

JOURNAL OF THE IRISH CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE

CONTENTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND IN IRELAND TODAY.....	<i>Alan Flavelle</i>	3
AGAINST THE STREAM: C. S. LEWIS AND THE LITERARY SCENE	<i>Harry Blamires</i>	11
RELIGION AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND	<i>David N. Hempton</i>	23
THE MYTH OF DARWIN'S METAPHOR <i>David N. Livingstone</i>		35
OPINION		48
REVIEWS		52

Preface

Ireland is famed for its high level of church attendance. Once seen as 'the land of saints and scholars', it is now, regrettably, famous for a strident and intolerant form of religiosity. And indeed how few signs of true Christianity we can see around us. Here, in particular, and in the modern world in general, being a Christian is a difficult business. An all-pervasive secularism makes it difficult for us to think in a Christian way about the world in all its aspects (particularly in the academic sphere) and also makes it difficult to think in a Christian way about all we do in our daily lives. Yet Christ calls us to express his Lordship in everything and has promised His help through the Holy Spirit, no matter what conditions we may have to face.

Those of us involved in the work of the Irish Christian Study Centre are determined to encourage committed Christian thinking and living and to respond positively to the challenges around us. We do so by organising conferences, lectures and seminars and by making the resources of our substantial library of books, international periodicals and tapes available to the general public. For some time we have been aware that there is no Irish evangelical periodical which provides clearly-written, well-researched articles for the general reader. The *Journal of the Irish Christian Study Centre*, which you are now holding, is an attempt to bridge that gap.

Each issue (we hope there will be two per year) will normally contain at least four major articles, some of which will be papers already given at the Study Centre, and from time to time we intend to devote issues to one particular theme. In addition there will be an opinion section to allow readers to respond to our articles or to initiate discussion on matters of vital Christian concern. The review section will concentrate on important recent books, both Christian and secular, and on controversial and seminal works whether recent or not, but will also consider such other things as films and television series. In our news section we will give advance notice of ICSC activities and those of similar organisations.

We would like, through the *Journal*, to encourage Christians in Ireland to start writing, not only articles on theological, academic or practical matters, but also poetry and other imaginative writing. We will, of course, welcome articles from other parts of the world as well.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the *Journal* and will find it helpful in your Christian life. If you do, we invite you to take out a regular subscription and to encourage your friends to do the same.

John H. Gillespie,
Chairman.

The Importance of the Christian Mind in Ireland Today

by ALAN FLAVELLE

In a striking sentence in his great work, *The Institutes*, John Calvin says: "the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols"¹. What he means is that in every age man has an incorrigible tendency to set up his own gods, gods to which he gives the affection and allegiance that belong to God alone. The word of God through Jeremiah addressed this problem: "Thus says the Lord: 'let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me'"²(9:23f).

Ours is a very different world from that of the prophet; yet who can doubt that knowledge, power and riches are three of the prime idols before which our contemporaries prostrate themselves today. What the Lord discounts is not wisdom and power and wealth in themselves, but man's wisdom, man's power, man's wealth, and these things so over-valued that men treat them as the only things that matter.

However, it is the positive thrust of the prophet's word that concerns us now: "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me." Herman Bavinck begins his book, *Our Reasonable Faith*, with the claim: "God, and God alone, is man's highest good"³. If this is so, and surely for us it is incontrovertible, then our main objective in life is to get to know God. Jim Packer brings this out in his own vivid way in his book, *Knowing God*: "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' which Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. . . . What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God"⁴.

As Christians we believe that such knowledge of God is only possible by way of revelation. We come to know God not by human discovery but by divine disclosure. Because He is a Person, it is more a matter of God allowing us to know Him than of our attempting to know Him. He makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. He has entered our history; He has assumed our humanity; He has bridged the gulf between Himself and us. For in Jesus we do not have a mere messenger from God, but God Himself. "God was in Christ . . . God with us." (2 Cor. 5:19)

God makes Himself known through the Scriptures, since all that we know of Jesus Christ, we know through the Scriptures. While we may thus regard the Bible itself as revelation, we must remember that (as John Stott points out)

it is like a prescription which sends us to Christ and persuades us to drink the water of life that He gives, or like a map which gives us directions which we must take and follow to our destination.

And God makes Himself known by His Spirit. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:9,10) This in itself warns us that knowledge of God does not come merely by the exercise of human reason. Knowledge of God comes not only objectively through revelation given in Christ and through the Scriptures, but also subjectively through illumination given by the Holy Spirit. This is necessary, for as Paul points out in 2 Cor. 3, fallen man needs not only 'light' but 'sight'.

Now it is this knowledge of God—made known to us in Christ, set forth for us in Scripture and brought home to us by the Spirit, that makes it possible for us to have "the mind of Christ". To have this is to think God's thoughts after Him, to see things, as it were, through His eyes, to have the biblical point of view on life. We cannot do better than characterise this in the terms used by Harry Blamires:

*"A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal perspective. That is to say, it looks beyond this life to another one. It is supernaturally orientated, and brings to bear on earthly considerations the fact of Heaven and Hell . . . The Christian mind sees human life and human history held in the hands of God . . . It sees the natural order dependent upon the supernatural order; time as contained within eternity. It sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another; this world as a temporary place of refuge, not our true and final home"*⁴

We might further clarify the concept: "The marks of truth as christianly conceived, then, are: that it is supernaturally grounded, not developed within nature; that it is objective and not subjective; that it is a revelation and not a construction; that it is discovered by enquiry and not elected by a majority vote; that it is authoritative and not a matter of personal choice"⁵

That we seldom show the Christian mind, that we fail to think christianly about the situation in Ireland, is a fact that few will dispute. Here in a country where we have respected the Scriptures, where we have cherished the evangelical heritage, where we still retain a Christian ethic and a Christian spirituality, we give little evidence that the Christian mind has been at work among us, shaping our convictions, determining our public witness, influencing our society, controlling our lifestyle. How much genuinely biblical thinking has been done about the underlying causes of the Troubles? When have authentic evangelical Christians come together to speak the Word of the Lord to our situation? What positive biblical guidelines have we formulated to help a Church and Community struggling to come to terms with social unrest, economic decline and rampant permissiveness? Personally, I would affirm that the most vociferous witness borne in the Christian name has been alarmingly at variance with the thinking of the Christian mind. We have heard the voice of religion all too stridently, but there has been a deafening silence from those who must see that much of our

religious life—our evangelical religious life included—is idolatrous.

What then are some of the ways in which the cultivation of the Christian mind is important in Ireland today? Naturally, I have to be selective, but here are some suggestions to set you thinking . . .

It will *expose our rigid traditionalism*. The Christian mind is grounded in, and at every point governed by, the God-given revelation. But alongside, and often on a par with, "the faith which was once-for-all delivered to the saints", we sometimes put the traditions year-by-year developed by the saints. Now not all tradition is wrong. After all, there is a body of tradition included in the Scriptures, and another body of tradition agreeable to the Scriptures. Danger arises when we give to man-made tradition the same authority as we give to God-given revelation; when we hold as tenaciously to things that stem from our culture as we do to things that stem from the Scripture. To think christianly is always to think biblically. You remember how when the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders?", he immediately rebuked them: "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition . . . thus making void the word of God through your tradition". (Mk. 7:5, 9,13) As Christians we need to take more seriously what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 4:6 "learn to live according to Scripture".

Perhaps it might clarify what I mean if I quote you a passage from Lovelace's book, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*:

*"By the 1930s the average American Fundamentalist was not at least a proponent of theocracy, but he did have a way of confusing America, the Republican Party and the capitalist system with the Kingdom of God. He did not practise circumcision, but he did assume that only those who had gone through a certain form of conversion experience were 'born again' Sanctification was not a subject he was used to hearing about . . . but he had an extensive behavioural code to distinguish dedicated Christians from liberals, the unsaved and the backsliders. He felt that black people, including black Christians, were all right in their place (and that included a separate place of worship), but he was ready to focus all the pooled hatreds and hidden fears of his heart on those who did not stay in their place If sufficiently well-trained, he could recognise the fact that theological liberals were Sadducees, but very rarely could he see the point of the liberal contention that he himself was a Pharisee"*⁶

If I simply ask you to substitute 'Ulster' for 'America', and 'green' for 'black', do I need to say more?

What happens when we try to think christianly about our *bitter sectarianism*? God is one; He loves the world; He gave His Son to save the world; He sends the Gospel into the world. He shows no partiality. He will not be used to countersign our selfish schemes, or support our pet programmes. He has no vested interest in any party, or country, or political structure. His only passionate concern is for His people, His Church, for His people are not only the recipients of His grace but also the agents of His purpose. He does not work to perpetuate our man-made divisions, but to

eliminate them. And if we stand with Him, that must be our work as well. But think how we all-too-easily slip into a sectarian mould, blinded by prejudice, poisoned by bigotry. And how sometimes so-called Christians with a sneer on their lips, rather than with a sob in their hearts, have excommunicated one another, rending the Body of Christ, grieving the Spirit of God. Now I am not arguing for an unbiblical inclusiveness—"We're all in this together"—or for a misguided ecumenism—"the more opinions we have, the fuller our grasp of the truth". No, but I am suggesting that our suspicion of, and separation from, other Christians often springs more from fear of man than from love of truth.

And it often betrays the kind of bigotry satirised in Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Moonstone*. Miss Drusilla Cluck speaks of herself and her friends: "*neither public nor private influence produce the slightest effect on us . . . we are above reason; we are beyond ridicule; we see with nobody's eyes, we hear with nobody's ears, we feel with nobody's hearts, but our own. Glorious, glorious privilege! And how is it earned? Ah, my friends, you may spare yourselves the useless enquiry! We are the only people who can earn it—for we are the only people who are always right!*". Sound familiar? You remember the man who said: "In matters controversial my perception's rather fine; I always see two points of view, the one that's wrong—and mine". Now, thinking christianly, saves us from such a spirit. We recognise that while it is given to all of us to see some of the truth, it is given to none of us to see all of the truth. The vitally important thing about any Christian is his or her relationship to Christ. All else is subsidiary—and must be seen to be subsidiary. But how lamentably evangelicals have failed to exemplify this. Might it be too much to hope that you, in the Centre, may pioneer some project in promoting a Bible-based, Christ-centred ecumenism?

The Christian mind is also an *antidote to an arid intellectualism*. In recoil from the experience-centred religion with which we have been plagued, the impatience with 'divisive' doctrines, we have introduced a new rationalism that lays so much stress on the thinking mind that the living soul is crowded out of our Christianity. If we reject an extremism where there is "too much in the heart and too little in the head", we must not embrace the opposite extremism where there is "too much in the head and too little in the heart". Truth and love must be held in balance: where we over-emphasise truth at the expense of love we are left with a dead and deadening orthodoxy; where we over-emphasise love at the expense of truth we are left with an anaemic caricature of biblical faith. Let me put that in another way: knowing God involves not only a seeing but a feeling; not only the mind but the heart and the will. The psalmist prays that he may see God in order that he may obey Him and enjoy Him. Such is the reality of God that He comes to us through every avenue of the personality. He breaks in on our whole being. Those of us who have an academic bias, a desire for logical coherence, must remember John Ruskin's warning that "a foolish consistency is the hob-goblin of little minds". We cannot imprison God within a neat formula; we cannot capture ultimate reality in a form of words.

There are two passages that I would like to quote. One is from A. W.

Tozer in *The Incredible Christian*:

*"For a long time I have believed that truth, to be understood, must be lived; that Bible doctrine is wholly ineffective until it has been digested and assimilated by the whole life. The essence of my belief is . . . that there is a vast difference between fact and truth. Truth in the Scriptures is more than a fact. A fact may be detached, cold, impersonal, and totally dissociated from life. Truth on the other hand is warm, living and spiritual. A theological fact may be held in the mind for a long time without its having any positive effect upon the moral character; but truth is creative, saving and transforming, and it always changes the one who receives it into a humbler and holier man. At what point then does a theological fact become for the one who holds it a life-giving truth? At that point where obedience begins . . . the Church or the individual that is Bible-taught without being Spirit-taught has simply failed to see that truth lies deeper than the theological statement of it"*⁹

Centuries ago Anselm wrote: "Just as the right order of going requires that we should believe the deep things of God before we presume to discuss them by reason, so it seems to be negligence after we have been confirmed in the faith if we do not study to understand what we believe"¹⁰. That I feel, gives the balance of the Christian mind.

But there is another statement that has meant a great deal to me as I have sought to understand what is to be our role in affirming truth and exposing error. It comes from Charles Simeon, who was a great evangelical in the Anglican tradition. He wrote:

*"The author . . . is no friend of systematisers in theology. He has endeavoured to derive from the Scriptures alone his views on religion; and to them it is his wish to adhere with scrupulous fidelity; never wresting any portion of the Word of God to favour a particular opinion, but giving to every part of it that sense which it seems to him to have been designed by the great Author to convey. He is aware that he is likely on this account to be considered by the zealous advocates of human systems as occasionally inconsistent; but if he should be discovered to be no more inconsistent than the Scriptures themselves, he will have reason to be satisfied. He has no doubt that there is a system in the Holy Scriptures (for truth cannot be inconsistent with itself); but he is persuaded that neither Calvinists nor Arminians are in exclusive possession of it"*¹⁰

Now I have great sympathy with that, simply because I do not think that any form of words exhausts the meaning of God or of His truth for us. On the other hand, I would be prepared to argue that some systems of doctrine more adequately express that truth than others—i.e. Calvinism. But I am altogether with Simeon when he adds: "The truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes . . . it is not one extreme that we are to go to, but both extremes"¹¹. That, if I may say so, is one of the reasons why I adopt a 'reverent agnosticism' about some of the things about which I once pontificated with dogmatic arrogance!

As against the intellectualism that reigns in academic circles, I recall the dictum from the Ancient Church: "It is the heart that makes the theologian".

Thus truth, even truth set forth by special revelation, may yield itself not so much to the man who is versed in the literature, but to the man who is steeped in prayer and meditation; not only to those who engage in the cut and thrust of debate—though this has its place—but to those who seek God in the silence; not in the discourse of the lecture room but in the worship of the house of God. Perhaps the best test of whether or not we are thinking christianly about God, His Word and His truth, is to ask ourselves, does it leave us with a sense of awe and wonder, or does it merely bring us a feeling of intellectual satisfaction? You may remember how John Stott, in his review of Packer's book, *Knowing God*, says: "he illumines every doctrine he touches and commends it with courage, logic, lucidity and warmth . . . the truth he handles fires the heart. At least it fired mine, and compelled me to turn aside to worship and to pray"¹². That is the ultimate accolade on any piece of theological study or writing.

Time forbids me to speak to you of the implications the Christian mind has for some of the other ills that afflict both church and community in our land: *the crass materialism* that is evident even among the people of God, pressurising them into acting as if this world, and the things of this world, is all that there is; *the false ecumenism* that works on the principle that the greater variety of opinions and insights that you collect, the greater the likelihood there is that you will arrive at the truth—ignoring as it does the fact that Christian truth is a gift once-for-all given by God, not a goal one-day-in-the-future to be reached by men; *the easy believism* which majors on the act of faith and underplays the life of obedience, which stresses what God gives but ignores what He asks, which makes fashionable a cultural conversion, changing the outward pattern of behaviour, but leaving the inner life unchanged; and *the ethical relativism* that assumes that moral standards for the individual are a matter of personal preference and moral standards for society something to be decided by consensus, imagining that since God is dead everything is permitted. These are some of the matters to which I hope you will apply yourselves in the years ahead.

But one other aspect of our subject must be mentioned. The Christian mind will expose the pretensions of a facile optimism and dispel the mists of a crippling pessimism. As Guinness says in *The Dust of Death* that "a description of Thomas Mann could be an epitaph for our era: 'he died, undecided between a desperate optimism and a weary pessimism'"¹³. I sense both moods within the church and community today. On the one hand, there are those who are utterly despondent about the future in Ireland. They identify with Oscar Wilde's sentiment: "we did not dare to breathe a prayer or give our anguish scope; something was dead in each of us, and what was dead was hope". Now against that, we recognise that God is alive, that He is at work among us, that His Kingdom is a present reality, that in the words that John hurled in defiance against the empire of the Caesars, "the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns". (Rev. 19:6) There we do not despair; we become fellow-workers with God; we are confident that "if God is for us", nothing can be against us. We might well brace ourselves with words written by William

Temple during World War II: "When we worship God and serve Him, Christ reigns; when we know success or taste defeat, Christ reigns; when we live, when we die, Christ reigns. When history goes, when time shall be no more, Christ is King for ever and ever".

On the other hand, we note signs of an ill-founded optimism. Some people still imagine that if we had integrated education, greater social justice, better housing, less unemployment, fuller dialogue between opposing groups, then we might emerge from the tunnel—or is it the jungle? It is the old liberal optimism in modern guise—"move upward, working out the beast, and let the ape and tiger die"; or it's the spirit reflected in John F. Kennedy's comment: "All men's problems have been created by man and can be solved by man". Now the fact that God's Kingdom is 'here and now' saves me from pessimism, and motivates me to work with God for a better world, a fairer society, a more united church. But the fact that the Kingdom is also 'not yet' saves me from an optimism that would allow me to expect the gradual Christianisation of the world. The fact of Original Sin must never be overlooked. As Cambridge theologian J. S. Whale wrote: "The congenital weakness of human nature is the submerged rock on which the complacent claims of an optimistic humanism are wrecked"¹⁴ And Carl Henry reminds us that "although modern man zestfully explores outer space, he seems quite content to live in a spiritual kindergarten and to play in a moral wilderness"¹⁵ The stubborn facts of life in Ulster shatter any illusions there may be about the essential goodness of man.

Thus our only ground of hope is in the living God, the God of the supernatural, the God who comes to meet us in Christ His Son, the God who is ceaselessly at work in us and through us by His Spirit, the God who wants to share His mind with us, so that understanding what He is about, we may submit our lives to Him as agents of His irresistible purpose and subjects of His indestructible Kingdom. This is what calls us to rigorous thought, to courageous rejection of the easier options, to confident prayer and adventurous living.

What is our need then? We need thinkers—and thinkers are thin-on-the-ground in church circles in Ireland; we need Christian thinkers—and it is both difficult and dangerous to think christianly in a society infiltrated by an almost atmospheric secularism and where it is almost impossible to think and speak dispassionately; we need those who, in Paul's words, have "put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator;" (Col. 3:10) above all we need to heed the apostle's injunction: "have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus", (Phil. 2:5) who both in word and deed embodied and exemplified the grace and truth of God in terms which men and women understood and in a way that not only convinced them in the top of their heads, but also persuaded them in the bottom of their hearts. May this be your aim . . . and to an increasing degree your achievement.

NOTES

1. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London, 1953) I, xi, 8.
2. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, 1977) p.17.
3. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London, 1973) p.31.
4. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (London, 1963) p. 67.
5. *Ibid*, p.107.
6. Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Exeter, 1979) p. 195.
7. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Heron Edition) p.209
8. A. W. Tozer, *The Incredible Christian* (Harrisburg, PA, 1964) p.92
9. Anselm *The Library of Christian Classics* (London, 1956) Vol. I
10. Charles Simeon, *Horae Homeletica* (London, 1819) p. 4-5.
11. *Ibid*. p.5.
12. John R. W. Stott, quoted on cover of *Knowing God* (London 1973).
13. Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death* (London, 1973) p.20.
14. J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (London, 1957) p.38.
15. Carl F. Henry, Article in *Christianity Today*, August 1972.

*Against the stream:
C. S. Lewis and the Literary Scene*

(The Inaugural C. S. Lewis Memorial Lecture, 8th October 1982)
by HARRY BLAMIRE

It was in the inaugural professorial lecture he delivered at Cambridge that Lewis presented himself boldly as a surviving relic of Old Western Man, a breed rapidly becoming as extinct as the dinosaur: and he suggested that, as such, he ought to fascinate his contemporaries as a rare specimen of how the civilised mind once worked and what it contained. It was of course a brilliant stroke on Lewis's part thus to parody the assumption of his enemies that he was out of date. But the claim was something more than an ironic counter-shaft. It had real substance for him. And I want to reflect on the validity of the image of the lonely embattled leftover in relation to the two sides of Lewis's output—his literary output and his theological output. I accept that the division is clumsy and inadequate. One of Lewis's greatest works, *The Screwtape Letters*, is at once a little masterpiece of imaginative literature and a telling moral and theological tract. Indeed Lewis once made clear to me that he saw himself as being about the same task in writing the *Narnia* books as he had been about in writing *Mere Christianity*. But Lewis the writer plainly has a standing in both literary and theological circles; and any sense of his being the odd man out no doubt had reference to both.

In the literary world secular humanist propaganda would naturally try to persuade us that the works of Lewis and other writers of his circle are museum pieces. It became fashionable in literary journals and critical books in Lewis's later years and after his death either to ignore him, and Charles Williams too, as literary figures, or to give them grudging recognition as freaks. The Christianity they represented might have its interest for a closed circle of reactionaries, but in terms of 20th century literary history in general it was something of an oddity and a throwback. As fashionable criticism saw it, the mainstream of 20th century literature flowed on its way reflecting the values and concerns of a post-Christian society. Twenty years ago that was the assumption you would have encountered had you been bold enough to raise the names of Lewis and Williams in some quite influential academic circles. It was a totally false assumption, but it was the kind of thing Lewis's antennae accurately registered when he burlesqued himself as a dinosaur.

Times have changed, yet traces of this attitude linger on—I mean the pretence that any serious reversion to Christianity in poetry, drama, or fiction

is embarrassingly irrelevant to the main concerns of modern life.

When Lewis wrote a paper on Christianity and Literature, he had some penetrating things to say about critical presuppositions in an age of naturalistic thinking, but the paper shed no light on his work as a Christian in the field of imaginative literature. He was clearly not too happy to be presented with topics like Christianity and Literature. He was probably at heart too earnest an evangelist to be content to side-step crucial issues of conversion and salvation by woolly talk about Christianity AND this and that. He was quick to point out the ambiguities of expressions like 'Christian literature' and 'Christian writer'. One could see his point. If a man is a devout Christian and his job is to edit and write specialised articles for a Pig-Breeders' Journal, his work is probably not going to bear evident marks of his Christian commitment, but presumably he has the right to call himself a Christian writer. More so, I suppose, than the man who is an unbeliever but who weaves the substance of Christian thought and practice into his work. James Joyce would be a good example. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* contains sermons, prayers and spiritual wrestlings, but James Joyce could not be called a 'Christian writer' nor his book 'Christian literature'.

We must not chase exceptions. On the whole we know what we mean when we speak of Christian literature. There is literature whose substance is essentially the substance of Christian revelation and Christian faith. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an obvious example. It is concerned with the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of Man, and the Redemption of Man in Christ. No substance could be more Christian than that. And it is concerned with these truths of revelation, not just as material for a work of objective artistry, but for a work whose purpose is to justify the ways of God to man. Moreover it is a project carried through in a spirit of prayerful dedication. The poem itself works out the poet's God-given vocation by the invoked power of the Holy Spirit. Literature thus soaked in Christian thinking and deeply concerned with man's earthly situation in the light of eternity has an important place in our literary history. One thinks of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and the mediaeval mystery and morality plays. One thinks of writers like the 17th century Metaphysical poets, Donne and Herbert, who focus with intensity on the personal spiritual pilgrimage, the wrestlings of the soul against the temptations of the world, its struggle to find peace in the knowledge and love of God. And one thinks of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

This is literature which cannot be adequately described or discussed in any depth without reference to the Christian faith—to God and Christ, to sin and forgiveness, to salvation and damnation. There is a quantity of such literature in the 17th century and in the Middle Ages. When I wrote a *Short History of English Literature*, I found myself frequently using specifically Christian concepts and theological vocabulary in covering these periods. Not so, however, in covering the 18th and 19th centuries. Apart from the hymns and poems of Cowper and that isolated oddity, Christopher Smart's *Song to David*, the 18th century produced little first-class Christian literature. In the 19th century, there is G. M. Hopkins, but he is an odd case in that his poetry

was not published until well into the 20th century. Otherwise, Hopkins apart, if one is looking in the 19th century for Christian literature in the sense in which we have defined it, one has to turn to minor writers like Christina Rossetti and Coventry Patmore.

But—this is the extraordinary thing—when we get to the 20th century—the mid 20th century, I should say—the literary historian finds himself, time and time again, referring to specifically Christian substance, not just in the work of minor writers, but in that of major writers, indeed often dominant writers. T. S. Eliot is a notable example. His output from the *Waste Land*, through *Ash Wednesday* to *Four Quartets* provides us with a new Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso which bring contemporary civilisation under judgement, analyse the Christian's personal progress through penitence to self-surrender, and project the way of renewal and recovery in strict incarnational and redemptional terms. Nor is Eliot alone. There are those—and they are very good judges indeed—who find a comparable private intensity and public sweep in David Jones's monumental poem *The Anathemata* (1952). Like Eliot's great work, this poem is an ingathering of fragments without narrative continuity. Jones was a Roman Catholic and the poem takes what patterning it has from the Mass. Again like Eliot, Jones rolls history and contemporaneity up together. The poem has been called 'a comprehensive declaration of the links between the whole of humanity and the Redemptive Act, between Art and Sacrament, between Bethlehem and Calvary.'

Then too we have 20th century poetry of spiritual wrestling as intense as Donne's or Herbert's. Indeed R. S. Thomas is a 20th century George Herbert both in the quality of his poetry and in his austere dedication to the work of the rural parish priest in Wales. His experience of the hill farmers has taught him how Nature is at once a brutalising force over against the demands of moral virtue and spiritual discipline, but at the same time a source of healing over against the corrupting effects of urban decadence and sophistication. This dual potential of Nature to brutalise and to heal is subsumed in a Christian awareness of man's openness to the bestial and to the spiritual. Thomas sees his fellow-creatures caught in this tension. In the same way he explores in ruthless detail the personal tensions of the priestly life—the bewilderment and spiritual testing provoked by the stark contrast between inclination and vocation, between what seems to make sense in earthly terms and the calling he has embraced. I was glad recently to hear Brian Morris on the radio call Thomas the best of our living poets. I think he is. And, if he is, it is surely interesting that the best living poet at work among us at any time during the last 50 years—Eliot, Auden, R. S. Thomas—has been a practising Anglican.

The 20th century has been rich too in the projection into fiction and drama of the kind of spiritual wrestling that an R. S. Thomas or a George Herbert expresses personally and directly. Indeed Lewis's own *Screwtape Letters* is a case in point. On a slightly different level there are the novels of Graham

Greene and those of William Golding. And of course there is Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, a fine archetypal study of the conflict between the spiritual and the temporal which relates every Christian's struggle to the pilgrimage of the martyr and to the passion of Christ. There is nothing finer or more enriching in this vein unless it be Helen Waddell's *Peter Abelard*, surely one of the masterpiece's of our century's literature.

I must stress that this resurgence of the Christian voice in our literature has occurred since 1930. In the earlier decades of the century the great names, with the exception of G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, carried no Christian connotation. Think of them. Shaw, Wells, Bennett, Barrie, Hardy, Kipling, Masfield, Galsworthy, Forster, Edward Thomas. Add the lesser names of Georgian poets, Monro, Davies, Hodgson, Gibson, De La Mare and the rest. Add the war poets, Graves, Sassoon, Rosenberg, Owen. (I am not saying none of these were Christians, but that they did not produce Christian literature.) After 1930 however it becomes easy to list writers whose Christian faith determines the character of their work overtly or implicitly. Among poets, Eliot, Auden, David Jones, Edith Sitwell, Edwin Muir, Andrew Young, R. S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings, Norman Nicholson, Jack Clemo, George McKay Brown, Vernon Watkins, Anne Ridler, Francis Berry . . . not to mention Betjeman. Christopher Fry must be added to the list as a verse dramatist. And in prose fiction there is Graham Greene, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, Helen Waddell and William Golding. Muriel Spark, J. R. R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, Barbara Pym and Evelyn Waugh have also some claim to be named.

The poets are a remarkable bunch. Andrew Young, a Scot, eventually a canon of Chichester, wrote a fine speculative poem about the after-life, *Out of the World and Back* (1958). Edwin Muir, another Scot, an Orkneyman, found in Christian revelation the archetypal imagery in which to express his personal experience of exile and loss. G. McKay Brown, another Orkneyman, is something of a Scottish R. S. Thomas. Jack Clemo, a Cornishman, a Calvinist, totally deaf and blind too, has a profound sense of Christianity as 'a redemptive invasion of nature by divine Grace'. The tension between nature and divine grace runs like a high-voltage current through his poetry. Norman Nicholson, a Cumbrian and an Anglican, has allowed his faith to interpenetrate his work both as poet and as verse-dramatist.

Of the novelists I will say a word only about Graham Greene. In an early essay he complained that the religious sense had been lost to the English novel in the early twentieth century, and with it what he called the sense of the importance of the human act. He even went on to lament that through seeking a compensatory importance in deeper layers of personality, subjective novelists like Virginia Woolf, 'having lost the spiritual world, lost the physical world also'. Indeed he went so far as to describe the characters of Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster as wandering 'like cardboard symbols through a world that is paper-thin'. Perhaps that makes clear what Greene was about in his determination to bring spiritual dimension and supernatural orientation to bear upon human dilemmas. In Greene secular humanistic notions of right

and wrong, of decency and caddishness, are distinguished from the Christian ethic—rooted in the idea of grace. This is evident in *Brighton Rock* (1938), in *The Power and The Glory* (1940) and in *The Heart of the Matter* (1944). You cannot talk about these novels without talking about sin and forgiveness, damnation and salvation, about the pressing demands of God upon the human soul. It was an achievement to make such issues central in works of literature. If Greene did nothing else, he impressed upon his readers the distinction between a happiness-orientated secular ethic and an obedience-orientated Christian ethic. In most fiction happiness is predominantly at issue. It has to be allowed, of course, that Greene overplays his hand in this respect. Sometimes scarcely merited haloes seem to float over the heads of prayerful Catholics who have sinned themselves into martyrdom, while ordinary decent unbelievers get small credit for their acts of genuine altruism. But when all is said, Greene deserves credit for packing fiction with religious content and getting away with it, even among secularists.

This is obviously not the proper place for me to try to make a survey of what the various writers I have mentioned stand for. I see it as remarkable that no such attempt appears to have been made as yet to pull together for general consideration the mass of literature produced by these writers, for it defies the prevailing drift towards the total secularisation of life and thought that has been evident during the last few decades. But it is not difficult to establish the point that the volume and quality of Christian literature since 1930 has been without parallel since the 17th century. Lewis was not as lonely as perhaps he thought he was.

Indeed Lewis began writing just at the point when this minor Christian Renaissance in literature was taking off. His *Pilgrim's Regress* came out in 1933. And the 1930s were a remarkable decade in this respect. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* came out in 1930, *The Rock* in 1934, *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935 and *Burnt Norton* in 1936. Charles Williams's *War in Heaven* was published in 1930, *The Place of the Lion* in 1931, *The Greater Trumps* in 1932, and his play *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* in 1936. Helen Waddell's *Peter Abelard* came out in 1933. Meanwhile on the stage James Bridie had great popular successes with his biblical plays *Tobias and the Angel* (1930) and *Jonah and the Whale* (1932). Then by 1937 Christopher Fry was launched with *The Boy with a Cart*. That same year saw Dorothy Sayers's *The Zeal of Thy House* performed, and David Jones's *In Parenthesis* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* published. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* followed in 1938 along with Williams's *Taliessin through Logres* and Greene's *Brighton Rock*. Eliot's *Family Reunion* followed in 1939, Greene's *The Power and The Glory* in 1940. During the same decade Evelyn Waugh was getting known and Rose Macaulay was in spate. Edwin Muir, Andrew Young and Francis Berry appeared in print.

So when the literary historian looks back at the English literary scene in the 1930s and 1940s he is going to see C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams, not as freakish throwbacks, but as initial contributors to what I have called a Christian literary renaissance, if a minor one. It was to extend over succeeding

decades, but they were in at the start. This is not the role of the dinosaur.

If the image of C. S. Lewis as the last surviving dinosaur does not fit his historical standing as an imaginative writer, what about his theological standing as a Christian apologist? There is no doubt that he suffered from *odium theologicum* to a painful degree. He was acutely sensitive to the fact that his theological books made him much hated as well as much loved. 'You don't know how I'm hated', he once said to me with great feeling.

Perhaps I should say a word at this point about my own connection with C. S. Lewis. I went up to Oxford in 1935 and, by an odd coincidence, I had read *The Pilgrim's Regress* soon after it came out in 1933. I re-read it carefully, pencil in hand, when I learned that C. S. Lewis was to be my tutor. Now you must remember that this book was coolly received and sold few copies. I did not find any fellow-student who was aware of it. I do not recall how soon or in what way I made it clear to C. S. Lewis that I had read it and enjoyed it; but naturally I did not waste this opportunity to get in with my tutor, and the point was made. I mention this because it is possible that I was soon marked in his mind as The Student who had actually read *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Be that as it may, we got on well together and C. S. Lewis was always ready to chat when the business of the tutorial was over.

It was some years after my student days were over that I came back into Lewis's orbit as a young writer. He helped me generously over my first books to be published and from time to time I went to spend a night at Magdalen for dinner, an evening's conversation, and breakfast with him. When my trilogy of theological novels came out in 1954 and 1955, *The Devil's Hunting-Grounde*, *Cold War in Hell* and *Blessing Unbounded*, Lewis read them and wrote to me encouragingly about each in turn. So his letters at that time tended to be about my books. But of course sometimes something was said which threw light on his own and, in this connection, one memory is worth recalling. I should explain that my trilogy is a sequence of journeys on the Dantean pattern through regions of the after life, though not exactly Purgatory, Hell and Heaven. The narrator is guided by his guardian angel. To spice the books and to suggest the element of judgement on the human soul, I gave my angel the idiom of the bureaucrat and the pedant—a mixture of the two, I suppose. Lewis questioned me about this. He thought it very funny, but he also seemed a little apprehensive lest I was not taking angel-hood seriously enough. He told me that when he wrote *Screwtape* his first idea had been to combine letters between the two devils trying to ensnare the human soul, with corresponding letters between two angels looking after the young man on the other side. But then he hesitated to enter the angelic mind—as though it might be too presumptuous. Now this—put in the friendliest possible way—certainly carried a probing point to cause me grave reflection. It appeared that I had rushed in among the angels where Lewis had feared to tread.

But my purpose here is to say something about the Oxford attitude to

Lewis the theologian, which no doubt helped to give him his sense of standing against the stream. Humphrey Carpenter has said some interesting things about it. Oxford dons objected to Lewis, not for becoming a Christian, but for advertising the fact. His way of putting intellectual and moral pressure on people in print for the purpose of converting them was an offence against academic etiquette. Unspoken rules of academic decorum required one to be decently secretive about religious convictions. One must remember, in this connection, that Lewis had no degree in theology and was therefore, in the eyes of some, trespassing into other people's rightful territory, an amateur taking on the experts. Plainly professional academic theologians could not be expected to enjoy having their thunder stolen. Lewis appealed to a vast audience, over the heads, as it were, of the university establishment and in defiance of academic protocol. In the eyes of some, he was using a donnish know-how to mesmerise the innocent masses with dialectical conjuring tricks.

As Christians we know that Lewis was right to do what he did. The message of the gospel is unmistakable in this respect. The disciples were ordered to preach the gospel throughout the world, and there was no mention of their need to graduate in theology first. By comparison with what C. S. Lewis had to tell his generation the protocol of even the most exalted university was trivial and petty. Nonetheless the offence was an irritating one for the Oxford academic mind. It was all very well to use the machinery of rigorous logic in playful exercise. It was good fun to manufacture syllogisms in the privacy of the tutorial room to sharpen and discipline the mind. And it was high sport to bring the artillery of logic into play in a spirit of semi-mockery in public debate in the Union on such propositions as: 'This House believes that a woman's place is in the home'. In these circumstances dialectical battle could be sportively joined and a thumping good time had by all. But here was a man, Lewis, who took the machinery of logic and soberly, devastatingly, proved that Naturalism was the implicit creed of half his academic colleagues and that it was nonsense; that dons and workers alike were miserable sinners, that Almighty God was calling upon them to confess themselves such, to cut the cackle and get down on their knees; for everything else they were involved in was trivial by comparison.

That was one of the most unpalatable home-truths of all. They'd got their priorities wrong. Wasn't Lewis as good as telling most of them that they had no sense of proportion, no awareness of what mattered supremely in life, being obsessed with the peripheral and the ephemeral? Wasn't he insisting that if they were not moving into the Christian way, they were lost in the mists of error, the unwitting agents of the evil one? The man had a perfect right to believe this secretly and share his strange notions with his friends in decent privacy. But he had no right at all to enter the public arena and use the verbal and dialectical equipment of the Oxford scholar and philosopher to press such a message upon others. The take-it-or-leave-it attitude was vulgar. The either-or dichotomy was a lapse from good taste. In the field of religious argument into which C. S. Lewis had entered, the polite method was to express every opinion tentatively, to begin every crucial sentence with expressions like 'It

could be argued that', 'A case might be made that' or 'It is possible to hold that'. And instead of indulging in such civilised exchanges of unruffled urbanity, here was a man who brandished the tool of learning like a battle-axe, and who brought his weapon crashing down to cleave the sheep from the goats in the name of God himself.

The intensity and coherence of Lewis's Christian understanding of life and thought provided one of the most formidable instances of Christian synthesis in our country; and it thrust Lewis into collision with the Oxford establishment. No doubt the collision could be identified as a collision between the Christian mind and the secular mind. But perhaps there would be justification for seeing it in some respects as a collision between the Irish mind and the English mind. I take up this matter for speculation because a notion has run in my head for some years that the English are allergic to Christianity, while the Irish readily get hooked on it.

There is in Ireland a frank, open religiousness not evident in England. To say that Irish Christians take their religion more seriously than English Christians would be misleading. Some of them, after all, take it more humorously. But no one who has read the literature of the Irish can be insensitive to the way Christianity seems to soak more pervasively into both their seriousness and their humour. Irish autobiographies abound in records of childhoods dominated by religious practices and religious talk. This often applies to the works of those who have rebelled against the faith as well as of those who have continued in it. It is the same in fiction. There often seems to be a more deeply ingrained awareness of Christianity in novels by Irish unbelievers than there is in novels by English believers. Christianity seems to 'take' with the Irish, to get into their bloodstream so that, healthily or pervertedly, gravely or comically, it surfaces in their life and thought. I mentioned Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* earlier. If literature is our guide, it seems that with the Irish Christianity 'takes' in such a way that they cannot even shake it off (mentally) when they cease to believe in it. Are the English, by comparison, Christianity-proof? I ask because the spectacle of unbelievers who seem unable to get Christianity out of their systems is an Irish spectacle, whereas the spectacle of supposed believers, especially theologians, who seem incapable of getting Christianity *into* their systems, is plainly an English spectacle. This, after all, was what Lewis was up against as an apologist.

There are certain aspects of Lewis's work that seem to me to mark him as an Irishman, yet when I try to define them, somehow the concept 'Irishness' tends to get lost. For instance, I would point to his mental sharpness, his devastating logic, his pictorial and illustrative abundance, his taste for myth and fantasy, his irony, his humour, his fluency, his rhetoric, his pugnacity and his symbolism. I would add to these that most central and significant quality of all; the theological clarity and inclusiveness, the all-embracing wholeness of theological articulation that subsumes all experience and all thought within its grasp; the appetite for comprehensiveness and universality. Obviously writers of various nations could be cited who share many of these

qualities; but somehow it is the list that comes to my mind when I try to analyse the recipe behind the overall savour of Lewis's work as an apologist that offended the nostrils of the English establishment and still offends them.

I naturally begin to wonder at this point whether the concept 'Irishness' has been called into being only as a converse to the concept 'Englishness', or perhaps I should say 'pukka Englishness'. For I argue that Lewis's rich dialectical combativeness and his taste for inflating the particular to the status of the universal go against the grain of the respectable English preference for niggling at particulars in isolation, for not leaping to conclusions, for avoiding what may lead to head-on intellectual conflict, for discouraging the whipping out of polemical swords, the unfurling of unambiguous credal banners. The English 'establishment' preference is for blunting sharp edges in controversy and greasing the works of social and intellectual interchange with the oil of non-commitment.

I must make the point that an Irish writer vastly different from Lewis engaged my attention for some years, as my book on Joyce's *Ulysses*, *The Bloomsday Book*, indicates. There is nothing remarkable, I suppose, about the fact that Joyce has many of the qualities by which I tried to define Lewis's Irishness—mental sharpness, logic, imaginative abundance, humour, rhetoric and so on. And I have sometimes thought that interesting comparisons might be detected in the kind of symbolism used by the two writers. Lewis's talking trees in *Narnia* somehow remind me of the arboreal wedding in the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*, and the head-long pursuit in *The Last Battle* (is it?) reminds me of the chase in Joyce's 'Circe' episode. The taste for allusive correspondences and fused layers of meaning is common. But I have been more interested in the dominant refusal of both writers to see the particular, the prosaic, the apparently trivial except within the context of what is universally significant. For both of them the ordinary person is embryonically heroic, his slightest acts or decisions potentially earth-shaking. Both, in their vastly different idioms and with totally different motives, involve the ephemeral, the pedestrian, and the diurnal with the epic and the cosmic, with archetypes that pattern all our ways.

The universality and comprehensiveness of literary significance cultivated by Joyce and Lewis is vastly different in motivation. The upgrading of the individual to the universal serves in the one case a decisively artistic purpose and in the other case a deeply moral purpose too. When Joyce's advertising agent, Leopold Bloom, strides about the streets of Dublin with a cake of soap clenched in his left hand and a rolled-up newspaper brandished in his right hand, Joyce makes clear that he is equipped with the shield and sword of the epic hero. For soap, the chemical product of modern manufacturing is a sure hygienic defence against all the ills threatening a materialistic civilisation, and the newspaper is the weapon with which modern man fights his battles. The symbolism and the parallels are, in T. S. Eliot's words, 'a way of controlling, ordering, of giving a shape and substance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'. But of course, to give literary shape and significance to what is futile and anarchic, though of some

satisfaction to the aesthetic observer, is not necessarily of much inspiration to the man who would seek to replace futility by purposefulness and anarchy by order in life itself. It may carry an implicit judgement on modern life, and therefore convey an oblique, though vague recommendation to do something about it. In Joyce this is tenuous at best, whereas Lewis never forgets that there is something to be done, and people can do it . . .

Thus the universality and comprehensiveness of significance cultivated by Lewis is something more than a literary matter. When he upgrades his mouse Reepicheek to the status of the battling hero, he is about something more than Joyce was about in turning Bloom's soap and newspaper into Homeric shield and sword. In both cases we are meant to smile at the ironic piquancy of the inflation; the plebeian ad-cadger Bloom becomes the epic hero Odysseus; the frail little mouse Reepicheek becomes the swashbuckling warrior. But in Reepicheek's case we are meant also to warm with admiration for courage, and indeed to ask ourselves whether *we*, in spite of our amusement, could emulate the dauntlessness of this little creature whom we should never have associated with valour.

You see both Joyce and Lewis turn the tables on the reader's initial laughter at the incongruity of humble ad-man or feeble mouse being heroic. But Joyce turns the tables only in the sense that the reader revises his view of the relative status of the anciently heroic and the currently pedestrian. Lewis turns the tables *qua* moralist. And that gets to you. Thus Lewis's purpose and technique in inflating the particular to the level of the universal goes to the root of the fact that he aroused fervent enthusiasm in some readers and violent antagonism in others; also to the root of the fact that this enthusiasm and antagonism were not so much literary/aesthetic as moral/philosophical. In this respect the issue is precisely Lewis's reading of the human situation in such terms that the apparently trivial is framed within the context of what is universally significant. All that man is about from day to day is embryonically heroic, potentially earth-shaking. The character of his apologetic and his fiction alike are determined by this fact.

For instance, in *The Screwtape Letters*, the powers of hell and heaven bear down on the question whether Wormwood's human patient is going to overcome his irritation at the way his mother lifts her eyebrow, or the question whether he will take a country walk down to an old mill for tea. One day the young man reads a book for pleasure—instead of for vanity or show—and takes a walk on his own because he enjoys it, and the senior devil comes down on the junior devil like a ton of bricks. Two solid but commonplace pleasures have been disinterestedly enjoyed—without any intrusion of conceit or self-congratulation—and the diabolical progress to date is all undone. There is anger in hell and a hint of joy in heaven.

The understanding of life in terms such as these plainly overturns any scale of values based on familiar secular criteria. There is nothing gimmicky about it. Nor is it simply a device for restoring the status of myth to pedestrian 20th century life—which was what Joyce was about when he made the smiles and banter of Dublin bar-maids and the sentimental ballads of Dublin ne'er-do-

wells lure his hero into the grip of idle sentiment, and paralleled it with the way Homer's Sirens tried to charm Odysseus from his duty long ago. For Lewis was about something more than the task of upgrading modern man to heroic stature for the purpose of shrouding him in literary pathos and ironic dignity. Lewis was about the serious business of putting human souls in the way of salvation. It was, of course, an imaginary soul that was under assault in the fictional *Screwtape Letters*. But there was an oblique assault too, a hidden assault, directed—not by His Abysmal Sublimity from his miserific hide-out—but from his great Enemy's Headquarters, and directed at the soul of the reader himself. For it is not just in fiction that supernatural realities bear down upon the soul of modern man. In his own life Lewis found that he was not safe from them when lifting his eyes from his book in the evening quiet of his study in Magdalen, when riding on a number two bus to Headington, or been given a lift on a trip to Whipsnade Zoo. As we know from *Surprised by Joy*, there was a divine Chess-player at work, watching his every moment of unweariness, and pushing him relentlessly into a corner.

The sense of proportion, the scale of priorities, which the defeated victim of such divine machinations will cherish are not going to be accessible, let alone acceptable, to those who cannot take with deep seriousness the impress of the supernatural upon natural life. Lewis's attitudes, over the various areas of thought and behaviour which his wisdom illuminated, so starkly forced into the open our Lord's Either/Or—'He who is not with me is against me'—that the reader is consciously left at a junction. Cosier theologians leave you at a comfortable resting-place. They leave you with a sense that you have temporarily got somewhere, can pause for a breather while you ponder such loose ends as they conveniently leave hanging around you. And there is no great urgency in this pondering, for you have a long way to go before there will be any need for grave concern about whether your route is the right one. Lewis, on the other hand, leaves you at a sign-posted junction where there can be no possibility of lingering. He prods you in the back so uncomfortably that you have no alternative but to choose your road—if 'choose' is the appropriate word when one sign reads 'Heaven' and the other reads 'Hell'.

Lewis's books are *active* books. They work on you. They will not let you be. To that extent they bear the marks of their ultimate Creator. Lewis is a writer who insists on being agreed with or disagreed with. Unless you enter fully into complicity with him against all the lurking agents of moral evil and intellectual error which ambush modern man—ambush you in the society which seemed so harmless, so neutral, until he analysed its hidden operations for you and traced its illusory deceptions back to the Father of all lies—unless you enter fully into complicity with Lewis in this respect then you are going to have to reject him utterly, or find evasive terms by which to render his method suspect and his message innocuous. You are going to have to find a way to disarm him by patronisation ('Rather dated, I'm afraid, isn't it?') or jump out of the way of his agile weaponry.

In this connection I recall one of the earliest conversations I had with Lewis at the end of a tutorial when I was a young student. The news had just come

through that G. K. Chesterton had died. I said how much I had delighted in his work and Lewis became warmly enthusiastic in his praise. His indebtedness to Chesterton was evident. Like Chesterton, he sensed the larger struggle between Christianity and paganism or secularism implicit in the minor intellectual conflicts of daily life, as he sensed the struggle between angel and devil behind every man's daily moral vacillations. Chesterton had cultivated a ready knack of imprinting a hint of cosmic conflict between the powers of darkness and the powers of light upon human endeavours, whether they are heroic confrontations on the battlefield or humdrum encounters on a London bus. Chesterton lived mentally in a world lit by tokens of divine order and under threat from the negations of human (and diabolical) rebellion. Lewis inhabited the same world.

This is precisely what cuts a chasm between one reader and another. It could be argued that whether or not a reader responds sympathetically to Lewis's work is a touchstone by which you can measure whether at root he thinks christianly or is infected by secularist criteria. For the Christian mind sees human life and human history held in the hands of God, and there is nothing in man's daily life and thought, however supposedly trivial, that can be dismissed as being outside the scope of that scrutiny that separates obedience from disobedience, good from evil. A writer like James Joyce may have focused the telescopic lens of literature on pedestrian minutiae and daily trivia for dramatic and emotive effect. Lewis did it because the close-up on what you and I or anybody else is about from moment to moment reveals nothing less than the fulfilling or negating of God's purposes for us.

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Ireland

by DAVID N. HEMPTON

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare . . . for I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:7-11

Religious ideas have the fate of melodies, which, once set afloat in the world are taken up by all sorts of instruments, some of them woefully coarse, feeble or out of tune, until people are in danger of crying out that the melody itself is detestable.

George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*¹

There are few places on earth where religious melodies are played with coarser instruments than in Northern Ireland, especially when it comes to matters of faith and politics. Consequently, there is now a whole generation of young people committed either to violence or to religious cynicism. More than that, cynicism is married to hopelessness, because any rational evaluation of Ulster's problems is bound to be pessimistic, due to the irreconcilable objectives of its citizens, the historical weight of generations of conflict, the polarization that violence always brings, a crumbling economy, and the apparent inability of churches to offer any real hope. This sense of despair has grown in recent months in the wake of the hunger strike, and the realisation that our thirteen years of conflict will almost certainly continue into the foreseeable future. To be thought of as realistic in Ulster political life it is apparently necessary to manifest hopelessness and despair, yet the Christian ought to be familiar with another kind of vocabulary, with words like hope, salvation, redemption, love and grace. This tension between external pessimism and internal hope is the most profound difficulty facing Christians in N. Ireland and relates closely to the sufferings of Christ, particularly on the cross, where a similar tension between love and despair resulted in the one truly hopeful event in the world's history.

This paper cannot hope to deal with new political initiatives, or the strengths and weaknesses of the political parties, or what went wrong in the past. There are in any case dozens of different views on these questions and the past cannot be undone. We must learn to crawl before we can walk, so there is a need to go back to proper theological principles to begin to clear our minds of years of prejudice and cultural conditioning. We also need to demolish before we can create.

I believe there are at least seven wrong ways to think about the relationship between religion and politics, all of which are detectable in this province, and all are doubly dangerous because they have at least a grain of truth in them. In this area, partial truths are generally more hazardous than lies.

1. The Sin and Sit it out Philosophy

This view is based on an over-developed theology of the fall, and consequently, an under-developed theology of redemption. Since human nature is totally corrupt, it is argued, one should expect nothing but chaos in this world. Therefore, our calling is to endure with patience until Christ returns. To engage in political and social action is really to waste one's time; far better to withdraw from a sinful world, save individual souls, and think expectantly of eternity. This view was particularly strong amongst nineteenth century pre-millennialists and ultra-Tories, and a modified version of it still survives within that theological and political tradition. The weakness of this tradition is that it undervalues God's continuing interest in His creation, and the role we are commanded to play as salt and light in restraining evil, keeping alive hope, and playing our part in God's gracious desire for redemption.

Think of Jeremiah 29. The year is about 595 B.C., Jerusalem has fallen to the Babylonians and captives have been taken into exile. A number of false prophets spoke of a speedy return for the exiles, but Jeremiah thought otherwise. According to him the exile would last seventy years, and those years were not to be endured in gloomy despair or suicidal disillusionment. Quite the opposite (see v.7). For the Christian, who is, in a sense, in exile in this world, it ought to be possible to embrace the world without necessarily falling in love with it. If we fail to commit ourselves positively to the improvement of things around us (including politics and society) then we end up with stunted personalities ourselves, and scare off potential talent which can find no expression in dowdy and sullen churches.

Moreover, it is an inescapable fact that we, as Christian citizens in a democracy, cannot avoid political action (in the widest sense) even if we wanted to. A non-vote is a political act in favour of the status quo, and whether we vote or not, we pay taxes which governments spend for us. We all have to act politically, and as Christians, we ought to do so on the basis of Christian criteria.

2. Unrealistic Liberalism

In the past thirteen years there have been many platitudinous comments from predominantly liberal (with a small l) politicians and church leaders that reconciliation, being stronger than conflict, must succeed in the end. These comments are, of course, well intentioned, but their mixture of Western bourgeois liberalism, political romanticism and middle-class paternalism, is simply not realistic. Those who hold this view of the world create fictions e.g. that there is a huge fund of goodwill and moderation which somehow never

gets expressed. Repeated election results give the lie to this kind of optimism. Make no mistake about it, we cannot make progress in this country until it is recognised that there are *real* issues dividing people, that cannot be etherised by words like dialogue and aspirations.

I wish to be careful here. I am not devaluing commendable attempts to bring communities together, nor am I advocating the retreat of churches into denominational ghettos. Who knows what state this nation might be in if it were not for innumerable attempts to bring people together in churches, youth clubs, prayer groups, house fellowships, community centres, schools, and so on. However, we must not deduce from all this that a surge of goodwill *in itself*, will result in peace and stability, when the issues are so intractable. We need a strong dose of realism and historical sophistication in these matters. Conflict and violence, in the past, have been disturbingly influential in shaping the political destiny of nations, including ours.

We need to mix realism with love, in a way that perhaps only Christ has exemplified. He never avoided confrontation (sometimes bitter and protracted), but he never abandoned love. Somehow enmity must be embraced. Irreconcilable objectives must be seen as such. In short, Christian love and truth must not be allowed to degenerate into wishful thinking and idealism.

3. *The Politicisation of the Gospel or the Gospelisation of Politics*

Edward Norman, in his 1979 Reith Lectures, "Christianity and the World Order"²; argued that Western Christianity had married the Gospel to a political and social ideology comprising elements of Western liberalism and pseudo-marxism. This marriage, according to Norman, has condemned the Western churches to inexorable decline. Paradoxically, the more the churches have striven to show that they are modern and intellectually in tune with the rest of the world, the more pronounced has been their decline. Not content with ruining the authentic Gospel message in the West, Norman alleges that liberal and marxist notions have now been introduced into South America and Africa, via theological education and cultural imperialism.

Norman is *not* arguing that Christians should have nothing to do with politics, but rather that we must be careful not to make political ideas part of the Gospel message itself. To take a crude example, when Christ is portrayed as a kind of left-wing revolutionary figure then that, says Norman, is politicising the Gospel. This is not the place to debate whether Norman's analysis of Christianity and the world order is correct or not. In my view his emphasis on the spiritual and eternal dimensions of the Christian faith have been as timely as his understanding of third world realities has been shallow. Nevertheless, his central thesis is easily applied to Northern Ireland. When a Protestant says 'for God and Ulster' or when a Catholic says 'for God and Ireland', they are, in fact, politicising the Christian message. Protestant fundamentalism and Catholic nationalism have been equally guilty in

supposing that God has sanctified their national and cultural prejudices. Of course all of us have personal preferences about what kind of cultural environment suits us best, but to pretend that God loves us more deeply because of these preferences is theological arrogance bordering on blasphemy. When a Protestant says that his faith is dependent on the maintenance of Stormont, he is, in fact, declaring that he has no faith at all. When a nationalist pins his faith on a united and Catholic Ireland, he is, in fact, reviving one of the oldest and most destructive heresies in Christendom—that is the marriage of a religious establishment to a national identity.

Just as serious a problem standing in the way of peaceful progress is the infusion of political ideas with misplaced religious zeal. Consider, for example, this comment by Conrad Russell on the English civil war in the seventeenth century.

Even with real political skill on all sides, a settlement would have been very difficult to achieve. Yet it could only be made harder by the astonishingly unpolitical method in which most of the parties concerned pursued it. Fear and idealism made a bad mixture, and it could only make the situation more difficult that most of the parties concerned had an uncompromising determination to achieve things which could not possibly be. [The leading protagonists who were all imbued with religious and political idealism] belonged to that school of thought which holds that the proposition that politics is the art of the possible is not merely open to abuse, but actually sinful³.

Christians who get themselves involved in politics must recognise that politics and theology are not about exactly the same things. The former depends on calculation and accommodation whereas the latter rightly emphasises absolutes. Once again there is need for care here, because politics, as anyone who reads election manifestoes knows well, is not free from unrealistic idealism. Moreover, I am not advocating the divorce of Christian principles from political participation. In fact, my complaint about Irish politics and religion is not their interconnection; but their inadequacy, as presently joined, to deal with the problems facing us. The proper Christian approach to politics should be based on genuine biblical principles and not on our cultural preoccupations with sex and Sunday. This means serious Bible study on the social application of concepts like justice, righteousness, grace and the kingdom of God. This will be difficult, even painful, but if we are to be taken seriously we can no longer afford to give fundamentalist answers to extraordinarily complicated problems. This is not mere accommodationism, nor is it a trendy Ulster version of liberation theology; it is simply a plea for Christian relevance and integrity.

4. *Triumphalism and Tribalism*

This kind of political behaviour plays on people's fears, hatreds, credulities, insecurities, prejudices and ambitions. In other words it feeds the

very things that militate against genuine spiritual progress. Whereas in the New Testament there is much about esteeming others, loving one's neighbour, and denying self, the politics of triumphalism are essentially self-assertive. As a result, many Ulster men and women are religious schizophrenics. This serious spiritual illness goes undiagnosed in churches with a vested interest in maintaining sectarianism. The politics of triumphalism merge with the Irish love of showmanship and melodrama in things like papal visits, Carson trails, Orange processions, Hibernian parades and Apprentice Boys' marches. Many of these things are harmless enough in themselves, but melodies of belligerence and tribal domination are closely mixed up with the processional rough music of both Catholics and Protestants. What a pity it is that our festivals are so provocative to the opposition. Politics based on triumphalism and domination can undoubtedly produce a certain kind of peace and stability, through fear, but they can never produce respect and justice. As such it is difficult to see how Christians can travel on this road without burning at least some pages in their Bibles.

5. Equivocation over Violence

It is a truism in Irish history that violence usually pays dividends. It is inconceivable that the changes which have taken place in Northern Irish government and society in the past two decades could have been achieved by any other method than violence. In the twentieth century terrorism has become international because it has been staggeringly successful as a vehicle for political and social change. Yesterday's terrorists are often today's reputable politicians.

In Ireland, because the link between power and violence is so close, political and ecclesiastical leaders have often flirted with terrorist organisations—if only by implication. The Irish people, in general, are terribly flawed in this respect. We always seem to create unheroic heroes. In my view, although violence may be the way of power and influence, it is unequivocally not the way of the cross. Christ's rôle as the suffering servant is one of the most humbling and moving examples in history—so clear is the example that Christians have little choice but to follow it. It is hard for a realistic person, Christian or otherwise, to reject the most powerful weapon he has—violence—in return for almost certain failure. Hard, but absolutely necessary. There must be an end to ecclesiastical equivocation over violence, from wherever it comes (recent signs have been encouraging in this respect). But further, it is up to governments and to majorities to ensure that there is enough scope for peaceful political change to make violence the social outcast it undoubtedly is. Those who provoke violence are just as guilty as those who engage in it.

6. The Politics of No Responsibility

When one finds oneself in a political and social mess, there is a very natural temptation to allocate blame. So, depending on whose views you listen to, our problems have been caused by the politicians, the British

government, Tory economic policies, the Dublin government, the Catholic Church, the army and other security forces, the provisional I.R.A. or the U.D.A.. The difficulty with this approach is that it leaves little room for self-criticism or fresh analysis. Now if this were simply a history paper it would be comparatively easy to give solid and fairly convincing historical explanations for Ireland's current plight. But explanations don't change anything, and being an historian simply makes it easier to justify one's own pessimism about Ireland's future. Being a Christian means that one doesn't always have to explain problems in terms of *other* people's wrongdoing. Moreover, a healthy self-criticism combined with the imaginative ability to understand why the other person thinks as he does, are virtues commended to us in the New Testament. No doubt all this sounds too individualistic and wishy-washy, but unless we can get to the point where Irish people recognise that our problems are partly the responsibility of every citizen and not just the malevolent creation of small coteries, then we are not thinking Christianly about politics and society, or about ourselves. True enough, in a complex Western society individuals seem unimportant, but even when the ballot box opens up a rare opportunity to influence events, Irish people have consistently shown that they love a dark past more than the possibility of a new future. Our churches (Protestant and Catholic), as collective distributors of Christian information, have failed to educate the Irish population in areas where it matters most—in relationships, family life, social concerns, financial responsibilities and politics.

7. *The Search for the Holy Grail*

The fact is that Northern Irish citizens have been dealt a dead hand by generations of unfortunate decisions, missed opportunities and shady compromises. Thus, what we have now is a remarkably complex set of problems, conflicts and mutually incompatible aspirations. Let us admit, then, that in the present climate there are no easy structural or political devices which can somehow paper over the cracks in our society. In fact, looking for a conventional structural solution, accompanied by frequent elections, is itself part of the problem.

It is difficult to think of any future scenario as favourable to a reconciliation of Northern Ireland's split community as the political events of 1973-4, when the power sharing executive was sent on its way with the full backing of the British civil service. W. D. Flackes has stated that

... the Faulkner Unionists, S.D.L.P. and Alliance had a real majority in the Assembly to back the power-sharing Executive in its initial stages. Not the new magic figure of 70 per cent, but still around 50 of the 78 seats. The Executive was not simply founded on the ingenuity of William Whitelaw in smoke-filled rooms at Stormont Castle.

But it was the product of very special circumstances. If there was fear and uncertainty among Unionists about the future of the U.K. link, the S.D.L.P. in 1973 were solidly behind British thinking on power-sharing and the re-discovered Council of Ireland. They were a largely united minority force, and

achieved the remarkable result in that election of taking 19 seats and having only one lost deposit from 28 candidates. In a sense, the old roles had been reversed—Unionists were fighting Westminster and new-style Nationalists had shown themselves willing allies of a British Government.⁴

My point is that even in these 'very special circumstances' a partnership government could not survive the strains imposed on it by loyalist pressure. In the wake of the hunger strike, and with the undisputed electoral power of the D.U.P. and Sinn Fein, it is difficult to imagine such favourable conditions returning for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the dead hand of our past is upon us, or as Canon John Baker wrote, 'theologically it bears all the distinguishing marks of true evil, namely that there is no right answer to the problems it poses'⁵. There is no rational step forward that is not open to fatal objections, and social and political engineering cannot solve the problems. In fact the only thing that really unites republicans and loyalists, British and Irish, is our inability to offer even a plausible, never mind successful, answer to the misery of Northern Ireland. Our own answers, bred out of our own group histories, are no good. But instead of recognising this fact, the party manifestoes for the recent assembly elections seemed intent on looking back to past events.

It is relatively easy, of course, to analyse the mistakes of the past and the present, but it is remarkably difficult to say anything new or hopeful about N. Ireland's political outlook. It is equally difficult, even amongst Christian people, to arrive at any consensus as to future directions. In the sure knowledge, however, that old pathways have not served us well I wish to make five points of a more positive nature.

1. *Our Theology must be right*

Christians who are aware of human sinfulness and God's graciousness ought never to be sullenly pessimistic or naïvely optimistic about this world. A proper theology of creation, fall and redemption should make us committed to the world, but with realistic objectives about what can be achieved in it. However, it is absurd for Christians, who believe that God's grace is the centre of the Christian faith, to abandon hope in their daily lives—even in political matters.

'For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'

Jer. 29:11

*'Human fallibility is not to be denied, but it is not what Christianity is, or ought to be, "about". To deduce from human ambiguities and corruption the "worthlessness of all earthly expectations" is to deny grace and make man rather than God determinative in the world. The substance of Christianity is not a "view of man" but believing in God and participation in his life by the Spirit. Consequently, the pivot of Christianity in the world is not the fall but redemption . . . The Fallenness of man is a universally pervasive power but it has been limited and unsettled by God the redeemer.'*⁶

How can we, who have discovered grace in our own personal lives, deny the possibility of grace operating on a wider community level? In God's world there is always a 'future' and a 'hope' until he chooses to wind it up.

2. *Penitence*

Paul Oestreicher, the ex-chairman of Amnesty International, stated in a public lecture at Queen's University Belfast, that neither a wave of goodwill nor an attitude of forgiveness could break the sectarian deadlock in this province. According to him what is required is penitence—both public and corporate. He said that it was difficult for the churches to admit guilt, but felt that the Roman Catholic Church for one needed to repent of its exclusivity (particularly in the areas of education and mixed marriages), and of its deliberate fostering of nationalism which has made it morally ambiguous on occasions over terrorist violence. In Oestreicher's view the first move should come from the ecclesiastically strong—the Roman Catholic church. Similarly, there is a need for the politically strong, the Protestant majority, to repent of its past discrimination in so many areas. What Protestant can boast of his conscience in these matters when it has taken such community destruction to alert us to things that were going on under our very noses?

We all know how powerful a healer penitence is in our spiritual lives and in our personal relationships. What marriage could exist for more than a few months without the word sorry? Yet how often have you heard a N. Ireland church leader or politician say 'I was wrong' or 'we made a mistake'? Only Gerry Fitt, over the issue of political status, had the moral courage to say that he had been wrong, and was rewarded by the virtual end of his political career. How sad it is that so few of us can distinguish between moral courage and weakness.

Of course penitence is costly and risky. It is not always reciprocated. But is it more risky than the growing spiral which aggression and self-assertion inevitably produce? In a sense, we are like two communities fighting over a loaf, which has now become a pile of crumbs. There can be no lasting peace in this province, however ingenious the political initiatives might be, until the sectarian deadlock is broken.

3. *Facing up to our History*

"Happy is the nation with no history" is an adage appropriate to Ireland, with so much history, so little of it happy. But such unhappiness allows room for myth, nostalgia and romanticism, so that few nationalities in the modern world are as preoccupied with their past as the Irish, even when their folk migrations have left Erin far behind. Moreover, preoccupation does not necessarily enlighten the understanding, instead it can often cement prejudices. Consequently the interpretation of Irish history is itself a matter of contention between republicans and unionists. What is indisputable however, is that what Professor Lyons has called 'the burden of our history' is upon us to an extent which the rest of the world finds puzzling and confusing. In

addition, unhelpful and frequently sensationalised media coverage of Ulster in the past fifteen years has encouraged international public opinion to regard the province as 'a place where bloodthirsty bigots of various obscure sects murder each other incessantly for reasons no sane man can fathom'⁸

In such limited space it is impossible to do justice to the complex historical roots of the current instability in Ireland which would alone convince the 'sane man' that the Irish are not congenitally troublesome, but have been victims of historical circumstances not always of their own making. Rather I intend to concentrate on two fundamental problems that have been bequeathed to us by our past; the first relates to the cultural diversity of the people living in Ireland, and the second concerns the impact of extra-Irish agencies.

Past patterns of settlement and religious practice have left an indelible imprint on modern Ireland. Professor Lyons is thus able to analyse the Irish problem in terms of four different, and often conflicting, cultures: Anglo-American, Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and Presbyterian. His argument is that Ireland's current plight is largely due to the fact that 'over the last hundred years few people have tried to relate political solutions to cultural realities'.⁹ One might add that Irishmen of all cultural backgrounds have been more interested in fighting for dominance than in learning how to live at peace with different kinds of people. Such conflict carries its own penalty however, because the major cultural groups in Ireland have become inexorably more defensive, strident and unappealing. This in turn makes political accommodation more difficult and so the spiral goes on.

A second problem bequeathed to us by our past is the result of extra-Irish influences. For example, Desmond Bowen in his book *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-70*¹⁰ states that Ireland's unhappy religious divisions were deepened in the nineteenth century by two expanding religious movements—Catholic Ultramontanist and British evangelicalism. Ireland was therefore a particularly intense microcosm of a global religious conflict, which has now almost abated in the rest of the world, but whose legacy lives on in this country.

Another outside factor in the current instability is the financial and emotional support given by Irish-Americans to violent republicanism. The unwillingness of Irish immigrants to cut their umbilical cord of anti-British sentiment is a psychological disorder that has cost far too many Irish lives. In short, those outside Ireland with a stake in its future, whether in Rome, London or New York, must not adopt political and ecclesiastical attitudes which only deepen the spiral of destruction, whatever their claims to the contrary. Irishmen must face up to the problems of their own history with honesty and integrity. This is hard enough without loading the dice from outside.

4. *Acceptance of Realities*

More practically, and perhaps more controversially, I believe that there can be no end to the present violence until everyone accepts, however

regretfully, that there is a border in this country. Whatever the historical reasons for its origin, and no matter how wistfully people may speculate on what might have been, the border has now existed for sixty years and is likely to survive at least until the end of this century. N. Ireland citizens must accept what they don't like until they can change it peacefully and by persuasion. From the nationalist point of view, while violence has certainly promoted changes within N. Ireland, it has irrevocably destroyed the possibility of Irish unity for a considerable period. From the unionist point of view, every fresh act of violence merely stiffens the resolve not to surrender to aggressive nationalism. Think again of the Jeremiah passage. The Jews had their city sacked by a foreign army and were carted off into exile in Babylonia, yet Jeremiah still writes—'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'

Unfortunately in N. Ireland, boycott and discrimination are almost impossible to separate. Unfortunately also, those who have suffered most in the past thirteen years have been those living in areas where the nationalist dream has been propagated most fervently. Idealistic dreams, like all secular political fantasies, have now become gruesome nightmares for too many people. In this tiny European off-shore island, the time for dreams has surely ended, now it is time to seek the genuine welfare of *all* its people. Jeremiah was right. In seeking the welfare of the place in which we live, we also achieve our own welfare. That is not to say that people must give up their ultimate aspirations, any more than the Jews were asked to give up hope of a restoration, it is merely advocating the acceptance of a reality until circumstances can be changed peacefully. Moreover, this is not simply a sophisticated argument for the long-term maintenance of the *status quo*, any more than Jeremiah had a vested interest in maintaining Babylonian military dominance. For this idea to have any chance of success in N. Ireland, those entrusted with government must be seen to be governing in the interests of all its citizens and not just a favoured section, whether of class, religion or culture. In addition, we must recognise that other people's desires, though different from our own, are nevertheless legitimate. They are not wicked for holding them, though they are wicked in saying that they must have their desires met, by force if necessary.

One would hope also that within a more harmonious political climate, and within the context of the E.E.C., the border would be stripped of its more obviously divisive elements. Although it is admittedly disparate in its culture, this island is too small for rigid frontiers.

5. A deeper concern for the quality of life in church and society

In essence, the major division in Northern Irish society is not between unionists and republicans but between those who improve the quality of life for its citizens and those who demean it. The saddest thing of all about

sectarian politics and romantic nationalism is that more important issues of social and economic policy get relegated to the bottom of the pile. We live in a country of massive unemployment, appalling housing, urban decay, and all sorts of related social problems, yet these matters scarcely ever determine an election result. William Morris, the nineteenth century designer, poet and revolutionary socialist, argued that the quality of life of working people could not be secured by 'coercing certain families or tribes, often heterogeneous and jarring with one another, into certain artificial and mechanical groups, and call them nations, and stimulate their patriotism—i.e. their foolish and envious prejudices'¹¹. From the other side of the political spectrum Brian Mawhinney, the Ulster born Conservative M.P. has stated that 'the tribal politics of intransigence is killing jobs just as surely as it is killing people'. He went on to say that if there was no change in our political and economic circumstances then 'unemployment will rise even further and even more idle hands will turn to violence, thus killing investment and jobs and confirming the vicious downward spiral'¹². To me our circumstances have all the characteristics of the judgement of God—namely, that if we persist in holding fundamentally evil attitudes then we can expect the fabric of our society to be torn apart.

Churches must also direct their attention to the quality of life both inside and outside their particular communities. The old links between religious denominations and tribal political loyalties must be broken. This will be exceptionally difficult, but there is a need for courageous church leaders to defy the traditional pressures that are put upon them and lead their people along happier paths. Even if this resulted in a numerical weakening of the churches, which I do not believe would happen, it would greatly increase the moral and spiritual credibility of such organisations in the eyes of the world. God's new society, the church, must be faithful to the word of God and put its own house in order in these matters. It is time for the Christian churches in the province to be part of the solution rather than being contributors to the problem. Or to use George Eliot's image, we Christians in Ireland must cease to play religious melodies with coarse musical instruments. If we refuse then we must expect people, both in Ireland and further afield, to declare that the melody itself is detestable. Who would blame them? Secondly, we must hope that God's new society will have a beneficial impact on our national life. Nevertheless, even if Ireland continues in turmoil for another century, how sweet it would be if God's people were able to witness effectively to the love of God 'which binds everything together in perfect harmony'. Because, as things stand at present, the secular world mocks our piety and our pretentiousness. For Christians it is absolutely imperative that grace, penitence, love and forgiveness should overcome violence, triumphalism, moral ambiguity and prejudice.

Conclusions

When I gave a modified version of this paper at a recent conference in Belfast, an American theologian of South American extraction told me

afterwards that, although he disagreed with parts of it, he admired its mixture of grace and realism. I now believe that these qualities strike at the very heart of our predicament in Northern Ireland. Idealism, wishful thinking and false optimism must be banished from our minds along with despair and hatred. There are after all no easy solutions—what is needed is the patient development of a righteous and just society in which Christians must be prepared to take a lead, even if it should go against our cultural grain. It is appropriate to conclude with Canon Baker's words—There are no structural devices which can hope to endure in the present climate, or even to be accepted. It is the air itself which has to be changed.¹³

NOTES

1. In the short story *Janet's Repentance* (Penguin, 1973).
2. The lectures were printed in *The Listener* between 2 November and 7 December 1978. They were subsequently published as a book by Oxford University Press in 1979.
3. Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History 1509-1660* (Oxford, 1971), pp 376-7.
4. *Fortnight*, no. 188 (October 1982), p.4.
5. John Baker, unpublished study notes entitled 'Ireland and Northern Ireland' (January, 1981)
6. Haddon Willmer, 'Does Jesus call us to Political Discipleship?' in Willmer et al., *Christian Faith and Political Hopes* (London, 1979), pp. 123-4.
7. Any serious attempt to understand Ireland should begin with its history. The following studies are recommended: J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London, 1966); Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland 1921-39* (Dublin, 1979), and *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1981); Robert Kee, *Ireland* (London, 1980); F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1973), and *Culture and Anarchy in Modern Ireland* (London, 1979); A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (London, 1967); and J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1970* (Dublin, 1971).
8. F. S. L. Lyons, *The Burden of our History* (Belfast, 1979), p.26.
9. *Ibid.*, p.14.
10. (Dublin, 1978).
11. William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London, 1891), ch. 14.
12. An address to businessmen in Belfast (1982).
13. Baker, *op.cit.*

I am indebted to Canon John Baker for the use of his study notes, to countless ministers and laymen who have made comments on different versions of this paper, and to Paul Oestreicher and Desmond Bowen for public lectures in Belfast.

The Myth of Darwin's Metaphor

by DAVID N. LIVINGSTONE

On 24th November 1859 Charles Darwin published a hurried summary of a theory he had been developing since his return to England in 1837 from a long South American voyage aboard H.M.S. 'Beagle'. This 'abstract', as he called it, turned out to be a 700-page book with the rather imposing title, *On the origin of species by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. Then and since, Darwin's theory of evolution has been a source of periodic, often raging controversy, especially among Christians. Indeed whole organizations, equipped with research facilities and in-house journals, have come into being with the sole aim of demolishing the evolutionary edifice, and replacing it with 'scientific creationism'. Those involved in such an ambitious programme are duty-bound, I would have thought, to grapple with the technicalities of palaeontology, biogeography, biology, zoology and population genetics. In this paper, however, I do not intend to discuss any of these questions; rather I want to look in a more philosophical way at the idea of evolution in order to identify what I believe to be far more fundamental challenges to biblical Christianity. And I would hope, moreover, that the kind of approach which I am taking here will enable us, on the one hand, to be fair to Darwin and his project, and on the other, to distinguish central questions from peripheral ones.

Before turning directly to the Darwinian theory, I want to outline an important principle of interpretation which I intend to use throughout my investigation. At first sight it is unimpressively simple, almost a truism; 'nature is natural'. By this I mean that nature is not a person, does not have personality, and cannot exhibit characteristics of personhood. This implies, for example, that nature of itself cannot make decisions, strive towards an ambition, exhibit emotions, or experience pain. If this seems quite clear cut, indeed self-evident, it is worth remembering that we often tend to personify nature when we speak of it as teaching lessons, showing the way, or being raped. Of course we all know what we mean by such metaphorical expressions; but then again there are animists, pantheists, mystics, emergent evolutionists and perhaps process theologians who might be less happy with the way I have formulated my interpretative principle. John Muir, for example, a leading nineteenth century American propagandist of wilderness preservation, assured his readers that "Nature may heal and cheer and give

strength to body and soul alike",¹ while Frazer Darling, more recently, has called us back to "the truth of Zoroastrianism . . . that we are all of one stuff, difference is only in degree, and God can be conceived as being in all and of all, the sublime and divine immanence."² This propensity to imbue the natural order with personality, or indeed spirituality, has in fact a long history and can often be detected in the writings of those who spell 'Nature' with a capital 'N'. Nevertheless, I want to reject it and retain my principle for two reasons. Firstly the mystification of nature, as this tendency can be described, sharply conflicts with the biblical view of creation; and secondly, the rejection of all forms of nature mysticism was a prerequisite for the emergence of modern experimental science. In point of fact these two themes are closely related in the history of the West, and for this reason I want to resort briefly to the early post-Reformation period.

The question of why modern science, as we think of it today, first flourished in sixteenth century Europe and seventeenth century England has perplexed historians for generations. Not surprisingly they have put forward a host of possible explanations; some stress the navigating needs of a maritime nation and the recent availability of simple technology, others the structural transformation of society due to the growing strength of its manufacturing class, still others the repercussions of a Protestant 'ethic' or ethos wedded to the needs of a nascent capitalism.³ But there can be little doubt that much of the engine power behind the emergence of modern science sprang from the theological revolution of the Reformation. Without going into detail I think it can be said that the Reformers' rejection of the mediaeval tendency to mystify nature was a conceptual mainspring of experimental science. For them creator and creation could never be conflated: for the created order was separate in essence from God and yet dependent on Him for its ultimate being and inherent structure; in philosophical language God and His creation were contingently related. The implications for science were both plain and immediate. The natural world could, and should, be understood by observation; scientists no longer had to be closet theologians; nature operated according to laws imposed upon it by the Creator. In a sense therefore it was the secularization, or if you like 'de-deification' of nature, within the confines of a biblical cosmology, which gave impetus to the cultural experiment now known as the scientific enterprise. And this steadfast refusal to 'divinize' anything finite was a cornerstone in the scientific philosophy of such pioneers as Bacon, Newton and Boyle.⁴

The reason I have given this thumb-nail sketch of the rise of natural science is to demonstrate just how important the aphorism 'nature is natural' has been in its historical development. And, by implication, it suggests that the principle is a useful one for distinguishing between genuinely scientific theories about nature, and those rather more philosophically or ideologically inspired. So, as we now turn to look at Darwin's theory as a conceptual model for explaining natural history, and at the way it has been extended to other spheres, it will be useful to bear these more general points in mind.

Darwin and Natural Selection

Charles Darwin, of course, did not invent evolution. Rather, since the time of the Greeks, the idea of a hierarchy linking the simplest inorganic phenomena to the most complex organisms has been a perennial theme in the Western tradition. For some this 'chain of being', as it is often called, was understood to be static, for others it took on a more dynamic character especially when temporalized, that is when spread out over time⁵. As far as the term 'evolution' is concerned, it was originally applied to the embryological development of the foetus and, perhaps for this reason, Darwin did not use the word until the fifth edition of his book. The issue is even more complicated by the fact that independent evolutionary theories were advanced in natural history by Lamarck and Chambers, in sociology by Spencer and Comte, and in prehistoric archaeology and cultural anthropology by men like Boucher de Perthes, Tylor, Maine and Morgan. Darwin's real contribution was that he put the theory of evolution on a new and imposing scale by specifying a *mechanism* by which the transmutation of species could be effected, namely natural selection.⁶ The idea was both grand and simple. Darwin showed how the multitude of living things in our world, so obviously and often beautifully adapted to their environments, could have come into being without recourse to direct divine interventions—in short, in a plain, causal, naturalistic way. His insight, I think, can be reduced to three simple propositions:

- 1. All creatures can, and often do, reproduce a large number of offspring;*
- 2. The sum total of organisms remains relatively constant, and this evidently means that many which are born fail to survive. Why?*
- 3. There is a struggle for existence and those better fitted to the environment survive.*

This then was Darwin's theory of natural selection, and it plainly implied that the characteristics of any organism which gave it selective advantage would be inherited by its offspring; given enough time, a new species would ultimately emerge. Indeed it was such a simple idea that Thomas Henry Huxley, Samuel Wilberforce's underrated adversary, was forced to concede how foolish it had been not to have thought of it before.

What Darwin had done, then, was to put forward a cogent theory of population change and, at least at the micro scale, his thesis was backed up with a massive array of empirical evidence which he had managed to marshal

into a coherent framework of analysis. Some however felt that if indeed the work was brilliant, it was, at the same time, brilliantly flawed. The signal lack of intermediate fossil forms in the palaeontological record, for example, seemed an embarrassing obstacle to Darwin's idea of species transformation. Darwin frankly conceded the point but hoped that future research would remove it. In fact this was only one of a number of scientific problems presented in the post-1859 era, by naturalists who had no particular religious axe to grind. Given the current state of knowledge about heredity, there was the difficulty that any new feature acquired by an organism would be 'swamped' within a few generations by being blended into the common stock. Then Darwin's assumption that the length of geological time available was almost limitless, was challenged by William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) and Fleeming Jenkin whose much shorter physical estimates for the age of the earth presented what Darwin himself confessed to be one of the gravest criticisms as yet advanced against his theory. In addition, despite the title of his book, Darwin's theory did not explain the origin of variations, much less species, at all; natural selection might well account for the survival of a new feature once it had been developed, but Darwin's repeated failure to explain why or how variations arose progressively led him in later editions of the *Origin* to resort to the older doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics put forward by Lamarck. According to this theory organisms consciously adapt themselves to prevailing environmental conditions and pass the adaptation on to offspring; plainly this version had no need to resort to those inexplicable, 'chance' variations on which Darwin's original theory relied entirely.⁷ Finally, the rediscovery of Mendel's famous paper in 1900—the foundation of modern genetics—cast Darwinism in the shade for more than twenty years, for Mendel's demonstration that heredity was particulate (going in little 'jumps') seemed to run counter to the gradualism of classical Darwinism. Indeed the definitive synthesis of Darwinism with Mendelian arithmetic had to wait until the publication of works by R. A. Fisher, J. B. S. Haldane and Sewall Wright in the 1930s.⁸ But since then Neo-Darwinism, or the synthetic theory as it is sometimes called, has remained biological orthodoxy.

There are, I think, two important implications to be drawn from this brief historical sketch. First, it is now plain that Darwin, for all his undisputed influence, did not sweep all before him. There were many uncertainties and ambiguities in his thesis with the result that many rival versions of the theory were subsequently put forward, notably, Neo-Lamarckism, the mutation theory, saltatory evolution, and orthogenesis. Indeed, the ambivalent state of evolution theory in the early part of this century is nowhere more obvious than in D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's celebrated classic *On growth and form* published in 1917. Second, the lack of an intervening evolutionary consensus undermines the triumphalist image of a powerful monolithic

science conquering an intellectually impoverished Christianity. The old metaphor of a 'warfare' between science and religion is no longer an adequate tool for interpreting the great Victorian debate. A revisionist model is clearly needed for, as Robert Young has conclusively shown, the leading architects of the evolutionary theory, far from being anti-theistic or atheistic, were deeply concerned to reconcile God, man, and the natural order.⁹

Evolution as Metaphor

Reflecting on Darwin's theory of natural selection and its extension to the interpretation of society, I think a strong case can be made for seeing it as a grand metaphor. Before turning expressly to Darwin's metaphor, however, it is worth having a brief glance at the nature of scientific understanding in general, and scientific model-building in particular. One of the chief tools which the scientist uses in his research is the construction of theoretical models. In his endeavour to come to grips with some aspect of reality hitherto unexplained, the researcher looks around for some broadly similar process which he does understand, and then tries to interpret the problem under investigation in the light of this information. He constructs a sort of picture to represent what he understands to be the nature of the processes at work, and then, following the normal procedures of scientific analysis, he tests his model against the real world to determine how successful it is. Basically he uses, we could say, an analogy or a metaphor.¹⁰ And this metaphor or model becomes a kind of screen or lens through which the subject is viewed; some aspects are ignored while others are emphasised or organised in specific ways. As Ian Barbour puts it, a scientific model "is a symbolic representation of selected aspects of the behaviour of a complex system for particular purposes. It is an imaginative tool for ordering experience, rather than a description of the world."¹¹ Good examples of this are the model of the atom as a miniature orbital system—the sub-atomic particles, it is conjectured, behave *as if* they are a tiny solar system, or the wave-particle theory of light according to which light exhibits both wave and particle-like characteristics. Now, it is because of this *comparative* process underlying scientific thinking, that some philosophers have argued that science is erected on metaphors—on systematically developed metaphors. They claim that their use is quite fundamental to science, and that the only question that can be asked is whether the metaphor in question has explanatory value. Further, they suggest that a good model or metaphor is one that is open-ended enough to allow for the exploration of additional similarities between the systems in question.

There can be little doubt that scientists do inescapably resort to metaphorical thinking in their creation of theoretical models, and that good metaphors have very rich explanatory power. Nevertheless there are drawbacks in the use of scientific metaphors, and perhaps the greatest danger

is that the scientist can forget that his model is only a *representation* of reality, and not reality itself. Take the model 'man is a machine' for instance. Doubtless there are many ways in which man behaves like a very sophisticated machine; his brain, some tell us, works in many respects like a computer, his nervous system can be studied in cybernetic terms, his genetic make-up is often depicted in the language of engineering technology. But it must not be forgotten that these are only pictures, and that man is not really a machine. The philosopher Turbayne puts this rather well when he writes that the use of a metaphor involves the pretence that something is the case when, literally speaking, it is not the case. And he goes on:

Just as often, however, the pretence has been dropped, either by the pretenders or by their followers. There is a difference between using a metaphor and taking it literally, between using a model and mistaking it for the thing modelled. The one is to make believe that something is the case; the other is to believe that it is. The one is to use a disguise or a mask for illustrative or explanatory purposes; the other is to mistake the mask for the face . . . After the disguise or mask has been worn for a considerable time it tends to blend with the face, and it becomes extremely difficult to 'see through' it . . . It is not necessarily a confusion to treat items belonging to one sort in the idioms appropriate to another . . . On the other hand it is a confusion to present the items of one sort in the idioms of another—without awareness . . . It is to mistake, for example, the theory for the fact, the procedure for the process, the myth for history, the model for the thing, and the metaphor for the face of literal truth.¹²

When we turn to Darwin's work it is not surprising that both the strengths and weaknesses of metaphorical thinking are clearly to be found. A moment's reflection on Robert Young's pertinent question "does Nature select?" suggests that there is a metaphor hiding somewhere in the idea of natural selection itself.¹³ The basic strategy Darwin had adopted for unravelling the species question was to demonstrate that species were ephemeral rather than permanent. His intense, indeed life-long, study of domesticated animal breeding (particularly of pigeons) soon convinced him that new variations could easily be produced under the control of a breeder. If this process could be applied more generally in nature, then the variations which fitted organisms to their environments might be explained without recourse to the interventions of a heavenly, purposeful Creator. What Darwin did, therefore, was to look at nature *as if* it were a breeder; in other words, to develop an analogy between the breeder's selective activity and natural selection. The metaphor certainly did provide a potent model for interpreting population change and, so long as Darwin could remember that he was comparing an *artificial* process with a *natural* one (thereby building an anthropomorphic element into nature's workings), it had great explanatory potential. In a sense, the problem was to maintain the valuable metaphor and yet not sacrifice the principle that 'nature is natural'. Darwin, in fact, seems to have detected this tendency in his own thinking, and he therefore felt it necessary to add the following paragraph in the third edition of his book:

*It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by us. With a little familiarity such superficial objections will be forgotten.*¹⁴

Despite this disclaimer, however, Darwin soon began to slip away from the metaphorical basis of his model. By absolutizing the analogy, it readily became apparent that, in many ways, he had transferred the attributes of Divine Providence to nature and its laws. Writing to his American confidant, the botanist Asa Gray, for example, he confirmed: "I think it can be shown that there is such an unerring power at work in *Natural Selection* (the title of my book), which selects exclusively for the good of each organic being."¹⁵ Thus, on many occasions, the *Origin of Species* displays rank anthropomorphism. The following extracts should suffice to illustrate what I mean.

*We have seen that man by selection can certainly produce great results, and can adapt organic beings to his own uses through the accumulation of slight but useful variations given to him by the hand of Nature. But Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art*¹⁶.

*It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.*¹⁷

By now it is apparent that a careless use of the metaphor of natural selection soon leads to the subversion of our interpretative principle, 'nature is natural'. And it is a short step to elevating evolutionism into a cosmic worldview in which the processes of natural selection are regarded as a fully creative agency comparable to, even identified with, Divine creativity. At this level, the theory of evolution has assumed metaphysical status far beyond its original purpose of interpreting the laws of organic succession.

If Darwin ultimately equivocated over the selection metaphor, he was rather more careful about his second metaphor—the struggle for survival. One or two initial points of clarification are needed. First of all, the term 'the survival of the fittest' was not originally Darwin's formulation; it was coined by the sociologist Herbert Spencer who had been writing about social evolution (for example in his *Social Statics* of 1851) long before Darwin made available his carefully elaborated theory. Then, the survival of the fittest really only meant the survival of the fitter—that is, the survival of those individuals or species more likely to leave offspring. There was, therefore, no idea of perfect adaptation to the natural milieu, but merely relatively superior

or inferior fittedness to the prevailing conditions. Finally, the idea of the survival of the fittest is really a tautology; it means little more than the survival of whatever survives for, by definition, in Darwin's theory, whatever survives is better fitted for survival than competitors.¹⁸

For his modern day successors, as indeed for Darwin himself, the idea of struggle is not to be understood—as Tennyson seems to have thought—as 'Nature red in tooth and claw'. Rather, it is a question of some members of a population being in some way better adapted to their environment than competitors, and in every case, better adapted in terms of leaving more descendants. Thus Darwin's 'struggle for survival' is less a *literal* than a *metaphorical* one. As he himself wrote in the *Origin*:

*I should premise that I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny.*¹⁹

This metaphorical qualification is important in the present context, for some Christians have balked at Darwin's theory because of the apparent brutality of the mechanism. But, while some of Darwin's followers were doubtless less restrained in their use of the idea of struggle, Darwin clearly intended it as a theory of relative reproductive success. The well-known instance of what is often known as the Midlands Moth—first studied by Kettlewell—in which the environmental change associated with the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by the relative reproductive success of a mutant variety of the butterfly, would seem to be precisely the sort of process Darwin had in mind.

There is one other evolutionary metaphor which I feel ought to be mentioned. In the decades following the publication of the *Origin*, it became very fashionable to apply evolutionary theories drawn from biology, to the study of society. Certainly, as Burrow has clearly shown,²⁰ early Victorian social theory in the pre-Darwinian period, had been evolutionary in the sense that various schemes of social development had already been elaborated. Darwin's theory was soon used to reinforce an already thriving tradition of social evolutionism.²¹ Central to most of these social theories was the metaphor that 'society is an organism'—that such qualities as the growth, structure, and function of organisms parallel more or less closely social processes. The following extract from Herbert Spencer shows just how similar social and organic behaviour was thought to be.

*We commonly enough compare a nation to a living organism. We speak of 'the body politic' of the functions of its several parts, of its growth, and of its diseases, as though it were a creature. But we usually employ these expressions as metaphors, little suspecting how close is the analogy, and how far it will bear carrying out. So completely, however, is a society organised upon the same system as an individual being, that we may almost say there is something more than analogy between them.*²²

Naturally, there were many ways of 'biologizing' the study of society. Spencer's version of Social Darwinism, for example, could be used to justify the cut-throat ethics of late nineteenth century capitalism by stressing the need

for the free play of market forces to parallel the 'struggle' for survival in the natural world. On the other hand, some schemes, notably those drawn from the Lamarckian version, could support late Victorian optimism by suggesting that social intervention could combat poverty, ignorance and disease. Again, no doubt, there are interesting ways in which society may be said to behave like an organism; but if the past is anything to go by, theories of social evolution were almost invariably used to reaffirm class, racial, or national interests. Eugenic control, Germanic jingoism, and Western imperialism have all claimed to be supported by the findings of science. And with the resurgence of interest in the interplay between biology and sociology in the form of sociobiology, it is worth reemphasising that the relationships between social and organic processes are metaphorical rather than literal, indirect rather than direct.

From what I have said I hope it is clear that I am not questioning the wisdom of employing metaphors for understanding biological or social processes. Indeed the question is not whether we *ought* to think metaphorically about such matters, but rather, since we inevitably *do* use metaphors in scientific and, for that matter, everyday discourse, how they can be turned to conceptual advantage. My complaint is that the metaphorical status of evolutionary models can be easily forgotten, and that this invariably leads in the direction of an all-embracing philosophy in which every aspect of reality is subsumed under the rubric of evolution. And it is to these 'mythic' dimensions of evolution that I now want to turn.

Evolution as Myth

I must emphasise from the outset that I am using the word 'myth' in a slightly technical sense. By myth, I do not simply mean 'a widespread but false idea' or a fictional story about how the world began. What I mean by myth, rather, is an all-encompassing system of belief which provides individuals and cultural groups with an explanation for the structure of reality and gives meaning to human experience. As Jacques Ellul puts it, a myth "explains a situation and a purpose whenever reason is unable to do so, and that characteristic has scarcely changed from the archaic myth to the modern myth."²³ My argument here is that the idea of evolution can be, and often has been, elevated to the level of a cosmic myth—a world-view which purports to provide, for example, guidelines for ethics and a coherent account of reality. Evolutionism, as I will call this 'myth', is of course quite logically distinct from evolution as a theory of population change, but it does arise, I want to suggest, from the abuse of the metaphors we have been discussing.

One of the basic functions of any 'myth' is to provide its adherents with principles for social and moral behaviour. By over-extending the survival metaphor, some evolutionists have seen in their theory a dogmatic creed which permits them to discriminate good from evil. In simple terms the 'good' is identified as whatever pertains to survival; and by a piece of skilful philosophising, such 'useless' qualities as love, co-operation, and self-sacrifice can be explained by regarding the group rather than the individual as the

fundamental unit of selection. This is because, for example, gregarious animals who co-operate with each other have greater survival potential than more individualistic organisms. The idea that principles for human ethics can be derived from the theory of natural selection, however, seems faulty for several reasons. Firstly, it involves a circular argument; the good is whatever leads to survival, because whatever leads to survival is good. And this, in fact, results in the moral impasse inherent in Alexander Pope's telling witticism:

*And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, "Whatever is right, is RIGHT."*²⁴

Secondly, evolutionary ethics depends on a highly questionable transfer from description to prescription or, to use C. S. Lewis's terminology, from the indicative mood to the imperative mood. This problem of moving from what *is* the case to what *ought* to be the case is particularly evident in Waddington's *The ethical animal*. Thus, what it is to be an ethical animal is plainly not explained by the fact that we have developed by mutation and natural selection. At the very most, evolution can only be "a description", to quote Donald MacKay, "of the mechanism by which species showing moral behaviour have come into being",²⁵ rather than a code by which moral choices can be governed. Ethics, I would have thought, has little to do with the origin of the creatures who adopt ethical stances. If nature is natural, transcendent values can never be derived from within the system of nature itself; indeed as one Marxist writer has pointed out, attempts to naturalise values in this way have usually been little more than a biologicistic justification for current values and the existing economic order.

The humanistic celebration of what may be called evolutionary progressivism demonstrates another mythic dimension of Darwin's selection metaphor. By expanding his theory into a broad philosophy of history, evolution becomes the guarantor of social progress. Now may I say immediately that Darwin's own writings show little assurance of inevitable progress, whether biological or social; one of Darwin's major contributions, in fact, was to establish an evolutionary theory quite independent of earlier progressivist versions. Once again, however, his followers have been less restrained, and some have seen in the evolutionary process an internal purpose or 'telos' which is moving towards some cosmic goal. Perhaps this is most conspicuous in the speculations of the geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky; for him "Selection is a fully creative agency just like the composition of a poem or a symphony."²⁶ "Nonsense!" retorts the philosopher Marjorie Grene recognizing the personification of nature. As an explanatory account of organic change, Darwin's theory has clearly great force. But to compare the selective processes in nature with, say, the composition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Beethoven's *Eroica* is to get into what she calls "a dreadful muddle". Selection, being thoroughly opportunistic on every occasion we are told, explains the survival of whatever survives; but as Professor Grene points out, it cannot at the same time (and as a purely natural process) be creative in the sense of contriving to move towards a goal in anything like the way an artist's imaginative creativity lies behind the

creation of a great work of art.²⁷ Now if you see evidences of purpose, creativity, or design in nature, I have no objection to you identifying them there. From a Christian perspective it would be very odd indeed if traces of a Creator's handiwork were totally absent from His creation. But in this instance, purpose is based on a particular religious belief, and is not dependent on personifying, even deifying, a natural process by imbuing it with creative capacity. At any rate it is far from clear just what evolutionary progress might mean; for some it is greater environmental independence, for others an increase of information or higher specialisation. And these specifications are inevitably derived by looking backwards from the current perspective and assuming that the present represents the furthest progress along some undefined scale of values.

When the advocates of evolutionism begin to wax lyrical about their claims to have found an axiom for ethics or a warranty for social progress, they need to be reminded that their theory has now assumed mythic proportions. No less is this the case with those who maintain that everything in this world can be reduced to its material constitution or genetic formula—to a 'fortuitous concourse of atoms' as Draper put it during that infamous Oxford debate at the British Association in 1860. This evolutionary materialism is perhaps at its plainest in G. G. Simpson's assertion that 'Man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned.'²⁸ Such an uncompromisingly reductionist faith in the omnipotence of random variation is, bluntly, a metaphysical belief falsely paraded as scientific fact. I cannot think of any normal scientific technique by which such a confessional claim could be tested. Moreover, one does not have to have any religious convictions to defend in order to find this line of argument unsatisfactory. To believe that man can be reduced to purely materialist dimensions, to nothing but psychological or physiological dimensions, is akin to the claim that all that can be said about this page of print is that it is a series of black marks on a white paper background. Of course, there is a sense in which this article is just that; but to say that it is nothing but that is to ignore the different levels at which any phenomenon can be studied. By analogy, to say that the evolution of something—how it came into being and developed over time—is the only question that can be asked of it, is to build an over-extended empire on a very narrow foundation. This is not to say that evolution theory is a bad theory of what it does set out to explain; rather it is to suggest that the evolutionary dimension (or the genetic, or physiological, or psychological) is only one element in any explanation, and that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. And therefore I cannot but have a great deal of sympathy with E. F. Schumacher's rhetorical observation:

If the great Cosmos is seen as nothing but a chaos of particles without purpose or meaning, so man must be seen as nothing but a chaos of particles without purpose or meaning—a sensitive chaos, indeed, capable of suffering pain, anguish and despair, but a chaos all the same . . . a rather unfortunate cosmic accident of no consequence whatsoever.²⁹

Conclusion

From what I have said, I think it is evident that the theory of evolution is a rather elastic concept which can be expanded or contracted to account for just about anything across the whole spectrum of reality. As a calculus for quantifying differential reproductive success, I personally do not see anything in it intrinsically hostile to Christian belief. Even its resort to natural explanations of organic adaptation by reference to the laws of variation seems to me to provide an acceptable explanation of phenomena complementary to, rather than incompatible with, the biblical view of a contingent creation. After all the Bible itself accommodates both 'naturalistic' and 'supernaturalistic' explanations of the same event, as in the Red Sea episode during the Exodus where both a strong east wind and Divine Providence are invoked as 'causes'. Provided, therefore, that we maintain the limitations of those tricky, if fruitful, metaphors, restrict natural selection to a description of the mechanism of organic change, and reject evolutionism's mythic manifesto, the theory can offer, so far as I can see, no threat to Christian belief.

The various attempts by 'creationists' to erode the theory of evolution by chipping away at its account of biological development may have some validity; but such efforts cannot of themselves challenge evolutionism as a macro-philosophy. The truth of Christian theism as against evolutionary naturalism can never be established by describing gaps in the fossil record, the statistical incredulities in genetic variation, the ambiguities in dating techniques, the ideological commitments of evolutionists, or evidence for catastrophic geological upheavals. Frankly I do not believe the issue can be reduced to Christian Creationism versus Neo-Darwinism, not least because a variety of secular alternatives have recently been forthcoming. What I do feel is that the myths inherent in the metaphors need to be exposed for what they are, and that Christians should be working for the reinstatement of those transcendent values which have their source in God Himself, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967), p. 165.
2. Quoted in John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London, 1974), p.173.
3. The literature concerning this episode in the history of science is vast, but see Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (London, 1965); Charles Webster (ed.) *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1974); Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (New Haven, 1958).
4. See R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Edinburgh, 1972); Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York, 1966).
5. A useful introduction to the general idea of evolution is T. A. Goudge, "Evolutionism", in Philip P. Wiener, (ed.) *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1973), Vol. 2. pp. 174-89.
6. See Loren Eiseley, *Darwin's Century. Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It* (New York, 1958); Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution. Science Red in Tooth and Claw* (Chicago, 1979).

7. See P. J. Vorzimmer, *Charles Darwin: The Years of Controversy* (London, 1972); David L. Hull, *Darwin and His Critics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).
8. The standard history is W. B. Provine, *The Origins of Theoretical Population Genetics* (Chicago, 1973).
9. See Robert M. Young, "The Impact of Darwin on Conventional Thought", in Anthony Symondson (ed.), *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London, 1970).
10. For philosophical introductions to metaphor in science see Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, 1962); Mary B. Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Indiana, 1966).
11. Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London, 1974), p.6.
12. C. M. Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (New Haven, 2nd ed., 1970), pp.3-4.
13. Robert M. Young, "Darwin's Metaphor: Does Nature Select?", *The Monist*, Vol. 55, (1971), pp. 442-503.
14. For ease of referencing I will refer throughout to the version edited by Morse Peckham, *The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin. A Variorum Text* (Philadelphia, 1959). This extract is on p. 165.
15. Francis Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (London, 1887), Vol. 2, p.125.
16. *The Origin*, p. 145.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69. This is the rendering of the first edition and it is significant that in the second edition he modified it to read: "It may metaphorically be said that natural selection . . ."
18. It is interesting to note that in the aftermath of the major environmental upheavals at the end of the Permian period, so few organisms survived (a mere four per cent) that, according to the Harvard palaeontologist Stephen J. Gould, the principle might be better expressed as the survival of the luckiest.
19. *The Origin*, p. 146.
20. J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society. A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1966).
21. Among the most important works on this topic are Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston, 1944); Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism in English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (Sussex, 1980).
22. H. Spencer, *Social Statics; or, The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified and the First of Them Developed* (London, 1851), p. 448.
23. Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 93-94.
24. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, I, lines 293-94 reprinted in *The Poems of Alexander Pope* edited by John Butt (London, 1963).
25. Donald MacKay, *The Clockwork Image. A Christian Perspective on Science* (London, 1974), p. 20.
26. Th. Dobzhansky, "Evolution as a Creative Process", *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Genetics*, (1954), pp. 435-38.
27. Marjorie Grene, A Philosopher Looks at Evolution, Open University Radio Lecture for the Course on Science and Belief from Copernicus to Darwin.
28. G. G. Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution* (New Haven, 1949).
29. E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, 1977), p.48.

OPINION

Worship Then and Now

by DAVID K. GILLETT

When some unbeliever or ordinary person comes in, he will be convinced of sin by what he hears, his secret thoughts will be brought into the open and he will bow down and worship God, confessing, 'Truly God is here among you.'

A Credibility Gap?

That, according to St Paul, is what should happen when an outsider enters our regular times of congregational worship (1 Cor 14:24f). There should be such a clear sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our worship that an outsider is compelled to notice something different, something powerfully supernatural, something that radically transforms his life. Yet often such a person confesses to be untouched, uninterested or even bored!

This credibility gap that often exists between our experience of worship and that described by St Paul prompts the question, 'What is real worship?' Jesus in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well provided the answer: 'The time is coming, and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. God is spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is.' (Jn 4:23f). This translation (from the Good News version) faithfully conveys the meaning of the more traditional rendering, 'in spirit and in truth'. These two factors—the presence of God's Spirit, and our appreciation of the truth of Christ—are at the heart of all true Christian worship.

Worship in the Power of God's Spirit.

It is the activity of God's Spirit which transforms a human ceremony or liturgy (whether written or not) into an encounter with the living God. The Spirit makes worship an event; He creates within the congregation that openness and expectancy which are the necessary preparation for worship. The worshipper thus anticipates being 'lost in wonder, love and praise,' he waits for the word of God to speak directly to his mind and heart, he desires to see God's

power at work in conversion, healing, prophecy and the like, and he expects to go home *changed* by the work of God's Spirit in which he has been involved (2 Cor 3:17f).

We see this supernatural quality of worship in many incidents in Scripture. When Moses was confronted with the presence of God in the burning bush he had to remove his shoes; he was on holy ground. The response of Jacob at Bethel reveals the deep awe and wonder that overtakes us when we realize the unmistakable signs of God's presence: 'The Lord is here! He is in this place and I didn't know it! . . . It must be the house of God; it must be the gate of heaven.' (Gen 20:16f). When, on the island of Patmos, John saw the vision of the glorified Christ, he fell involuntarily at His feet as though dead (Rev 1:17), so overawed was he by the wonder of God in that encounter.

Since the day of Pentecost the Spirit has been poured out on all believers so that worship for all can be an event, an encounter with the living God. After being baptized with the Spirit the disciples ran out into the streets of Jerusalem praising God in the new tongues they had been given. The presence of the Spirit led first of all to joyous and spontaneous praise, which in turn brought significant evangelistic results. This note of praise is one of the clearest marks of the Spirit's presence within the worshipping community. The Spirit leads first to praise and thanksgiving as the basis for all worship, confession and intercession. All too easily our prayers can become centred on ourselves and our problems with a consequent heaviness and hopelessness that rarely rises to that level of faith and expectancy which Jesus encourages us to exercise (Matt 18:19f). It is when our hope is raised by prayer and thanksgiving for all that we have received in Christ that we will know true power and effectiveness in our intercession (cf. Phil 4:6).

St Paul recognises the centrality of the Spirit in our worship when he encourages us—'Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with words of psalms and hymns and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts.' (Eph 5:18f). This praise has a liturgical element (psalms) which draws on the tradition, as well as a creative and spontaneous element which the Spirit inspires within the congregation. Any church which is open to the direction of God's Spirit will find a natural blend of old and new, liturgical and spontaneous, structured and free.

It is the direction of the Spirit that also leads to participation by the whole Body. St Paul's rubrics for worship in the early church were as follows: 'When you meet for worship one person has a hymn, another a teaching, another a revelation from God, another a message in strange tongues, and still another the explanation of what is said. Everything must be of help to the church.' (1 Cor 14:26). To enable such creativity and the sharing of spiritual gifts which are given to different members of the congregation (1 Cor 12:7) there must be a clear framework and a leadership which ensures that all is done in peace and harmony (1 Cor 14:33). As this kind of leadership fosters such creativity and spontaneity within the structure, so corporate worship becomes that encouragement it should be for the individual believer. For we not only approach God in worship but we speak to one another (Eph 5:18), and it is in

this horizontal interaction that we help one another into that place of praise and expectancy. This encouragement becomes more necessary as we live in an increasingly secular and materialistic age (see Heb 10:19-25).

Worship God as He really is

This Spirit-filled activity of worship must also be 'in truth'. Christian worship is not interested in experience for experience's sake: it must always be a response to God as He has truly and definitively revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Hence we must be cautious about the growing tendency in the West to adopt Indian approaches to prayer and worship (e.g. Transcendental Meditation and Yoga) under the misleading assumption that because they seem to work they are consequently helpful and valid for a Christian.

While we can, of course, learn from other religious and spiritual traditions we must also be aware of the radical difference between the Christian and the Indian approaches to the spiritual life. The object of Christian worship is to lead to the unity of our whole beings with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we praise God 'with hearts and hands and voices.' The Indian approach is quite different. The attempt there is to escape from the body and enter into the transcendental realm unhindered by our bodies, our minds or our emotions. In contrast we, as Christians, are looking to God to redeem our fallen humanity and bring our whole beings, body, mind and spirit, into the presence of God through Christ.

To worship 'in truth' also points to the importance of the will. We shall not always be stirred to active and spontaneous participation in worship by the encouragement of our fellow believers, nor indeed, at times, by the presence and power of God's Spirit, but, because we know the truth of what God has done for us in Christ, we shall *determine* to praise him and remember all that he has done for us (Psalm 103:1-5). Thus although worship should involve our whole beings, including our emotions, it is not dependent on our particular psychological make-up or our emotional state at any given time.

Christian worship will always be a response, among other things, to the revealed actions of God in scripture—to the truth as we see it supremely in Christ. It is for this reason that liturgy has come to play an important part in most Christian traditions; it ensures that Christian worship is set firmly within a framework of biblical truth.

Spirit and Truth together

History reveals the tendency for the church to swing to one extreme or the other: to settle *either* for the Spirit *or* for Truth rather than the fulness of *both together*—in fact neither can be truly present on its own, and any such worship that majors on the one to the detriment of the other is bound to be impoverished. Paul had to warn the Corinthian church about a too exclusive concern with the Spirit and spontaneity, but for most of the Christian era the danger has been to ignore the Spirit and be left with an arid ceremonialism (largely in the more Catholic traditions) or a dry formalism (widespread among Protestant churches).

The various renewal movements that have arisen, often in reaction to formalism and ceremonialism have, at times, tended to err in a Corinthian direction. Perhaps in our time the early days of charismatic renewal showed too little concern for truth and order, so heady was the experience of the new wine. Now, as the more restrictive word 'charismatic' gives way to the broader, fuller description, 'spiritual renewal', we are seeing a maturity coming in the area of worship. Increasingly there is that blend of biblical and liturgical worship with the free spontaneity and eventfulness of Spirit-directed worship.

The New Testament challenges us all to pray for the Spirit's presence in our worship, that our structures may be filled with the power, the awe and the eventfulness of true worship—a foretaste of that in which we shall all one day share in heaven.