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# THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: A DISCIPLINE THAT UNDERMINES RELIGION?

W.S.F.Pickering

## I

Believers coming face to face with the sociological study of religion are destined to have their faith sorely challenged. There is no *logical* reason why such an encounter should undermine what they personally believe in. Yet the truth is that the experience raises questions about their faith—and here I have particularly in mind the Christian faith—and the result is that the weak, and perhaps the strong as well, find the testing very abrasive. Some intellectually inclined Christians might argue that the challenge is to be commended, since it will eradicate spurious and weakly founded reasons for upholding religious faith. On the other hand, there are doubtless challengers of the challenging who would maintain that the threats which arise from the conclusions drawn by sociologists in their examination of religion are unwarrantable, fallacious and even reprehensible. True personal religion stands well outside such threats, ill-founded as they are. No sociology can break down that religion which resides in the heart.

In bringing to light these and other attitudes towards the sociology of religion, we encounter one facet of what might be called the sociology of the sociology of religion. To those who may be unsure about the task sociology sets itself, I shall offer a brief word. It will probably come as no surprise to learn that sociology is divided into many schools, which proclaim various emphases and approaches, and that there is considerable disagreement among sociologists on methods and aims, particularly at the present time. If, however, I were forced to give a wide, general definition, which would encompass the work of those who call themselves sociologists, I would say that the discipline attempts to speak about—some would maintain to examine objectively, even 'scientifically'—society in its entirety. It is nevertheless made up of various components and dimensions which sociologists have tended to see as constituting its institutions, such as marriage, law, religion, education, and so on. Sociology has been inclined to concentrate on established ways of behaving, thinking, and believing, within such a social framework.

To ensure clarity of communication, it is necessary to attempt the impossible and to define religion. I do not want to enter into what has been a long and sometimes fruitless discussion; but for the purposes of what I want to say here, I mean by religion a system of beliefs and practices centred on a super-human being or beings. Such a system is inevitably linked with a group of people, a church, for example; and the belief system usually involves a moral component.

## II

These definitions contain within themselves concepts and implications which if placed alongside one another give rise to potential, if not actual conflict. Such conflict, of course, exists not only between sociology and religion, but is also part of the greater and longer controversy between science and religion, that arose in the eighteenth century, and which still persists.

During that time the conflict has taken many forms and passed through diverse vicissitudes. No longer perhaps are people's religious beliefs challenged or shattered, as once they seemed to have been, by the scientific discoveries of the physical universe. It is often suggested today, and indeed this view was not unknown in the nineteenth century, that there is no logical or necessary reason for a conflict to occur between religion and the findings of the natural sciences. Each can function legitimately in its own separate sphere. This works perfectly well if certain theological claims about creation and the functioning of the world are modified. But the question arises, what if this convenient compartmentalisation dissolves? What if science directly intrudes into the sphere of religion? And what, if the natural sciences are replaced by the human and social sciences, by psychology and sociology, which examine scientifically the religious phenomena themselves? These sciences claim the right to penetrate the psyche of the individual to its innermost depths, or to study every institutional component of religion, which for us in the west could mean an examination of the sacraments or people's religious actions; and the Church itself is open to examination in the same way as an unsuccessful football club! No longer then is the science-versus-religion battle one in which the protagonists reach a *modus vivendi* by respecting each other's territories. It is a battle in which one party invades deep into the territory of the other.

Like every modern science, sociology is secular. It has no alternative procedure. It thus sees only man at work, not God. The world is man-made. Individual sociologists in their personal beliefs may discern God in the universe, but sociology itself cannot. It seeks to indicate how man has created his institutions, how man has changed his institutions, how man will direct his institutions in the future. Religion is one such institution. That God might be a creative source within the universe who sustains it, and communicates himself through it and through religion, must be excluded. All sociologists have to be methodological agnostics; or more radically, methodological atheists. They are forced to proceed *as if* God did not exist. They openly proclaim this, since from the beginning of their short history, they have had to face constantly problems of method on account of their claim in some way to be scientific.

But sociology can go further. It burrows its way through what some people might think is dubious material and one of the paths it creates in so doing is to shatter ideals of various kinds. What man in his innocence believes to be perfect, holy, rational, honest, and true, the sociologists may demonstrate is imperfect, ordinary, irrational, dishonest and false. Sociology takes a delight in comparing what is practised with what is thought to be desirable or ideal. Worship and prayer are not made to a non-existent deity but are projections about society. God is nothing more than social ideals writ large. Of all the social and human sciences, sociology is *par excellence*, the debunker of cherished virtues, ideas and achievements. It is not surprising therefore that when sociology enters a field of religion, it vitiates it. Religion is infinitely more vulnerable than other social institutions to such displacement because it rests on the notion of the sacred. The church, as a component of religion, is believed, in the Christian tradition, to be the vehicle of the Almighty, or the vehicle of the Spirit, or the vehicle of Christ. One nineteenth century commentator on the sociology of religion as it was then emerging wrote. 'Religion is on the dissecting table awaiting vivisection; standing alongside is the operating surgeon scalpel in hand' (Richard 1923/t.1975:251).

## III

Let us now see how these challenges arise as the sociologist goes about his work. I mention a few types of findings and their implications for the believer.

First, the connection made by Max Weber (1864-1920) between economic and religious organisation (1904-5). Very well known is his contention that Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries accelerated the development of bourgeois capitalism—indeed, it provided the necessary component for such capitalism to grow. The Protestantism of that period, he argued, contained within itself theological and moral ideas, such as the notion of election, hard work, domestic asceticism, which were particularly prominent in Calvinism, and which provided the launching pad of new forms of capitalism. I do not wish to argue whether or

not, or to what degree, Weber's analysis is to be supported. The argument is full of difficulties and methodological problems, but nevertheless it was widely accepted at the time he wrote at the turn of the century, and to this day there are a large number of intellectuals who have uncritically accepted it. Now, the explanation of the emergence of capitalism, made in the name of objective knowledge, is or can be ideologically contentious. Contention in part turns on a general appraisal of capitalism. If capitalism is highly esteemed, as it was by most of the middle classes in the nineteenth century, then Protestantism is likewise applauded in being instrumental in bringing about such great economic achievement. By contrast, Roman Catholicism is seen as an inferior form of Christianity which was unable to supply the required moral impetus. But Catholicism receives a contrary judgment if capitalism is viewed as the curse of modern life. Catholics have been able to keep their hands clean in the face of the willingness of Protestants to involve themselves in a filthy enterprise! Perhaps more in keeping with some kind of left-wing criticism is the belief—and it was certainly expressed by certain Christian socialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Protestantism must share some of the blame for the evils of capitalism. The close alliance that Protestants seem to have had with capitalism naturally shows Protestantism in a bad light. However, a devout and sensitive Protestant might well be challenged by that fact that a church for which he has great respect, with which he is identified and which he may believe is a truer form of ecclesiastical organisation than that of the Roman Catholics, should become entangled in economic structures and find its fingers dirtied by an 'alliance' with mammon. That a church can have such influence over a type of economic organisation would seem to be remote from that pristine form of church life exhibited in the New Testament, a type for which most Protestants yearn. Can one really believe that the church is the vehicle for the Holy Spirit, or that it is made up of true Christians, when it is associated with such economic enterprise? (One logical position might be to suggest that capitalism is also the vehicle of the Holy Spirit!)

Protestants have also suffered—if suffering is the right word—at the hands of another founding father of sociology, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). Durkheim demonstrated in the 1890s—at least to his own satisfaction—that certain forms of suicide, what he called anomic suicide, occurred at a significantly higher rate amongst Protestants than Catholics (1897). He maintained that Protestantism, because of its individualistic theology, with its emphasis upon personal decision, with its lack of asceticism and institutional moral controls, explained for him the fact that its adherents tended to commit suicide more frequently than Catholics. Protestants lacked, he argued, a sense of community and of loyalty to the church and such looseness of attachment weakened the individual's ability to deal with what he called tendencies towards suicide in society.

A more recent type of sociology, bordering on what we might call micro-sociology, serves as a challenge to both Catholicism as well as Protestantism. And I include it because I cannot emphasise too strongly the fact that the sociologist is as much, if not more concerned, with the religious actions and beliefs of the man in the street as he is with those of the intellectual and theologian. This type of sociology is concerned with surveys carried out on the various churches at the parish and national levels. It seems harmless enough but until about the 1950s the Roman Catholic hierarchy resisted detailed surveys about the extent of practice and quality of religious life within the local church. Then, as the opposition to sociological research began to weaken, the authorities came to believe that such investigations would help the pastoral work of the church. Later, with the growth of liberalisation there was no limit to the types of research that could be carried out.

In the main, two classes of surveys have emerged. One, a thorough investigation into the level of church going *per capita*, which on the whole has proved to be higher for Catholics than for other major Christian groups, although it has not been as high as many people thought it would be, especially in South America and some regions in Europe. The age-structure, sexual differentiation, class analysis, were all carefully analysed. In the second, the object is to assess the difference between what the churches teach about belief and morality and what the man in the street believes, be he a devout Catholic, a loyal Protestant or even a nothingarian. As

might be expected the results of these surveys show that *even* amongst the faithful of all denominations there is a great deal of rejection or ignorance of the official teaching of the churches, and in its place as it were, there is, what might be called folk religion, including for example, superstitions like astrology, all haphazardly mixed up with orthodox Christianity.

A recent survey carried out by Martin and Pluck (1977) goes further and shows that amongst young people there is very little that resembles anything approaching Christian belief and that the ideals and beliefs young people possess are extraordinarily incoherent and illogically related one to the other. Perhaps this is partially a reflection of the permissive phase of thought and morality which we witnessed in the late 1960s.

Of the many deductions that can be made from these elementary surveys, I offer two which are relevant to the theme of this paper.

1. If the church is made up of people whose own faith does not reflect the authoritative teaching of the church, or that of the Bible, how can one in any sense refer to the church as a spirit-filled body, as Christ's body as St Paul declares? One cannot be sure that any member of the church upholds the beliefs and practices for which it stands.
2. If salvation is mediated through the church, through people being called into the church from the world, through participation in the sacraments, through hearing the preaching of the Word, God seems to favour, in this country at least, as well as in others, the lower-middle classes, the very young, the elderly, and spinsters at large! One would have expected on theological grounds, as well as those of justice, that salvation would have been randomly distributed. In fact salvation is skewed. Almost irreverently one may wonder if it is not divinely skewed.

There is another sub-discipline in sociology, closely related to the sociology of religion, which stands as a direct threat to the claims of religious truth. It is the sociology of knowledge. At the risk of over-simplification, it might be said that the sociology of knowledge attempts to show that a great deal of knowledge, especially abstract knowledge, non-empirical knowledge, is derived from society, more specifically from social structure. Knowledge does not come from a source superior to man, unless one believes that society is in some way of a higher order. All knowledge is grounded in man, and each system of knowledge is related to the society in which it is located. This approach to epistemology, relativist up to the hilt, contains many philosophical problems, not least in finding a way out of the impasse of absolute relativism.

The effects of the sociology of knowledge on religious belief are challenging in the extreme. Chief amongst them is the assertion that all language about God and other religious components is derived from the social context. Religious truth therefore cannot come from revelation, or through God speaking to the prophets, for example, but emerges as a result of man's conscious or unconscious awareness of social behaviour and structure. Since religious knowledge is nothing more than a social projection, sociologists tend to give little place to belief as an independent variable. It is itself dependent on some more basic factor. The challenge of the sociologist to both the theologian, and also the religious believer, is that they should examine what they call religious truth against factors in society itself. That process, once embarked on, will most likely lead to one outcome.

## IV

The vitiating influence that sociology tends to exert over a man of faith rests largely on the axioms and presuppositions on which sociological procedure rests.

Attention has already been drawn to the methodological agnosticism necessary in the sociology of religion. This means that the sociologist cannot stand where the believer stands, nor can he use his language with the meaning of the believer. He therefore cannot accept at face value such a statement as: 'It is my communion with Jesus that makes me happy', or 'God commanded me to go to the market place and there I met a man who recognised me', or, as an evangelist recently said, 'I just touch the sick and God does the rest', or 'The Holy Spirit guided the early church to adopt the order of presbyters'. These religious statements are causal statements which explain individual or corporate action, implying that behind the actions there is some force at work, some reality, which is beyond sense experience. The language is very

much that of the Bible and of the saints but can never be that of the sociologist. For him there can be no sociology of God or of the Holy Spirit! (Nor do such entities have a history!) However he will readily admit that an individual or a number of individuals may subscribe to beliefs and causal statements such as those I have mentioned, and that adhering to them may have certain social consequences. If he were forced to talk about origin or causality—concepts that are no longer popular amongst sociologists—he would inevitably seek reasons other than those given by the believers and, as a sociologist, would attempt to locate them within social behaviour and social structure.

Where explanations are sought—and clearly the sociologist strives after explanations—they have to be located in man, in his society, in his culture. Durkheim set sociology on one distinctive path when he maintained that social phenomena must be explained by other social phenomena. Therefore, religious phenomena, which are essentially social, are to be understood by other social phenomena—a formula that neatly excludes the reference to a transcendental reality. Religion is therefore an activity *sub specie temporis* and *sub specie communatatis*, never as the theologian and believer might see it, *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, having a non-empirical, normative, authoritative foundation (Berger). By contrast, the sociologists assumes that man is largely the product of his environment. Assuming a common genetic makeup, he would expect the same behaviour of people, given a common environment. Pure determinism is prevented by holding that there is the possibility of the modifiability of external factors.

Another axiom is summed up in the term religious relativism. Since the sociologist is agnostic or atheistic about the truth value of a religion and about the alleged reality, he is forced to have an identical position with regard to all religions. Not only is he professionally forced to admit that no religion is *prima facie* better than another, but he generally holds to such a position by conviction. One can slightly modify some words of Durkheim and say that all religions are equally true and all are equally false. In this way differentiation between religions is eroded so that they all appear in grey tones. Black and white are colours not used by the sociologist. He may admit that one religion is more developed than another, that Christianity is the most humane of all religions, as Durkheim held, but usually any positive merits accorded to a religion are negated by faults and weaknesses. It is easy to see that a professional attitude quickly becomes a personal attitude and it is not surprising to learn that nearly all the great names in the sociology of religion have been those of men who were devoid of strong religious conviction. Durkheim was fascinated by religion, probably more than any other sociologist of comparable stature. He was an agnostic Jew, born into a family of rabbis, and when his son was killed in the First World War openly admitted that he had tried but failed to receive any consolation from religion.

What the sociology of religion does—what any relevant science does—is to set up a competing explanation of religious phenomena. Two explanations thus come on the market, two claims to truth. One is a naturalistic, scientific explanation; the other a religious, God-centred explanation. I do not wish to say that one explanation is more logical than the other; nor do I raise the question whether each may contain inherent weaknesses. My point is that they are presented as competing alternatives, and that which is scientific has the advantage of being posed in a society dominated by an awareness of the success of scientific procedures. There is no place for both explanations to exist side by side. One is forced to choose one or the other. Is it surprising people choose the way they do?

## V

I return to my opening remarks. Often churchmen and theologians declare that the fiery testing of the sociology of religion far from doing harm in fact does good. It helps to sift the chaff from the wheat by exposing errors of belief and reasoning held by Christians past and present. But if in fact the sociology of religion is instrumental in causing a loss of faith, it can also be argued that there must have been certain hesitations and doubts prior to coming in contact with the discipline. Further, there are theologians and church leaders who speak in laudatory tones of the sociology of religion. One such person, by no means a radical theologian, but writing recently about Durkheim, admitted that sociological thought may menace Christianity but that once the reductionism of Durkheim is ignored,

his findings have 'provided resources which are still proving invaluable to Christians in understanding better what they believe and in realistically conducting their lives and expressing their hopes in a way which is more consistent with both what they believe and what is actually going on in their world, their society, and themselves' (Shaw 1978:80). And the selfsame writer also remarked. 'It is, in short, hardly possible to overestimate the service which sociology can render to the church in enabling it to understand itself better' (ibid:76). My own reading of certain modern theologians leads me to think that they often exaggerate the findings of sociologists with regard to society at large and on the other hand underestimate the damaging influence of the sociology of religion.

Where the results of the sociology of religion are welcomed by theologians, and in some cases incorporated into their writings, one finds that the theologian is of liberal or left-wing or even radical inclination. Using the findings of the social sciences, the theologian wishes even to change the thinking and belief patterns of religious people in the conviction that truth has been discovered by such sciences and that this truth should be widely communicated. Sociology should be incorporated both into theory, that is, what used to be called dogmatic theology, and also into practical concerns, that is, pastoral studies. In the late 1960s the radicals who supported religionless Christianity went so far as to baptise the decline of religion in the name of Christ! Such religious leaders and thinkers are as a rule of middle-class outlook if not origin, and their wish is for clarity of communication, relevance, and in the end a religious rationalism. I am convinced that this kind of thinking was in part behind the changes in outlook towards sociology that has now become apparent in the Vatican, and that it is associated with many of the reforms of Vatican II.

## VI

What a person expects of religion is certainty. However, not every component and item in a given religion is held to be certain; there are areas which are open and optional. But beyond these at the heart of every religion stands that which is rock-like, that which is dependable, that which resists every challenge, and is ultimately beyond question. We might call it the sacred.

Now, particular truths enshrined in the sacred, which are at the base of all that is religious, are eroded when science enters the holy of holies. Science, as Durkheim himself stated, is a profaning discipline, and as such, demolishes sacred edifices. At one time, western religion, especially Catholicism, when it was in the ascendancy, was able to resist the intrusions and enquiries of free thinkers, rationalists and scientists. Today, the position is different. The scientist and the rationalist are free and indeed are sometimes encouraged to search the religious house and to declare whether its foundations are sound. The process of enquiry, of challenge, of observation, is a means by which -but not the only means of course -religious structures, religious legitimation, religious plausibility become modified.

Maybe all that is happening is just that. As one type of sacredness withers in the face of the investigations of science, another emerges to take its place. As churches disappear, especially their buildings, at the rate of several hundred a year in this country--so new forms of religion based primarily on man, his uniqueness, even his sacredness, emerge. So held Durkheim, the old-fashioned rationalist, yet a worshipper of religion in general. But this to me is unfounded optimism. On *a priori* grounds religion can die as naturally as alchemy disappeared centuries ago. Science can and does desacralise religon without creating an alternative. And to the Christian who believes in a once-and-for-all revelation from God in Christ, witnessed in his Church, such a prospect must be challenging in the extreme.

No one can deny the enquiries and findings of science. Truth will out; it will never be repressed in the long run, for we no longer live in the days of Galileo. One has to face and accept the discoveries of science, even when they apply to the religious enterprise. There is no real choice; no alternative.

However two points of warning should be sounded. The first is that I do not believe that those who try to look scientifically at religion want its annihilation, at least in the immediate future. For sociologists of religion this could be counter-productive, because if they were too successful in undermining religion they, as might theologians, would soon be out of business since they would have nothing to study. Durkheim wrote (1897/t.1951:169).

'Let those who view anxiously and sadly the ruins of ancient beliefs, who feel all the difficulties of these critical times, not ascribe to science an evil it has not caused but rather which it tries to cure! Beware of treating it as an enemy.'

One has always to accept the integrity of the scientist in his search for truth.

The second point is that one should always examine critically the findings of social science, where 'proof'—I use the term with extreme hesitation—is infinitely more difficult and problematical than in the natural sciences. Many of the so-called scientific generalisations by such a grand master as Durkheim are not acceptable, and indeed were rejected by critics in his day. None the less Durkheim himself maintained that one of the most notable characteristics of any science, be it a natural or social science, is that it is always open to challenge, to doubt, to falsification, in a way that religious knowledge was not at one time to be questioned. Religious knowledge after all rests on some kind of authority, on dogmatic teaching, on the Bible, on some mystical experience. Scientific knowledge is built up slowly, not least because it is built on scepticism. As I have had occasion to note already one of the dangers, if I may say so, of sociology is that for reasons I have no time to mention here, certain theologians and populariserss of sociology all too uncritically scoop up its alleged scientific findings and treat them as 'gospel' (Berger 1967: 183). It would be helpful if these 'outsiders' could have as sceptical a turn of mind as scientific thinkers themselves are supposed to possess. What is needed is that theologians should examine critically the findings of the sociology of religion and come to terms with them within the axioms of their own discipline rather than embracing the findings with open arms. For the fact remains that religion is on the dissecting table and the very presuppositions of the surgeon underline the danger of the operation and the uncertainty of the outcome. It is up to theologians to be prepared to be surgeons as well. But if their theology is man-centred rather than god-centred they will concede precisely what the sociologist wants. The more religion is numanised—the greater the emphasis on man, on his achievements, on his personal and psychological fulfilment—the more devastating becomes the challenge of the sociology of religion. For in the end all religion does become a human activity, which is precisely one of the assumptions of the sociology of religion, and hence, the conclusions of the theologian will approximate to those of the sociologist of religion.

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# MARTIN BUBER REVISITED

Ulrich Simon

When Buber died in 1965 Arab students placed a wreath at the funeral of the old sage who had worked, fought, and suffered for the peace of Jerusalem. Since then two further wars have taken place, and Buber's reputation in Israel has become even more ambiguous than it had been at the time of his death. The prophet is not generally well liked in his own country. Buber always enjoyed a far higher esteem in, say, England than in Israel. I remember, for example, when he gave an almost inaudible and unintelligible lecture at King's College, London, and the audience of several hundred submitted to his charismatic spell to such an extent that criticism was out of the question. In Israel, on the contrary, the charisma was pierced by daily contact, quarrels of a very common nature, about money, administration, and honours. Many Jews found fault with Buber when he accepted German prizes not many years after Hitler's genocide. Yet a picture in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* shows with what warm enthusiasm Jewish youth celebrated the professor's eightieth birthday. Indeed, the article is a friendly tribute and evaluates Buber's standing after his death in terms not dissimilar to the writer's in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, whereas Italian, Spanish, and French reference works remain silent. I have wondered whether oblivion would altogether encompass Buber's work, but now that the critical first decade is over one may be reasonably certain that Buber has come to stay in the annals of religious thought.

This survival may have been helped by critical and even hostile appraisals. One of the most penetrating has come from the pen of Gershom Scholem, himself an authority on Jewish mysticism. A paper 'Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism' (*Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXV, Zuerich 1967) has just been republished.[1] Scholem makes the point that this existentialist thinker cannot be evaluated apart from his personality and intellectual biography. Scholem knew Buber well for a period of fifty years and acknowledges the 'strong radiance emanating from him'. But he attacks his former hero for what almost looks like opportunism and cowardice 'when the chips were down'. Scholem exaggerates when he claims that Buber's 'total lack of influence in the Jewish world contrasts strangely with his recognition among non-Jews'. Only the future can prove or disprove whether Buber must be classed a Moses or Elijah manqué. Scholem's criticism cannot be directed against Buber's lack of orthodoxy, for he, too, is a non-observing sage, and religious allegiance to party, or attendance at synagogue, cannot be used by him as criteria. Buber never disguised his opposition to *halakhah* and ritualistic demands of religion. In the so-called battle between priests and prophets Buber certainly stood for a spirituality which still owed much to German idealism, i.e. the period before the catastrophe. Scholem admires his 'self-assured subjectivity and sovereignty' with which he blended his grandfather's chassidic treasures with the post-Kantian school. But soon the elements of mysticism and myth ('whose relation to each other never became wholly clear in Buber') had to yield to a new, and more lasting, realisation or actualisation of Judaism, distilled in the famous I-Thou, after years of disenchantment, war, and alienation.

Much has been written about the 'life of dialogue', the great discovery of Israel according to Buber. I am afraid much of our religious jargon (e.g. 'revelation in every Here and Now') stems from Buber's deployment of old theological tags. Scholem is highly critical of Buber's claim to have left mystical definitions behind and accuses him of distorting kabbalistic concepts of revelation. 'Encounter' is an example of what amounts to cheating, used by Buber to avoid the stringency of historical analysis, so that the Exodus is mixed up with 'the anarchic ground of the soul' rather than facts. Scholem hates 'pneumatic constructions', and even when Buber wishes to free Messianism from apocalyptic fanaticism his critic puts him in the company of Karl Barth, 'to minimize the factor of history'.

None of Buber's famous antitheses escape unscathed. Scholem can hardly go wrong in his throw-away condemnation of the *Emunah-Pistis* dialectic found in *Two Faiths* (i.e. the old Fiducia-Trust versus Fides-Faith polemic, now attributed to Judaism and Christianity, though with edges blurred). But the ungenerous final verdict to

place Buber among the prophets who 'sow but do not reap' will, I think, be reversed when Scholem is in all probability forgotten, despite certain 'factual' corrections which are in order. Indeed, Buber belongs to the long line of writers who shine and continue to influence, not on the grounds of accurate information, or scientific analysis, but a less definable quality. I have had a delectable taste of this by a study of his letters, which have appeared in three fat volumes, covering the years 1897-1965. This remarkable publication (1972-5)[2], subsidised by several foundations and not yet available in English, overflows with new riches.

The best thing about this Correspondence is its spaciousness which allows Buber's correspondents to query and answer the striving young Zionist (with Herzl), the maturing scholar (Barth, Brunner, Hesse *inter alia*), and the ageing exile in Jerusalem (Maurice Friedman et al.). It is indeed a superb dialogue, humane, rational, and unpredictable. Grete Schaeder, aided by Ernst Simon and Buber's son Rafael (whose mother was a German Gentile, converted to Judaism), and others, has achieved a miracle of editing from the immense archives in Jerusalem. The whole story of our time, its tragic and even its comic dimensions, unfolds before our eyes through the pens of all kinds of people, mostly now distinguished after their deaths in theology, literature, and the arts. Alas, why do such correspondences *never* contain letters to and from the great villains of the age? But have you ever written to, say, Hitler, or Stalin, or Mao or any of the criminal murderers—and received a reply? The great evil remains still shrouded in our documentation, and even here one cannot help detecting the gulf which separates the 'men of good will', with their sharp minds and warm feelings, from the unthinking and unfeeling bureaucrats. Buber certainly belongs to the class of letter-writers who approach every subject in a civilised manner and who have not yet learnt to score points by clever journalism. He is, of course, one of the greatest stylists of our time. His Bible translation, begun in cooperation with Franz Rosenzweig, author of the *Star of Redemption*, already sick and paralysed in 1925, when the enterprise got under way, and continued after his death in 1929, is one of the monumental marvels of the century. I have hailed it elsewhere (e.g. *The Old Testament Book List*) and cannot do justice to it here.

The production of *I and Thou* occurs before our eyes thanks to the letters exchanged between Buber and Rosenzweig.[3] The former submits his pages to the latter, for approval and critical comment. This correspondence begins in August 1922 when Buber taught part-time in a Jewish academy in Frankfurt. Rosenzweig quotes Eccles. XI, 1, and these famous words—'Cast your bread upon the waters!'—seem just right to express the hope that despite all former shortcomings and later reservations as expressed by Scholem Buber will fulfil a massive task. His interest, as he says, lies in the *Ur*-forms of the religious life, with special emphasis on community and personal existence. Magic, sacrifice, mystery and prayer are topics which demand to be included. Both men are aware of the pagan sub-structure of the religious passion, whose 'I will' is contrasted with 'Thy will be done', and which can so easily be denuded of passion and become an inferior, weary self-submission. Institutions, too, are always questionable, as religious buildings, be they temples, synagogues, or churches. Buber faces the irony of these paradoxes quite simply when he visits Rosenzweig, the genius of the word who can no longer speak, but only articulates by gesture or a most painful way of indirect writing. Thus the lengthy comments on *I and Thou* may almost be said to be written in blood.

After a few remarks on structural infelicities he takes the bull by the horns: 'You give to your I-Thou a mere cripple in the opposing I-It.' This programmatic censure takes us to the heart of the enduring debate. What about the IT? Is it the modern world, or the government of the modern world? If so, judges Rosenzweig, you can easily cripple IT, the product of a great deception, only 300 years old in Europe. I-IT cannot be articulated, except as a philosophical postulate. Only He (God), maintains Rosenzweig, can pronounce the given I-IT, being the author of life and death. Buber is reminded that he is intoxicated and thus consigns IT to the area of death and dying. But, no, Death belongs to the IT, i.e. the order of HIS creation.

Lest this sound like puns and word-splitting Rosenzweig alludes to a story in the Talmud (Cag.14b) which refers to four scribes in a garden (Paradise), one of whom saw and died, another saw and was wounded, yet another

started hacking away the buds (image of the apostate), and only one (Akiba) found the right way out. Buber is drugged and therefore plays havoc with the creation. And what is the proper exit, according to Rosenzweig? It is WE-IT, corresponding to the He-IT way in. When you add all these formulae you fulfil Schelling's great word: 'And then Pantheism will have become true'.

Pronouns aside, this problem of the I-Thou in a world of WE and IT has surely gained in scale since Buber wrote to his friend. His reply to the 'altruistic knight of the IT', though written in 1922, is therefore worthy of our consideration, with the knowledge of the unprecedented growth of IT constantly before our eyes and ears. Buber wrote in an age without computers, electronic communications of our sort, ecological perils, nuclear threats, and totalitarian organisation of society. The IT has grown to such an extent that only Kafka (whom Buber knew and valued) seems to have anticipated, transcribing the images of dreams in story form.

Buber tells his friend that he is grateful for. and receptive to, his uncompromising criticism, hoping that Rosenzweig will acknowledge that first IT, and then HE and WE, are being given their rightful place as the work proceeds. When you deal with the WORD, HISTORY, and GOD you cannot anticipate the complications which must follow. But even before this happens, Buber pinpoints the problem: what is the *Reich* (regnum, reign)? The answer is not to be found in the realm of 'religion' or soulful piety. Buber is now heading for the actualisation of holiness, the way and transformation of real life.

At this stage there appears a letter from F.C. Rang, a Protestant pastor, who after patriotic deviations during the war had returned to a radical Christian stance. He senses a breath of holiness in *I and Thou*, but also gets involved in a discussion about IT. Rang is already talking the language of a later (our) generation when he criticises too much secularity, or the false optimism which so easily permeates an 'openness to the world'. True, he argues, theological tradition as well as a pagan and tragic awareness of the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* are also to be condemned. A prayerful language, rather than scientific discourse (as Buber's), is appropriate for the *THOU*. Otherwise among the many *thous* God becomes just another thou, and his Unity is lost. Love, obedience, faith, repentance cannot thrive in empty talk about relationships. This is Augustine's greatness (in the Confessions) that he addresses HIM as THOU. How can one find a language between the altar and the scientific market?

Rosenzweig by this time has got used to the ever-growing book as one gets used to living in a new house, and what attracts him most is that which he regards as mistaken. He touches here upon the mysterious nature of 'dialogue': mere agreement elicits no real response, but when we think towards the unthinkable we establish a community, even of disagreement, which cannot be unscrambled. However, the IT remains troublesome, a kind of sorry remainder after the THOU has evaporated, but reality cannot be disposed of so lightly. Rosenzweig teases Buber by remarking that if he had honestly his way how gladly he would accept Buddha in his paradise, yes, and also the cat and all the pious good souls, just as Dante puts the pre-Christian philosophers in limbo. But they need not be constrained in this ante-hell, it would be a proper ante-heaven, if only Buber had not been bewitched by the diabolical I-IT of the philosophers and had been content with the blessed HE-IT of children, of Goethe, of the Creator himself. Having said that, Rosenzweig wonders, after some silence in the correspondence, if his friend and author feels hurt and sulks.

Buber returns to the fray and movingly states in such a relationship as theirs there can be no question of 'being hurt'. He could not say anything, let alone write. Not being a 'writing man' by nature Buber is again perplexed by the very nature of articulation as part of our reality. Our inner and our external history inevitably contribute to, and blend in, our thinking, and of this not everything can be made clear. For a Jew this is always an acute problem, since the external world clashes with the traditional heritage. Christians in the West have now also been made aware of this gulf and have to question, as they did not in Buber's day, what really constitutes the IT which confronts them under HIM.

The discussion, however, ends here, or rather continues on a different level. After I-and-Thou Buber, who soon declares himself to be 'far away from it', turns to Gog and Magog, and leads such a busy life that he envies Paul's 'clear conscience towards God and Men' (Acts 24, 16). Contacts

with Christians abound: Gogarten, Ragaz, Guardini. Hence the letters are shorter and concern individual points and even practical matters, such as conferences. However, a letter from Ernst Simon returns to the attack. Buber's I-and-Thou is too 'metaphysical', lacks the sense of the tragic. We have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and our knowledge is in itself tragic. We know shame: hence sex is tragic. We are expelled from Paradise. hence work is tragic, for we are helplessly delivered to it. But this is precisely what makes us into human beings: we speak not to animals nor to angels, but to men as they are. The Law must be accepted as a tragic necessity. Yes, religion does become religiosity, it becomes IT, just because we are human beings. Buber, alleges Simon, overvalues human relationships at the expense of Law (Halacha). We do not stand 'naked before God', but rather need clothes to stand at all, in our middle mediocrity. Only the preacher can afford to stand before the holy community without reservations, i.e. holy. There is no Messianic world where we can naively presuppose a receptivity for I-Thou directness. The crowd prefer cheap, hysterical sensations, and the religious lust is perhaps the worst. This poison—perhaps now in the nineteen seventies still better known—destroys. Buber did not reply, but is said to have commented that all this is quite right—*but only beyond Love* (my italics).

In 1924 the letters show that these topics are not academic but directly relevant to the Jewish problem in Germany. As Rosenzweig says: 'Christians ignore Jews in order to tolerate them; Jews ignore Christians, in order to let themselves be tolerated.' In these pre-Hitler days these voices long for meaningful dialogue in the Messiah. It was never achieved, as we know to our cost. Buber meantime remains more God-centred than his friends, just because he rejects human traditions. The Pauline Law-Revelation controversy flares up between the friends, but not in the New Testament context. Once again, Buber tackles the ancient and modern problem, namely, of the dividing line between God's self-revelation and human laws, commandments, statutes, regulations. Buber insists that God is not Law-Giver in a universal sense, but man is recipient of laws in a sense of personal acceptance. For the eaves-dropping Christian the debate is fascinating, for it provides just the kind of background which St Paul must have had himself. The complexity of the argument is reminiscent of *Romans*, and it is not just an accident that Rosenzweig, as against Buber's concept of Revelation, denounces a Barthian stance, which he himself seems to have flirted with earlier. For the Jew the Law is part of the contract, *tout court*, whereas for Buber Law and culture are secondary and disposable. Then, in May 1925, the young Lambert Schneider writes, apparently out of the blue, to fly the kite of a new translation of the Bible—'commercially risky', but to be taken seriously. I love Rosenzweig's first comment on the German Genesis text, presumably sent to him by Buber in June 1925 '. . . amazingly German; Luther sounds almost jiddish by way of contrast. Is this getting too German?'

A sense of humour is hardly one of Buber's great assets, almost as if he avoided a light touch. Similarly, though a lover of music, he reserves all his music for the translation. How much all our translators could profit from a thorough study of his principles which derive from the theological foundation of I-and-Thou. The verb, not the noun, holds the secret of divine and human speech: the Spirit does not 'hover' but 'broods' over the deep, concretely. Nothing is left to chance, no mere acceptable verbiage is allowed to slip through. Rosenzweig, most suggestively, sees the work as a weapon against the Christian Marcionites (Harnack!), who only accept the N.T. with an admixture of the Psalms. Scholem's reaction to this great 'missionary' enterprise moves from sincere praise to certain reservations regarding the 'pathos' of the style. Should Biblical prose have an aura of solemnity, a pathos which demands that the text be sung? Does the intonation resemble that of an incantation? Buber, while welcoming informed criticism, replies that style is not the matter for discussion, but the text which inspires the style. This 'elementary' prose is not to be confused with 'art'. And while these discussions continue Max Brod sends Buber the last novel of Kafka's life, *The Castle*. Had Kafka been alive, replies Buber, this is what he would have said to him: 'Yes, indeed, so it is: in order to achieve meaning the meaningless enters existence, and with that we have to deal here, right to the last moment. But in coming to terms with

it, and enduring its confusions, in concrete contradiction, do we not become aware of meaning, in cruel sanctification, not of our kind, and yet turned towards us, piercing at the right time, and filling our hearts?' *The Castle* was for Buber 'not reading matter but real happening, an incarnation or embodiment of the secret which concerns Kafka's survivors in their own inmost experience'. Brod replies that the echo to Kafka's work is yet weak and reminds Buber that the author had asked his lady friend Dora Dymant to burn twenty thick notebooks and from his bed watched the flames engulf these manuscripts.

These late nineteen-twenties present us with a last flowering of great minds in Germany. Buber is continually under pressure and responds richly to Jewish, Christian, and secular enquiries. Never again could there be such a hectic dialogue between I-and-Thou. Rosenzweig reminds Buber not to yield to expectations of a work of art though *it is one*. The elegance of mathematical proof is only open to those who understand mathematics, and not to those who seek elegance for its own sake. The Bible cannot be subjected to aesthetic controls, though the texts establish aesthetic norms. In 1927 Alfred Jeremias welcomes the work not as a 'beautiful' success but as a Jewish Bible which exposes 'the mystique of daily life and the sacredness of the profane'. Luther, with all his genius, could not render the hebraic Pneuma, and this did not matter because Luther wrote for Christians who were convinced that *novum testamentum in vetere latet*. But Christendom in its present state profits from new life in the Old Testament. Herman Hesse gives three reasons for his praise (1) The translation lives as a living creature; (2) it is a real person, not a personality; (3) it is a friend, not always a friendly friend, but just a friend.

Buber's life seemed to end in triumph when he celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1928. For a moment it seems as if all the enlightened spirits of the age (Ragaz, Schweitzer, Weizmann etc.) converge upon a humane commonwealth of religion and peace. Buber is invited to accept a professorship in Jerusalem and he reflects on the offer while he visits the great French cathedrals. But the first rumblings of the violence of the next decade can be heard. Jews and Arabs fight in Palestine. Buber protests in vain against executions. Then the ailing Rosenzweig dies on December 10th 1929. One profound and creative dialogue ends, and, to crown it all, a project in Berlin elects Torczyner (later Tur Sinai) as chief editor of another translation of the Bible. But underterred by setbacks and the menacing advent of Nazism (the first reference to Hitler occurs not before January 1933) the work continues. The doors are still open and Buber makes contact with, or is asked for information by, men like Lohmeyer, K.L. Schmidt, Gogarten, Barth, and Brunner. How is it, and why is it, that this symphony of truth was, for a time at least, drowned by the yells of totalitarian terror? Why was there never the remotest chance of dialogue with, say, Hitler and his henchmen, or indeed Stalin and his gang? Why did the dialogue not extend to the hopeless cynicism and naked despair in the 'twenties, as, for example, shown now in an exhibition in London, at the Hayward Gallery, called NEUE SACHLICHKEIT? Does the *Ich* in the final count only speak to the *Du* which wants to listen anyhow? Or do I only dare address the Thou which I anticipate to be on my side?—I ask the question again, for it haunts the reader with increasing poignancy.

In 1938 Buber leaves at last for Jerusalem, on the eve of the beginning of the Final Solution. Hesse wishes him God-speed on his sixtieth birthday: work and community is to welcome him. He leaves the Diaspora, after a serious attack of influenza, bare of self-assurance and yet with a certain 'confidence arising out of friendship'. I detect here the culmination of the tradition of wise men, who, like Joseph in and out of prison, dreamers and interpreters, utopians and practical at the same time, experience endless disasters and never lose hope. This very Jewish attitude to life answers to the Lukan Christian soteriology, which, far from suppressing the abyss over which we tread, elegantly mounts hurdle after hurdle to reach the end, where life and death meet in triumph. Buber's correspondence is a document of our times which reflects acutely this mad optimism of faith and serious effort on every level of human existence. Two types of faith—Emunah and Pistis—truly meet.

NOTES

1 Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, Schocken Books, 1978.

2 *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, Heidelberg, Lambert Schneider.

3 First draft of *I and Thou* dates back to 1919. Buber does not acknowledge Rosenweig's direct influence (Cf. Letter 302, of 16.2.1954).

# GEORGE TYRRELL AND LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM: AN ESSAY IN DEVELOPMENT

Eamon Duffy

George Tyrrell was born in Dublin on February 6th 1861, and educated at Rathmines school, a day establishment where the discipline was 'too Irish, too easy', but modelled 'on Arnoldian lines', with 'plenty of corruption and free fighting', and where he achieved 'a quiet steady record of low mediocrity'[1]. His home background was Evangelical, but in 1875 he began to attend the old-fashioned high-church services at Grangegorman church. His anglo-catholicism was at first largely accidental, and, as he later claimed, entirely external; but it awakened in him a longing for reality in religion, a desire for moral reform, and a fascination with Roman Catholicism, which he quickly came to think 'the goal towards which High Churchism was an impeded movement'. In 1878 he went up to Trinity College, where his friendship with the young Robert Dolling helped give theological backbone to his religious position; nevertheless he gravitated increasingly away from Anglicanism. Though he travelled to London with Dolling in March 1879 to work with him at St Alban's, Holborn, it was clear to both of them by then that Tyrrell would become a Roman Catholic. Tyrrell loathed the Anglo-Catholicism he found in London, 'a sort of ecclesiastical debauch', and on Palm Sunday 1879 was unable to remain in St Alban's during the blessing of palms. Full of 'sickness and anger and disappointment' at a service which for all its decorum and beauty was not 'the utterance of the great communion of the faithful, past and present, of all ages and nations', but merely 'of a few irresponsible agents acting in defiance of the community to which they belonged', he wandered across the road to the Roman Catholic church of St Etheldreda's, Ely Place. There, in darkness, and 'mid the smell of a dirty Irish crowd, the same service was being conducted, in nasal tones, most unmusically, by three very typically popish priests'. This experience was for him decisive. 'Of course it was mere emotion and sentiment, and I set no store by it either then or now, but oh! the sense of reality! here was the old business, being carried on by the old firm, in the old ways; here was continuity, that took one back to the catacombs[2]; here was no need of, and therefore no suspicion of, pose or theatrical parade; its aesthetic blemishes were its very beauties for me in that mood'[3]. By the end of May 1879 Tyrrell had become a Roman Catholic; by September he had joined the Jesuit order.

The story of Tyrrell's conversion to Catholicism[4], told with characteristic self-laceration in the *Autobiography* he wrote for his devoted disciple and biographer Maud Petre, has been dwelt on here for the light it throws on the personal roots of Tyrrell's later career. His alternate hatred of Catholicism for its unreality and empty show, and his love of its integrity and completeness, the link it provided with humanity past, present and future in its quest for God, were to dominate his later writings as they dominate his account of his religious awakening. More than any other of the Catholic modernists Tyrrell's writings are expressions of his own spiritual journey, and are to be understood only by reference to it.

Tyrrell portrays his Jesuit career as one of progressive disillusionment, but in fact it was in many ways a distinguished and successful one, at least up to the publication of his first book in 1897. Despite a mercurial temperament, exacerbated by recurrent migraine, despite also a caustic and often lacerating wit, he had the gift of friendship, and was popular with his fellow Jesuits. Ordained in 1891, he went the following year as curate at the Jesuit mission in St Helens, Lancashire, where he was blissfully happy, and where he first discovered his gift of spiritual direction. Much against his will he left St Helens in 1894 to become professor of philosophy at Stonyhurst College; and here it may be said that his contribution to modernism began.

Roman Catholicism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was intellectually and morally depressed. Its theological schools were still dominated by a degenerate scholasticism which owed little to Aquinas, and were dedicated to the justification of the offensive/defensive polemic of Pio Nono's ultramontanism. The

comparative liberalism of Leo XIII was, however, beginning to make itself felt, in the canonisation of 'social catholicism' in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and in the revival of Thomism signalised by *Aeterni Patris*. The general if modest liberalism represented by these measures was not taken up with any enthusiasm by English Catholics, but at Stonyhurst Tyrrell threw himself wholeheartedly into the Thomist revival. He began, in his own words, to 'turn the young men into Dominicans'. There was in this something of the convert's zeal, but it was more. Tyrrell had been revolted by the rigidity of contemporary Catholic thinking, and believed that 'Aquinas represents a far less developed theology than that of the later schoolmen . . . by going back to him one escapes from many of the superstructures of his more narrow-minded successors'. Tyrrell found in Thomas 'an elastic sympathy with contemporary culture -a spirit soon forgotten in a rabinical zeal for conformity to the bare letter of his teaching'[5]. In fact his own pugnacious espousal of Thomism against the Society's traditional Suarezian teaching led to his removal from Stonyhurst in 1896. But he was not in disgrace, and moved to Farm Street as one of the Society's apologists and publicists, and a regular contributor to *The Month*. He was also becoming increasingly popular and widely known as a spiritual director, much in demand for retreats, and considered a specialist in dealing with sufferers from 'difficulties and doubts'[6].

Out of this pastoral concern his first book grew. *Nova et Vetera*, published in 1897, was a collection of informal meditations, and contains much of his most distinctive and beautiful writing. The book changed Tyrrell's life, for it was the occasion of his first meeting with Baron Friedrich von Hugel. In so far as 'Modernism' existed as a coherent movement, von Hugel was its centre, its organising genius. Though a layman he had devoted his life to theological studies, and was conversant with the most advanced theological work, whether protestant or catholic, then being carried out in Europe. He made it his business to promote personal contact between liberal-minded catholics and protestant workers in theology, and his friends included the most promising of catholic biblical scholars, Alfred Loisy, as well as German, French and English Protestants such as Eucken, Sabatier, Troeltsch and Caird. Von Hugel, impressed by *Nova et Vetera*, now 'took up' Tyrrell, he began to direct his reading, bullied him into learning German, and forced him to read extensively in the field of biblical criticism. His power over Tyrrell was immense. 'Every time I meet you or hear from you', Tyrrell told him in February 1901, 'I am poked on a little further, but, like a wheelbarrow, I am not susceptive of sustained impetus, but stick where I am dropped'[7]. He was never allowed to stick for long, and the process of 'poking on' was painful. Von Hugel is an enigmatic figure; his slow, ruminative mind, cautious and addicted to minute shadings and qualifications, was able to hold side by side a deep and traditional catholic piety, and a radical and even drastic historical and biblical scepticism, without apparent discomfort[8]. Tyrrell was less able to cope with such contradictions, and at Christmas 1902 wrote in anguish to his friend Henri Bremond:

> 'Saying the midnight Mass for the nuns for whom it was all so real, life-giving, factual and tangible I could fain have cried out "Date nobis de oleo vestro", hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt and loathing the thin and windy manna of criticism and truth. And then, appealing to my emotional feeblensss, round came the waits at 2 a.m. with their "Glad tidings of great joy" till I could have damned all the critics into Hell, if they had but left me such a receptacle. However they wound up with a somewhat dolorous rendering of "so long thy power hath blessed me, etc". And so I went asleep with a vague hope that in some, as yet unguessable, way, we should find the synthesis, and that the angel-faces of the beliefs, loved long since and lost awhile, would shine out on us again glorified and eternalized'[9].

Tyrrell's search for a synthesis between traditional belief and modern critical science was to preoccupy him for the remainder of his short life, and was an epitome of the major problem of reorientation facing not Catholics alone but Christianity itself at the turn of the century. Put simply, the problem was that of relating historical orthodoxy, and in particular Christology and Trinitarian theology, to the picture of Jesus and of early Christian origins which was emerging from the work of men like Weiss, Pfleiderer, and Harnack. For Catholics the problem was particu-

larly acute, for they were confronted with the task of justifying the dogmatic, sacramental and hierarchical system which historical research showed to have been the product of centuries of growth, but for which the Church had immemorially claimed Christ's specific institution. It was this concern which was to produce the classical 'Modernist' utterance, Loisy's *L'Evangile et L'Eglise*. Liberal Catholic apologetic was normally based on some version or other of Newman's theory of development, and up to August 1900 Tyrrell himself was convinced that a doctrine of development would explain the apparent discrepancy between modern Catholicism and primitive Christianity. The 'deposit' of revelation was, he wrote,

> 'susceptible of a three-fold development—first by the analysis of the literal and abstract sense of the words delivered or the ideas created in the minds of the first hearers; secondly by the intermarriage of truths revealed with the truths and experiences naturally possessed by the minds of the hearers at any given period; thirdly, by the growth of the collective intelligence of the Church, whereby the concrete meaning of the original utterances, the truth they hinted at but could not contain, is better divined.' [10]

This position did not long satisfy Tyrrell. It involved two assumptions which he could not accept. Firstly, in this theory the 'deposit of revelation' seemed to grow, and nineteenth century theologians to 'better divine' the truths of revelation than St Augustine or even the Apostles. Secondly, in assuming continuous development between the elaborated theology of modern Catholicism and the original 'deposit', the theory invested that theology at least derivatively with the status of a sort of secondary revelation, and reduced the deposit itself to a set of theological first principles. Tyrrell sought a solution which would distinguish between revelation and theology, and which would relegate the latter to its proper and secondary position. His first attempt at a solution was published in *The Month* for November 1899, under the title 'The Relation of Theology to Devotion'. Tyrrell later claimed that all his developed teaching was explicitly contained in this essay—'I have simply eddied round and round the same point'[11]. Its argument is simple enough. All our knowledge of God is analogical; he can be conceived only anthropomorphically and in metaphor. Metaphysical and theological speculation about God are 'of the thinnest and most uninstructive description' in direct proportion to their distance from the 'grossness' of popular religious conceptions. God has revealed himself 'not to the theologians or the philosophers, but to the babes, to fishermen, to peasants'. The task of scientific theology is wholly regulative or corrective—to moderate the abuses and extremes of popular notions of God. The church's task as guardian of revelation is to preserve 'this concrete, coloured, imaginative expression of Divine mysteries as it lay in the minds of the first recipients'. This original revelation is itself the corrective both of popular devotion and of theology, but devotion is a surer guide to truth than speculation—*Lex orandi est Lex credendi*. The popular devotion to the lonely and neglected 'Prisoner of the Tabernacle' is 'crude and simple', but fundamentally more Christian than the notion of a 'now passionless and apathetic Christ'. Theology, therefore, 'as far as it formulates and justifies the devotion of the best Catholics, and as far as it is true to the life of faith and charity as actually lived, so far is it a law and corrective for all. But where it begins to contradict the facts of that spiritual life, it loses its reality and its authority, and needs itself to be corrected by the *lex orandi*.' [12]

Tyrrell's target in this essay was the sort of scholastic rationalism which he again attacked a month later in 'A Perverted Devotion', an article which resulted in his removal from Farm Street and his 'exile' in the remote fastnesses of Swaledale, at the Jesuit mission in Richmond. Tyrrell had as yet no conception of a general reinterpretation of Christian doctrine as an expression of Christian piety, on lines laid down by Schleiermacher. Indeed in the previous year he had attacked this very idea in a review of Auguste Sabatier's *Vitality of Christian Dogmas*. In that review he had rejected the view that dogma was 'but the language of faith or religion', whose meaning was to be observed 'in life and action, not as fixed or petrified by definition' he had roundly asserted revelation to be 'a supernatural instruction of the mind . . . in all respects similar to the informing of one mind by another.'[13]. Clearly his thinking had shifted

in the course of the intervening year closer to Sabatier's position, away from a 'propositional' view of revelation.

The shift was, of course, the direct result of the reading prescribed by von Hugel. Harnack's *Das Wesen der Christentums* impressed him with 'the madness of supposing we can go on ignoring so plain a fact as the growth of Catholicism out of a germ as unlike Catholicism as a walnut is unlike a walnut tree.' Though he clung to the notion of 'development' as a means of meeting Harnack's challenge he was using language in private which suggested radical disruption rather than gradual development. Catholicism, he told Bremond, had been held rigid so long that 'there must come a sudden bursting of impassible barriers, resulting in inundation and much loss of life . . What will be left in the reconstructed Catholicism is more uncertain matter of prediction.' The tone here is more radical than the content, for he could still envisage that not only belief in the Incarnation, the communion of saints, the sacramental system and 'a teaching *vox populi*', but even 'a modified sort of Papal Infallibility' might possible 'survive the scorching light of criticism.' Nevertheless, Tyrrell was now preoccupied with the 'essential and most characteristic feature of the problem which Modernism has to deal with', the 'historical difficulty'[14]. He was himself no historian—'I am weak in facts' he told A.R. Waller, 'strong only in fancy and fiction', yet von Hugel's mentorship forced 'facts' upon him[15]. He reacted by seeking a formulation of Christianity in which historicity was minimised. Tyrrell's appreciation of Blondel's thought is well known, though his grasp of it has been questioned, but it was in any case simply one aspect of a search for a spiritual reality which was invulnerable to the powerful solvent of criticism. The whole value of our religious theory and symbolism, he wrote in 1901, 'is to give some sort of mental expression and interpretation to those facts of internal experience which are the substance of all religion.' Christ himself was to be sought 'not in the life that he once led outside us', but 'in that which he is continually living within us, and in which every event of the other has its mystical counterpart.'[16] The theoretical underpinning for this approach came as much from protestant post-Kantian and neo-Hegelian thought as from Blondel. He spoke of the 'grateful relief' he found in reading Fichte, whose *Bestimmung der Menschen* 'would help many a soul in search of a firm basis of faith'; after a particularly disturbing visit from von Hugel in September 1902 he told Bremond

> 'The Baron has come and gone, and left me, as usual, with more to think of than I can digest. I wish he would draw up a list, not of what he doesn't believe, but of what he does . . . Were it not for men like Caird and Euchen I don't know where I should be, but these men have touched what Jesus Christ touched. Doubtless God speaks in history, but it is a polysyllabic word of which we miss the ends and therewith the meaning; and unless He is to be found within each soul he is practically unfindable.'[17]

This phase of Tyrrell's thought is encapsulated in *Lex Orandi*, published in 1903. Published, astonishingly, with ecclesiastical approval, this work treats dogma as 'the highest spiritual expression of the will-world that the collective understanding of believers has elaborated by the spiritual labour of centuries', a 'guide or plan to direct our attitude in the will-world'. The church was concerned with history, science, or philosophy only in so far as they bear on 'eternal life'. Thus, 'the *religiously* important criticism to be applied to points of Christian belief whether historical, philosophic or scientific, is not that which interests the historian, philosopher, or scientist, but that which is supplied by the spirit of Christ, the *spiritus qui vivificat*: is the belief in accord with, is it a development of, the spirit of the Gospel? What is its religious value? Does it make for the love of God and man? Does it show us the Father and reveal to us our sonship?' The Virgin Birth, therefore, is to be valued for its fruitfulness in the devotion of the faithful—'the spiritual truth is given to us not in the language of parable but in that of historical fact, which as such is subject to the criteria of history, though as a vehicle of a religious value, as the earthern vessel of a heavenly treasure, it is subject only to the criterion of faith'. Were the Infancy narratives 'merely a legend inspired by some prophet full of the spirit of Christ, this religious value would not be affected'.[18]

This theory was riddled with problems. It seemed to solve the problem of history by sidestepping it—Tyrrell paid lip-service to the fact that Jesus Christ 'is not a purely ideal creation

like King Arthur, but an historical personage', but in *Lex Orandi* he made no real case for the *historicity* of the creeds. Indeed he was accused of maintaining pure pragmatism, of ignoring the question of the truth or falsehood of dogma in favour of its spiritual usefulness. Tyrrell denied the truth of this allegation, but it cannot be said that he refutes it, either in *Lex Orandi* or its sequel, *Lex Credendi*, written in part to meet such charges[19]. What he had produced was in fact a version of Ritschl's 'value theory' of dogma, as he himself admitted, though he claimed to have derived it from William James's *Will to Believe* rather than from Ritschl. He realised, too, that it was 'very wobbly as a criterion for belief . . . You can't sit down and sort existing beliefs as true or false by it', but it did represent 'the life-law by which the collective experience of the Christian people determines whether beliefs shall live or die, or at least be modified'.[20] This was essentially the position he had criticised in August Sabatier's *Vitality of Dogma* in 1897, and the posthumous publication of Sabatier's *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* prompted some uncomfortable self-questioning. 'I ask myself frankly', he told a correspondent, 'am I implicitly a liberal Protestant, or is Sabatier implicitly a liberal Catholic? Or is there still an irreducible difference between us?' Tyrrell believed there was; while at one with the school of Schleiermacher in seeing dogma as the experimental utterance of an essentially non-verbal 'sentiment', not given 'as it were from an external teacher' but slowly evolved 'under the dumb guidance of the Spirit', nevertheless he parted from Liberal Protestantism in seeing the creeds so evolved as *normative*. Tradition, like the canon of scripture, demands inner assent, as the 'record of the self-evolution' of the Spirit. The authority of dogma was 'not merely that of an intellectual guide or artistic standard; but is truly moral and in its very inspiration demanding study and consideration and adaptation to one's own spiritual wants'[21].

Whether this distinction did in fact redeem Tyrrell's theory from a charge of liberal protestantism seems an open question. At any rate he had reached a crucial point in his own theological development. Determined to resist the equation of dogma and 'feeling', he found his dissent from this position difficult to formulate. Tradition, theology, dogma, were vital to any balanced Christianity, yet they needed to be redefined. 'It is not', he told von Hugel, 'as they [the ecclesiastical authorites] suppose, about this or that article of the creed we differ; we accept it all; but it is the word *credo*; the sense of "true" as applied to dogma; the whole value of revelation that is at stake'[22]. His sense of the need for a theological revolution was heightened by a growing disillusionment with the church itself as a vehicle for the Catholicism of the future. The repressive pontificate of Pius X was the principal cause of this disenchantment; comparing the policies of Rome with 'the Czardom or any other tyranny' he told von Hugel that 'I am forced to wonder . . . whether an evil tree can bring forth good fruit and an institution so (it would seem) essentially the foe of liberty and the principles of the Gospel can by any steady evolution develop into that Catholicism of which we dream—except in the sense in which Judaism developed into Christianity'[23].

Throughout 1905 and 1906, then, Tyrrell was wrestling with a series of crucial issues. He rejected the scholastic notion that revelation consisted essentially of a set of immutable propositions, he rejected Sabatier's view that revelation was a continuing experience of which dogma was the ever-changing expressio..; he rejected the liberal catholic attempt to bring these two poles together in a theory of doctrinal development[24]. His proposed solution was twofold. firstly 'a return to the earlier and stricter view of the unchanging, unprogressive character of the apostolic revelation' with a corresponding 'repudiation of all attempts to mitigate the supposed difficulties of this severer view by theories of development'; and secondly the definition of this original revelation or deposit as 'the Spirit of Christ', the divine life of charity and the perfect knowledge of the mystery of God joined in a human life lived once for all -

> He was the King, and he was the Kingdom. Grow how it will, as a vine stretching its branches all over the world, the Church is nothing but Christ. The saints but partake of his fulness. They but manifest what was latent in his spirit. The fulness was there when he was there, the end was involved in the beginning, the fruit in the germ. After the fulness

there can be no new revelation, only an endless unfolding[25].

The revelation of God in Christ is a complex, involving feeling, thought, and action; it finds expression in the apostolic 'deposit', and in the lives of the great saints, 'as partial revelations of the same spirit, but in no wise possibly adding to the substance. With it, as controlling rule and criterion, they make up a growing body of revelation whose parts are not connected dialectically like those of theology, but are related to one another as all the works of the same school of art, namely as various manifestations of one and the same master spirit'[26]. The language in which the Apostolic revelation is expressed was not that of 'a reflex thought-out life theory, but . . . the spontaneous self-expression of a profound religious experience .... a prophetic vision of the kingdom of God directed to the orientation of the spiritual life, and enshrining a mysterious truth independent of those other truths used for its illustration' [27]. These prophetic utterances are evocative, not scientific, and they cannot be systematised, for 'misinterpreted as literal statements of fact they are often inconsistent with one another and with the world of fact-truths'. Yet they legitimately prompt reflection and explication, the proper sphere of theology. This 'science of theology' will be always liable to revolutions according as the accumulations of its own proper sort of experience calls for restatement of its theories and conceptions. These restatements must not be 'mere patchings and lettings-out' but 'transformations, the dying of form into form—the new containing the old virtually and effectually'. Side by side with this theology should grow a 'living and growing creed or body of dogmas and mysteries reflecting and embodying the spiritual growth and development of the community'[28].

These views, formulated and published before Tyrrell's excommunication in 1907, were underpinned by a wider preoccupation, which was to have momentous consequences for the final phase of his thought, culminating in *Christianity at the Crossroads*, his most important and most characteristic work. As early as 1903 he had told von Hugel that 'the question of the relation of Christianity to other religions is just the *whole question*'[29]. Tyrrell held firmly that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ was unique, definitive, 'alone classical and normative'. Yet he was impatient too of the parochialism of Christianity, of 'its ridiculous little world-scheme and its funny little God, and above all its deplorable history'. He complained of Steinmann's *Die geistige Offenbarung Gottes in der geschicthlichen Perzon Jesu* (1903) that it was 'too Christocentric and makes a knowledge of the historical Christ a condition of the fullest religious life. I cannot swallow that'[30]. The clue to this apparent contradiction, puzzling in the light of the relentless Christocentrism of Tyrrell's own writings, lies in the immanentism of Tyrrell's thought about the religious faculty itself. For him all man's religious activity was the work of the indwelling Logos, and therefore in some sense a faculty natural to all men. External revelation is recognised and appropriated by 'a revelation in ourselves which is the action of conscience . . . Were it not already written in the depths of our being, where the spirit is rooted in God, we could not recognise it'[31]. This immanentism was a constant feature of Tyrrell's thought; von Hugel had noted and praised it as early as 1899. As Tyrrell became less convinced of the viability of his vision of a renewed Catholicism it fed his conviction that Christianity itself might be provisional. He began to search for a theory which would relate the historical particularity of Christ and Christianity to a general theory of religion, wider even than Catholicism and into which he could envisage Catholicism dying. For Catholicism to him was more than Christianity, it was not merely 'the leaves of the Gospel, but .... all that has been or is in process of being leavened by it' not a name merely for 'the fire, but for all that it has set burning.' Yet he was increasingly doubtful about the possibility of a reconciliation between this wider view and existing forms of Christianity. 'Modernism', he told an Anglican friend in January 1909, 'is a defiance of the parable. "The bottles will burst" says Christ. "They will not burst" says the modernist. The best way to keep the old bottles is to stick to the old wine . . . My own work, which I regard as finished, has been to raise a question which I have failed to answer'[32].

His work was not finished; his wrestling with the relation of Christianity to religion in general had forced upon him the question which dominated the liberal protestant theology of his day.

What *was* Christianity? He was certain of the inadequacy of the liberal protestant answer to that question, and fearful that his own past work was itself based on liberal protestant assumptions. On April 9th 1909 he wrote to von Hugel.

> Having finished Schweitzer and reread J. Weiss very carefully .... I am satisfied that the liberal Protestant Sunday-School-teacher Christ is as mythical as the miraculous Christ .... But I feel that my past work has been dominated by the liberal Protestant Christ and doubt whether I am not bankrupt .... If we cannot save huge chunks of Transcendentalism Christianity must go. Civilisation can do (and has done) all that the purely immanentist Christ of Matthew Arnold is credited with. The other-worldly emphasis, the doctrine of immortality, was what gave Christianity its original impulse and sent martyrs to the lions. If that is accidental we only owe to Jesus in a great measure what we owe to all good men in some measure. In the sense of survival, immortality, the Resurrection is the critical and central dogma[33].

Tyrrell believed his own writing tainted with liberal protestantism because in his concern to separate the permanent in Christianity from the contingent, to discover what Harnack had called 'Eternal life in the midst of Time' he had portrayed Christ as incarnate conscience, and dogma as a prophetic guide to conduct. He had been aware of the danger of this emphasis—'I find something frigidly Anglican and respectable in Matthew Arnold's Righteousness as the characteristic of the divinity', he once wrote, 'It is a bloodless sort of attribute, and so comprehensible, even when qualified by "eternal", as to starve the mystical sense ... God must be righteous, but he must be more.' He had tried in *Lex Credendi* to present an account of Christianity that made allowance for the transcendent and mystical in religion, but he had not yet come to terms with the scandal of particularity, with the historical Jesus, who, 'even should our Christologies be blown to atoms by the damned critics' retained his mystery[34].

In his last work, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads*, published posthumously in 1909, Tyrrell reworked the whole modernist controversy, gathering together into what he sensed to be a final synthesis the results of his work of the previous ten years. In it he attempted to tackle the problem of Christianity's relation to world religions, to distinguish the modernist enterprise from liberal protestantism, and above all to come to terms with the historical Jesus and his abiding significance. A book which set out to summarise the work of ten years cannot be adequately summarised in a paragraph or two, but Tyrrell's fundamental point is simple enough. He argues that 'with all its accretions and perversions Catholicism is, for the Modernist, the only authentic Christianity. Whatever Jesus was, He was in no sense a Liberal Protestant. All that makes Catholicism most repugnant to present modes of thought derives from Him.'[35] Christianity according to Liberal Protestantism is 'rather a system of religious ethics than a religion', but in the apocalyptic orientation of Jesus' teaching, revealed by Weiss and Schweitzer, ethics play a secondary role—'if ... the religion of Jesus was not exclusively transcendental, its emphasis was almost entirely on the other world.... And this transcendentalism is the great reproach made against Catholicism by the Liberal Protestant, as well as by the Positivist'[36]. Harnack and his school had praised the moral teaching of Jesus, while rejecting the 'supernatural' conceptual system in which it took its place as a product of a Jewish first century mentality, of no permanent value. Tyrrell challenges this: 'Is it credible that the purest of all hearts should not have seen God; that it should have been the prey to a sort of religious delirium? Is it possible to trust the moral, and distrust the religious, intuition of Jesus?'[37]. The religious, transcendental teaching of Jesus, and in particular its apocalyptic expression, is true to the essential tragedy of man, his sense of exile in a world of sin and suffering, his restless search for God; these emphases are faithfully reflected in Catholicism, are absent from liberal Protestantism, with its 'bland faith and hope in the present order, its refusal to face the incurable tragedy of human life'[38]. So far Tyrrell's argument is essentially that of Loisy in *L'Evangile et L'Eglise*, though incomparably more passionately and religiously expressed. In the second part of his book he examines the place of Christianity in the wider spectrum of world religion, and considers the possibility of an 'universal religion' which would embody the insights of all the great religions.

Tyrrell considers the possibility that the study of religions, anthropology and psychology might provide a 'science of religion' which would bring such a 'unification' of religion within our grasp. Here Tyrrell was reflecting contemporary optimism about the benefits of religious unification, the same optimism which had helped bring about the World Parliament of Religions a few years before at Chicago. Yet it is worth noting that he attacked any idea that such a 'unification' could be achieved by a synthesis of the great religions, the tendency 'to search for some one or two truths in which all religions agree, and to make this the essence of religion, regarding all the rest, not as development, but as mere accretion'. This was 'to declare the historical religious process mere waste.' What remains when religion is 'purified' of all doctrinal and religious accretions is 'a mere sentiment. . . . We are to ask, seek and knock, but never to find, receive or enter. We are to feel the significance of life; we must not dare to say what it signifies.' Any true 'unification' of religion can only come from the assimilation of the genuine insights of other religions into an existing catholicism, their incorporation into a definite and coherent religious body which is yet rich and various enough to assimilate a variety of religious insights and forms. Such a religion is 'Catholic Christianity, which is more nearly a microcosm of the world of religions than any other known form' [39].

Finally, Tyrrell turns to consider the person of Christ, and his place in man's religious quest. Jesus was no mere prophet or teacher, and Christianity is no mere *Imitatio Christi*. 'He was not a prophet speaking in the name of the Spirit, but the Spirit itself in human form', the 'Divine indwelling and saving Spirit', 'a fire kindling from soul to soul down the long centuries', Himself 'the revelation of God . . . communicating not His ideas or His doctrines, but His very self . . . through the sacramental power of the Gospel and the Church'. Jesus was 'the incarnation of conscience. He did not merely possess, but *was* personally the indwelling Logos . . .', and therefore 'all who are saved are saved through Christ . . . Christianity has but brought the universal principle of salvation to its highest degree of force and explicitness'[40].

Opinions will vary about the success of Tyrrell's attempt to effect a synthesis of his previous writings, of the findings of modern criticism, and of religious psychology. Certain elements in the synthesis have worn rather badly. It does not now seem very likely that 'a relatively universal and permanent religion' could be constructed out of 'the laws and uniformities revealed by a comparative study of religions and a study of religious psychology'. Such a notion bears very much the stamp of the period which produced it, of Madame Blavatsky and of the Society for Psychical Research. Yet what is notable about Tyrrell's proposal for such a 'greater catholicism' is his rejection of 'unitive' religion, his emphasis on the integrity of the great religions and the impossibility of any syncretistic 'Budchrinduism'. In fact, if examined carefully his proposal amounts to little more than the absorption of insights from other religions by a renewed and purified Catholicism, and it is significant that his chapter on Christology follows that on universal religion. That Christology, too, is one of the book's weaknesses, for its insistence that Jesus was 'simply the incarnation of conscience, the manifestation of that ideal humanity which conscience is striving to reveal and realise in every human soul' brings him perilously close to that 'moralistic' view of Jesus which he condemned in Matthew Arnold and Adolf von Harnack.

Tyrrell was not a great theologian; his aim in all his writing was pastoral, to formulate a Catholicism on which devotion might feed without the sacrifice of intellect. His fundamental insight can be summed up in very little space 'Theology is human, Revelation Divine'. The Church was the place where both occurred. 'It is within the Church where the experiences of so many peoples and so many centuries are united and compressed and forced into harmony, that the Gospel Spirit seeks experimentally to embody itself in the best form of external religious institution. Catholicism is neither the unchanging spirit nor the growing organisation, but the two together'[41]. This is not very revolutionary, not even very modern. Indeed, it could be argued that it does not proceed very far beyond the pietistic emphases of so traditional a work as Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. That most anti-theological of writings, with its declaration that 'I had rather feel compunction than know the definition of it', its contrast between 'the word of truth' and quibblings

about 'genera and species', is never far from Tyrrell's mind, his letters and published works are littered with references to it, and in 1905 he wrote that 'I fall back more and more on a Kempis as . . . the wisest reading of life and the best comforter in trouble'[42]. His distinction between theology and devotion is to be found in the prayer of the disciple in book III cap. 2, a passage he used himself and prescribed to penitents[43].

Tyrrell once said that he wrote 'for a small circle of readers, those who belong to three generations ahead'. Three generations later his thought seems in places obscure, in places curiously dated. Yet to read him is to encounter a passionate and devout intelligence, a bracing complex of iconoclasm and reverence wrestling to reconcile *Nova et vetera*, things new and old. For all its weaknesses his work escapes the easy complacency which disfigures and renders unreadable so much of the theological writing of the period before the Great War, and if his belief in the birth of a new Catholicism reflected the optimism of his age, it has in part been justified. Above all, for all his 'Modernism' he never succumbed to the tendency of his age, and of ours, to trim the gospel to the 'temper of the day', when 'Immortality is thrust into the background' and 'Christian civilisation takes the place of the kingdom of God, and morality, that of eternal life', when 'the churches chatter progress, and the secular and clerical arms are linked together in the interests of a sanctified worldliness'[44]. That is a tone of voice unusual in his day, and worth listening to in our own.

NOTES

1 M. Petre *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell* (London 1912) vol. I pp.59-64.
2 The chapel of St Etheldreda was a crypt chapel—hence the darkness and the reference to the catacombs.
3 *Autobiography* II, pp.97-153.
4 'Catholic' and 'Roman Catholic' have been treated as synonyms throughout for the sake of brevity.
5 *Autobiography* II. 95.
6 Maisie Ward, *Insurrection versus Resurrection* (London 1937) 554.
7 *Autobiography* II.95.
8 A. Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge 1970) 117-8.
9 M.D. Petre, *Von Hugel and Tyrrell* (London 1937) 118
10 George Tyrrell, *The Faith of the Millions* (London 1901) I.190.
11 George Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis* (London 1907) p. 85.
12 *Faith of the Millions* I.228-252.
13 *ibid*.I.115-135.
14 M.D. Petre, *George Tyrrell's Letters* (London 1920) 3-8, George Tyrrell, *Medievalism* (London 1909) 107-8.
15 British Library Additional Ms. 43680. Tyrrell to A.L. Waller, 21.iv.1904.
16 George Tyrrell, *Oil and Wine* (London 1907) 229.
17 B.L. Add. Ms. 44927-31 contain Tyrrell's correspondence with von Hugel. I have cited letters simply by date, since their chronological arrangement makes the location of individual items easy. Tyrrell to von Hugel, 14.x.1902; *Von Hugel and Tyrrell* p. 117.
18 George Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi, or Prayer and Creed* (London 1903) 46-64, 164-179.
19 George Tyrrell, *Lex Credendi* (London 1906).
20 *Letters* 22.
21 *Letters* 89-91; *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 6.iii.1904.
22 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 30.ix.1904.
23 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 25.i.1903.
24 See on this Ward, *Insurrection versus Resurrection* 165-171, *Autobiography* II.207-223; *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 106-154.
25 *Lex Credendi* 159.
26 *ibid* 143.
27 *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 11.
28 *ibid* 232-7.
29 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 11.i.1903
30 *Letters* 25
31 *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 264 - 307
32 *Letters* 119
33 *B.L.* Tyrrell to Von Hugel 9.iv.1909.
34 *Letters* 163.
35 George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London 1909) xxi.
36 *ibid* 66-7.
37 *ibid* 98-9.
38 *ibid* 127.
39 *ibid* 229-260.
40 *ibid* 261-273.
41 *Medievalism* 129, 179.
42 *Letters* 273.
43 *Letters* 257.
44 *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* 156-7.

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# THE CHRISTOLOGY OF GEORGE TYRRELL

Nicholas Sagovsky

In a brief book entitled *Modernism: Its Failure and Its Fruits*[1] Maude Petre summarised the unquestioned assumptions of the Catholic understanding of Christ with which she had grown up. At the head came "the historical fact of the Resurrection: . . . if we could not be sure that the dead body of Christ actually rose from the tomb, the very foundation of our faith was insecure. Secondly, we were taught that Christ definitely affirmed His own Divinity . . . Thirdly, in virtue of the Hypostatic Union, He possessed even as man a certain omniscience . . . if He spoke, in [the Gospel] records, as though He only possessed the knowledge of His own time, that was in no way because only such knowledge was present to His mind, but because He had to speak to men in their own language. Fourthly, the Church was His direct foundation; her hierarchy and her sacraments were His direct institution: every one of her definitions was explicitly or implicitly included in His teaching." She goes on to show, principally from the works of Loisy, how all these hitherto unshakable facts were questioned in the name of historical science by modernist writers. Although the historical strand was only one in a number that were interwoven in a loosely-knit movement, it was the one that threatened most vitally such traditional understanding. As George Tyrrell wrote,

> "It is the historical and not the philosophical difficulty that inspires the reconstructive effort of the Modernist pure and simple. It is the irresistible facts concerning the origin and composition of the Old and New Testaments; concerning the origin of the Christian Church, of its hierarchy, its institutions, its dogmas; concerning the gradual development of the Papacy; concerning the history of religion in general -that create a difficulty against which the synthesis of scholastic theology must be and is already shattered to pieces"[2].

Tyrrell was acutely aware of the vulnerability of neo-scholastic theology to historical criticism, and the way in which Catholic apologetic did not engage with the questions of the time. Moreover, since the whole neo-scholastic doctrinal synthesis was underwritten by the teaching authority of the Church all parts of it were considered equally important. Therefore, 'if Rome so much as cut her little finger she would bleed to death'. More than that, he was conscious as a spiritual counsellor and writer at Farm Street that people who had adopted the Roman synthesis were *already* bleeding to death from the cuts inflicted by a hundred years of historical scholarship.

From the earliest part of his teaching career he had tried to work with the theology of Aquinas, convinced that the Church had not developed, but had abandoned, his spirit.

> "The fact is that Aquinas represents a far less developed theology than that of the later schoolmen, and by going back to him one escapes from many of the superstructures of his more narrow-minded successors and thus gets liberty to unravel, and reconstruct on more sympathetic lines. Aquinas was essentially liberal-minded and synthetic . . . as unlike as possible in tone and temper to the scholastics."[3]

However, the attempt to return to pure Thomism did not work for at least three reasons: it was impossible to go back to medieval Aristotelianism in the face of historical questions that demanded historical answers; had it been possible the enterprise would have been unacceptable to Church theologians imbued with the categories of thought inherited from developed neo-scholasticism; had it been acceptable Tyrrell would not have had the patience to make it work. He could never have won over his critics for he had nothing but contempt for "that purely intellectual, theological curiosity and enquiry, which is often most active in the least reverent, which kindles a controversial ardour that is so falsely confounded with zeal for the truth, and which we may call the scholastic spirit."[4] Writing to the Abbe Dimnet about *The Faith of the Millions*, which contained twelve essays published between 1896 and 1900, he said:

> "Till about the date of my first essay I had, not a firm faith. But a firm hope in the sufficiency of the philosophy of St Thomas, studied in a critical and liberal spirit. The series represents roughly the crumbling array of that hope and the not very hopeful search

for a substitute."[5]

Scholasticism and historical study were to prove quite incompatible for Tyrrell, but it was not scholasticism *per se* to which he was initially opposed. He abhorred the elevation of any theological system above rational criticism as though it were the theology itself that had been revealed. Only gradually did he come to feel that scholasticism itself is hopelessly flawed, "that it really has no room for such conceptions as *spirit* and *life*, since it explains these higher things—thought, will, love, action—mechanically and artificially, in the terms of those that are lower. Hence it is too opaque a medium to admit the full light and beauty of Christianity."[6]

In an article written at the end of his life[7] Tyrrell contrasted the new Christology with the old, pinpointing two areas of confusion in the accepted interpretation of the Church's teaching about the Divine Sonship, and the practical difficulty in avoiding either monophysitism or Nestorianism. His criticism focussed on the use of the term 'person'[8] for the popular understanding of the term is of "a separate spiritual individual, a separate mind, will and energy . . . Hence, when our creed tells us that there is but one personality in Christ, we interpret it almost inevitably as meaning a union of natures, a mixture or confusion of divine and human attributes in a third hybrid nature that is a blend of both. We imagine a man whose mind is omniscient, whose energy is omnipotent. Our language is orthodox, but our mind is monophysite." Theologically, the term 'person' as applied to Jesus was "simply a word to express the solution of a difficulty that could not be solved; an x to symbolise a missing link by which Godhead and manhood might be united without confusion of natures". This came about because of the sheer impossibility of reconciling (1) that Jesus was an incarnation of God (2) that God is numerically one (3) that Jesus was a personality distinct from his Father. In terms of the normal use of language he accuses the orthodox formula of being simply incoherent. As we have seen, if we are too much influenced by contemporary usage of the term 'person' we shall be monophysite in our thinking; on the other hand, "if we accept scholastic dichotomy (soul and body = human person) it is almost impossible to escape Nestorianism or to show that in Christ there was not a human as well as a divine personality."[9]

Tyrrell was convinced that this linguistic confusion led to further misunderstanding. Practical monophysitism was expressed in the belief, which Maude Petre was taught, that Jesus' "human mind enjoyed uninterruptedly the face to face vision of God" and his human will was endowed with almost unlimited miraculous power over the whole realm of nature. As a consequence "according to theology, his ignorance was always feigned; his progress in wisdom was feigned; . . . his fear was feigned, for fear implies ignorance and weakness; his temptations were feigned, for where there is no possibility of yielding there is no temptation."[10] This Tyrrell repudiated absolutely.

In the first place, such teaching ruins a strong apologetic argument, for "When the apologist appeals to the veracity, the goodness, the noble moral elevation of Christ, he is weighing him in this very balance that theology pronounces false."[11] Unless there is a real overcoming of fear, temptation, ignorance or weakness there is no moral achievement to point to. "He shared all our groping and darkness and uncertainty and blameless ignorances—to me that were more than his sharing pain and weariness. The theological Christ lived in a blaze of absolute certainty about everything—like a Roman Cardinal."[12] Years later, William Barry wrote, "In a short but decisive correspondence I elicited from Tyrrell that Jesus of Nazareth need not have known himself to be the Eternal Son of God. That was too much for me."[13] Tyrrell was prepared to argue his case on historical grounds, well aware that "if [criticism] could prove that Jesus was unconscious of his Godhead; that he never laid claim to it; that his utterances implicitly deny it, this would be a scandal for the orthodox, who base their belief solely on his own claims to divinity,"[14] just as Maude Petre had been taught. Tyrrell was by 1909 fully prepared to defend the *messianic consciousness* of Jesus in the context of the apocalyptic understanding of Weiss and Schweitzer, but obviously this did not amount to the developed awareness of eternal Sonship Barry wanted. To the likes of Barry, Tyrrell made two logical points. The first was that the hypostatic union was beyond any kind of verification—by miracles or moral perfection. "We can conceive no facts or signs by which so transcendental a truth as the hypostatic union could become a matter of historical affirmation or denial."[15] It *could* not be threatened by

demonstration of fallibility or limitation in Christ, but, were it able to be, it *would* not, because, as Tyrrell argued to von Hugel, "There is natural and blameless passion whose absence were a defect, and there is a passion which is the fruit of past carelessness or sin, personal or ancestral. To deny the former to Christ is open to the same objection as docetan views as to his knowledge. Are not ignorance and passion the two roots of our temptations? and how is Christ tempted as we, how is his sinlessness conceivable, if he lacked either root?"[16] There is no inconsistency in maintaining the sinlessness of Jesus whilst admitting his liability to ignorance or error. Tyrrell's thinking on this developed under the influence of Weiss who maintained in *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*[17] that the imminence of the parousia was the dominant theme of Christ's teaching. The issue is put bluntly. "If Jesus shared the contemporary illusion as to the nearness of the event, what of His knowledge? If not, what of His sincerity."[18]

Tyrrell had little to offer in place of the traditional language for the hypostatic union. He once commented warmly on a suggestion of von Hugel's that a Christology could be worked out in terms of our psychological experience of the 'I' and the 'me', "If we accept trichotomy (body + soul + spirit or person = human person = me + I) then we can say that a Divine Spirit or Ego assumed a non-personal human nature (i.e. soul + body, which as related to the Divine Spirit becomes the *me* of that I.)" Then follows a characteristic rider. "Ignoramus et ignorabimus"[19]. All he is doing here is playing somewhat half-heartedly with von Hugel's idea. There is a more characteristic expression of his own not very clearly defined position in *Revelation as Experience*, a paper delivered at King's College, London, in 1909.

> "What we adore is the Power in Christ that Makes for Righteousness. That it is substituted for his human personality as distinct from his human spirit, mind and will has no intellectual but only practical meaning for us. It is a rule of speech and action, not of thought."[20]

Further than that he does not go.

If the facts did not in the end tell against the Christ of Catholicism, but only against the monophysite Christ, the same could not be said for the self-understanding of Catholicism itself. Inasmuch as the Church claimed both dominical authority and institution for its hierarchy and dogmas, the conclusion of historical study was that it was quite mistaken. Tyrrell took up the problem and its Christological implication, in *The Church and the Future*.

> "It is . . . probable that Christ, like his disciples, believed that the end of the world would come within the lifetime of his hearers, and before the extinction of the generation which he addressed. Hence, unlike other prophets and reformers, he made no provision for a future 'institutionalising' of his cause; but trusted that the 'inspirational' impetus would last 'unto the consummation of the world'."

The point is developed with characteristic polemical vigour.

> "Indeed to suppose that Christ foresaw the whole future history of his Church, all the conflicts that would arise from the paucity and obscurity of his utterances; all the doubts that a clear word of his would have solved; all the controversies that have split Christendom into fragments and cost the spiritual distraction of countless millions—and that, foreseeing all this clearly, he deliberately wrapped, or even left, the truth in obscurity is, from an apologetic standpoint, antecedently irreconcilable with a belief in his goodness, wisdom and piety."[21]

This 'institutionalising' of Christianity was simply a development that took place in conformity with normal and natural laws. It was not possible for the Church to remain in that charismatic phase which the protestant vainly tries to reproduce.

> "It is not then precisely as a creation of Christ that Catholicism can claim to be divinely instituted, but as the creation of that Spirit which created both Christ and the Church to be different and complementary organs of its own expression, adapted to different phases of the same movement."[22]

For Tyrrell 'the Spirit of Christ' is a central concept, of which "the 'Our Father' illustrated by the crucifix is perhaps the best epitomised utterance" and the "full explication and development is still in process in the life of the Christian community."[23] Here, not in exploration of the hypostatic union, is the heart of his Christology.

This must be understood in the context of Tyrrell's wider religious philosophy: he was never a speculative theologian, but a devotional writer of great depth and perception, and a theological journalist with a quicksilver pen. At the heart of his writings is a continual awareness of the mystery that surrounds man, and of which the believer speaks but haltingly. He scorned those "to whom everything is clear, and common-sense, and obvious; who can define a mystery but have never felt one." For him "the human words and ideas in which eternal truths are clad cannot, *even through divine skill*[24] convey to us more than a shadow of the realities they stand for" and they "cannot, like numbers, be added, subtracted, and multiplied together, so as to deduce new conclusions with arithmetical simplicity and accuracy."[25] This is a recurrent theme in all his writings. For Tyrrell a mystery was "a truth which can never be quite coherently thought or described, but which can be expressed more or less approximately by two or more complementary but partly inconsistent statements."[26] The Christological implications of this are obvious. Language, since it is developed within the world of sense-experience, will break down before a mystery, but in symbol, analogy and metaphor it can point beyond immediate referents in sense-experience to suggest "truths fringed with darkness" or mysteries. Both the world in which we live and the language we use have a sacramental dimension for, ultimately, both are expressions of the immanent spirit of God. "The words in which religious truth is clothed are sacramental; they belong to the world of sense and also to the world of spirit, to the apparent, the relative, the transitory, and also to the real, the absolute, the eternal."[27] Language is itself a mystery and words are, in the Coleridgean sense, symbolic. Despite his initial Thomism, the structure of Tyrrell's thought is markedly Platonic: the priority is with the world of the spirit, so "religion is not a dream, but an enacted self-expression of the spiritual world--a parable uttered, however haltingly in the language of fact."[28] Since the language of religion can never 'fit close' as can the language we apply to things we perceive by our senses, and since we therefore have to deal in symbols and analogy, the test of the accuracy or appropriateness of our religious language must be fruitfulness in life—though Tyrrell is always anxious to stress that symbolic language is not true because fruitful, but fruitful because true. It converges on the truth asymptotically.

Christology for Tyrrell could never be a purely intellectual or historical exercise, but must be linked to experience: life not logic is the context for the verification of religious discourse. In September 1899, he wrote to his friend Henri Bremond,

> "As for my faith, so far as it must necessarily be rooted in some kind of experience and not merely in propositions and principles accepted on hearsay, it rests upon the evidence of a Power in myself and in all men 'making for righteousness' in spite of all our downward tendencies.- that is the basis of my Theism, which a cumulus of other reasons and experiences only supplments: that is the solid core about which they are all gathered. My Christianism is based on the concrete and intuitive recognition of that said Power in the man Christ as known to us historically -so full, that I can trust Him and take Him as a teacher sent by God."[29]

The identification of the Power within and the Power without, incarnate in Christ and manifest in the world; of the interior conscience and conscience incarnate; of each manifestation of the one Spirit, remained the cornerstone of Tyrrell's Christology. Because of its affinities to liberal Protestantism, with its echoes of Matthew Arnold and Ritschl, it led to accusations of a sell-out, but the vehemence with which Tyrrell opposed the Christology of Harnack, welcoming Loisy's novel apologetic, clearly shows that it was never his intention to develop anything other than a renewed Catholic Christology. As Alec Vidler writes, "Tyrrell's modernism may be reasonably regarded as an attempt to meet Liberal Protestantism on its own ground, and to show that its premises led to a different conclusion."[30]

Tyrrell's first extended consideration of Christology was in a pamphlet entitled *The Civilizing of the Matafanus: An Essay in Religious Development*, which was actually published under the name of A.R. Waller, though Waller had done no more than tinker with Tyrrell's extended allegory. The story concerns an initially unsuccessful philanthropic attempt to bring "civilisation" to a primitive tribe. There is an extended discussion of the

difficulty of communication between the civilised philanthropists and the uncivilised tribesmen, and therefore the need for a mediator. "That which was plainly needed for the office of mediator was the double experience in one personality, and this could be practically effected by hypnotism in the control exercised by a civilised hypnotiser over a Matafanu subject."[31] The hypnotiser is to be someone with a comprehensive understanding of the values and nature of civilisation; the hypnotised an intelligent Matafanu, acceptable to his own people. Such a tribesman is found in Alpuca, who is duly hypnotised and thus imbued with the entire contents of the hypnotiser's intelligence, memory and imagination -all his experience plus "an imperative and irresistible impulse to communicate this great body of knowledge and light to the Matafanu tribe."[32]

In 1902, Tyrrell wrote to von Hugel, "the argument is rather closely knit and very little has been said without deliberate design."[33] Thus it is fair to see in it explicit allusion to a number of christological points -points on which Tyrrell never wavered. There is repeated reference to the difficulty of communication, and the inadequacy of the Matafanu language to contain the concepts which Alpuca -with his vision for "civilisation" -wishes to impart:

> "Alpuca had to endure the anguish of being forced by a passionate appetite for self-revelation to try to give utterance to a conception so wide, lofty and deep, in a medium so narrow as the language and imagery of a people but lately advanced beyond the lowest stage of ferocity and darkness . . . Surely this were apparently as hopeless as the endeavour to render a Beethoven sonata on the Jew's harp or to reproduce Raphael on a stable door with a lump of chalk."[34]

This is the context in which Tyrrell places a discussion of miracles. The unsuccessful attempt to communicate causes Alpuca intense suffering. In the attempt to explain his status as a denizen of two worlds, he is forced to use "miracles", not to show his power as thaumaturge and thus compel some sort of wondering belief in himself, but as an illustration of that "natural knowledge" in the "civilised world" of which he is struggling to speak. Thus Tyrrell attacked contemporary Roman apologetic, which still relied on demonstration by the miracles of Jesus and by fulfilled prophecy. He wrote in *The Church and The Future*: "the consensus of current criticism of even the more moderate sort makes the Bible an insufficient basis for the scientific establishment of a single indisputable miracle or of a single clear fulfilment of prophecy."[35] This position he later abandoned, for he came to see how much it depended on nineteenth century presuppositions.

So in the case of Alpuca, it was his moral preeminence and absolute integrity that won for him, in the eyes of those capable of appreciating it, an implicit belief in the reality of his claim to a knowledge or science of which they were not yet capable, owing to the unprepared state of their minds."[36] We are not surprised that Alpuca finds himself under immense internal strain because of his dual personality, and at odds with the priests of his tribe because he threatens their authority. He has to reconcile himself to the fact that it is only after his untimely death that the Matafanus who accept his teaching will grow into an understanding of its import.

> "The light of the mind is experience, digested and verified, and as the light intensifies, objects reveal themselves in even greater fulness . . . Were we to sum up in one word the whole *reality* which it was the mission of Alpuca to reveal, it would be 'civilisation', and the power of apprehending this perfect ideal . . would depend precisely upon the degree of imperfect civilisation attained by the people in question . . ."[37]

Thus Tyrrell discusses the developing understanding of Alpuca among the Matafanus after his death. He criticises this on two grounds. "The most tempting fallacy . . . was that of a sort of 'realism' ascribing the forms of language and thought to the reality represented; ascribing the qualities of the paint and canvas to the original of the portrait . . . The means were treated as an end." And then, "During this same period of declension it became more important to establish the claims of Alpuca to be the possessor of spiritual knowledge than to enter into the substance of that knowledge."[38]

None of this seems of novel import, yet it contains warnings that are not irrelevant to incarnationalists today. *The Civilizing of the Matafanus* is very much a work of Tyrrell's central period, before he had absorbed the eschatological insights of Weiss and Schweitzer.

It is a miniature life of Jesus, uncompromising in its incarnationalism, and yet sensitive to the psychological dilemmas that implies. The value it has for us is mainly as an illustration of Tyrrell's abiding concerns. In summarising the legacy of Alpuca, he had written:

> "Above all he tried to impress upon them the all-important fact that civilisation was not merely an idea or notion to be developed or defined, but a life to be lived. that life was the criterion by which the true development of the notion was to be criticised, and that those who strove most to live the life would be the most apt to apprehend the notion."[39]

In theory, the story turns on the "civilisation" that is brought, through Alpuca, to the Matafanus. In practice, the story is about Alpuca as the incarnation of that "civilisation". It should be said that Tyrrell shows no interest in the mechanics of hypnotism whatsoever!

The points that were expressed allegorically in *The Civilizing of the Matafanus* were expressed less pictorially, but not less forcefully, in a number of other books at this time. The most important was *Lex Orandi* where Tyrrell develops a metaphysic of spirit, but always from a practical standpoint. Under the influence of Blondel he explores the notion that we are basically wills, and that our existence centres on the Divine Will. He is as far from an immediate consideration of history in this book as in any. it is really a book about a renewed basis for faith –a not very satisfactory one –as the tide of criticism sweeps in "the spirit which acts and wills is alone felt to be 'real' in the full sense; and . . . the world given to our outward senses is shadowy and dreamy, except so far as we ascribe to it some of the characteristics of will and spirit."[40] In this world it is the function and aim of the human will to be conformed to the Divine Will, a process in which the teaching and expression of religion is of supreme importance and Jesus the exemplar. Although, as we have seen, the language of religion is but a language of analogy and symbol, Tyrrell, much influenced by William James, is confident that it is refined and verified according to its power to foster the Divine Life in the individual. A favourite analogy of his was that of the blind man groping his way towards a fire; so do we, by our continually modified expression, grope towards truth. In *Lex Orandi* Tyrrell discussed the Creed according to this criterion; in *Lex Credendi* the Lord's Prayer. In this period he could write, "The fatherhood of God; the brotherhood of man; the Kingdom of Heaven; the triumph of the Divine Will, Providence; Sin; Reconciliation; Deliverance; these and others are the ideas which beget, characterise and control the affection that utters itself in the Lord's Prayer, and of these ideas the Creed is the amplification and closer definition."[42] For practical Christianity the Incarnation is a similarly important idea.

At this time Tyrrell believed that what had been revealed to man was the Divine Spirit, recognised by man because spirit answered spirit, from within the life of man, and outside it. His most characteristic christological statements all turn upon the Christ within (often identified with conscience) and the Christ without expressions of the one Divine Spirit. This could be exemplified from almost the whole of his corpus, and provides one element of consistency in his theological work. Thus, it appears, fully-formed in *External Religion*, a series of conferences given to undergraduates at Oxford in the Lent Term of 1899:

> "It was [God's] Divine Will that from the very beginning had, under the abstract name of Conscience, been struggling against the selfish and sinful will of every child of Adam; so constantly and persistently, that man mistook that Divine pressure within them for part of themselves, for one of their natural springs of action . . . Therefore it was needful that this conscience of theirs, this indwelling will of God, this Power within making for Justice should go outside them, should become Incarnate and face them, and speak to them as man to man: that God should live visibly and outwardly upon earth that life of humiliation which He lives millions of times over in human souls, that our slow minds might apprehend, at least in figure, that tragedy, which is realised daily in the very core of our being."[42]

A decade later when his views of revelation and doctrine had changed totally, Tyrrell could still write of the "personality of Jesus" as that of "the Spirit which speaks to every man in the mysterious whisperings of conscience" and of Jesus as "simply the incarnation of conscience, the manifestation of that ideal humanity which conscience is striving to reveal to, and realise in, every human soul."[43]

Of course, the problems with this are mani-

fold. We are so aware today of the social formation—or deformation—of conscience, and the recognition of the transparent righteousness of Jesus, once we have decided that such records as we have are either trustworthy or compelling, is, in a world of pluriform culture, correspondingly a more precarious business. Experiential apologetic may be the proper reaction to excessive intellectualism, but in Tyrrell it threatens to dissolve the historical Jesus (already rendered somewhat anaemic by what Tyrrell took to be the consensus of scholarly opinion) in the immanent, spiritual Christ, and thereby to raise this spiritual Christ above intelligent criticism. He becomes a cipher, a contentless symbol, and doctrine a contentless choice to behave in this way or that. That is a crudely pragmatic position, one which, however much he protested, Tyrrell seemed at times to hold. We may ask whether in the following passage analogy has not been stretched to breaking point: "To believe a truth is to reckon with it as with a reality, whether welcome or unwelcome: it is to adapt our will to it as to a new factor of the world with which we have to deal. Here it means to speak of Christ, to feel and to act towards Him as towards a person who, being one and the same, possesses distinctly all the attributes of divinity and humanity; it means for us that the life and death of Christ are the life and death, not of the divinest of men or of the greatest of prophets, but of God."[44] Amazingly, by a mixture of subterfuge and threat, Tyrrell managed to obtain the Imprimatur for *Lex Orandi*, from which this is taken. He never obtained it again.

> Five years later, he wrote to von Hugel, "I feel that my past work has been dominated by the liberal-Protestant Christ, and doubt whether I am not bankrupt. Civilisation can do (and has done) all that the purely immanentist Christ of Matthew Arnold is credited with."[45]

In some senses, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* is written to set the record straight, for it contains both a vigorous reassertion of the transcendence of God and a restatement of Tyrrell's belief in Christ as conscience incarnate. Here he set out his final 'modernist' position, distinguishing it explicitly from neo-scholasticism, from Newmanism and from liberal protestantism. For the first time, Tyrrell writes at length about the historical Jesus, leaning heavily upon the work of Weiss, Loisy and Schweitzer. Thus, for Jesus, his "messianic consciousness was the main determinant of His action and utterance, . . . his Christhood was the secret, the mystery of his life."[46] In his earthly state he probably regarded himself as the promised Son of David and the 'suffering servant' who was to be glorified eventually as the Son of Man. He was concerned not to preach his own glory, but to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom. Everything is coloured by immediate expectation of the end, which he himself intended to precipitate by his provocation of the powers of Evil to a final assault upon himself when he went up to Jerusalem. For the latter part of his life he actively sought the death that he predicted on the basis of his own resolve; on the basis of his messianic self-consciousness he expected the resurrection. The roots of Catholic doctrine lie in the apocalyptic vision of Christ—an uncompromisingly transcendent vision. As Tyrrell expounds the apocalyptic understanding of Jesus, he writes with a sense of real release, of release from the misunderstanding to which his adoption of liberal protestant methods had opened him; of release from the tentative nature of his own former conclusions, and the fear that the 'assured results of criticism' might produce a Jesus like the Jesus of Harnack. The key to Tyrrell's synthesis is "a frank admission of the principle of symbolism,"[47] but this is now made easier for two reasons: the imagery of apocalyptic is so much more patently imaginative, and therefore less likely to be taken as an attempt at literal expression; and the continuity that exists between the imagery accepted and used by Jesus, and that retained in Catholic doctrine, is demonstrable. This continuity of imagery links with continuity of experience (and of course development in understanding).

> "The Faith in his own Christhood that Jesus by the power of His personality, was able to plant in his Apostles, has been continually reinforced by the experience of those who have found Him, in effect, their Redeemer, the Lord and Master of their souls, their Hope, their Love, their Rest—in short, all that they mean by God. For them He has become the effectual symbol or sacrament of the transcendent, through which they can apprehend the inapprehensible—the Eternal Spirit in human form."[48]

Thus, if any brought up like Maude Petre had turned specifically to *Christianity at the Cross-*

*roads* for a fresh expression of the 'unquestioned assumptions' of their childish faith, they would have found more comfort than in many of Tyrrell's books, but in an entirely new mode. On the Resurrection, he writes that "there can be no doubt as to the appearances of Jesus to His Apostles after death"[49] but his wider attitude to the historical question is most succinctly expressed elsewhere:

> "Without ['the Resurrection phenomena'] Christianity could not have been; its success and endurance is their best proof . . . [The Apostles] believed and therefore they saw; they saw and therefore they believed; faith and vision were organically one and correlative, as the real object and its mirrored reflex or shadow."[50]

Now, on Jesus' attitude to his own divinity, Tyrrell writes of "messianic consciousness" and "messianic secret" though adding: "It would at least be hard to show that, whatever Catholic theology may mean by the doctrine of a hypostatic union from the very first of (the) two natures, that doctrine is excluded by the notion that Jesus was *made* the Christ only by his glorification after death. For Christhood may have meant the state of manifestation."[51] The omniscience of Jesus is, of course, rejected. he speaks in the apocalyptic language of his own time because he is a man and a prophet of his own time; but we have seen that in Tyrrell's estimate that did not detract from his divinity. The Church, if not his institution as such, was the continuation of the corporate life of that 'little flock' he gathered round him.

It is the last section of the book that is in many ways the most interesting and the most frustrating. Here Tyrrell sketches his convictions on the relationship between Christianity and other religions, turning his religious philosophy, as developed in *Lex Orandi*, to account with respect to *religion* in general. He seeks to depict Catholicism as a potentially universal religion on the basis of his 'Spirit' metaphysic and christology. With respect to Christology this is actually a step back, for the effect is to leave the apocalyptic Jesus of the first part of the book, who became, in the Church's developed understanding, the Catholic Christ, lying uneasily alongside the immanent, spiritual Christ in whom the yearnings of the world's religions are fulfilled. The tension is unreconciled, but prophetic of a question that faces us today.

In the *Autobiography and Life* of Tyrrell Maude Petre commends him because he faced the problem of Christology where others would not.[52] This is true up to a point. In personal terms, he suffered a great deal from his lonely excursions into critical study. After a Christmas of disbelief and anguish he wrote to Bremond: "I could have sent all the critics to hell if they had left me a hell to send them to."[53] He could see, and feel, the question, but he had not the training as a scripture scholar to explore the historical dimension as he wished. He was reliant on others, and his own contribution was to work out the implications for faith not so much of their specific conclusions—in the long run these would shift and change—but of the Church's commitment to responsible scientific enquiry. He was further hampered in the work by personal isolation and illness, so that the progress he made in absorbing the work of scholars as different as Blondel and Loisy, or von Hugel and Schweitzer was truly remarkable. Today his work looks more like an articulate restatement of faith than an articulated theological explication, largely because he continued to assert without question that the spirit within simply recognises in Jesus the incarnation of the same spirit, which is one with the immanent Divine Spirit. Clearer definition of the doctrine of the Trinity is often sorely missed. In the last analysis, he was not a theologian, but a man of courageous faith and a spiritual writer of genius. He would have appreciated the distinction.

NOTES

1 London 1918. See p 83 ff.
2 *Medievalism*, London 1908 p 108. Cf *The Church and the Future* London 1910 p 15.
3 To von Hugel. Dec. 6th 1897. BM Add Mss 44,927
4 *Essays on Faith and Immortality*, London, 1914 p 121.
5 *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell*, Vol 2, by M.D. Petre, London 1912 p 164.
6 A.L.1 p 248. Note that this is not a completely unbalanced judgment. Tyrrell grants that scholasticism "has become a sufficiently flexible medium of expression to suggest the main outlines and chief prominences of the world of spiritual and intelligible realities."
7 *The Point at Issue* in *Jesus or Christ?* Hibbert Journal Supplement 1909 p 5 ff.
8 See p 9. Compare the following in a letter to von Hugel, 21st April 1903. B.M. Add Mss 44,928: "The scholastic conception of person conveys nothing whatever to my mind and yet orthodoxy swears by it."

9 To Von Hugel, 21st April 1903. BM Add Mss 44,928
10 *The Church and the Future*, p 62.
11 Ibid. p 63.
12 To Maude Petre 21st June 1903. BM Add Mss 52,367.
13 *Memories and Opinions*. London 1926 p 266. Tyrrell would not have been surprised: he said of Barry that he knew "the man to be indiscreet and unbalanced and not really a liberal in any sense." to von Hugel 27th June 1903. BM Add Mss 44,928.
14 *The Point at Issue* p 12.
15 Ibid. p 11.
16 To von Hugel. 8th April 1903. BM Add Mss Von Hugel enthusiastically accepted this concept of "(innocent) concupiscence". Tyrrell developed the point in *Essays on Faith and Immortality* p 43 ff.
17 E.T. by Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland. London 1971.
18 *The Church and the Future* p 26.
19 To von Hugel. 21st April 1903. BM Add Mss 44,928.
20 B.M. Add Mss 52,369. Cf Heythrop Journal April, 1971, where it is published.
21 *The Church and the Future* pp 61-2.
22 Ibid. p 64.
23 Ibid. p 78.
24 My emphasis.
25 *External Religion*. London, 1899 p 119.
26 *Through Scylla and Charybdis* London, 1907 p 178.
27 *Lex Orandi*, London, 1904 p 3.
28 *Lex Orandi* p 168.
29 To Bremond. Sept. 20th 1899. See *Autobiography and Life*, Vol 2 p 73. This is Matthew Arnold's Christology, almost in Matthew Arnold's phraseology.
30 *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church*, Cambridge, 1934, pp 161-2.
31 *The Civilizing of the Matafanus*. London, 1902 p 33.
32 Ibid. p 36.
33 To von Hugel 3rd January, 1902. BM Add Mss 44,928.
34 *The Civilizing of the Matafanus*, p 46.
35 *The Church and the Future* p 20.
36 *The Civilizing of the Matafanus* p 40.
37 Ibid. p 57.
38 Ibid. pp 61-2.
39 Ibid. p 58.
40 *Lex Orandi* p 9.
41 Ibid. p 61.
42 *External Religion* p 32.
43 *Christianity at the Crossroads*, Ed A.R. Vidler. London 1963, p 177.
44 *Lex Orandi* pp 150-151.
45 To von Hugel, 9th April 1909. BM Add Mss 44,930.
46 *Christianity at the Crossroads* p 50.
47 Ibid. p 81.
48 Ibid. p 126.
49 Ibid. p 51.
50 *Essays on Faith and Immortality* pp 58-59.
51 *Christianity at the Crossroads* p 69.
52 *Autobiography and Life* p 388f.
53 See M.D. Petre. *Von Hugel and Tyrrell*, London 1937 p 117 ff.

## SEMANTICS AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

Martin Kitchen

It is surprising that Biblical Studies took such a long time to take note of linguistic science; that they should do so is a presupposition for the rest of what follows. The information here is available elsewhere[1], but readers of this *Review* might find an introduction to the subject of some value.

*I Philology and Linguistics*

Philology is rather an old-fashioned term, referring to a rather old-fashioned approach to language; the field it covered is now more commonly known as that of historical and comparative linguistics. Philological study in Europe in the modern era arose with the discovery by Sir William Jones in 1786 of the similarity between Sanskrit, on the one hand, and Greek, Latin and German, on the other. It was he who first conjectured the existence of a parent language for all of them, along with Gothic, Celtic and Old Persian. Franz Bopp systematised Jones's work early in the nineteenth century, and subsequent work led to the establishment of the hypothesis of Indo-European as a family of twelve groups of languages[2]. This has become the lasting monument to philological studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the approach of philology to language is based almost entirely upon its written form, and this leaves untouched a whole range of questions about the nature of language which require an altogether new science of language. The rise of linguistics as one of the human sciences has met this need. Writing, of course, is secondary to speech, it is the adding of a further set of symbols -visual symbols- to a prior set of symbols which are sounds. The science of linguistics sets out to study language primarily in this prior sense; naturally, however, it has wide

implications, as we shall see, for the study of written texts.

We may posit three reasons—and there may be more—for the rise of linguistics. The first was the need to widen the field established with philology. By the turn of the century, the limitations of the discipline as it had developed were beginning to be felt, and a much broader approach was needed. The second was the growth of philosophical interest in language; philosophers were beginning to turn their attention to language at about the same time as Saussure was lecturing in the University of Geneva. Thirdly, linguistics arose as a distinct discipline along with the human sciences of psychology and sociology; Saussure, the "father" of modern linguistics, was born in 1857, one year after Sigmund Freud and one year before Emile Durkheim. The development was, therefore, particularly rooted in an historical context. What is perhaps surprising is that theology, and Biblical studies in particular, took so long to come to terms with all these factors.

Linguistics is the study of language, as distinct from the study of languages, which are its data. It aims at a general theory of the nature of language itself; and it can be pursued by those who are not necessarily polyglots. The subject divides conveniently into distinct, though related, branches. Firstly, phonology, which is concerned with the sound system of language. The human vocal organs are capable of producing about five hundred different sounds, and, naturally, no language makes use of all of them. Moreover, the sounds a language does use are often related in such a way that they do not need to be represented in the alphabet by separate symbols. For example, the final "s" sound at the end of the English word "cats" is quite different from that at the end of "cads", but speakers of the language are aware that the pronunciation of that "s" depends upon whether or not the preceding consonant is voiced. By these and other methods a workable alphabet can be chosen. Secondly, linguistics is concerned with grammar. For a long time, language studies in Europe were dominated by the influence of classical languages, so that, for instance, one heard of reference being made to "cases" in English, which it does not possess. The aim of a grammatical theory should be to describe the particular language in terms demanded by that language, and not foisted upon it from elsewhere. Methods have been elaborated within the field of linguistics during this century to enable this to be done. Thirdly, linguistics includes semantics. In fact, it took some time for linguists to interest themselves in the question of meaning, being convinced that this only obscured their proper preoccupation with the form of language. However, it became clear that the study of language would have to include also the study of meaning, and the analysis of it in appropriate linguistic categories.

A look at the work of Ferdinand de Saussure is essential for any understanding of the development of linguistic science. Born in 1857, as has been said, he was educated in Geneva, the place of his birth, studied for a while in Leipzig and taught in Paris before being appointed to a post at the University of Geneva in 1891, where he became Professor of Indo-European Linguistics and Sanskrit ten years later. From 1907 he was also Professor of General Linguistics, until he died in 1913. His *Course in General Linguistics* [3] was 'reconstructed' by his students after his death and first published in 1915. Saussure's work is of prime importance for at least four reasons. In the first place he drew a distinction between what he called the "synchronic" and "diachronic" study of language. Most language study until his day had been "diachronic", that is to say, it had concentrated on tracing the development of language through its different stages, with the emphasis on historical comparison. This is one valid approach to language, as we have seen, for it is the ground covered by philological studies, but in view of its limitations, Saussure contrasted with it a "synchronic" approach, that is, an approach which aimed at a description of the language at a specific stage of the language's history, regardless of its earlier or later development. The second main feature of Saussure's work is the concept of structuralism. Now this, of course, has been taken up in other areas of the human sciences, and in literary criticism, but in the linguistic context what is important is that the parts of an utterance may be seen in two different kinds of relations: (a) they are related to the other parts of the utterance, and this is called the *syntagmatic* relation. To give an example, in the sentence, *the king is coming*, each of the words is in syntagmatic relation with the other words in the sentence, and the individual sounds of each of the words are each in syntagmatic relation with

the other sounds in the word. But there is also another relation (b), and that is with units of language which are not found in the sentence, or word (or paragraph, or discourse), but which could be found there. This is known as the *paradigmatic* relation. In the sentence which we have just used, then, the word *king* is in paradigmatic relation with, for instance, *queen*, or *spring*, and the word *coming* is in paradigmatic relation with *dead*, or *leaving*. In order to illustrate both the synchronic/diachronic distinction and what he meant by structuralism, Saussure used the analogy of a chessboard. At any given stage of the game, the players are obliged to regard the board as it stands at that particular moment, regardless of the moves that brought about that present state. Further, it is clear that each of the pieces on the board has a value which depends on its position with regard both to the other remaining pieces and to those which have been removed from play. It is the same with units of language.

The third important feature of Saussure's work is the distinction he drew between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the sum total of the rules which govern the language; these are internalised by the native speaker at a very early age and give rise to *parole*, which consists of actual utterances. Thus any utterance is an example of *parole*, which is as limitless as the number of possible utterances in a given language and which reflects the rules of the *langue*. *Parole* therefore refers to the event of speaking, while *langue* is, to use Saussure's analogy, a kind of storehouse of the total language. The fourth reason why Saussure's work is of such importance is his drawing attention to the principle of *conventionality* in language. By this he refers to the fact that the link between a concept and the word used for it in any language is not one of essence or logic, but simply that speakers of the language are aware of and abide by certain conventions; there is nothing about the sound sequence /t/, /a/, /b/, /l/ which makes it intrinsically proper as a word to refer to the thing on which my typewriter is resting, but all of us who speak and read English agree that this word is appropriate for this and similar items of furniture.

The work of Saussure remains of vital significance to this day, especially, as we shall see, in the application of linguistic insights to Biblical studies, particularly from the field of semantics. Semantics is the science of meaning, and the semantic system of a language is a system, no less than the grammar and phonology. At the outset, it is essential to get away from models of "representation" in semantics, that is, the view that a word *represents* something in the extra-linguistic world. This model breaks down simply because it can cover only a limited area of language; it works quite well with nouns, for example, "table", "unicorn", "teapot", and even with abstract nouns, such as "love", "beauty", "fascination", and so on, since it is possible to explain what these words "refer" to, and this is the case also with verbs. But what about all those other important words which go to make up the utterances we produce? What does "what" mean? What does "about" mean? What does "all" mean? And so on. These words can only be given any meaning in the context of the total utterance; that is to say, their meaning has to be defined in terms of their *syntagmatic* relations. What is required is a semantic model which will take these things into account, and that involves two things, firstly, it must take into account what Saussure said about structuralism, that is, the significance of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and here the analogy of the chessboard is useful. The significance of the units differs according to their position, for meaning is a structure, a system, just as are sounds and syntax; it must therefore be approached with this in mind. Secondly, it must be borne in mind that *the word is not the primary bearer of meaning* in language. Take, for example, the word "door". Now this can be used in place of a sentence, such that when a schoolteacher or parent says "Door!", it is quite plain that he or she means "Shut the door!" Or one may use the word with a questioning inflection, "Door?", to mean "Shall I shut the door?" But the word on its own conveys little or no meaning; in order to interpret a one-word utterance, a large amount of knowledge of the context is required, so that a sentence can be substituted, at least unconsciously.

*II Semantics and New Testament Interpretation*

The man who introduced linguistics to Biblical studies was Professor James Barr, now of Oxford. His book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [4] arose out of his annoyance with the assumptions underlying much of the linguistic work done in the name of "Biblical Theology", but its significance goes further than its intention, in that it is probably the first work of Christian theology to take seriously the science of

linguistics.

One of the aims of "Biblical Theology" was to re-establish the unity of the Bible after some decades of critical work on both the Old and New Testaments that appeared to be destructive of it; it was not an anti-critical movement (if "movement" is the right word), but it did aim to push critical studies in a more "positive" direction. Biblical theologians claimed to have discovered the unity of the Bible in the background of Hebrew thought which was said to be set out clearly in the Old Testament and to underlie the Greek of the New. Several assumptions were made about the alleged contrast between Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking, and these were said to be reflected in the respective language systems. These may be summarised as follows:

1. Greek is said to be static, whereas Hebrew is dynamic; the Hebrew world-view sees time as the scene of meaningful action, while Greek is concerned with the static, inner essence of things.
2. Greek thought is thus abstract, while Hebrew is concrete.
3. The Greek view of man is dualistic, unlike Hebrew, in which the soul and the flesh are inseparable. This is said to explain how the Greeks had a doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as opposed to the Hebrew concept of the resurrection of the body.

It is not so much these conclusions with which Barr wishes to argue as the method by which they are reached; that is, by an alleged parallelism between thought and language. This is the important point, biblical theology entertained the tacit assumption that a contrast in thought structure was reflected in a contrast in language structure, so it was possible to speak of "Semitic" and "Indo-European" *ways of thinking*. Clearly, for this hypothesis to be tested, at least five requirements would need to be met:

1. a proper study of the structure of the two languages would have to be carried out,
2. a similar study of the respective "thought structures"—ethno-psychologies—would have to be made,
3. —and this would involve working out a viable model for ethnopsychology, something about which anthropologists are very hesitant,
4. a valid procedure for testing the relationship between the two structures would then be required,
5. followed by a study of the status of any such theory within the two disciplines.

According to Barr, none of these areas have been sufficiently studied by any of the theologians whose work he criticises; in fact he goes so far as to say that the most characteristic feature of the attempt fo relate thought with language is its unsystematic and haphazard nature. This is particularly so, he continues, in the work of the Norwegian scholar, Thorleif Boman, whose study, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* [5], was translated from the German in 1960. Boman both exaggerates the contrast and misuses linguistic data to support his case. In particular, Barr draws attention to several areas of study in which these false assumptions are made.

(a) Verbs and the Hebrew view of time

According to Boman—and the point was also made by J. Marsh in *The Fulness of Time*[6]—the Hebrew view of time is dynamic; time is "the scene of meaningful action", and this "dynamic" concept is present even in verbs which denote immobile states such as standing, sitting or lying. The "stative" aspect of the verb is said not really to exist in the Hebrew mind; "only a being which stands in inner connection with something active is a reality".

As Barr points out, this is simply not true. There are many stative verbs in Hebrew, and there is no reason to suppose that they are less significant than any other verb. In fact, the English language uses the verb "to stand" in both active and stative senses; either "to stand up"—active, or "to be standing"—stative. It is not possible to say which of the two meanings is dominant; they differ in differing contexts.

In his study of the Hebrew view of time, Boman relied mainly on the verbal system of the language; Indo-European verbs have tenses, he said, whereas Semitic verbs have aspects. To the objection that the Hebrews seemed to be strangely interested in history for a people with little concern for past, present and future in time, he asserts that it is "more correct" to speak of actions in terms of their completeness than their precise timing. Clearly, this will not do; many Indo-European languages have "aspect" systems—some, for example, Russian, in addition to tenses. As regards "ways of thinking", it is said that the Japanese are very time-conscious, yet the Japanese verbal system is very similar to that of Hebrew; on the other hand, some African languages have more tenses than

any Indo-European language, yet it is said that Africans have very little sense of time.

In fact, to say that the Hebrews had little sense of time because their verbal system had no tenses is as good as saying that English people are not interested in sex because the language does not distinguish between gender in nouns and adjectives. It is essential here to bear in mind what Saussure said about structuralism and conventionality: structuralism, because the units of language must be viewed in relation to their context, and conventionality, in that it is impossible to say what is "more correct" in language; linguistic rules are descriptive, not prescriptive, and they change as the language community assents to change.

(b) Roots and ideas.

Any student of Hebrew knows that words are recognised by their roots, that is, the characteristic three letters (usually) which remain throughout the tenses and in the associated nouns, adjectives and participles. So, for instance, *qatal* means "he killed", *qotel* means "killing", *qetel* means "slaughter", *hiqtil* means "he caused to kill" and so on. The way to remember the verb is to learn the third person singular masculine perfect active form, then to change vowels, or add prefixes, suffixes or infixes, as the case may be, to form other parts of the verb. The consonants thus remain constant in the memory, and all the more so, since the vowels are written below, or sometimes above, the line of consonants. But this focus on consonants can be misleading, for it can lead to the kind of conclusion that J. Pedersen set out in *Israel, its Life and Culture*[7]; "There is no distinction between the various classes of words; this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the Semitic languages. To the root m-l-k the signification of 'kinghood' attaches itself, and according to the modification of the word, it may mean 'king', 'kingdom' and 'the fact of acting as king' ". Of this statement Barr says, "This is simply not true. The great word classes known as 'parts of speech' are very distinct in Semitic, though there may be fewer than in many Indo-European languages, depending on how the classification is made . . . The root m-l-k is an abstraction, and all extant forms are readily distinguishable as 'king', 'kingdom' or 'ruling', in the various classes."

Other writers take this obsession with roots still further, for example, W.C. van Unnik has said[8], ". . . radicals of a root often have many meanings *simultaneously* which in our eyes seem to have little or nothing to do with one another". We shall deal with this problem in a moment under the heading of 'the adding of significances', but it is worth pointing out now that it goes back to the 'root' fallacy. It ignores, of course, the concept of homonymy--when two words sound the same but in fact mean different things, e.g. "principal" and "principle" "led" and "lead", "red" and "read", "heir" and "air", and so on; it is only the oddness of our alphabet that explains why these pairs are not spelt the same way, too. In Hebrew, the word *lechem*, "bread", appears to be related to the word *milchamah*, "war". Now, if there is some relationship between the meanings of these words, is it that wars are fought largely over bread, or that they cannot be fought without it? Again, we are brought back to Saussure's principles of structuralism and the synchronic/diachronic distinction.

(c) Etymology

Barr is concerned to make the point that etymology, the study of the origins and derivations of words, is no guide to the present meaning of a word. The Hebrew word *dabar* is a useful example, and Barr quotes from *Royal Priesthood*, by Prof. T.F. Torrance[9], who says, "This (word) appears to derive from a Semitic root *dbr* meaning 'backside' or 'hinterground', which is apparent in the expression for the Holy of Holies just mentioned, the *debir*, which was lodged at the very back of the Tabernacle or Temple. This term *dabar* has a dual significance. On the one hand it refers to the hinterground of meaning, the inner reality of the word, but on the other hand, it refers to the dynamic event in which that inner reality becomes manifest. Thus every event has its *dabar* or word, so that he who understands the *dabar* of an event understands its real meaning . . .This is one of the dominant conceptions behind the Old Testament understanding of the cult, and indeed it looks as if the whole Tabernacle or Temple were constructed around the significance of *dabar*. In the very back of the Tabernacle or the Holy of Holies, the *debir*, there were lodged the ten Words, or *debarim*. Those Ten Words form the innermost secret of Israel's history. It is therefore highly significant that in the Old Testament's interpretation of its own history and its ancient

cult, they were lodged in the hinterground of a moveable tent which formed the centre of Israel's historical pilgrimage . . . .All through Israel's history the Word enshrined in the form of *debarim* was hidden in the *debir*, but was again and again made manifest when God made bare his mighty arm and showed his glory."

There are three problems with this kind of statement. In the first place, it is based on etymology rather than usage. Secondly, the idea of a "hinterground of meaning" is quite irreconcilable with any Hebrew usage of *dabar*. Thirdly, the idea of a "dynamic event" in which a reality "becomes manifest" is exaggerated and farfetched. Barr illustrates these objections by looking at the statement, "The thing happened at Waterloo in 1815". Now, the "thing" here is an historical and, presumably, dynamic event, but "dynamic, historical event" is not therefore a possible meaning of "thing". In fact, then, to say that *dabar* means "event" is misleading; in the expression, *debar yahweh*, it is clear that what is intended is "word of the Lord", and not "event of the Lord" or "Act of the Lord".

The misuse of etymology can be demonstrated quite effectively from English. Our word "thing" derives, in fact, from a Germanic word which meant "tribal law court". This came, in time, to mean the case before the court, then any matter, whether legal or not, and subsequently, its meaning in modern English. No one would think of saying that the word "thing" *really* means a "law-court".

(d) The adding of significances

By this expression Barr means the establishment of the meaning by the use of the "root" fallacy and etymology, and adding these various ideas together to form a "concept". An example of this is to be found in E. Jacob's *Theology of the Old Testament*[10], where he takes the four Hebrew words for "man", *adam*, *ish*, *enosh* and *geber*, examines their etymology and concludes, "From these terms some conclusions can be extracted about the nature of man and his vocation. If it is true that *adam* insists on the human kind, *enosh* on his feebleness, *ish* on his power, *geber* on his strength, then we can say that added together they indicate that man according to the Old Testament is a perishable creature, who lives only as a member of a group, but that he is also a powerful being capable of choice and dominion. So the semantic survey confirms the general teaching of the Bible on the insignificance and greatness of man." As we have already said, it is not necessarily the conclusions with which Barr takes issue, but the method by which these are reached, and this is a case in point; the linguistic argument is weak, and this may undermine the exegetical point, which is valid in its own terms. As Barr says, "While I do not say therefore that Jacob has led us far astray in the treatment of the Hebrew idea of man, I do think he has used a very dubious method of working from linguistic realities and has failed to protect it against a misuse which could be very harmful."

(e) Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*

Barr's criticisms of linguistic method come to a head in his assessment of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*; he begins in this instance by stating what a dictionary ought to be—a reference work which lists the possible alternatives in one language for the word in the other, in order to provide an indication of the contribution made by any particular word to the meaning of the sentence in which it functions, by giving an indication of the range of meanings which it can bear. The *Theological Dictionary* tends to provide idea-histories; for example, under the word *agapaō*, there is a section entitled "the words for 'to love' in pre-biblical Greek", which is not really relevant for the understanding of the word in the New Testament. Barr also criticises the frequent use of the word "concept" instead of "word" in the Dictionary, since it is supposed to be "words" with which a dictionary is primarily concerned. Of course, the history of an idea or concept is of some value, but it is not, according to Barr, the preserve of the lexicographer. "An object or event may be signified by word *a* or word *b*. This does not mean that *a* means *b*. We have already seen that *dabar* means 'event' or 'history' or the like. The identity of the object to which these different designations are given does not imply that these designations have the same semantic value. The mistake of supposing that it does we may call 'illegitimate totality transfer'."

This mistake arises from the false distinction between "external lexicography" and "inner meaning", and is akin, of course, to the "root" fallacy. It is compounded in Kittel by the fact that the Dictionary tends to ignore those contexts where the meaning of a word does not fit

into the general "concept" presupposed. Moreover, the concentration on religious and philosophical usage encourages a tendency not to look outside these fields. It should be noted, however, that the later volumes of Kittel are not as guilty of these false assumptions about language as the earlier.

Prof. Barr's great contribution to biblical studies has been to introduce the science of linguistics to theology; in a sense, it is surprising that this introduction was not made much earlier. However, now that it has been made, the inevitable "catching-up" process may begin. But is Barr right? Certainly, his application of Saussure's work has to be taken seriously, and his views on the function of dictionaries provide a welcome cautionary note to the user of such articles in the *Theological Dictionary* which pay scant regard to proper linguistic procedure. Also, with regard to his views on the relationship between language and culture, that is, on "ways of thinking" as expressed in a particular language, we are obliged to recognize that "only in the matter of actual vocabulary, as against phonetic composition, phonological systems, and grammatical systems, do languages directly reflect the cultural environment of their speakers."

However, Barr has been accused by Professor T.F. Torrance of an extreme kind of formalism in his disjunction of language from culture[11]. For Torrance, the relation between these two is important "if only because of the enjoyment we derive from the great artistic and symbolic creations in literature." This is an important point, and it has to be held in tension with the need for a rigorous, scientific approach to the study of language. The problem is that the Bible's language is religious language, and the artistry, symbolism and creativity that we discover in good literature are all the more prominent in writing that purports to speak of God. Linguists are becoming aware of the impossibility of *precision* in linguistic description, an impossibility which is also being recognized in other fields of scientific work[12]. Dr Stephen Prickett has drawn attention to this with particular reference to translating the Bible in his review of the *Good News Bible*[13]. Clearly, more work needs to be done in this area.

*III Biblical Studies and Linguistics*

Just like any other discipline, linguistic science does not stand still. Barr's work of 1961 reflected that of Saussure before 1913. Other linguists, such as Bloomfield[14] and Chomsky [15] have made immensely important contributions to the development of linguistic theory since then, and there are theologians who have worked at bringing these insights to bear on the study of the Bible. Among these is Dr Eugene Nida of the United Bible Societies. In an article in 1972[16] he pointed out six areas in which linguistics and Biblical studies may usefully be brought together. Firstly, he underlines the validity, from the point of view of information theory, of the textual critic's guiding principle, *difficilior lectio potior*, drawing an analogy with the second law of thermodynamics. Secondly, he points to the possibility that what Saussure referred to as *langue*, which is akin to Chomsky's concept of "deep structure", might throw interesting light on questions of authorship. Thirdly, he makes some observations about exegesis in the light of linguistic theory, basing what he says on an analysis of Rom. 1.5. Fourthly, he comments on the importance of linguistics for lexicography--and we have already discussed this with reference to the work of James Barr. He makes the point that what is required in word studies is not so much the study of the various possible meanings of one word, but of the very closely related meanings of different words. For example, a study of the word group "run, walk, hop, skip, crawl" is of more value than a study of the various meanings that the word "run" can bear.

Nida's fifth area of interest is the question of language teaching. The teaching of Hebrew and Greek is a recurrent problem in faculties and departments of theology. What is required is a method which takes account of the fact that the language is not going to be spoken; that translation into the language is not necessary; but that a thorough knowledge of the original texts is essential for serious work on the Bible. Richard Coggins[17] drew attention to the problems underlying language teaching to theological students in his review of J.F.A. Sawyer's *A Modern Introduction to Classical Hebrew*[18] while commending that book in its intentions; he pointed out not only that great strides had been made in linguistic theory but also that, in view of the technological revolution which has introduced language laboratories and audio-

visual aids to language teaching and the fact that much less grammatical information is required than was formerly thought before a student may begin working on a text in a foreign language, our whole approach to language teaching might be due for review.

Finally, Nida remarks that modern linguistics has great relevance for the business of Bible translation; this, of course, is his primary concern. Translation, however, can hardly be done independently of exegesis, and this is where linguistics is of such importance. The intention of any translator should be to render in the "target" language the substance of what was written in the original, with as much of the associative meaning preserved as possible. This approach, known as "dynamic equivalence" translation, allows for the primacy of the sentence as the bearer of meaning and concentrates on the total message conveyed by a complete utterance, of whatever length, style or level of writing. Since this aim entails more than word equivalence, it would seem appropriate that knowledge of some linguistic insights be required of any student of foreign texts.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the foregoing article has at least shed a little light on the field of linguistic science. The writer certainly hopes that he has set out the grounds for the autonomy of linguistics, and the necessity for it to develop its own proper procedures, just as theology and, more particularly, Biblical studies must. This is absolutely essential for interdisciplinary work to be carried on at a valid level, for only then can it become, as it should, a necessary prelude to hermeneutics and, which is probably of greater significance to readers of this *Review*, to teaching and preaching.

NOTES

1 For example, in an excellent article by A.C. Thiselton, 'Semantics and New Testament Interpretation', in I.H. Marshall (ed) *New Testament Interpretation*, Exeter, 1977.
2 The twelve being: Hittite and Toccharian (no longer represented by any spoken language), along with Indian, Iranian, Slavonic, Baltic, Germanic, Celtic, Italic, Illyrian, Thraco-Phrygian and Greek.
3 F de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Glasgow, 1974.
4 J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford, 1961.
5 T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, London, 1960.
6 J. Marsh, *The Fulness of Time*, London, 1960.
7 J. Pedersen, *Israel; Its Life and Culture*, London, 1926.
8 W.C. van Unnik, 'Reiseplåne und Amensagen', in *Studia Paulina* (Festschrift for J. de Zwaan), ed J.N. Sevenster, Haarlem, 1953.
9 T.F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, Edinburgh, 1955.
10 E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, London, 1958.
11 In *God and Rationality*, Oxford, 1970.
12 Cf. the work of Karl Popper in the philosophy of science and, for a convenient introduction, Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Modern Masters, Glasgow, 1975.
13 Stephen Prickett, 'What Do the Translators Think They are Up To?', *Theology*, November 1977.
14 L. Bloomfield's major work, *Language*, was published in New York in 1935.
15 N. Chomsky's work still continues across a wide field. His seminal linguistic works are *Syntactic Structures*, The Hague, 1957, and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Mass., 1965.
16 E.A. Nida, 'Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship', *JBL* 1972.
17 R.J. Coggins, 'Hebrew?—It's All Greek to Me!', in *The Kingsman*, No. 19 (1976-77).
18 J.F.A. Sawyer, *A Modern Introduction to Classical Hebrew*, Oriel Press, 1976.

# BOOK REVIEWS

## *EXPLORATORY WILES: OR HOW TO BEAT ABOUT THE BURNING BUSH.*

*Stuart Hall*

"The earlier part of my career as a theologian", writes Professor Wiles, "was spent in studying and teaching the early history of Christian doctrine. My approach to that early patristic tradition, including the creeds, was the same as that of any serious biblical scholar to the biblical texts. One treated them as the writings of fallible human beings seeking as best they could to record, to interpret and to make sense of their experience in terms of the knowledge and culture of their day. In the case of the Fathers that involved understanding the Bible very differently from the way in which it is understood by Christians today and working out their convictions in terms of a philosophy very different from our own. How could such an approach,

I found myself reflecting, however faithfully fulfilled, be thought to provide an unchanging framework of truth for all time? To conceive that it could was not so much an expression of faithfulness to God and to his revelation; it was more like a refusal to take history seriously, more like making an idol out of particular forms of words. Just as the nineteenth century found itself committed to the painful but necessary task of 'biblical criticism', so it seemed to me was our age committed to the equally necessary but equally painful task of 'doctrinal' or 'credal criticism' "[1]. This piece of autobiography is very illuminating if we are to understand what Wiles has done, in this book and elsewhere. He has moved from an historical discipline to what he would call 'critical'. In doing patristic history he is lucid and proficient, and the final essay in this book on "Sacramental unity in the early church", being largely historical, is the best (despite a lapse in presenting Sozomen's narrative on p. 101; read Sozomen!). He sometimes takes for granted a level of patristic information which his readers may not have (e.g. 47), but that is an error on the right side. It is when he gets to 'critical theology' that the touch becomes insecure, there is a remarkable absence of secondary documentation (did not the great Ritschlians such as Harnack attempt this same reworking of creed and dogma in the light of massively documented history?, and the content threatens always to evaporate to nothing. And yet it is the core of this, as of the author's other recent books, and his avowed goal.

The book consists of lectures and papers from various dates, one as early as 1963. Three, on the role of critical theology and its relation to christology and to world religions, and a fourth on the patristic appeal to tradition, are all recent and previously unpublished. The remainder, on the historical element in Christianity and on Holy Spirit, scriptures and eucharist, have all appeared before. But they all illustrate the theme of 'doctrinal' or 'credal' criticism. Before getting into detail, we should perhaps note the disjunction. Doctrinal and credal criticism are not necessarily the same. It is one thing to say that a particular creed such as the Nicene is not verbally infallible, needs to be understood in its historical context, might have been expressed differently, is capable of conflicting interpretations, and omits features of Christian faith which at other times and places seem of vital importance. That is credal criticism. It is quite another thing to attempt to disentangle the Gospel from broad areas of doctrinal belief howsoever expressed, which is what 'doctrinal criticism' might be taken to mean. The ambiguity was there in *The myth of God incarnate*, and on the ambiguity that book chiefly foundered. Its authors never seemed to know whether they were discussing the belief that God was personally incarnate (enfleshed) in Jesus, or every kind of doctrine which gives him a personal divine status or a pre-existence; whether they were attacking the refined metaphysical propositions of Chalcedonian type, or the earliest Christian preaching for which we have first-hand documentation, the heaven-sent Son and exalted Lord of St Paul. Wiles himself seems to embrace the more radical alternative.

In the oldest chapter, "The Holy Spirit in Christian theology", he pleads for a restatement of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in terms of the transcendent holiness of God on the one hand, and the communion of God with man (Spirit to spirit) on the other. "Thus to know God as Holy Spirit is to know him as the absolutely other entering into the most intimate conceivable relationship with man" (68). The traditional approach is at fault in "attempting to understand the Holy Spirit in too direct and isolated a manner. This has led to the hypostatization of the idea of the Holy Spirit as a distinct third person of the Godhead" (70; I think he must mean "the hypostatization of the Holy Spirit" not "of the idea"). This may lead us to relegate Holy Spirit to a partial, peripheral or secondary place in our understanding of God, instead of the total, central and primary (71). Wiles draws conclusions about the effect of this on our understanding of the Spirit's relation to scripture and sacraments: mention of Holy Spirit warns us that the matter is "part of the activity of a God who is absolutely transcendent and yet at the same time enters into the most intimate conceivable fellowship with men" (72). That is clear, forceful, and to those with a peripheral view of the Holy Spirit salutary. It anticipated when first published the elaboration of similar

[1] Maurice Wiles. *Explorations in Theology 4*. SCM Press, London, 1979. xii + 115 pages. £3.50. p. 51. All subsequent references, in parentheses, are to pages of this book unless otherwise stated.

ideas by Geoffrey Lampe in *God as Spirit*. But from another point of view it is flat and jejune. It lacks the vitality which bubbles over in New Testament texts about the Spirit, and which underlies even the more prosaic definitions of the church fathers. For them, the intimacy with God transcendent is finally and immeasurably given to man *in Christ*. "God sent the spirit *of his Son* into our hearts crying 'Abba, Father' " (Gal 4,6). And that is not an isolated verse. Not only the apostles and believers, but even the ancient prophets, were thought to have received the Spirit because they spoke of Christ. We shall see that such an omission of the Christ-element, whether deliberate or unconscious, is highly characteristic of Wiles' explorations. But, not to be distracted, the point we are now making is that his treatment of the Holy Spirit illustrates how radical the criticism is. It is not just credal, and not just verbal. It takes doctrine to bits, and tries to make something new of it.

This is the place to quote the favourable reference to a passage of Ray Hart: "Tradition must be dismantled to see what it mediates, what it handed around and hands on. Mediating only in dissolution, tradition furnishes debris for building up the structure to house what it could not hold against the flood of time" (quoted p.52). Stirring words. But we have stumbled on another problem. Even on this formulation, tradition mediates something, houses something, and that something is what you expect of it. But what is it? Wiles himself allows there is something; he even calls it "the truth we have received" which must be guarded from error (52). It emerges at one point in an historical context. He speaks of the impact of platonism on early Christianity, and seems to imply that these are two sets of beliefs of comparable status. The result was a "platonic or platonized form of Christian belief, one which incorporated distinctive insights of platonism and interpreted its own beliefs from a recognizably platonic angle" (39). There is, apparently, some sort of "Christian belief" apart from its platonic expression. To find what that is in the mind of Wiles, one might look to page 61. There, in order to make progress in detaching Christianity from its commitment to historical events, he takes as a "working definition of what is essential to Christianity" the expression "faith in God through Jesus Christ." "And let me begin", he proceeds, "by spelling out a bit more clearly how I understand 'faith in God through Jesus Christ'. At its heart is the conviction that there is a God of love who is the ultimate source of the world and in whose hands its ultimate destiny lies, that men and women are able to respond to that God and by his grace can be empowered to overcome both the evil of their own sinful devising and that which the world metes out to them" (61). There is surely some sleight of hand here. The "through Jesus Christ" of the definition has vanished from its exposition. Proceeding from this "definition" of essential Christianity to the question, "Does such a faith in God stand or fall by certain particular happenings in the past?", inevitably the answer is going to be "No". If you studiously erase Christ from the premise, you cannot expect him to pop up in the conclusion.

Relegating Christ to the category of the inessential is no momentary slip. Study closely the second chapter, "Christology in an age of historical studies", and you find christology whittled away, partly by inadvertence, partly by design. Christology is first rightly distinguished from Christianity: "Christology is not Christianity. Christology is the church's attempt to give some unified account of Jesus of Nazareth and of its apprehension of God through him in the experience of Christian faith" (21-2; the last six words are presumably an apologetic sop to naive empiricism, since faith is not an experience). Jesus' teaching, character and death are then presented as a symbolic action like those used by the ancient prophets to reinforce their words, only "in a far more comprehensive way" (24). If we accept a literary discipline that recognizes the imaginative element entwined with the historical in the books, "incarnational language understood in a properly mythological way will prove to be a powerful pictorial way of affirming the most fundamental truths about God's ways with the world" (25). What are these fundamental truths? "In the life of Jesus . . . we have an enacted parable of the love that embraces all people and will not let them go, of the God who unites people to himself in a relationship of the most intimate union, who shares their sufferings and holds them even in and through the tragedy of death" (25; does the last clause imply life after death or covertly sanction its denial?). Such pictorial interpretation excludes metaphysical christology, which would see Jesus' acts as in any direct sense acts of God (24). It can be applied successfully to the diverse features in the

gospels which if treated christologically produce unnecessary doctrinal problems. The irreconcilable presentations of Jesus should be interpreted "within the setting of a *theo*logy or theology of history" (26). Many christological problems will then vanish, or be transferred to other parts of the doctrinal agenda. Wiles expects (though with proper caution) that historical criticism will erode the last bases of traditional christology, and offers his solution in the hope that it might provide a positive way forward (26-7). That Hegel, Baur and Strauss once said similar things and made similar offers is not indicated. Perhaps it should have been.

By relegating Christ to the pictorial fringe of the "essential" or "fundamental" divine truths (a place not altogether unlike that from which Wiles would rescue the Spirit), the way is opened to the bold embodiment of non-Christian religions in Christian theology. For now we may even envisage the possibility of forms of Christian theology "in which insights central to Buddhism and Islam . . . will have been allowed to mould and modify Christian belief in a way which will illuminate and deepen aspects of belief implied but only imperfectly realized in other forms of Christian theology" (39). This seems to mean that the fundamental divine truths derived from the Jesus-pictures are to be supplemented by others drawn from Islamic and Buddhist pictures. While in favour of serious attempts to come to terms with world religions in doing our theology, I must express a doubt whether Wiles' weakened version of Christianity will in fact do more than palely surrender to the nearest vivid myth or legend from the holy books of others. This point will come out again in the next paragraph.

Wiles emphasizes the foreignness of the biblical world-view from our own (8; his authority is a letter of Lord Hailsham to *The Times* of 1976, a citation reiterated on 33 and 36; a touch of the cap to the great Bultmann would have been welcome). He also reminds us (aptly quoting Schweitzer) that "the Jesus-component of our Christ-figure is likely to be an uncomfortable alien in our contemporary world" (17). Nevertheless, it is precisely to the human Jesus and his religious beliefs that Wiles appeals for his model of the "fundamental truths" of God: "a sense of God's immediacy to the world and himself, openness toward God and other men, trust in God and a sense of being commissioned by him, forgiveness and faithfulness through suffering even to the point of death" (22-3). The strangeness of the biblical world is referred in the context, but simply not allowed to interfere with the picture. It is as if the writer never read Nineham's chapter in *The myth of God incarnate*, which shows how desperately insecure such a procedure is. Nor, one would think, is it necessary to Wiles' thesis. If Christology is purely symbolic of more general theistic truths, one need not be tied to the symbol of the gentle Jesus, but could go for the kerygmatic certainties that Paul made central: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15, 3-4). If we are to have a Christ who is pure symbol, there is no apologetic gain in discarding the cross and physical resurrection as Paul sees them. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the miraculous signs and wonders which dominate the narratives of Jesus in the gospels. The fact that Wiles still wants to base his divine symbolism on a reduced liberal-modernist Jesus induces the suspicion that he wants to have his cake as well as eat it; to accord objective verifiable historical reality to the merely symbolic, lest it deceive him. But he may be left with the worst of both worlds, a symbol at once subjective and impotent.

Glimpses of the rich lifeblood of the Gospel still break through. A quotation from Simone Weil rejects a vague religiosity in interfaith studies: "We must have given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith and love which is proper to it" (37)—an echo of the wholehearted, exclusive love which Jew and Christian alike owe their jealous Lord. Another from Luke's account of Jesus is similar: "If any man comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (12). But that is quoted to show that God deserves an absolute devotion higher than the very best things on earth, which become idols if made absolute. The best must be sacrificed for God (for whom Jesus is apparently the symbol). But observe the punchline: "So it is with our beliefs". So the Christian (I almost wrote "believer") is in this book called to the supreme sacrifice—of the beliefs he holds most sacred. That is itself significant for understanding what these "Explorations" are about.

The point is reinforced when the writer has occasion to allude to the mighty saying that "the one who would save his life loses it, while the one who loses his life gains it" (52). The context is again tediously academic: tradition must be demolished if it is to do any good, and "the Christian has to live in a dialectical situation between critical attention to the ancient tradition and equally critical attention to what makes sense in our life today" (52). That interpretation may or may not make sense in itself. But to suggest that it is a legitimate application of the saying of Jesus is at best in poor taste. The saying comes from a precious passage in Mark 8, 31-5, where Jesus reveals his own suffering destiny in fulfilment of the scriptures, and requires everyone who will go with him to take up his cross and follow. It is a far graver matter than the status of traditional religious language. The world is not full of prejudiced and blinkered believers needing only to make the supreme sacrifice of their religious convictions in order to win eternal life. The saying concerns the highest matter of God himself, a matter inseparable in the New Testament texts from bearing witness to and confessing Jesus the Son of Man, for which testimony (again I follow the gospels) Jesus was himself sentenced to death. I am not here advocating an excessively christocentric version of the Gospel, which ignores the Father and centres devotion on Jesus alone. That would, and does, cut off the Gospel from natural theology and from the divine perspectives of creation and world-destiny. We must speak of God, and not merely of Christ. But the central point remains: either God spoke fully and finally in Christ, or all Christianity's foundation documents are perverse.

Perhaps it was all a mistake from the start. Perhaps the Son of Man was never worth shedding blood for, not even in Jesus' case. Faced with the persecutor's challenge, "Curse Christ", perhaps we should say, "One has to live in a dialectical situation between critical attention to ancient tradition and equally critical attention to what makes sense in our life today." The persecutor might be satisfied. But while someone goes on asserting that God was *in Christ* reconciling the world to himself, some idiots like me are going to believe it. They may also go on attributing their belief to the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit who makes Christ known. My hope and prayer is that they will not all be obliged to run off to those sects and churches (like the well-known one near Professor Wiles' own college) where brain is banished, where theology if not entirely despised is confined to predestined grooves, and where intelligent students drown their doubts in the pure milk of sacrificial fundamentalism. But if they look to the accredited spokesmen of ecclesiastical theology for bread, and get only stones, or for meat, and they cast forth ice like morsels, who can blame them? If they find there not a dying and risen Lord Almighty, but a pale pictorial Nazarene, are they not right to go elsewhere? If we are offered only the symbolic gestures of a well-meaning rabbi for our salvation, and not the mighty work of God himself, the wise among us will not even take up an arm-chair to follow him, let alone a cross. Caiaphas got it right.

*GUIDE TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY*. By Harry Mowvley. Lutterworth Press, 1979. pp 153. £3.95.

Time was when a title such as this would have implied a book which aimed to show how this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, that one in some aspect of the life of the church, and yet another foretold the end of the world. But most students of the Old Testament can no longer treat prophecy in quite that way, and so it is not surprising that the book under review is a more workmanlike, though perhaps less exciting, volume. It is a serviceable text-book, written by the tutor at Bristol Baptist College, and likely to be particularly useful to those coming as students for the first time to the critical study of the Bible, and needing orientation as to the main types of question raised about the prophets, and some of the answers offered.

The book is in four parts. The first deals with the phenomenon of prophetism in Israel and the Ancient Near East, with an estimate of its significance in religious and social terms. The second

explores some of the problems posed by the development from the spoken word of the individual prophet through the written form of the prophetic book to the establishment of a prophetic canon. The third relates prophets to other groups in Israelite society, with some reflection upon the question of cultic prophets, and considers the prophetic attacks upon the cult and upon some other aspects of Israel's life. Finally, some outline of prophetic teaching is offered, inevitably of a rather sketchy character in a book of this size.

All in all, then, this is an unexciting but useful outline. It is somewhat old-fashioned in its main approach, with little reference to recent developments in study of the prophets. This may, however, not be a bad thing in a work of this kind, and in any case an exception should be made for a useful short section warning against too ready an identification of the prophets as covenant preachers in the way that was fashionable a few years back. There are subject and biblical indexes, but no suggestions for further reading, though the diligent will find plenty of ideas in that direction among the footnotes. It is a pity that several slips inaccurate references and the like survived the editorial stage; details that would not be important in a work primarily intended for those already familiar with the field become more serious in a basic text-book. Despite this, Mowvley's work will form a useful complement to Heaton's *Old Testament Prophets* as a guide to the basic issues in study of the prophets.

*Richard Coggins*

*MATTHEW: A COMMENTARY FOR PREACHERS AND OTHERS.*
By Jack Dean Kingsbury.
S.P.C.K. 1978. pp xii + 116. £2.50.

This book is not a traditional verse by verse commentary on Matthew but an exposition for a wide audience of some of the evangelist's theological themes. About half of it is an abbreviated version of the author's *Matthew: Structure, Christology and Kingdom* published by SPCK in 1976. Kingsbury's first book, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, was published by SPCK in 1969, with a paperback edition in 1977. He now promises a fourth book on Matthew, a 'comprehensive overview of the theology of Matthew'. Four books on Matthew is surely a *tour de force* by any standards!

The present book reflects a thorough knowledge of recent Matthean scholarship, though many readers will miss discussion of other scholarly approaches to disputed points: for that they will need to consult the longer book. The first chapter provides a useful introduction to modern Matthean scholarship. Later chapters discuss Matthew's Christology, his understanding of God and his ecclesiology.

Most of the author's own conclusions are widely shared by other scholars: Matthew has used Mark and Q; he writes for a 'well-to-do' community in Antioch about 85-90 AD; the evangelist depicts Jesus as abrogating at points both the law and the tradition of the elders—but Jesus is also depicted as upholding both to the extent that they do not conflict with his teaching of the will of God; Matthew's community is made up of Jews and Gentiles and lives in close proximity to Judaism, but it is no longer within Judaism.

Kingsbury is convinced that the key to the structure of Matthew is to be found in the phrase 'from that time on' which is used only at 4.17 and 16.21. I am not persuaded that this is correct. 4.17 does not mark the beginning of a new section and Matthew's five 'set-piece' discourses are central in the evangelist's design. Kingsbury stresses that the evangelist is addressing Christians of his own community and shows effectively just how many passages in Matthew are related to one another. But he interprets Matthew without reference to first century Judaism and with hardly a reference to first century Christianity. The reader is given the impression that with the aid of a concordance it is possible to reconstruct a systematic account of Matthew's theology. Unless this is done on the basis of rigorous source critical work (which

is conspicuous by its absence), it is impossible to judge to what extent Matthew develops his own *distinctive* theological emphases. The author shows convincingly that the evangelist was a sophisticated and skilled writer, but Matthew did not write in a historical and theological vacuum.

*Graham Stanton*

*THE ETHIOPIC BOOK OF ENOCH.*
*A NEW EDITION IN THE LIGHT OF THE ARAMAIC DEAD SEA FRAGMENTS.*
*Vol 1: Text and Apparatus; Vol 2. Introduction, Translation and Commentary.*
By M.A. Knibb, with the assistance of Edward Ullendorff.
Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 1979. pp XVI-428; VIII-260. £30 the set.

The book of Enoch has its importance in various contexts. The oddity of the reference to the figure of Enoch in Gen.5.24: 'Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him', gives an all too tantalising allusion to what must evidently be a tradition of considerable importance. The parallel with the 'taking' of Elijah (2 Kings 2.10 - the same verb; and cf. also Ps. 49.15 (Heb. 16); 73,24) points by its very rarity to such a tradition. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that a wealth of later writings has survived in which Enoch has become the recipient of divine revelations and the explorer of the secrets of the heavenly realms. As part of that great mass of non-biblical writings known to us from the period 200 B.C. to A.D. 150, it has come in for renewed study with the upsurge of interest provoked by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which include some Aramaic fragments of Enoch. That upsurge of interest could better be seen as a renewed concern with the whole religious and cultural scene of the Palestine of the first Christian century. If emphasis earlier tended to be on what might be learnt for Christian origins—and the problem of the 'Son of Man' involved the Enoch literature very specially—it is now much more directed towards the wider range of the developing life of the Jewish religious community and of the Christian movement within that community and separating from it. The book of Enoch, like the book of Jubilees, has a further particular interest in the light of contemporary study of the biblical texts. It was accorded canonical status in the Ethiopian church; and this serves as a reminder that the concept of canonicity, so often thought of in narrow and fixed terms, is in fact a much more fluid one. The borderlines between canonical and non-canonical are not to be seen as rigid.

The importance of the Enoch literature is matched by the difficulties of handling it; and of these the primary ones are those of text and language. It is therefore of the greatest importance for the study and use of the book of Enoch, that Dr Michael Knibb, lecturer in Old Testament Studies at King's College since 1964 and responsible for the area of Intertestamental Studies, should have produced this new scholarly edition of the text, and provided a new translation with commentary.

It is, indeed, with the second volume that most readers will be concerned. The introduction here sets out the textual problems, relating these to the actual presentation of the text in the first volume; where the chosen manuscript, Rylands Ethiopic MS 23, is produced photographically in small sections, with the textual apparatus below, a superb piece of detailed scholarship demanding the most meticulous work. The second volume continues with a bibliography, and then the translation with its accompanying notes. There are numerous points here at which cross-reference to other and related literature indicates the wider importance of the Enoch material. But this is strictly an edition of the text, and the translation and the notes to it are directed to the problems of precise meaning, the relationship between the Ethiopic, Greek and Aramaic forms of the text.

This is therefore a basic work of scholarship, and it is superbly done. It is on such a sound foundation that the superstructure of exegesis can be satisfactorily built.

*Peter R. Ackroyd*

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*IN FUTURE ISSUES*

Richard Coggins on Changing Patterns of Old Testament Study

Lisabeth During on Barth and Hegel.

Friedhelm Hardy on Indian Spirituality.

*BOOKS RECEIVED*

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| Howard, G. | *Paul. Crisis in Galatia.* A Study in Early Christian Theology. (C.U.P. £5.95) |
| Best & Wilson | *Text and Interpretation.* (C.U.P. £15.00) |
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| Cupitt, D. | *Jesus and the Gospel of God.* (Lutterworth Press £5.95) |
| Aubert, R. et al. | *The Christian Centuries*, Vol. V. The Church in a secularised society. (Darton, Longman and Todd £16.00) |
| Rahner, K. | *Foundations of Christian Faith.* An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity. (Darton, Longman & Todd £14.00) |
| Elliott, C. et al. | *Christian Faith and Political Hopes.* A reply to E.R. Norman. (Epworth Press £1.75) |