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Evangelism, Church and Theology

One of the encouraging features of mainstream church life in the West in recent years has been the rehabilitation of evangelism as an explicitly acknowledged part of the church's mission. Since 1986 the Church of Scotland has deployed a nation-wide team of Organizers for Evangelism (one is grateful that 'for' is not 'of'), and the churches of the Anglican Communion have embarked on a Decade of Evangelism in the 1990s. Welcome though this Anglican venture is, its implications are not altogether comforting. Will evangelism cease at the end of the Decade? Should a Decade of Evangelism be any less disturbing than, say, a Decade of Worship would be, or a Decade of Loving-One's-Neighbour? Does not the very designation of a special Decade for evangelism suggest that it is not as normal and constitutive for the Christian church as worship and loving one's neighbour? Our prayer must be that the Decade marks the restoration of evangelism to as central and routine a place in the church's activity as Sunday services and pastoral care.

Many readers of this *Bulletin* may now be patting themselves on the back, as it were – for surely evangelical churchmen have always, almost by definition, maintained a fundamental commitment to evangelism? Does not evangelism represent an evangelical distinctive which evangelicalism has guarded like a sacred trust and is now only too happy to be sharing with the wider church? *Awakening the Giant* is how a recent paperback describes the task. Its sub-title is *Evangelism and the Catholic Church* and its author is Pat Lynch, a priest who persuaded his English bishop to set him apart as a full-time evangelist (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1990; 146pp., £5.95). Lynch is unambiguous about his extensive indebtedness to evangelicals – both full-time evangelists and writers on evangelism – in the development of his own understanding and role.

Yet it should not be too readily assumed that, where evangelism is concerned, evangelicals have no need of a teacher. The subject has not traditionally had much place in our theology. Calvin's *Institutes* do not deal with it as such, and the nearest L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* (to cite a widely used handbook) comes to it is the sentence: 'The true preaching of the Word is the great means for maintaining the Church and for enabling her to be the mother of the faithful.' To which theological writer or book would *you* refer someone seeking instruction in the theology of evangelism? One could make a start with the article in the IVP's *New Dictionary of Theology*, or even in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, a post-Vatican II Catholic work

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reviewed in Vol. 7:2 of this *Bulletin*, whose article begins with the revealing statement: 'A few years ago a term such as "evangelization" would have been unusual in a conversation about the Catholic Church's sense of mission and purpose.' (Catholicism has tended to prefer 'evangelization' to 'evangelism', but the former is commonly defined in a more comprehensive sense than the latter.)

If our Reformation heritage throws little direct light on evangelism, one of the dangers we face is that we identify it with something that Reformation ecclesiology took with utmost seriousness – the preaching of the Word (*cf.* the quotation above from Berkhof). If there is one weakness we are prey to, it is to believe that evangelism is synonymous with pulpit proclamation. The gospel is of course proclaimed in preaching, but neither is the Word wholly gospel nor is preaching the only means of communicating the gospel. Indeed it has to be insisted that methods of evangelism are not specified in the nature of evangelism itself. And here's the rub, for unworthy means can be resorted to (*cf.* the warnings of 2 Cor. 2:17, 4:2, 5) and not infrequently are, with the result that they discredit evangelism itself – which is one reason why the term, and even the practice, have been out of favour in some circles in recent decades.

But there can surely be few more urgent tasks in the 1990s than to formulate a clear-headed biblical theology of evangelism. We therefore welcome William J. Abraham's *The Logic of Evangelism* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1989; 245pp., £7.95), which laments 'the rift between evangelism and theology' and claims to be venturing into woefully neglected territory. He ends up conceiving of evangelism as 'that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time'. There is much to stimulate in this book, not least in its sensitive critiques of what it calls the proclamation and the church growth approaches. But it does not finally satisfy, not least because it makes so little use of Scripture, even – remarkably enough – making do without an analysis of the New Testament's use of the relevant Greek vocabulary. Hence Abraham reaches an understanding of evangelism lacking in sharpness of focus – one that encompasses discussion of conversion, baptism, morality, the creed, the gifts of the Spirit and the disciplines of the spiritual life, despite his recognition that when everything is evangelism, nothing is evangelism.

So the task remains. Its importance is neatly expressed by Abraham: 'Surely it is obvious that there would not have been a Christian community if there had not been any evangelism; nor might there be

one in the future.' If the church will not evangelize, no-one else will (which cannot be said of many of the church's activities). Meantime we could do much worse than keep the Lausanne Congress's fine definition before us:

'To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is every kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with this new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.'

* * * * *

It is fitting, as the editorial chair of *SBET* changes occupants, to pay tribute to Dr Nigel Cameron's service over the past ten years. *SBET* will continue to be published jointly by Rutherford House and the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, and will seek to play a constructive (not a conformist) role in stimulating evangelical theological reflection, in Scotland and beyond (not in Scotland in isolation), for the 1990s and beyond (not for any past era, however glorious).

CANONICAL THEOLOGY: AN EVANGELICAL APPRAISAL

CARL F.H. HENRY

Recent emphasis on narrative hermeneutics and on canonical exegesis has shaped new possibilities of constructive dialogue between evangelical orthodox and mediating critical scholars. Doubtless some conservative enthusiasm for these developments flows from a misconception of what advocates of the new hermeneutical approaches really imply. Some welcome only what they find compatible in the new approaches without wrestling with underlying assumptions and debatable consequences. But others are ready to grapple with important aspects of the current hermeneutical shift. What is beyond dispute is that narrative theology and canonical exegesis, in some respects at least, mark significant breaks with the recent modern critical approach to the Bible.

I propose to discuss the view of canon exegesis which Professor Brevard Childs has influentially propelled into the current hermeneutical controversy. Professor Childs is a formative thinker of profound erudition and high courage. No scholar should gloss convictions that have emerged from his lifetime of critical engagement. From early graduate studies in biblical introduction that liberal historical criticism dominated he returned to several decades of teaching in America during which he noted the disintegration of the broad European critical consensus, the rise and fall of the post-Barthian biblical theology movement, and the ensuing 'widespread confusion' precipitated by the modern critical approach to Scripture. It is from this confusion that he proposes to rescue us.

Critical 'Orthodoxy'

For several generations higher critical 'orthodoxy' has insisted that for cultic purposes the biblical writers superimposed upon the ancient past an imaginative history, one that reconstructs and embellishes supposedly earlier and more reliable literary strands. The regnant critical approach subordinated divine action to cosmic processes and viewed the Bible as merely a religious search for Hebrew self-identity. It levelled Scripture to the plateau of universal religious literature and eroded its distinctive witness to an authoritative Word of God. Stimulated by the Enlightenment's contempt for miraculous theism, the modern theories searched for primitive sources considered more trustworthy than the Scriptures. Even where philosophical idealism prevailed, and not raw naturalism, it conformed Judeo-Christian claims to those of religion-in-general. So Adolf Harnack,

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for example, insisted that the divine Christ of the Pauline epistles was a speculative reconstruction of a primitive non-miraculous Jesus.

The main goal of biblical criticism was to identify behind the biblical text an earlier, more reliable and more normative record. Into this primitive 'black hole' biblical critics funnelled a remarkable divergence of supposedly long-lost superior original sources. Critical scholars indoctrinated multitudes of divinity students to believe that competent Bible study requires concentration on documents such as J, D, E, P, and Q as an Ur-Bible that would yield a surer clue to the essence of Hebrew religion and history than does the scriptural literature.

The assumption of a developmental reconstruction of religious narratives was not, to be sure, without some basis in other Near Eastern literature. Sumerian religion exhibits, as Jeffrey H. Tigay points out, multiple literary sources enabling us to trace the evolution of its spiritual traditions over a long period of time, most notably the Gilgamesh epic (*The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, Philadelphia, 1982). But no independently-existing earlier sources corresponding to biblical materials have been found.

Critics routinely questioned Scripture's historical trustworthiness whenever independent extrabiblical confirmation was lacking. But during the past half-century, archaeological findings publicized by William F. Albright and others nurtured confidence that the biblical writings reflect accurately even the patriarchal and Mosaic eras. Such archaeological confirmation somewhat turned the flank of Wellhausenian theory that required much later datings for the pre-prophetic period, although critical scholars like John Van Seters (*In Search of History*, New Haven, 1983) still disallow the essential historicity of the Pentateuch.

Although higher critical 'orthodoxy' allowed for later textual insertions by redactors, it could muster no impressive agreement over either the content or the date of such later alterations and additions. Professor Childs' verdict is that the dating of P remains 'a tentative enterprise at best' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia, 1979, p. 124), and that critical research tracing the development of D is in a 'fluid state' with 'no signs of moving toward consensus' on the issues it raises (*ibid.*, p. 208), and moreover that many assumptions of 'the "orthodox" literary critical method' still must be examined (*ibid.*, p. 121). Nothing confronts the critical enterprise more embarrassingly than the unfruitfulness of its theory that Scripture presupposes ancient earlier documents whose precise content conflicting schools of thought have been unable to stipulate but which are nonetheless held to constitute sources more trustworthy than the received biblical text.

Brevard Childs' Dissent

Professor Childs rejects much of the outcome of recent historical criticism for three reasons: (1) It is less concerned to analyze the canonical text than to revise and reconstruct Hebrew history and its religious and literary development. (2) It mistook canon formation as an activity external to the biblical literature, ascribing it to a fourth-century ecclesiastical imposition of normative writings. (3) It failed to grasp the dynamics of canon formation in dialectical relationship with Israel's and the early church's religious consciousness that shaped a tradition normative for faith and practice.

By his complaint against mainline historical criticism Professor Childs does not intend the wholesale repudiation of critical method or of any and all investigation of earlier documentary sources, nor does he propose a return to traditional evangelical datings of canonical materials. What he objects to is the critical postulation of normative pre-canonical sources and a consequent devaluation and distrust of canonical materials. Professor Childs deplores a particular tradition that for a century and a half had a stranglehold on higher critical inquiry. He rejects the modern heralding of the history of critical studies as a movement from ignorance to objective truth as vigorously as he rejects an extreme conservative dismissal of it as merely an enthronement of human pride over biblical wisdom. But fruitful study of the Bible, he contends, will not come from improved source analysis, or pursuit of some new genre, or surfacing some previously overlooked redactional layer. 'The contribution of historical criticism to exegesis', he insists, 'does not lie in separating so-called genuine from non-genuine oracles, nor in seeking to recover the faith of the community at different stages in a book's composition' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p.336). Childs specially objects to historical-critical concentration on developmental stages rather than on analysis of 'the actual canonical text which has been received and used as authoritative Scripture by the community' (*ibid.*, p. 40). The regnant liberal view brought historical-critical method to a standstill instead of achieving an intellectual breakthrough; its overall effect was to confuse and to divert biblical studies from their real goal.

Professor Childs would refocus critical energies from a backward look for pre-scriptural normative sources to the canon itself as the legitimate focal point of biblical learning. The prime task of historical criticism, as he sees it, is to illumine the intention of the editors who gave final shape to the canon. Its central concern is to concentrate on the hermeneutical importance and theological message of the canonically shaped materials.

Childs energetically applauds the gains registered by modern scholarship in philological, textual and literary criticism, and in

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historical knowledge and exegetical precision. He pursues historico-critical exegesis of the canonical text as a highly legitimate enterprise provided the text is not arbitrarily correlated with naturalistic assumptions. All the standard questions faced in courses in biblical introduction remain to be critically investigated – whether biblical materials really come from contemporaries to whom tradition assigns them, whether independent sources were used and if so whether and how authors or redactors incorporated these – in short, the complex process of textual development that issues finally in the scriptural canon. Childs is open to two or three Isaiahs and, for that matter, to the derivation of numerous New Testament letters in their canonical form from other than traditionally stipulated authors. But while historical criticism may unravel the literary history of a text, the history of textual formation, Childs emphasizes, is not decisive. The final canonical form, by contrast, is authoritative.

In expounding the emergence of Scripture, evangelical scholarship finds less reason for departing from canonically-indicated authors of the component biblical books. It leans more heavily on the factor of divine revelation and prophetic-apostolic inspiration, without on that account minimizing the biblical writers' personality differences and stylistic peculiarities or excluding their use of sources.

By contrast, Professor Childs stresses a reformulated canonical content reflecting the work of editors. He does not view the canon, therefore, as aiming to preserve a pure prophetic-apostolic text. Hence he must relate divine revelation and inspiration to the canon in non-traditional ways. But if ancient materials embodied in the canon are no longer identifiable as specifically prophetic or apostolic, then the prophetic-apostolic autographs are in principle levelled to the same non-normative plane as are the ephemeral P-D-Q critical sources.

Professor Childs thinks, for example, that Mosaic authorship should not be a historical problem; later generations that regarded Mosaic authorship as normative, he holds, attributed post-Mosaic traditions to the great Hebrew lawgiver. But it seems incredible that believers who received and perpetuated prophetic-apostolic writings imposed as the Word of God would have unprotestingly accepted such misleading attribution and the view that only as redacted by unknown editors could the ancient writings be regarded as normative for future generations of believers (*cf.* 2 Tim. 3:14). Nor do such passages as Luke 1:1–3, 2 Peter 3:15f. and Revelation 1:3 justify the view that the canon rests on 'a dialectical combination of historical and theological criteria' and that the canonical text evolved as a process of selection and shaping of material into a scriptural norm by a

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'community of faith' that reformulated the prophetic-apostolic witness in dialectical interaction with it.

Bruce Waltke makes the point that if critical scholarship must 'admit ancient material in the (biblical) sources yet cannot demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt their inclusion of later material', we have no reason to reject out of hand the notion 'that Moses authored the essential core of the Pentateuchal material' ('Historical Grammatical Problems', in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Rademacher and Robert D. Preus, Grand Rapids, 1984, pp. 71-120, at p. 92). The case for critical reconstruction seemed impressive when critics dismembered the scriptural record in much the same way, but their intramural differences more and more frustrated scholars who disagreed among themselves over such rival assumptions as the relative priority of linguistic or of theological criteria. Their confluent erosion of confidence in the canonical text on the basis of conflicting theories and divergent reconstructions provoked an accelerating desire to study the text as it stands as an intentionally-given norm. Recognition that the canonical text reflects an integral unity resistant to divergent pre-canonical patchwork discouraged proposals for a comprehensive canonical reconstruction.

Focus on Canon

Evangelical scholars have applauded emphasis on the canon as the critical issue in biblical introduction, on the primacy of the canonical text, on the enduring hermeneutical significance of the final form of the canon, and on the illumination of its meaning as the main task of textual criticism. Formation of the canon was no mere historical accident or even an ordinary historical development, nor was it a late ecclesiastical council's special achievement that expressed the church's supposed infallible judgment. The canon was shaped, rather, by an interaction of divine and human factors that constituted it the regulative context and content for doing biblical theology.

The tenuous critical assumption that the biblical canon was an evolutionary development given fixed form by a late ecclesiastical council steadily eroded interest in a normative text. Modern hermeneutical theories moreover rejected objective interpretation not simply because no interpreter is assumption-free, but through larger claims also that the interpreter's own epistemic contribution ranks above that of the text's author, or that historical or metaphysical realities exclude universally shared meaning. So relativized was textual meaning that biblical interpretation seemed doomed to existential subjectivity or to nihilism.

Canonical exegesis and narrative hermeneutics both dispute the emphasis that our contemporary experience supplies the best key to

the real sense of Scripture. Instead they emphasize the priority of the biblical narrative, or in the case of canon exegesis, of the final canonical text, as the source of meaning that illumines our experience.

Professor Childs' exposition leaves the sense of the term 'canon' sometimes confusing. To be sure the Greek *kanōn* was already used in ancient times with multiple meanings – a rule or measure, a particular range of books, a divinely authoritative literary deposit. Sometimes Professor Childs uses the term of a specific literary corpus (the present Old Testament and/or New Testament); sometimes merely of the final form of the Judeo-Christian literary tradition in contrast to earlier sources which it supplements, interprets and reconstructs; sometimes abstractly as a principle of authority. But most notably he uses it not simply of the final stages of setting limits on the scope of the sacred writings but rather for the whole process by which he thinks the authoritative tradition was collected, edited, ordered and transmitted. In the preface to the second edition of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* he employs the term for a long process of formation of the biblical text and divorces it from exclusive association with the stage of text-canonization. At times he seems also to use the term to include the modern Christian's interpretative activity in identifying with and appropriating the heritage.

Professor Childs therefore projects a unique view of the canon and of its relation to historical criticism. He rejects the notion that formation of the canon was 'a late, ecclesiastical activity, external to the biblical literature itself' and 'subsequently imposed on the writings' (*The New Testament as Canon. An Introduction*, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 21). He contends that canon-consciousness 'arose at the inception of the Christian church and lies deep within the New Testament literature itself' as particular traditions played an authoritative role for a community of faith and practice. Hence Childs postulates 'an organic continuity' in the historical development of an established canon 'from the earliest stages of the New Testament to the final canonical stabilization of its scope' – although this continuity 'was hammered out in continuous conflict'. Hence Childs ascribes to the early church a considerably larger role than did the Protestant Reformers both in the determination of the canon and in the articulation of its content. This larger role of the church in giving finality to the canon is asserted more than argued. But it thrusts upon us the question of the extent to which the theological truth of the canonical text is embedded in the interactive mind of the early church reflected by editors who are presumed to have given final shape to the canon.

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The canonical hermeneutic does not reject redaction-criticism but rather introduces it at a different stage and for a different role. Redaction-critics usually seek to interpret the biblical books by reconstructing their supposed historical development, on the premise that the key to the shape of a book lies in some referent outside the text that requires reconstructing the text. But canonical hermeneutics is concerned rather with the text in its finally given form, and seeks to grasp its expressed intention. It is interested in redaction-criticism only 'to the extent that it aids in a more precise hearing of the edited text', Childs comments. It has no interest in reversing 'the priorities of the canonical text, either by bringing to the foreground features left in the background, or by providing a referential position from which to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of the canonical intent' (*ibid.*, p. 301). We are to work back from the decisive final text to and through the layering that led up to it (*ibid.*, pp. 41f.). But this restriction of hermeneutical movement from the final text through the New Testament to the Old Testament, on which Childs insists, ignores the fact that the gospels – and frequently the epistles also – unhesitatingly move also from the Old to the New Testament, perhaps nowhere more impressively than in Matthew's invocation of prophecies that Jesus in turn fulfils.

By the same token, Childs must dismiss the priority of historico-grammatical interpretation insofar as he considers authorial intention not decisive for exegesis, historical analysis and pre-canonical usage as irrelevant, and theological content and meaning as distillations exclusively of the canonical text. While the canonical approach establishes the boundaries within which exegesis is to be conducted, it does not rule out in advance a variety of differing exegetical models, e.g., liturgical or dramatic, which might engage the text as it functions within the context of the community of faith. But 'it does not agree with a form of structuralism which seeks to reach a depth structure of meaning lying below the surface of the canonical text.' It 'differs sharply from ... "kerygmatic exegesis" which reconstructs the historical situation in the interest of a theological response' and from the traditio-critical approach by emphasizing the normative status of the final form of the text (*ibid.*, pp. 74f.).

Attainment of Canonical Status

In the evangelical orthodox view the various New Testament books did not acquire canonical status either by late ecclesiastical determination or by a process of evolutionary development or by canon-formation involving a dialectical relationship of creative interaction between the early church and a revered tradition subject to reinterpretation. Most evangelicals consider Professor Childs' mediating view of dialectical canon formation fully as unacceptable

as is the liberal critical view that the canon is the achievement of a late fourth-century church council. For if textual normativity is the achievement of a final canonizing community, then the meaning of the biblical text is dissolved into what the early church decided, and the decisive role of the prophets and apostles is effaced.

Professor Childs projects a post-apostolic dating (about A.D. 100) even for a settled Old Testament Hebrew text. But critical views that connect the final form of the Old Testament text with the council of Jamnia have very little if any foundation; Roger T. Beckwith (*The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, Grand Rapids, 1985) and others have recently given massive impetus to an earlier more conservative dating. Evangelicals insist that the New Testament church from its outset acknowledged the authority of the Old Testament. This view is reflected by the apostle Paul (Acts 28:23; Rom. 15:4); by Matthew the evangelist and by Jesus (Matt. 5:17). The Old Testament canon was considered divinely authoritative and Christ was heralded as its fulfillment. In this sense the early church even from the time of the disciples was never without an authoritative canon. Jesus appointed apostles as official channels of divine revelation. They in turn proclaimed the Word of God both orally and by letter. They expected their writings to be circulated and read in the congregations much as the Hebrew canon was read in the synagogues.

Against views that the New Testament canon was a post-apostolic ecclesial development of no real significance for understanding the shaping of the New Testament – whether Bultmann's view that catholic bishops imposed it to promote doctrinal and ecclesiastical unity, or Barr's view that it was an accidental occurrence lacking hermeneutical significance – Professor Childs holds that the beginnings of the process of canonization are located in the New Testament itself and were motivated by theological concerns that cannot be dissolved into sociological or historical explanation. Childs shares the view of H. von Campenhausen (*The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Philadelphia, 1977) that the apostle Paul already had in mind a Christian Bible. But he supplements W.G. Kümmel's emphasis, that the canon derived from a need to preserve in writing the truth of the oral tradition once the first generation of witnesses had died, in order to stress the relevance of the canonical process for 'the formation of the New Testament books themselves' (*The New Testament as Canon. An Introduction*, pp. 12 f.).

Childs dismisses as too simplistic the conservative view that the New Testament canon is 'a natural growth of universally recognized authoritative writings into a normative apostolic collection' (*ibid.*, p. 13). He contends rather that the material itself reflects a complex process of shaping forces issuing in multi-layered writings reflecting

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a variety of perspectives. Childs seems quite disposed to see the canon as fixed in its outer limits by a decision of the Eastern and Western branches of the church about the end of the fourth century. This places him against conservative views that the canon was largely completed during the first half of the second century or decided earlier simply on the basis of a principle of apostolicity that served to freeze the tradition at particular points. He is critical of 'soft' historical criticism by conservative scholars and calls for a much more rigorous critical approach (*ibid.*, p. 35). The meaning of the text is not found by seeking its sense only in one particular historical context (*ibid.*, p. 36). The commentators Childs prefers for describing the theological function of the canon as Scripture are seldom conservative expositors.

Professor Childs is wholly right in his emphasis that historical investigation has not illuminated the pattern of events whereby a fixed collection of books took its place as the completion and consummation of the Hebrew canon. There is unquestionably a legitimate and necessary sense in which the received canon must be called post-apostolic. The early church did not universally possess the present canonical books as a definitively complete collection during the apostolic age.

Apostolicity and Canon

The writings appeared over a considerable time span during the lifetime of the apostles. The gospels and epistles were preceded by authoritative oral proclamation. But even before that, the Old Testament illumined by the words and deeds of Jesus functioned as canon. The sporadically appearing apostolic writings officially interpreted Jesus' life and teaching in an expanding canon whose full content and scope was as yet indeterminate. Consequently there is a sense in which we must technically distinguish canon from Scripture, as well as from oral proclamation, not indeed in terms of authority, but in terms of scope. The collection of a well-defined literature as a formal canon normative for the church's existence and life involved an historical process.

Some scholars have argued that the canon must be a post-apostolic phenomenon on the ground that the idea of a closed canon is necessarily associated with an awareness that classical prophecy is at an end. Yet completion of the canon does not as such add a higher authority to the component parts. The individual writings, to be sure, may gain full relevance and meaning only in the context of the complete canon. But authorial intention nonetheless remains fundamentally important for the constituent parts as well as for the whole. The apostles may indeed not have been conscious of the fact that they were writing letters that would be collected in canonical

form, and hence that they were penning the full equivalent of Old Testament writings that would appear as part of a more comprehensive accumulation. Some recent expositors contend, however, that Paul presupposes a written form of the new covenant when in 2 Corinthians 3 he speaks of the old written covenant in contrast with the new. In any case, the apostles' imposition of written documents to be read as authoritative in the churches already implies the idea of canonicity. The principle of canonicity is therefore not post-apostolic, and the scope of the canon is best defined in terms of the principle of apostolicity.

The difficulty with this view that apostolic commendation is the criterion of canonicity lies not merely in unpersuasive critical theories that a fourth-century church council sanctioned our New Testament as a specific collection of writings; or that theological diversity in the early Christian writings obscured their normativity until false teachers and cults evoked a literary tradition to distinguish orthodoxy from heresy; or some other speculative variation on the critical theme that the canon is but a human achievement. The early church kept the principle of apostolic authority alive, and shared the conviction that normative Christian literature is not indefinitely open-ended (*cf.* Luke 1:1-4). Yet it remains the case, nonetheless, that the apostles conveyed no direct revelation of the express limits of the canon, and that the local churches did not universally share a complete collection of inspired writings.

To be sure, the Apostolic Fathers quote the apostles authoritatively on a par with the Old Testament. Moreover, they also indicate that the apostles are authoritative even if no longer living on earth; the earliest fathers appeal to 'living memory' of apostolic teaching and later fathers to what 'is written'. The inescapable implication is that apostolic teaching is authoritative even before a complete canon is accessible. Already by Irenaeus, who claimed contact with the apostolic generation through Polycarp and barely misses inclusion with the Apostolic Fathers, a definitive literature is stipulated – four Gospels (no more, no less) and well-defined additional writings including Paul's letters.

Equally important, apostolicity is a forefront emphasis: the prior authority of the apostolic community is specifically stated. Nowhere do the church fathers give any indication that they are acting creatively to constitute the canon. The Muratorian canon (about A.D. 200) seems simply to acknowledge the books that the churches used and considered integral to the Christian heritage.

Providence and Canon

What explanation best accounts for this situation? Instead of appealing to an obscure process of dialectical canon-formation, many evangelicals appeal to special divine providence to explain the compilation and preservation of the canon. If one asks why providential divine sovereignty could not have been equally operative through dialectical canon-formation, the response is that apostolicity is a more compelling principle than dialectical process to account for the reception of the canonical books as authoritative. The serial reception of these documents by local churches, to which many of the letters were addressed, and their subsequent distribution and dispersion to more distant churches, seems a more natural explanation of why no indication exists of formal finalization of the canon as one might expect in the case of a single climactic event.

The hypothesis of a process of dialectical canon-formation implies the need for such a culminating event to mark the community's achievement of the final text. Through its inability to uncover such an event, historical criticism led earlier to the emphasis on evolutionary development of the canon and the theory of late ecclesiastical imposition. If historical criticism erred in the recent past by looking for prior sources more reliable than the Mosaic-prophetic writings, Childs' alternative duplicates that error by projecting authoritative post-apostolic sources. Childs' canonical editors are presumably more authoritative than the apostolic autographs. Supposedly, issuing from a process of traditio-ecclesial dialectic, they confront us with an editorial authority surpassing that of the apostles to whom Jesus specifically vouchsafed the guidance of the Spirit of Truth.

The apostles were ever on the move in fulfillment of a missionary mandate while the early churches were simultaneously growing and multiplying. Some of these house churches the apostles pastored, some they briefly visited and taught orally, some they handed over to others, some arose through the missionary outreach of converts. The apostles were mobile – Paul going to Rome and perhaps even to Spain, Thomas possibly to India, others elsewhere to new and proliferating churches. Only with difficulty could the sporadic apostolic writings keep up with the expanding Christian movement in an age without modern means of communication and travel. It is not surprising that churches, treasuring what autographs or copies they had, nonetheless had somewhat differing lists, and that for a time uncertainty might prevail over the composition of the growing canon. The churches in the late first and early second century were better positioned than the churches in the fourth or in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to acknowledge Christianity's real charter documents. The complete canon emerged from recognition that the

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Christian churches, guided by the principle of apostolicity, treasured the apostolic writings and continually returned to them as foundational to the church's life and growth. That need not mean that apostolic authorship was the exclusive hallmark of documents received by the churches as authoritative. Apostolic commendation was equally serviceable, since the apostles were the divinely authorized interpreters of the crucified and risen Christ's ministry and mission. What was decisive for the canon is authorship by the apostles and/or their attestation of apostolic colleagues who faithfully relayed the apostolic message.

It is, admittedly, difficult to extrapolate this principle of apostolicity from some components of the canon, but it is explicit in most of the writings and implicit in others. It is unnecessary to insist that the apostles intended all their letters for a necessary or permanent role in all churches; Paul's reference to an epistle to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16) seems to identify a letter that was not preserved. Yet nothing supports the notion that the apostles prolifically produced such letters. Although the first Gospel is formally anonymous, a good case can be made for authorship by the apostle Matthew. But the authorship of Hebrews is much more in doubt. There is no known apostolic commendation, moreover, for some writings by non-apostles, for example, Jude and James. Yet it is incredible that the early church which accepted the core books on the basis of apostolicity would have accepted other books as equally authoritative on some rival basis.

The providential operation of the Spirit of Truth supervised the preservation and collection for post-apostolic generations of inspired books which the apostles wrote or commended as authoritative, and which Christians through the ages have treasured also for their inherent worth. Canon-criticism, which elevates the textual authority of post-apostolic editors above that of the apostles, must cope with the fact that while the canon enlivens the names of Paul, Peter, John and other evangelists, the supposed canonical editors are nameless phantoms reminiscent of P, D and Q.

Professor Childs speaks of the canon's 'growth' in a way that dissolves interest in verbally inspired autographs. To be sure, he holds that 'the authoritative Word gave the community its form and content in obedience to the divine imperative' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 58f.). This phrasing emphasizes supernatural initiative, but it accommodates at the same time a broad relational view of divine revelation and inspiration. It avoids the widely held evangelical insistence on a canon constituted essentially of inspired autographs, authoritatively imposed upon the early churches, and received as unrevisable normative statements of Christian revelation.

Tradition and Canon

What the churches receive, rather, on Childs' view, is authoritative tradition that church leaders are free to modify by way of selection and expansion, redaction and interpretation. For, as Professor Childs adds, 'reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through an historical and theological process of selecting, collecting and ordering'. This involved 'a series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the books'. The fixed nature of 'the divine imperative' and of 'the authoritative Word' is here somewhat unclear.

Professor Childs also escapes traditional Protestant limits on the church's role in shaping the Bible and he revises the contrast of biblical authority and church tradition. Reformation and evangelical scholars look at the Bible as more than a faithful expression of the church's oral tradition. They emphasize the verbal inspiration of Scripture and absolute veracity of the original text, and in consequence link final composition of the canonical writings essentially to the respective traditional authors. But Childs considers this evangelical Protestant alternative a lost cause, one that evaporates any significant role for historical criticism, even as he rejects also the liberal critical alternative which evaporates any significant place for the canon. Liberal interest in textual criticism aimed at the scientific recovery and restoration of an earlier and better tradition, and dismissed the canon as 'an external ecclesiastical validation without any real interest for the shaping or interpretation of the biblical literature' (*ibid.*, p. 45). For Childs the crucial task is 'to overcome this long established tension between the canon and criticism'. The canonical approach 'differs from a strictly literal approach by interpreting the biblical text in relation to a community of faith and practice for whom it served a particular role as possessing divine authority' (*ibid.*, p. 74).

It may be that Professor Childs' suggestion of the very late date of about A.D. 100 for Jewish standardization and Christian acceptance of an authoritative Old Testament is motivated in part by a desire to escape the evangelical emphasis on an objectively inspired literary deposit unrevisable by a process of community interaction. This late date positions an emerging Old Testament alongside the New in a simultaneous process of early Christian canon-formation that arrives at a normative biblical text through interaction with the believing community. Yet it seems strange to hold that the church first embraced an authoritative Hebrew canon only after the church separated itself from Judaism. For the early church, correlation of the Jewish Bible with Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the singular authority Christ conferred on the apostles was far more consequential than any late Jewish textual

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standardization of the Old Testament supposedly about A.D. 100, a date that most non-evangelical and evangelical scholars alike consider unacceptably late. The much earlier recognition of the cessation of prophecy in principle excluded later external additions, and there is no indication that the books were open to ongoing internal addition.

Conceptually it is not difficult to grasp Professor Childs' proposal of a process of interaction of revered tradition and creative community response. In a sense this is what goes on continually throughout church history, with its sporadic eruption into new movements and denominations, and their justification of distinctive or novel positions by appealing to an interpreted or reinterpreted normative text. The Word gives the believing community its form and content, yet the community collects, selects and reorders the revered texts. A developing corpus of authoritative literature is shaped in constant dynamic interaction with the community that treasures it, and gives the text new and decisive meaning for those not personally involved in the original revelatory events.

Community and Canon

But the larger problem facing canon exegesis is that of identifying just which community canonized a specific final text, and when and how. The canon was not, Professor Childs insists, the achievement of a late church council nor, he contends, was it an authoritative apostolic imposition. But then, within which community and when did the text become unrevisably fixed? When and where did a comprehensive Christian community first exist to accredit the final canonical form?

When one raises the issue of canonicity in this context, one can understand why Professor James Sanders argues for a fluid text rather than for a decisive final text that the early Christian community accredited. Professor Sanders merely extends permanently the textual fluidity that Professor Childs holds to have routinely prevailed until the eventual sudden emergence of a decisive final form of the text. Although Professor Childs' alternative insistence on a final authoritative canon seems to me the superior view, his emphasis on community formation unfortunately forfeits support for an authoritative canonical text which that text itself implies.

Evangelical orthodoxy has emphasized that the New Testament has its authoritative ground in Jesus' special designation of certain followers as divinely qualified interpreters of his life, death and resurrection-ministry. The fact that Jesus promised that the Spirit of Truth would recall to them what he had taught during his earthly ministry implies that he addressed contemporaries who would build on eyewitness and earwitness relationships in their exposition of his life and message (John 14:25f.). Even Paul was a belated eyewitness

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of and earwitness to the resurrected Jesus. In consequence, a distinctive apostolic authority inheres in the New Testament, an authority grounded in the risen Christ and mediated through the Spirit who superintended the apostles' oral and written proclamation. The early church was answerable to the apostolic message, even as the apostles were themselves earlier bound to the Spirit-given prophetic Word.

While in one sense the canon came 'through the church' it did not come 'from the church'. The church recognized the divine inspiration of certain writings, but it did not confer or directly share in that inspiration. The church in worship services read apostolically imposed writings and considered conformity to their teaching a test of divine obedience.

What evidence is there that the New Testament incorporates community additions and revisions on a canon-wide basis? Professor Childs concedes an 'almost total lack of information regarding the history of canonization' (*ibid.*, p. 60). The complex process of canonical development largely eludes critical reconstruction, he adds, for we 'cannot decipher all the layers of tradition and redaction'. Historical criticism predicated on diverse assumptions has reached conflicting conclusions about canonical sources, revisionary additions and datings of various strands of the canon.

Under these circumstances does discussion of canon-origination and canon-formation then become merely a mass of rival *a priori* and conflicting theories in an area of uncertainty? In view of the evidential silence concerning a canonical process, is there an alternative superior to Professor Childs' theory of interactive canonical process? Is Professor Childs' quite nebulous reconstruction of canonical process any more convincing than was the documentary search for ancient pre-biblical sources to which biblical critics eagerly but arbitrarily attached normativity? If the crucial first-order issue is the authoritative nature of the final canonical text, and identification of its constitutive struts is a second-order concern, as Professor Childs implies, should we not reconsider whether the principle of apostolicity is as credible as if not more than, the premise of interactive process? Is the case for canonical process formulated by Professor Childs as persuasive as that for apostolicity? Does not the final canonical text itself lend support to apostolicity rather than to community-formation as most decisive for the canon's final form?

Earliest New Testament Witness

Even the earliest New Testament components weigh against excessively differentiating apostolic oral teaching from written Scripture and canonical content. Already in 2 Thessalonians, widely

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conceded to be among the New Testament's earliest documents, the apostle Paul expressly equates the authority of apostolic oral teaching and apostolic written teaching. In 1 Thessalonians he stresses that the gospel is not of human origin but of divine origin; the apostolic message, he writes, 'truly is God's Word' (2:13). In 2 Thessalonians he declares that believers are to hold fast the traditions which the apostles taught, and which the Thessalonians learned from them 'by word or by letter' (2:15). Apostolic instruction was to be received as equally authoritative, whether conveyed by word of mouth or by letter, whether taught orally or by epistle (the reference is doubtless to 1 Thessalonians). From the outset of his ministry, Paul considers Scripture no less authoritative than oral teaching and does so long before the received canon could have been completed.

Oddly Professor Childs thinks that the canonical process 'did not seriously alter' the original shape of 1 Thessalonians (*ibid.*, p. 356), but that 2:13-16 might possibly be a secondary expansion. But if we do not have apostolic originals except as editorially fused into the final canonical text, are such judgments not presumptuous and highly speculative? It is doubly strange that Professor Childs specially questions the very passage that assigns divine authority to the apostolic message. Unstable as its moorings may be in Professor Childs' approach, we may nonetheless be gratified by his verdict that the original letter was a written substitute for the apostle's presence and, significantly, was to be read from the start not only by one specific historical community but by the whole community of faith. Subsequently it gained 'a new canonical role in which it was joined to a larger collection and designated as normative scripture for a community of faith' which included later generations.

Again, Professor Childs states that 2 Timothy 3:15 ff. shows that the role Paul formerly exercised in physical presence among the churches is now assumed by 'the collection of sacred writings' as 'a divinely ordained means for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (*ibid.*, p. 392). By inspired Scripture the text intends the Old Testament, but before long the church would assign a similar function to 'Paul's own letters'. This comment is remarkable for its discrimination of 'Paul's own letters' in a canonical context which supposedly disallows any distinction of apostolic autographs. Moreover, what vital significance has canonical attribution to Paul, since Childs (who considers a canonical Moses problematical) tells us elsewhere that we need not trouble ourselves over Mosaic authorship just because later generations attributed post-Mosaic traditions to Moses? Childs rejects pseudepigraphical authorship of the Pastorals but holds that their relationship to Pauline authorship is indirect rather than direct, on the supposition that the Pastorals arose after Paul's death (*ibid.*, p. 386).

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Instead of viewing the inspired apostolic/canonical writings as nurturing the church, Childs in fact holds that the believing community formulated the scriptural role of Paul's writings (an inversion that Calvin would have compared to the daughter giving birth to the mother, rather than the mother to the daughter). Childs declares it unwise to begin exegesis only after deciding the issue of authorship. Canonical interpretation does not begin with a judgment regarding historical authorship but allows 'the peculiar features of the text's shaping to determine the meaning and role which historical and non-historical elements play within the text itself' (*ibid.*, p. 386). The historical enterprise, while legitimate, 'is not identical with the theological enterprise of discerning the canonical shape of the material' (*ibid.*, p. 387). 'The canonical process of collecting, recording, and interpreting the Pauline tradition has resulted in blurring the sharp historical lines' (*ibid.*, p. 387).

Childs' view deprives us of singularly inspired apostolic autographs, holds in suspense the authorship of components of the canonical text, does not firmly exclude all possibility of pseudepigraphical authorships, leaves unsure the range of historical factuality in the canon, and to compensate for this loss relies on the church's recognition of revered tradition and its redaction into an authoritative canonical collection.

If we ask how by contrast the canon itself views Scripture, the answer is that even the very earliest apostolic writings, dispatched and received before most components of the New Testament originated, reflect a regard for the divine authority of the apostolic epistles. The canonical process therefore includes a recognition of scriptural authority prior to the inspired tradition's final canonical form. The canon does not treat scriptural components as if they acquire finality and authority only if and when they are canonically frozen, or as if their authority is in any way, even in part, suspended upon a creative contribution or reconstruction by the community of faith. The divine authority of apostolic letters was not contingent upon their future canonical inclusion, although canonical inclusion attests their authority. The collation of writings as a distinct literary corpus did not first constitute them finally and decisively authoritative. The apostles did not have a compilation of the canon in view at the time of writing. A prior inherent authority precipitated their inclusion in the final canonical corpus. The notion that Scripture became authoritative only through its final canonical inclusion depends in part upon the theory of a late conjunction of the Old Testament with the New, and in part upon a debatable view of canonization.

Childs rejects any canon that gives priority to divine initiative and minimizes the believing community's response to the divine Word in

canon-formation. In designating specific writings as Scripture, he contends, the church 'confessed its faith in the divine origin of its Scripture in a thoroughly time-conditioned fashion' (*Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Philadelphia, 1970, p. 105). Childs does not ascribe to the canon either a divine or apostolic sanction; rather, he ascribes the formative role in canon development to the early church. The canon's authority consists in faith's understanding that through this human literature the living Lord continues to address the people of God.

Nowhere is Professor Childs more obscure than in unpacking this relationship. His synthesis of historical development, critical interpretation and normative canon does not escape a costly modification of the historical Christian understanding of revelatory Scripture and of canonical authority.

Text and Canon

According to Professor Childs the aim of textual criticism is to recover the standardized canonical text, not to restore an original text. Childs stresses that canonical authority may differ from the original writer's intention. Are we then to infer that no identity of textual content or meaning need exist between the final canonical text and prophetic-apostolic autographs?

Childs is critical of the view of F.J.A. Hort, one shared by B.B. Warfield, A.T. Robertson and many evangelicals, that the goal of textual criticism is to recover as far as possible the original words of the New Testament. Modernist critics of that view have long held that no text should be considered authoritative because none is inerrant and all incorporate a time-conditioned content. Childs considers the conservative alternative objectionable because it does not 'adequately link text with canon'.

Conservatives do in fact link text with canon by insisting that the canon preserves divinely inspired autographs that the apostles imposed on the recipient churches. But Childs holds that the apostles and the canonical text stand in a very different relationship, one which involves a fallible apostolic text and then a complex editorial process of selecting, editing and revising an inherited message until the final canonical form blends theological and linguistic elements into a normative collection of revered tradition. Hence Childs doubts that author-intentionality can be discriminated from the canonical text. To be sure, he distinguishes apostolic tradition from ecclesiastical tradition. But he connects the canonical text dialectically, and often obscurely, with what readers of the canonical text hear as containing not only a normative tradition but early ecclesial interpretation and reinterpretation of the heritage.

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Childs stresses this activity of incorporating textual interpretation in connection with copying of the text between A.D. 50 and A.D. 125. At times the process involves intentional change or reconstrual, not to falsify but by adding a specific theological dimension to promote a canonically approved view. Hence the relation of the written word to the received word which embraces a particular theological dimension becomes a focal point of interest; attention is fixed not on the autographs but on a final canonical text in distinction from these.

The search for a historically accurate text behind the received post-apostolic canonical text Childs regards as misguided. What he sacrifices, therefore, is the special divine inspiration of an original text. Instead, he connects divine providence with the community of faith's whole process of transmission, selection, addition and interpretation that issues in the canonical text. He abandons the view that the present multiplicity of copies – with its different families of texts – derives ultimately from apostolic autographs. An intermingling of written and oral tradition is said to have been prevalent in the early church. Childs replaces interest in an apostolic original by interest in the text supposedly most influential among a variety of traditions. No pure text is any longer assumed; instead, a stage of fluidity is affirmed in which a multiplicity of textual traditions compete until a complex recensional development achieves a relatively stable text over several generations. The effort to restore original autographs is therefore considered inadequate for establishing 'the church's received and authoritative text' (*The New Testament as Canon. An Introduction*, p. 527).

Evangelical scholars have long conceded that the Spirit's inspiration may impel a later inspired writer to offer nuances of meaning not evident to an earlier inspired writer. Examples are Matthew's application to Jesus of certain Old Testament prophecies, or Paul's special use of quotations from the Septuagint. But that is not to say, as Professor Childs seems to, that the larger 'community of faith' (the precise extension of this term is sometimes obscure) contributes to a development, selection and freezing of a final authoritative meaning or that the final canonical form encapsulates an authority unanswerable to the inspired prophets and apostles. The apostles are governed in their interpretation of Scripture by a definable hermeneutic, as Don A. Carson notes, one that is traceable to Jesus himself, and using typological and other elements along a salvation-historical axis. The canonical-exegesis stance, by contrast, emphasizes growing insights by the early 'community of faith', which some expositors extend to the current life of the Christian community, or especially to contemporary biblical critics some of

whom do not hesitate to presume the Spirit's illumination in their reinterpretation of Scripture.

For Professor Childs, to be sure, the canonical text inseparably fuses what the text meant and what it means. Only the final reconstructed canonical form is authentic Scripture; Scripture and the canonical form are inseparably identical. Even where he concedes that the canonical text is mutilated (as in 1 Samuel 1:24, for example, where he acknowledges that the Septuagint and Qumran preserve the proper meaning) Childs stays nonetheless with the canonical text. Yet Childs refuses to identify the canonical text uncritically with the *koine textus receptus* in which textual corruption has encroached upon the tradition (*ibid.*, p. 527). Hence the goal of textual criticism is to recover the text that 'best reflects the true apostolic witness found in the church's Scripture' (*ibid.*, p. 527). The critical interest shifts to a text different from apostolic autographs and yet not wholly identical with the last stages of 'a stabilized *koine* tradition'.

But if we lack access to an authorial text or meaning independently of a canonical text, how can we confidently say that the canonical text fuses authorial and finally decisive meaning? Any sacrifice of authoritative apostolic autographs (or of copies) must shift elsewhere the authority for the content and meaning of the message. In the recent past, loss of interest in authorial meaning readily invited the view that the text means whatever the regnant critics affirm. Does Professor Childs' approach shift definitive meaning to past regnant first-century ecclesial conviction encapsulated in the final canonical form, that is, to the early church in living interaction with the sacred writings? If author-intention can be comprehensively altered by canon-intention, are we not then involved in a massive programme of community redaction? Since the community is said significantly to shape the canon through which it interprets the divine Word for future generations, is not an independently objective canon or Scripture displaced by the church community as an equivalent authority?

The text of Scripture is, of course, always an interpreted text. No exegete approaches it without preconceptions and assumptions. But must we on that account view the canonical text as a community product in the sense that the believing church shapes its decisive meaning? Professor Childs opposes multi-level meanings which Scripture is held to have acquired during a multi-staged development. He contends that the final canonical editors have correlated earlier materials without identifying original sources vis-a-vis final redactors, into a text whose meaning is fixed in the authority of that text experienced in the life of the believing community.

The entire history of the received tradition, from the patriarchal to the apostolic eras, is indeed attested by the canonical Scriptures as a

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single layer of authoritative text and meaning. Yet one reason that Professor Childs prizes canonical intentionality over authorial intentionality may be the higher critical assumption that the received tradition is not derived from its traditional authors even when the canonical text implies and affirms that it is. When Professor Childs bids us to hear the canonical Isaiah as a unitary message, he does so because most multi-source scholars atomize the book's message, not because he considers the book of Isaiah the divinely inspired work of an eighth-century prophet, for he is not averse to its multi-source origin by two or three authors. Childs would enhance the book's unity by universalizing chapters 40–66 rather than applying them specifically to Israel. Hence canonical exegesis accommodates subordinating authorial intention not only to canonical intention, but to preferred modern critical intention as well. Professor Childs holds, to be sure, that in its final form the text no longer continues to evolve as something to be exploited by the fluctuating consciousness of inventive interpreters. But even if the task of criticism is to illumine the intention of editors who gave final shape to the canon, it would seem that modern historical criticism can apparently become creatively decisive in reconstructing an obscure process of canon development.

Crucial questions arise, moreover, both over the nature of canonical truth and the historical reliability of the canon. The question of normative truth 'for Christians' is not identical with the question whether what Christians affirm is intellectually sound and exerts truth-claims on non-Christians. To view the New Testament simply as the church's liturgical and didactic book no more establishes the universal truth or factual history of its message than does a recognition of the Koran's role in Islam or that of the Book of Mormon in the Church of Latter-Day Saints. The intellectually sensitive enquirer must ask whether the redemption the Bible affirms actually puts us in touch with objective truth and historical fact.

A persuasive case for divine disclosure and for scriptural truth requires more than an evasion of negative historical criticism. Professor Childs proposes to recover the Bible's theological relevance by stressing the final text of a tradition that throughout its development was considered authoritative. Under the umbrella-concept of theology he subsumes the topics of religious authority, religious belief and doctrine, and religious experience. The canon's unifying feature, he tells us, is not literary or structural but an overall theological coherence. The canon is a theological whole whose parts function coherently and meaningfully in reflecting divine judgment, forgiveness and grace.

But on what ground ought a Confucian or Hindu to opt for the Bible? In the end all questions are subsidiary to the issue of whether

the canonical process as Professor Childs conceives it leads simply to a final normative text (whose religious perspectives are enmeshed in the early church's reciprocal interaction with the tradition) or whether the text offers universally valid theological absolutes and doctrinal truths. Are scriptural affirmations about God and man and the cosmos and history 'for Christians only' or are they cognitively relevant truth-claims that are intellectually incumbent upon non-Christians also?

Revelation, Canon and Authority

The nature of divine disclosure here presses for attention. Textual scholars devoted to questions of introduction may well insist that theologians focus more appropriately than do they on concerns of revelation and truth, and of revelation and history. Yet Professor Childs expressly rejects the historical-critical tendency to interpret biblical literature as a natural epiphenomenon of Israel's sociopolitical-economic history, and in doing so offers some broad theological perspectives. Although not articulating in a schematic way the indispensable particulars of biblical theology, he emphasizes nonetheless that all the developing canon's editors affirmed divine judgment and redemption.

From his protest against wedding historical criticism to naturalism, we infer that when writing of God's grace and judgment Childs disavows a subjective vision of reality, deism and pantheism, and affirms instead that God is transcendentally real and that biblical theism accords with the ontologically real world. He does not subscribe to George Lindbeck's replacement of cognitive orthodoxy with a cultural-linguistic theory of religion, nor does he reduce all doctrine merely to a second-order concern. He reaches beyond the experiential theology represented at Yale from the time of Horace Bushnell through H. Richard Niebuhr to David Kelsey.

Childs nonetheless expressly repudiates propositional revelation, that is, divine disclosure of a fixed deposit of objective truths or doctrines. 'The heart of my canonical proposal has been missed', he writes, 'when this conservative theory seeks to ground biblical truth on objective propositions apart from the reception by a community of Christian faith and practice.' He postulates a dialectical relationship between text and experience. 'In a polemical debate with the theories of conservative propositionalists and liberal experientialists', he would insist, he writes, that the function of the canon was not propositional, although the church did use the canon in a propositional as well as in other ways (*ibid.*, p. 544). 'There was a truthful apostolic witness to Jesus Christ', he observes, 'a faith once-and-for-all delivered to the saints, on which Christians grounded their existence. In spite of a variety of legitimate formulations of the

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one Christian faith, and in spite of the historical time-conditionality of the confessions, the Bible as the church's rule of faith laid claim to saving truth' (*ibid.*, p. 545).

These comments, not untypical of recent dialectical formulations, hold in tension two conflicting emphases. Over against religious commitment nebulously anchored in experience, Professor Childs insists on cognitive factors: a 'truthful apostolic witness', a ground of Christian existence transcending the believer, the normative authority of a specific literature, and an (unelaborated) faith 'once-for-all delivered to the saints'. At the same time he distinguishes these cognitive elements from a divine propositional revelation of truths and emphasizes a 'saving truth' not categorized as universally valid; additionally, he considers Christian confession to be marked by historical time-conditionality, and affirms the legitimacy of a variety of formulations of 'the one Christian faith'.

Such an approach commendably aims to escape an experience-centred faith. But can Childs really achieve that objective even in a revelatory context if the believing community supplies faith's propositional content in a time-conditioned confession that is inescapably multiform and pluralistic? It clarifies little to note, as Childs does, that 'the church used the canon in a propositional as well as in other ways', since sentences are the minimal unit of sharable meaning; the canonical witness by contrast, attests that God routinely spoke to the prophets in sentences, and that in his revelation God conveyed divine truths to inspired writers as a crucial aspect of his redemptive self-disclosure. Professor Childs' references to revelation and inspiration are largely undeveloped.

Although he considers the canon authoritative, it is for Professor Childs neither the Word of God nor infallible. Scripture, he says, mediates the authoritative divine Word, although just how, and what this involves, is obscure. For Childs, the canonical development reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel, but it is the text's final form alone that witnesses to the entire history of redemption.

Canonical Scripture, we hasten to add, is indeed the Christian's verifying principle. But what test are we to apply to truth-claims associated with revelatory encounter? Are the basic Christian beliefs reflected in the ecumenical creeds normative for Christian faith simply on the basis of the scriptural expression of how biblical believers understood their religious heritage, or do they define the content of transcendent divine revelation? For evangelical orthodoxy, the Bible's central doctrines are binding not simply because they comprise authoritative traditions, but also and especially because they are cognitively true on the ground of divine rational revelation that discloses the nature of the real world. What one misses in Childs'

exposition is any elaboration of revelation that sustains this conviction. An ever-developing community of faith can hardly contribute to the canon's universal authority if it has no objective criteria for determining whether or not the canon is universally authoritative, and if it exhibits no explanatory principle that makes its commitments credible.

For the biblical community, by contrast, what lends distinctiveness to Scripture and canon are supernatural revelation, inspiration and authority. The appeal to a process of canon-formation through a confluent shaping by the early church is both less direct and less compelling than the inherited Reformed view of divine inspiration and authority. If the canon represents a judgment by the community of faith on the basis of an historical process that issued in a normative corpus of writings, does not the community really constitute an authority just as ultimate, and even more so, than the canon? An ecclesiastically commended authoritative text is hardly the same as an authoritative divinely-inspired text.

If the meaning of the text does not inhere in a scripturally-embedded revelation that is objective to the community of faith, but rests in divine authority experienced dynamically in the life of the believing community, then the question arises whether the early Christians were possibly wrong in applying the ancient prophetic promises to Jesus of Nazareth. If the canon and the community reciprocally gave each other life and meaning, on what basis can we distinguish transcendent authority from experiential vitality? In rejecting Jesus the Jews appealed to their revered tradition to repudiate his messianic claims. Would dynamic experiential 'acceptance' of their tradition as other Jews interpreted – or reinterpreted – it yield an equally valid creative meaning and revelatory truth?

To say that in pre-canonical times a process of authoritative tradition plus responsive community formation shaped the canon may in fact justify or accommodate an even larger destabilization of authority. If the present canon is really the early church's self-understanding of the Bible, and the modern critical understanding differs, why should one pattern of community-formation be considered decisively normative over another? If the first canonical stabilization of the text in interaction with a community of faith led on the one hand to an Old Testament canon by appealing to which many Jews across the centuries have rejected the messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth, and led on the other to a New Testament canon that embraced the Old in full confidence that Jesus is the Christ, what in principle would exclude some future canonization of a more comprehensive final text that incorporates both Old Testament and New Testament into a 'Universal Testament', one that reconstructs

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the presently inherited tradition by setting messianity in pan-religious context by an ecumenical redaction implemented by contemporary critics? If the Hebrew canon once brought life to the Jews but was placed by the early Christian community of faith into a new and larger context identifying the Christ in terms of Jesus, why may not an ecumenical faith-community today universalize that identification in terms of a pan-*Logos* doctrine? If in the interest of canonical unity Professor Childs can trans-historicize the meaning of Isaiah 40–66, assigning to this passage a timeless quality rather than referring it primarily to the Hebrew historical context, why may not the canon of the early church now be trans-historicized by an ecumenical church that sets the *Logos* in Christ in the context of universal salvation? Why may not the present canon in principle be enfolded by a more comprehensive ecumenical canon that prizes the metaphorical above the historical and assimilates the particularity of Jesus Christ to a universal Christ-principle by which all world religions manifest the hidden Christ?

If canon exegesis renders irrelevant an autographic authorial intention, must we then really assume that fallible early Christian interaction and interpretation that shaped the canonical Scriptures is unrevisable? Does the shift from authorial intention to a canon-church correlation convincingly undergird a faith 'once-for-all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3)? In the absence of objectively valid religious truth, it will take more than 'saving faith', and more than time-bound confession and doctrinal pluralism, to preserve the current ecclesial interpretation of messiahship from reverting to either secular Jewish or to pluralistic ecumenical interpretations.

Historical Factuality

As noted, Professor Childs meshes his theory of canonical process with qualified respect for historical criticism. He disavows any intrinsic marriage of criticism to naturalistic theory, as well as the legitimacy of critical pursuit of earlier sources more reliable than Scripture, and denies any presumed omniscience even in identifying supposedly precanonical documentary strands. Whatever light historical criticism sheds on literary development, he insists, will not be decisive for canonical authority and meaning. Childs puts additional distance between historical criticism and the canonically authoritative text by emphasizing that the canon carries its own implication of the historicity of redemptive acts and does so quite apart from any verdict by historical criticism. This is an important distinction, one that I have made also – although in a somewhat different way – in *God, Revelation and Authority* (Vol. II, 1976, pp. 330f.). Since Scripture authoritatively gives the meaning of the divine redemptive acts (which as historical events are not self-interpreting),

it implies and presupposes the authenticity of those acts independently of empirical historical confirmation which as such is but tentative and never absolute.

In Childs' detachment of higher criticism from pursuit of a primitive Ur-Bible as its main role, some critics have sensed his suppression also of the canonical text's historical concerns. On Childs' premises the canonical text gains its sense not through a literal interpretation of original events in relation to which the text first arose, but through its meaning for the Christian community. To be sure, many conservative scholars grant and even insist that historical research cannot conclusively establish the facticity of historical redemptive events, or of any events. But evangelical scholars do not forfeit the integrity of biblical history. Professor Childs seems at times to imply that the canon deliberately eliminates much of the text's historical anchorage. Bernard W. Anderson has complained that Childs confusingly applies the term 'history' to divine-human encounter while he dismisses the value of seeking a particular account's historical referent. Evangelical scholars by contrast insist that insofar as redemptive acts are declared to be historical they are historically investigatable. Is Childs, in other words, promoting a canonical hermeneutic that so concentrates on the community of faith's canonical sense that it compromises historical factuality? If historical acts insofar as they are historical are in principle put beyond the realm of possible historical investigation, then the price becomes too high for a religion in which divine revelation relates centrally with the particular life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not to mention prior Old Testament redemptive events.

Although Professor Childs accepts many results of historical critical method, he sets these aside in order to base exegesis not on its empirical verdicts but rather on the final canonical text whose form is transhistorical. The theological task of the church can thus proceed in a nonhistorical way. As Elmer B. Smick puts it, 'the final (canonical) form of the text has relativized past historical events' ('Old Testament Theology: The Historico-Genetic Method,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26, 1983, pp. 145-155, at p. 147). For all Childs' focus on the canonical text, Smick holds, 'his search for scriptural authority will be elusive until he is willing to face the issue of the integrity of Biblical history' (*ibid.*, p. 147).

Childs protests that 'the peculiar dynamics of Israel's religious literature' has been missed because of a 'predominantly historical interest' that disregards 'the peculiar function of canonical literature' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 40). For him preoccupation with historical 'political, social or economic factors' loses the fundamental dialectic of the canonical process, in which 'the

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literature formed the identity of the religious community, which in turn shaped the literature' (*ibid.*, p. 41). 'In the search for the canonical shape of a biblical book', Childs asserts, 'pre-critical interpreters often saw dimensions of the text more clearly than those whose perspective was brought into focus by purely historical questions' (*ibid.*, p. 82). The issue, he concludes, is 'not whether or not an Old Testament Introduction should be historical, but the nature of the historical categories being applied' (*ibid.*, p. 41).

Childs is not unaware that evangelicals view with some reservation the relationship he postulates between the Bible and history. He writes that 'when conservative and neo-Evangelical Protestants occasionally align themselves with portions of my canonical proposal, they accept the emphasis on the authority of the Bible, the role of the final form of the text, and the need for using the entire Christian canon. However, the caveat is quickly expressed that the historicity of the biblical accounts as the objectively verifiable foundation of the faith has been inadequately defended' (*The New Testament as Canon. An Introduction*, p. 543). He charges that in approaching the historical issue evangelicals espouse an objectionable 'modernity' no less than do recent historical critics.

We do well at this point to differentiate between four emphases. It is one thing to say that comprehensive scriptural inspiration authenticates the historical factuality of the biblical redemptive acts. It is quite another to note also that the inspired biblical-theological interpretation carries an implication of the eventness of redemptive acts independently of historical investigation. It is still another to say that the historical-event claims of Scripture are, as dialectical theologians hold, of such a nature that historical criticism is irrelevant to such claims. Finally, it is still another matter to say that historical criticism can decide whether divine redemptive acts depicted in Scripture are (or are not) supernatural.

It is both possible and feasible to combine the emphases that divine inspiration vouchsafes the reliability of biblical history, that the scripturally-given meaning of redemptive acts supplies its own track of confidence in the factuality of those events, and that the biblical redemptive events are not beyond historical investigation to the extent that they are alleged to be historical.

But suppose, alongside one's affirmation of divine scriptural inspiration, one allows for historical error and interpretative misjudgments in the text? Can one then any longer confidently contend that redemptive acts actually underlie related theological interpretation? Or that canonical interpretation is necessarily trustworthy, even if religiously authoritative?

One may, of course, as do some Barthians, argue from interpretation to background 'events' whose 'eventness' is so isolated

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from the history that historians investigate that they lie beyond the province of historical inquiry. But such linguistic artifice satisfies only those who seek to rationalize a prior rejection of supernatural historical revelation. Or one may hold that historical criticism conclusively judges the factuality of asserted historical acts. But historical method cannot confirm or disconfirm any historical event absolutely, since no empirical science can get beyond high probability. If historical or scientific investigation could absolutely disprove the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the case for Christianity would crumble. But empirical science cannot absolutely disprove anything; the door must always remain open for revised judgment. The factuality of historical revelation does not hinge on the verdict of historical critics. Yet an undisputed negative verdict by such critics would in principle invalidate canonical representations of revelatory history.

Apart from an explicit doctrine of revelation and inspiration, appeals to canonical teaching cannot decide the truth and factuality of the content of Scripture. In the historic evangelical view, divine inspiration is what constitutes Scripture authoritative, and not simply the fact that Scripture comes to us in a comprehensive final canonical form. If, as Scripture attests, God reveals himself intelligibly and verbally, then it is credible that the writers of Scripture give us a God-breathed textual content that tells the truth about God and his purposes and actions. Behind the redemptive acts implicit in canonical interpretation stands the rational disclosure and communication of God who authoritatively inscripturates his revealed truths and goals.

A biblical scholar can properly appeal to canonical authority in support of the historical dimension, and do so with the same confidence that he places in the text's theological and moral teaching. Nor in emphasizing a line of confidence independent of empirical verifiability need one exclude representations about the cosmos.

With notable inconsistency Professor Childs applies the premise that God's acts can be inferred from a track independently of historical method. For among the canonically-attested acts of God is the divine inspiration of prophetic-apostolic proclamation. What lends credence to the comprehensive authority and reliability of the scriptural history and teaching is textual inspiration. When the production of the canon is linked essentially not to inspired prophets and apostles, but is connected instead to fallible supplementers, editors, redactors and interpreters, divine inspiration becomes so insubstantial as to be powerless. In short, an appeal to canonical history grounded one-sidedly in the theology of the canon cannot overcome the problems of an errant divine inspiration, however much

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one commendably disavows a historical-critical method that has betrayed biblical studies into irreconcilable contradictions.

Professor Childs disclaims the charge that his canonical approach sponsors 'a non-historical reading of the Bible', and rejects any general principle that 'history is unimportant' for the Bible. The issue at stake, he says, is rather 'the nature of the Bible's historicity and the search for a historical approach ... commensurate with it' (*ibid.*, p. 71). He insists that 'there is no "revelation" apart from the experience of historical Israel' and that only the canon does justice to 'the nature of Israel's unique history' (*ibid.*). 'To take the canonical texts seriously is to seek to do justice to a literature which Israel transmitted as a record of God's revelation to his people along with Israel's response' (*ibid.*, p. 73). 'The witness of the text', he asserts, 'cannot be separated from the divine reality which Israel testified to have evoked the response' (*ibid.*). 'The final form of the biblical text alone bears witness to the full history of revelation' (*ibid.*, p. 76). 'The witness to Israel's experience with God lies not in recovering ... historical processes', for 'history *per se* is not a medium of revelation which is commensurate with a canon Only in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end' can 'the full effect of this revelatory history ... be perceived.'

The emphasis that redemptive history is not self-interpreting is indeed wholly welcome. Evangelical theology affirms that inspired Scripture gives the meaning of these events. That Jesus died on the cross is historical fact; that Christ died for our sins is the event's revelatory significance as conveyed by Scripture. But since Professor Childs disavows propositional revelation, and connects the fixed canonical sense instead with a revered tradition correlated with the believing community's creative response, dissonance and divergence will qualify the meaning, even if the authoritative canon constitutes a limit to such discord. It is noteworthy that in the last quotation above Professor Childs speaks of the canon as reflecting not 'the full meaning' but rather 'the full effect' of the revelatory history. In other words, revelation is channeled not into objective truth but rather into experiential dynamic.

Professor Childs therefore seems at times to engage in a shell game in his handling of the historical. On the one hand he insists on the factuality of the unique religious experience of the Hebrew people and emphasizes that the biblical text frequently refers to historical processes and to discernible historical events that have become an integral part of the canonical literature and therefore must be taken seriously. He stresses that the literature is not simply or primarily interested in history, but the real centre of the witness requires reading it holistically for its emphasis on the will of God for the community of faith. Yet at other times he seems to

subordinate the historical to the spiritual in such a way that historical critical problems appear to be irrelevant to the reality of canonical revelation.

Professor Childs seems to reject the competence of historical-critical method in one context only to affirm it in another. In effect, he tells us that it is futile for historical investigation to reach behind the canon for earlier and more reliable sources on which the biblical writers are alleged to have superimposed legend, myth or other imaginative constructs. The reason for this futility is not that an inquiring student of religion may not probe a possible explanation of biblical data on these assumptions. Nor is it only that such an effort runs counter to Scripture's witness to its own origin and nature. The reason for this futility is rather that such investigation ends repeatedly in contradictory outcomes that reflect the critics' arbitrary *a priori*. The canonical writings by contrast set the stage for fruitful investigation by witnessing to unique divine revelation and action that does not rest upon empirical methods for its sanction and legitimacy. All this is gain.

But Professor Childs then reintroduces the very method that led biblical studies into pre-canonical confusion. Suddenly it seems to acquire new competence to unravel a complex canonical process and development, one that Childs champions apart from any direct scriptural validation and despite far-reaching critical disagreement. Critical interpretation of post-apostolic canonical process has led to contradictory conclusions no less extensive than has critical interpretation of supposed pre-biblical sources and the pre-canonical process.

Autographs

Professor Childs unfortunately relativizes the importance of definitive biblical autographs, in part because he considers error an integral part of the authoritative canon. Thus we are locked up in his view not only to fallible prophets and apostles, but also to a fallible final text containing fallible interpretation by fallible canonical editors, not to mention fallible contemporary critical scholars who pronounce the very last current word about canonical finalities.

Problems do exist with infallible autographs, but they are not what many critics think they are. Some debunk them as merely an evangelical apologetic stratagem, and emphasize the fact that no one can produce or exhibit them. But no one can display fallible autographs either. The argument for fallible rather than infallible autographs turns not on empirical data but on philosophical assumptions. What we have are copies, not originals, and their disagreements – although largely matters of grammatical detail, and involving no credal matters – rule out their absolute identity with

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the originals. Obviously to discount divine incription by emphasizing that human nature is inescapably fallible and sinful has baneful implications for divine incarnation as well.

To say that all talk of inerrant originals is irrelevant since we possess only errant copies overlooks an important point. There is a significant difference between a supposedly authoritative copy that is necessarily errant, and an authoritative inerrant original of which we have an errant copy. In one instance we deal with a text that is inherently fallible, and are faced at all points with the possibility of human error; in the other, we are offered an essentially trustworthy text which here and there, wherever divergences in the copies attest, some evident alteration has taken place, even if largely grammatical and not involving doctrinal revision.

Critics also protest that in copying the text copyists made not merely unintentional errors but deliberate changes, even if those changes are not theological or doctrinal. But here, too, speculative assumptions are involved. For example, the Second Book of the Psalter seems, in contrast to the other four books, routinely to alter Yahweh's name to Elohim. Some critics think this change was made to accommodate reverential avoidance of the divine Name. By contrast, others hold that poetic parallelism in the original and not scribal recension may account for the variation.

The problem that critical textual scholars created by assigning differing importance to varying text-types – e.g., the majority text versus an editorially reconstructed text – may perhaps have lessened interest in autographic inerrancy. But the dispute over textual types nonetheless presupposes that some one text has primacy – not merely chronological primacy but primacy of content that normatively defines the canon itself.

Apart from the conviction that such a text puts us fully in touch with truth as the originally inspired writers proclaimed it the search for an authoritative text would have far less value. What Professor Childs proposes to do is recover the theological relevance of the Bible by stressing the final text of a tradition that was received as authoritative while at the same time it was editorially interpreted and reformulated. But evangelicals in affirming the authority of the final canonical form of Scripture, and the canon's normativity for biblical theology, consider the canon as a deposit of autographs which because uniquely inspired vouchsafe the truth and factuality of their revelatory content. The relationship between the written text and the primitive Christian community did not constitute the canon's authority but rather reflected that authority. Evangelicals resist any notion of canonicity that locates scriptural authority merely in the fact that in these writings the church continues to hear the Word of God. The fact that a canonical text functioned as Scripture did not

objectively validate the Bible's divine authority in the early Christian community. The achievement of a canon whose authority an interacting community acknowledges and to which it submits does not in and of itself guarantee its divine authority. The Protestant Reformers insisted that Scripture is self-authenticating; it does not stand indissolubly dependent upon the primitive church. The canon witnesses, in the apostle Paul's words, that Scripture functions profitably for the church's thought and conduct because it is antecedently 'God-breathed' (2 Tim. 3:16). The reason for taking Scripture and canon seriously, according to their identical and independent self-witness, is that Scripture is the Word of God that confronts us with divinely given imperatives and truths.

Strengths and Weaknesses

To its credit, canonical theology commendably challenges the tyranny over biblical studies that historical criticism imposes through unwarranted assumptions. It refocuses scholarly interest on a normative canonical text as being the authoritative content and context for Christian theology. This development, at the present stage of critical controversy, is a monumental achievement. Its movement away from recent modern criticism and its renewal of links with classical Protestantism and evangelical orthodoxy are evident in several important respects:

1. Canonical theology affirms the primacy and decisive authority of the canonical text.
2. It affirms the comprehensive unity of Scripture and requires exegesis in the context of the entire canon instead of distinguishing between stages of authority or a canon within the canon.
3. It affirms Scripture as the only legitimate context for Christian theological reflection.
4. It boldly challenges prevalent critical dogmas, and openly recognizes that continuing critical diversity attests historical criticism's vulnerability to perverse assumptions.
5. It reconnects redemptive history with the biblical text instead of suspending it upon empirical historical confirmation, and concurrently emphasizes biblically-given meaning rather than bare historical events.

These positive features of canonical theology must, however, be counterbalanced by its serious weaknesses:

1. If, as canonical theology claims, the early church legitimizes and definitively construes Scripture, then the Bible is subordinated to the church. Even if it rejects the historical-critical verdict that the canon answers to the higher authority of primitive pre-canonical sources, and the verdict also that the canon is the late fourth-century imposition of an authoritative church council, the theory of

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dialectical canon-formation nonetheless implies that a twentieth-century critical scholarly elite authorizes a text whose definitive form relates less to prophetic-apostolic sources than to ecclesial editorial contributions. Canon criticism does indeed hold historical criticism at bay by emphasizing the lack of consensus and of persuasive evidence for documentary redactionist claims. The fact is that the recent projection of a dialectical process of canon formation is similarly and no less vulnerable since its when and how of canon completion remains both obscure and disputed.

2. Professor Childs' comments on revelation are too skeletal either to satisfy the scriptural representations of that doctrine or to supply a clear warrant for scriptural authority.

3. The subordination of prophetic-apostolic teaching together with the forfeiture of authorial intention reflects an inferior view of divine inspiration and discounts the importance of apostolicity for canon-formation.

4. Both Professor Childs' ambiguity concerning the objective historical factuality of many of the biblical redemptive events and his undeveloped references to special categories of history minimize the scriptural emphasis that apart from the historicity of biblical core events the Christian faith collapses.

5. Alongside Professor Childs' emphasis on personal response and commitment, his theology does not clearly indicate the objective cognitive truth of Scripture. The weakest link in Childs' canonical proposal lies in its nebulous views of divine revelation and inspiration.

PRAYER AND UNION WITH CHRIST

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

The Rutherford Lecture for 1988

In the Epistle to the Hebrews there is a remarkable connection between Christ and his people - between his priesthood for them and their priesthood in him. I wish to explore that connection and its ramifications for the ministry of intercession of God's church. We will find clues to help us grasp this fruitful connection between the incarnate Christ and his interceding people not only in Hebrews, but also in John's Gospel, chapters 6 and 14-17, in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapters 5-8, and Ephesians, chapter 2, as well as in other relevant biblical texts.

Various church Fathers and Reformers as well as more modern theologians have helped to shed much light on the meaning and bearing of these passages on our subject. From time to time I will be referring to Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Anselm, Richard of St. Victor, John Calvin, and to such nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers as B. B. Warfield of Princeton, B.M.Palmer and J.L.Girardeau of the American Southern Presbyterian tradition, the Congregationalist P. T. Forsyth of England, as well as, from the Scottish tradition, MacLeod Campbell, Thomas F. Torrance and Ronald S. Wallace. These and a number of others, including William Still and James Philip, have helped to focus my thinking on the glad tidings for all who pray - that their life and prayers are taken up into the life and prayer of their risen and enthroned Saviour and Lord.

Let us get right into the subject by taking a very brief and superficial overview of the connection I have noted in the Epistle to the Hebrews between the humanity of Christ and his people and between his prayers and their prayers. We must deal with details later, but let us note by way of introduction, in Hebrews 1:3, that God the Father speaks his last and final word and thus reveals the fullness of his character in the person of his Son, who becomes incarnate or enfleshed in our human nature in order to redeem us. Then in chapter 2:10, we notice that the Son of God, 'tasted death for every man' in order that through suffering he might 'bring many sons to glory'. In chapter 3:1, we are admonished to 'consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus...'. 'Apostle' at its root means that Christ is the one sent out from God the Father to us, and 'High Priest' signifies that the one who was sent out takes us

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back with him into the favourable, loving presence of the Father on the basis of what he has accomplished in the meantime.

Chapter 5: 7-9 of Hebrews speaks of the suffering and death which his holy, filial, total obedience in our humanity cost Christ, which caused his 'prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears' to be heard by the Father. Then chapter 6:19 tells the glad tidings that our soul's anchor 'enters within the veil' of the Father's innermost heavenly presence, where 'the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek'. Calvin rightly takes this verse to mean that Christ has taken his people behind the veil with him, to that blessed place where the Father hears and answers prayers.¹ Hebrews 9:13,14 speaks of how Christ shed his blood and offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit, and then of how that same eternal (thus, ever present) Spirit 'purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God'. And finally, Hebrews 13:15,16 shows the people of God on earth (who, mysteriously but really, are also within the veil 'in the Spirit, through the Son') offering two kinds of priestly sacrifices: praises to God and good works towards men. What a glorious note: we former worms of the earth and children of hell, now restored in Christ and offering up priestly sacrifices to the Father and also practical blessings to the world! Calvin comments:

So when we come to pray and say: 'Our Father, who art in heaven,' we must recognize that, as far as we are concerned, our lips are unclean, and we are not even worthy to call him God our Creator, let alone being so presumptuous as to regard ourselves as his children. But in spite of this, our Lord Jesus Christ is our spokesman, and our prayers and intercessions are sanctified by him, just as it says in the last chapter to the Hebrews, that it is through him that we render to God the sacrifices of praise and all our prayers, and that he is our Mediator and today we call upon God our Father in his name.²

And Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on this same wonderful change, writes:

Although the host above and the holy spirits worship him, when he became as we are, he worshipped with us as man ... offering, as fragrant incense, himself on our behalf, and us through himself and in himself to God the Father³

1 John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews 6:9*.

2 John Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, translated and edited by T.H.L.Parker, pp. 144, 145.

3 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (London 1975), p. 176.

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Having looked very briefly at this 'missionary movement' which constitutes the very heart of the gospel — Christ the Son, coming out from the Father to lead many sons back to the Father, thus giving them a share in his own life and priesthood, so that their intercessions reflect his and bring joy to the heart of the Father and blessings to the world as they live and pray in the realm of the eternal Spirit — we must now explore in rather more depth this mighty gospel movement in order to draw out encouragements to prayer for those who are united to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

I think this basic movement of the gospel of God in the Epistle to Hebrews most naturally lends itself to being understood in terms of a threefold or Trinitarian structure, and hence we shall consider the effects of the union of believers with Christ upon prayer under a threefold heading.

I. The Character of the Father in the Son

The Greek word from which we get our English word for 'character' is found only once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 1:3, where Christ is 'the brightness of God the Father's glory, and the express image (or character or outshining or effulgence) of his person'. Speaking of how the sufferings of Jesus Christ bear testimony to the infinite love of God for us, Calvin wonderfully says in his sermons on Isaiah 53 that in Christ, 'It is as if God laid bare to us his heart and set before us his inmost feelings to testify to us how dear we are to him and how precious our souls are to him.'⁴ Or as Professor T. F. Torrance quotes H. R. Mackintosh, 'When I look into the face of Jesus Christ and see the face of God, I know that I have not seen that face elsewhere and could not see it elsewhere, for he and the Father are one All creation in heaven and earth, all the divine ways of history, all time and eternity — they meet and converge in this one transcendent Figure.'⁵

In other words, we look at Christ and we see the heart of the Father. In the New Testament we learn that basic to the reality of the living God is his triune nature, as one God eternally existing in three persons. The triune nature of God was apparently not yet revealed in the Old Testament, because as B. B. Warfield suggested, the revelation of the Trinity had to wait upon the timely unfolding of the historic fact of redemption: the sending Father, the incarnate,

⁴ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p.95.

⁵ T. F. Torrance, 'Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Theologian of the Cross,' in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987), p. 163.

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atoning, resurrected Son, and the outpoured Spirit.⁶ So, 'in the fullness of the time, God sent his Son' (Gal.4:4), and then on the day of Pentecost, from the enthroned Father and the Lamb, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon a waiting church, reconstituting it and thus giving it new birth.

What I wish to underscore here is the importance of the fact that our experience and knowledge of God in historic redemption as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, ever one God, fully rests upon what this one God in three persons is in himself, beyond history, in the endless reaches of eternity. The revelation of the Trinity in the history of redemption is rooted in what God was and is and will be before history, in history and after history. Jesus shows us what this one, true God was, is, and ever will be.

Richard of St. Victor, one of the greatest of Scottish theologians, who moved to France in the twelfth century, meditated as profoundly as any sanctified human mind ever has upon the meaning of the eternal, inner nature of God as triune. In his *De Trinitate*, he thinks of the Trinity of the one God as being rooted in the truth of 1 John that 'God is love'. It is the nature of love, writes Richard, not to be inturned and self-centred, but to be outgoing, generous and overflowing, seeking like natures with whom it may share its life, light and love. Thus our God, says Richard, has never been a single, solitary, lonely person, an atomistic individual cut off within himself. Rather, he has always existed with a rich inner life of communion and exchange of those three attributes so often mentioned in the Johannine writings: light, life and love. This sharing has been between three co-equal persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, 'the same in substance, equal in power and glory'.

Furthermore, because the inner love of the triune God is so great and overflowing, the Father chose to create a world which would be peopled by a race created in the image of his Son, so they could reflect the glory of the Son and share in the eternal life and blessedness of the Trinity. This purpose of God lies behind everything that is or ever will be and behind everything that has happened or will ever happen. Therefore, as Richard of St. Victor has helped us to see, when we gaze upon Jesus, we are taken into the very fullness of the eternal life and purpose of God the Father Almighty and of the ever blessed Holy Spirit.

The importance of this unity between Son on earth and Father in heaven is not hard to grasp. If Jesus is one with the Father, then what he did for us in space and time is eternally validated and rooted in

6 See B.B. Warfield, 'The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity' in *Biblical Foundations* (London, 1958), pp. 79-116.

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God the Father Almighty. In his commentary on John 14:30, John Calvin insightfully notes that when Jesus is saying 'I and the Father are one', he is referring not merely to unity of substance in the inner Trinitarian life (although from other passages that is profoundly true), but he is actually speaking 'about the agreement which he has with the Father, so that whatever is done by Christ will be confirmed by the power of his Father'. That is why the early church in the third and fourth centuries, guided by such as the great Athanasius, insisted so strongly and uncompromisingly upon the *homoousios* – the fact that Jesus Christ is of one and the same substance with the Father – enshrined in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In the words of Athanasius: 'The fullness of the Father's Godhead is the being of the Son, and the Son is the whole God.'⁷

Stated negatively, the denial of this important truth of the unity of Son and Father has this consequence, which was bluntly stated by Cyril of Alexandria: 'if Christ who suffered for us was mere man and only the organ of Deity, we have not really been redeemed.'⁸

In his book on *The Trinitarian Faith*, T. F. Torrance has stated very lucidly the joyful consequences of the character of the Father being truly revealed in the person of the Son:

If we are really to have knowledge of God we must be given a point of access to him which is both in God himself and in our creaturely existence. That is precisely what we have in the incarnation, where God's self-revelation as Father takes place through his self-giving to us in Jesus Christ his Son. When God gives us access to knowledge of himself like that he does so within the conditions of space and time and therefore within the bounds of what we human beings may apprehend. At the same time the knowledge which God thus gives us of himself in his incarnate Son is from a centre in his own being, where all our human understanding and conceiving of him may be governed and tested in accordance with his divine nature. Thus when we approach God as Father through the Son, our knowledge of the Father in the Son is grounded in the very being of God and is determined by what he essentially is in his own nature. Since in Jesus Christ we are really enabled to know God in accordance with his own nature as Father and Son, we may know him in a way that is both godly and precise.⁹

We must now go on to consider the purpose of the Father's revelation of his character in the Son.

7 Athanasius, *Cont. Arianos* 1:9.

8 As quoted in T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 159.

9 T. F. Torrance, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 53.

II. 'Many Sons to Glory' – Priesthood of the Son in Human Nature

John Calvin so often brings out in his writings that all that Christ did on earth was not done for himself, for he had no need of anything in the ultimate sense since he was God of God, but rather, he did everything for us. That is precisely the reason why he took on our condemned human nature – so that he, the Son, might by so doing 'bring many sons to glory'. This theme is the particular concern of Hebrews chapter 2. There and elsewhere, we find two closely connected elements in this divine theme of Christ's bringing many sons to glory: first, the reality of Christ's priesthood in our mortal flesh; and second, the consecration of the saints in his incarnate priesthood.

The Reality of Christ's Priesthood in our Mortal Flesh

First, we note that Hebrews 2 is in fullest harmony with the rest of the New Testament in bearing witness to the full flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnation of the eternal Logos, second person of the holy Trinity, in our mortal human nature to be our priest. Hebrews 2.13, quoting Isaiah 8:18, takes the word/action of the prophet Isaiah, who presented himself with his two sons to the king, and places its fulfilment in the word/action of Christ the Son, presenting his church to the Father above: 'Behold I and the children which God has given me.'

In order to present a redeemed humanity to the holy Father above, the eternal Son had, in the words of verse 14, 'to take hold of flesh' since 'the children are partakers of flesh and blood, so that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'. Verse 16 further confirms the reality of Christ's true manhood by denying that he took on himself the nature of angels. Angels do not physically die and, more to the point, angels are not to be redeemed. But Christ takes on himself that which he is going to redeem – the nature of the seed of Abraham. He thus becomes a real man with mortal flesh, 'made under the law to redeem those that were under the law' (Gal. 4:4). Hebrews 2 shows that the way the last Adam 'brings his many sons to glory' is by assuming their flesh, taking it down into death 'to make reconciliation for the sins of the people' (v.17), thus destroying the power of death over them (vv.14,15).

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In order to fill out the teaching of Hebrews on what was happening when Christ took on our flesh, we need to join chapter 5:7-9 to chapter 2, as Cyril of Alexandria does so well:¹⁰

He wept as a man that he might hold back your tears – he became afraid, as economically, he allowed his flesh to suffer what is proper to it that he might make us very courageous – he refused the drink that the Cross might expose the impiety of the Jews. He is said to be weak in respect of his human nature that he might do away with our weakness. He offered up prayers and supplications that he might render the hearing of the Father open to your entreaties. ¹¹

In other words, Christ was not only doing something tremendous in our nature on our behalf as he was dying on the cross for our sins, but also, all through his incarnate life, he was living the life of holiness in our flesh, resisting sin, keeping the whole law in filial devotion to the Father, and therefore turning our whole nature back to God. As John Calvin remarks in *Institutes* 2:16:5, Christ has redeemed us ‘by the whole course of his obedience ... in his very baptism ... he fulfilled a part of righteousness in obediently carrying out his Father’s commandment. In short, from the time when he took on the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us.’

In this context, Calvin quotes Romans 5:19, ‘As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.’ In this connection between ‘the whole course of his obedience’ and the work of the last Adam, Calvin gives us the right clue for grasping the profound relationship between Hebrews 2, where Christ takes our flesh down into death, and Hebrews 5, where he suffers in our flesh in order to turn it to God in prayer. Great light is shed on this unbreakable relationship between the holy life and prayers of Christ in our nature and on our behalf and his victorious death in the flesh of ‘the seed of Abraham’ by the great Pauline concept of Christ as the last Adam. In Romans 5:12-21 and in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul contrasts the first and the last Adam. Both are representative men. All humanity are in the first Adam, even as all the redeemed will abide in the last Adam forever. As the fall of the first Adam brought all who were in him into sin and death, so the obedience of the last Adam will bring all who are in him into righteousness and eternal life.

We must think of this obedience, as Calvin and Cyril and Paul have shown us, as involving not only his death in our humanity on

10 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, p. 174.

11 Cyril, *Apol. Con. Theodoretum* (PG 76, 441).

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the cross of Calvary, but his whole incarnate life. Or in classical theological terms, we must hold together Christ's active and his passive obedience. Indeed, Principal Alex F. Mitchell (of St. Andrews University in the last century) shows that there was considerable debate at the Westminster Assembly of Divines in the 1640s on whether or not the active obedience of Christ was needed by the believer as well as his passive obedience. The Assembly came down very strongly in favour of the conveyance to the believer of both the active and passive obedience of Christ.¹²

Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century developed this Pauline concept of the great exchange accomplished by the last Adam in our flesh in terms of the 'recapitulation' of the human race in Christ, who came to restore what was lost in the first Adam. In his famous *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus says:

When he became incarnate and was made man, he commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam – namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God – that we might recover in Christ Jesus (3:18:1).

In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus states why Christ had to obey in our very flesh (and here he is greatly influenced by Hebrews 2 and 5):

Because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh, it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. So the Word was made flesh that through that very flesh which sin had ruled and domesticated, it should lose its force and be no longer in us (31).

He (God) sent his creative word, who in coming to deliver us, came to the very place and spot in which we had lost life . . . and hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained (38).

In a rather unusual passage in *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus develops the idea (not specifically found in St Paul) that Christ's very passage from infancy to adulthood sanctified the various ages and stages of life through which he grew. Indeed he had the idea that Christ lived to be fifty years old, so that old men too could be sanctified.¹³ Although here Irenaeus obviously stretched a good point too far, we cannot doubt that his instincts were soundly

12 Alex F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia, 1897), pp. 154-160.

13 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2:22:4.

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biblical and evangelical in seeing – with Hebrews 2 and 5 – that the priesthood of Christ in our flesh involved the totality of his existence as man, from conception to coronation, and that all that he was and did, and is and does, was for us – not for himself.

In the nineteenth century the controversial theologian, John MacLeod Campbell, tried to think through precisely what was taking place within the humanity of Christ while he, as the last Adam, was sanctifying by his holy presence all stages of our life. Campbell wrote that ‘the atonement not only . . . was rendered possible by the incarnation, but (was) itself a development of the incarnation’.¹⁴ Commenting at some length on Romans 8:3 (‘God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sacrifice for sin’), Campbell states that Christ would have suffered from the beginning because of his holy mind of love towards the Father dwelling in our humanity with its evil selfishness and enmity towards God.¹⁵ But as he suffers in our mind and flesh, he is turning our humanity back in humility, repentance and love to the Father. In language that offended many, MacLeod Campbell expanded on what he understood passages such as Hebrew 5 and 2, Romans 8, John 6, 14, and 17 to mean, as regards what Christ was doing in our nature on our behalf:

Christ’s own condemnation of our sins, and his holy sorrow because of them, indicate that dealing with the aspect of the divine mind towards sin which prepared the way for intercession. That oneness of mind with the Father, which towards man took the form of condemnation of sin, would in the Son’s dealing with the Father in relation to our sins, take the form of a perfect confession of our sins. That confession, as to its own nature, must have been *a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man...* He who would intercede for us must begin with confessing our sins.

He who so responds to the divine wrath against sin...*in that perfect response he absorbs it.* For that response has all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sin of man – a perfect sorrow – a perfect contrition – all the elements of such a repentance, and in absolute perfection, all – excepting the personal consciousness of sin; – and by that perfect response in Amen to the mind of God in relation to sin is the wrath of God rightly met, and that is accorded to divine justice which is its due, and could alone satisfy it.¹⁶

14 John MacLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (London, 1878), p. 122.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 116–118.

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By the way, I take it that this does not mean for a moment that sinners do not need to repent of sin. On the contrary, it means we *can* repent because of our union with 'the Apostle and High Priest of our profession' (Heb. 3:1), 'the author and finisher of our faith' (Heb. 12:2). That way alone can we solve the problem mentioned by the great evangelist, George Whitefield (as quoted by MacLeod Campbell): 'our repentance needeth to be repented of, and our very tears to be washed in the blood of Christ.'¹⁷

Our acceptable repentance before the Father in and because of our union with the Son in his human priesthood leads us to examine the second element involved in the theology of Christ bringing many sons to glory, as taught in Hebrews.

Consecration of the Saints in Christ's Incarnate Priesthood

Commenting on Hebrews 6:19, Calvin writes that 'In the person of one man all entered the Sanctuary together'.¹⁸ Similarly, in his commentary on Exodus 28, Calvin describes how the priest entered the Sanctuary with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod and how he wore a breastplate with twelve jewels representing the tribes. As Calvin puts it: the priest 'was not separate for private advantage but that in his one person they were all a kingdom of priests'.¹⁹ When Calvin deals with Hebrews 10:14 ('For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified'), he prefers to translate *teteleiōken* by 'consecrated' rather than by 'sanctified' or 'perfected', as Professor Ronald S. Wallace has pointed out.²⁰ Thus Calvin comments on this verse: 'All the saints have a full consecration in the one offering of Christ.'²¹

Centuries earlier, Athanasius had seen the same mighty truth, when, arguing against the Arians, he showed that Christ took on our humanity – including its prayer and worship – so that he might consecrate it and take it up with himself to the Father.²² Cyril of Alexandria actually says that Christ, the High Priest of our souls (referring to Heb. 3:1), 'carried up the mind of believers into the one nature of the Godhead'.²³ To quote Cyril:

17 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

18 John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* 6:19.

19 John Calvin, *Harmony of Pentateuch*, on Exodus 28:9.

20 Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 12.

21 John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* 10:14.

22 Athanasius, *Cont. Ar.* 4:6.

23 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, p. 175.

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Just as he remained God when in human nature, so while being in the nature and majesty of Godhead he is nonetheless man, Emmanuel. It is indeed still as man that he exercises his priestly ministry in the innermost seat of the Godhead.²⁴

Elsewhere, Cyril states that through his continuing humanity in the world of glory, Christ represents us to the Father. Praying on our behalf and taking our prayer up into himself, he presents us through his own self-offering to the Father.²⁵ In a wonderful way the inspired writer in Hebrews 4:14-16 binds together the profoundly human understanding that Jesus Christ has of us because of his personal experience of our infirmities and temptations with his victorious passage into heaven – still in our flesh – to intercede for us and actively wait to extend grace and mercy to us in time of need.

The consequences of our consecration in Christ – particularly for the matter of prayer – are immense. In his *Commentary on 1 Peter* 2:9, Calvin writes:

Moses called your fathers a sacred kingdom, because the whole people enjoyed, as it were, royal liberty, and from their body were chosen priests, both honours therefore were at the same time joined together. But now you are royal priests indeed in a more outstanding way because you are each of you consecrated in Christ that you may be associates of his kingdom and partakers of his priesthood.

In *Sermon XXII* on 2 Samuel, Calvin explains in plainer language the practical importance for prayer of our consecration to the Father in Christ:

...if we are separated from our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be no accord between the head and the members, and consequently we will be stripped of his presence, in which the salvation of men consists. Be that as it may, to call on the name of God without always basing our approach on the name of his Son, will surely throw us into the abyss of death. As I have said, we cannot participate in the remarkable favours which are promised us by the mouth of our Lord and by the message of his prophets, until our Lord Jesus Christ accepts us in his body, which is done by the faith of the gospel. Well, now we see that all those who think they are praying to God, but do not think that our Lord Jesus Christ is their Advocate to introduce them to God his Father, are doing nothing but beating the water and even abusing the name of God and profaning it.

Let us learn, therefore, that if we want to pray to God, if we want to taste his goodness and want him to answer our requests, we must begin this way: that is, to recognise that all the good gifts of our Lord Jesus Christ

24 Cyril, *Adv. Nestorium* (PG 76, 132-3).

25 See Torrance, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

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are given to us and that we are made participants in them. That is why St Paul says that 'he impoverish himself to enrich us' with his blessings. For he took all our wants on him in order that all that belonged to him might be communicated to us, insofar as it would be expedient for our salvation.²⁶

This complex subject, just mentioned by Calvin, of how we participate in the self-consecration of Christ for us so that 'the wondrous exchange' between his riches and our poverty occurs, will take us to the third major division of this essay on our union with Christ and prayer.

III. The Reality of the Holy Spirit Uniting Believers to the Father Through the Son

Hebrews 9:13, 14 teaches that the blood of Christ was offered to God 'through the eternal Spirit'. As Professor Milligan of Aberdeen suggested in his work *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, this offering of the blood of Christ to God according to the context of Hebrews 9:11-12 and 23-26, refers not only to his actual passion and death on the cross, but also his presentation of his completed work in his victorious resurrection body in heaven above.²⁷ And this gives us the clue to understand how believers are united to the Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnate life, atoning death, glorious resurrection and continuing intercession: we are united to him who lived, died, and ever lives by the eternal Spirit.

At its simplest level, this means that since the Holy Spirit is eternal, he is not limited by time (or space). The Gospels teach that the human nature of Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit; that the Holy Spirit was communicated to his humanity 'without measure', and as we have seen, that he 'offered himself through the eternal Spirit'. That same eternal Spirit is just as present in our time and place as he was in Christ's time and place. Thus he can make absolutely real to us the life, death and resurrection of Christ, since Christ performed them through him. If the eternal Spirit was and is in Christ and the same eternal Spirit is in the believer, then the believer and his Lord are spiritually bound together.

We must now consider first the nature of this union of Christ and his people and secondly the fruit of this union, particularly in relation to the prayers of his people.

26 John Calvin, *Sermon XXII* on 2 Samuel (this author's translation), pp. 14, 15.

27 William Milligan, *The Resurrection of Our Lord* (London, 1884).

The Nature of the Union of Christ and Believers

In his *Commentary on Galatians* 2:20, Calvin speaks of our union with the Saviour as 'a real and substantial union'. That is, it is not merely mental or moral but enters into the ontological reality of our very existence. And yet Calvin also makes clear in his *Institutes* (particularly where he argues against theologians such as the Lutheran Osiander) that our real union with Christ is a spiritual union wrought by the Holy Spirit, so that there is 'no gross mixture' of the substance of Christ and ourselves (see *Institutes* 3:11:10; 3:1:3).²⁸ In his comments on the Gospel of John, Cyril of Alexandria brought out, centuries before Calvin, the same emphasis on the substantiality of this union with Christ, while avoiding any idea of a mixture of divine and human substance or any loss of individual humanity by us.²⁹

The ancient theologian, Epiphanius, taught that not only was the Holy Spirit the bond of the holy Trinity, he was also the bond of the believer's union with Christ.³⁰ The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks three times of believers and Christ being in some sense mutual 'partakers'. In Hebrews 2:14, 15, Christ partakes of our flesh; in Hebrews 3:4, we are encouraged to remain partakers of Christ; and in Hebrews 12:10, we are partakers of his holiness. This close relationship of the Holy Spirit to the human life and work of the historic Christ and then his relationship to believers in conveying the blessings of the Christ even to them, helps us understand why it was only at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit definitively came down to inhabit permanently the people of God.

In answer to the old question of why the Holy Spirit had not done this before, Milligan wisely suggested that the eternal Spirit came to indwell us only after Christ had indwelt a human body as his own human nature, so that the Spirit comes '... from one who is not only Spirit, but who has at the same time an exalted body... We have communications from him not as one who is Spirit only, but as one who is still possessed of real and complete humanity. In a glorified humanity he not only lives himself, but he binds us to himself as one living in that state. The very power that comes to us from heaven is pervaded by human elements.'³¹

Calvin reminds us that only the Holy Spirit can so join things in heaven and things on earth, and that the life, virtue and knowledge of

28 Ronald S. Wallace, *op. cit.*, chapter 3.

29 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, p. 181.

30 Epiphanius, *Anc.* 5-10.

31 Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

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the one can be genuinely shared by the other.³² Calvin often refers to the sacraments as a visible depiction of this wonderful union of mankind with Christ in the Holy Spirit.³³ In the words of Athanasius, the Son has given us 'the first fruits of the Spirit, so that we may be transformed into sons of God, according to the image of the Son of God'.³⁴

If we may speak temporally, one of the 'first' things the Spirit does in those who are bonded into union with the risen Christ is to raise them to faith in Christ. Calvin states that faith enables us to partake of the life made available through the death of Christ,³⁵ and that faith actually inserts us into the body of Christ,³⁶ which allows us to possess and enjoy Christ himself.³⁷ In a word, Calvin says that faith unites man to God and makes God to dwell in man.³⁸

When Paul speaks of the last Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:45 as a 'life-giving spirit', we may properly envisage the risen Christ sending the Spirit from his throne to bond the new humanity into union with himself by resurrecting their spirits to faith in him. In *A Man in Christ*, James S. Stewart caught vividly the significance of this movement:

Everything turns upon faith. Justification does not happen in a vacuum. It happens in a faith-pervaded atmosphere. . . . The sinful soul, confronted with God's wonderful self-disclosure in Christ, and with the tremendous and subduing fact of the cross where the whole world's sins were borne, responds to that divine appeal and abandons itself to the love that stands revealed: and that response, that abandonment, Paul calls faith. This is what God sees when he justifies the ungodly.³⁹

This spiritual union with Christ which gives rise to faith has many aspects which we do not understand. Indeed, Calvin wisely said that ultimately this union is incomprehensible to the human mind.⁴⁰ Similarly, James Philip in his book, *Union With Christ* (1973), brings out the important point that this union by which we are 'baptised into Christ's death and resurrection' in terms of Romans 6, is not

32 Calvin, *Sermon on Ephesians* 5:32.

33 Calvin, *Sermons on Acts* 2:1-4.

34 Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 8 (PG 26, 997).

35 Calvin, *Commentary on John* 5:11.

36 Calvin, *Institutes* 3:2:30.

37 Calvin, *Commentary on I John* 4:14. I owe these last three references to R. S. Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

38 *Ibid.*, 4:15.

39 James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (London, 1935), p. 256.

40 Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians* 5:32.

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something we feel, any more than we specifically feel our union to the first Adam. Thus, although these two unions – with Adam and then with Christ – are the most important things that can be said about who we really are, they go both deeper and higher than the human mind and human feelings. Some famous theologians in the later Byzantine tradition tried to specify more details on this union (such as the writings of Gregory Palamas on the ‘energies’ of God⁴¹), but we will undoubtedly do best to remain satisfied with the silences of Scripture. But what we can note, however, is that the union of Christ and believers is fruitful.

The Fruit of the Union of Christ and Believers

Hebrews 13: 15, 16 show the fruit of the great movement by which the Apostle and High Priest of our profession has come down to us and taken us back with him up to the Father: ‘By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.’ The joyful note of this royal ministry which has been made ours as sons who are united to the Son is caught by Calvin in one of his sermons on Isaiah 53:

When we are humbled like this, we can come to our Lord Jesus Christ in the knowledge that it is he who is spokesman for us, and that it is also through him that we can boldly call ourselves the children of God. So when we come to pray and say: ‘Our Father, who art in heaven,’ we must recognise that, as far as we are concerned, our lips are unclean, and we are not even worthy to call him God our Creator, let alone be so presumptuous as to regard ourselves as his children. But, in spite of this, our Lord Jesus Christ is our spokesman, and our intercessions are sanctified by him, just as it says in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it is through him that we render to God the sacrifices of praise and all our prayers, and that he is our mediator and today we call upon God our Father in his name. We can indeed boldly glory that he regards us as his children.⁴²

In Revelation chapter 8, we are given a pictorial movement to reflect this reality of how the prayers of the saints reach the throne of God who then in answer to their intercession casts fire into the earth. It is instructive to note that something happens to the saints’ prayers once they reach the heavenly places and before they are granted entrance to the Father: an angel sprinkles incense upon them.

41 E.g. see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (London & Oxford, 1974), p. 164.

42 Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah* 53, pp. 144, 145.

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This is clearly reminiscent of the work of the high priest in the book of Leviticus (16:12), who spread the fragrant incense as a way of demonstrating that the worship of the people had to be sweetened by the Lord himself for it to be acceptable. And so the incense sprinkled by the angel in Revelation 8 cannot be disconnected from the wounds of the Lamb that was slain who now sits upon the throne. The perfume speaks of the merits of his holy life and victorious death and resurrection. It is as though Revelation 8 thinks of the prayers of the saints – with all their unworthiness as they come from people of unclean lips – being taken through the cleansing, beautifying nailmarks of Jesus, and thus turning into the most desirable and powerful influences with almighty God. These intercessions of the saints through the Lamb thus prevail and cause fire to be cast into the earth. They change history, for later in Revelation 8, ships, mountains and trees are burned up because of prayer.

How we need today this focus on the validity of the prayers and spiritual sacrifices of God's imperfect people, prevailing to the casting of fire into the earth, because of who they are in Christ, not who they are in themselves! In the biography of General Thomas J. 'Stonewall' Jackson of the Confederate Army by the Southern Presbyterian theologian, Robert L. Dabney, a moving scene is described as the body of the deceased general was lying in state in the Capitol in Richmond, Virginia. Thousands of the Confederate people had filed by all day to look upon their slain hero. At sunset, the officers in charge began closing the large bronze doors of the Senate chamber to keep anyone else from entering. Suddenly, a rough old soldier, in tattered grey uniform, with tears running down his lined, bearded face, pushed his way forward and cried, as he held up the stump of a missing right arm: 'By this right arm which I gave for my country, I demand the privilege of seeing my general for the last time.' Before the officer of the day could push the old veteran of the Stonewall Brigade down the steps, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, who happened to be standing by, insisted: 'Open the gates and let this man in: he has won entrance by his wounds.'

In an altogether more profound way, the prayers of believers win entrance to the Father because they, as it were, go through the wounds of Christ. Or, to speak rather more accurately, Christ's people are present with him in his life, death, resurrection and continuing intercessions, and hence they – and their prayers and spiritual sacrifices – find glad entrance to the Father so that fire is cast into the earth. Theologically, it would be hard to improve on the way this truth is summarised by Cyril of Alexandria:

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Although the host above and the holy spirits worship him, when he became as we are, he worshipped with us as man . . . offering, as fragrant incense, himself on our behalf, and us through himself and in himself to God the Father.⁴³

Now we must note here not only the influence of the union with Christ in winning acceptance with the Father for the prayers of believers, but also the influence of the union upon the very prayers themselves as they rise out of the deep places of the lives of Christians, who are indwelt by the eternal Spirit. This eternal Spirit, in the words of the nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian theologian B. M. Palmer, 're-echoes the intercessions of Christ' within the spirits of believers.⁴⁴

Palmer, of course, has reference to Romans 8:26, 27, where we are told that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and confusion when we do not know what to pray or how to pray. When we can do no better than groan, somehow the blessed Spirit is in us, actively working like a mirror to reflect back to heaven the mind of Christ through our very groanings – and thus accomplish things through our praying that far surpass the human understanding. That is undoubtedly one of the reasons why prayer, which is one of the weak and foolish things of this world, is so absolutely powerful with God to the pulling down of strongholds and the doing of mighty exploits. It is one of the tragedies of the twentieth century that so much of the church seems to take the humanist, deistic view of the secular world that prayer is weak and foolish, rather than God's assurance that prayer is the mightiest of all channels between heaven and earth through which the life and virtue of his Son are constantly passing up and down, doing wonders.

Hence, P. T. Forsyth says: 'it is the Christ at prayer who lives in us, and we are conduits of the Eternal Intercession.'⁴⁵ Basil the Great spoke of the Holy Spirit as 'the proper place' where there was true worship (including prayer),⁴⁶ and Hippolytus of Rome spoke of the Holy Spirit as 'the high-priestly Spirit'.⁴⁷ T. F. Torrance has appositely highlighted the significance of the ministry of the 'high-priestly Spirit' as follows:

The Spirit is so closely related to the being and activity of the incarnate Son from whom he is sent to us by the Father and from whom he

43 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, p.176.

44 Benjamin M. Palmer, *The Theology of Prayer*, pp. 318–321.

45 P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London, 1954), p. 16.

46 Basil, *The Holy Spirit* 62–64.

47 Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 3.5.

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receives, that in a real sense he is Christ's *Alter Ego* or *Alter Advocatus*, glorifying Christ and acting in his place. The Paraclete is the living and life-giving Spirit of God who mediates to us the life of God, glorifies Christ as the Son of the Father, by throwing his radiance upon him, who thus actualises among us the self-giving of God to us in his Son, and resonates and makes fruitful within us the intervening, atoning and intercessory activity of Christ on our behalf. It was quite in line with this biblical teaching that Hippolytus had called him 'the high-priestly Spirit.'⁴⁸

St Paul is dealing with an important aspect of this same reality when in Romans 8 and Galatians 4 he speaks of God sending the Spirit of his Son into us to cry that intimate family word to our heavenly Father: 'Abba', Father. And for all who pray, this is good news, for in the words of MacLeod Campbell:

The feeblest cry of the spirit of sonship is sure of a response in the Father's heart, being welcome from its own very nature, as well as for that of which it is the promise, as it is also the fruit – for it both comes from and grows into the perfect sonship which is in Christ. But the thought of the righteousness which God has accepted in accepting Christ, the righteousness to which the words, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him,' turn the mind, altogether encourages the child's cry in us – indeed, is its source – for to cherish to utter that cry, is the spiritual obedience to the word, 'hear ye him.'⁴⁹

From this same point of view, we must remember that the Spirit of sonship (by which we pray) ultimately comes out from the Father as well as the Son. The God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16) is the Father who provided the Son of his heart to propitiate the wrath stirred by the integrity of his holy character against sin which is the contradiction of that character. And this Father whose love sent his Son to cleanse our guilt and make us sons by adoption is the same one who sends prayers to us from his own heart 'through the Son in the Spirit' in order that by the intercessions of his church he might answer those prayers and advance his purposes of almost incredible grace and glory. If this is, in fact, what God is like, could there be anything more needed at this hour, and anything more relevant to the desperate needs of individual humans and the corporate life of our corrupt, secularised nations than a chastened, believing church, once again on its knees, interceding for this world 'to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit', for in so doing it expresses the truest, deepest heart of the Father towards this

48 T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 249.

49 John MacLeod Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

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world, and so – in a royal priesthood – unleashes the benedictions of his infinite goodness upon it.

It is my humble prayer that this lecture may in some way be used by the Holy Spirit to stir many of the people of God once again to range themselves alongside the disciples, and with all of their hearts to ask him: 'Lord, teach us to pray.'

REVIEWS

Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making

Richard J. Bauckham

Marshall Pickering, Basingstoke, 1987; 175pp., £9.95,
ISBN 0 551 01566 7

This is 'an appreciation' of Moltmann. Describing his first reading of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* as 'one of the most exciting theological experiences of my life' and acknowledging that Moltmann's writings have been 'a source of constant stimulation and inspiration for my own theological thinking', Bauckham records his 'very considerable debt of gratitude' to Moltmann. In his Foreword, Moltmann himself pays high tribute to Bauckham, describing this study as 'much the most comprehensive and thorough work on that stage of my theological journey which is defined by the books *Theology of Hope* (1964), *The Crucified God* (1972) and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975) ... He demonstrates the consistency and coherence of the thought even where I myself had the feeling of being led by spontaneous inspiration or of only being carried back and forth.'

Moltmann practises 'experimental theology', emphasizing that theology is 'an existential experience'. He engages in 'dialogical theology', stressing that theology should be 'open to the world'. 'Auschwitz' is a one-word description of the existential experience out of which Moltmann writes: 'my individual biography has been painfully affected by the collective biography of the German people'. Concerning Auschwitz, he asks, 'How can one live with this?'

The Christian-Marxist dialogue is the chief context in which Moltmann's dialogical theology is written. Assessing Moltmann's contribution to it, Bauckham hears an echo of Marx in Moltmann's stress on Christian knowledge of God in Christ as '*world-transforming* knowledge'. According to Moltmann, the Christian hope gives the believer 'a critical distance from his present so that he can recognise its deficiencies and work to transform the present in the direction of the promised future'. Bauckham suggests that there is, in Moltmann's theology, a 'danger... of promoting a revolutionary political attitude in too simplistic a way'. To avoid this danger, we must, with Moltmann, insist that the 'Christian hope which transcends every relative anticipation in history makes possible frank recognition of the shortcomings of the revolutionary achievement'.

Bauckham observes that 'Increasingly in Moltmann's work the broad context for theological questions became the theodicy question'. In this, there is the recognition, on Moltmann's part, that his own political theology had not 'yet probed the problem of evil and suffering deeply enough'. Emphasizing that 'The problem of suffering cannot be met by explanation, but only by redemption', Moltmann focuses his theodicy on the dying Christ who is 'in a profound sense the human God, who cries with (suffering man) and intercedes for him'. Thus, Moltmann insists that 'The proper approach to theodicy must be one which maintains the protest against suffering and the hope for the overcoming of suffering'.

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Whatever we may make of the details of Moltmann's theology, we can applaud his concern with bridging 'the growing gulf between systematic and practical theology' and his emphasis on the local congregation as the place 'where theology should be done'. While sterner critics of Moltmann might look for more criticism, it should be noted that there is sufficient criticism for Moltmann to promise 'in my next book, on Christology'. Bauckham has provided a detailed bibliography of Moltmann's works and studies of Moltmann's theology.

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From Text to Sermon. Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching

Ernest Best

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988; 124pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 567 29143 X

This book by the former Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow is designed primarily for preachers and its aim is to help them to 'get from Scripture to God's message today'. Professor Best in three lucidly written chapters moves from a consideration of 'Scripture' to an analysis of 'Our World' and then to a study of 'Scripture in our World'. The fourth and final chapter yields his conclusions for making the transition from text to sermon.

In the chapter on Scripture, Best's presuppositions are revealed as familiar and predictable. He rules out any form of infallible inspiration, discounts any unity of biblical theology and accepts a relativistic view, with only one absolute, namely Jesus Christ. What may be less familiar is Professor Best's use of the concept 'precipitation' or 'crystallisation' as an explanation for significant scriptural insights in respect of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ. He likens a set of 'precipitations' to a set of photographs of a cathedral taken from different angles. These culturally conditioned 'precipitations' of Christ are useful starting points for us as we try to give an authentic angle on Jesus for our day and culture. In his examination of 'Our World', Best outlines a number of differences between biblical and modern cultures. These include a different view of evil, a different understanding of personality and different ways of looking at and solving world crisis. The essential distinction is the disappearance of a supernatural reference point in modern man's world view. We must, he believes, interpret Scripture in terms of this contemporary framework. The third chapter is the longest and in it Best analyses nine possible techniques for handling Scripture for preaching purposes. All are found wanting! In his conclusions, Best sets out several maxims for preachers to follow. These include the importance of knowing our own interests and presuppositions and recognising how these can differ radically from those of our hearers. He also helpfully reminds readers that the translation of text to sermon is never a matter of words into words, but life into life.

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This book will stimulate thought amongst its readership and much serious reflection is surely required on this vital subject. But will the book help preachers to preach better sermons? This reviewer doubts it. In fact it may depress would-be preachers even more than they are already! Best leaves you with the impression that authentic biblical preaching is an impossibly complicated business. Translating text into sermon, he says, is as difficult as changing a fairy story into ballet! Some preachers, after reading this book, may opt for choreography rather than preaching as a more productive pursuit. Preaching cannot be as complicated and as sophisticated as the Professor makes out. There must be more bridges between the first and twentieth centuries than he allows. Best would appear to see no truth in the familiar dictum, 'a man's a man for a' that'. 'There is no stripped-down basic man', he says (p. 95). Without an adequate doctrine of man, it is difficult to envisage how Best's preacher could ever preach as 'dying man to dying men'. The numerous great evangelical preachers, past and present, perhaps got and got things wrong at times. But, in Best's terms, can they be that wrong?

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Islam in the Modern World: A Christian Perspective

Norman Anderson

Apollos, Leicester, 1990; 288pp., £11.95; ISBN 0 85111 141 8

Books by Professor J.N.D. Anderson are welcome additions to the treasury of works on Islamics and Christology. The author had a distinguished career as Director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in the University of London. First-hand knowledge of the Middle East and South Asia enhances that scholarly reputation. The title of the book is a timely reminder of the influence of modern Islam, now seen as the main rival to world Christianity. The author's objective is to familiarize Christian readers with the basics and subtleties of Islamic religion and law, to inform enquirers and to equip those concerned to meet the intellectual challenge of Islam in dialogue or witness to Muslims. Part I deals with matters mainly Islamic; Part II concentrates on conventional Muslim objections to Christological formulations enshrined in the Creeds – a Christian apologetic with a specific aim. To this we need to add the Appendix on the Gospel of Barnabas, which makes the apologetic section of the book somewhat longer than Part I.

As befits a book by a legal expert, the Shari'a or Islamic law is comprehensively treated. In fact the entries in the index on this subject are more numerous than those for the Quran or Muhammad. Some overlap is evident in the threefold listing of the founders of the four Sunni law schools in different chapters of the book along with equally scattered reference to Shazali and Sufi practices. Otherwise the sections on law are highly competent, providing a mine of information on several facets of the Shari'a. The paragraphs on the four expedients for reforming the Shari'a in conformity with orthodox principles are particularly helpful. On 'some of the

reforms effected', I would have appreciated a note on the various countries (besides Tunisia) where such changes are under way.

Sufism (Islamic mysticism) is the most appealing feature of Muslim devotion. The author devotes his longest chapter to this movement, and quotes profusely from Western scholars who have analysed its sources and development. More quotations from the limpid poetry of Sufi saints and martyrs would further explain the attractiveness of the mystic way. This chapter carries us only to 1565, apart from brief notes on Sanusi (d.1859) and Naqshabandi (d.1914). The linkage with modern Islam requires further demonstration. Whilst the author alludes to Salman Rushdie and to Khomeini in his preface, he steers clear of recent events that have shaken the Muslim world. Discretion may be the motive for such omission. Yet theology, law and politics are so inextricably mixed in Islam that a political overview is a desirable complement to the religious debate.

I found Part II with its chapters on Incarnation and Christology particularly valuable. Issues that baffle the Muslim and dogmas that appal him are wisely and sensitively expounded: divine Sonship, atonement, resurrection. The author duly records the responses of the Mu'tazila and Nasafi on related themes in Islam. Evangelicals will gain much profit from these insights which should serve as incentives to share our faith with Muslims.

Bibliographical details are adequate for most readers. Besides the index the author has provided a glossary of Arabic terms; even less familiar Sanskrit and Japanese words such as *Advaita* and *nembutsu* need defining at some stage; *Hulal* means 'alighting' or 'indwelling' rather than 'fusion', the Arabic counterpart to 'immanence'.

Long ago the great German expositor Bengel offered some splendid advice on what today we might call dialogue: 'Never enter into controversy without knowledge, without love, without necessity'. Professor Anderson has supplied us with such knowledge, opportunities lie around us and love is God's gift that Christ's servant can bring to Muslims.

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Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians

John Barclay

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988; 298pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 567 09493 6

This study is the revision of a doctoral thesis and a very good one too. John Barclay's book is chiefly addressed to answering the question: why in a letter mostly dedicated to attacking 'judaisers' does Paul warn against moral libertinism in Galatians 5:13-6:10? He constructs his answer in a careful, judicious and ultimately persuasive way.

Barclay argues that the problem underlying Paul's polemic in Galatians was not an abstract one of legalism (works being advocated instead of faith as a way of making oneself right before God) but rather cultural imperialism (Jewish identity and customs being seen as essential tokens of membership of the people of God). The attraction this may have had for Gentile Galatian converts is that their initial experience of Christianity left them socially dislocated and morally confused; the Jews were an established religious group,

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and the Jewish law provided detailed instruction for the conduct of ordinary life. By appeal both to their initial experience of the Spirit and some convoluted Old Testament exegesis Paul seeks to dispel this attraction in chapters 2 to 4. But his argument would have been seriously deficient without some attempt to define how to continue in the Spirit or make faith active in love: 'the main body of the letter both points towards and renders necessary the ethical instruction at the end'.

Turning to the question 'what did Paul mean when he spoke of "fulfilling the law of Christ"?', Barclay thinks Paul meant that the law is redefined in Christ by the way he exemplified it in a life of love. But Paul may also have used the word 'fulfil' because its ambiguity suited him, leaving unclear the status of the detailed regulations of Jewish law. Barclay has an illuminating chapter on Paul's flesh-spirit dualism where he concludes: 'πνεῦμα is not an anthropological entity nor is it a general term for the spiritual (non-material or divine) realm: it is the eschatological token of the new age, the power that establishes the sovereignty of Christ in the new creation. As its opposite, σὰρξ is caught up into the dualism inherent in all apocalyptic thought and is thus associated with "the world" and "the present age" which stand in contrast to the new creation'. 'Flesh' thus refers to what is merely human, and for Paul this includes libertine behaviour, social disunity (a particular target in Gal. 5 and 6) and law-observance.

In summary, then, Galatians 5:13-6:10 serves as an appeal to the Galatians to let their lives be directed by the Spirit, functions as an assurance that the Spirit can provide adequate moral constraints and directions, and operates a warning against the moral danger summed up in the word 'flesh'. Barclay leaves open the question of whether this was *sufficient* moral direction; he inclines towards the view that Paul created a prevailing tone of Spirit-filled enthusiasm in the Gentile churches which was somewhat naive. Later Pauline tradition found it necessary to modify Paul's 'freedom' in the direction of extensive codes of behaviour and a clearer definition of moral duties. Barclay sees Romans as a clearer and fuller expression of a theological perspective which in Galatians is polemically loaded and structurally shaky. Some evangelical readers may react against the implied criticism (albeit respectful and cautious) of Paul which this represents. In fact I found it helpful in helping me understand more about Paul as a very human figure in a process of development. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Barclay's book is that it made me wonder why other Galatians scholars have made such hard work of it. That is testimony to the ease and persuasiveness with which Barclay argues his case.

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Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s

D.W. Bebbington

Unwin Hyman, London, 1989; 364pp., £11.95, paperback; £35, hardback; ISBN 0 04 941019 9

Despite its obvious importance with regard to the history of religion in modern Britain, Evangelicalism has received scant attention from historians. Nonconformity has attracted a good deal of scholarly interest and a few valuable studies of the Evangelical party within the Church of England have appeared, yet, notwithstanding its immense influence on Victorian culture, the broad-based Evangelical movement has been largely neglected. David Bebbington's excellent book sets about remedying this lack. Calling the hundred years prior to the First World War 'the Evangelical century', he describes how, for a brief time, Evangelicals 'remoulded British society in their own image'. This comprehensive survey of the movement, from its eighteenth century origins to the present, is a pioneering work of the highest quality which is likely to be a major resource for a considerable time to come.

Bebbington's study has a number of distinctive features. First, it sets the story of the Evangelical movement within the broader context of the cultural history of Britain since the Enlightenment. Thus, the earliest phase of Evangelicalism is seen as 'an adaptation of the Protestant tradition through contact with the Enlightenment'; the dramatic shift of emphasis and the growing divisions of the 1830s and after are explained in terms of the impact of Romanticism upon the leaders of Evangelical opinion – especially the key figure of Edward Irving; while the recent charismatic movement is described as 'a product of the diffusion of cultural Modernism'. These points are well made, although it is not altogether clear how a movement so profoundly shaped by successive cultural waves can then be said to have 'remoulded' society in its own image.

The second important feature of this history arises from the first, namely its account of the changing character of Evangelicalism – which Bebbington defines in terms of four fundamental characteristics, conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. Features of historic Evangelicalism which may surprise the modern reader range from the bizarre (did you know that in the 1920s the esoteric cult of 'pyramidology' – based on the belief that the great pyramid of Egypt somehow incorporated predictions of the fortunes of the British Empire – exercised considerable influence on Evangelicals?) to the very important. Thus, Bebbington claims that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was a 'Romantic innovation' which was unknown to the earliest Evangelicals, while, perhaps even more startling, belief in the personal return of Christ to earth was not inherited from the Protestant tradition and 'continued to be rejected by the Evangelical mainstream' long after its introduction with the upsurge of apocalypticism in the 1830s. Clearly these claims, involving beliefs regarded by many as essential to Evangelicalism, will provoke controversy and are likely to prompt closer examination. One is inclined to ask, for example, how Protestantism's alleged indifference to the visible return of Christ can be squared with John Bunyan's stern opposition to

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Ranters and Quakers in the 1650s on precisely the ground that they mocked belief in a visible return of Jesus Christ?

Inevitably in a major work of this kind readers will quibble over the relative stress given to people and movements at various points: there is no mention of Edward Miall, surely one of the most important sympathetic critics of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism; James Orr and James Denney, despite being outstanding theologians who, rarely among Evangelicals, took the apologetic task in relation to modern thought seriously, receive only passing mention. So far as contemporary Evangelicalism is concerned, the Lausanne Congress surely merits more than the casual reference it receives on page 266, while, in my view, Samuel Escobar is wrongly said to have 'grafted elements of liberation theology onto Evangelicalism'.

More generally, we may wonder whether the *social* factors in the growth and decline of the movement are adequately taken into account in this study? Bebbington explains the Evangelical surge in the nineteenth century in terms of the movement's 'hunger for souls' and says that the ability of the churches to attract the wealthy and powerful is 'a sign of the importance of religion in society'. Well, maybe it was, but what kind of religion was this? If critics of Evangelicalism are to be believed, and this includes prophetic voices within the movement like Miall, Thomas Guthrie, Andrew Mearns and the Booths, the growth experienced by Evangelical churches had something to do with notions of 'respectability', while the seeds of eventual decline are also to be found in the alienation of those who had good reason to resent the alliance between religion and elite culture. Early in the book Bebbington recognises that 'Stirring the elite in church and state to care for the poor may have had the effect of reinforcing the social order', but this insight is not developed, with the result that a key factor in Evangelicalism's rise and fall is overlooked. These comments are in no way intended to detract from the immense value and importance of this book. David Bebbington's history of Evangelicalism is a landmark study and a review such as this cannot adequately describe its rich content. The volume is warmly commended to all who are concerned with the Evangelical heritage and history. More than that, this study helps to identify the critical question confronting Evangelicals today: if, as our author demonstrates very clearly, the movement has been shaped by cultural factors to a far greater extent than has usually been recognised, what cultural influences are at work on the resurgent movement today? Is Evangelicalism doomed to be little more than the religious expression of the latest secular ideology, or can it rediscover the critical perspective on Western culture which is a precondition for genuine mission in post-Christian Europe?

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Theological Politics: A Critique of 'Faith in the City'

Nigel Biggar

Latimer Studies 29/30, Latimer House, Oxford, 1988; 85pp., £3.00;
ISBN 0 946307 28 8/29 6

For those of us who welcomed the Church of England report *Faith in the City* but were dismayed by the lack of serious theological thinking in it, this study is most welcome, exposing the weakness of the report, and articulating in a serious sustained manner the argument for good theological thinking, even in the most practical and political statements. As a *Latimer Study* it is predictably conservative in theology and rigorous in the examination of its subject. To the accusation that he is simply nit-picking Biggar provides a robust response throughout. Theology is necessary both for the church to be true to itself and to be effective in the presentation of its message. At a time when we are showered by statement and counter-statement on the church's role in politics purporting to be theological arguments, but in reality political point-scoring, this study raises the discussion into a serious theological climate. There are three main sections to the study, preceded by a useful introduction to *Faith in the City* and the reaction to it, and followed by a stimulating conclusion on the present state of Anglican social ethics. Two brief appendices on relevant issues are included, namely 'Christian Ethics and Public Office' and 'Revelation and Experience'. The main sections tackle, in turn, matters of principle in the report, the application of these principles, and the political calling of the church, implicit in the report. It was disappointing to find little discussion of the more explicit statements in the report, on ministry, other faiths and the people of God.

The strength of the study lies in its discussion on matters of principle. There the report's thought on such issues as compassion for the poor, reform of structures, justice and community, is dissected and evaluated. While Nigel Biggar consistently finds conclusions in the report to be applauded he is unreservedly critical of the method employed to reach these conclusions. Not only because he feels there is methodological weakness, but because method affects substantive context, and the absence of appropriate theology reveals a failure to understand the nature and life of the church. The danger of cutting things loose from their theological moorings is constantly alluded to.

Particularly incisive is the discussion of the report's attitude to justice and community. On the former, there is a useful reflection on the distinctively Christian component of justice, with a number of major ethicists referred to. On the latter, a distortion of the Pauline concept of community is suggested, and the dangerous vacuum left in the report's general affirmation of personal and community growth is pointed out.

Although the study is by no means reticent to appreciate lessons to be gleaned from the methods of liberation theology, it is made clear that the paucity of theological reflection in *Faith in the City* is an inherent danger of any method which gives epistemological priority to the concrete situation over abstract reflection.

Two practical points. The print is small and intense and difficult to follow for lengthy periods of concentration. Secondly, helpful notes on the text are unhelpfully placed between the main body of the study and the appendices.

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These minor criticisms apart, this is an excellent study, not only in providing some meat which was lacking in *Faith in the City*, but in setting down a sustained argument for theological thinking on political issues.

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Christologie

Henri Blocher

Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique, 85 avenue de Cherbourg,
78740 Vaux-sur-Seine, France, 1986; 2 vols., 374pp.

These volumes have been published internally by the Evangelical theological faculty near Paris where the author is Dean. They meet a real need for a student guide to the subject of Christology which is both thorough and easily assimilable. The material is divided into numerous sections and subsections, each of which is clearly labelled. The overall design of the work reflects the clarity of thought which we have come to expect from French scholars, and which makes the books that much easier to use.

There are four main chapters spread over the two volumes. The first chapter deals with the biblical evidence, beginning with the Messianic hope of Israel and giving a very full treatment of the New Testament evidence for the divinity of Christ. The second chapter covers the theological developments of church history. There is a very clear presentation of the patristic controversies, to which is added a study of Reformation teaching and a short section on modern controversies. Some readers are likely to feel that this section could have been greatly expanded, but the author does the church a service in pointing out how modern discussions relate to those of the longer Christian tradition and in giving his readers a sense of the relative insignificance of a good deal of the most recent thinking.

The third chapter begins the more purely dogmatic section of the book. Its subject is the person and natures of Christ, which is treated in strict logical order. First the author discusses Christ's divinity, then his humanity, and then the natures are united. Each section contains two subsections, the first of which examines the biblical evidence and the second questions of systematic theology. The fourth section takes us from the person to the work of Christ, and is subdivided into the two states of the Mediator, that of humiliation and that of exaltation, and the three offices of Christ, prophet, priest and king. Once again, both the biblical evidence and the theological development are set out with great precision and there is an especially helpful conclusion in which the excesses of various theological trends are assessed.

As a primer in Christology it would be difficult to beat this book, and it is a great pity that it has not been translated into English. Perhaps this task could be undertaken by a commercial publishing house, so that the volumes might be made available to a wider public than currently has access to them.

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Jesus: The Unanswered Questions

John Bowden

SCM Press, London, 1988; 259pp., £9.50; ISBN 0 334 02099 9

The author, well known as a prolific translator of theological works, but also a theologian in his own right, gives us here his own contribution to the quest for Jesus. In a sense, however, it is not the historical Jesus that Bowden looks for in the book, but the Christ of the Christian church – Christ as he is understood in the variety of Christian traditions, a multi-faceted figure but yet the very heart of the Christian faith. Bowden quite rightly starts with the premise that if we are to understand anything of Christianity, then we must begin with Jesus.

Each chapter of the book deals with a different aspect of Jesus, historically and in today's world, such as the historical Jesus, the early church, Christian ethics, the question of the uniqueness of Christianity, and miracles.

The author represents the more radical tradition of scholarship, and approaches the issues with a critical, and at times we must say, a sceptical mind. Critical of unwarranted assumptions about what we can know of Jesus, or of the unity of the church, Bowden may himself be guilty of the converse: of approaching the subject matter with the attitude that the material is 'guilty' until proven 'innocent'.

Although wide-ranging in its scope, there is little which is new in the book. It adds little to the discussion as it may be found elsewhere, and the points made lean heavily on the opinions and findings of other scholars. It is thus not an original book, but its chief usefulness lies in the fact that it condenses a wealth of scholarly opinion into a manageable form. The footnotes are particularly useful in this regard, for anyone wanting to check on his sources, or follow them up in more detail for themselves. However, the more conservative writers are ignored for the sake of the book's radical thesis.

Readers will find much stimulation in this book, and in a day when the excessive scepticism of the shadow of Bultmann is waning in theology and New Testament study, it is a timely reminder to those of a more conservative disposition not to take too much for granted, nor to accept unwarranted, dogmatic assumptions about Jesus which cannot pass the test of rigorous scholarship.

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It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture (Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, S S F)

D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson (eds.)

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 381pp., £37.50;

ISBN 0 521 32347 9

This handsome volume was compiled by colleagues and former students of Professor Lindars for presentation to him on his 65th birthday. It focuses on a field of study to which he himself has made notable contributions, not only in his major work *New Testament Apologetic*, published in 1961, but in a host of journal articles, symposia and other works published since that date.

A useful introduction by Howard Marshall traces developments since C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (1952). The remainder of the book is divided into three sections. The first of these deals with the Old Testament in the Old Testament, with chapters on history, prophecy, psalms and wisdom. The next five chapters deal with the intertestamental period and the way, during that period, the Old Testament was translated, retold, commented on and cited, along with a special chapter on apocalyptic literature. The final section on the Old Testament in the New Testament is, as might be expected, the longest with nine chapters, covering the text forms of the Old Testament used in the New Testament and then the way each book of the New Testament handles the Old Testament. The editors claim that 'this book is not a disparate collection of essays but a tightly organised unity'. In terms of subject this is true but the standpoint of the authors is somewhat diverse. Some, like both editors, are conservative in outlook, while others have quite different presuppositions.

The general subject is of course immensely important for those who treat Scripture as fully normative for faith and conduct. It is also extremely wide-ranging. Inevitably this has meant that the selection of areas for study made by the editors and of matter within them made by the various contributors has had to be somewhat limited. Nevertheless it is regrettable that some very important areas, such as the Psalms and 1 Peter, have had quite inadequate space allotments.

Clearly the volume was written by scholars for scholars, and this is particularly obvious in the central section, 'Between the Testaments'. There is however much that would be of use to all theologically literate readers who can read the biblical languages. A diligent study of the book would provide a thorough introduction to the Bible's internal hermeneutics. The indexing is excellent and good bibliographies at the close of each chapter provide incentives to further detailed study.

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C.S. Lewis on Scripture

Michael Christensen

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1989; 126pp., £3.95;

ISBN 0340 50271 1

Lewis never worked out a systematic view of Scripture. This book is an attempt to establish his position regarding the Bible, revelation and inerrancy. Christensen has to depend on the 'tentative thoughts' in the letters and writings of Lewis on the subject. However the book is not confined to a discussion of these. Within a short space it is a wide-ranging book. In the first chapter, 'In What Way is the Bible Inspired?', it recognises the difficulties in both liberal and conservative positions. There is then a discussion on 'Lewis: Liberal or Conservative?' followed by 'Literary Criticism of the Bible', 'Myth, Revelation and Scripture', and 'The Question of Inerrancy' which is considered from a historical viewpoint. The book ends with a chapter suggesting the Bible is 'A Treasure in Earthen Vessels'. All this certainly illuminates Lewis's thought. Christensen concludes that Lewis helps us to see 'the Bible as human literature carrying a divine message'.

I found this an intriguing book which left me curiously dissatisfied. If, as Lewis seems to suggest, the myth is more important than the words, does not that make the truth subjective? Then, while Lewis was aware of the problems in the conservative position, nowhere does he give any critique of answers that have been proposed. However I found it a stimulating book, even where doubts arose in my mind about the validity of some of the arguments.

The Welsh Revival: Its Origin and Development

Thomas Phillips

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1989; 147 + xvi pp. £4.95;

ISBN 085151 542 8

Thomas Phillips was a contemporary of the 1859 revival and compiled this book from his own experience and eye-witness accounts. The immediacy of the reports gives a sense of the excitement at what God was doing. Throughout Wales thousands were being swept into the kingdom. Prayer meetings were commonplace, not only in churches but in work-places and the hills. Women, and even children between the ages of ten and fourteen, were organising prayer meetings for themselves. It is a thrilling story affecting many communities. In Aberystwyth eight publicans took down their signs and became teetotallers. Some villages no longer needed policemen. As one woman said, 'Every day is a Sunday now'. In his summing up Phillips suggested that the features of the revival included the absence of great names, its universality, the exercise of prayer, the simplicity of the ministry and lay involvement. Perhaps we are needing to learn from these for today. This is a book to warm our heart and drive us to prayer.

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John Bunyan

Frank Mott Harrison

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1989; 213pp., £2.95; ISBN 085151 105 8

John Wesley

John Pollock

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1989; 256pp., n.p.; ISBN 0340 50272

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John Bunyan is an imaginative biography where dialogue is used and the thoughts of the characters are revealed. But, as an authority on Bunyan, Frank Harrison writes as it must have been. This approach makes a fascinating life of Bunyan. We learn of his youth and the influence of his first wife, Mary, 'whose father was counted godly'. Then there was his struggle with 'a great desire to take my full of sin' and coming through to saving faith. From that day it is the totally committed Bunyan who preaches, suffers and writes until on his deathbed he can cry, 'Take me, for I come to Thee'.

It is an illuminating book which at times is quite moving. His love for his blind daughter, his simple home life and his joy in reading God's Word are well portrayed. I found the account of Elizabeth, his second wife, pleading before the judges for her imprisoned husband, quite touching. I recommend this book. It shows that John Bunyan was more than the author of one literary and religious classic.

If there are few books about Bunyan the same cannot be said of John Wesley. John Pollock recognises this but 'realised that there was a need for a straightforward book' which would not 'drown the reader by attempting to describe and discuss every action and activity'. He has succeeded in his aim by giving us a book which reads as a story. Certainly the life of Wesley is anything but boring; it was full of incident. He took 'the world as my parish' not as a theory but a personal challenge.

This is not a rehash of the many biographies already published. Pollock has taken advantage of recent research such as Wesley's code which was not deciphered until 1972. The humanity of Wesley comes through. He was not only a great preacher and organiser but a very human being. So we have sympathetic accounts of his unfortunate romances and unhappy marriage. Both these books show what God can do through individuals – whether they be tinkers from Bedford or Oxford dons.

*John Wilson
Motherwell.*

Lovers of Discord: Twentieth Century Theological Controversies In England

Keith W. Clements

SPCK, London, 1988; 261pp., £8.95; ISBN 0 181 04329 9

This is a timely account of its subject. Public theological controversy needs to be placed in two contexts. One is the backdrop of academic theology, where debates have often gone on for cloistered decades before they go public. The other is the history of open controversy which, like all history, teaches us through our mistakes how to make new ones. The latter is Dr Clements' concern, though he does not indulge in cynicism about historical lessons. His book is clearly and well written, interesting and informative. It may be commended to anyone with a serious interest in theology.

The survey is chronological and properly begins with R.J. Campbell and the 'New Theology'. By isolating the fundamental issue as Campbell saw it, Clements successfully narrows the distance from the superficially different concerns of a modern controversialist like Don Cupitt. That issue is what sometimes goes under the broad title of 'cognitive dissonance', though Clements spares us that phrase. Here it refers to the cleavage between traditional religion and the realities of everyday life, which threatens the very integrity of our consciousness if we try to hold them together. Again, the author is quite successful in establishing the continuity between this concern and that which surfaced in the *Foundations* debates which started just before the First World War. Perhaps it was Bonhoeffer who tipped Clements off to aspects of this problem (though in the terms stated it is certainly more reminiscent of Bultmann than of Bonhoeffer's angle). But Clements shows how it all surfaced in England.

On the face of it, the two succeeding chapters after *Foundations* take a different tack. These deal with Hensley Henson and then 'two individualists', T.R. Glover and E.W. Barnes. Here the material is not analyzed in the terms of the previous two chapters and interest in Glover as a person is marked. But this is not a criticism. Clements is not out to demonstrate a substantial homogeneity in the controversies of our century more than to describe them on their own terms. In relation to Henson, he shows how the debate was shifting from miracle to Christology and how important that was. As far as Glover is concerned, he quite deliberately permits himself interest in the controversialists themselves.

If a faint outline of the author's heart has by now appeared on his sleeve, it becomes bolder in the last three chapters. He is partial to Alec Vidler of *Soundings* (1962) and, indeed, dedicates the book to him. The *Honest to God* debate (1963) then gets the longest chapter in the book, but *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Cupitt and David Jenkins get fairly brisk treatment because of their contemporaneity. The author's conclusion is that the tension within theological understanding generating controversy in the church must be endured.

Four particular points: (1) We are not told quite why the First War made such an impact on theological controversy. (2) We are not told quite how liberalism and modernism changed from being alternatives to being virtually identified (e.g. J.S. Bezzant, p. 169). (3) There is a misleading reference to

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C.S. Lewis' 'donnish jottings' on John Robinson's work: Lewis was *not* responding to *Honest to God* but to Robinson's article of 17 March 1963 in *The Observer*, where Bonhoeffer is prominent but Bultmann absent. It is worth noting, incidentally, that in the issue where Lewis made his comments (*The Observer*, 24 March) the Archbishop of Wales likened Robinson's earlier contribution to seventeenth/eighteenth-century deism. Whether or not that was justified, the comparison between twentieth-century and deist controversies is well worth pursuing. (4) The comments on F.H. Chase (p. 92f) show the need to sort out different claims about *necessity* that come up in connection with the relation of 'incarnation' to 'virgin birth'. *E.g.* (i) it may be argued that the Christian concept of incarnation logically entails the concept of virgin birth; (ii) it may be argued that the virgin birth *may* be necessary to incarnation *in se* but not *quoad nos*; (iii) it may be argued that the virgin birth is necessary to Christian belief whatever its *logical* connection with 'incarnation'. This is certainly an important area in which we should strive for clarity at present.

Finally, must 'the tension be endured'? The answer ultimately depends on one's material theological convictions which govern one's view of the significance of theological controversy. There is 'tension' in Clements' own view here, I think, for he seems *both* to charge us to learn when to be silent (Bonhoeffer) *and* to accept that verbal controversy is inevitable and may be for the good of all. Whatever doubts one has on these scores, the author is to be congratulated on the way he enables us to come to terms with ecclesiastical realities.

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A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation

R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.)

SCM Press, London, and Trinity Press International, Philadelphia,
1990; 751pp., £35; ISBN 0 334 00294 X

At a time when many Bible encyclopaedias and dictionaries are being produced this volume is something of a new venture in that it focusses on biblical interpretation and is thus able to provide a fuller picture of it than one would get in the conventional type of reference work. About 150 scholars, the vast majority British, have combined to write some 330 articles of varying length (up to 8.5pp. on 'Jewish Exegesis') on every aspect of the subject. Brief bibliographies are appended, and full cross-referencing is supplemented by selective indexes.

The range of the volume may be seen by listing some of the areas covered: there are articles on each book of the Bible, on the various types of criticism and study, including the most recent types of approach (Holistic interpretation, Narrative criticism, Synchronic exegesis), on various background areas (Judaism in all its aspects ancient and modern; Syriac

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tradition; Hellenism); on the history of scholarship in different periods and in different countries (*e.g.* Scandinavia; Germany; UK; America; Black Christian Interpretation; Liberation Theology); on particular scholars (*e.g.* K. Barth; B. Duhm; A. Schweitzer; W.R. Smith); on specific historical and critical problems (*e.g.* aretology; pseudonymity; infancy narratives; Sermon on the Mount, and other aspects of the life and teaching of Jesus); on theological themes (Word of God; authority of Scripture; canon; verbal inspiration; inspiration; fundamentalism; covenant); and on the use of the Bible in different ways (icons; hymnody). There are topics that one misses (*e.g.* 'Q').

The theological and critical standpoint of the contributors is very diverse with scholars from very opposite ends of the spectrum taking part (I counted about 15 or so who could be tagged as 'evangelical' and noted a number of Jews), but the general standpoint is naturally very much a middle-of-the-road critical approach. An evangelical wrote on 'Inspiration', but 'Fundamentalism' and 'Verbal Inspiration' were entrusted to other hands.

The value of a work of this kind is that it provides thumbnail sketches of significant topics, opening them up to further study, and that it gives us the assessments of controversial matters by eminent scholars. A special characteristic of this volume is a certain concentration on the history of interpretation. This means that in some cases an article will summarise the history of interpretation of a particular book of the Bible, whereas other contributions may be more concerned to set out the problems of interpretation as they are seen today or to give a personal interpretation of the book. This leads to some unevenness in the treatment of different topics, and inevitably readers will not always find the answers to the questions in their minds.

Some articles are frankly disappointing. For example, 'Eschatology' is distinctly weak on the NT side; 'Eye witness' is disappointing in its endeavour to disparage the historical value of such testimony. A number of articles reflect a rather sceptical approach to the OT, as regards its historical value or its contemporary relevance. But it seems on the whole that failure to find a word from God for today in the OT is due more to the interpreter's approach than to the character of the OT itself, and therefore one should not take some expressions of pessimism too seriously.

A fundamental weakness in the volume is the lack of material on exposition and interpretation for today. How do we appropriate and use the message of the Bible? The article on 'Homily' (*sc.* 'preaching') hardly makes up for this lack. Even the article on exegesis does little more than quote at length two passages from commentaries. The result is that this volume will be more useful for the student interested in biblical interpretation as a historical and literary study than for the preacher or expositor who wants to know how to interpret the message for today.

For people in the former category, however, this is a most useful volume containing a vast amount of useful information and much stimulus. Examples of articles which I found to be of particular value or interest are: 'Archaeology (New Testament)', 'Community', 'Exodus', 'Form Criticism', 'Holistic Interpretation', 'Hymnody', 'Jewish Exegesis', 'Matthew', 'Meaning', 'Midrash', 'Proverbs', 'Translation, Problems of' – but these are just a few examples from a rich store.

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I found this book interesting and readable despite its inevitable terseness, and I am learning much from it. It provides a biblical education in miniature, and there is nothing else known to me which is so up-to-date or so full on this particular area.

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Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation

Peter Cotterell and Max Turner

SPCK, London, 1989; 348pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 281 04358 2

In recent years a number of scholars have sought to apply the insights of modern linguistics to biblical studies. Despite this, it is largely true that 'the disciplines of biblical studies and linguistics [are] isolated from one another', and potential benefit in biblical interpretation is lost. This book, addressed to students and biblical scholars, aims to provide guidance on possible uses of linguistics in the search for 'more nuanced approaches to exegesis'.

The book focusses on what the authors regard as the most relevant areas: the concept of meaning; the significance to be assigned to author, text and reader in the search for meaning; and the role of discourse as a whole in establishing meaning. In exploring the dimensions of meaning and relating it to the human communication process, they argue for a qualified version of E.D. Hirsch's view that meaning is 'what the author meant', over against the view of the 'Reader-Response' school that the meaning of a text is only 'what it means to its readers'. The text under consideration does not stand in an autonomous relation to the author's intention, a conclusion of some importance for the consideration of the text as inspired Scripture.

In the chapters which follow an excellent summary is given of the Kittel-Barr controversy on the place of word studies in theology, and the ongoing significance of that debate. Ways of defining the meaning of a word (lexical semantics) are then considered, and a distinction is drawn between those aspects of meaning which are essential to the sense of a word and those which arise from its wider context in a discourse. Attention is drawn to the recently published *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* of J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, and to the technique of 'componential analysis' of words as useful linguistic approaches.

The analysis of texts and larger discourses is the main concern of the second half of the book. The approaches dealt with are: the 'kernel analysis' of E.A. Nida, the diagramming methods of W. Kaiser and G.D. Fee, and the 'semantic structure analysis' developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators. Examples of these as applied to biblical passages provide the reader with a clear understanding of these ideas. The consideration of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 will be of interest to those who have followed recent debate on this passage. Though even with the use of such linguistic tools, the authors point out that 'we are still left with uncertainty as to the meaning of what Paul wrote'.

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Some readers will find the ready dismissal of the ideas of Claude-Levi Strauss and certain theories of structuralism, plus the failure to deal with semiotics, surprising. Both these schools of thought are of considerable importance for biblical interpretation in Francophone and Latin American countries.

The book is well-documented, though given the importance of approaches to text analysis developed in the field of Bible translation, one might have expected *Meaning-based Translation* by M.L. Larson and *From One Language to Another* by J. de Waard and E.A. Nida to be mentioned. A glossary of linguistic terms might also be useful to the reader.

These, however, are minor matters. The book provides an excellent introduction to the subject, and should be required reading for all involved in biblical interpretation and exegesis.

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Open Baptism

Mark Dalby

SPCK, London, 1989; 105pp., £4.95; ISBN 0 281 04421 X.

This tract for the time is a plea for the practice of infant baptism in the Church of England to be 'as open as in the past' – not strictly general or wholly indiscriminate, but not restricted to the children of baptized parents, let alone of parents who are 'believers' or practising, worshipping Christians. One of its author's main targets is the Grove theology of Colin Buchanan. While some of the warnings against an overstrict policy are salutary, the argument is itself too insecure at essential points to carry much conviction. Rejecting the notion that believers' baptism is the norm, it fails even to attempt to identify the norm of baptism in biblical and theological terms, and flirts dangerously with F.D. Maurice's hazardous account of the necessity of baptism – which must lead to the baptizing of all within reach and without discrimination. It is hence not surprising that Dalby insists that 'infant baptism is administered in the faith of the Church' – which is obviously true but insufficient and imprecise.

Baptismal discipline is a pressing pastoral concern, especially in a 'Christian society' on the decline like modern Britain (and not only for baby-baptizers). The decline in the traditional family will make it more so. But Dalby scarcely touches on these dimensions of the situation, nor is he apparently motivated chiefly by evangelistic concern. He cites with approval the confession, 'I practice indiscriminate baptism because I believe in the Holy Spirit', as well as W.D. Horton: 'To make *anything* the *sine qua non* of baptism is to set a human price-tag on what God offers "gratis".' The subject deserves an approach that keeps closer to the New Testament than these notions.

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God, Sex and Love: An Exercise in Ecumenical Ethics

Jack Dominian and Hugh Montefiore

SCM Press, London, 1989; 92pp., £4.50; ISBN 0 334 00533 7

This book records the 1988 Margaret Harris lectures delivered at Dundee University on the subject of sexual ethics. There are two lecturers who come from different Christian traditions. Hugh Montefiore is the former Anglican bishop of Birmingham and Jack Dominian is a consultant psychiatrist in London who is a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

The first lecture is by Bishop Montefiore and provides an introduction to the subject. His standpoint may be illustrated by the following quotations:

'To understand human nature, we have to see it in the context of the animal life from which it has evolved' (p. 2).

'The primitive sexual bonding of animals is the only base on which human love is built' (p. 3).

'Conscience is best thought of as a person's deepest moral reflections on actual situations' (p. 15).

The second and third lectures are given by Dr Dominian. He first deals with masturbation and premarital sexual intercourse and in regard to premarital intercourse by engaged couples he concludes that 'it is very difficult to find moral grounds for condemning this behaviour'. He then discusses marriage and marital breakdown. He suggests that 'the Judaeo-Christian tradition has regarded marriage basically as a secular reality taken up in the divine order'.

The fourth and fifth lectures are by Bishop Montefiore on the subjects of homosexuality and then abortion and in vitro fertilisation. Most of the few scriptural quotations which occur in the book are in the chapter on homosexuality, where the prohibition of homosexuality in Leviticus 20:13 is explained as 'a prohibition of cultic prostitution along with other Canaanite cultic practices'. The bishop suggests that 'it clearly did not enter Paul's head that there could be such a thing as genuine homosexual love between two adults'.

In a short review it is not possible to detail the arguments used in defence of the various positions maintained, but it will be obvious from the quotations given above that the book is not a statement of the traditional ethical teaching of either of the two Christian traditions represented by the authors. This is made explicit in Bishop Montefiore's suggestion that it may be necessary in certain situations to amend the ethical teaching of the New Testament, although we need to have strong reasons for doing so. These strong reasons may arise when 'a sexual issue has been radically affected by new circumstances or by new knowledge'.

These lectures are an attempt to adapt Christian sexual ethics to the problems of a secular society, and in so far as this attempt succeeds, it appears to be mainly at the expense of the Christian element in those ethics.

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Scripture, Tradition and Reason: a Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine

Benjamin Drewery and Richard J. Bauckham (eds.)

T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988; 297 + viii pp., £14.95;

ISBN 0 567 09482 0

This fascinating volume is a *Festschrift* for R.P.C. Hanson, who died shortly after it was published. After an introductory section covering Hanson's work and life, the main part of the book divides into three, focussing on Scripture, Tradition and Reason in turn – each in relation to the other two. This is therefore an unusually unitary *Festschrift*, and while some of its essays relate only tangentially to its structure ('Origin on Free-Will' in part three, for example), each section begins with a discussion of its theme.

F. F. Bruce accordingly tackles 'Scripture in relation to Tradition and Reason', taking Hooker as his point of departure and ranging with characteristic erudition over Jewish and Christian perceptions – managing even to include A. E. Housman and G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown in the argument. If Hooker opens the argument, it is Nehemiah who closes it (8:8): 'Here we can recognize the threefold cord: Scripture; interpretative tradition (incipient, but already necessary); reason (apart from which neither text nor interpretation could have been understood). The pattern then established retains its validity today'.

Perhaps the most interesting essay is Richard Bauckham's on 'Tradition in relation to Scripture and Reason', in which a taxonomy of understandings of the relation of Scripture and tradition becomes the vehicle for a fresh model of these relationships. So he writes: 'The "authority" of tradition is not merely juridical, but belongs, for example, to the testimony of the martyrs, the life of Francis of Assisi or the spirituals of American black slaves – in all of which the Gospel is remarkably actualized – at least as much as to any council of bishops'. That is, the underlying question is that of the 'contextualization' of the gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: 'Contextualization is not an exact science, but the difficult art – in which theology may participate – of the church's whole life of faithfulness to the Gospel in authentic response to the challenges of a particular situation'.

In his short Epilogue, Henry Chadwick reminds us that it was Augustine who remarked that the memory is the stomach of the mind: 'tradition is the church's memory', he adds, and it is something of which evangelicals – who are so often most mistrustful of anything going by the name 'tradition' and at the same time most beholden to their own – need constantly to be reminded. The range of topics covered by other essays in this volume shows how deeply the question of tradition is woven into the warp and woof of our theological discourse: the Virgin Birth, priesthood, mysticism, and a series of historical studies. *Scripture, Tradition and Reason* is a worthy tribute to the memory of a fine scholar, but more besides.

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The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes

William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, and I.V.P., Leicester, 1989;
430pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 8028 03148

To read through this book is to become engaged with many strands of Christian tradition and to be driven back to the biblical roots of Christology and Anthropology, with the concept of the image of God serving as the unifying principle of the book. Thus, the nature of man as created in that image becomes the theme of the first part of the book, focusing on God's intention that we are to be integrated into a life-sustaining personal relationship with the personal Creator. The concluding chapter of this part is a helpful reworking of the perennial question of the manner and extent to which the image is retained in fallen man. The whole discussion is rooted in Old and New Testament thinking, and a feature of the book is that there is woven throughout a rich tapestry of insights from a very full range of Christian thinkers from every era.

Indeed, a perusal of the index causes one to pause and to acknowledge that we have here a mature theology drawing deeply from patristic wells, both Greek and Latin, and Reformation sources. Hughes does not succumb to the evangelical tendency to draw only on certain periods of history for support, rather he converses with Anselm, Abelard and Aquinas, with the 'Enlightened' Schleiermacher, and with Barth and Pannenberg in the modern age. Here is evangelical theology unafraid to enter the lists, and as such, it seems to me, it serves as a benchmark for the standards of evangelical thinking.

The second part of the book looks at the disintegration of the image, with a full discussion of the origin of evil, and likewise of divine and human freedom. The Adam-Christ relation in Romans 5:12-21 serves as a paradigm for expressing the human condition, and this part ends with a renunciation of the ever-present tendency to synergism in religion.

The image restored becomes the theme of the final part, which is in effect a fulsome Christological survey, with Christ the exemplar of what the image of God is. Once again we begin with Scripture foundations and advance along paths strewn with patristic references. A particularly interesting chapter is devoted to the concept of man's deification in Christ, a thought prevalent in Orthodox theology. While I agree with his interpretation I am not sure every Orthodox thinker would, and I suspect they would accuse him of 'westernising' Athanasius in emphasizing the cross as logically prior to deification (2 Pet. 1:4).

In conclusion I would say that this book deserves a place on the desk of any serious student of theology, but it has about it a deeply spiritual quality which marks it out for continued reflection.

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The Moody Handbook of Theology

Paul Enns

Moody Press, Chicago, 1989; 688pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 8024 3428 2

If you think that a good theologian is one who is expert at categorising and analysing doctrines then this could be the book for you. It is full of definitions, technical language and charts to illustrate differences between this and that aspect of theology.

Its five main parts cover what the author believes are the five main ways of doing theology. So we have Biblical, Systematic, Historical, Dogmatic and Contemporary Theology. The section on Biblical Theology is really a history of the development of doctrine in the Bible. So its sections deal with such subjects as the theology of the 'Edenic Era', ... 'Mosaic Era', ... 'Prophetic Era', ... 'Synoptics', ... 'James', ... 'Paul', ... 'John', Each of these subsections contains brief but useful discussion of subjects that one would find in books on O.T. and N.T. Introduction, and also the main theological emphases to be found in these various sections of the Bible. If, unlike me, you think that this is what the Bible is about then you might find this part of the book helpful.

The next part is 'Systematic Theology', by which the author means analysing doctrines from the perspective of the whole Bible. The section on 'The Doctrine of God' deals with such subjects as 'proofs of existence of God' and attributes of God with Scripture proofs. There is no emphasis on Jesus being the revelation of the being of God to humanity and yet this surely is the foundation of our understanding God. The section on the doctrine of Christ deals with such subjects as O.T. prophecy and incarnation. Less than one page is given to the latter. Its emphasis is on Scripture proofs for the incarnation rather than the incarnation's significance for knowledge of God and salvation.

Part three of the book is 'Historical Theology', by which the author means the history of doctrine from the early fathers to the present day. This section gives a concise and helpful overview. Part four is 'Dogmatic Theology', in which the author gives a fairly useful analysis of various theological systems such as Calvinism, Dispensationalism, etc. Part five is 'Contemporary Theology', in which we meet Harnack, Barth, Bultmann, Pannenberg and many others. The necessarily concise discussions of these theologies are nevertheless accurate.

The book has a very useful glossary and a good index. The author's theology is moderate dispensationalist and his ecclesiology is congregational. This is not the main reason I could not warmly recommend this book. I just do not think that the author has grasped how the incarnation and the atonement are the interpreting principles for the whole Bible in which we come face to face with God's purpose in history to draw near to human beings and redeem them from sin and evil.

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Baptism with the Spirit: The Teaching of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Michael A. Eaton

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1989; 253pp., £6.95;

ISBN 0 85110 663 3

Michael Eaton, a Baptist minister based in Nairobi, exercises a wide teaching ministry in Central and Southern Africa. In this, his second book for IVP (the first being his commentary on Ecclesiastes in the Tyndale series), he does successfully what many authors have failed to achieve, in rewriting his M.Th. thesis for a wider readership. Eaton openly and gratefully admits his debt to Dr Lloyd-Jones's teaching ministry, having attended Westminster Chapel in London during those years of the Doctor's heyday as preacher and pastor.

Eaton's work is based on research into the published sermons of Lloyd-Jones which were produced after his retirement in 1968, as well as upon study of unpublished material and tape recordings. In 1978, *God's Ultimate Purpose*, an exposition of Ephesians One, was published (Banner of Truth), in which Lloyd-Jones's teaching on the baptism with the Holy Spirit is expounded. That volume stirred up considerable debate among Evangelicals. I remember sharing my confused excitement (or was it excited confusion?) with a colleague at the time, who shrugged off the matter with the retort, 'But that's Pentecostalism'. In those days, conservative Evangelicals had no dealings with such! However, the present writer was stimulated into further research into Paul's theology of the Holy Spirit in Christian experience as a result of that encounter. There is no doubt that Lloyd-Jones, with his roots in the experience of the Welsh revival of 1904, has done much to challenge recent Reformed pneumatology, and to question whether the underlying biblical exegesis is at all adequate. Eaton demonstrates that his teaching on the work of the Spirit is not an offspring of Pentecostalism at all, but stems from the Puritan writings of seventeenth-century expositors such as Thomas Goodwin (1600-80), John Owen (1616-83), and Richard Sibbes (1577-1635).

In contrast to much conservative evangelical teaching on the baptism with the Holy Spirit, Lloyd-Jones distinguished between Spirit-baptism as referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and the phenomena described in Acts associated with being filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit. While the former concerns the redemptive-historical constitution of the church as the body of Christ, and is therefore not directly of an experiential nature, the latter clearly involves manifestations of the Spirit which enable believers to grow in assurance of their relationship with God. Lloyd-Jones denied that this 'seal of the Spirit' (Eph. 1:13) is necessarily accompanied by particular charismata such as tongues or prophecy, while also opposing the cessationist viewpoint. After conversion (sooner rather than later), the great need of the believer is, in Eaton's view, to be overwhelmed (gently or more intensely) by such an experience of God's love for him or her that witness and service would be empowered as never before. Eaton demonstrates the historical and theological pedigree of this teaching, and agrees with Lloyd-Jones's exposition apart from a few minor points. The tendency to play down the importance of experiencing the work of the Spirit in the Christian life has, for Eaton and Lloyd-Jones, resulted in a conservative orthodoxy which often lacks warmth of love to God and man and a suspicion of feelings in spiritual life. The

danger of over-emphasising subjective emotions is also reckoned with. Experience must be tested by Scripture, but the fire of the Spirit must not be extinguished. Only R.F. Lovelace in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (IVP, 1979) has attempted to provide an evangelical theology of renewal which is comparable to Eaton's thesis. For both authors, the biblical and historical evidences of revival are central to recovering a renewed pneumatology which could encourage believers to be open to full spiritual experience without conforming to any stereotype. Churches need revival to bring them back to their first love, they suggest. The overwhelming experience of God's love in revival times is reflected in a Toplady hymn: 'While I feel thy love to me, every object teems with joy. May I ever walk with thee, for 'tis bliss without alloy'. Eaton concludes, 'Such, I submit, is the baptism with the Spirit.' Eaton's book will challenge, inform and enrich the reader, whatever his or her present views may be. The scholar will find in the collected footnotes a goldmine for further research.

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BOOK NOTES

The Banner of Truth Trust has reissued in paperback Ian Murray's selection of Reformation and (mostly) Puritan documents on *The Reformation of the Church* (Edinburgh, 1987; 414pp., £5.50; ISBN 0 85151 118 X). Their authors shared a commitment to conforming everything to Scripture, although they were not led thereby to a common mind. *Let God be God* is the familiar title of a contribution by three Anglicans of different traditions – Bishop Graham Leonard of London, Iain MacKenzie and Peter Toon, the well-known evangelical writer – to deeper debates aroused by the challenge of the feminist movement (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1989; 85pp., £3.95; ISBN 0 232 51852 1). They insist that the data of revelation in Christ must control how we think and speak about God, which means that the 'Father-Son' language is not negotiable. This short book packs a forceful but sensitively aimed theological punch.

Among the Banner of Truth Trust's recent reprints is a paperback on *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh, 1987; 122pp., £1.50) by Thomas Watson, a seventeenth-century Anglican rector in the City of London. This is largely applied practical teaching in Puritan vein. Without extended discussion Watson believes that 'faith is seminally in the heart before repentance'. The publishers have added a few footnotes (not always correct) to explain some of Watson's more learned comments.

A more recent reprint from the same publisher is Ned B. Stonehouse's *J. Gresham Machen. A Biographic Memoir* (Edinburgh, 1987; 520pp., £5.95). Although described as the third edition, it is not clear that it differs from the corrected reprint (1955) of the first edition of 1954. Machen was the last first-rank exponent of Princeton theology. Stonehouse provides the basic course of his life and work. Several briefer evaluations in recent years (e.g., Stanford Reid's in D.F. Wells (ed.), *Reformed Theology in America*, 1985) could with

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profit have been listed in this re-issue, which is excellent value for money. Less well-known in Britain is the Presbyterian minister of New Orleans who is the subject of T.C. Johnson's *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1987; 688pp., £11.95), first published in 1906. Palmer was a major figure in the Southern Presbyterian Church – outstanding preacher, assiduous visitor, reluctant professor of church history for a short period. This *Life* is no detached critical study, but a tribute to a revered churchman, who knew much personal sorrow and lived through the national trauma of the Civil War.

The Christian Way of Life by F.X. Murphy (Michael Glazier, Wilmington, Delaware, 1986; 224pp., n.p.) belongs to an American Catholic series *Message of the Fathers of the Church*. It deals with the way the fathers taught the Christian ethic and is organized father-by-father rather than thematically. Generous quotations are interspersed with commentary and analysis in this introductory study by an experienced patristic scholar. Hans Küng's *Why I Am Still a Christian* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1987; 82pp., n.p.) is in part answering another question, 'Why I am still a Catholic'. Its brevity, honesty and simplicity commend it. It is much more concerned with Christ and the Spirit than with the church.

S.C.M. Press have brought out the first paperback version of Owen Chadwick's *The Victorian Church*, part 1: 1829–1859 (London, 1987; 606pp., £13.95), a reprint of the third edition of 1971. Its praises have been adequately sung by reviewers. Even our century of ever accelerating change is rooted in its past, to which this learned and elegant work is a rich initiation.

David Wenham of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, a noted evangelical NT scholar, has contributed *The Parables of Jesus: Pictures of Revolution* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1989; 256pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 340 48811 5) to 'The Jesus Library' edited by Michael Green. This is a semi-popular exposition, following through the theme of revolution, with useful brief appendices on the parables' authenticity, purpose and interpretation. Many a teacher and preacher will find it very helpful. Robert Martin's *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh; 1989, 89pp., £2.95; ISBN 0 05151 546 0) concludes that the NIV is 'not worthy of becoming the standard version of the English-speaking world' (as though it were likely to be!). The author's real target is the dynamic equivalence method of translation, but his belief that verbal inspiration requires that the primary unit of translation must be the word is logically flawed. The argument is courteous, but if the debate is to continue with profit, greater clarity is needed about what it means to translate – preferably conducted by practitioners!

Two brief discussions of the Lord's Supper argue conflicting positions. *Accept This Offering: The Eucharist as Sacrifice Today* (SPCK, London, 1989; 88pp., £3.95; ISBN 0 281 04405 8), by Kenneth Stevenson of the C. of E.'s Liturgical Commission, draws from all quarters, but scarcely at all from Scripture, in favour of an enlarged idea of sacrifice essential for healthy eucharistic understanding and practice. The danger is that if everything (e.g. intercession)

becomes sacrifice (even my writing this short notice!), distinctiveness in concept and language is at a discount, and clarity is not well served. More rigor is N.A.D. Scotland's *Eucharistic Consecration in the First Four Centuries and its Implications for Liturgical Reform* (Latimer House, Banbury Road, Oxford, 1989; 46pp., £1.75; ISBN 0 046307 30 X). It concludes that fourth-century concepts in both East (the invoking of the Spirit on the bread and wine) and West (consecration by the recitation of Christ's words of institution) are totally out of keeping with the NT. It promotes the view that consecration is effected by a prayer of thanksgiving which makes some reference to the intention of Jesus' words. This restatement of a cherished evangelical position makes no concessions to the stream of ecumenical confluence in which Stevenson swims. Following his revision of J. Stevenson's *A New Eusebius* comes W.C.H. Frend's new version of the same author's *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church AD 337-461* (SPCK, London, 1989; 410pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 281 04327 2) – twenty pages longer, almost thirty more documents, and all reorganised on more thematic lines. The expansion is chiefly in the last decades, on the fall of the Western Empire. In this revised form, Stevenson's collection remains the best means of access to the sources of a significant era of ecclesiastical – and theological – history.

The Christian School. An Introduction by Noel Weeks (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988; 204pp., £4.50; ISBN 0 85151 526 6) is based on an Australian school. About half discusses curriculum, preceded by general considerations. *SBET* readers will be particularly interested in the biblical and theological justification offered for separatism in education. While there is a restitutionist undercurrent running through the book ('We might wish for a return to a situation in which a small farming or cottage industry' enabled fathers (*sic*) to have time to train children), it recognises that Scripture says nothing about schools in the modern sense. In fact, since pagan schools existed in the NT world, the assumption that children should remain in local schools leans less on the NT's silence than the case offered here. For nowhere in the NT do parents have a responsibility to teach children computing or dressmaking. For one thing we may be glad; nowhere it is suggested that Christian parents fulfil their responsibility towards their bairns by sending them away to live at school.

G.R.Selby's *Jesus, Aramaic and Greek* (Brynmill Press, Doncaster, 1990; 120 pp., £12; ISBN 0 907839 40 1) argues that Jesus' teaching to the general public was given in Greek, not Aramaic, and that the Evangelists both faithfully recorded it and carefully translated what he said in Aramaic in more restricted circles.