The opening chapter defines the purpose of such preaching as 'to win an immediate commitment to Jesus Christ'. (p. 18) the author does not spell out the content of the evangel to be preached, but does state clearly his belief that salvation is impossible apart from a person's conscious surrender. This book is more a 'how to' manual with basic hints on

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such subjects as sermon construction and delivery. The examples given, in the appendix, of evangelistic sermons are disappointingly thin, being merely a string of stories held together with the thread of a textual theme.

*Martin Allen,  
Chryston Church Glasgow*

### **Sermon Guides for Preaching in Easter, Ascension and Pentecost**

C. W. Burger, B. A. Muller, D. J. Smit (eds.)

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988; 284 pp., £9.50, paperback; ISBN 0 8028 0283 4

The contributors to this volume are all ordained ministers in South Africa, most of whom hold teaching posts in universities. The book is designed to help preachers produce, for Easter Day and the seven following Sundays, sermons that are theologically 'sound' and exegetically 'true'. Three cycles of eight sermons are suggested, 24 in total. The cycles deal with text from the Synoptic Gospels, the Old Testament and Paul's letters, and John and Peter's writings respectively. Each guideline gives exegetical, hermeneutical and homiletical analysis and suggestions. The demarcation lines between the three aspects of the sermon guides are not always clear and there was some overlap. This format does, however, provide a structure which results in a remarkably even consistency from the range of contributors. This book is an excellent aid for preachers, providing a wealth of thought-provoking insights, suggestive presentations and penetrating illustrations. The various sermon guidelines will appeal to different readers in different ways. Those that impressed this reviewer deal with the following texts: Luke 24:36-49, Colossians 3: 1-4, Acts 2:1-8, I Corinthians 15:50-58, Ephesians 1: 20-33, Psalm 87, John 20:24-29, and I Peter 1:3-9. The opening chapter, 'Preaching around the Calendar', will stimulate evangelical preachers to consider again one form of expository preaching that has never received a high profile on the conservative camp. The second introductory chapter sets out the elements of Easter proclamation in a very arresting and challenging way. The five elements are: It is real: It awakens faith: It reveals something of God: It saves us: It raises us into a new lifestyle. Those who purchase this volume will find it money well spent.

*Martin Allen  
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### **A Critique of Pastoral Care**

Stephen Pattison

SCM Press, London, 1988, 210 pp., £8.95, paperback; ISBN 0 334 00280-X

'Counselling' has had a high profile of late. The Lecturer in Pastoral Studies in the University of Birmingham does not need to remind Christian pastoral carers and counsellors that these disciplines have a very tenuous place in some theological departments that are, themselves, losing ground.

Pastoral care is 'that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow, and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God'. In this technologically progressive age, those who are carers are moved by the need for self-justification towards sharing the optimism that human beings can overcome all problems and difficulties if the right techniques are learned. Pattison wants to assert that pastoral care is undertaken by what you are as much by what you do. As such, lay and professional persons can become capable carers. This still makes difficult the justification of pastoral studies without adopting the secular world's rationale – 'ratio-technological thinking' in Pattison's terms.

The critique offered by the author quite properly reveals the way the American pastoral care scene became shaped by pragmatic concerns to concentrate upon counselling and its concomitant techniques. Evidence is offered by a survey of past literature and the changing forces are revealed by reference to current authors who seek to recover a wholistic approach. This valuable survey of current books – there are 15 pages of detailed footnotes – continues into essays on ethics and pastoral care as well as on discipline and politics.

An emphasis on compassion and acceptance combined with liberal theology has moved pastoral concerns away from ethical or justice dimensions in Christianity. Yet, all pastoral encounters embody and promote particular norms and values. Society today wants to be tolerant of the moral codes of those who differ. Pastoral care, perhaps to keep itself acceptable, has run the risk of being caricatured such that the person seeking care receives the stone of therapy, but no bread of value and meaning. Ethical confrontation, however, is being recognised as a two-way process in which the carer's attitudes and beliefs are also challenged. This reduces the dangers of authoritarianism and judgementalism which may make the pastor feel good but do not bring healing to wounded people.

Discipline has been and still is part of the perception of Christian ministry. On the one hand it perpetuates false guilt feelings, which are not related necessarily to wrong actions. Discipline comes better from the inspiration of a mutual vision rather than from coercion. The desire to hi-jack pastoral care to be a tool of persuasion for the highly committed has to be set aside, however, since its nature is to reach out towards the marginalised, uncertain and doubting.

The socio-political dimension, Pattison maintains, must be a concern today also. Pastoral counselling as a specific skill can give job satisfaction to a pastor, but it also can aid avoidance of the structures of society that give rise to suffering and prevent growth. Issues of power, justice, inequality and human rights are omitted from many books on pastoral care. 'The Kingdom of God cannot be built by Christians alone', asserts Pattison – a comment which invites a thorough reading of his argument.

Pattison's distrust of conservative evangelical theology is revealed in the chapter on the Bible and Pastoral Care. It is, however, essential reading and the charges made need answers. His difficulty is revealed by the gospel-centredness of his definition of pastoral care coupled with the belief that pastoral care theory and practice are not the Bible's concern. This reviewer

would agree wholeheartedly with Pattison's critique but is left with the work still to do to write a theology of pastoral theology from which the definition could be derived.

Pattison's final chapter on failure and laughter is worth the book's price alone, even if it merely underlines that the author's critique invites a proliferation of material on the recovery of pastoral care. It invites readers to have second thoughts. Pattison's use throughout of the female pronouns, however, perhaps is unnecessarily provocative in a work of this kind.

*Peter Bowes  
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### **How to Understand Marriage**

**J.-P. Bagot**

SCM Press, London, 1987; 96 pp., £4.50

This book, by a French Roman Catholic priest, was written to provide insight and encourage commitment to marriage in an age when it seems to be under threat. Priests find themselves 'torn between a legal demand' to marry all who ask for it, and a 'pastoral sense' which moves them to restrict church weddings to sincere Christians. The writer, who articulates well the problems felt also by ministers, is aware of the conflicts between the expectations of different generations, the pressure for 'trial marriages' (of course a contradiction in terms), the shifting values of society and the difficulty of finding an order of service which fits the situation of those who come to be married in church with little Christian commitment.

The first part of the book is a study of the teaching of the Bible. The writer's 'critical' approach is used to bring out rather than dilute the acute insights of Scripture into marriage relationships. Just one example of many insights is his comment that three out of the four women noted by Matthew in our Lord's genealogy were the victims of sexual violence, leading on to a quotation from Paul Claudel, 'God writes straight with crooked lines'.

The analysis of church history is helpful though done from a Catholic viewpoint, probably more useful before the Reformation than after. Like many modern Catholic writers, he is critical of parts of Augustine's teaching and the tradition which sees marriage as primarily for procreation. Bagot points out the lack of evidence for 'getting married in church' before the fourth century, and argues that Christian marriage is distinctive in its commitment rather than in its essential nature; only by the twelfth century was it obvious that the 'I do' of marriage must be said before a representative of the church.

Bagot explains how marriage came to be thought of as a sacrament; this section is somewhat complex, but the closing pages, including a look at the remarriage of divorced persons, give some insight into the relation of Roman doctrine and pastoral care, and how doctrine may be allowed to 'develop' in the Roman Catholic tradition. The book contains extended quotations from a variety of sources, and illustrates some of the common ground between Roman Catholic and evangelical Christians, as they wrestle with common issues posed by an increasingly pagan society.

*Jock Stein, Carberry Tower, Musselburgh*



**The Incarnation of God: an Introduction to Hegel's  
Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology**

Hans Kung

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1987; xv+601 pp., £24.95

This is the translation of a lengthy work written in 1970 and so preceding by several years John Yerkess' treatment of Hegel's Christology. It reveals the theological wrestling behind *On Being a Christian* and *Does God Exist?*, but Kung's protagonist is less religiously daunting though more philosophically knowledgeable than was Jacob's – viz., Hegel. Yet, like Jacob's, the protagonist is no foe, as the sub-title of the work indicates. So we witness again in this work the contemporary continental theological fascination with Hegel.

Kung's strategy is to describe in chronological detail the development of Hegel's theological perspective, which is simultaneously a consciously philosophical one. He shows Hegel's early thought culminating in the speculative Christology of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Then, after a summary of the relevant argument of this work, the three other major works Hegel published in his lifetime (the *Logic*, the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Philosophy of Right*) are briskly treated. Kung sticks to the central theological, not the philosophical, business and so Hegel's posthumously published lectures focus for us the religious points of interest in his thought. Kung has set out to demonstrate how Hegel developed an essentially theological concept along essentially philosophical lines by expounding reality as the dialectical kenosis and self-realisation of Absolute Spirit. This is 'the incarnation of God'. Kung finds Hegel theologically fruitful both when he posits the historicity of God and, more generally, the historicity of Christ, for this presages a direction out of the widely publicised difficulties of classical Christology. Kung is certainly critical, but studies to learn

The work's main value is in its orderliness and detail; as in his other works, Kung is crisp in his treatment of the familiar, judicious in his assessment of the controversial. The central theme itself, Hegel's interpretation of incarnation as the manifestation of the idea of divine-human unity, is not surprising. Yet for all his discussion Kung refuses a really critical engagement with Hegel on this point. Hegel is defended historically as the alternative to naive anthropomorphic biblicism and rationalistic Enlightenment deism and defended theologically as the proposer of God's dialectical attributes in lieu of the awkwardness of Chalcedonian Christology on a Greek metaphysical footing. Yet Hegel's reduction of incarnational Christology to divine-human unity is not tackled; Kung prefers, e.g., to think about Heidegger's rather than Kierkegaard's response to Hegel at this juncture. So the real trouble with Hegel is arguably not exposed.

There are several errors in the text, the most serious of which perhaps is the impression given (pp. 324, 362) that Hegel's lectures on *Philosophy of History* are other than those on *Philosophy of World History*; again on p. 76 it seems as if Kant published a *Philosophy of Religion* alongside *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. On the interpretation of Hegel, it would have been clearer why he is *not* a pantheist had Kung pursued by a comparative analysis with Fichte the sense in which the world is neither contingent nor divine for Hegel. But one can always ask for more and Kung has certainly

given us enough, with time to include a memorable account of Hegel lecturing. Hegel aspired to be a Napoleon of the intellect; he probably succeeded and what we make of the latter we will perhaps make of the former too.

*Stephen Williams*  
*United Theological College,*

### **To Reach a Nation: The Challenge of Evangelism in a Mass Media Age**

Gavin Reid

Hodder and Stoughton 1987; 185 pp., £2.25; ISBN 0 340 40745 X

The purpose of this book is to see how the electronic age enables the churches to raise public awareness of the gospel and to help preaching for a verdict. It is honestly and positively written from the inside, as Gavin Reid has been involved with evangelism throughout his ministry. He charts his own course as an evangelical, then gives the background to the Mission England campaign with Billy Graham in 1984-85. A large part of the book evaluates the preparations for organisation of, and results from that major project. Then he takes up basic principles in preaching which are highlighted in a quick-information age. The final part evaluates the use of television in evangelism, drawing on lessons from American Christian TV stations. He concludes that 'In the task of reaching the nation for Christ, there is no electronic short-cut'.

This book improves as it progresses. The heart of the matter is not reached until chapter 10, 'Electronic gospel?', and the definition of the title 'To Reach a Nation' is not taken up until chapter 12. The style also becomes livelier and the whole mood more compulsive as the book reaches its climax.

The earlier part which takes up the lessons from Mission England does however have some very helpful points to make. The understanding of the accommodationist-entrenchment positions within the churches in chapter 3 shows the difficulties in organising a national mission initiative. There are good insights into the internal harmonious working of the Billy Graham team in chapter 5.

The criticism of why an overseas evangelist was used for a mission to England is answered in chapter 6 by seeing how British culture and churches have conspired against producing figurehead evangelists of our own.

The book's major contribution is in its concluding chapters. Reid prefers the British concept of broadcasting, despite the limitations of the 'public service' policy of the BBC and IBA, to the American concept of 'narrowcasting' of Christian programmes to primarily Christian audiences. The answer to the British problem is to have more committed Christians involved in the media industry. The back-to-basics approach in chapter 9 about preaching is very helpful, whether used in a church, a stadium or a studio. This emphasis on proclamation, drawn from the book of Acts, is also used to guide the reader through the different schools of thought, and the 'kingdom language' used by different evangelists today.

The socialised interpretation of Jim Wallis, and the modern-day miracle interpretation of John Wimber are both appreciated, but found to be inadequate in this light.

The lessons learnt from John 4 in chapter 12 give the basis for realistic evaluation of the work of outreach: a community can be said to be 'reached' with the gospel if there is 75% awareness of the message, and the Christian community has been increased by 20% through the mission activities. Throughout the book, the vital place of prayer and the necessity for churches to work together are both emphasised.

The reviewer was at the meeting which Reid refers to on p. 169, and agrees with his impressions about the Scottish situation. The whole book rings true with Reid's ministry and vision, and is a good contribution to this vital subject for our time.

*Alastair Gray  
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### **Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in 19th Century Britain**

Nigel M. de S. Cameron

*Text and Studies in Religion*, Volume 33. The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, N.Y./Queenstown, Ont., 1987; 419pp. ISBN 0 88946 821 4

There have been several surveys of late dealing with the rise and progress of biblical criticism in nineteenth century Britain – some of them belonging to the field of Old or New Testament studies and others to that of Ecclesiastical History. This survey, the work of the Warden of Rutherford House, Edinburgh, is rather an exercise in historical theology: in an earlier form it was a doctoral thesis produced under the supervision of the Professors of Divinity and of Christian Dogmatics in the University of Edinburgh.

What Dr Cameron is chiefly interested in is the revolution undergone by biblical study in Britain between the middle and end of the nineteenth century. The reviewer has elsewhere illustrated this revolution by comparing two scholarly works by theologians in the Free Church of Scotland – Patrick Fairbairn's *Prophecy* 1856 and W. Robertson Smith's *The Prophets of Israel* 1882. The difference was that the scholars of the earlier period maintained their inherited principle of making biblical criticism subservient to the premises of biblical infallibility: what the Bible said, God said, and it was therefore true and infallible. Any critical findings which conflicted with this premiss were not to be accepted. By the end of the century the prevalent doctrine was that critical conclusions must not be foreclosed by such dogmatic considerations.

Behind this revolution Dr Cameron discerns the influence of Spinoza (in Western Europe in general) and of S. T. Coleridge (in Britain more particularly). But the chief practitioners of biblical criticism in England and Scotland were devout Christians, not rationalists, as so many of their continental predecessors had been: it appeared, therefore, that the dominant critical methods and conclusions were compatible with Christian commitment. This is evident in the case of Robertson Smith, to which Dr Cameron devotes a chapter of nearly 60 pages. However uneasy Robertson Smith's opponents felt at the positions he defended, they found it unexpectedly difficult to prove that they violated the Westminster Confession of Faith, to

which indeed Smith declared his allegiance throughout. In the event, while Smith was removed from his chair because he had lost the confidence of his church, the outcome of his case vindicated the liberty (not to say the autonomy) of biblical criticism in the Free Church of Scotland.

At this stage in the story the New Testament was almost untouched by the critical process in the theological schools of Britain. When conservatives appealed to recorded statements of Christ on such points as the authorship of Psalm 110, the others felt bound to offer a reasoned reply: they did not question the authenticity of such dominical statements, as many would do today. The Cambridge school, says Dr Cameron, 'succeeded in insulating British thought almost completely from the influence of the radical scholarship which dominated continental debate'. In some important respects the achievement of the Cambridge school has stood the test of time: Lightfoot's essay on 'St Paul and the Three' (in his case *Galatians* commentary) demolished the dogma of antithetic Pauline and Petrine first-century setting of the New Testament with evidence that stands firm a century after his death. The tradition of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort was ably upheld by such successors as H. B. Swete, J. B. Mayor and J. Armitage Robinson, even if they 'attained not to the first three'.

There are many other things in this fascinating and well-documented work, which clamour for mention, but the limits of a review must not be exceeded. The issues with which it deals are still alive at the end of the twentieth century, and much of its substance is relevant to our own day.

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### **Jesus Risen. The Resurrection – what actually happened and what does it mean?**

Gerald O'Collins

Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987; 233 pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 232 51727 4

The author gives us a rather 'mixed bag' treatment of the resurrection, covering biblical material, the history of views, modern theologians, as well as his own ideas on its importance. He begins with a brief review of the patristic writers, then medieval theologians, concentrating on Aquinas. Interacting with their ideas, O'Collins shows how some of these were later developed by others.

There follows a summary of the work of eight modern theologians – namely Barth, Bultmann, Pannenberg, Marxsen, Moltmann, Rahner, Kung and Sobrino. Although useful summaries and comparisons are given, he is necessarily selective in their writings chosen for discussion (as he admits), and selective also in the choice of the eight! The brevity of the treatment makes this selection of limited use, since much has to be left out of the discussion.

From these eight studies, themes are then selected which act as the backbone for the rest of the book, event, faith, revelation, redemption and hope, love, and communicating the resurrection. Although his own views are expressed, the author tends to operate by summarising the work of others,

then interacting with it. 'Popular' material is also considered, including Channel 4's 1984 series 'Jesus The Evidence'. Curiously, the Bishop of Durham is noticeable by his absence, as is Murray Harris.

Alternative theories if the empty tomb are discussed, and dismissed as improbable. An appendix is also devoted to refuting the idea that 'luminous' appearances of Jesus, such as were claimed for other ancient religions, were the primary experiences of the disciples. The author's view is quite traditional – the historicity of the empty tomb is the best explanation of the events.

But the book does not stop there, for 'the question of Jesus' resurrection cannot be solved by historical evidence alone'. A 'who moved the stone?' type of approach is regarded as incomplete, since personal experience is also evidence, and Easter faith involves commitment and confidence in the resurrection, the author proposes that a person's 'embodied history' is raised from death to new life, though he admits that this itself raises questions which he does not answer here.

The book always keeps an eye on popular ideas about the subject and particularly on Roman Catholic thought. Thus, eleven pages are devoted to 'Peter as Easter witness', including a consideration of Peter and the pope. The primary role of the pope is seen as *the* proclaimer of the Lord's resurrection. The doctrinal commitment of the author (dean of theology at the Gregorian University, Rome) does therefore affect some of the views in the book. This does not detract from its value, however, except perhaps that his originality is restrained, and we are left knowing a little about a lot of others' views, but not a lot about his. Perhaps it will best serve the interested lay person who would like a broad sweep of the subject.

At the beginning of the book, we are told that three perspectives will be used – academic, suffering and worship. The first predominates, the third is present, but very little of the second appears. This is disappointing, but perhaps another volume could be devoted to this, to explain how 'we can learn about the first Easter not only by studying in the library but also by suffering in a slum and singing in a church'.

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### **The Enigma of the Cross**

Alister McGrath

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1987, £6.95, 192 pp.

Recent months have seen the publication of several scholarly evangelical contributions on the theme of the cross; George Carey's *The Gate of Glory*, John Stott's *The Cross of Christ*, and now this book from the somewhat prolific pen of Alister McGrath. The book is, the author explains, 'an attempt to unfold the crucial enigma which lies at the heart of the Christian faith, and indicate its meaning for the life of the church'. If this seems a somewhat Herculean undertaking the author is certainly well aware of it, and indeed of the mystery which surrounds the object of investigation and renders every attempt to fathom it exhaustively futile. Nevertheless, convinced as he is that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ represent something 'given' in

God's self-revealing activity. McGrath ventures forth, equipped with both a scholarly mind and a preacher's gift for communication. The result is an eminently readable book which goes a long way towards enabling the non-theologian to relate the symbol which so dominates Christian art, literature, hymnody and architecture to the many areas of Christian faith and life from which it has all too often been notable by its absence.

The book falls into two sections. In the first of these the author seeks to establish the *centrality* of the cross for an authentically Christian understanding of God and of the world. After Calvary, he argues repeatedly, there can be no other starting point for knowledge of God, and any attempt to begin elsewhere must certainly renounce the claim to be Christian theology, since 'the criterion of what is Christian and what is not is the cross of Jesus Christ, the crucial enigma which distinguishes the peculiarly Christian way of looking at human existence and experience from all other viewpoints'. Thus this historical event which lies at the very heart of the kerygma has a significance reaching far beyond the soteriological slot normally provided for it in dogmatic text books. It tells us who God is and what he is like, as well as what he has done, and who man is and what he is like, and has profound implications for the way in which we live. In short, the cross is at the centre of all Christian thinking and cannot be avoided or qualified (no matter how much of a scandal it may prove to our previous understanding of things), without the integrity of the gospel itself being called into question.

The second part of the book develops this same theme further, exploring the *relevance* of the cross for humankind in today's world, in knowing God, in preaching and hearing the truth of the gospel, and in life in general, both individual and corporate. The 'word of the cross' is considered in its historical aspect and as part of a living tradition which cannot stand still but must ever seek to address itself to the ears of those who need to hear, while yet recognising the dangers of an uncritical assimilation of 'peripheral cultural accretions'. The reader is reminded that the cross does not need to be *made* relevant, but simply to be proclaimed effectively in its relevance for modern men and women who, like their first century counterparts, stand in need of its paradoxical message of judgment and forgiveness, condemnation and acquittal, the Godforsakenness of death and the death of death itself. The cross creates its sown point of contact within the lives of men and women in the self-revealing activity of God through the Holy Spirit, and does not need to be fitted into any convenient or congenial modern category in order to gain credibility. Every attempt to lessen the folly of the cross to the 'modern mind', therefore (such as the Enlightenment's reinterpretation of it as the embodiment of human self-sacrifice), risks emptying it of its true significance, which resides precisely in its nature as a *scandalon*, calling humanity into question in order to heal and renew it. To lose this scandal is to lose touch with the relevance of the cross.

*The Enigma of the Cross* is a helpful book which raised some important issues at a level accessible to those who spend their lives doing things other than studying or teaching theology. For this is to be commended. If it is to be criticised then it must be for its failure to hold the cross firmly in its incarnational and Trinitarian context, and its suggestion that Golgotha somehow possesses a significance for the Christian faith which outweighs and

exists independently of that of Bethlehem. To respond to these doctrines, whilst important, are not the particular focus of the book would simply be to confirm the worst, namely the utter failure to appreciate the fact that the cross can only bear the climactic and staggering significance which it does in fact bear for the Christian when it is understood from the outset *who it is* who goes to the cross for others, when it is perceived that this not a cross like any of the thousands of others which adorned the Roman empire precisely because it is *God's* cross – the cross of the Son who embraces it in obedience to the Father and in the power of the Spirit. Unless we view the event of the cross on the historical plane through the lens of the same event in the Trinitarian life of God, we shall risk serious misunderstanding of its true significance for all, and, indeed, for God himself. That *The Enigma of the Cross* does not make this point more clearly is to its detriment. Yet it remains a book worth reading for all who seek to deepen their appreciation of the crucial enigma at the heart of the Christian faith.

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### Thinking about Faith

David Cook

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, and Academie Books, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1986; 220 pp.; n.p., ISBN 0 310 44131 5

David Cook believes that too many people shy away from any engagement with issues or concerns which are given the description 'philosophical'. Sometimes they are repelled by philosophers' perversity in raising questions which do not seem problematic to anyone else; sometimes they are daunted by the complexity of philosophers' debates; and Christians in particular are anxious or fearful that their faith may be corrupted or undermined by philosophical argument. But Cook is convinced that Christians do not have anything particularly to fear. More positively, he says 'My aim is . . . to equip people for evangelism and ministry'. He is surely correct that a working-through of philosophical issues (whether a high-sounding description like 'philosophical' or 'epistemological' or 'metaphysical' is employed to describe them, and whether any philosophers' names are dropped) is an important aspect of evangelism; a refusal to consider such issues can be a faithless or uncaring refusal to take seriously the thinking of people for whom evangelism is undertaken. Philosophical questions arise, after all, from the unusually persistent and rigorous pursuing of questions which concern everyone.

In the present book the author is aware that he has scope only to sketch some basic lines of argument, together with an indication of further reading by which the topic can be pursued. He has chapters introducing these topics: Faith and Reason, Mysticism, The Paradoxical character of Faith, God's transcendence and immanence, the problems of Evil and Suffering, Prayer, Miracles, Science and Faith, Religion and Morality, traditional arguments for God's existence, language about God, and Religious Experience. There is also a concluding chapter in which Cook seems to favour our thinking of philosophy as at least clarificatory, helping Christians as well as others to a

more exact grasp and articulation of their views. Where philosophy and theology meet and overlap, there is more going on than mere clarification: a description is being offered of the way the world is. It is not made plain (to this reviewer) whether Cook thinks that the philosophy simply helps to clarify the really substantial affirmations which are, as it were, provided by theology. At least the debates discussed in Chapter 12, on Talk about God, are over whether theology can *claim* to assert anything factually significant. To argue, as Cook does, that theology can make that claim, is to go beyond mere clarification in one's philosophizing. But this is perhaps one of the many points at which the reader is prompted to take the questions further. In this case five books are suggested for study. One of the most useful of these, that by T. McPherson, is given the wrong title: this should be *Philosophy and Religious Belief*. Again, the author of *The Theological Frontier of Ethics* is W. G. MacLagan.

The 'who's who of leading and representative philosophers' helpfully identifies the key contentions of some philosophers (e.g. of Berkeley , , , 'his famous view is that "to be is to be perceived" '); it also has entries on Desmond Morris and the prophet Ezekiel, whose claim to be philosophers is thin; the entries on Adam, Julius Caesar, Maurice Chevalier, and Uzziah do seem clearly to be out of place; that on J. O. Urmson ('1915- an English Philosopher') is notably unilluminating.

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