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There is unity among Christians through the Word, the Light and the Message. Just as the sun unites all human kind physically, as all are dependent on it, so the Son unites all Christians spiritually. The light goes out from the empty tomb almost two thousand years ago and extends now around the world., The leadership for the extension of the gospel rests not with a few but with all of those who have placed their faith in him. All are dependent upon him, and through him a new community is created. No longer are there Americans or Filipinos, white or brown; now all are Christians first of all. The highest loyalty and allegiance goes to Christ and in him the boundaries of state or race are forgotten. Yet I need brown brothers and sisters so that I might be authentically Christian. I need their perspective on the form of Christianity which I take up so that I may be sure that it is pure and not simply some cultural aberration. And they need me too so that they may avoid the same. Christian theology so built will be purer at the core than any particular cultural expression of it because it will be done through many eyes and hearts.

The community of the Word, of the Light and of the Message is the community of love, a love which shows respect for the dignity and integrity of others. There is no room for a dominating and superior spirit. Christians must relate with one another as brothers and sisters walking beside each other on the way the Word has revealed, the Light has shown and the Message has demonstrated, the way of Christ.

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Dialogue with Non-Christians in the New Testament

I. Howard Marshall

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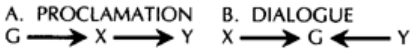
In this article Professor Marshall argues that dialogue as understood today is not found in the New Testament. He examines the use of the word in the Acts and concludes that the goal is to correct misunderstandings of the gospel and not to reformulate it. He looks at dialogue in the synoptics, in Paul's letters and in the Gospel of John in relation to the presentation of the gospel. He questions whether the church and the world ever conversed as equal partners in search of truth. On the other hand, the author discusses the role of dialogue in understanding and communicating the gospel in response to people's felt needs. Not all will agree with the author's definition of contemporary dialogue and may wish to ask how far cultural factors of religion, economics and politics have influenced our understanding of the gospel and whether or not dialogue between Christian scholars and with people of other faiths enables us to see more clearly the biblical message. The issue is more than one of communication, it goes to the heart of our hermeneutical methodology.
Editor

The place of dialogue with non-Christians in relation to the evangelistic task of the church has received renewed attention recently in the pages of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.[1] It is clear that some Christians regard dialogue as an important form of witness, and think that the church's evangelistic task should be carried on by means of dialogue as well as by proclamation.[2]

We may roughly contrast the two possible approaches as follows. In proclamation the evangelist (X) has a message (G—the gospel) which he communicates to his hearer (Y) as something which is to be accepted or rejected; the evangelist himself has received this unchanging message, and he communicates it virtually without p. 29 change. In dialogue, however, the message is not something which the evangelist already possesses in normative form. Rather he must enter into discussion with his hearer, both participants contributing to the dialogue and thus together reaching an understanding of the gospel. The question which is posed by juxtaposing these two types of approach is whether the Christian message is something 'given' to the evangelist which is passed on unchanged to the potential convert, or whether the truth of the gospel is something that emerges in the course of dialogue. Obviously the issues are not as sharp as this in practice. Any evangelist must shape his proclamation to the situation and character of the hearer; it is no use speaking in German to somebody who only understands Tamil, and illustrations and concepts must be chosen which will be intelligible to the hearer. Similarly, even in a situation of dialogue the evangelist will have some understanding of the gospel, even if his understanding of it may undergo radical alteration in the course of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask whether the *essential* content of the gospel is something 'given' to the evangelist or can undergo radical alteration in a common search for truth along with a non-Christian.



It is surely essential that in discussing this matter we have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'dialogue' in the New Testament and determine whether it was practised as a means of evangelism. We shall look first at the meaning of the Greek verbs which suggest the idea of dialogue, and this will involve us in a study of the church's evangelism as portrayed in Acts. From there we shall turn back to the synoptic Gospels to see whether the dialogue form can be found there, and then we shall move forward to see whether Paul's letters reflect the use of dialogue, and finally we shall consider the Gospel of John as a source for dialogue. The essay will close with some brief conclusions.

1. THE WORD-USAGE IN ACTS

The Greek verb which is roughly equivalent to the English verb 'to discuss' is διαλεγομαι, which occurs 13 times in the NT.[3] It can be used of a debate in which two or more people argue with one another, P. 30 as in Mk. 9:34 where we read of an argument among the disciples of Jesus, and in Jude 9, where the archangel Michael and the devil dispute about the body of Moses. But the verb can also be used in contexts where the idea of mutual

[1] P. Schrotenboer, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue', ERT 12:3, July 1988, 208–225. Reprinted from *Reformed Church Synod Missions Bulletin*, March 1986.

[2] The problem was considered at the conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians in 1978, and the following paper is based upon a lecture given on that occasion.

[3] See G. Schrenk, TDNT II, 93–5.

discussion appears to be absent. Thus in Heb. 12:5 the writer asks the readers, 'Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?' and goes on to quote from Proverbs; the Revised Version translates the verb as 'to reason with'. Here there is no question of dialogue or discussion, and this corresponds with the usage of the word in Jewish Greek, where, according to G. Schrenk, it 'is used not merely for "conversation" or "negotiation" but quite frequently for "speech" in the sense of an "address"'.[4]

This range in meaning must be borne in mind when we come to the 10 occurrences of the word in Acts with reference to the missionary activity of Paul. It is used to describe his teaching in the synagogues (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8), in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) and in Christian assemblies (Acts 20:7, 9). It also describes his disputes in the temple (Acts 24:12) and his conversation with Felix about justice, self-control and judgment to come (Acts 24:25). Arndt and Gingrich suggest that in Acts 18:4 and other passages the word may simply mean to speak or preach,[5] and G. Schrenk makes the same point more forcibly: 'There is here no reference to "disputation" but to the "delivering of religious lectures or sermons" … What is at issue is the address which any qualified member of the synagogue might give.'[6] This interpretation is justified to the extent that there is certainly no mention of what Paul's hearers may have said to him; all the stress falls on Paul's activity as a speaker, and he discusses the gospel with them, rather than they with him. It would be helpful to know how far discussion and debate took place in the synagogues. So far as I can tell, the synagogue service included a sermon by any person present who was competent to deliver one, but there does not appear to have been religious discussion. Nevertheless, there are one or two places which indicate that the preaching of Paul led to vocal opposition during the actual synagogue service. This was the case in Acts 13:45 and also in Acts 18:6, and we might also cite the cases where Jesus' activity in the synagogue led to protests and arguments on the spot, and sometimes to expressions of wonder and approval (Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:22; 13:14; Jn. 6:41, 52). There could also be discussion outside the synagogue. The p. 31 picture which Luke gives of the Jews at Beroea who examined the Scriptures daily for themselves to see if what Paul said was correct (Acts 17:11) certainly suggests that discussion was taking place. Furthermore, the use of the verb δυζητηω to describe how the Jews disputed with Stephen (Acts 6:9) and how Paul argued with the Hellenists (Acts 9:29; cf. Acts 17:18) indicates that debate or dialogue certainly took place. Similarly, Apollos engaged in debate with the Jews and refuted them (Acts 18:28).[7]

There is, therefore, sufficient evidence to show that the preaching of the early Christians could lead to debate and discussion with the hearers. But it is clear that the emphasis falls upon the preaching of the gospel, a fact that would certainly be borne out by a detailed study of the vocabulary used to describe the evangelism of the early church. In short, the evidence of the vocabulary used in the NT to describe evangelistic activity can scarcely be said to give a large place to dialogue as a means of cemmunicating the gospel; dialogue or debate arises rather as a result of the initial proclamation. There is certainly no indication whatever in the material from Acts that the evangelist needed to enter into dialogue with his hearers in order that he himself might gain a fuller and better

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[4] *Ibid.*, 94.

[5] BAGD s.v.

[6] TDNT II, 94f.

[7] Empty disputes, however, are not recommended in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim., 1:4; 6:4f.; 2 Tim. 2:23; Tit. 3:9).

knowledge of the gospel. The objective is always to correct misunderstandings of the gospel, not to reformulate the gospel.

2. DIALOGUE AND PARABLES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

When we move back from the study of Acts, to which we were guided by our linguistic investigations, and turn to the synoptic Gospels for evidence of the activity of Jesus, we find that the category of dialogue is a common one. Two types of unit demand our attention.

A. The Apophthegrnata or Pronouncement stories

The first of these is the *Apophthegmata*, sometimes and more helpfully known in English as 'pronouncement stories'.[8] R. Bultmann has subdivided these into the two categories of 'controversial and academic discussions' and 'biographical apophthegmata'. It is the former of these groups which interests us, and I shall continue to follow Bultmann in his classification of the material in this category and his p. 32 further subdivision into four groups. He distinguishes: 1. Controversies occasioned by a healing performed by Jesus. 2. Controversies occasioned by a healing performed by Jesus or the disciples. 3. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by the disciples or other people with friendly intent. 4. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by his opponents.[9]

According to Bultmann all these stories originated in the early church. In every case, therefore, they must be regarded as 'ideal' scenes, in the sense that they are constructions which express an idea pictorially in a concrete setting. While they may depict the kind of happenings that may have taken place in the ministry of Jesus, none of them certainly represents an actual individual, historical episode. Nevertheless, the stories developed relatively early in the history of the tradition, since the closest parallels to the types of discussion described are to be found in Palestinian Judaism.

The stories, then, are to be regarded as frameworks created to incorporate sayings ascribed to Jesus. Often they are concerned with the behaviour of the disciples rather than of Jesus himself, and this indicates their community origin. The labelling of the opponents of Jesus as Pharisees and Sadducees is stereotyped, and this again betrays a lack of historicity.

Even the sayings of Jesus incorporated in them are not necessarily authentic in the eyes of Bultmann. They often contain the sort of counterquestions or appeals to Scripture which are found in Judaism, and in particular the use of Scripture is typical of the early church.[10]

The merits of this discussion are that Bultmann has drawn attention to the existence of a dialogue form in a couple of dozen synoptic narratives. This form suggests that the early church retained the memory that Jesus' ministry was often carried on by means of controversial discussions, but above all, for Bultmann, the form testifies to the church's own controversies with the Jews over its beliefs and activity.

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[8] V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, London, 1933, 30.

[9] The passages in question are: 1. Mk. 2:1–12; 3:1–16; 3:22–30 (also in Q); 2. Mk. 2:15–17, 18–22, 23–28; 7:1–23; 11:27–33; Lk. 7:36–50; 3. Mk. 9:38–40; 10:17–31, 35–45; 11:20–25; 12:28–34; 13:1–5; Mt. 11:2–19/Lk, 7:18–35; Lk. 9:51–56; 12:13f.; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 17:20f.; 4. Mk. 10:2–12; 12:13–17, 18–27.

[10] R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition*, Göttingen, 1958, 9–26, 39–56. See further M. Dibelius, *Die Forageschichte des Evangellures*, Tübingen, 1971[6], 34–66; M. Albertz, *Die Synoptischen Streitgespräche*, Berlin, 1921; A. J. Hultgren, *Jesus and his Adversaries*, Minneapolis, 1979.

Before we can build anything on this analysis, however, we need to p. 33 ask whether it is soundly based, and it is not difficult to show that in many respects it must be pronounced to be totally unconvincing.

1. While Bultmann argues that the *Sitz im leben* of many of the controversies is the church's attempt to justify its own practices over against Jewish criticisms, J. Roloff has demonstrated that the main thrust in many of the stories is more accurately designated as christological; the stories are designed primarily to show why it was that Jesus was ultimately crucified.[11] Although, therefore, the stories still have their *Sitz im Leben* in the early church, the basic reason for narrating them lay in their testimony to what Jesus said and did on his way to the cross; in other words, the church showed a historical interest in Jesus. If this is the case, then the argument that the church created these scenes as a reflection of its own controversies about its way of life falls to the ground, even though the stories may have had a secondary value in helping to justify the church's conduct.

2. Bultmann's particular criticisms of the content of the stories are not cogent. It is not at all clear why the type of use of Scripture found in these stories should be denied to him. On the contrary, R. T. France's examination of the use of Scripture in the sayings ascribed to Jesus does much to support the general authenticity of the material as a coherent product of a single mind.[12] Nor is it strange if the types of answer favoured by Jesus should resemble those found in rabbinic discussions, unless it be denied that Jesus in any way resembled a rabbinic teacher.

3. The argument that the questions about the disciples' conduct betray their origin in the early church has been effectually countered by D. Daube's demonstration that a master was held responsible for the actions of his pupils and that consequently the Gospels can be regarded as showing how Jesus is called to answer for the habits which he had taught his disciples.[13]

4. There is at least some doubt whether the radical attitude towards the Jewish scribal interpretation of the law which is found in the controversy stories was typical of the early church. The disputes involving Paul strongly suggest that the Palestinian church was somewhat less radical than Jesus in its attitude to the law. p. 34

5. Bultmann's claim that the controversy stories contain 'ideal' scenes appears, so far as I can see, to be pure assertion without any real evidence to back it up. The fact that the stories were 'created' in the early church does not mean that they must be devoid of historical basis. On the contrary, the assumption that the early church had some historical basis for its stories about Jesus is much more credible. We may not be able to prove that each individual instance is historical, but in each case we may reasonably suggest that stories should be regarded as having a historical kernel unless positive answers to the contrary are produced. Bultmann's assumption that stories produced in the early church do not have a historical basis is in no sense a compelling argument.

The result of this examination of Bultmann's analysis is to suggest in broad terms that the controversy stories should be seen primarily as testimonies to dialogue situations in the ministry of Jesus, and that these dialogues are genuine and not artificial creations.

The value of Bultmann's classification of the dialogues in terms of the kind of occasion that led up to Jesus' reply is not especially helpful for our present purpose. What does emerge from the analysis is that, so far as Mark is concerned, discussions arising out of a

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[11] J. Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus*, Göttingen, 1970. Roloff's investigation is concerned with the sabbath controversies, but its results can be extended more generally.

[12] R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, London, 1971 (reprinted, Grand Rapids, 1982).

[13] D. Daube, 'Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels', NTS 19, 1972–3, 1–15.

healing or other action performed by Jesus or his disciples occur predominantly in the first half of the Gospel, while discussions arising out of questions formulated by the disciples, interested enquirers or opponents of Jesus occur predominantly in the second half. This if historically plausible. In the early days it is more likely that the unusual actions of Jesus would lead to reaction in the form of enquiry about their significance. Only later do we find that questions are addressed to Jesus as an established teacher or with a view to acquiring evidence against him from his own mouth.

It is more useful to look at the kind of issues which arise in the dialogues. They can be roughly classified as: 1. Questions about Jesus' attitude to the law, especially the sabbath law, clean and unclean foods, fasting and divorce; 2. questions about Jesus' attitude to sinners, which again raised the issue of his attitude to the law; 3. a question about the chief commandment; 4. the question about entry to the kingdom, which again relates to the law; 5. questions about Jesus' authority to teach, to exorcise and heal and to forgive. These questions nearly all have some reference to the law and might, therefore, be regarded as dealing merely with ethical issues. But the concern is not merely ethical. It is about the law as the way of life appointed by God and with the authority of Jesus to pronounce concerning God's will. In a Jewish environment, therefore, the p. 35 dialogue is very much concerned with the way of life associated with the gospel.

But this means that something precedes the dialogue. Its ultimate basis lies in the action and proclamation of Jesus which calls out for elucidation and finally for critical examination. The dialogues, therefore, are only to a limited extent concerned with the proclamation of the rule of God and the call to discipleship, although these figure prominently in at least two significant episodes. The basic question that keeps on recurring is: 'How do the teaching and activity of Jesus square with the existing Jewish understanding of the will of God for people?' We may legitimately draw the conclusion that the dialogues do not constitute a primary form of *presenting* the gospel. They serve to elucidate aspects of a message that has already been proclaimed in word and deed.

We may ask next about the effect of the dialogues. Do they constitute a 'dialectical' means of progress in understanding, so that the participants on both sides come to a new awareness? Clearly the people who question Jesus receive answers to their questions in the form of instruction, correction and challenge. Having been drawn into the possibility of a new awareness by some action or teaching on the part of Jesus, they now respond by seeking a fuller explanation, and they receive it. Whether they respond positively or negatively is another matter. As for Jesus, there is no indication whatever that he appears as the enquirer or that his understanding is deepened by the encounters. The whole point of the pronouncement story is that its theme is the definitive and authoritative statement or pronouncement made by Jesus himself. He never appears as the questioner, anxious to find out things that he himself does not know. When he asks questions, these are intended to make his opponents think, or to stir up his disciples to a deeper awareness. Jesus appears as the teacher who knows the answers.[14] There is no indication that the dialogues bring together two people in a common search for truth.

This general conclusion is confirmed by the actual form of the dialogues. As we have them, they are generally very simple in character. Only in two or three cases does the actual conversation go beyond a simple question and answer form. The questioners do not take up what Jesus says, except when he specifically asks them a p. 36 question; at most there are expressions of approval or disapproval of what Jesus says.

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[14] This applies, of course, to the role of questions in the controversy stories. It is not denied that Jesus on occasion lacked information and asked for it, or that he grew in self-understanding. See J. R. Michaels, *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel*, Atlanta, 1981.

B. The parables

The second type of unit which may be relevant to our enquiry is the parables. J. Dupont has argued that the parables of Jesus are intended to be understood as instruments of dialogue.[15] Their purpose is to answer the questions posed by people who listened to Jesus, and to propound fresh questions in their minds with the object of persuading them to make their response to Jesus. Hence many of the parables begin in question-form with the aim of involving the hearers in the topic discussed. They are to be regarded as means of persuasion rather than as weapons for conflict. The paradigm example of this understanding of the parables is to be seen in Lk. 7:36–50 where the parables of the two debtors deals with a question in the mind of Simon the Pharisee and is meant to lead him to reflection and understanding about his own attitude to Jesus.

This is a helpful and useful approach to the parables, but again it must be stressed that there is no suggestion that the views of Jesus are to be changed in the course of the discussion. On the contrary, the aim is to convert the hearer. What is significant, however, is the use of a method which will lead the hearer to think in a new way and to be drawn into a discussion which can change his outlook. He is not so much confronted by an authoritative presentation of a set of facts or propositions which he must accept or reject; rather he is brought into a situation where he is led into seeing things from a new angle and is forced to ask his own questions and reformulate his own attitudes.

It might be argued that in neither of these cases, controversy stories and parables, is there 'dialogue' in the proper sense, in that there is no real interplay between the two sides, leading to deeper understanding on the part of both. But our concern is not with what 'dialogue' *ought* to be but with the actual phenomena in the Gospels, and it must be emphasised that the synoptic Gospels give us no basis for supposing that the task of evangelism consists in a dialogue in which Jesus and his partners embark on a common search for a truth which neither of them fully possesses. p. 37

3. PAUL AS AN EVANGELIST

From Jesus we turn to Paul. Here we at once come up against the difficulty created by the sources. Paul's letters are directed to Christian communities and are not evangelistic tracts. It is, therefore, a matter of some difficulty to reconstruct the probable contents of Paul's missionary message, and even more difficult to reconstruct the forms in which his message was presented. We can of course supplement the material in the letter with the evidence from Acts, but our earlier investigation of the vocabulary of dialogue showed that little concrete information was forthcoming from that area. So we are compelled to adopt a more indirect approach.

A. Diatribe style

Although the writings of Paul are letters, they were no doubt meant to be read aloud in church, and we may presume that to some extent at least they were formulated for this purpose. In one or two places Paul adopts the style of the 'Diatribe', a type of philosophical address which was well-known in the Hellenistic world.[16] The diatribe was characterized by its use of artificial dialogue in which the speaker himself expressed objections to his

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[15] J. Dupont, *Pourquoi des paraboles? La méthode parabolique de Jesus, Paris*, 1977.

[16] R. Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe*, Göttingen, 1910. There has been some discussion as to whether Paul's style is really that of the diatribe. See S. K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Chico, 1981, for a careful evaluation of the position.

argument and questions which might be posed by imaginary interlocutors and then proceeded to answer them. We have a good example of the style in James, especially in chs. 2 and 3 where we may note the posing of questions by an imaginary interlocutor in 2:14 and 18.[17] Paul uses the style in Romans, where the use of questions and objections put into the mouth of imaginary opponents serves to provide him with hooks on to which to hang his own replies and so to move his argument forward.[18] Sanday and Headlam comment: 'No doubt this is a way of presenting the dialectical process in his own mind. But at the same time it is a way which would seem to have been suggested by actual experience of controversy with Jews and the narrower Jewish Christians. We are told expressly that the charge of saying "Let us do evil that good may come" was brought as a matter of fact against the Apostle (vet. 8). And vi. 1, 15 restate this charge in Pauline language. The Apostle as it were takes p. 38 it up and gives it out again as if it came in the logic of his own thought.'[19] If this comment indicates that we cannot proceed directly from the artificial style of the diatribe to actual controversies in which Paul was engaged, at the very least we can say that use of this style probably indicates that he was conscious of real questions which arose in dialogue with other people, and that the actual questions which arose in such dialogue have contributed to the way in which he expounds his thought in his letters.

The use of imaginary questions by interlocutors is most prominent in Romans. It is not clear whether the limited use of questions in Galatians (3:19, 21) is anything more than a literary method for forwarding the argument. In both cases we have to do with objections to the Pauline gospel from the side of Jewish Christians or Jewish opponents of Paul. Certainly the questions could be regarded as points which caused Paul to deepen his understanding of the gospel. If Paul alleged that all could be saved through faith in Jesus Christ without observing the law of Moses, it was only natural to object: Why, then, did God give the law (Gal. 3:19)! Is the law contrary to the promises of God about salvation by faith (Gal. 3:21)? What is the point of being a Jew or submitting to circumcision if faith is all that matters (Rom. 3:1)? And so on. But these are such obvious questions that it would be difficult to state categorically whether they first arose in the mind of Paul or in the minds of his opponents. While, therefore, it is very probable that Paul is dealing with real questions raised by Jews and Jewish Christians, it is not at all clear whether these questions actually led to any development in his thinking. But we must return to this point later.

B. Questions from the churches

In 1 Corinthians 7:1 Paul begins the discussion of a fresh topic with the words: 'Now concerning the matters about which you wrote'. The same formula appears in an abbreviated form in the introductions to later topics in the letter (1 Cor. 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12), and it may also be present in 1 Thessalonians (5:1; cf. 4:9, 13). It appears that the structure of these letters is partly determined by a series of questions or topics which had been presented to Paul for his answers and opinions, so that here we have evidence of a genuine correspondence between Paul and the churches, with Paul replying to specific questions in the minds of his friends and conveyed to him either by letter (as in 1 Cor. p. 39 7:1) or by word of mouth. In both cases the questions are raised within the

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[17] M. Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, Göttingen, 1957[9], 36.

[18] See especially Rom. 3:1, 3, 5, 27, 29, 31; 4:1, 9; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 9:14, 19.

[19] W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh, 1902[5], 69f.

congregations, and therefore they afford no direct evidence for Paul's relations with non-Christians.

However, it is possible that indirectly some light may be shed on the way in which Paul's thinking could have developed in the context of dialogue. J. C. Hurd has drawn attention to the existence of an earlier letter of Paul to Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–11) and proceeded to reconstruct the stages of Paul's thinking on various problems dealt with in his correspondence. He traces Paul's opinions as expressed in his original preaching at Corinth, in his so-called 'previous' letter to the church, and in his canonical first letter to the church, and he attempts to show how Paul's thinking changed and developed between these three stages. On Hurd's view Paul's thinking was affected by the promulgation of the apostolic decree (Acts 15) and by the Corinthian letter sent in reply to his 'previous' letter.[20] If this hypothesis is sound, we would have some indication that Paul's views changed and developed in the context of controversy. However, Hurd's theory has failed to convince the most recent English-speaking commentators on 1 Corinthians; there is no clear evidence that Paul was affected by the apostolic decree, and the alleged changes of mind which he said to have undergone are improbable in the comparatively short period of time covered by the correspondence.[21]

In any case, the issues which Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians are concerned with matters of Christian belief and behaviour within the church. They cover such questions as sexual morality, attitudes to idolatrous feasts, the conduct of Christian meetings, the resurrection of the dead, and the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. There is little here that is directly associated with the proclamation of the gospel to non-Christians, except for the question of the resurrection of believers which Paul regarded as being a direct implication of the primitive affirmation of the kerygma about the resurrection of Jesus.

C. Responses to opponents

In a brief summary of Paul's theology I once wrote that 'Paul's basic theology rested firmly on that of the primitive church; he frequently is indebted to it for theological and ethical material. Throughout his p. 40 career he was beset by opponents who were envious of his success or anxious to upset his work. His theology is thus very much shaped by polemics, and it owed its individual development to the exigences of debate.'[22] When writing this statement I had very much in mind the way in which Paul's theology was hammered out in controversial writings dealing with the perversions of the primitive faith by Judaisers and by gnosticising Christians. This suggestion leads us to consider at a slightly deeper level whether we can see in Paul's theology the effects of controversy. Such effects might be of two kinds.

First, there is the suggestion, already hinted at, that Paul may have been led to develop particular themes in the light of objections made to his viewpoint. Thus it is arguable that Paul's stress on the close relation between the Spirit and justification arose out of the need to defend his doctrine of justification by faith against the charge of antinomianism. Similarly, his stress on the supremacy of Jesus Christ in Colossians could be a reiteration of a point which was called in question by gnosticising Christians. In such cases heresy acted as a catalyst to the development of Christian doctrine which in fact drew nothing from the heresy itself.

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[20] J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, London, 1965.

[21] C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1968.6–8; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, London, 1971, 24, 58; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 13.

[22] J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1974, 757.

One interesting thesis along these lines has been developed by an evangelical scholar. J. W. Drane has noticed how Paul appears to be something of a libertine in Galatians, whereas he is something of a legalist in 1 Corinthians. He argues that these apparently contradictory stances taken up by Paul are dictated by the nature of the opposition which he was facing. In Galatians he was confronted by Judaising legalists, and therefore it was natural for him to stress the immediate guidance of the Spirit and to play down the importance of human traditions in the Christian faith. Then Drane argues that some of the Corinthian Christians proceeded to develop Paul's view well beyond their limits as a kind of reply to the apostolic decree of Acts 15:20 which required that Christians should observe the Jewish law in whole or in part. On this view the 'Gnosticism' in Corinth was in part due to a one-sided development of Paul's own teachings. In 1 Corinthians we have Paul's reaction to this movement, and he reacts in terms of a legalistic approach, appealing to various traditions and rules which must be observed in the church. A middle ground between these two Pauline extremes is found in 2 Corinthians and Romans where Paul is 'anti-libertine without being legalistic'.[23] p. 41

It seems to me that Dr Drane has probably overplayed his hand.[24] I do not find that Paul has swung so violently in his opinions as this brief summary of the thesis might seem to imply. Nevertheless, in broad terms it is psychologically plausible that a person will emphasise now one aspect and now another of his theology in dealing with opponents from different angles. While I hope, for example, that my understanding of Christian baptism is reasonably consistent, there is more than a trace of original sin in me (not washed away by baptism), which makes me want to supply a paedo-baptist corrective to the views of advocates of believers' baptism when I am confronted by paedo-baptists. Certainly one may learn and develop in thinking through facing advocates of different positions, even if such growth is within a reasonably stable understanding of Christian doctrine. In broader terms we may claim that the development of doctrine has often been determined by apparently fortuitous circumstances.[25]

The preceding remarks have dealt with the possibility of development by way of reaction to opposition. There is also the possibility that contact with other opinions may lead a thinker to a creative assimilation of certain motifs from them, even although he may be fundamentally opposed to them. Something of this kind has been asserted with reference to Paul's contacts with gnosticising Christians. For example, it has been claimed that some of the theological terms which Paul uses may have been drawn from gnosticising use, or at least the fact that they were used by gnosticising thinkers may have brought them to Paul's attention and encouraged him to use them. Thus H. Schlier has commented on the use of the term 'head' in Colossians. 'Here we see both the ideas and terminology of the Gnostic myth'.[26] In the same way, Paul's use of the term 'body' in the captivity epistles is often thought to owe something to Gnosticism.[27] Indeed, it has been argued that such a passage as Col. 1:15–20 is a Christian adaptation of an originally

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[23] J. W. Drane, *Paul, Libertine or Legalist?* London, 1975.

[24] See my review in EQ 48, 1976, 60–62.

[25] C. F. D. Moule, 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Christological Terms', JTS ns 10, 1959, 247–63; 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Eschatological Terms', JTS ns 15, 1964, 1–15. Both essays are reprinted in the author's *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, Cambridge, 1982, 165–183, 184–199.

[26] H. Schlier, TDNT III, 681; see 676–8, 680f.

[27] E. Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi*, Tübingen, 1933.

Gnostic text.[28] If these views are correct, then the suggestion is that certain words and concepts came p. 42 into Christianity from alien sources, and, to use a well-known comment by H. Chadwick, were 'disinfected' for Christian use.[29]

While the correctness of this thesis in detail must rest on careful exegetical consideration of the relevant texts, there need be no objection in principle to the possibility of this kind of development in Christian thought; at best it will have been marginal and has not substantially affected the central content of the faith. There are, of course, more far-reaching claims that Pauline theology (and also Johannine theology) can be shown to have a very broad base in the gnosticising outlook of certain early Christian groups,[30] but in my view such proposals are highly speculative and unconvincing, and we do not need to consider them here.[31]

4. DIALOGUE SITUATIONS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

We come, fourthly, to a consideration of the Gospel of John. Of all the documents which we are considering this one is the best source for dialogue. It is well known that it contains not only extensive monolgues by Jesus but also lengthy scenes in which Jesus talks with several interlocutors. The story of the woman of Samaria, for example, is essentially a dialogue in which both participants engage in a comparatively lengthy conversation. Or one might cite John 9 in which a whole variety of actors take part in conversations among themselves and with Jesus. Other scenes may begin as conversations, although they drift into monologues by Jesus, rather like the way in which Paul lets his conversation with Peter in Gal. 2:11–14 slide over into a theological disquisition directed to the readers of the letter. So too Nicodemus quietly disappears from the scene in Jn. 3 as Jesus continues to speak. It is, however, no exaggeration to say that the Gospel of John is characterised by dialogue, and that for the most part the dialogue is between Jesus and outsiders or opponents, rather than between Jesus and his disciples.

One may, therefore, examine the Johannine dialogues more or less as they stand, in order to learn from them how Jesus was envisaged as speaking to people. The story of the woman of Samaria has been seen as a paradigm for the Christian evangelist, exemplifying the way in p. 43 which a person may be brought to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.[32] But it is doubtful how far we can trace this exemplary motif, since much of the dialogue is of a kind that the church could not take over. Christians obviously could not speak in the same way as Jesus had spoken in his own person. They could, to be sure, adapt what he had said for use in their own conversations with non-believers.

To many scholars the Johannine dialogues have appeared to be somewhat unreal. It is argued that often the conversation proceeds by way of deliberate ambiguities on the part of Jesus and by inept misunderstandings on the part of the other participants. The dialogues, in other words, are literary rather than reports of the *ipsissima verba* of the participants. We may, therefore, be justified in regarding the scenes in John as dramatic

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[28] E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Theses*, London, 1964, 149–68.

[29] H. Chadwick, 'All things to all men', NTS 1, 1954–5, 272.

[30] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London, 1952, 1953; W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, Nashville, 1971.

[31] See R. M. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament*, Oxford, 1968; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, London, 1973.

[32] W. Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, London, 1945, 65–68.

rather than as precise reports of actual conversations. John presents the conversations in the manner of a dramatist who has a certain freedom in how he reports what took place. Just as the speeches in Acts may be Thucydidean, in the sense that Luke has 'kept as closely as possible to the general gist of what was really said', so too the Johannine dialogues may have the same quality. Indeed, this is what we would expect, since it is unlikely that the precise wording of what at the time appeared to be a casual conversation could be exactly remembered and recounted by any of the participants. We cannot, therefore, even on this level accept them as necessarily being protocal reports of what took place.

However, allowance for this dramatic element in the presentation does not mean that we cannot observe them to note the kind of issues which are raised and the answers which are given. It is immediately obvious that, as elsewhere in the NT, Jesus is the one who gives the answers or poses counter-questions to make his hearers think; there is no sense in which he is presented as learning from the dialogues or modifying his ideas in the light of what others say; the picture is entirely consistent with the synoptic one in this respect. The subjects of conversation are varied, but in general they are more christological than in the synoptic Gospels. The person of Jesus, his authority and functions as Saviour are of central importance. The first part of the Gospel is taken up with the claims of Jesus, and the problems discussed are those of Jews who are puzzled by him.

From a historical point of view there is much here that can belong to the historical ministry of Jesus. It is not difficult to compile a lengthy list of Johannine sayings which have parallels in the synoptic Gospels and which can be plausibly assigned to a life-setting in the ministry of Jesus. p. 44 Nevertheless, two further factors justify us in cautiously broadening the scope of John's interest. On the one hand, there is the fact that in this Gospel, much more than in the others, Jesus speaks in the character of the risen Lord. There is a unique merging of the earthly and the risen Jesus. On the other hand, there is also a case that the situation of the disciples and the Jews often reflects the situation of the early church in a Jewish environment. The questions that arise are those faced by the early church.

An attempt to do justice to these factors has been made by J. L. Martyn who posits that John operates on two levels of reality, and that the dialogues can be seen as testifying to the historical events of the life of Jesus and as reflections of debates in which the early church had to engage with the Jews. John has, as it were, written a Gospel which attempts to deal with the problem: 'What would Jesus have said if he had been alive now in our particular situation?'[33] The important point that emerges for our purpose from the theory is that Martyn holds that the early church was in contact with Jews and discussions did take place between Christians and Jews; to be sure, such relationships could be broken as the synagogue excommunicated Christians and refused to have dealings with them, but the Gospel testifies to a period in which discussions did take place and the Christians attempted to defend and commend their faith. Such discussions may originally have taken place in a synagogue setting before Christians were excommunicated. Afterwards, they must have taken place in more private settings. But the point is that the evidence of John implies that one setting for evangelism was discussion and debate. We should not ignore the fact that the Gospel can also be cited as evidence for the presentation of the gospel by means of the sermon; it has been argued that features typical of Jewish synagogue sermons can be seen in some of the discourses in John.[34] But alongside such sermons there were also discussions.

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[33] J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York, 1968.

[34] P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Leiden, 1981.[2]

If this general hypothesis is correct, however much we may want to question some of the details, then it would seem that here in John we have some of the strongest NT evidence for the activity of dialogue in the early church. Thus the dialogue form which characterises John at a surface level reflects the situation of the church which was engaged in dialogue with the Jews, and the Gospel is both a reflection of such discussion and also, one may presume, a guide to Christians faced by the kind of questions that arose in such contexts. p. 45

Martyn suggests that one of the themes of such dialogue was the person of Jesus. He identifies a Jewish hope in the coming of a prophet like Moses who would be a messianic figure. Christians had to take a stance over against such Jewish expectations, and they did so by affirming that Jesus was the expected prophet. Yet this presentation was an inadequate one, and the church went on to affirm its belief in Jesus as the Son of man. If this is correct, it would show how the church responded to its environment by taking up the Jewish messianology and developing it positively. If, however, we prefer to believe that the ultimate basis of the teaching in John goes back to Jesus, then we can again say that Jesus responds to the views of his contemporaries and yet goes beyond their inadequate ideas about the Messiah. In both cases it remains true that there is a Christian response to ideas genuinely held in the environment of Jesus and the early church. Christian theology develops in response to these ideas, and yet it is not controlled by them; it makes use of them so far as they can serve its purpose, and especially because they can provide a point of contact with the people it addresses. But there is still no evidence that the thinking of the early church or of Jesus was significantly developed or changed by dialogue.

5. CONCLUSION

It emerges that the total amount of NT material that would contribute to a theology of dialogue is small in quantity, although there is more than might be realised at first sight. The lesson is surely that dialogue was not the primary means of presentation of the gospel in the early church. Certainly the church took notice of the ideas of its audiences and made use of them as starting points for its own proclamation of the gospel; one cannot communicate without using ideas that are comprehensible to one's audience. But we have found very little evidence indeed to suggest that the church's own thinking was significantly influenced by dialogue with non-Christians, or indeed that dialogue within the church played a significant part in the development of doctrine. The traditional picture of a church communicating and proclaiming the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints is a well-founded one. There is not the slightest suggestion that the church and the world conversed as equal partners in the search for truth. There is more room for the view that the early church progressed in its understanding of the way of God by discussion internally; we may think of the discussions recorded in Acts 11; 15 and Galatians 2 which were concerned with the place of Gentiles in the church. It has been P. 46 suggested that 1 John depicts a church which is not clear where the lines between orthodoxy and heresy are to be drawn, and which is engaged in dialogue to seek the answer, but this picture is not convincing to my mind.[35]

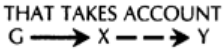
Positively, we may claim that the church did speak in terms that would be intelligible to its hearers and addressed them in their different situations. We have only to think, for example, of the way in which the presentation of the gospel in Acts to Gentiles differs in form from the presentation to Jews and proselytes who already believed in Yahweh. The

[35] K. Weiss, 'Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im I. Johannesbrief', *ZNW* 58, 1967, 247–255.

church has a duty to understand its hearers and their needs and to frame the presentation of its message accordingly.

It follows that our simple antithesis between proclamation and dialogue at the outset of this essay is over-simple. We must think rather of a model in which the unchanging essence of the gospel is proclaimed in forms adapted to the needs of its hearers.

C. PROCLAMATION THAT TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION



(Here the broken arrow indicates that the 'shape' of the message is varied to make it intelligible and relevant to the hearer.)

Put otherwise, the problem of transmitting the message is a problem of *communication* or translation, in which the message must be put in such a way as to be intelligible and applicable to the receptor. It is not a problem of *discovery* in which the evangelist hopes that the 'receptor' will help him by means of dialogue to discover what the gospel is.

If we conclude that the New Testament knows nothing of a form of dialogue from which the evangelist may learn what the essential content of the gospel is, it still remains true that Christians must practise dialogue with non-Christians. On the one hand, only by means of dialogue can they come to an understanding of the situation of non-Christians and how the gospel answers their needs. On the other hand, as the examples in the Gospels show, Jesus responded to the questions raised by the people whom he met, and above all he sought to involve them in a personal encounter with the claims of God on their lives by bringing them in to a situation of dialogue in which they were invited to respond to his message.

Michael Green has written: p. 47

> … in days like our own … Christians tend to be rather shy about the uniqueness of their religion. 'Dialogue' replaces 'mission' in the vocabulary, and 'conversion' is an unacceptable concept. Recently Professor J. G. Davies has launched an assault on both the word and the idea of conversion. He criticizes the Church for attempting to extend its own numbers by proselytism and individual conversion. The true aim of Christians, he thinks, should be to enter into dialogue with the world, not subject it to monologue; to send men into the world with God's reconciling message in their lives, rather than to try by lip to exert an influence on the social and economic life of their generation. That is to say, Dr Davies is coming down firmly on one side of the old divide, social gospel or spiritual gospel. But the New Testament firmly rejects the dichotomy. The early preachers did not enter into dialogue with the world, except to understand it and to present their life-changing message in terms comprehensible to their contemporaries. They believed they had got good news for their friends, and they knew that good news was embodied in Jesus Christ. Him they proclaimed.[36]

I suggest that Michael Green's thesis is confirmed by our examination of the evidence.[37]

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[36] E. M. B. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, London, 1970, 147f.

[37] T. F. Torrance, 'Questioning in Christ', in *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, 117–127, has suggested that what Jesus did was to raise questions of fundamental importance in the minds of those who heard him and then to force them by his counterquestions to think even more deeply. 'In the last resort it is we who are questioned by the Truth, and it is only as we allow ourselves to be questioned by it that it stands forth before us for our recognition and acknowledgment.' This type of approach operates at a theological level and draws out the fuller significance of the fact that people ask questions of Jesus, and find that in the process they themselves come under questioning. It is not altogether a new approach, for it has often been recognised that in a sense the trial scenes in which Jesus appears as the one on trial are really occasions on which the judges themselves stand under judgment. But where Torrance goes further in theological

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The Witnessing Church in Dialogue

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As in the previous article this author rejects dialogue as a dialectical method for reaching the Truth. But as a way of life and a missiological method to understand people of other faiths, to communicate faithfully and relevantly the gospel and to sharpen one's own understanding of the message, dialogue is fundamental to fulfilling Christ's mission in the world. The author argues that in dialogue the witnessing church expands the frontiers of the Church's holistic mission.
Editor

I am the pastor of a Hindi-speaking congregation of the Church of North India in the satellite town of Gurgaon, 35 kms from the centre of the capital city of New Delhi, a career missionary seconded by a mission agency to the Diocese of Delhi. I am appointed by the Bishop and I am accountable to him as is every other presbyter in the diocese. In our State of Haryana only 1 in 1000 of the population belongs to the Christian community and in some places only 1 in 10,000. Our local church of 70 families and the Roman Catholic Church of the same size are the only structured congregations in a town of perhaps 400,000 people. Thus the Christian community is a very small and insignificant community in the midst of a plurality of communities, some of whom are antagonistic to us. Our natural tendency is to retreat into our own ghetto, keeping to ourselves the limited benefits we possess and viewing with suspicion outsiders who want to join us. In such a context dialogue in the struggle for communal harmony and dialogue with other communities in our call to evangelism and church planting, are no academic issues for the Christian church. They are matters of life and death.[1] In the turbulent flow of our national life, the Church is either moving upstream in the struggle against principalities and powers or she is drifting downstream towards self-destruction. The question before the evangelical Christian is not whether our goals and methodologies are biblical, but

discussion is when he claims that Jesus identifies himself with people in their questionings: on the cross he calls out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and thus voices on behalf of mankind the most insistent question of all; at the same time it is Jesus who gives the true and final answer to God; 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' This cry was answered, and this prayer was ratified by God when he raised Jesus from the dead.

On this view the dialogue is not one in which Jesus comes to deeper understanding, but rather one in which the world does so. And yet in a paradoxical fashion Jesus takes mankind's questions upon himself as part of the burden which he has to bear. But, Torrance insists, the questions which Jesus asks are the right questions, questions which are capable of fruitful answers, whereas our human questions are the wrong questions and need to be refined and purified through encounter with Jesus.

[1] See James P. Alter & Herbert Jai Singh, *The Church in Delhi*, (Nagpur, NCC, 1961) pp. 81–115.