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Time in the Bible

I. Barr's Embargo

Whoever now wishes to state the significance of time for biblical theology must reckon with the strictures of Professor James Barr. In two books¹ he lays an embargo on the attempt by the so-called 'biblical theology' school² to distinguish a peculiarly biblical concept of time. His statue of prohibition contains three clauses: the first forbids internal traffic in spurious philological theories, the second the import of philosophical contraband, and the third the export of theological articles manufactured from their combination. The market researcher must first decide whether to accept or reject the restraint on the commerce in biblical word studies, to observe or breach the blockade on the biblical coastline.

By section one of his interdiction Barr the exciseman seeks to bring to book those who evade their correct linguistic dues. Committed to a dogmatic belief in the coherence and distinctiveness of the Bible for which they are determined to invent evidence if they cannot find it, the 'biblical theologians' have been moonshining a heady concoction of linguistic fallacy for the theological market, and bootlegging it through such discreet channels as Kittel's dictionary. They imagine they can reach a uniquely biblical concept of time on the basis of a comparison of the lexical and syntactical structures of classical Hebrew with other languages, Semitic and Indo-European. But their basic assumption is erroneous that without regard to date, context and author, the key words in the Hebrew Old Testament can be allotted a meaning uniform for each and every occurrence by reference to the vocabulary stock from which they sprang; and further that where an equivalent may be discovered in the

¹ *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, O.U.P., 1961 – *Biblical Words for Time*, S.C.M., 1962.

² Barr lists the culprits in a bibliography to the second work.

Greek New Testament its meaning is likewise controlled from the same original word -herd. This semantic technique infringes the elementary philological rule that usage and syntactical environment take precedence over etymology. A metalinguistic extension of the method attributes ontological status to the concept supposed to lie like a Platonic form behind the verbal counter or group of counters by which it is represented;³ a hypostatizing of linguistic phenomena aided by the deception of denoting the concept by a transliterated (but craftily untranslated) Hebrew or Greek word.⁴ This piece of lexical *legerdemain* is a speciality of O. Cullmann and G. Dellings, using, for example, the words *kairos* and *chronos*. The alternative jugglery with syntax is the mainstay of T. Boman⁵ who tries to demonstrate that the Hebrew verbal system encouraged a view of time as a spatter of critical incidents or pregnant events in contrast to the smooth unrolling of a horological ribbon. Built into the very structure of the Hebrew language was a tendency to regard time in terms of concrete content (what happens at any point) rather than in terms of abstract form (what order the points fall into and what distances lie between them). God let the Greek language, and thought that corresponds to it, run wild during the classical period but the Hebrew language and the religious insight which it evoked he made the object of special cultivation.⁶ Barr subjects both the lexical and syntactical claims to a thorough examination and emphatically rebuffs their pretensions; a valid biblical theology can be built only upon the statements and not upon the words of the Bible.⁷ The primary object of his study of the biblical words for time is not in order to reach any very firm conclusions on that subject but to bring into disrepute a faulty procedure for theologizing from individual word studies which has for too long dominated the exegetical scene. I do not need for my present purpose to decide whether or not he has succeeded in this enterprise, and knocked a lot of pretentious twaddle on the head. It is enough that I judge he

³ *Semantics*, pp. 209ff; *Biblical Words*, pp. 50ff.

⁴ *Biblical Words*, pp. 58f.

⁵ *Hebrew Thought compared with Greek*, (ET) S.C.M., 1960.

⁶ *Semantics*, pp. 72-80.

⁷ *Biblical Words*, pp. 147-8.

has proved the case against a peculiarly biblical concept of time synthesized inductively from purely linguistic data. For this reason I propose to respect his embargo to this extent and forgo the attempt to extract a sanctified theory of the temporal from the study of biblical words.

II. *Alien Theory*

In the second article of his ordinance, Barr bans the import of philosophical categories. Not content with taxing illicit linguistic liquor he sets out, in the rôle now of customs officer, to smash the stills in which the stuff is made. The 'biblical theologians' whom Barr attaches have not derived their descriptions of the biblical idea of time solely from the collation and classification of Hebrew and Greek words for time and their cognates. In order to arrive at their desired end-product of a single, distinctive biblical theory of time they have had to boil down, reduce, concentrate, filter, refine, blend and mature the extremely diverse material which the biblical library provides. To do this processing they needed other tools and plant than purely philological ones; and therefore they brought in philosophical categories. Barr does not enquire systematically into the sources of this equipment because it is not directly germane to his aim. He is more anxious to stop the stuff reaching the consumer than to prevent the producer installing his distillery. Theologians may use their stills and vats and casks constructed from philosophical categories for other things if they please, but they may not poison the study of language with them. All the 'biblical theologians' have resorted, to a greater or less degree, to categorizing biblical material by theologico-philosophical formulations.⁸ Some admit it; others do not. John Marsh, for example, promises in his study to be Reformed in theology and Platonist in philosophical method.⁹ By contrast Cullmann leaves his pre-suppositions unconfessed. Barr resents in particular three distinctions, philosophical in origin, which all modern investigators of time in the Bible seem to accord axiomatic status; the commonplace opposition of Hebrew and Hellenic thought, the

⁸ *Biblical Words*, p. 149.

⁹ J. Marsh *The Fullness of Time*, Nisbet, 1952, p. 18.

well-known difference of opinion between Plato and Aristotle on the relation of time to eternity, and the popular Bergsonian antithesis between timeless idealism and the reality of temporal activity.

It has become a truism in philosophical theology of the last thirty years that Hebrew and Greek thought stand in antithetic relation to each other and archetypal relation to modern Western thought. The stark simplicity of the disjunction and the derivation will not survive much critical examination; it is little more than a convenient mnemonic device for the theological examinee. The supposed opposition has been characterized in so many contradictory ways that it can no longer be taken seriously. The labels Hebrew and Greek stand only for ideal polarities and do not correspond with any known historical discussion. The Greeks are supposed to have had a circular or cyclic view of time and history, according to which the cosmic process repeats itself endlessly like the rim of a wheel turning on a stationary axle. By contrast the Hebrews struck out with a rectilinear image of time, conceiving history as onward-moving, upward-pressing and irreversible. Hence the Greeks could not think of history as a vehicle of God's revelation but quite the opposite, a flashing of revolving spokes behind which the static reality of the axis remained hidden. Whereas the Hebrews could and did perceive the action of God in the thrust of actual historical events. I shall return to this antithesis shortly. It is sufficient here to notice that Barr wastes no powder and shot on it because the linguists have not used this particular tool to define the meanings of Hebrew and Greek words. It is the sort of distinction drawn by T. Boman and elucidated with the aid of Bergson which has wrought linguistic havoc. This is the alleged difference between a Greek and Hebrew view of time according to which the former knew how to reduce time to the bloodless category of sequence whilst the Hebrews did not. Oddly enough in this distinction the exponents seem to have switched seats. In the former distinction the Greek could not get off his fairground big-wheel whilst his Hebrew cousin was scooting along his switchback; in the latter the Greek had reduced time to mathematical measure whilst the Hebrew remained all knotted up in occasions of critical encounter.

Why is it, if the antithesis is invalid and contradictory, that it is persisted in? The 'biblical theologians' are not likely to undertake or agree to its demolition for two reasons. The first is that if some modes of thought in the Hebrew Old Testament are repugnant to the twentieth-century Westerner and difficult to defend from his presuppositions it will be a theological godsend to find a whole thought-world of comparable antiquity set in ostensible opposition to which this repugnancy and this difficulty can be traced. Greeks and Hebrews can be imagined as hard at it long before the modern wrangles between religionist and secularist were dreamed of. God, it may be devoutly thought, had set his seal on the incompatibility of two thought-structures, one pagan and perverse, the other sanctioned by his imprimatur. What theologian worth his salt could witness the destruction of so powerful a dogmatic and apologetic tool without a tear? Yet the truth is that for most of the formative period of Hebrew and Greek thought the thinkers in each language and culture were soliloquizing without contact about totally different questions. The validity of the contrast depends on the existence of a dialogue; but this was not taken up until long after the master thought of each race had crystallized, when the best part of the Old Testament had already been written. The second reason for the wish to retain the antithesis is its exegetical usefulness in affording apparent exactness in the definition of biblical ideas. Definition by contrast is a legitimate device, provided the thing opposed has been justly characterized. Barr begs leave to doubt whether, in the matter of Time, it has.¹⁰

He protests against the unholy alliance of aprioristic thought-forms with selective linguistic data. The Hebrew-Greek contrast wedded with lexical trickery produces monstrous progeny. He devotes one chapter to an alleged distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* and two more to a rebuttal of a supposed contrast between *kairos* and *aion*, the first a contrast of two kinds of time and the second a contrast between time and eternity.¹¹ John Marsh is the named perpetrator of the first and Oscar Cullmann

¹⁰ J. Marsh *The Fullness of Time*, Nisbet, 1952, p. 137.

¹¹ *op. cit.* chaps. ii, iii and iv.

of the second offence.¹² The Greek word *chronos* denotes calendar time, chronological time, clock-time, chronometer time, time by mathematical measure; the word *kairos* stands for realistic time, time with content, time of opportunity and fulfilment, critical, pregnant time. The former represents Greek thought and the latter Hebrew. 'History', says John Marsh in reference to the Hebrew view, 'consists of times bringing opportunities . . .'.¹³ 'It is typical of Scripture not to locate an event by defining its place on a chronological scale, but to identify it by its content'.¹⁴ Naturally enough the test contexts for the validity of the distinction between the two Greek words are those in which they stand side by side apparently synonymous e.g. Acts. i. 7; I. Th. v. i. (AV, RV and RSV 'times and/or seasons', NEB. 'dates and times'). Barr has little difficulty in showing that whilst in some instances *kairos* does carry over from classical Greek something of the meaning of 'critical' or 'opportune' time, for the most part it has taken on a neutral meaning indistinguishable from *chronos*, and is never re-sharpened to its classical meaning in contrast with *chronos*. The other distinction between *kairos* and *aiōn* is stated thus by Cullmann¹⁵: "The two ideas that most clearly elucidate the New Testament conception of time are those usually expressed by *kairos* (*kairos*, "a point of time"), and *aiōn* ("age") . . . The characteristic thing about *kairos* is that it has to do with a definite *point of time* which has a fixed content, while *aiōn* designates a *duration of time*, a defined or undefined *extent of time*'.

The details of this contrast may be reserved for consideration in connection with the thought of eternity. The point I am concerned with at present is the legitimacy of the procedure by which it is drawn. Barr does not object to philosophizing and theologizing about time as such, but protests against the spurious lexical method. Is Barr's embargo to be backed or opposed on

¹² J. Marsh *The Fullness of Time*, Nisbet, 1952, pp. 19ff.

'Time' in A. Richardson (Ed.), *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, S.C.M., 1950, pp. 258-67.

O. Cullmann *Christ and Time*, (ET) S.C.M., 1951, pp. 61ff.

¹³ *Theol. Word Book*, p. 263.

¹⁴ *Fullness*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ *op. cit.* p. 39.

this score? Certainly lexically he is entitled to set up a no-trespassing notice to keep theologians and philosophers off philological preserves. But I see no reason why a theologian should not be free to resort to philosophical categories, to definitions drawn from extraneous sources, as hermeneutic tools to the manipulation of biblical material, provided that on the one hand the biblical material consists of whole sentences and paragraphs and not disconnected words and on the other hand the adopted category is not used as a strait jacket or mould to force the material into shapes incompatible with the idiom of its medium. After all many philosophers, even the more mathematically minded, have spoken of time in visual images. For example Plato's definition of time as the 'moving image of eternity'¹⁶ and Dora Marsden's various descriptions: 'Time is measured motion, mobile extension, shifting room, flying magnitude'.¹⁷ Why should not the theologian use his geometrical figures of circular, linear and the like? Norman Snaith, in a stimulating little paper,¹⁸ chooses to understand time in the Old Testament by distinguishing three kinds, circular, horizontal and vertical, the former two of which are invaded and transformed by the third. He joins issue with Barr over his lexical prohibitionism but avoids a head-on clash by making his approach topological rather than etymological.¹⁹ I shall take another glance at this route into the problem in a moment. What matters now is that the distinction provides Snaith with an interpretative key which turns independently of the meanings of individual words. Cullmann likewise attains a control over the biblical material by his imagery of rectilinear advance, water sheds, and puckered points. I am not saying that the chosen ideas of time are the right ones or necessarily correspond with anything entertained by the original writers of the Old Testament or the New Testament, but only that talk of different shapes to and kinds of time may nevertheless allow the exegete to do justice to the biblical message. I think that Cullmann's

¹⁶ *Timaeus*, 37 d.

¹⁷ *The Philosophy of Time*, O.U.P., 1955.

¹⁸ 'Time in the Old Testament' in F. F. Bruce (Ed.) *Promise and Fulfilment*, T. and T. Clark, 1963, pp. 175-186.

¹⁹ *op. cit.* p. 175.

great book *Christ and Time* is going to survive as a work of theological insight even though his methods and most of his individual exegetic results may be shown to be riddled with holes. And the reason is that he does not seriously misrepresent the essential message of the Bible. Barr goes out of his way to disclaim any intention of rolling Cullmann in the dust; he endorses his organization of the material in his work on Christology and quarrels only with the lexical procedures in the work on Time.²⁰

As regards clause two of Barr's embargo, therefore, I accept his rejection of the use of any particular philosophical categories in the manipulation of linguistic data and indeed of any such employment of any such tool to distort the basic facts, but refuse to advance to a general proposition that all use of philosophical forms in interpretation is debarred. At the same time I do not feel terribly defiant about this. There is a great deal of talk of kinds and types of time, quite apart from specific lexical representation, which I think would be best dropped. What matters is what happens in time and not the nature of time itself. I would not absolutely ban, but certainly seek to avoid qualifying the word 'time' with such epithets as *primaeval*, *redemptive*, *dream*, *non-historical* and the like, if they are going to suggest the existence of a special kind of time before, after, beyond, outside or within time instead of simply an identifiable point or period of time which has certain definable characteristics. I never know whether the German words *Urzeit* and *Endzeit* are supposed to signify simply the beginning *of* time and the end *of* time or some non-temporal existence or form of being vaguely felt to frame the real time we know.

III. *Indigenous Concept*

Under clause three of his enactment Barr decrees that no finished theological article on time manufactured by processing the raw material furnished by the languages of the Bible in illegally-imported thought-forms shall be free of a severe export duty. This tourniquet on the export trade represents his final

²⁰ 'Time in the Old Testament' in F. F. Bruce (Ed.) *Promise and Fulfilment*, T. and T. Clark, 1963, p. 81.

bid to check what he seems to regard as a species of rum-running. I have already alluded to his insistence that a valid biblical theology can be built only on the statements and not on the words of the Bible. He goes on to point out with some satisfaction that there is a serious shortage within the Bible of the kind of actual statements about 'time' and 'eternity' which could form a sufficient basis for a Christian philosophical-theological view of time.²¹ Such statements may be found as 'God has promised times of restoration', 'Jesus said that His time had not yet come', 'Christ is alive unto all eternity', 'The gospel claims that the coming age has already arrived'. But there is another class of statements which is conspicuously rare in the Bible e.g. 'Time is the same thing as eternity', 'Paul teaches that eternity is not timelessness,' 'Time is the field of God's action', 'God created time', 'There is a time, other than our time, which is God's time'.²² The apostles, so far as we know, never enunciated in their preaching a doctrine of time²³ and it is, therefore, an intolerable presumption on the part of the 'biblical theologians' to rank a theory of time alongside and on the same level as the articles of faith by which we stand or fall. Not only is there no biblical concept of time, or even a group of biblical concepts differing from Old Testament to New Testament and from author to author; neither is there a biblical doctrine, or the material for, a biblical doctrine of time.

Having overthrown an established linguistic technique for arriving at a specially biblical view Barr will allow few alternatives. Possible starting points he lists are: (a) an examination of the implications of the creation stories;²⁴ (b) an attempt to discern a thought-structure as distinct from a lexical-structure in the Bible;²⁵ (c) an exegesis of Qoheleth 'the only book in the Bible consciously exercised by the *problem* of time';²⁶ (d) a literary study of biblical literature in its approach to historical

²¹ 'Time in the Old Testament' in F. F. Bruce (Ed.) *Promise and Fulfilment*, T. and T. Clark, 1963, pp. 131-2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *op. cit.* p. 157.

²⁴ *op. cit.* p. 145.

²⁵ *op. cit.* p. 146-8.

²⁶ J. A. T. Robinson *Theology*, lvi, 1953, p. 107 cited at *op. cit.* p. 148.

narrative.²⁷ He does not hold out much hope from the first; it might be (no more) the starting point for a discussion of eternity as something other than time. The other possibilities have in his view, distinct limitations. The upshot is the finding that 'if such a thing as a Christian doctrine of time has to be developed, the work of discussing and developing it must belong not to biblical but to philosophical theology'.²⁸ W. Eichrodt reaches substantially the same view.²⁹ He suggests that there may be no biblical conception of time substantially different from our own arising from a quite different understanding of reality. The important thing for the Bible lies not in the idea of time itself but elsewhere, in the use made of the historical sequence for the presentation of an encounter with God. If Eichrodt is right, Barr thinks³⁰ there may be good reason here for theology to avoid being forced into developing such a theological doctrine of time, or at any rate to avoid claiming that any such doctrine developed rests on a certain biblical basis. I accept both these judgements as eminently moderate and sensible, but remain unconvinced that the Bible must be held to yield so little. Barr grants grudging permission to take something out of the Bible on other than a linguistic basis but promptly vetoes the enterprise before it can be set on foot. His third section of prohibition would effectively sever the connection between the description of the teaching of the Bible and the subsequent theological-philosophical construction put upon it. If the formulation of a biblical attitude to time proves to be impossible then the expedition into dogmatics ought never to set off. I am not thinking of a biblical concept but of an attitude. If there is an apologetic demand on theology from the other end to adopt a stance regarding the temporal, the nature of history, the meaning of the eternal, such as was thrust upon it by Gnosticism in the second century and Existentialism in the twentieth, then the biblical theologian must try to express, if he can, the time-implications of the vital biblical doctrines, and seek to determine how far the question of time is a necessary hermeneutic key. He may well conclude that

²⁷ J. A. T. Robinson *Theology*, lvi, 1953, p. 149.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ W. Eichrodt *Th. Z.*, Vol. xii, 1956, pp. 102-3.

³⁰ *op. cit.* p. 149.

he cannot say much, that the material is too scanty and patchy, but he is bound to make the attempt to provide a foundation for defining a biblically-based Christian theology over against a speculative philosophical theology. He must say to the dogmatic theologian, 'You can say this but you must not say that'.

Barr himself draws attention to the fact that substantial dogmatic treatments of 'time' have been made by e.g. Barth and Brunner, with very little reference to Hebrew and Greek words.³¹ And yet both men have tried, not always successfully, to submit their theology to the authority of the Bible. I am persuaded that it is impossible to express the message of the Bible, the Old Testament gospel of hope and the New Testament gospel of fulfilment, without temporal reference. The call of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, the summons to Israel from the bondage of Egypt, the suffering of Jesus under Pontius Pilate must all remain in their historical settings. I look on Barr's last embargo with a piratical eye to assess the prospects of evading the blockade. I abide by his lexical law, pay due heed to his regulations on philosophy, but mean if possible to infringe his export restrictions. There is no need to break his cordon and sail through the few mean gaps he has conceded. It is only necessary to skirt his blockade entirely and look afresh at such indications as the biblical material itself gives for development. Some of these indications are the supplanting within the Old Testament of non-historical by historical thinking, the elaboration of a sacred view of history, the sub-division of time into progressive acts of a single cosmic drama, the completing of this schematization of history by a climactic *dénouement*, the apparent enclosure of the temporal process by a start-finish framework which does not trap within it the whole activity of God, the possible drawing of the corollary that God is independent of and Lord over time, the projection of religious aspiration in future hope, and the discovery of finality in a past event. If the Bible cannot be made to yield a theory or concept of time, it may nevertheless by such considerations as these evince an utmost seriousness about the temporal.

³¹ W. Eichrodt *Th. Z.*, Vol. xii, 1956, p. 155.

IV. *Mythical Time*

The cyclic view of time never was an exclusively Greek view. Only some few (very philosophically minded) Greeks held it and they derived it from equally sophisticated thinkers further East. The commonly contrasted rectilinear view of the Hebrews never derived from it nor arose in explicit contrast to the Greek version but had an independent source. The time contrast is not between a Hebrew and a Greek view of time but between what H. Frankfurt has called a primitive mythopoeic view held generally in the ancient Near East and the sudden unprecedented emergence among the Hebrews of a historical awareness. 'The mythopoeic conception of time is, like that of space, qualitative and concrete, not quantitative and abstract . . . Early man does not abstract a concept of time from the experience of time'.³² The evidence for this opinion is not lexical but is culled from a comparative study of ancient texts. Barr's ban is therefore no bar. As I understand it mythopoeic or mythical time, as B. S. Childs prefers to call it, is not a special kind of time, but a denial and disparagement of time; or, better, a refusal to recognize time, the inability or refusal to face up to its unarrestable and irreversible nature. Nothing new ever happens. The whole content of history was determined long since in some primaeval epoch vaguely felt to precede time but still mysteriously pervading the present, a golden age in which the final and persistent character of things emerged. All that now happens is repetition. The cyclic view was perhaps a rationalisation of this much more primitive non-temporal consciousness. Time is unreal or if real worthless. Time is a fading away, a decline, a deterioration, a degradation. The strength and vividness of the world's youth can only be recaptured and sustained by the ritual repetition of the myth of its origin and birth, the myth of the eternal return, at once recounting and effecting the perpetual recurrence and renewal, astronomic, cosmic, mundane, agricultural, political, social, personal. Before ever man expressed his attitude to time in terms of an individual and social teleology amid the phenomena of change, he discovered himself

³² H. and H. B. Frankfurt in *Before Philosophy*, Pelican, 1949, pp. 32-5.

temporally in the ritual perpetuation of an archetypal past.³³ He could not yet commit himself to temporality and historicity but learnt to come to terms with time ritualistically. It would be a bit odd if expressions of this kind of mentality did not crop up in the Old Testament which harbours much primitive material. I accept the findings of the myth-and-ritual scholars that they do. The problem is what are they doing there. Snaith and Childs³⁴ both conceive the situation as one in which a general ethnic concept of time is overthrown by a special enlightened Hebrew view. Note immediately that this is not that idiosyncratic Hebrew view expounded by Marsh of which Eichrodt and Barr complain, so different from our own, but simply the ordinary modern progressive understanding inherited from Israel. Both Snaith and Childs regard the overthrow as the key to the theology of the Old Testament. For Snaith the Old Testament is the record of the invasion by Vertical Time of both Circular and Horizontal Times. By Vertical Time he means the idea of visitation from God at opportune moments. Circular time is seen not only in the circular motion of the heavens, wheeling round annually and in the Platonic Great Year, but also and more immediately in the annual pastoral and agricultural programmes which are subject to seasonal recurrence corresponding to the cyclic movement of nature. In a more urbanized setting this time becomes 'religious' time, 'cult' time, and with the development of religious institutions it becomes 'ecclesiastical' time.³⁵ The Agricultural Feasts belonged originally to this kind of tempo. Very little effort of the imagination is required to see that in the right geographical setting, the great river basins of the Nile, Tigris, Euphrates and Indus, and at the right stage of cultural development, the great food-producing societies which emerged in the ancient Middle East, there was little, apart from invasion, to induce a strong sense of time. Indeed, if the evidence of the Australian aborigines has any bearing on the question the weak sense of time goes back into the food-gathering stage as well.

³³ Brevard S. Childs *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, S.C.M., 1960, pp. 72-3.

M. Eliade *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

³⁴ Vide notes (18) and (33).

³⁵ *op. cit.* pp. 75-83.

By contrast, Snaith's Horizontal Time signifies chronicled time, annalistic time, measured by dynasties, invasions, natural disasters and the like. Snaith's thought is that the Vertical Time invades the other two, an inbreaking of the Divine upon the naturalistic, an intersection of both nature and history by revelation. The irruption of Vertical into Circular Time registers not merely in the historicizing of the cult Festivals (that would only be the Horizontal ironing out the Circular to which thought I must return) but in their reinterpretation as commemorations of salvation history. For example, the originally apotropaic Spring. Passover for the exorcism of evil spirits is recruited to celebrate the Exodus rescue. The trail of the invasion of Horizontal by Vertical Time appears in the use of the primitive myth of a divine struggle with and conquest of the chaotic Deep to describe both the rescue from Egypt and the rescue from Babylonia. This is not just Horizontal Time being recurled by Circular but a perpendicular interruption in redemption. Childs expresses similar ideas in different terms. The biblical category of time is qualitative and quantitative. The mythical conception of time with its *Urzeit and Endzeit* scheme whereby the conclusion of history is expected to repeat the commencement is not just breached, as Gunkel thought, by a 'linear history', for this would be simply the substitution of one rationalization for another.³⁶ The Bible does not just replace cultic re-enactment of primaeval acts by a chronological succession of significant events, not even one leading to an immanent eschatology, but treating chronological time with all seriousness, portrays God as injecting novelty on the way in a series of personal interventions in historico-redemptive acts.³⁷

Both these writers treat the Old Testament as the product of a polemic situation in which the spiritually enlightened of Israel are contending for true faith in Yahweh against heathendom either trapped within the heritage of Israel or exerting pressure from without. The critical question is whether the Old Testament writers themselves were conscious of the tension between a Nature Religion and a Historical Revelation. If

³⁶ *Myth and Reality*, p. 75.

³⁷ *op. cit.* pp. 75-83.

there was a debate, a dialogue of theologians, in Israel on the subject of time, with Baalists lined up on one side and Yahwists on the other, conservatives and radicals respectively, the precise contentions advanced by each party have now been lost or deliberately suppressed and no final communique records the resolution of the problem. The situation is not polemic but post-polemic. The older mythical ideas have not been expelled but subjugated by the newer. The cosmos-chaos myth does service for the Egyptian Exodus and the Babylonian Deliverance, the archetypal event has been historicized. It is difficult to be quite sure whether the allusion is intended to correct the myth or whether the myth has so lost its potency that it has been demoted to a merely poetic standing. What Snaith and Childs have done is to take an aerial photograph of an archaeological site to throw into high relief features not visible from the present or even the contemporary ground level. Is it legitimate to draw in all these old buried contours on a modern map of the country? Surely yes, so long as nobody pretends that the Old Testament writers themselves knew so exactly what was under their feet, or that the question of time was more than incidental to their real struggle for religious supremacy.

The obverse is true of the New Testament. There the situation is pre-polemic. Irenaeus has not yet come to blows with the time-drained mythology of the Gnostics. Paul and John have scarcely begun to define Christology and Soteriology over against germinal Gnosticism and have not yet had to spell it out that the Gospel is not about timeless truths or an ever-present potential in man for existential decision but about an act of grace by God in time at a specific point of time. The 'Εφ'απαξ, once for all, of Paul and the writer to the Hebrews³⁸ is not, as Brunner³⁹ would have it, directed against a non-temporal revelation through Nature instead of history but against the indecisive and inconclusive repetitiousness of the Jewish ceremonial and ethical system. We must beware in interpreting Scripture of ascribing to biblical writers the polemic postures we imagine they

³⁸ 'απαξ Heb. 6.4; 9.7, 28; 10.2. 'Εφ'απαξ Rom. vi. 10; Heb. vii. 27; ix. 12; x. 10.

³⁹ *The Mediator*, (ET) Lutterworth, 1934, pp. 25-35.

would have adopted to problems which trouble us but never disturbed them. But at the same time when we have to adopt these stances ourselves we need not be ashamed of turning to the Scriptures for ammunition. Brunner's 'Ἐφ'απαξ is exegetically false but dogmatically sound. Paul did the same sort of thing in the outrageous applications he sometimes made of Old Testament texts. The Scriptures were originally the product of protestation, an outgrowth of the struggle for truth and loyalty, and if no explicit teaching on time has crystallized from the overlaid tension between myth and history within the Bible itself the attitude of the Bible can soon be brought to utterance in the words of the Bible as soon as the conflict arises. In a clash about the importance of time the Bible remembers its roots and its fundamental repudiations and declares itself time-minded.

V. Salvation History

Snaith and Childs try to locate the birth of an endemic Israelite attitude to time in a ideological conflict within the Middle East of the two millenia before Christ, the settlement of which is recorded in the Old Testament from the standpoint of the victor. Their treatment builds on the form-critical method of Gunkel and discovers a contrast between the static, mythical presuppositions of the indigenous agriculturalists of Palestine and the dynamic historical experience of the invading nomads. The disadvantage of their method and the field of their review is that they have to tackle the text of the Old Testament piecemeal digging bits out of their present context and enquiring into their sources in maybe earlier millenia. A more productive method would be one which took the whole text as it now stands and looked for some orientation which betrayed a special time interest. This is the kind of approach taken by S. G. F. Brandon⁴⁰ who, relying more on the older source-criticism, attempts to reconstruct the stages in the development of Hebrew historiography. This way he gets nearer the nib of the pen of the biblical writers than Snaith and Childs who are rather trying to reconstruct a thought background. In contrast to the gods of the

⁴⁰ *Time and Mankind*, Hutchinson, 1951, chaps. iv and v.

Ugaritic texts, Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, demonstrated his providence for his people on the stage of political affairs rather than in the fertility of crop, flock and family.

The relationship between Yahweh and Israel was not natural but conventional. He became God of Israel not by natural affinity or kinship but by artificial adoption, on the ground of election and on condition of covenant.⁴¹ The marriage of God and his people took place for Israel not annually in recollection of some aboriginal, unoriginate union but at a definite remembered point of time, viz. the Exodus. The sacred writings of the Hebrews were therefore concerned with *Heilsgeschichte*, salvation history, all stemming from an interpretation of the founding of the nation at the Exodus. Brandon, following Von Rad, seeks to show that triggered by the Exodus experience, a school of Yahweh loyalists produced the Old Testament in stages to serve an ideology of revelation through history. The Hexateuch, which forms the kernel of the Hebrew conspectus of history, sets forth the essential pattern. The Exodus rescue and its attendant covenant are read back by the Yahwistic historians into the Patriarchal Sagas (e.g. Noah as Bringer of Salvation and the election of Israel forecast in Noah's oracle).⁴² The historicizing programme is not deliberate and artificial but, in the earliest stages at least, probably unconscious and spontaneous. The germ of the Salvation history probably lay in the credo of the ancient amphictyonic festival at which the Israelitic tribes celebrated their league of political alliance immediately on settlement in Palestine which according to modern theory for some tribes preceded the Exodus; but it was the Exodus event which gave a new status to the recollection of the past.

The Yahwistic writers initiated in literary record the concept of aetiology relative to the flow of events and took the first step from the intuitive to the explanatory stage of thought in a ratiocinative account of historical action.⁴³ The result is no mere annalistic chronicle but a highly selective and tendentious manifesto.⁴⁴ The writers of Hebrew literature set out to combat

⁴¹ *Time and Mankind*, Hutchinson, 1951, p. 95.

⁴² *op. cit.* pp. 62-83.

⁴³ *op. cit.* pp. 82-3.

⁴⁴ *op. cit.* p. 62.

Baalization and therefore interpreted the Exodus and the settlement as salvation history.⁴⁵ They were the first people to give a meaning to history and therefore to recognize the seriousness and the reality of the onward march of time. Brandon works the theme out in other books besides those which form the Hexateuch. The prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries had to maintain the scheme and extend it in the face of all the contrary evidence of national apostasy and evident Divine displeasure, some of the Psalms popularize the idea of sacred history in their liturgical rehearsals of past deliverances, the apocalypsts eventually schematize the whole thing in numerical divisions. Between them over the whole time of the production of the Old Testament they shaped a propaganda myth, a justification of the religious revolution against the apostate *status quo*. They were not defending the existing politico-religious structure of Israel during the monarchy and beyond, creating for the support of the kings an apologia, a kind of Tudor myth, but on the contrary were vindicating God against them. Now there may be a lot wrong with the detail of Brandon's argument. He is, for example, too dependent on a theory of sources which is generally thought to be crumbling. The Hexateuch is not the obvious entity it was once thought to be. Moreover, his thinking is on a low naturalistic level. I do not mean that he fails to recognize the hand of God; he is not writing that sort of book. I mean that he does not give enough weight to the religious as distinct from political motivation of the Old Testament writers. But for all that he does perceive the intense sense of destiny in the Old Testament and the difference between this and any other actual historical view of history. A man with a cyclic view of history might advance from conceiving a wheel turning about a static axis to conceiving the wheel as rolling and the axle-tree in motion. The distinction of the Old Testament writers is to have discerned direction and goal. Hesiod thought the wheel was moving but he imagined it was rolling downhill. The Yahwists believed that God was pushing and drawing the wheel. But this sprang not from a special idea of time but from a special idea of God. I believe it is

⁴⁵ *Time and Mankind*, Hutchinson, 1951, p. 97.

a mistake to reduce the offence, the scandal of the biblical message to that of historical particularity but there is no denying that it is there, ineradicably, in the idea of a salvation-history, a recorded series of events in which God has peculiarly acted. There is much more to the offence than that but there is also at least that.

VI. *Divided Time*

D. S. Russell warns against the grave error of regarding the literary phenomenon of Apocalypticism as an aberration from traditional Hebrew thought. He quotes⁴⁶ Sabatier's dictum 'Apocalypse is the prophecy what Mishnah is to Torah' and T. W. Manson's judgement that Apocalyptic is 'an attempt to rationalize and systematize the predictive side of prophecy as one side of the whole providential ordering of the Universe. The other side of the systematizing process is the scribal treatment of the law leading to the codification of the Mishnah.'⁴⁷ The practically pathological curiosity about time in the Apocalyp-tists is not a wholly alien element, though it must owe something to Persian influence from the similar attitude in Zoroastrianism, but is largely a natural evolution from the simpler idea of Salvation History. The unity of history as a corollary of the unity of God was already adumbrated in the canonical prophets Amos, Deutero - Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. All that the Apocalyp-tists were to do was to take the process a stage further by arranging history systematically and sub-dividing it into periods and epochs predetermined by divine decree.⁴⁸ Most Apocalyptic lies, of course, outside the canon, but since *Daniel* and the New Testament *Book of Revelation* are generally regarded as marking respectively the first and last great products of the tradition the fantastic developments in the interim must to a large extent control our understanding of the canonical works.

No interpretation of the message of the Bible can be correct which cuts out this wedge. The thought-forms of the Old Testa-

⁴⁶ D. S. Russell *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, S.C.M., 1964, p. 86.

⁴⁷ T. W. Manson 'Some Reflections on Apocalyptic' in *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne (Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel)* Neuchâtel and Paris, 1950, pp. 139ff quoted by D. S. Russell, *op. cit.* p. 84.

⁴⁸ *op. cit.* p. 218, 223.

ment do not reach their mature development within the canon but beyond it. The same goes for the New Testament the categories employed in which are denuded of their proper significance if the inter-testamental literatures are left out of account. I am not saying that the ancient Hebrews had a distinct concept of time which the Apocalyptists recut and polished, but only that the way the latter handled questions of time rebounds teleologically upon the meaning attached to time by the intra-biblical writers. Russell lists the special temporal features of Apocalyptic as (a) pessimistic historical surveys (b) the division of time into periods (c) the doctrine of the two ages (d) the unity of history (e) the notion of primordially.⁴⁹ All these elements are to be found at least germinally within the Old Testament itself. The feature that I want particularly to draw attention to is that of the division of time into periods. The final judgement on Apocalyptic may well have to be that its message is vitiated by the spurious precision of its prediction, a charge from which *Daniel* and *Revelation* may not entirely escape. Daniel, elaborating a hint in Jeremiah (Jer. xxv. 11-12; xxix. 10) divides up history, from the time of the Captivity onwards into seventy weeks of years or seventy heptads of years (Dan. ix. 2 iff), and again apports the world empires between four ages ruled by four beasts and signified by four metals (Dan. ii. and vii. 3). Extra-canonical works wax far more extravagant and carve up world-history from the Flood to the Final Judgement. The Apocalyptists deserve to be disbelieved for such pretence and for their bizarre idiom, but at the same time they were asserting something about God and his relation to time, and that not obliquely but quite directly. God was Lord of time. He had determined all things beforehand according to his good will and set in train their occurrence in order to fulfil it. He had rolled history flat and thrust it in a discernible direction towards an apprehensible goal. Of course, the conflicting schemes were mechanistic rather than organic and misconceived God as a kind of fate. Of course, much of the detail was theologically dangerous, some of it, e.g. Daniel's theory of deterioration, only

⁴⁹ T. W. Manson 'Some Reflections on Apocalyptic' in *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne (Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel)* Neuchâtel and Paris, 1950, p. 105.

partially baptized paganism. Too much of this kind of thinking represented human presumption and a draining away of religious mystery. But for all that the Apocalyptists were still seeking to give God the glory for the high destiny he had thrust upon Israel. If they boasted of being able to take in the whole of history at a glance and allocate the times and seasons of God's purpose, they meant only to rejoice in his dominion of time. But for my present purpose their importance lies in their taking the next logical step in the development of a biblical attitude to time. They succeeded to a tradition in which a group of men had originally broken with a Nature Religion in favour of a Historical Revelation and their successors had recounted the series of events in which the revelation was thought to have occurred, handling on the idea of a salvation history. I think of those little framed charts found in the vestries of some churches in which the whole of world history is marked out in ages. The Apocalyptists have their successors still and he would be a rash man who thought that they had seriously misunderstood the Bible. Whether literally or symbolically history is planned by God. How otherwise should he know the fulness of time when he should send his Son? The Apocalyptists represent in an extreme form the naïveté which lies at the heart of the biblical message. In the New Testament when asked to locate himself on such a time-chart Christ did not deny the existence of such a chart but declined for lack of knowledge (Mark. xiii. 32 cf. Acts. i. 7). All those modern endeavours to relieve Jesus and Paul and John and all but a minority in the earliest church of the shame of belief in the time-schemes of Apocalyptic are to my mind misconceived. The only eschatology the contemporaries of Jesus knew was an apocalyptic one saturated with time references. The Christians, following Jesus, certainly pruned back the rank growth and simplified the scheme but they did not repudiate it (*pace* T. P. Glasson, J. A. T. Robinson and others).

VII. Climactic Time

The burden of the earlier salvation history of the Old Testament and of the later quantified version of developed Apocalyptic was that all times were not equal. God himself distinguishes times and events: in some he manifests himself but in others he

remains hidden. Within the series of events which constitutes salvation history again some times are more valuable than the others, more numinous. Such was the time of deliverance from Egypt, the 'classic' time of redemption, which become the base and model for all salvation times. The creators of the tradition took the Exodus as their starting point not only to extrapolate into the past (so that Israel's ancestors are shown as receiving the call that came to the nation) but also to project into the future (so that all God's deliverances and his final Deliverance will follow the pattern of the Exodus). For the Old Testament writers the Exodus is definitive, normative and final, answering the what, how and when of God's redemptive action. It is definitive because it reveals God's salvation as a deed of rescue from actual evils within real time and is not merely a conceptual escape at no particular time. It is also definitive because it identifies the God henotheistically. It is normative because it establishes a pattern or model for all such rescues. It is final because it is pivotal; all such rescues being ultimately the same rescue, not because though repeated in time it is only one intervention for God but because God never acts in any other way; his last act will be in the same mode as his first. This I take it is the proper interpretation to put on the description of the Exodus in terms of the old myth of the overthrow of the ancient dragon of destruction,⁵⁰ the re-enactment of the Exodus in the cultic celebration of the Passover⁵¹ and the expectation of a latterday Exodus.⁵² Clearly here mythopoeic conceptions are submitting to historical. It is not that an originally historical event has been progressively assimilated to a cultic happening but that ritual and mythical motifs have been requisitioned to serve a scheme of salvation history. Admittedly there are elements in the Old Testament which seem to conflict with this, e.g. the extensive motif of a correspondence between the Beginning and End of the World. N. A. Dahl⁵³ distinguishes

⁵⁰ Isa. li.9; Ps. lxxxix.10.

⁵¹ Exod. xiii.14.

⁵² Isa. xi.11, 15, xvi; 10.24-6; Jer. xxxi.31-33; xxxii.39, 40.

⁵³ 'Christ Creation and the Church' in *Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, edited by Davies and Daube, 1956, pp. 422ff of Russell *op. cit.* p.282.

seven main types of correlation between Creation and Re-creation. They are (i) analogy; (ii) restitution; (iii) transformation; (iv) identity; (v) reservation (i.e. of certain aspects or elements of the old); (vi) perfection; (vii) pre-existence or pre-destination. The idea is that the Paradise of the End will match the Eden of the beginning. No climax or critical occurrence comes in between them. None of these correlations is directly dependent on the idea of an intervening, irreversible, temporal process, and might therefore be taken as a proof of a non-temporal view of God's relation to the world. But against such a conclusion must be set (a) the fact that this symmetrical kind of thinking probably preceded true historical thinking and is therefore vestigial in its present contexts; (b) the fragmentary nature of these allusions in contrast to the unity and coherence of the historical tradition; (c) the fact that all seven correlations are capable of being fitted in to a time-scheme and have in their present contexts been so fitted; (d) the existence of other correlations with a historical base, e.g. the modelling of the Messianic Age on the Davidic reign; (e) the historizing of the cultic festivals. As to this last some, e.g. the Passover, the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Booths still retain the marks of their Pastoral and Agricultural source and are clearly in process of being historized; and there may well be others which have become completely historized. Such may be the case in the idea of the Day of Yahweh which from being the climax of the agricultural year in a New Year Festival has been applied by the prophets to a climax of Divine intervention in history (Amos. v. 18).

Although the Exodus is regarded by the Old Testament writers as definitive, normative and final it turns out in the New Testament to be no more than the foreshadowing of the Exodus which Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem. Marsh draws the numerous parallels in the New Testament in detail.⁵⁴ I confess that I am always initially sceptical when typological references are being collated in the New Testament to show that, e.g. one of the four Gospels has been modelled on the Pentateuch and Jesus given the rôle of a second Moses, but in the end I usually have reluctantly to concede that the cumulative weight of evi-

⁵⁴ *Fullness*, p. 81.

dence is irresistible. So it is here. Too many lines point to the conclusion that the primitive Church regarded the Advent of Christ as a second Exodus or rather the event that the original Exodus was really all about. The coming of Jesus is conceived as occurring at a moment of ripeness or maturity, in the fullness of time.⁵⁵ The fullness is not the fruition of a process immanent within history but the fulfilment of the overriding purpose of God. The ripeness is not determined by the seeding of promise but by the plucking of fulfilment. An objective reader must admit that the Bible as a whole reveals an extraordinary attitude to time as a medium in which a selective series of special times of divine activity (the successive Callings of God and the promises made by him for the future in connection with them) adumbrates and points to a climax within time which sheds its quality on the rest. The Exodus held this privileged position in the Old Testament but the whole event of Jesus takes over the role in the New Testament. Now there may be more or less satisfactory ways of stating the thought (with or without resort to spurious lexical techniques) and undoubtedly the idea is hideously problematic logically and philosophically. However it is put, the idea of a privileged time, a uniquely revelatory time, a period of maximum numinosity containing the quintessence of redemptive action, is bound to be at odds with the plain-man's view of time. Marsh⁵⁶ is critical of Cullmann's image of the midpoint of a rectilinear line of selective salvation events. Christ, he says, is not only the midpoint, he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the alpha and the omega. True enough, but then Marsh is only substituting for Cullmann's crude and admittedly defective temporal concept another crude and equally faulty temporal concept. And neither can claim to be more or less Scriptural than the other. Cullmann's D-Day illustration, his midpoint, his watershed, his puckered up or crinkled point, Tillich's *kairos*, are all in the end logically nonsense, but they still seem to me worthwhile symbols of the biblical witness to the climactic nature of the redemptive event described by Paul in the words 'Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us' (I Cor. v. 7).

⁵⁵ Gal. iv.14; Eph. i.10 cf Heb. i.1, 2.

⁵⁶ *op. cit.* p. 177.

VIII. Time and Eternity

If you asked a child to characterize God's relation to time by asking the questions which Barr disapproves of, viz., Did God create time or create in time or with time whilst he himself stayed outside of it? Is there a time other than our own which is God's time and which will survive when ours is worn out? He would probably not expound a dualism of time and eternity on the Platonic and Idealist model unless he were a remarkably precocious brat. He would more likely fish up the idea of perpetuity, of God's going on for ever and ever and having been there all the time even before the start. The concept of timelessness is much more sophisticated and presupposes both a certain disaffection with mutability and a degree of mathematical grasp. That is why the idea arose in India before ever it was taken up by the Greeks. For this reason it is *prima facie* improbable that the concept of timelessness finds expression in the Bible, which never negates time in the Far Eastern fashion.

The lexical disputes between the experts over the exact significance of the Hebrew *ōlam* and the Greek *aiōn*, their cognates and the standard phrases containing them, are not likely to yield any positive results for the simple reason that there is no special word for eternity in either language and the concept has therefore had to be expressed in words whose primary connotation is temporal. Barr and Cullmann who take opposite sides on the issue seem to me not to be arguing so much about the meaning of the words used as rejecting each other's picture of the relation of time and eternity. Cullmann looks to the doctrine of the two ages for his clue and concludes that for the Bible eternity is the entirety of time. Eternity is not other than time; it is the totality of time sharing in the same character which pervades and constitutes both. The edges of time, so to speak, do not lie at the beginning and the end but at the middle where the 'present age' and the 'age to come' overlap, and the decisive event of the cross cuts in at the midpoint to mark the beginning of the age to come before its expected time.⁵⁷ James Barr, on the other hand, fixes his attention on the Bible as it stands and sees the apparent framework of an absolute beginning at

⁵⁷ *Fullness*, pp. 62-93.

Genesis i. and a final conclusion at *Revelation xxii.* from which he is prepared to entertain the idea that eternity may be other than time. In his opinion the natural reading of *Genesis i.* is that the beginning of time was simultaneous with the creation of the world. And whilst he admits that Rev. x. 6. as it stands does not refer to the abolition of time and its replacement by timelessness but to the reduction of delay, he still harbours the suspicion that 'delay' was not what the angel originally said.⁵⁸ Both men are to my mind more right in what they affirm than what they deny. Cullmann is right to see that biblically the connection of time and eternity lies in the decisive interventions by God within time and not in any vague drift before or after the raising and lowering of the curtain on the cosmic drama. Barr is right to insist that the reduction of eternity to unlimited time does not recognize sufficiently the presence of the start-finish framework of Hebrew eschatology.

Neither gives sufficient attention to the fact that both for the Old Testament prophets and for the apostles (particularly John) the age to come, i.e. that which is or which issues in eternity is not merely the completion of the present age, but is altogether different from it. Some indication of the difficulty the Hebrews had within their tradition of conceiving timelessness appears from the diverse views taken in Apocalyptic of the duration of the Messianic age. For some this had a term and was to be succeeded by the everlasting reign of God himself; for others it had no end and was coextensive with God's eternal reign. The millennial reign of Christ in Rev. xx. belongs to the former school of thought. Thinkers whose main concern is to understand and do the will of God are not going to be very precise about a thing like that. If time has a term but God's purposes turn out to be the richer and more varied than they had at first thought, then time will be regarded as extensible to fit those purposes in. Paul evinces the same cool disregard of apocalyptic schedules in his apologia for the delay in the Parousia. All that he was sure of was that if there was to be a guillotine on time, God held it. If you had asked a Jew contemporary with Jesus and Paul what eternity was like he would

⁵⁸ *Fullness*, footnote p. 26.

have been like the child we imagined and would have thought naïvely of a transcendental order going on for ever but temporally starting from a decisive intervention by God. The only difference in the Christian was his belief that the decisive act had already taken place.

IX. Christ and Time

What is the relation of Christ to time? Can the message of Jesus and the Kerygma about Jesus be stated with our reference to time? Can the Gospel of Christ crucified, risen and expected be torn from its mooring in a past event in history and cut from its anchor in a future hope? The older attempt by the nineteenth-century liberals summed up by the achievement of Adolf Harnack is now generally repudiated. Jesus was regarded as an expositor of timeless truths about the permanent relation between God and all mankind who just happened to have flourished at a given historical era. More recently men like R. Bultmann, T. F. Glasson, C. H. Dodd and J. A. T. Robinson⁵⁹ have sought to show that whilst the time element ought not to be removed from Jesus' message in principle nevertheless the real meaning can be stated without resort to conceptions such as a decisive act of God in time, a definite hope for the future, and an end to time. They have been satisfactorily answered by W. G. Kümmel⁶⁰ who does not, in my view, go quite far enough. The key to the matter is the centrality of Jesus' eschatology and the irremovable futurist element in it. If Jesus was prophetic without being predictive, if his eschatology was uncontaminated by Apocalyptic, then it might be possible to say that the time-coefficient was a dispensable element in the Gospel. His message then readily reduces to a summons to existential decision in response to a challenging word of God spoken first by Jesus at a particular place and time

⁵⁹ R. Bultmann *History and Eschatology*, T. and T. Clark, 1957.

T. F. Glasson *The Second Advent*, 1945.

C. H. Dodd *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*, 1936.

J. A. T. Robinson *In the End God . . .* Jas. Clarke, 1950.

Jesus and His Coming, S.C.M., 1957.

⁶⁰ W. G. Kümmel *Promise and Fulfilment*, (ET) S.C.M., 1957.

but since proclaimed by his followers without necessary reference to that time and place and without holding out hope of a future time of comparable crisis. But this way the word 'eschatology' is often transformed from meaning the study of the last things to concern about the contemporaneously important. Kümmel has shown⁶¹ to my satisfaction that the message of Jesus cannot refer exclusively and exhaustively either to future or present fulfilment, that he placed side by side the conceptions that the kingdom of God was expected soon, that its coming was expected within his generation, and that the expected kingdom of God was at the same time already present in his ministry. Jesus believed, taught and proclaimed that his present was a time of eschatological fulfilment of past promise but that an unfulfilled residuum remained for future realization, not disconnected with his present but closely entangled with it. Kümmel states the position correctly but wonders quite how Jesus resolved the tension. The bridge, he thinks, is simply that in the present Jesus demands a decision which will be the determining factor for the eschatological verdict of Jesus when he comes as Son of Man. There is more to it than that. Jesus did not have to think out this connection *de novo*. I believe those scholars are right who believe that Jesus inherited and took over a dogmatic, ready-made scheme of the Last Things from the Apocalyptic tradition of the inter-testamental period and that far from by-passing it and reverting to the non-apocalyptic eschatology of the canonical prophets he produced a synthesis of the two by casting himself in the lead-rôle in the cosmic drama. I shall not work out the details but content myself with saying that it follows that the self-understanding and message of Jesus, together with the Church kerygma which is not a distortion but a development of it, is saturated through and through with time-reference. For Jesus the past is not an aspect of the self which is crucified in decision, nor is the future a new aspect of the self which is created by decision but an area *ad extra* of the redemptive activity of God. There are acts of God yet to be that require time to fulfil.

⁶¹ W. G. Kümmel *Promise and Fulfilment*, (ET) S.C.M., 1957, p. 141.

X. Conclusion

To sum up: there is no peculiarly biblical concept of time distinguishable on the footing of lexical studies or any other kind of studies; harm may be done by uncritical surrender to philosophical ideas of time to which theologians have turned to make up this deficiency, though not necessarily for the theologian need not surrender but pick and choose as he likes; and in the end the apologetic situation always demands a statement of the relevance of time to the Gospel, which is not nearly so hard to find if you are naïve enough to let the Bible speak in its own unabashed way about the once-upon-a-time of God's salvation.