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BOOK REVIEWS

Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context

Brevard S. Childs. SCM, 1985. Pp. xvi + 255. £10.00

One of the most intensely debated contributions to Biblical Studies over recent years has been the canonical approach of Brevard Childs, Professor of Old Testament at Yale University. His *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979) and also its companion volume *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (1984) represent a crucial backdrop to the present volume. He has offered one way out of a crisis which he sees as threatening much biblical study, namely the failure of the historical-critical approach to relate the nature of the biblical literature correctly to the community which has treasured it as scripture. In his provocative corrective to "arid" analytical criticism, he pushes us back to the theological significance of the text of scripture, using the concept of "canon" as the central motif. Childs' contributions have given considerable stimulus to the study of these questions over recent years. They have also brought him under heavy fire from a range of distinguished critics, including James Barr, John Barton, E. P. Sanders and John Van Seters, and here he attempts to meet some of these criticisms as well as to break new ground.

Since theological considerations have long been central to Childs' canonical approach, one might expect that here in a work explicitly devoted to the *theology* of the Old Testament his perspective might prove more appropriate than his critics have judged it to be in his earlier Introductions to Old and New Testaments. This book is, moreover, particularly timely in that there is much current interest in the discipline of Old Testament theology. One thinks, for example, of recent historical and methodological studies of the discipline by Reventlow and also by Hayes and Prussner. There is today, it seems, a renewed awareness of the need to explore the *theological* dimensions of the bible text.

But what constitutes an appropriate basis for a theological evaluation of the literature? It is to this question that Childs attempts to offer an answer in the present volume. He writes, "It is my thesis that a canonical approach to the scriptures of the Old Testament opens up a fruitful avenue along which to explore the theological dimensions of the biblical text". For Childs, the object of theological reflection is the canonical writings of the Old Testament (that is, the Hebrew Scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel appropriated by the Christian church), and not the events or experiences behind the text.

Childs argues that much of the confusion in the history of Old Testament theology derives from a reluctance to recognize that it is a distinctively Christian enterprise: "To suggest that the Christian should read the Old Testament as if he were living before the coming of Christ is an historical anachronism which also fails to take seriously the literature's present function within the Christian Bible for a practising community of faith . . . The Christian canon maintains the integrity of the Old Testament in its own right as scripture of the church. However, it sets it within a new canonical context in a dialectical relation with the New Testament". Childs' position, then, is an avowedly confessional one: "The critical process of theological reflection takes place from a stance within the circle of received tradition prescribed by the affirmation of the canon". Thus he defines the task of Old Testament theology as being to reflect theologically on one portion of the Christian canon, precisely as Christian scripture.

Childs sees the discipline of Old Testament theology not just as a description of a historical process in the past; the theology of the Old Testament is not a closed deposit, to be unlocked with a single interpretative key. Rather, each new Christian generation is called to a fresh and profound theological engagement with the text. He suggests that the discussion of the so-called "centre of the Old Testament" which has dominated many recent contributions in the field of Old Testament theology has in large part arisen from a concept of the discipline which views it simply as an historical enterprise. Childs himself gives prominence to the categories of revelation and response in his exploration of the theology of the Old Testament, but he is at pains to stress that he makes no exclusive claims for any one systematizing principle and that his canonical approach acknowledges "a dimension of flexibility which encourages constantly fresh ways of actualizing the material".

Childs is emphatic that it is with the final canonical form of the text that the theologian of the Old Testament must work. He claims that his canonical approach does not deny the theological significance of a "depth dimension" of the tradition (that is, he does not reject altogether the possibility of tracing different historical levels within the growth of the Old Testament literature), but he is at the same time insistent that features within the tradition which have been "subordinated, modified or placed in the distant background of the text" cannot be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form. This, he says, would be to "disregard the crucial theological intention of the tradents of the tradition, and to isolate a text's meaning from its reception".

There can be no denying the attraction of Childs' writing. A reader of his works cannot but be impressed by the phenomenal range of his reading, the breadth of his vision, and the seductive power of his rhetoric; but there can also be no denying the real problems raised by his presentation.

Childs has helped us to see again the theological importance of the finished canonical text hallowed by use in synagogue and church. However, in spite of his claim that his canonical approach takes account of the significance of the process which formed the text, one cannot help feeling that he fails to do full justice to the dynamic traditio-historical process, the "depth dimension" of the tradition. Moreover, the logic of Childs' position seems to lead him effectively to be blinkered to material outside the strict parameters of the canon. But why limit perspectives so narrowly? – what of the many rich continuities between the biblical texts and the other literatures of the Ancient Near East, and indeed of inter-testamental Judaism?

Childs tends to slide between historical and theological discourse in a somewhat confusing way, without ever seeming to do full justice to either. It may be suggested that greater clarity is needed with regard to the many historical questions raised by the canon of the Old Testament

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THE RELIGION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: WHAT ARE WE STUDYING?

RICHARD COGGINS

During the past seven years, I have given a course of lectures under the general title "The Religion of the Old Testament" to finalist students for the London BD degree. It soon became apparent, from the confusion in my own mind and in those of the students, that an introductory lecture exploring some of the commoner causes of such confusion would be desirable. What follows is largely a reflection of the final form which that lecture has reached. It has changed over the years, very much as a result of the questions and comments that have been raised. I am most grateful to successive groups of students for keeping me thinking about this matter, and hope that what is set out below may stimulate further questions – and perhaps even some answers! – among others grappling with the Old Testament.

I HISTORICAL ROOTS OR FINAL TRADITION?

Every serious student of the New Testament soon becomes aware of the problem: is the primary object of study Jesus of Nazareth, his life and teaching? Or is it the writings about him, for which his actual life was in effect a necessary preliminary? The same question arises when we consider any prophetic tradition in the Old Testament, and, on a larger scale, in the study of the religion therein described. It is on principle likely that the "religion of the Old Testament", as set forth in the final official collection, will differ significantly from "the religion of ancient Israel", as actually practised. There are two very obvious reasons for such a judgement: first, actual religious practice will surely have varied over a period of more than a millennium, under greatly differing social and political circumstances, whereas the final form of the Old Testament, if not all the product of one period, certainly represents the considered view of what was acceptable as religious expression and practice. Secondly, it is necessary always to keep in mind the probability that there will be a polemical element in the final form of the Old Testament, which will in effect have been an attack upon the actual religion of ancient Israel. Thus, when Deut.12 stresses that there is only one sanctuary where Yahweh has caused his name to dwell, and at which he may properly be worshipped, this must surely be seen as an attack upon rival claims from other sanctuaries that they were the repositories of true Yahwism.

II CULTUS AND BOOK

The idea of the "holy book" is the product of one, relatively modern, religious tradition, that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the ancient Near East there might be authoritative texts, but they were concerned with the proper performance of rites, for example those relating to sacrifice or to funerary customs. They were not a Bible; religion meant cult.[1]

On this matter study of the Old Testament is particularly important, for here we are concerned *both* with an ancient religion, whose natural expression was cultic, *and* with a shift to the veneration of the written word as such. The shift in emphasis here implied is conventionally associated with the finding of the "book of the law" (2 Kings 22), but is also illustrated by the setting down of prophetic oracles in fixed written form. In particular this had the effect of universalising individual prophetic condemnations of cultic practice and thus limiting very severely the places and circumstances under which such practice might be maintained. In their original context it seems clear that the condemnations found in, for example, Isaiah 1 or Amos 5 were much more limited and specific; otherwise, if taken literally they would have implied the rejection of all religious practice.

It may be relevant here to mention two other dangers which are liable to cause misunderstanding for the modern Western student of the Old Testament. The first is the tendency to intellectualise religious themes, as if in some philosophical discussion. We talk about "covenant", for example, as an idea, something about which books and essays are written; yet – though much remains obscure about the meaning of the Hebrew word *berith* – the covenant must surely have been actualised in some specific cultic/liturgical setting, which was no doubt taken for granted by the Old Testament writers and so never spelt out in any text which has survived. (The well-known attempt by A. Weiser to explain many Psalms in the context of a covenant-renewal festival was based on a sound instinct, even if his particular reconstruction has not won general assent.)

The second danger arises from the tension between religion as belief and religion as practice. Even today the correlation is imprecise, but it would be widely felt that certain types of belief would be the basis for particular practice. Those who engage in church worship, that is to say, are expected to be those who take a particular view of the world in which they live, and specifically, believe in the existence of God. But this kind of distinction is scarcely an Old Testament concept. There is a Psalm which begins by referring to the fool who says, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1), but it is very widely held that this is "practical atheism", a failure to take God into account in one's behaviour, rather than a deliberate intellectual judgement.[2] For the Old Testament community, religious practice was an accepted, almost an instinctive, part of life; it would therefore be quite anachronistic to interpret the prophetic attacks upon religious practice as if the worshippers had entered into some kind of private commitment which merely showed their hypocrisy – as if, like some moderns, the prophets were saying, "They go to church a lot but they're no better than the rest of us".

III THEORY AND PRACTICE

We have already noted that there is a potentially confusing tension between the study of the Old Testament in its final form as a witness to Israelite religion and the attempt to explore its historical development. A related, but different, tension arises when we consider the way in which official religious texts seem not to correspond to actual practice. No doubt many formal statements of religious or ideological belief have an ambiguous relation to what is actually carried out under their aegis; surely this is true in the Old Testament, where we can often discover violent polemic against what was regarded as false belief and practice.

A good example would be the attack upon the worship of the "queen of heaven" found in Jeremiah (7:18; 44:17f). The most natural interpretation of such an expression would be that Yahweh was pictured in some circles as having been accompanied by a consort. For the official theory, such a thought was not merely wrong; it was utterly unthinkable, and so it is impossible from the evidence that has come down to us to be certain whether it was indeed the case that the understanding of Yahweh himself changed significantly, or whether Jeremiah's words are addressed to those who had fallen away from the worship of Yahweh. (The discoveries at Kuntillet Ajrud would, in the judgement of some, make the former the more likely alternative.[3])

We may therefore assume both that the polemic within the Old Testament implies that there was false belief and practice which justified such polemic, and that the Old Testament itself will not provide a fair and balanced account of the belief and practices being condemned. This causes additional difficulty if the "polemical" and the "biblical" levels are mixed, and polemic against, say, Canaanite religion is taken as objectively accurate. It is clear that it may have been pictured as depraved for many reasons other than the need to give an objective description. Problems of this kind run right through the Old Testament; they can still be found, for example, in the assessment of the attempt by Antiochus IV Epiphanes to achieve religious unity within the Seleucid Empire in the second century. The Old Testament is "witness" in the crusading rather than the dispassionate sense of the term.

Polemic against false views naturally implies the advocacy of true practice, and this needs to be remembered when we read of good kings or of religious reforms. Not all would necessarily have shared the view of the compilers, but this became the officially accepted line. It would not be difficult, for example, to build up a strongly critical view of the political and religious activity of Hezekiah and Josiah, both of whom are praised by the authors of Kings and Chronicles. More generally, it is important to remember that all Old Testament books have undergone a "Jerusalem edition", even though their contents may have originated elsewhere (cf. Hosea, a northerner, to whose words have been added Jerusalemite allusions such as 3:5).[4] Indeed, a number of recent studies have argued that it was only at about the time of the Exile that a "Yahweh alone" movement finally imposed its views as normative;[5] earlier Yahweh had been regarded both as more like and as compatible with other gods.

All of this brings out in acute form the difficulty of deciding whether particular "history-like" statements are indeed records of historical fact or expressions of ideals. Thus: was Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22-23) the bringing about of a new state of affairs universally recognised as good and implying that Yahweh could henceforth only legitimately be worshipped in Jerusalem? Or was the biblical account a pious ideal pleading on behalf of such an understanding? (In this case archaeological excavations from sites such as Shechem, Bethel or Arad show no dis-use of the sanctuaries there from this period, and there are literary references to the shrine at Elephantine in Egypt.) In other words, the polemical element in the Old Testament is not directed only against what could be regarded as "foreign" (that is, Canaanite) but also against other groups within Israel who claimed to be the true upholders of genuine traditions.

Complexities of this kind provide one of the reasons why the methodological distinction which is often drawn between "History of Israelite religion" and "Old Testament theology" is not entirely satisfactory. The Old Testament in its final form already represents a theology, a particular way of interpreting God's dealings with his people. The historical material has already in the form in which it has come down to us been shaped in the interest of a particular interpretation which could be called a "Jerusalem theology". This has not reduced the Old Testament to uniformity, because the editorial process, in a way which we might regard as naive, often allows the variations pointing to different traditions to remain visible.

IV CANONICAL FORM AND "ORIGINAL"

One of the most puzzling features of the New English Bible to anyone not inoculated by familiarity with the odd ways of biblical scholars is the frequently-found footnote which takes the form: "Probable Reading: Hebrew adds . . .". This clearly does not refer to simple mistakes which can creep into any written text. Rather, it assumes that there is an "original", in principle traceable, underlying our present Hebrew text, which is in some unexplained way more biblical than the Bible. (Whether such an original is in any given case traceable in practice is not an issue with which we are here concerned.) Carried to its logical extreme this would be obvious nonsense: the underlying fragments of Psalms, prophetic oracles and the like would become the real Bible.

But the practice of the New English Bible is only bringing out in acute form what underlies much biblical scholarship, that is to say, an assumption that "redactors" are in some way second best, and that the quest should be to get back to the original words of the prophet, or the basic form of the law. Surely such an assumption is a confusion of two distinct exercises. In a prophetic book it may be proper to spend time trying to discern which words go back to the time of the prophet himself, though such an exercise is notoriously vulnerable to circular argument; discovering conditions in (say) the eighth century by reference to the prophet, and then proclaiming genuine those passages which corroborate the picture just discovered. In any case it is much more questionable whether a historical exercise of this kind should be determinative for those whose interest is to study the texts that have been handed down as "Bible". For those whose main concern is the religious practice of the ancient Near East, the historical question must be the prime one; for students of theology such an assumption is at least open to challenge.

We are confronted, that is to say, with a difficulty analogous to that which we discovered when we were exploring the "historical roots/final tradition" tension; here again it would seem as if logically our main consideration should be for the material in its final form, though in practice commentaries and textbooks generally give much more attention to the material usually regarded as primary.

V THE UNIQUENESS OF ISRAEL'S RELIGION

Questions relating to uniqueness have very much come to the fore in recent study.[6] Sometimes the question is discussed at a surprisingly superficial level; of course each of us is unique as an individual, and so are the communities that we form and the institutions which those communities develop. Equally, there are certain characteristics and demands made upon all religious systems, which will mean that comparable institutions can be found over very wide areas.

These points are familiar and obvious enough, but they need to be borne in mind when we are confronted with some considerations of Israel's religion vis-à-vis the religious systems of her neighbours. Thus, some of the writers of the "biblical theology" school have wanted *both* to draw attention to the similarities between Israel's religious expressions and those of other ancient religions in order to demonstrate the antiquity of particular texts or of Israel's religion in general; *and* to stress the incomparability of Israel's religion as something sharply differentiated from her immediate environment. Again, in the various forms of "patternism" which have been put forward, it has often been assumed without adequate examination of the evidence that any gap in one part of the assumed common pattern of ancient Near Eastern religion can be supplied by reference to alleged parallels elsewhere. In fact, it seems that we may have to say, the picture offered by the surviving evidence is much less tidy than this would imply. As Israel developed its conscious identity (whether as migrants into the land as the overwhelming biblical tradition maintains, or as an indigenous but formerly oppressed group as proposed by some modern scholars), much established religious practice was taken over, apparently without question: holy places, festivals, personnel. Only later did there develop a conscious claim to difference, and with it a deliberate rejection of all things Canaanite. This is traceable in Hosea, and very markedly so with the Deuteronomists. Why such a development should have taken place, and whether the appropriate questions to ask in attempting to analyse it are historical or sociological or theological are issues which can scarcely be pursued here.

It is, however, worth noting that even so brief a survey as this encompasses two different understandings of uniqueness. One relates to the specific detail of religious practice: were Israel's customs in this regard fundamentally different from those of her neighbours? An answer to this question can only be attempted on the basis of a full assessment of Israel's religious practice and a comparison with other ancient Near Eastern evidence. The other issue relates to Israel's self-understanding: did Israel view its history, and God's action in that history, in a way without parallel elsewhere? Here we may note that the claim has often been made, especially in the context of claims about "salvation history", that Israel had an understanding of God's action in history radically different from any found elsewhere in the ancient world. This claim has, however, come under considerable criticism in recent years, especially in B. Albrektson's study, *History and the Gods.*[7]

There is, however, one possible pointer to the uniqueness of Israel's religion which should be noted, even if final decisions are scarcely likely. It is possible to find ancient Near Eastern parallels for the greater part of the material in the legal sections of the Old Testament, and for the demands expressed by Israel's prophets; the links between the wisdom literature and Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources are, of course, well-known. Even where no parallels exist, it is difficult in all this to see anything particularly distinctive, such as might form the foundation for a different basis to Israel's religion. What is more noteworthy is the way in which, in the Old Testament, the demands made seem to be bound up with the very nature and character of God. In other Near Eastern texts, the god or gods are pictured rather in the manner of distinguished visitors who come along, as it might be to a school prize-day, make speeches of encouragement and exhortation, and then withdraw from the scene. This is in striking contrast to the immediacy of Yahweh's presence with his community. It is unlikely that the often proposed parallels between Hittite vassal treaties and Old Testament covenant-making should be pressed as showing any kind of dependence, but they do illustrate the immediacy of the relation between the suzerain and his subjects.

One illustration must suffice. Parallels have often been drawn between the Code of Hammurabi and the Pentateuchal legislation; yet how great is the difference between the distant elaborations, invoking a host of deities, of the Hammurabi text, and the direct introduction of the Decalogue: "I am the LORD your God who . . .".

Such a point can of its very nature be no more than a tentative suggestion. At least it serves to remind us of the fact that, despite the many similarities between Israel's religion and that of her neighbours, there was some element in this one alone of all the religions of the ancient Near East which enabled it to survive every kind of disaster, so that its progeny are alive and well, living all over the world today.

FOOTNOTES:

1. See the title essay in C. F. Evans, *Is "Holy Scripture" Christian?*, London, 1971.
2. This understanding is the most probable one, though the cautions of J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford, 1961, p. 62, should be borne in mind.
3. See J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religion: the Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud", ZAW, 94, 1982, pp. 2/20.
4. This still seems to be the most probable explanation of that verse despite the reservations expressed by G. I. Emmerson, *Hosea: an Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, Sheffield, 1984, esp. pp. 101-116.
5. See in particular B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, Sheffield, 1983. Lang's views have been strongly challenged in a collection of essays edited by E. Haag, *Gott, der Einzige*, Freiburg, 1985.
6. This debate was given fresh impetus by the detailed study by N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, Maryknoll, 1979, esp. pp. 667-709.
7. Lund, 1967. A brief but helpful discussion of this aspect of uniqueness is offered by J. Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, Leicester, 1981, esp. pp. 77-79.

A RE-SITED ECCLESIOLOGY

JOHN M. TODD

All the theories about the Christian Church, all the ecclesiologies held by the Roman Catholic Church, and to only a slightly lesser extent the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran Churches, the Reformed Church, and virtually all other main line churches though in their case certainly to a lesser extent, all these ecclesiologies imply that it is an established fact that Jesus of Nazareth founded a Church and that our present institutions are something like what he had in mind, or are at any rate in principle authentic developments from that which he began. The sheer absurdity and impertinence of this assumption jumps readily to the mind. These Bishops, that congregation, genuine successors of the dusty dusky Semitic preacher, and of his followers. The Reformers caught well the mis-match. Luther wrote "we old fools march around in bishops' hats, and with clerical pageantry, and take it not only seriously but as an article of faith".

But more seriously when we today talk of a Founder, our language normally refers to someone who establishes a constitution and a Trust Fund – or at least writes a Rule. Can the dynamic instructions, paradigms and counsels of the New Testament honestly be seen as the charter of our 20th century churches? Only with qualifications which take shelves full of books to enunciate on account of the relatively exiguous and disparate nature of the theological and historical data of the first three centuries, leaving the theory looking at best only very marginally credible to minds of non-believers, and difficult to cope with for many believers.

The problem is analogous with the problem posed by the tension between the Jesus of Faith and the Jesus of History. Christianity as we have it, and as it is preached, is ineluctably a historical religion, in that it is tied absolutely to particular events and experiences recorded in the New Testament texts by the followers of Jesus of Nazareth in the first century. The Jesus of Faith has to be derived from the Jesus of History, or rather the "Jesus and his first followers of history", using that phrase to indicate what could be reasonably proposed by a historian as a factual residuum from all the documentary evidence about Jesus and his followers including those who wrote the New Testament texts. But the problem with the *Church* of History and the Church of Faith has about it a major difference. The *Jesus* of Faith refers to what Christian communities and individuals claim to experience. But the Church of Faith has to *be* simply those actual people acting as bodies and institutions calling themselves Churches. Can we believe that they are genuine heirs of the Church of History, of the first century?

The problem can be referred to as the tension between institution and event, between history and present experience. In his book *Being as Communion,* the Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas presents his understanding of a solution which I suggest points to the direction in which ecclesiology, Church theory, must go in coming years. I hope to show what is needed is a reorientation of all ecclesiology, perhaps something which could properly be called a radical reorientation, and that it also entails a more careful study of certain aspects of the biblical texts. I quote now a paragraph from the opening pages of Zizioulas's book in which he attempts a summary of what he is saying. He is talking about the eucharist which is the locus of his solution. He says:

". . . the eucharist manifests the Church not simply as something instituted, that is, historically *given,* but also something *con-stituted,* that is constantly realised as an event of free communion, pre-figuring the divine life and the Kingdom to come. In ecclesiology, the polarisation between 'institution' and 'event' is avoided thanks to a correct understanding of the eucharist: Christ and history give to the Church her being, which becomes *true being* each time that *the Spirit* con-stitutes the eucharistic community as Church . . . it is the eschatalogisation of the historical word, the voice of the historical Christ, the voice of the Holy Scripture which comes to us, no longer simply as 'doctrine' through history, but as life and *being* through the *eschata* – the risen Body of the Logos". Well – clearly this is the language of faith, of *fides quaerens intellectum,* and the English mind tends to take a deep breath after even just one paragraph of this kind. But in fact this is serious and rigorous thought and I think appropriate to my topic. On this quotation I have two points to make and a preliminary observation. The observation is simply that what Zizioulas describes is the ideal state of affairs rather than what actually happens. He says "polarisation between 'institution' and 'event' is avoided thanks to a correct understanding of the eucharist" and then makes clear that this correct understanding implies a recognition that the Spirit constitutes the eucharistic Community as Church. This correct understanding has I think often not been present in eucharists in the West where *institution* is often thought of as the real power behind the event, the eucharist celebrated by a validly ordained priest or minister, the Spirit virtually absent.

The two points I wish to make relate precisely to Institution and to Spirit. Zizioulas's descriptions of the Church still contain a substantial historical input. Historical institution is not its absolute base, the sole anchorhold, but it is still there as something real. We still need to be able to define the Church as instituted in the first century. We still have to ask: Can what is described there in the first century be understood as related to what we have today through our celebration of the eucharist? The second point is about the emphasis on Spirit. What is this Spirit which constitutes the Church? It sounds suspiciously like something read into the situation, a holy oil which will lubricate anything in need of assistance to make it work. I suggest two tasks then: to try to understand the Churches today as heirs of a first century institution, and to understand references to the Holy Spirit as something biblical and intelligible, which may help to resolve the difficulty about institution. To put it synthetically: Who are the people celebrating this Eucharist at which the Spirit constitutes this eucharistic community as Church and brings it into the Last Days? Are they not already in some sort Church? Before the Spirit constitutes them, they need to have started from some basis to do it, at least a potential Church, with some organisation. And by what right do we speak of this Spirit, *Ruah or Pneuma?* Is the resultant community, *koinonia,* something only to be seen with the eye of faith? Are we at a dead end here intellectually, needing simply to accept the statements and the events and the people as self-authenticating and their language as the language of faith, essentially opaque to any outside attempt at understanding it? That would not seem to me to be in harmony with anything human or divine.

Forty-two years ago I was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Is Christianity as a divine Church-founding movement still convincing to me, and if so can the Roman Catholic Church or any Christian Church be a rightful heir of it? To the first question I answer a greatly enriched "yes". I find the existence of the New Testament texts inexplicable other than on the assumption that something entirely exceptional, something unique, happened in Galilee and Jerusalem in the first years of the first century, and that what the texts describe is a reliable description, in the cultural terms of the time and place, of what happened; and I find that my personal experience of life tells me that the message they have and the teaching they propose is authentic and valid for everyone. The human disciplines which sometimes purport to reduce the meaning of the text to a function of sociology, or to find an explanation of the words used through some analytic method, such suggestions I find sometimes interesting and enlightening, but in a sense complementing and not in any way cancelling out, the meaning and message which the texts have, taken at their face value. I do not adhere to any kind of fundamentalism, but consider that the biblical texts should and can be elucidated like any other historical text. Of course as with any text of which, as regards the New Testament, the originals are fourth century Greek parchments, assisted by many earlier papyri fragments, there will always be things to argue about. But the New Testament text as a whole points to oral forms dating from the time soon after the crucifixion itself, and to some kind of written forms within 10 years or so, to enable the statements made by Paul in the early 50s and our first written gospel within 35 years or so. To posit some kind of psycho-social pressures, and/or several astoundingly inventive literary geniuses, and/or the influence of literary forms and linguistic structures as sole explanations of the existence of the New Testament texts seems to me unreasonable and incredible. Better to receive the text as principally the witness of a number of people and groups to what happened and what they experienced. There is then some adequate starting point for the swift expansion and spread of Christian Churches, for their deeds and words. The only difference for me between 1944 and 1986 in this respect is that today I can see the possibility of the mutual enrichment between the cosmic vision of the New Testament text and the visions of other spiritual traditions.

So, what of the next step? What are these churches that St Paul wrote to, in relation to the churches we have today? After 1900 years, after Newman, after Vatican II, after the charismatics, after the healing preachers, pentecostalists and 10,000 African sects? What, after the new understanding of the riches of the Vedanta? The development in my own understanding of church is substantial. In a word it is symbolised by a radical movement from exclusive to inclusive. In 1944 when my friends and I were conditionally baptised in the Roman Catholic Church of St George's at Taunton we held a logical, linear, historical view of the Church. Either this one or that was the True Church. The True Church was one that could trace its Bishops and priests back in an unbroken line to the 12 apostles. Churches which could not do this were heretical. The emphasis was on institution and structure. The Church was visible. Easy to caricature it. One example of the absurdities of these days was to come across a priest who regretted that the gospel writers had failed to record

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for us the precise eucharistic rubrics which Jesus had followed at the Last Supper, and the particular type of vestment that he wore. A more serious example is that of the type of studies for which the best Roman Catholic priests were normally sent. It was Canon Law. The assumption was that these men with first rate minds had now in their possession a full understanding of revelation, of faith and morals, and a well based personal discipline. What they needed now was to know how to guide and regulate the lives of individual men and women and of societies. It was all perfectly logical.

However from my point of view from the start there were always a number of loose ends, a number of problems, which I simply put up a siding, expecting to find solutions to them as time went on. One of them of course, relevant to the present discussions, of the linear logical and exclusive, was infallibility. At Cambridge I had read Von Hugel's *Notes on the Petrine Claim.* Although when going back to it many years later I could not quite see how it had come about, that short book had left me with the simple and reasonable idea that if Jesus of Nazareth had founded a Church, he must, if the principal Christian doctrines were true, have intended to provide that Church with inspiration and protection of some kind. Its rightful authorities must benefit from such protection. So they would not fail totally. Infallibility was all right then, understood etymologically, in a negative sense, as a protection from error. Then another comforting thought was that history showed that there had always been moderate voices, from the 14th century onwards, working to confine papal claims, to keep them within reasonable bounds. Then again, some theologians arguing about the Infallibility Decree of the First Vatican Council declared that it was practically speaking impossible to be certain when any particular *ex cathedra* utterance actually fulfilled the necessary conditions to be certainly infallible. Then more recently other theologians began to throw doubt on that Council itself – could it be called an Ecumenical Council when the majority of Christians had not even been invited to it? And in any case were not its decisions so influenced by political and other pressures that its canonical status had been impugned? The vision of a pristine true church was further muddied by the realisation that the Roman Catholic Church had allowed a kind of creeping infallibility to overshadow its entire life, so that a Pope's speech to bee-keepers might seem to be inspired, or more seriously as in Humanae Vitae, the Pope could attempt to impose behavioural norms against logical argument and practically unanimous advice. The Vatican was beginning to look altogether too Vatic, Delphic.

The beautiful logical design seemed to be getting muddied over with a lot of unresolved human factors. The Arcic texts and many other ecumenical texts deal with some of these considerations, sometimes in great detail. And a consensus emerges from them that at any rate the Church itself must be indefectible, a belief held for instance by both Luther and Calvin. But then the question gets asked where can we locate this indefectibility. The answer to this question in Arcic includes a sentence about the need for doctrinal statements to be "received" by the whole body of Christians, a sentence which comes very close to being a direct contradiction of a statement to the contrary in the texts of Vatican II. Maybe these things can be ironed out. Maybe in the future the Pope will in fact become a kind of constitutional monarch, as I do indeed fully expect. Maybe at the other end of the spectrum the idea of the Bible as literally inspired and the use of justification by faith as a kind of shibboleth will evolve satisfactorily. Such outcomes would not be out of harmony with the reorientated ecclesiology which I am suggesting must emerge.

And it has been, correctly I believe, suggested that the great text of Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* did mark the beginning of the end of a theology which was always deficient pneumatologically, and as a result always had a bias towards monarchy in its church government, and underplayed the input of its members.

But what really worries me is the whole concept of being able to demonstrate the authenticity of the Church in this kind of way, whether theologically or historically. Let me give you another paragraph of Zizioulas. He refers in this quotation to the Epiclesis, the prayer to the Holy Spirit, normally present as an essential part of ancient eucharistic liturgies:

"The epiclesis means ecclesiologically that the Church asks to receive from God what she has already received historically in Christ as if she had not received it at all . . . The epicletic life of the Church shows only one thing: That there is no security for her to be found in any historical guarantee as such – be it ministry or word or sacrament or even the historical Christ Himself. Her constant dependence on the Spirit proves that her history is to be constantly escahatalogical. At the same time the fact that the Spirit points to Christ shows equally well that history is not to be denied. 'The Spirit blows where he wills', but we know that he wills to blow towards Christ".

At the moment the ecumenical negotiation of verbal counters, the agreeing of ever more carefully ironed texts, tend to imply that such activities can encapsulate the whole nature and purpose of the Church, in spite of disclaimers and the certain belief of participants in the making of such texts that this cannot really be so. But the verbalised doctrines continue to take priority, and they do continue to imply belief in a Church which as a whole can either trace its history continuously back in terms of doctrines and structures to the beginning, or at least knows enough about the primitive and early Church to be able to claim to be the same Church or heir to it. But these claims really do not bear rigorous historical examination. However, there *has* been a continuous Church *life* without doubt. We need to look behind the words to the *life* of Churches and Christians to reach a genuine identity.

The New Testament has many images of The Church: Body of Christ, People of God, Bride of Christ, Household of God, Servant, and many others. These images are not really complementary to one another. They are simply entirely different. They do not carry any doctrinal common factors. They are simply different views of the Church, from within a culture whose language is constantly metaphorical. The evidence is clear enough that the Churches were *there,* bodies of Christian Jews and non-Jews meeting and worshipping and living in a way which others could identify – communities of widely differing natures round the Mediterranean seaboard. The New Testament texts often show writers visibly struggling to find a way of establishing an identity. Until the fourth century the evidence left to historians is relatively exiguous and in many ways disparate, from Syria to

Egypt, from Greece to Rome, France, Spain and North Africa. I suggest that the identity which emerges is much closer to the kind of description provided by John Zizioulas, than to that provided by theologians or historians who locate it exclusively in the area of defined doctrine of the propositional kind or by theories of organisation and structure of a similar kind. The Graeco-Roman doctrinal and disciplinary structures are part of the central history and inheritance of the Church. But they are not any more the only key to its nature, nor the exclusive factor in its identification in the first centuries. The liturgists, by studying early liturgies have given our 20th century church a synthetic text for the eucharist, the so called Lima text, which can be used acceptably by many Churches today, and has its roots stretching satisfyingly back into the Old Testament past. Can we perhaps find then in the New Testament texts on the Church some underlying driving force which will enable us to see beyond or behind the purely verbal structures. Zizioulas's speaks of The Spirit constituting the Church. Perhaps there is a clue here.

I am not a biblical scholar but I dare to put an idea to you. I was encouraged in my idea that somehow the word Spirit, and the very meaning of it as used by St Paul had not been fully grasped by the Church, when I read a footnote in one of Raymond Brown's recent books which said simply that in his view there was no good book on Spirit in the New Testament. It seems to me that when Paul speaks of Spirit, back behind the current ideas of the time embodied in the word Pneuma, it is the Torah that we are hearing, the Torah as interpreted by the Prophets, and it is the Spirit of Yahweh, the driving compelling, inspiring Spirit of God, about which Paul is speaking – already in Greek we have moved a step away from that primeval vision, poetic, but more than poetic, instinctively religious, innocently worshipping; and we read into this Pauline Greek all the following 1,900 years of often merely routine theologising about *Spiritus Sanctus,* by which we have domesticated the great fundamental personal power in all life, and turned the sublime vision of the Holy Trinity into a set of ecclesiastical doctrines. Doubtless in some way or other it had to be. But today it is our task in this and many other areas of life to look back to the primal visions and to grasp again consciously what was then held in a kind of spontaneous innocence. I would like to see an understanding of Spirit, of Ruah-Pneuma analogus perhaps to the way in which Professor Clements has recently suggested we should understand the word Life in the Old Testament – not as a blessed life or a prosperous life, or long, or good life, which is what as we read the Old Testament we tend automatically to read into many uses of the word Life. But Life, he suggests, in the Old Testament commonly refers to simply being "alive", something neither inert nor dead, but living – and we can then receive the full uncluttered message: yes, of course, the poet (for virtually all ancient texts are in a certain sense poetic) is talking about praising and praying for that whole marvellous reality of something alive, not dead, or inert but living. So we may somehow perhaps strive to get some idea of Spirit, which always refers in some way to the inner driving creative and sustaining and inspiring power in everything. In a mysterious way these early texts have the ability to convey across all the cultural barriers an intuition of meaning here. The ambivalent ikonic words of the Hebrew speak to the whole person. They are self-authenticating. No wonder Luther spoke of trying to teach the nightingale to sing like the cuckoo when he was translating the prophets into German. The Spirit of Yahweh, The Spirit of the Lord – the mind needs to allow itself to dwell on the New Testament texts: "The Spirit led him . . ." "But always the same Spirit . . ." It is difficult for a modern scholar, used to linguistic analysis, to work out on a logical basis what Paul must mean (as they say) by Spirit – but the confidence with which the word is used bespeaks a certainty on the part of the author or authors in what they were doing. The solution surely lies in the semitic inheritance.

Suppose then that in some way a new understanding of the Spirit might lead to a new orientation for our understanding of the Church. It would not so much contradict or correct as set in a new context all our theories. Perhaps the entire style, the whole Greco-Roman conceptual language of Western Catholic theology needs to be qualified in some way, not superceded so much as enriched from life and perhaps indeed from the contemplative and apophatic seams of its own tradition. Has anyone tried to see what such a Church might be like? The answer is that serious attempts have been made. One that I find most significant is that of Fr Bede Griffiths writing from within a 35 year experience of attempting to live the Christian monastic life within the deepest authentic heart of the Indian spiritual traditions. At the end of his book *The Marriage of East and West* he sketches out some suggestions. They are vague enough. But the life he lives is far from vague, and he deserves to be heard.

It is not really a matter of trying to envisage how structures might be altered, how disciplines might be changed. Rather, by concentrating on, by attending to, meditating on the revelation of the Spirit in the world, we begin to alter the whole approach. I shall quote a few observations from Fr Bede: "In Christian tradition the figure of the Mother is found in the Church. In an early Christian writing, *The Shepherd of Hermas,* the Church appears in the form of an old woman – and this is said to be so 'because she was created first of all. On this account is she old, and for her sake was the world made'." Bede comments "It is necessary to see the Church in this cosmic aspect. The Church as a historical institution has a very recent origin and occupies a very small part of the world. But the Church in herself is the eternal Mother; she is the created aspect of the uncreated Spirit". There is no space here even to sum up the superb exposition of the Church as man became conscious of his destiny as a son of God, humanity drawn out of sin by the power of the Spirit and responding to the Word of God. In this sense he says the Church is present in humanity from the beginning of history . . . The presence of the Spirit in this sense can be traced in all the religions of mankind. We need to recover this understanding of the Universal Church, the Church which "was created first of all – for whose sake was the world made". "In Jesus this movement of matter and consciousness towards the life of the Spirit reached its culmination . . . In him the marriage of God and Man, of Nature and Spirit, of Purusha and Prakriti was consummated . . . The Church is the Pleroma, the fullness, the consummation of all things, the term of the whole evolutionary process. The divine *Purusha* has taken possession of Prakriti, Nature and filled her with his presence. At Pentecost a new age begins in which this power of the Spirit is to spread through the world and humanity is to be gathered into the Kingdom of God. Such is the mission of the earthly Church, to be the witness, or

rather the embodiment, of the power of the Spirit, acting as a leaven in creation and bringing it to fulfilment in the Kingdom of God". But of course the Spirit then becomes overshadowed by the human sins and infirmity of the historical church, and this mystic vision of the Church which is and agrees with the Semitic understanding of the holy people, the sacred assembly, also became corrupt. "When we look at the Christian Churches today and recall their history, it often seems more like a record of human sin than of divine grace. If we look deep enough, we shall see that the Spirit of God is always present, changing people's lives, moving them to love and service, often effecting radical changes in society, inspiring people with ideals of sacrifice, with visions of truth, with the fire of mystical experience". But we still find he says that "human limitations, cultural blindness, narrowness of mind and fanaticism are still only too evident. If the Myth of the Church is to be revived today, it must find new forms of expression. Its universal meaning has to be discovered, its relationship to all the religious traditions of mankind. Its relevance to the world in which we live. Such a rebirth of the Myth of the Church is already taking place, but it still has a long way to go. Above all we have to discover the source of those deformations which have afflicted the Churches . . . The Church became dominated by that system of rational thought, which is the cause of the imbalance of the Western world, though the imaginative insight and intuitive wisdom of the biblical tradition was never wholly lost". The Church became obsessed with the need to construct logical formulas and to enforce them in the form of dogmas. Then the Reformers revolting against it, produced a mirror image in a further set of rigorously enforced formulas. Turning to the ecumenical movement for a moment Bede says that "unless it abandons the search for doctrinal formulas and legal systems, and recovers the intuitive wisdom of the Bible and of ancient man, there is little hope of success". We have to go beyond all our present historical structures and recover the original Myth of Christianity, the living truth which was revealed in the New Testament . . . But this cannot be done by the Western mind alone. We have to open ourselves to the revelation of the divine mystery, which took place in Asia, in Hinduism and Buddhism, in Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism. Nor can we neglect the intuitive wisdom of more primitive peoples, the Australian Aborigines, the Polynesian Islanders, the African Bushmen, the American Indians, the Eskimoes. All over the world the supreme Spirit has left signs of his presence. The Christian mystery is the mystery of God's presence in Man, and we cannot neglect any sign of that presence". He says of course the divine Mystery, ultimate Truth always lies beyond our conception . . . The great Myths are only reflections in the human imagination of that transcendent Mystery. Even the Myth of Christ belongs still to the world of signs, and we have to go beyond the Myth to the Mystery itself, beyond word and thought, beyond life and death".

Coming from Father Bede in his Ashram these are words to be pondered by someone concerned about the problems of the Church as Institution and the Church as constituted by the Spirit. He has a vision of a resolution. The Western theologian and historian may ask: "Can we cash it? Can we verify it?" But of course the point is that a vision is not a cash voucher. At any rate we can ask whether the vision seems to be so far from reality that it cannot be taken seriously. It surely does need to be taken seriously, basing itself as it does on the earliest self-understanding of the Church. And one has to be clear that the mis-match will always be there.

Asking a recently convinced Christian if he had joined a Church he replied to me, "No, none of them seems to fit". Well, presumably none will ever fit. In that sense we need to cease looking for a fit. The Church institution will in the nature of things look like other institutions in the particular human culture in which one lives. It will carry the values, message and being of the Church in the same styles as those in which its members normally live. It will be recognisable by its reverencing of the texts, notably the biblical texts, its use of symbolical rites, notably the two sacraments to be found in the New Testament, and most notably the eucharistic meal where the eschata can be made present along with the past, under the presidency of the Spirit, and by the practical love for one another and for all people, of its members. The testing of the spirits can be done by no rule of thumb. In the end in a certain sense it will be necessary to accept, and make a virtue of, self-authentication. It may be useful to observe that Christianity is not alone in finding itself in this non-verifiable situation. Those who struggle to understand the values, the message conveyed by works of art are in no different a plight, and again can be seen making a virtue of it. I am thinking of the final passage in the Leslie Stephen Memorial Lecture given by George Steiner delivered on 1st November last year. The passage begins with the feeling of a cul-de-sac about present ways of attempting to analyse art:

> Personally, I do not see how a secular, statistically based theory of meaning and of value can, over time, withstand either the deconstructionist challenge or its own fragmentation into liberal eclecticsm. I cannot arrive at any rigorous conception of a possible determination of either sense or stature which does not wager on a transcendence, on a real presence, in the act and product of serious art, be it verbal, musical, or that of material forms.
>
> It may be the case that nothing more is available to us than the absence of God. Wholly felt and lived, that absence is an agency and *mysterium tremendum* (without which a Racine, a Dostovesky, a Kafka are, indeed, nonsense or food for deconstruction). To infer such terms of reference, to apprehend something of the cost one must be prepared to pay in declaring them, is to be left naked to unknowing. I believe that one must take the risk if one is to have the right to strive towards the perennial, never-fully-to-be-realized ideal of all interpretation and valuation: which is that, one day, Orpheus will not turn around, and that the truth of the poem will return to the light of understanding, whole, inviolate, life-giving, even out of the dark of omission and of death.

In this last passage of course one can substitute Christ for Orpheus, and say "Christ will cease to be crucified and the truth of the religious vision will return to the light of understanding, whole inviolate, life-giving, even out of the dark of omission and of death".

Someone might object that all I have done in this lecture is to transfer the impossibility of believing that these Bishops, that congregation can possibly be authentic heirs to the first century churches to the impossibility of believing that these Bishops, that congregation can possi-

bly be the kind of inspired and inspiring community which I have perhaps shadowed forth. But as I have said in the sense of finding an exact fit, it is useless looking for a verifiable and truly worthy heir to the revelation. What emerges is the need to ask the question at a deeper level and to reorientate the whole approach. It might be objected again that what I have suggested was achieved by the reformation as the reformers returned to a more biblical understanding of the Church and attempted to discern a pattern of primitive observance. But as we know the attempt to a great extent fell victim to the same structuralisation and conceptualism as that which it rebelled against.

Let me make clear again that I do not foresee some kind of reneging on the whole 1,900 years of conceptualist theologising, on the great doctrines and dogmas which have been thought out, commented on, and handed down to us. But I expect to see a re-siting of them, a fresh context, a less spatial and less temporal insistence on the verbal and behavioural disciplines they may have been seen till now to imply. I think liberalisation would be a wrong description. My major witness comes from an Ashram and the traditional ashram is by no means a liberal place from the point of view of life-style, of the cultural and even liturgical expectations of Europeans. The long hours of meditation and the modest requirements in terms of food, clothing and shelter might even be called the other side of the coin option for the poor. What perhaps needs then to be pressed forward is a further growth, a new and deeper perception that what Jesus of Nazareth instituted or founded was a way of life, a way of responding to the divine Spirit which in its own way is as strict as many of the New Testament counsels imply and which founds its regular apotheosis in the gathering of Christians to listen to the Holy Word and to eat holy food, finding therein the presence of the one who was crucified, who was raised up, who appeared to many, and now lives and rules in ways we shall fathom but which we have already fathomed in that eucharist.

In so far as the linear historical view of the pilgrim Church is retained we must give a serious place to the line which reaches into the future equally with the past. Theologians, like medical doctors, commonly tend to act as if the present moment in time is the pleroma – they think and act as though the complete purpose and fulfilment of revelation on the one hand and all scientific discovery on the other is complete. The information is here, the study has been done and we can give answers. And any kind of admitted agnosticism as an essential part of the system tends to be seen as a weakness, unnecessary weakness. But we have every reason to think that the past of theology and the past of medicine is likely to prove to be a very small fraction of the total time stretch for which these disciplines will be exercised. Changes and discoveries will surely be made at the same rate as in the past. We can say that certain principles will remain but their new application and the discovery of further principles still lies hidden. Great humility is appropriate.

A revived pneumatology and a greater willingness to listen to one another will be part of the new ecclesiology. As Father Bede has pointed out, this is relevant to the present ecumenical discussions.

I share Father Bede's scepticism about the now so laboured activities of the ecumenical commissions and committees. The idea that it must be years still before, for instance, Anglicans and Roman Catholics may share fully together at the eucharist (although in fact many already do so on a wide range of occasions) and that the problems of reconciliation between for instance the high theories of the Church and an African sect are virtually insurmountable seems to me to mistake our situation. We need a greater realisation that all our arrangements are part of a great provisional, an arrangement for a time and a place and that we are trying to serve a Purpose we can never perfectly discern, which is mirrored in the mystery of life and of the Universe. In particular as a result of a failure at this point, the received version of the theology of Church unity as propounded by Roman Catholic authority is fundamentally over-intellectual in its crude theory that eucharistic sharing is impossible outside organic unity. In effect this phrase "organic unity" has become a kind of chimera and appears to be, I hope perhaps final, manifestation of the moribund idea that on the one hand bureaucratic organisational unity is the proper and exclusive sign of Church unity and on the other hand of the mistake of thinking that Christians in communion with the See of Rome have ever thereby or ever will be agreed on the interpretation of all major doctrines. As Newman pointed out theology itself has to be the ultimate regulator; by its very nature its work is never done.

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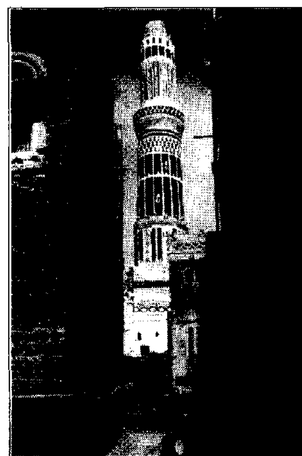

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FACTS, FAITH, AND FUNCTIONALISM

THEO SIMPSON

1. BELIEF THAT AND BELIEF IN

The distinction between BELIEF THAT and BELIEF IN is one that will be familiar to readers of this journal. It is related to the distinction commonly made between facts and values. Philippa Foot[1] puts it like this:

> "The truth or falsity of statements of fact is shown by means of evidence; and what counts as evidence is laid down in the meaning of the expressions occurring in the statement of fact . . . With evaluations, however, it is different. An evaluation is not connected logically with the factual statement on which it is based."

Philippa Foot goes on to argue that it is not possible to make so sharp a distinction between matters of fact and matters of value. We accept something as fact only when we are clear as to "what counts as evidence". Our judgment as to "what counts as evidence" may involve an element of "evaluation" – in several possible meanings of that term. Unfortunately, theologians too sometimes speak as if there were only two tenable positions in regard to the relationship between facts, and values or beliefs: either beliefs are deducible from facts, or beliefs are more or less independent of the facts. Either BELIEF THAT and BELIEF IN are identical, or they are quite independent of each other.

I would like to refer here to the highly publicised survey conducted by ABWON (Action for Biblical Witness to Our Nation). According to the report available to me, the ABWON questionaire required bishops to give a public answer to three questions:

1. Do you believe in the Virgin Birth for Christ as a historical event?
2. Do you believe it is necessary for a Christian to believe in the Incarnation of Christ as "God made flesh"?
3. Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ from the tomb on the third day?

When I read this report in the *Church of England Newspaper* for 29th March, 1985, I felt an unexpected pang of compassion for the bishops. The second question, about the reality of the Incarnation, is so badly stated that it appears to require an affirmation that God the Father became incarnate. The first and third questions – and this is more to the point of our enquiry – both require the bishops to affirm their faith by using the BELIEVE IN formula of events which are said to be "historical" or "bodily". The effect of this is to make belief IN Christianity identical with believing THAT certain things actually happened some 2,000 years ago.

It is, of course, the Bishop of Durham who provides the obvious example of a theologian who wishes to reduce or even eliminate the appeal to historical fact as the basis for faith. The *Church of England Newspaper* on 4th April, 1985 published a statement by Bishop Jenkins in which he says that he "cannot tell precisely what happened at the first Easter nor get behind the experiences, encounters and discoveries of the early Church and their way of telling the stories of faith".

The really significant thing about this is that Bishop Jenkins does not seem to think this matters very much. What has perhaps given offence is the impression he conveys that he rather enjoys shocking us with his historical agnosticism. Hence he can quite cheerfully sponsor the highly improbable and rather cynical theory that the disciples stole the body of Jesus after his death.

In fact, it appears that Bishop Jenkins' position on the relationship between fact and faith does not differ substantially from that of an existentialist theologian like Tillich. At any rate it appears that faith is virtually self-authenticating. It neither needs nor desires historical fact to back it up. He is again quoted by the *Church of England Newspaper* as writing in his *Diocesan Newsletter* that historical uncertainty is of no significance for those who experience "the encounters of faith, the assurance of faith, and the practice of faith. This faith claims that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is so real that it changes our approach to all reality".

British philosophers, such as Gilbert Ryle, tend to treat existentialism – more especially in its German form – as a form of intuitionism. It is easy to see the attraction of an intuitionist approach to religious truth in a sceptical age which places great emphasis on experimental and empirical verification. In fact, some of Bishop Jenkins' remarks sound like a deliberate repudiation of the kind of apologetic which attempts – with painful lack of success – to demonstrate that Christianity is just as surely based on "objective" fact as science itself.

But this raises the point as to why it is that intuitionist, subjective interpretations of Christianity are so much in vogue today. Why is it that the Anglo-Saxon world, which has shown a healthy scepticism in regard to the slightly misty existentialist philosophies of Jaspers and Heidegger, has accorded such reverence to their theological counterparts, like Bultmann and Tillich?

There is a certain air of desperation about all this which suggests that we are indeed living in an old age in which theology finds it very hard to justify its own existence. More specifically, theologians find it very hard to present the faith in such a way that it will commend itself to people for whom scepticism is a virtue.

It may be helpful therefore to ask ourselves just what it is that is so very different about the world today from the world of Aquinas or Augustine, or from that of Homer. What I want to suggest is that the difficulties in which Christian apologists find themselves today are mainly claused by the fact that we are trying to operate in terms of an outdated and inadequate world view. It is not so much that our traditional beliefs about God and his relationship with his creation – and therefore also about the relationship between fact and faith – are completely wrong, but rather that our account of these things simply doesn't carry conviction just because our world view is not that of our contemporaries.

Broad accounts of the history of ideas are often rather hazy – and consequently unconvincing. I therefore propose to operate within the framework suggested by Cornelis van Peursen in an article published many years ago, where he distinguishes between the mythological, the ontological and the functional periods in human

history.[3] It will be noted, however, that I have made considerable changes to van Peursen's presentation of the distinctive features of these different eras.

2. FROM MYTH TO ODYSSEY

2.1 The period of myth

The basic religious question is "Why are things the way they are?" I take it that without that kind of imaginative wonderment, the phenomenon we know as "religion" would be unknown. I hope I may also assume that there is a broad measure of agreement with the description of "religion" outlined by the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz.[4] Geertz argues that a religion always presents a "symbol system" which provides a broad frame of reference for the apprehension of experienced reality. We should also note in passing that van Peursen's scheme of three periods in human thought describes the development of European thought well enough, but does not reflect the progression of human thinking in other cultures such as, for example, African traditional culture.

Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, we may follow the familiar European progression from ancient Greece to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology! We begin therefore with the Period of Myth. How did the people of that era answer our question, "Why are things the way they are?"

One way of coming closer to an answer is to try to be rather more precise about the sort of things which seemed to people of that time worth asking questions about. What precisely were those experienced realities which in their world seemed to prompt a religious answer?

Again, quite a number of different answers have been given to this, including disaster, defeat and death; barrenness and fertility; the living presence of the departed in dreams; the creative and destructive effects of wind, rain, spring, river and sea; of animals and plants; or of human society itself.

All this might be summed up by saying that the ancients were looking for clues which would enable them to tame – or at any rate, to come to terms with – a hostile and unpredictable environment, in which a man's life seemed to be continually at risk from chaotic forces of destructive power.

In *Before Philosophy,*[5] H. and H. A. Frankfort put it like this:

> "The ancients . . . saw man as always part of society, and society as embedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces. For them nature and man did not stand in opposition . . . Natural phenomena were regularly conceived in terms of human experience . . . and human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events."

However, as Mircea Eliade has been at pains to stress, it is more particularly in terms of the origin of things that myth explains present realities:[6]

> "Myth . . . is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be . . . The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the "beginnings" . . . In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred . . . into the world. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that establishes the world and makes it what it is today."

Of course, this does not mean that myths are merely stories about the long-dead past. On the contrary, "by knowing the myth, one knows the 'origin' of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will". Nevertheless, there is a heavy emphasis in Mircea Eliade's account of myth on the function of myth as a source of power through knowledge of the origins. The way things came to be explains the way they are. In sharp contrast to, for example, Bultmann, who constantly reiterates that a myth is a story about God or the gods intervening in human affairs, Mircea Eliade argues that on the contrary a myth is a story about the ancient inter-changes between men and the Powers which shape our existence, a story which enables those in possession of the secret of the myth to come to terms with and even to control their environment. In fact, its intended function is much closer to that of modern science than Bultmann likes to recognize. Van Peursen wishes to make a distinction between myth and magic, the latter being "an effort to master reality". On the contrary, it is precisely because man wishes to – indeed needs to – master reality that he asks "Why are things the way they are?" In terms of a mythical frame of reference, the answer will be "Because of what happened at the beginning". And "what happened at the beginning" will be spelt out as a story about man and the world and the "more-than-human", the daimonic forces which even now shape our destiny.

2.2. The period of ontology

By the "period of ontology" van Peursen means that period which begins with Plato and Aristotle and finds it culmination in the scholasticism of the High Middle Ages. Man becomes "a subject that is searching for being as being". Van Peursen sees this as "a liberation from the magical force of myth, which is mastered by the process of human reflection".

It is interesting to note that St Thomas Aquinas argues[7] that it is only because we have Genesis that we know that the world has a beginning. Rational reflection on the observable world is sufficient to lead the enquiring mind to that ultimate reality which is Self-Subsistent Being. This Being, "all men call God" – and as Christians we know He created the world "in the beginning". But in the last analysis, the doctrine of creation is not about how the world began, but about the relationship between created, and therefore contingent, reality, and Uncreated, Self-Subsistent Reality. This account of things certainly provides us with a very sharp constrast with the pattern of mythical thinking as outlined by Mircea Eliade.

Aquinas held that there would be no good reason to suppose that the world was not eternal if it were not for the fact that Scripture reveals that it had a beginning. The world is constituted by a "hierarchy of causes", in which every subordinate member is dependent on the causal

activity of a higher member – higher, that is, in order of being. Thus we have what might be called a "taxonomy of being" – an ordered hierarchy of being which has Being Itself, Self-subsistent, Uncaused Being, which "we call God", at its apex.

Thus Aquinas' point is not that an infinite regress of causes is impossible – it is in fact conceivable that the world had no beginning. What is not conceivable – at least to the rational mind – is that it has no explanation, that it is simply an ordered arrangement of causes which has no reason to be what it is.

On this interpretation of Aquinas, finite effects are taken as evidence for the existence of a Supreme Cause in whose perfections they share to a lesser and imperfect degree. Thus there is a similar pattern of thinking underlying both the Five Ways by which Aquinas attempts to demonstrate the existence of God, and the doctrine of analogy. Both reflect the same basic presuppositions, namely that the rational mind is aware of a "taxonomy of being", and that this in turn leads us to a Supreme Cause on the principle *agens agit simile sibi.*

Unfortunately, however, Aquinas' system is vulnerable at its weakest point, which happens to be the very base of the construction. Aquinas builds on the assumption that there are real universals. In fact, the whole doctrine of analogy is based on the idea that when we "name" a perfection, such as "wisdom", we are referring to an intelligible reality (the *res significatum,* what is signified by the "name") and using a term ("wisdom") which may be applied to beings who exist on different levels in the taxonomy of being. Hence the term "wisdom" has a different, though similar, meaning (*modus significandi*) when applied to animals, or men, or God.

We have to say, I believe, that this simply does not reflect our world view today. We do not see the world in such static terms, nor do we ascribe any more than a purely notional significance to the fact that the same word may be used of many different objects. When Aquinas asked himself, "Why are things the way they are?", the answer he offers fails to convince us, not because of any failure of his logic, but because we do not share his initial premiss.

As is well known, belief in real universals was attacked even during the Middle Ages, and in the end the Nominalists won that particular argument. Once cut adrift from its metaphysical moorings, the arguments from the taxonomy of being re-emerged in the hands of Paley as the argument from design, which in fact was simply an attempt to demonstrate that the design of individual entities (as in the famous example of the watch) could replace the function of the design of the whole structure of being, in the argument for theism. This in turn focussed the argument on to the issue of whether the wholes are ever greater than their parts. Surely complex entities, such as man himself, can only be regarded as skilfully – indeed, divinely – constructed artefacts? In this case, the analogy would be the machine, which has a function greater than its parts – at any rate, from a human perspective.

Unfortunately, the idea that *ontogenesis* – the emergence of being – offers proof of the existence of a Creator rests on the tacit assumption that the story of the evolution of life on this planet is a story of skilful planning brought to a successful conclusion. Presumably the dodo would not agree with this point of view.

However, one or two points emerge from this discussion which may be relevant for the future development of the argument. On the negative side, we may note that the attempt to revive belief in real universals is probably a lost cause,[8] and it follows from this that "theism" – if by that we mean a metaphysical system based on the taxonomy of being – is also unlikely to come back into favour.

Another negative point is that arguments from design, based on the premiss that "the whole is more than the parts", tend to founder on the objection that it may be sheer prejudice on man's part to assume that he is anything other than a chance product of a blind process.

More positively, however, we may note that the argument about God can now be seen to be more closely bound up with the question of man's own role and status in the scheme of things. It may be that what went wrong with the traditional appeal to "design" in one form or another was that its protagonists operated within a world-view which is no longer attractive. Aquinas' vision of the taxonomy of being is not our view of things. Paley's watch does not seem to us at all a good analogy for a living entity. But it is only in regard to living entities that the question as to whether the whole is more than the parts becomes non-trivial. Thus the issue of ontogenesis becomes central to the whole debate. The question "Why are things the way they are?" is construed as a question about the whole creative travail of a universe which has given birth to self-transcendent being – to man.

Finally, we may also note that the "theistic" perspective on things tends to treat order as the principle evidence for faith. It is inevitably rather uncomfortable with the idea of miracles, therefore, since on this view a miracle is a breach in the proper order of things. The tendency to treat miracles as the ab-normal was intensified of course by the progression from theism to deism which the collapse of the metaphysics of the High Middle Ages made inevitable.

Thus Paley and Hume are like two sides of the same coin. Deism at once exalted the notion of order, and distanced the God of order from His world. Miracles could now only be construed as divine breaches with the divinely constituted order of things. Thus, paradoxically, both order and disorder are to be taken as evidence for the existence of God! It is not surprising that Hume found this argument wanting, and drew the conclusion that a man genuinely committed to looking for order would not easily be convinced of the possibility of divinely instigated disorder.

2.3. **Functionalism: the modern era**

It is always difficult to gain enough distance from one's own time to be able to put a label on it. In general, however, there seems to be a measure of agreement that the present era is characterized by a pragmatic spirit. Much stress is laid on the experiential and experimental. Although it has been the occasion of some controversy, Jean-Paul Sartre's dictum that existentialism is the philosophy that existence precedes essence[9] might be taken as a motto for a whole culture. People take it for

granted that there is little point in asking what things *are* except in the context of what they *do*. The dominant image of reality is no longer of a series of *individual objects*, but of a network of *inter-locking systems*.

All this was brought into sharper focus for me by the symposium edited by Erich Jantsch and Conrad H. Waddington *Evolution and Consciousness*.[10] In his introductory summary of the major positions adopted by the contributors, Erich Jantsch notes the following points, among others (pp. 6 & 7 – orginal numbering):

2. Functions (the relations with the environment) and structure determine each other; they are complementary.
3. Deterministic and stochastic (random) features are interdependent; chance and necessity become complementary in a process view.
4. There exist multiple stable regions, or dynamic regimes, for the system; in switching between them, the system has capability of undergoing qualitative change.
12. Evolutionary process implies openness as self-transcendence and thus imperfection, courage and uncertainty, not the deterministic perfection, static security, and certainty inherent in the ideals of the traditional structure-oriented Western world view.

What we have here is a kind of "Process Teleology". It is a world view with many similarities to that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who receives a number of favourable mentions in the text. Van Peursen speaks of the "Functional" character of contemporary thinking. It should be noted that this term is used in a different sense in certain other disciplines, but it may nevertheless be a convenient description for the kind of conceptual framework appropriate to a Process Teleology. Process Teleology is, of course, quite different from Hartshorne's "Process Philosophy", which is a form of idealism based on the definition (or "essence") of process as change.[11]

Some of the features of Process Teleology which are particularly significant for religious faith are as follows:

1. There is a move away from the analysis and classification of structures, from the study of nature in the sense of the *nature of things* – independent entities – towards the study of evolving, inter-reacting and inter-related *systems*.
2. Such systems achieve a structure when they become stable, but when we study this structure, what we are actually doing is capturing a "dynamic regime" in a particular phase of its interaction with a specific environment.
3. When a new regime emerges there is a possibility of a qualitative change such that the functions of the new regime are not fully predictable on the basis of our knowledge of the old – and would not be so even if that knowledge were absolutely – and impossibly – complete.
4. Different regimes inter-lock with each other in such a way that what appear to be peculiarities or abnormalities in the behaviour of one regime become intelligible when it is viewed in the context of other regimes to which it may be related either laterally or hierarchically.
5. The possibility of an emerging "metaregime" is also mentioned (p. 5). What is in mind here is a vision of the universe as "evolving, self-generating and self-organizing" (p. 212). The metaregime would emerge at a point where this universe undergoes a transition from "a chain of temporarily stable regimes" to "a metaregime of perpetually transforming patterns" (p. 5).

Jantsch, Waddington and their colleagues do not suggest that this vision of the Universe has anything to contribute to Christian theology, though they speak with approval of Aldous Huxley's idea of a "perennial philosophy" and various Eastern religions (p. 42). But the relevance and legitimacy of the religious question, "Why are things the way they are?" is obvious. Indeed it is immediately apparent that among many possible answers, there are two which immediately suggest themselves, namely "Because that's just the way that things are going", and "Because that's the way we are being led".

With the recovery of the idea of the human adventure as an Odyssey, an expedition into uncharted waters, the transition from the backward-looking world of myth to the forward-looking world of modern technology appears to be complete. In this context, the relevance of those issues with which Christian theology has traditionally concerned itself is immediately apparent. People may still conclude that the theologians are wrong: they are no longer so likely to dismiss them as simply irrelevant.

Viewed from a theological perspective, the issue raised by process teleology resolves itself into the familiar conflict between immanence and transcendence. Is ultimate reality exclusively and exhaustively contained within the historical process, so that whatever emerges is somehow already implicit within it; or is it exclusively and exhaustively outside the process, guiding and directing it from without? Neither view seems entirely satisfactory. Man himself emerges from the process and yet has a (limited) capability to transcend it. It looks as if we need to do justice to both elements in human experience in giving account of the process which gives him birth.

In the perspective of world religions, it is Christianity which stands out as the faith which has made the most consistent attempt to hold together the complementary truths of immanence and transcendence. Bishop Robinson popularized the use of the term "panentheism" to describe the view that God is both transcendent and immanent – in the terms of our discussion, that he is both the source and the goal of the creative process, its beginning and its end. If we believe in any kind of ultimate reality beyond our immediate experience, it is surely that kind of reality which it makes sense to believe in.

3. FACTS AND FAITH ONCE AGAIN

If a religion is a "symbol-system", it is obvious that it is likely to lose its heuristic power once it appears that experienced reality needs no further explanation beyond itself. Materialistic monism is, by definition, such a system. It is no solution to the dilemma of religion in this situation to take refuge in a dualism of matter and mind.

But it now appears that the problem of religion may have its roots in an inadequate Philosophy of Science rather than in religion itself.

In a functional perspective, the issue of faith and fact, and therefore also the more specific problems of miracles, appears in quite a different light. This kind of thinking makes us familiar with the idea of a hierarchy of systems and regimes. In certain circumstances, anomalies within systems operating at one level may be regarded as evidence for the operation of a more inclusive regime at another level. It may be that this affords an analogy which would enable us to work out in more detail the criteria which might be applied in the case of supposedly miraculous events.

As we have seen, mediaeval metaphysics was virtually doomed to drift into deism, and the God of the deists is too remote from his creation to play any role within it. But the Christian God is not so much the Archi-tect as the Arche-telos of his creation, its first principle and its final goal. It is easier to express such an idea in terms of functionalism than it was in terms of the metaphysics of the Middle Ages. One need no longer think in terms of the "interference" of one entity with another, or of the "intervention" of God within His world. But one would expect a "miracle" to have a "proleptic" character: to be a pointer to the "over-ruling" of the "regimes" of this world by the Kingdom of God, and an indication of the future which is to come. In other words, as the Fourth Gospel puts it, to be a sign – and not merely a *miraculum*, wonder.

It is possible to BELIEVE IN a sign – that is, to accept that something for which there is good evidence but which appears to run counter to our normal expectations is an example of the divine "over-ruling". It is not possible to BELIEVE IN a wonder. A wonder is simply a supposed event which astonishes us with its extreme improbability.

In their attitude to the question of miracles the Bishop of Durham and his critics seem to share some deist-type assumptions. Deism is associated with a conceptual framework in terms of which signs are always misinterpreted as wonders. If this is our perspective, then we must agree with Hume that no sensibly sceptical person can expect to find good enough evidence for belief in miracles. On the other hand, we would also have to agree with those people who argue if for some reason we happened to have incontrovertible evidence that something so odd had happened that its very abnormality required us to accept it as a miracle, then we would certainly have to become theists. Whether that kind of BELIEF THAT there is a God is really the same as BELIEF IN God is, of course, another matter.

Obviously the suggestions made here require fuller discussion. But it seems to me that, as far as miracles are concerned, my position is similar to that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who offered the comment that while the Resurrection – which is after all the supreme and archetypal miracle as far as Christians are concerned – does not compel faith, it certainly invites it. In other words, the Archbishop, apparently differing from both the Bishop of Durham and his critics, believes that there are cases when BELIEF THAT may constitute evidence in favour of BELIEF IN. This is surely intuitively correct. It is, I believe a strength of the position suggested here that it allows us to give a coherent account of such a view.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs", in *Fundamental Problems in Philosophy,* ed. Oswald Hanfling, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 2nd. ed. (1989), p. 267.
2. Gilbert Ryle, "Phenomenology", *Proc. Aristoc. Soc., Supp.* Vol. XI, (1932), p. 73.
3. C. A. van Peursen, "Man and Reality – the History of Human Thought", *A Reader in Contemporary Theology,* ed. John Bowden and James Richmond, S.C.M., London (1967).
4. See, *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. M. Banton, Tavistock, London (1966), pp. 4 ff.
5. H. & H. A. Frankfort, *Before Philosophy,* Penguin Books, London (1949), p. 12.
6. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality,* George Allen and Unwin, London (1964), p. 6.
7. See E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy,* Longmans, Green, London (1949) p. 7, for refs. and for some further comments on this point.
8. In spite of the efforts of Chomsky and some of his disciples – *Language and Other Abstract Objects,* by Jerrold Katz, Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1981).
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946), tr. Philip Mairet, Methuen, London (1948), pp. 27 ff.
10. Erich Jantsch and Conrad H. Waddington (eds.), *Evolution and Consciousness, Human Systems in Transition,* Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts (1976).
11. Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection, and other essays in Neo-Classical Metaphysics,* Open Court, Lasalle, Illinois (1965).

A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF SECURITY?

A REPLY TO GORDON DUNSTAN

PHILIP WEST

> The holy teaching while remaining single nevertheless embraces things belonging to the different philosophical sciences because of the one formal meaning which is its interest in all manner of things, namely the truth they bear in the light of God. [Aquinas, *S.T.*, 1a.1,4]

There are broadly two conceptions of the appropriate scope of theology on the market today. On the one hand there are those who would equate it with what Gordon Kaufman calls the scientific study of religion, which at most "purports to interpret the meaning, significance, and value of a particular segment of human culture, the religious sector".[1] Theology here is to do with God, and that portion of individual and corporate human life labelled religious. The other, following the tradition of Aquinas, refuses this narrowing of horizons. In this tradition, it is not the subject matter (God, religious behaviour) but the perspective from which the world is viewed that gives to theology its distinctive nature and unity. Here theology is concerned with all the matters dealt with also by other fields of human study and endeavour, but in the persective of "the truth they bear in the light of God".

To name only Aquinas and Barth, surely among the most impressive and influential systematicians of this millenium, is to indicate the strength of this second tradition. Both of these theologians, albeit in different ways, reject firmly the suggestion that there are areas of human social life about which there is nothing of interest to say theologically. They resist the forcing of theology back into a circumscribed religious dimension that leaves the political, economic, and even ethical dimensions autonomous. Thus Gordon Dunstan is far from obviously correct when he states, in a recent article entitled "Theological Method and the Deterrence Debate",[2] that "there are some human activities which cannot be discussed in Christian terms at all", (p. 40) including the activity of warfare and the concerns of security generally. If by this he means that there are some areas of human practice that are autonomous, about which there cannot be any distinctively theological position, upon which the central Christian symbols of the cross and resurrection cannot be brought to bear, then he is outlining a position that is at best a contentious one.[3]

In what follows I shall briefly set out Dunstan's argument in this short but dense and important article (I), argue that his theological method is flawed at various points (II), and suggest an alternative substantive conclusion in the area of the ethics of deterrence to the one he defends (III).

I

Dunstan's key contention is that

> if the language and meaning of Christianity are taken seriously, there are some human activities which cannot be discussed in Christian terms at all. There is no specifically "Christian" way of waging war, or of amputating limbs, or of fixing oil prices, or of deciding for or against the nuclear generation of energy. (Dunstan, p. 40)

In particular, the problem of whether to hold or use a nuclear deterrent

> is one of those tragic necessities which . . . cannot be categorized at all in Christian terms. There is no *Christian* solution to it. There is only a choice among evils; and there is the Everlasting Mercy for those who, in good faith, are driven to choose. (p. 50)

In such areas theology has no *direct* bearing at all. In fact it is true, as Lambeth has repeatedly affirmed, that "war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of Our Lord Jesus", and there is no "Christian" way of prosecuting "an inherently unchristian pursuit". (p.40) The Christian gospel is effective here only indirectly "in the character which it imprints upon Christian men in the relevant exercise of judgement and use of power", above all in the production of the (Aristotelian) virtue of prudence. (p. 51)

Dunstan's views on the nature of theology, and on the social relevance of the Old and New Testament witness, are assembled into a coherent picture that backs up this basic contention. "Theology" he defines as "an intellectual discipline . . . possess(ing) an integrity and autonomy of its own in that it handles a corpus or body of material of its own in a disciplined way . . . in its nature, an application of reason to the things of God, primarily the self-revelation of God". (p.46) Especially in talk of "a corpus or body of material of its own", this sounds as if Dunstan is opting for my first (restricted) definition of the scope of theology; and this suspicion is confirmed by his treatment of the Old and New Testament traditions. Particularly striking here is his ability to distinguish neatly between the "political" and "religious" experience and action of the Israelites. On the one hand "their *religious* experience was of the God who revealed himself to them . . . and in this experience of God they came to a responsive judgement upon themselves, upon good and evil, right and wrong, blessing and curse in man", (p. 41) while on the other "their *political* experience", although "related to their religious experience", was distinct from it. (p. 41, my stress) "Prescriptions for security", such as "invade this territory . . . go out to battle . . . ally yourself with this nation; do not become entangled with another" etc, although "given also out of religious conviction", were clearly "*political* prescriptions". (pp. 41f) Indeed, Dunstan is able to distinguish (and condemn) possible religious solutions in the political arena as those involving "a passive 'faith' in God which would leave the issue to him . . . without human political or military activity at all". (p. 42) Such a confusion of categories is the type for the modern confusion of theology and politics.

In turning from the Old to the New Testament, Dunstan detects one striking and relevant difference. Whereas "the Old Testament is the literature of a political community preoccupied, in every century, with its own security", (p. 41) the New, although also "the product of a community", arose from a community that "never saw itself as a political community nor acted as one". (p. 42)

"Universalistic" by its very nature, "the politics of national survival were irrelevant to it". (p. 42) Not only did Jesus "carefully dissociate himself and his mission from that of a political messiah" (p. 42) but, and this is perhaps the most telling assertion of all:

> there is *no evidence at all* that the earliest Christian communities took political action to implement their theological transcendence of imposed distinctions, as between bond and free. In all the interpretations which they left us of the death of Jesus on the Cross, there is *not one hint* of a promise attached to it of political success, or of its use, actual or potential, as a political weapon; they thought *entirely within the purely religious idiom* of the various traditions of sacrifice . . . (p. 43 my stress)

Politically, in Dunstan's view, the earliest Christian communities were quietist, looking for the ultimate promise of the Kingdom of God at the end, but with no attempt to change the structures meanwhile. In the face of sufferings,

> such as could be relieved by Christian charity were to be relieved – that is evident everywhere. But of political action to relieve them there is no hint. (p. 43)

In the meantime they had a positive appreciation of the value of (secular) political government, as witnessed by Romans 13, I Timothy 2 and I Peter 2, appreciating the benefits of the *Pax Romana,* and refusing legal and military service only because of the "idolatrous" (i.e. religious) oaths involved. (pp. 43f)

Given this neat split between the political and religious realms, and the accompanying restriction of the legitimate scope of theology to the latter, Dunstan is naturally suspicious about claims to "a specific 'Christian approach' . . . to the problems of security", (p. 40) because this usually amounts to "the uncritical extrapolation of words and acts from the theological context of the mission of Jesus . . . to the political context of our own day". (p. 51) Usually such allegedly Christian approaches amount to a mere veneer of biblical language covering a solution reached on other grounds; this is the case in particular with "some of the products of the World Council of Churches" and "some 'liberation theology'". (pp. 40f) Theology and politics must remain clearly separate. Certainly, "Christian idealism, founded in faith" may give us "goals", but it is "Christian realism" that must dictate political action in the area of security in today's world, and this dictates "the duty to deploy and control effective power", (p. 51) including, regrettably, the nuclear deterrent. (pp. 49f) It is crucial that we appreciate "the nature of Scripture, ethics and politics" (p. 44) and do not confuse them, for such category mistakes would lead us seriously and perhaps catastrophically astray.

II

It is clear to me, however, that in this clear, confident and wide-ranging picture, Dunstan has made some category mistakes of his own. Perhaps the most glaring is the projection back into the society of ancient Israel of the contemporary distinction between "politics" and "religion". Of course these modern categories may, and perhaps must, be used in our analysis of the Old Testament and the community that produced it; indeed one of the most fundamental gains in the discipline of hermeneutics in recent years is the realization that the interpretation of an ancient text inevitably involves the bringing of our own categories and prejudices to it, that a "neutral" understanding of *any* text is impossible.[4] But it is a mistake to think, as Dunstan clearly does, that the distinction between religion and politics is really "there" in the Old or New Testament communities in essentially the same way as in modern Western societies; that therefore we may divide Old and New Testament verses, motifs, actions and principles neatly into political and religious groups, and "apply" only the political ones to our current security problems.

That the separation out of relatively autonomous political and economic spheres is a comparatively recent development in Western social history, rendering modern Western societies structurally quite different from all earlier ones, is a commonplace of modern social theory that such an analysis neglects.[5] But even a historically imaginative study of the Old and New Testaments on their own reveals plainly the differences between ancient Israelite society and our own. Mention need only be made of the terms temple and kingship to appreciate that in those societies what we would now call politics and religion overlapped to an alarming extent. It is simply not true that, for the ancient Israelites, cult was a matter of religion while warfare was a matter of politics, as Dunstan implies. War was holy war too, the defence of the temple at once a religious and a political duty, cult also a political sphere of action. The temple-kingship complex was the power-centre of the symbolic order of what we would artifically divide into the religious and political spheres of ancient Israel.[6]

Neither is it true, as Dunstan claims, that the crucifixion of Jesus, that central feature of the Christian religious drama, can be neatly separated from what we would call political overtones. Several major recent studies, notably those of Sanders[7] and Rowland,[8] have stressed the opposite, and in particular that the immediate cause of Jesus' execution was the challenging of the religio-political order of the temple, and its dominant place in maintaining the *status quo* in Israelite society. As Sanders, for example, comments: in discussing "the principal cause of Jesus' death, it is incorrect to make a rigid distinction between 'religious' and 'political' reasons". (Sanders, p. 296) No doubt Jesus rejected the idea that the Kingdom of God was to be established by force of arms (Sanders, p. 326), but talk of the Kingdom, and the provocative symbolic acts of the triumphal entry and the temple cleansing, by no means betoken a Jesus who "carefully dissociated himself and his mission from that of a political messiah". (Dunstan, p. 42)[9] Neither can it be maintained that the crucifixion was interpreted "entirely within the purely religious idiom of the various traditions of sacrifice" (Dunstan, p. 43) in the earliest church. Not only was the crucifixion interpreted in a wide variety of frameworks by the earliest Christians, with the use of legal and political as well as sacrificial metaphors, but also sacrifice was itself not a purely religious category in our terms – witness, for example, the martyrdom theology of the Maccabees.

Moving from these general considerations to examine

specifically the political half of Dunstan's religion/politics divide, it is clear that here too his analysis is lacking. Firstly, in making a case that the earliest church had a uniformly positive assessment of the autonomous political sphere of the *Pax Romana* (from which he derives the appropriateness of such an attitude for the contemporary Christian) Dunstan operates with his own particular canon within the canon (Romans 13, I Timothy 2, I Peter 2). Largely absent are the synoptic gospels and, perhaps most significantly in this context, the book of Revelation.[10] It is only by ignoring the existence of the latter, and a superficial treatment of the former ("Put up thy sword into its sheath" does not imply Christian pacifism (p. 44) etc.) for an exclusive stress on his chosen texts that Dunstan is able to assume the uniformly positive reception of the political *status quo* that is essential to his case. No one reading Mark or Revelation would readily imagine that their authors were as positive about the world powers as Dunstan suggests, or indeed that they subscribed to his view of the autonomy of the political realm.

Secondly, Dunstan's actual treatment of these texts, and of the non-activist stance of many of the earliest Christian communities, fails to take into account the restricted scope for action available to them in their actual setting as compared to ours. Thus Ernst Bammel argues[11] that the positive appreciation of the state in Romans 13:1-7 is to be accounted for by the precarious position of the Christian communities in Rome at the time of writing, and the questionable nature of Paul's *bona fides*. He argues persuasively that the authentic Pauline position is to be found rather in I Thess. 5:3, which is severely critical of the official Roman ideology of the state in the light of the Pauline apocalyptic framework.[12]

And thirdly, it is clear from Dunstan's treatment not only of the New Testament, but also of Western history and the current situation, that he holds an altogether too naively positive view of the state. Dunstan's state is the benevolent upholder of the *Pax Romana* within which citizens are freed to pursue their legitimate activities (including their religion) in security. It can be assumed to represent the best interests of all those it rules. But such a view of the state, traceable to Hegel and Durkheim in terms of the major sociological traditions, lacks perception of the criticisms that have been offered of it in the other major traditions that go back to Weber and Marx. It lacks the Marxist recognition that the state to some extent reflects and defends the class interests of the society that it rules; that it thus upholds the concrete injustices built into any present political order – an insight arguably implicit in the concept of the Kingdom of God that at the end will replace all earthly rule with one of divine justice. And it lacks the Weberian realization of the importance of power, and of the automony of the state from the interests of the rest of society – insights again arguably implicit in the New Testament concept of the heavenly "powers". Both traditions cast doubt on the advisability of cutting politics free from the critical edge of the theological tradition as Dunstan proposes. Both cast doubt also on the advisability of trusting the instinct for self-preservation exhibited by the modern nuclear state as being in the best interests of the whole of its citizenry.[13]

Finally to return to hermeneutical matters, and in this I lead on to my positive proposals to be made in the last section, it is misleading to imply that the appropriate categories for the hermeneutical task are "application" and "extrapolation". (Dunstan, p. 51) "Creative reinterpretation" might be a more adequate term for the appropriate use of the tradition. Something of this nature can be seen happening to the tradition within the Old Testament itself (consider, for example, the repeatedly complex and creative reapplication of the tradition that has occurred within what we now call the book of Isaiah), between the testaments (for instance the uses of the terms of Christ/Messiah and Son of Man), and within the New Testament also. Tellingly, within the canon we can see the tradition, caught up in this hermeneutical process, crossing and recrossing the boundaries of Dunstan's religious and political spheres. And so it should. It is only an anachronistic division of these two realms that could deny authenticity *a priori* to this process.

III

It is time to present very briefly a positive case. If, as I have argued at length, the biblical traditions are not to be isolated artifically from our modern political concerns, if the contemporary problems of security need also to be seen "in the light of God", where does that leave us with respect to the deterrence issue? How might Dunstan's legitimation of the use of ultimate power in the interests of our own security look in the light of the foundation story of our religion; or rather, how might someone informed by the story of Jesus of Nazareth react to this position?

The crucial point to be made, surely, is that in the story of Jesus the concepts of power and security undergo a paradoxical transformation, a creative reapplication.[14] Thus the "security" that Jesus talked of in the Sermon on the Mount did not exclude the taking up of the cross to follow him (no doubt a literal allusion to martyrdom in its original application). And the "power" of God was manifested in Jesus being delivered up – and acted upon – not in the action of the legion of angels that he declined to invoke. It is a paradoxical power made perfect in weakness (Paul), a glory exhibited in humiliation (John), a lack of anxiety amidst tribulation (Matthew) with which we have to do here. And it is all – if we can trust the synoptic stress on the content of Jesus' preaching, and the symbolic implications of his final acts – in order that the Kingdom of God might be established: in pursuit of a *non*-quietist and indeed (non-violent) revolutionary transformation of society, necessitating the criticism of, challenging of, and change of the structures of society in the here and now.

The Christian religion has as its basis a crucified King, whom we believe to be the ultimate revelation of the character of God. It is difficult to see, therefore, "in the light of God", how prudence can be accepted as the primary virtue, or security as an unquestionable good, or ultimate power as a legitimate means – at least as long as these words retain their usual meanings. If it is true, as Dunstan asserts, that warfare is an inherently unchristian pursuit, there *is* an alternative to forcing theology back into a circumscribed religious dimension, such that we may prepare for warfare in our defence unhindered by its prescriptions. And that is to renounce the use of warfare – *at least* warfare of as indiscriminate a kind as that necessitated by the use of nuclear weapons – and suffer the consequences.

This alternative may not appear to be palatable, and it would certainly involve the putting of our security on the line. It may, in fact, involve the way of the cross. But it *could* claim to be a Christian approach to the problem of security, and in my view it is not to be dismissed lightly.

In today's world there is, indeed, "only a choice among evils", as of course there always has been in every age. The story of Jesus, however, places a large question mark against the pursuit of our own security at the cost of choosing great evil for others. It tells of a man vindicated by God because of his consistent life and death of self-abandonment in the cause of the Kingdom; of a man who lost his life for the sake of the gospel, and found it.

It is reported that he expected his followers to do likewise.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1972, p. 18 Kaufman D. (p. 17) subscribes to the second view of the scope of theology outlined here.
2. In Geoffrey Goodwin (ed.), *Ethics and Nuclear Deterrence*, London, 1982, pp. 40-52.
3. It clearly has connections with the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, that is also implicitly under attack in this article.
4. See classically Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, 1975.
5. For a model of the relationships between the economic, political and other subsystems in late capitalist societies, see Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, London, 1976. For an account of the distinctive nature of these societies in historical perspective, see Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Cambridge, 1985.
6. See further, George V. Pixley, *God's Kingdom*, London 1981.
7. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, London, 1985.
8. Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins*, London, 1985.
9. This is not to accept the case that Jesus was a Zealot. On the Zealot hypothesis, see several essays in Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (eds.), *Jesus and the Politics of his Day*, Cambridge, 1984.
10. On the political relevance of Revelation, see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, 1972, chapter 12.
11. Ernst Bammel, "Romans 13", in Bammel and Moule (*op. cit.*), pp. 265-383.
12. He argues further that Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13ff are traceable to similar Jewish and pagan sources: Paul is here adapting or quoting traditional materials, not giving his own position *de novo*. For an appreciation of the contingent nature of the Pauline arguments in general, see J. C. Baker, *Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh, 1980.
13. On various views of the state, see Giddens (*op. cit.*), pp. 17-31 and *passim*.
14. See, for example, Luke 22:24-27.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context

Brevard S. Childs. SCM, 1985. Pp. xvi + 255. £10.00

One of the most intensely debated contributions to Biblical Studies over recent years has been the canonical approach of Brevard Childs, Professor of Old Testament at Yale University. His *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979) and also its companion volume *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (1984) represent a crucial backdrop to the present volume. He has offered one way out of a crisis which he sees as threatening much biblical study, namely the failure of the historical-critical approach to relate the nature of the biblical literature correctly to the community which has treasured it as scripture. In his provocative corrective to "arid" analytical criticism, he pushes us back to the theological significance of the text of scripture, using the concept of "canon" as the central motif. Childs' contributions have given considerable stimulus to the study of these questions over recent years. They have also brought him under heavy fire from a range of distinguished critics, including James Barr, John Barton, E. P. Sanders and John Van Seters, and here he attempts to meet some of these criticisms as well as to break new ground.

Since theological considerations have long been central to Childs' canonical approach, one might expect that here in a work explicitly devoted to the *theology* of the Old Testament his perspective might prove more appropriate than his critics have judged it to be in his earlier Introductions to Old and New Testaments. This book is, moreover, particularly timely in that there is much current interest in the discipline of Old Testament theology. One thinks, for example, of recent historical and methodological studies of the discipline by Reventlow and also by Hayes and Prussner. There is today, it seems, a renewed awareness of the need to explore the *theological* dimensions of the bible text.

But what constitutes an appropriate basis for a theological evaluation of the literature? It is to this question that Childs attempts to offer an answer in the present volume. He writes, "It is my thesis that a canonical approach to the scriptures of the Old Testament opens up a fruitful avenue along which to explore the theological dimensions of the biblical text". For Childs, the object of theological reflection is the canonical writings of the Old Testament (that is, the Hebrew Scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel appropriated by the Christian church), and not the events or experiences behind the text.

Childs argues that much of the confusion in the history of Old Testament theology derives from a reluctance to recognize that it is a distinctively Christian enterprise: "To suggest that the Christian should read the Old Testament as if he were living before the coming of Christ is an historical anachronism which also fails to take seriously the literature's present function within the Christian Bible for a practising community of faith . . . The Christian canon maintains the integrity of the Old Testament in its own right as scripture of the church. However, it sets it within a new canonical context in a dialectical relation with the New Testament". Childs' position, then, is an avowedly confessional one: "The critical process of theological reflection takes place from a stance within the circle of received tradition prescribed by the affirmation of the canon". Thus he defines the task of Old Testament theology as being to reflect theologically on one portion of the Christian canon, precisely as Christian scripture.

Childs sees the discipline of Old Testament theology not just as a description of a historical process in the past; the theology of the Old Testament is not a closed deposit, to be unlocked with a single interpretative key. Rather, each new Christian generation is called to a fresh and profound theological engagement with the text. He suggests that the discussion of the so-called "centre of the Old Testament" which has dominated many recent contributions in the field of Old Testament theology has in large part arisen from a concept of the discipline which views it simply as an historical enterprise. Childs himself gives prominence to the categories of revelation and response in his exploration of the theology of the Old Testament, but he is at pains to stress that he makes no exclusive claims for any one systematizing principle and that his canonical approach acknowledges "a dimension of flexibility which encourages constantly fresh ways of actualizing the material".

Childs is emphatic that it is with the final canonical form of the text that the theologian of the Old Testament must work. He claims that his canonical approach does not deny the theological significance of a "depth dimension" of the tradition (that is, he does not reject altogether the possibility of tracing different historical levels within the growth of the Old Testament literature), but he is at the same time insistent that features within the tradition which have been "subordinated, modified or placed in the distant background of the text" cannot be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form. This, he says, would be to "disregard the crucial theological intention of the tradents of the tradition, and to isolate a text's meaning from its reception".

There can be no denying the attraction of Childs' writing. A reader of his works cannot but be impressed by the phenomenal range of his reading, the breadth of his vision, and the seductive power of his rhetoric; but there can also be no denying the real problems raised by his presentation.

Childs has helped us to see again the theological importance of the finished canonical text hallowed by use in synagogue and church. However, in spite of his claim that his canonical approach takes account of the significance of the process which formed the text, one cannot help feeling that he fails to do full justice to the dynamic traditio-historical process, the "depth dimension" of the tradition. Moreover, the logic of Childs' position seems to lead him effectively to be blinkered to material outside the strict parameters of the canon. But why limit perspectives so narrowly? – what of the many rich continuities between the biblical texts and the other literatures of the Ancient Near East, and indeed of inter-testamental Judaism?

Childs tends to slide between historical and theological discourse in a somewhat confusing way, without ever seeming to do full justice to either. It may be suggested that greater clarity is needed with regard to the many historical questions raised by the canon of the Old Testament

before "canon" can be used too freely as a theological motif. These questions are, for the most part, not addressed by Childs. With regard to theological discourse, he can be disconcertingly cavalier. Thus, for example, on page 14 he speaks of the canonical process as that "process by which divine truth acquired its authoritative form"; or again, on page 15, he speaks of the modern biblical theologian waiting "in anticipation of a fresh illumination through God's Spirit". There is altogether too much theological shorthand – and too many massive theological questions are begged.

We earlier commended the breadth of vision which is a mark of the work of Childs, but the negative side of this is that the enterprise becomes too ambitious. His range is admirable (extending, for example, to the question, "Is the God of the Old Testament a male deity?" and to a discussion of "Male and Female as a theological problem"), but the overall result is, inevitably perhaps, disappointing. In his preface, he says that what is needed is "a new manner of theological reflection rather than once again rehearsing in detail the familiar lines of earlier research", that is to say he admits that the work is of the nature of a programmatic sketch; but even so the result is less than satisfactory. It is a slim volume (just over 250 pages) for such a large undertaking – a tantalizing, but ultimately frustrating, piece of work.

A closely related problem is that of style. Childs himself declares, "I have chosen to develop my understanding of Old Testament theology in a less technical form than my earlier commentary and introductions". But the work is not in fact very accessible – indeed, it is at points rather hard going and occasionally even a little cryptic. At the same time, whilst there are very useful bibliographies, and indexes of authors and of biblical references, one feels the lack of full footnotes, and at times the use of bracketed references to scholars gives an unfortunate impression of vagueness.

Childs makes frequent use of the phrase "the canonical approach to Old Testament theology", as though this were a self-contained package with a life of its own. In fact it appears as the subject of many verbs; the canonical approach, we are told, "rejects", "attempts to overcome", "envisions", and even "looks with suspicion". This recurrent usage makes one feel that one is in effect encountering an ideology – and this is an impression that is borne out by the work as a whole.

Paul Joyce

Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century

John Rogerson. SPCK, 1984. Pp. xiii + 320. £15.00

If King's College has the dubious distinction of having ejected F. D. Maurice – atonement has now been effected by the establishing of both a professorship and a course of lectures in his honour – it has also the merit of having acquired an Old Testament chair founded in the University of London in 1926 in memory and in honour of Samuel Davidson who was ejected in 1857 from his professorship at Lancashire Independent College. It was not only Anglicans who could be intolerant. The chair was, by agreement, rescued from the limbo of its unattached position in the University and brought into King's College in 1960, at a time when the full development of what was to become the present Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies was on its way. So it is pleasing to find a complete chapter in this book devoted to Samuel Davidson and his dismissal, and importantly to his contribution (as an Irishman!) to the development of Old Testament studies in England. And it seems proper to begin the review of Professor Rogerson's book in the present context by expressing appreciation for that particular emphasis, and to note the comment at the end of the chapter that Davidson is the only 19th century scholar to have an Old Testament chair named after him in England.

But that is only one of the incidental merits of this book. In the two major sections, we have a review of Old Testament scholarship in Germany and in England – it is still not quite clear why the latter was not extended to include the remainder of the British Isles, though exceptions are made, as in the case of William Robertson Smith. In each of these sections, some account is given of the period before 1800, by way of introduction.

Much of the discussion takes the form of careful summaries of the major works, with full bibliographical information and in particular with indications of when English translations were available of German scholarship and of how far English scholars actually made use of German works. The section on Germany corrects and clarifies many of the generalised statements often made about individual writers; it also illuminates carefully the conservative opposition to radical views, elucidating the differences within the "confessional" areas of thought. The section on England traces both the cautious advances made and the hostility with which the more radical views were encountered, often with a blame attached to German scholarship which was less than well informed.

In a final survey of the last years of the 19th century, Rogerson sketches in the triumph of the critical method, though it is interesting to observe how often what then appeared to be radical now seems much more traditional and cautious in the light of later developments. He also ventures on some more general comments on the differences between German and English scholarship. In doing this, he notes – very vividly with his tabulation of academic posts in Germany – the much larger scale of activity in Germany compared to the modest position in England, where so many of our universities are of recent origin. Clearly this is an important element in the degree of scholarly work undertaken in Germany, though his final statement plays down English contributions perhaps rather more than is entirely just. Part of the difference is one of scale, but it is also one of style: there is little of the bitterness which has often characterised German work, and virtually none of the political interference; there is also very little in England of that dominance of scholars over their pupils which has so often created in Germany rather narrow schools of thought and has sometimes made real interchange of understanding difficult if not impossible. English scholarship has tended to be more individualistic and independent; it has also been marked by a much greater openness to what was going on elsewhere, whereas it has often seemed – though less so in more recent years – that many German scholars had hardly read an English book, let alone a French one. It

was said of a notable King's College teacher, W. O. E. Oesterley, that he never read any book unless it was in German; and though this was clearly a joke, it is the case that no scholar in any theological discipline would expect to operate without the ability to read German, as well as other languages.

But this last is a matter of emphasis. What Professor Rogerson has given us is a very readable presentation of an immense range of material, a very clear picture of movements of thought. And, what is more, he provides a significant context for considering some of the contemporary moves in the direction of heresy-hunting, even if these affect other theological disciplines more often now than that of Old Testament studies. We are given some important sidelights on the ways in which theological debate is sometimes conducted.

Peter R. Ackroyd

The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, and its Background in early Judaism

Roger Beckwith. SPCK, 1985. Pp. x + 528. £35.00 hb

Anyone who thinks the Reformers were right to claim that Holy Scriptures is our sole authority for faith and morals is faced with the question which are the canonical books that are authoritative for the Church. In the case of the OT, is the Church to accept only those books which came to be regarded as canonical by the Jews, or should it accord equal authority to the additional books which Protestants (following Jerome) call Apocrypha and Catholics Deuterocanonical? On Protestant principles the former view has no sure basis unless it can be shown that the shorter list was regarded as normative by our Lord and the writers of the NT. This the learned author of the present book (Warden of Latimer House, Oxford) seeks to demonstrate.

Recently studies, based mainly on H. F. Ryle's *The Canon of the Old Testament* (1892), have argued that the Jewish canon was not fixed until the end of the first century AD; from which it follows that Christians need not be bound by a Jewish decision taken after the NT was written, but are at liberty to accept the wider canon which the Church came to acknowledge during the early centuries after Christ. Against this, Beckwith argues in great detail that the Jewish list was already settled in the second century BC, if not earlier, and was the canon known to Jesus and the NT Church.

After describing in Chapter 1 the various witnesses to the Hebrew scriptures, he considers in Chapter 2 what is meant by "canonicity". Even in the OT, and certainly in the NT, we find the sacred scriptures regarded as divinely inspired, authoritative, and infallible. The same reverence was shown by Philo, Josephus, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and books in the Apocrypha such as Ecclesiasticus and 4 Maccabees. Chapter 3 briefly describes the variety of titles given to the inspired books from the second century BC onwards. Chapter 4 reviews the evidence, from the same century, that the scriptures were arranged in three sections – law, prophets, and hagiographa. Beckwith contends that the assignment of the books between the three sections was not due to accidents of history but was done on rational grounds. He accepts the speculative view that the prophets and hagiographa grew up as canonical together, and what happened in the second century BC (probably under Judas Maccabaeus) was not that the hagiographa were added to the canon but that they were separated off.

Chapter 5 considers, at perhaps needless length, the order of the canonical books, since if there were a settled order for the books this would imply that the identity of the books was known and that the canon was closed. Unfortunately for Beckwith's thesis, there is no evidence that the order of the books was settled before the second century AD. There is a full discussion of the reference to the killing of Zechariah in Matt. 21.34-36 and Luke 11.49-51. If this refers to Zechariah son of Jehoiada whose death is recorded in 2 Chron. 24. 19-22, and if in Jesus's time 2 Chron. was the last book in the canon, then this saying could have referred to all the righteous men murdered from the beginning to the end of the canonical scriptures; but there are too many ifs here. The saying reads oddly if the last of the prophets was murdered eight centuries before, in the reign of Joash; it makes better sense if the Zechariah alluded to had been killed not long before Jesus's day.

Chapter 6 considers the number of the canonical books and argues from later quotations that the Hebrew text of the Book of Jubilees, dating from about the second century BC, must have stated that the canonical books numbered 22, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It does not follow, however, that the canon was already closed, because by grouping books together a wide variety of books could be brought within the number 22.

Chapter 7 asks what conclusions to draw from the fact that some Jews, as early perhaps as the first century AD, doubted the inspiration of Esther, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Ezekiel. The conclusion is reached that these doubts would not have been felt as a problem unless the books were already canonical.

Chapter 8 considers at length the question whether the canon ever included more books or was open to expansion, and answers in the negative. The enlargement of Esther and Daniel and the addition of the Prayer of Manasseh to 2 Chronicles are questions of text, not of canon.

Does Beckwith prove his case? In this reviewer's judgment, he falls short of doing so. While it can be regarded as certain that the list of canonical books was practically settled by about the end of the first century AD, the previous evidence is inconclusive. The prologue to Ecclesiasticus is missing from a number of manuscripts and may be much later than the supposed date of about BC 130; even so, it says no more than that in the author's opinion certain other (unspecified) books beside the law and the prophets were worthy of study and translation. The NT refers to the scriptures only as "the law and the prophets", except for Luke 24.44 which adds the psalms, implying that these were the only inspired writings outside the law and prophets. Nothing outside the law and the prophets is quoted as sacred scriptures, except that at 1 Cor. 3.19 a quotation from Job is introduced by the words "it is written".

However, even if Beckwith has not proved his case, his book is of great value as a mine of accurate information about the attitude of Jews and Christians to the Hebrew scriptures in the last few centuries before Christ and the first few centuries of the Christian era.

J. M. Ross

The Bible and Christian Life

Charles E. B. Cranfield. T. & T. Clark, 1985. Pp. 248. £6.95

This volume is a collection of essays by Professor Cranfield, published in various journals or books over a period of years. They are characterized by the author's thorough and meticulous exegesis. A majority of them deal with the interpretation of the Bible: e.g. of whole books such as "The Message of James", or "An Interpretation of the Book of Job"; sections of the New Testament letters, e.g. "A Study of 1 Thessalonians 2"; or of individual verses, e.g. "Hebrews 13:20-21" and "Romans 8:19-21"; or even of phrases, e.g. "The Significance of *dia pantos* in Rom. 11:10" and "*Metron pisteōs* in Rom. 12:3".

The latter essay is fairly typical of Cranfield's approach. First, he addresses three basic questions to the text. (i) In what sense is *metron* used? (ii) In what sense is *pistis* used? (iii) What kind of genitive is *pisteōs*? He illustrates from the history of exegesis a great measure of agreement concerning (i); but despite this he applauds Michel for offering an alternative understanding. Cranfield then proceeds by proposing (1) to set out severally the various possible answers to these three questions; (2) to set out some, at least, of the possible combinations of these possibilities and (3) to consider which of these combinations is the most probable interpretation of the phrase. Having completed this exercise, his tentative conclusion is that *metron pisteōs* in Rom. 12:3 means "a standard (by which to measure himself) namely (his) Christian faith"; the true measure of this (faith) Cranfield considers to be Jesus Christ who is Himself therefore the Standard and Norm.

As the title of the volume indicates, a second group of these essays deals with Christian life, e.g. "The Christian's Political Responsibility", "The Preacher and his Authority", "Diakonia in the New Testament" and "Divine and Human Action: the biblical Concept of Worship". More ecclesiastical interests are reflected in the essay "The Church and Divorce and the Remarriage of divorced Persons in the Light of Mark 10: 1-12", in which Cranfield distinguishes between God's perfect will and the expression of His will in response to the consequences of human sin. In his final essay, "Unity and Love in the Light of John 17", the author considers the situation of the churches in England after the rejection of the Covenant proposals. He reaffirms the biblical basis for ecumenism, but in the light of its close connection with "agape", he suggests a "sabbath rest" from all reunion schemes in England for a considerable period for the good of all those involved.

Cranfield's careful and balanced exegesis might possibly lead some erroneously to conclude that biblical exegesis has a timeless quality and is in no way influenced by contemporary currents of thought. If truly objective exegesis *were* possible, Cranfield would come closer to achieving it than most! It was this faithfulness to the text which led him in his 1964 essay to oppose most modern translations of *dia pantos* in Rom. 11:10 as "for ever" (meaning that the Jews are to bend their backs for ever), in favour of the "always" of the AV and RV and Knox's rendering "continually".

Typical also of Cranfield's balance is his essay, "Light from St Paul on Christian-Jewish Relations". Here he is not slow to emphasize God's judgement upon the Jew who is sure of his own moral superiority over Gentiles (Rom. 2) but he immediately adds "Much of what Paul says could be applied to many Christians"; he then links Jews and Christians together in their self-complacency.

A valuable addition at the conclusion of this collection is a complete list of the author's extensive publications from 1941 to his "Romans: a Shorter Commentary" and "If God be for Us: a Collection of Sermons" (1985).

W. S. Campbell

Christian Origins

Christopher Rowland. SPCK, 1985. Pp. 428. £12.50

In this follow-up to his *The Open Heaven* (1982), which now stands as the premiere study on Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, Christopher Rowland takes his investigations into the eschatological teachings of Judaism and Christianity a step further. This second book is divided into two halves, with a detailed study of Jewish belief, practices and ideas comprising the first half and an equally detailed study of Christianity comprising the second half. In fact, I am not certain whether stating the matter in that fashion would entirely meet with Professor Rowland's approval, since he takes great pains to demonstrate that Christianity arose from a Jewish milieu and needs to be so acknowledged before it can be properly understood. Rowland himself emphasizes two major theses which run through the whole of the book and serve as the glue which holds it together. These are the centrality of eschatology within both Judaism and Christianity and the critical importance of the Jewish world for understanding the New Testament and Christianity. If we can grasp these two points, argues Rowland, we are well on the way to discovering Christian Origins.

Part One deals with Jewish Life and Thought at the Beginning of the Christian Era and is sub-divided into 15 topical themes. These themes cover everything from "The Synagogue" to "The Interpretation of Scripture" to "The Expression of Hope". Most of these 15 sub-sections are only a couple of pages long each and thus serve as excellent introductions to the specific subject areas. The manner of discussion of each is straightforward and direct, while the material covered in each is very recent. Rowland's opinions I found to be judicious and well argued in the main. Although the 15 sub-sections are each individually excellent, as a group they are a bit dry and difficult to read one after the other. This first part of the book is not the kind of thing one would want to sit down

and read from beginning to end. It does however serve as an excellent catalogue summary of Jewish belief and practice for the serious student.

By contrast, the second section dealing with Christianity is much more stimulating and easier to digest. It is within this section that Rowland goes on to apply the knowledge gleaned from his study of Jewish belief and thought to our understanding of Christian belief and thought. The way in which Rowland sees Christianity as dependent upon Judaism is betrayed by the subtitle of the book as a whole – "An Account of the Setting and Character of the most important Messianic Sect of Judaism". It is in so interpreting the origins of Christianity that Rowland makes his most distinctive contribution – and at the same time opens himself to the most penetrating criticism. Many scholars will no doubt find it difficult to accept that the rift between Christianity and Judaism was as late and imprecise as Rowland would have us believe. I for one would emphasise the distinctiveness of Jesus as a Messianic figure and would argue that simply to describe him as one among many is insufficient. According to Rowland neither Jesus nor Paul believed himself to be in the process of forming a religious system independent from Judaism. At least this is one way of re-asserting the essential continuity between Jesus and Paul but I have reservations about it being the correct approach. In short, I am not certain whether Rowland's foundational point about the reliance of the Messianic sect of Christianity upon Jewish eschatological beliefs can bear the weight Rowland demands of it. It seems to me that the Christian proclamation of the *fulfilment* of those Jewish beliefs in the life and ministry of Jesus created far more of a disruption than we sometimes appreciate. In other words, I think that much of what Rowland has to say is true and right, but I would tend to see tension between Christianity and Judaism in terms of disruption whereas Rowland would see it in terms of dependence.

Nevertheless, his grasp of the essential critical issues of New Testament study is excellent. His explanation of the "Delay of the Parousia", for example, is superb. It would be an excellent buy for those who would like a single book to keep them abreast of recent trends in biblical scholarship.

Larry Kreitzer

The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics. III Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles

Hans Urs Von Balthasar. T. & T. Clark, 1986. Pp. 524. £19.95 hb

Towards the end of this third volume, at the beginning of the chapter on Charles Peguy, Balthasar announces that Peguy "completes the circle back to our own point of departure, to Irenaeus" (p. 406). This statement immediately raises, for the reader, vital and difficult questions. We have been on a long journey with the author (nearly 1,000 pages) and what has been its nature? Has it been "circular" in the derogatory sense? Or have we "arrived where we started and knowing the place for the first time"? What has been the intention of the author in going on this journey and conducting this vast survey of 12 thinkers? And has he succeeded in persuading us that he has achieved his intention? To find the answer to these questions we must first re-trace our steps to the introduction to the second volume of *The Glory of the Lord* where we find Balthasar looking down the long road curving away in front of him.

> So once again the questionableness of any historical development in theology becomes clear: Each original form breaks out anew from the centre. It has its own *kairos* in its historical context, is, as an instruction for the Church, indeed of the Church, set into ways of thought and forms of speech of the epoch and it is in this way that it attains its uniqueness. (p. 29)

Balthasar thus disposes of the problem that troubled John Henry Newman, and continues to trouble us today: the problem of the development of doctrine. What Balthasar is not writing is "historical theology"; a demonstration of a continuous unfolding of an original revelation. Is he writing a "systematic theology": a demonstration of the internal coherence and intellectual consistency of the structures of Christian belief? That is more difficult to answer; his movement, as he says, is circular; it does not go forward in logical sequence to a conclusion, it revolves around truth in an attempt to view it from different angles. Can we always be sure that it is the same truth that we are viewing? The words "an original form breaks out from the centre" are crucially important: Peguy and Irenaeus, we are led to believe, are viewing the same truth, but their views are quite different. So there is no "line" in theology for Balthasar; there is instead what he calls a "symposium" of thinkers. Historical change seems to represent no problem for him and he clearly expects us, in the 20th century to respond no less eagerly to the second century Greek than to the 20th century Frenchman. But we know the world of Hopkins and Peguy in a way that we do not know the world of Irenaeus or Augustine. This does not make their worlds opaque, or remove from them the power to illuminate our lives and inform our beliefs; but it requires a particular kind of imaginative effort, and I wonder if Balthasar takes enough account of this fact. It is not easy to see immediately the truth of his statement that in Peguy we have come home to our starting-point in Irenaeus. There is, of course, the concentration in both thinkers on the interpenetration of Nature and Grace, but the language of their approach is quite different, and I do not think it is obtuse of me that I should want a fuller explanation of their connection. I need to be shown, for instance, how Hopkins fits into the company of Anselm if I am to recognise the "symposium" that they belong to. It is as though, in these two volumes, the speakers at the symposium step forward, utter their piece, then relapse into silence. Where is the conversation between the members of the group?

I cannot help thinking that the lack of "coherence" is partly caused by the nature of Balthasar's material itself. He has set himself an extraordinarily difficult task; within his vast span he has chosen to bring forward a fearsome variety of literary form and cultural context. They are not all susceptible to the same treatment. Balthasar is far too sensitive a man and brilliant a scholar not to be aware of this, but even he cannot quite manage all the material, and, more seriously, he cannot quite overcome the

endemic disease of the German critical tradition – i.e. the tendency to elevate the relatively simple science of hermeneutics above the more subtle process of literary criticism. A poem will not yield its secrets in the same way that a philosophical treatise does. It seems an obvious observation to make, yet there is, in Balthasar, as in so many theologians, an incorrigible desire to extract "meanings" from texts. A great work of art will range between several possible meanings, existing, as it does, not to give a message or a programme, but to tease us in and out of thought and feeling. A single (admittedly crass) example will demonstrate my point. On p. 48 of this volume Balthasar writes: "The *Comedy* begins with Dante being lost in the dark wood of sin". To identify Dante's condition as sin makes interpretation of the *Comedy* easier, but Dante nowhere says that the condition was a condition of sin; he merely says: *mi ritrovai per una selva oscura.* The "dark wood" is a complex image: it suggests, as well as sin, bewilderment, fear, loss, inarticu late grief, frustrated love. Balthasar is imposing theology on poetry here, and it does not work; the richness of the aesthetic vision evaporates under this kind of theological scrutiny. Perhaps what I am touching on here is the question of whether Balthasar, in the first volume, has really established the structures of a "theological aesthetic", because when it comes to the application of the principles of this activity it seems as though theology dominates; the aesthetic achievement (*Divine Comedy,* poems of John of the Cross, etc.) is judged by a theological yardstick.

However, even when all that has been said, Balthasar provides us with more nourishment and genuine intellectual delight than any other living theologian. In a recent "sermon" Frank Kermode observed that "It is part of our experience of the past that we change it as it passes through our hands; and in changing it we may make it more puzzling in making it more our own". A great deal of the past passes through Balthasar's hands in this volume and much of it undergoes a remarkable change. Sometimes it becomes more puzzling (in the sense that Kermode intended); sometimes it shines with a brightness we had not expected before we read his words.

B. L. Horne

God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation

Jürgen Moltmann. SCM Press, 1985. Pp. xvi. + 365. £10.50

Jürgen Moltmann is now well established as a theologian on the world stage. This volume, the Gifford Lectures for 1984/85, represents the second in a series of five volumes intended to comprise a systematic theology. It follows *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* and is to be accompanied eventually by three further volumes on Christology, Eschatology, and the Foundations and Methods of Christian Theology. It is built upon the solid foundations which we have come to expect from Moltmann, of immensely wide reading and scholarship, combined with the characteristic rigour of German theological reasoning. Much of the Moltmannian methodology reappears in these pages. He reaffirms his roots in Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (now usefully available in an English translation). Hints of the "crucified God" are there, and all is rooted in the so-called "trinitarian history of God".

There are, however, new points of departure. Moltmann is keen to learn from and utilise the "systems approach" to reality, popularised in the work of Fritjof Capra, whose writings he refers to in footnotes. Indeed, many of the insights employed in his approach to the doctrine of creation are reminiscent of the argument in Capra's *The Turning Point.* Pre-eminent here is his stress on co-operation within the total process and ambit of creation. This forces him into a strongly theocentric attitude to creation which gives some stretches of his argument a Calvinistic feel. Moltmann is keen to demonstrate that creation and evolution are not opposed and this takes him on to the next, and perhaps most crucial, stage of his argument.

He argues, as indeed have others recently, that many of our present problems both theologically and philosophically, stem from René Descartes. The strict dualism which his thought implies, combined with a crude interpretation of the Genesis exhortation to humanity to "subdue the earth" (Gen. 1:28) has led to an objectification of nature alongside a subjectification of humanity. It is this that has led to the possibility and indeed reality of humanity dominating and exploiting the created order. The priority of a thoroughgoing theocentrism is the only means of avoiding this. Building upon this, Moltmann goes on to describe protological and eschatological elements within the doctrine of creation. The first refers to the divine act *ex nihilo,* and the second to the possibility of new creation through Christ in the Spirit. Creation is thus identical with God's eternal nature, and automatically part of the concept of God.

The result of this is a concept of God who is deeply concerned with and involved in his creation, although Moltmann is keen to steer clear of any form of panentheism, by talking of a "trinitarian doctrine of creation". At one point he writes: "The created world does not exist in the 'absolute space' of the divine Being; it exists in the space God yielded up for it through his creative resolve" (p. 156). There is thus a kenotic feel to his argument. Eschatological concepts as always are to the fore and again he writes: "The word 'heaven' is the term for the side of creation that is open to God". This immediately leads him into a discussion of the human co-operation with the divine initiative and the "priestly" function of humanity. Human beings "stand before God on behalf of creation, and before creation on behalf of God". They are, to use his terms, both *imago mundi,* and *imago dei,* they are both part of the community of creation but also hold a very particular role within that community.

It is not difficult to see in which direction this argument will take us. Domination of creation is not simply ruled out, but runs against the grain of the created order. Ecology and concern for the future of creation are part of the nature of human existence and destiny, working pneumatologically with God. The Sabbath and the restraint there implied becomes for Moltmann the "feast of Creation".

The power of the argument here is to be welcomed at a time when the plant at Sellafield has been condemned by wide sections of the community for its anti-creative

effects, and when a large part of the Christian Church still struggles to see the effects of its teaching on birth-control on the total world community. In the face of these and other anti-creative threats, Moltmann represents ecology not as an enthusiasm for the few but as a demand upon all humanity. This in its issue cannot be gainsaid. Not all, however, will tune into, or accept his philosophical/theological critique. His Germanic style can often feel opaque and over-written for the Anglo-Saxon reader. Furthermore, he is strongest in his wielding of tradition, and in his critique of Descartes. He ignores some of the other challenges to both classical philosophy and classical Christian orthodoxy which are examined by a writer like Alasdair MacIntyre in his recent reflections upon "virtue". This need not discredit his thesis, although it may undermine some of the compulsion which the intensity of his thought at first seems to imply.

Stephan Platten

The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth

Stephen Sykes. SPCK, 1984. Pp. xii + 349. £8.50

From very early times, Christians have differed among themselves about key issues, doctrinal and practical. Much time and energy has been spent through many centuries in an effort to define what is essential to Christianity, and what sorts of beliefs and practices are inadmissable. Sometimes the debates have been open and generous; too often they have been conducted to the accompaniment of much mud-slinging. But always the ideal has been unity. In this work, Sykes examines this ideal of unity based on the idea of an essence of Christianity, and offers suggestions about the minimum conditions for the presentation of its identity.

By way of a prelude, Sykes offers a discussion of three important dimensions of Christian existence. In the first place, he considers the facts of plurality and controversy in the church, reaching back to the time of the apostles and deriving at least in part from ambiguities in the teaching of Jesus himself. Secondly, although the doctrinal dimension with its variations of interpretation is an indispensible part of the Christian inheritance, it is the inward experience of the believer that makes these doctrines personally significant and that therefore dialectically affects both the manner and content of their interpretation. Third, all of this takes place in the public context of the Church on earth, which means that there are structures and individuals of authority and influence. The theologian in particular, because of his or her acknowledged claim to interpret doctrine and experiences, is a person of power, all the more potent because it is often hidden behind a claim to say nothing of oneself but only to speak forth the truth of God.

The central section of the work presents the views of major modern theologians on the essence of Christianity. Schleiermacher roots religion in the feeling of absolute dependence; but it is in his view always "positive", that is, organised according to a content which sets its boundaries. The structural coherence of Christianity derives from its inwardness which grasps or intuits its essential principle: this rests on the conception of the human person as a religious being – a conception which Schleiermacher takes to be pre-theological but which Sykes shows to be reciprocally related to this Christian doctrine of humanity. Nevertheless, his effort to develop a relationship between theology and non-theological disciplines, and his insistence that any inner grasp of Christian truth must be measured against actual historical material is of lasting methodological value.

Newman, by contrast, rejected the idea of a single graspable essence of Christianity, insisting that the urge to a systematization of Christianity under a "leading idea" is an illegitimate effort to make God immediately intelligible to the human mind. Nevertheless, Newman was concerned to show the continuity and development of doctrine, and suggested the inner apprehension of the mystery of the Incarnation as a central focus from which all Christian doctrine, practice and devotion could be viewed in an interconnected way. He is thus similar to Schleiermacher, despite all their differences, in his emphasis on the inward centre of Christianity and the need for a focus which enables Christianity to be seen as a whole.

Sykes next considers Harnack's enormously influential *Das Wesen des Christentums,* which saw dogma as a temporary, if characteristic phenomenon from which we need to be liberated by exposure to Christ and his practical love of God and neighbour. Loisy, by contrast, argues that the development of dogma perpetuates the Gospel. Both agree that there are distortions and corruptions, but whereas Harnack uses a metaphor of kernel and husk, seeing the teaching of Jesus as central, Loisy prefers metaphors of continuous organic growth through Christian history.

This dispute leads naturally to a consideration of modern historiography and its implications for belief, and Sykes uses a discussion of Troeltsch to pursue these problems. Any enquiry into history, and *a fortiori* Christian history, must be partial if it is to be of value; and yet no historical investigation can occur without the sympathetic perspective of the historian. Therefore any historical assessment of the essence of Christianity would involve a reciprocal interplay between the Christian position already held by the historian and the facticity of the past. Not the least consequence of Troeltsch's work was the recognition of the vast gulf between modern civilisation and the earliest Church, and therefore the difficulty of establishing any essence of Christianity that will do justice to both. He himself overcomes this by focussing on the figure of Christ, but as a powerful symbol of social adhesion rather than as a crucial dogma.

Barth, Sykes' final selection, sees the historical gap bridged in the preaching of the Word of God, by which the Church identifies itself with Jesus Christ. This simultaneously connects the present proclamation with the past, and stands as a radical challenge to the secular assumptions of the modern world. In order to hear and proclaim this Word, however, the theologian must attend to it as a gift of grace in obedience of heart. This means that Barth can be seen both as the apotheosis of the inwardness tradition, and also as the one who gives most power – albeit Christologically-derived power – to the theologian.

In the analysis of these discussions of the essence of Christianity, Sykes suggests that the theologians have three purposes: first, the provision of a simple statement or short formula of the actual nature of Christianity; second, a creation of priorities around this central focus which serves to deepen the grasp of the central matters of faith; and third, a method for tackling the problem of continuity of Christian doctrine. In each case, the inward reality of spiritual transformation is central, but is disciplined and understood by doctrinal consideration. Because of the disputes about the question of essence, reflecting the diversity of faith and practice throughout Christian history, Sykes suggests that the philosophical notion of an essentially contested question be brought into play. This is a question which all sides agree to be central, but to which varying answers can be given and varying methods of solution used. Sykes believes that Christology may be seen as the essentially contested question. The account one gives of the events of Christ's life and of the context of that life in his relationship to God is decisive for one's understanding of Christianity. The identity of Christianity lies in the interaction between one's internal experience of new life in Christ, related to the worshipping community, and the external forms of Christianity, both doctrinal and practical.

From this summary, it is clear that Sykes has made a significant contribution to theological thinking, not least in this theme of the interplay between inwardness and the external doctrines and forms of religion. It seems to me, however, that this could be pushed much more deeply. Sykes is clear that doctrinal considerations must be brought into play to interpret and evaluate inward experience. No doubt this is true; but it leaves unanswered the crucial question of *which* doctrinal considerations must be raised, and which are misguided – or, to use the old word, heretical. (Arius would have agreed with Sykes that Christology is the essentially contested concept in Christianity, and that identity of Christianity consists in the interplay between the external and internal dimensions.) Furthermore it does not tackle the question of the extent to which the inwardly apprehended "word of God" can be allowed radically to challenge (or even overthrow?) received doctrine and practice. Sykes' book is a work of solid but cautious scholarship. It helps the theologians to be aware of what they are doing; but it does not offer a position on the specific challenges which modern theologians seek to face.

Grace Jantzen

Theology on the Way to Emmaus

Nicholas Lash. SCM, 1986. Pp. 240. £10.50

Professor Lash's *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* is a collection of papers and letters written or delivered between 1982 and 1984, which seek to articulate Christian interpretation in the light of the parable of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. That is, Lash is concerned with the "way" or the "doing" of theology in such a manner that all aspects of life are engaged in a never completed theological interpretation of reality. As the disciples had to learn new ways of looking at things, ask different sorts of questions and finally recognise the risen Christ in a new context, so the task of Christian interpretation, for Lash, must take seriously the various contexts in which theology takes place and in terms of which insights are gained.

The book is somewhat uneven, inevitably so perhaps, ranging from broad discussions about culture, metaphor, ideology, the Church's responsibility for the future of humanity, to chatty comments on contemporary social issues, Marxism and a rather technical, concentrated consideration of Aquinas on analogy. Lash's papers and lectures are to be welcomed for their intellectual honesty and for their concern to engage Christian categories with the struggle, ambiguity and often meaningless suffering of the human condition. Certainly Lash purges himself of sentimentality and illusion, but it is not always clear just how his vision of Christian interpretation addresses the human condition in a creative, transforming way. Lash speaks a lot about transformation but also of recognising limits, of a history of grace but also of so much light and no more.

If the book coheres in any satisfactory way, it does so, at least for this reader, in Part IV – *Human Experience and the Knowledge of God.* Here one senses that Lash is saying most clearly what he is hinting at elsewhere. For if one is to "do" theology "on the way" through life, the old fixed categories deriving from a two-world dualism, must be discarded. Lash wants us to understand the meaning of God, Easter and so forth, in this context. God, he says, is not to be found in any one particular "district" of our experience but in the limits of the ordinary (pp. 154-5). But exactly how or where God is found can never be precisely stated; to attempt such specificity would be to fall back into some kind of dualism. So Lash steers a course through all sorts of opposites, refusing to "stop" anywhere. In effect, what he is arguing for is a dynamic "play" between the apophatic and the cataphatic. Thus, to stop at the identification of God's creative spirit and the world, would be to end up in pantheism. To follow the path of negation, on the other hand, would lead to agnosticism, if we stopped here, and to stop at the historical givenness of Christian revelation and to absolutise it, would be to end up divinising the past. Instead, Lash believes we can never "stop the dance" of the dialectic of experience and say: *this* alone is what we mean by "God", and *here* alone is his presence and activity to be discerned (p. 156). We can glimpse God only by allowing ourselves to be part of the ceaseless dance.

In his final section on Christian hope, Lash is rightly critical of Christian (or any other) theodicy. He reminds us that all theoretical attempts to harmonise the goodness of God with "tragic disorder" are harmful to people's sufferings and to the transformative reality of God. So he says, "Christian hope remains a form of tragic vision in the measure that it refuses to foreclose the question of the future by postulating, in the imagination, some resolution to past and present tragedy that, in fact, has not been resolved" (p. 214). It is clear that, for Lash, Christian hope is only to be found "on the way", concretely, and that means as a response to and solidarity with the sufferings of human beings (p. 215).

Lash's book is certainly inspirational, critical and honest; it is only a pity that the style and content is frustratingly uneven.

Martin Roberts

The Faith We Confess: An Ecumenical Dogmatics

Jan Milič Lochman. T. & T. Clark, 1985. Pp. 274 + xiv. £14.95

Troeltsch described the construction of a dogmatics as "the specific ultimate theological problem". "Ultimate" presumably because it presupposes extensive groundwork in biblical, historical and philosophical studies, as well as the development of the appropriate theological method within the discipline of fundamental theology. But why a "problem"? Writing a dogmatics is unquestionably problematic if we follow Troeltsch's definition of dogmatics as "the exposition of a normative Christian religious system". Leaving aside the tempting issue of what is meant by "system" in this connection, let us focus on the epithet "normative". Dogmatics sets out to produce a normative account of the content of the Christian faith. It claims a certain authority. It purports to expound, not merely a point of view, but the true faith. How can this claim be justified? What is the source of this authority? If the work receives the imprimature of ecclesiastical authority and goes out with its blessing, that will commend it to some. But if, as in Protestant dogmatics, that route is not available, there are two further options. First, the normative status of the dogmatics may be derived from its faithfulness to some controlling focus, the central reality or essence of the Christian faith. But this too is a controverted area where lively debate continues. Moreover, as we see in Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Troeltsch, it requires extensive and sophisticated prolegomena. Alternatively, a dogmatics can seek, less ambitiously, to express a tacit consensus of scholarly conclusions concerning the fundamental truths of Christianity, limiting its assertions to what carries broad agreement, refraining from idiosyncratic interpretations and curbing the apparently innate tendency of dogmatics to superfluous polemics and inflated rhetoric. Such a dogmatics will be ecumenical by definition, for it is meaningless and retrograde to speak of a consensus that does not transcend particular traditions. But it will remain, in Troeltsch's words, "*a* normative Christian religious system" – one of a plurality of interpretations of Christianity, normative as a valid presentation of a phenomenon that exceeds our human grasp, but not ultimate. As such, it will have a personal slant; its distinctive vision will reflect the narrative component of one theologian's journey of faith.

Jan Milič Lochman's *The Faith We Confess: An Ecumenical Dogmatics* is precisely such a work. It expresses a modern ecumenical consensus on the basic Christian beliefs enshrined in the Apostles' Creed. The personal dimension is that of the author's biography as a "mediating" theologian whose background stems from the Czech Reformation, who has worked in Christian-Marxist dialogue and now holds the chair of systematic theology at Basel. If "dogmatics" seems a little pretentious for a book that is compact, clear and a pleasure to read, it is because Karl Barth's massive achievement has created the impression that a dogmatics has to run to an intimidating dozen or more solid volumes of small print. However, Barth's work would be counter-productive if it paralysed the writing of more modest dogmatics that were constructive and serviceable but not works of genius. Lochman's is a work of solid worth: sound, edifying, enlightened and controlled, providing plenty of food for thought. Clergy will find it a rich source of sermon insights and a good companion for daily devotions. I hope it will be widely commended by those in a position to do so and taken up by Christians seeking to strengthen their grasp of the fundamental faith and by those teaching basic Christian doctrine. But for that to happen, a paperback edition at a modest price is essential.

Paul Avis

Divine Impassibility
An Essay in Philosophical Theology

Richard E. Creel. CUP, 1986. Pp. xi + 238. £25.00 hb

Whether God can suffer, or rather can be passive – be affected in any way by anything other than himself – is an issue where the emotional relations of believers to their God engage with philosophers' arguments about what the Divine attributes should be. It will lead into the opposition between, for example, the "Hebrew" conception of God as a larger and glorious human mind and the "Greek" pure activity without any potentiality, which cannot be passively affected, cannot change, and is outside time.

Professor Creel approaches this issue in the style of an "analytical" philosopher, taking points one at a time, and developing and responding to arguments; he is fertile in sharp examples directed against rhetorical claims about what a believer must feel. He displays an enviable knowledge of the recent literature on his topics. It is a great merit of his books that he presents the work of American "process" philosophers in a way accessible to an English academic philosopher.

But he may not be fully alive to the grounds underlying the conceptions of God in question. It is a mistake to proceed by taking for granted that there is some being which might appropriately be called "God", and asking what it is like. Differing conceptions of God spring from different reasons for believing such a being to exist.

Besides, it is not wise to rely as Creel would on the argument that God must be worthy of worship, and to be worthy of worship a being must be thus-and-so. Creel sees that God is not subject to moral obligations, and so is not morally good: he is not to be praised for doing what he sees he ought contrary to his selfish desires. He will be worthy of praise of other sorts. However, the point can be generalized: what humans will find admirable may depend in untold ways on what they think really possible.

Creel distinguishes four respects in which a non-embodied mind might be affected by the world: nature, will, knowledge, and feeling. He sets aside God's nature; all the literature agrees that this cannot be altered. Creel's God has an impassible and eternal will, a passible knowledge and (almost) no feelings at all. In humans the feelings connect what one is aware of to what one chooses. Creel's God is composed of an awareness and a will which have (almost) nothing to do with each other. For the religious emotions, the strength of Creel's position will be the portrayal of God's will as like a rock, and its weakness the denial of feeling.

As regards knowledge, Creel embraces the view currently fashionable among analytical philosophers, that a timeless knowledge could not be adequate. Even if one could timelessly know the whole history of the world, one would not know which part of this history was taking place *now*; and one cannot know a free choice except after it has been made. Here we might supplement Creel by distinguishing passivity from mutability. If a being knew in advance every free choice that would be made, there might be no change in its knowledge. But still, if this were a knowledge to be likened to sight, it would be caused by the free creatures, and the being would be passive in this respect. *Impassibility* in knowledge would be saved if we held God to be acting in the free choices of his creatures. This idea probably cannot be sustained, but it is a pity Creel does not mention it at all.

With regard to the will, Creel makes the helpful point that where my aim remains fixed and my changing awareness of the facts affects only the instrumental means I choose, my purposes are not affected. But we should distinguish from that the case where I desire your good, and so am responding to what you want and choose. In this case my purposes are affected by your choices, and it is my basic character which remains the same. Creel, inclining towards the Greeks, finds it plausible that God should have willed in advance his responses to the results of every possible free choice, and so be at least *unchanging* in purpose and choice of means. He argues cogently against process thinkers that this knowledge of possibilities must be conceivable. But, as he concedes, knowledge of a possibility deals in properties which are universals, not in particular individuals. He does not remark that there seems to be a difference – brought out by recent philosophical work on sexual desire – between responding to an individual as a particular and responding to a set of properties, and that the religious believer might prefer to think of God as responding to him or her as a particular.

When we turn to feelings, we should separate sensations (which constitute the stream of our consciousness, but perhaps cannot be attributed to a mind which has never been embodied) from states such as desire and the dissatisfaction of knowing that what one desired has not happened. Creel's God is always entirely happy, and therefore cannot be grieved by human history. Creel does not evade the consequence that while God has a steadfast desire for our good in so far as we are willing to receive it from him, he simply does not care what actually happens to us. There is a tension here, which Creel does not really bring out, between the idea that our present griefs matter (to us, and therefore to God) and the idea of a consummation which they cannot mar (and the joy believers hope for, their God already possesses). The way forward is surely to try to think of a consummation which does not simply wipe away tears and replace them with joy, but is internally related to the memory of the events of mortal life. And once we hold that when God is aware of events, he is moved by them, it will be plausible to say this is the time when he decides how to respond to them.

On these and other topics, Creel's book contains much that will stimulate philosophers working on the Divine attributes. But he presents a collection of clever points which will provoke further thought and disagreement, rather than positions which will be found satisfying.

Robert Gay

Philosophy for Understanding Theology

Diogenes Allen. SCM, 1985. Pp. vi + 287. £9.50

There is a great need for a book of this type, which sets out to provide students of theology with a broad understanding of philosophy which they can relate to their theological studies. Unfortunately this book does not meet that need.

First of all there is a serious imbalance in the different periods covered in the history of philosophy. The book is heavily orientated towards classical and medieval philosophy, which together comprises slightly over half the book. Within this distribution there are further imbalances: by what priorities does Plotinus get 14 pages while Marx gets half a page? The author may reveal what he thinks about modern philosophy when he begins a discussion of the significance of Descartes' radical doubt with the hypothetical question, "What is the value of such silly thinking?" (p. 175).

Secondly, the author discusses the material within a conventional Christian world view. The difficulty with this is that philosophy's critical edge is dulled; it seems to be there to underpin faith, never to subvert faith's self-understanding. It may be significant here that the author says that his selection and presentation of the material has been guided by what is important for theologians, not by what is important for philosophers.

Even within this chosen approach there are startling assumptions. For example, we read that God created the world freely: "God is not incomplete without a world" (p. 10). This view is repeated later: "The Godhead is complete in itself . . . The trinitarian life is one of fullness and completeness, so there is no need to create or to communicate outside of it" (p. 85). But surely a loving God requires an object of love? The only hint Allen gives of a problem in this respect is in the context of a later discussion of process philosophy, which is more or less dismissed in a cursory two-page glance (pp. 146–48).

Incidentally, on p. 147 Allen makes a statement which occurs in several places in the book, namely that the Bible is not concerned with philosophical speculation about the true nature of the world. In a literal sense this is more or less true. But surely there are stories which reveal aetiological interests? And surely much of the Bible could be seen in terms of a broad quest for human self-understanding? Here, as elsewhere, Allen seems too concerned to safeguard the absoluteness of revelation. Bernard Lonergan (who is omitted from the book) would certainly have argued that the human search for ever greater knowledge creates the possibilities of divine-human communication.

Some parts of the book are unsuitable for students beginning to look at philosophy. For example, the account in ch. 5 of Aristotelian teleology and the scholasticism which drew on it tends to become bogged down in a morass of definitions, terms and essences. And while in a brief discussion of Wittgenstein in ch. 11 the author says that the latter saw meaning as use, the significance for religion of this seminal idea is never drawn out and the point rather lost. Students who want to consult modern

philosophy because their faith is seeking understanding would be better directed to Roger Scruton's survey of the field.

Terry Tastard

Verus Israel. A study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (A.D. 135-425)

M. Simon (translated from the French by H. McKeating). OUP, 1986. Pp. xviii + 533. £30.00

When *Verus Israel* was first published in 1948 it could be said that "the question of the relations between Judaism and Christianity . . . has been dealt with only rarely". This English translation appears in a vastly changed scene; the question of Jewish-Christian relations has become a lively topic of concern for biblical study, church history and systematic theology. The prime impetus has come from reflection on the Holocaust, now increasingly being explored through a number of disciplines; current interfaith dialogue and the need to come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel have fuelled that impetus. In this setting, "history of religions" questions no longer constitute the sole issue. It is not easy to escape the shadow of questions about the responsibility of the Christian church and its theology for the Holocaust – what are the origins of Christian anti-Semitism and how deeply embedded is it in Christian theology and even in the New Testament itself?

How does *Verus Israel* fare in this new climate? Simon is not concerned to trace the history of the separation of Christianity from Judaism nor with the NT roots of the question. What he does is to plot the complex course of the relations between the two religions between AD 135 and 525. The theological questions over which the modern debate agonises hardly surface. Even in the "Postscript" (1964) there is only a cursory rejection of any attempt to identify modern anti-Semitism with that of the early church or to see an inherent connection between the two. Yet this in itself does not render Simon's study obsolete. In today's context ideological or emotive forces too easily dominate the debate unless it is built on thorough analysis of all available sources in their original context. It is a model of such an approach which Simon provides, constantly warning the reader against generalisations or over-simplification.

First he establishes the setting – the consequences of the disasters of AD 70 and 135 for Judaism in Palestine and the diaspora, and the fortunes of Judaism and Christianity within the Roman world. Then he explores the explicit polemic between the two, the accusations made, the methods and arguments used; here Christian sources are far more abundant than Jewish ones but not, according to Simon, evidence that the polemic was one-sided or artificial. A final section on evidence of assimilation – Jewish Christians, Judaisers and Jews or syncretistic-Jewish magical practices being adopted by Christians – is seen to demonstrate the real attraction of "Judaism" to some Christian groups. Thus the recurring theme is the vitality of Judaism as an opponent and competitor to Christianity throughout the period. Simon was seeking to counter those who saw the Judaism of post-AD 70 as a religion which had turned in on itself with no interest in the outside world and posing no threat to Christianity. If his views rightly carried the day we may now need to reconsider how often the arguments against "Judaism" do in fact represent the church's need to understand and define itself against the "Judaism" both of its own day and of the Old Testament, or even reflect intra-church debates about that understanding and that Old Testament. Moreover, the complexity and variety which appears in every part of Simon's study needs even more underlining, together with its consequences. There was no single type of Judaism, no single type of Christian response, and attempts to impose a chronological or logical order are doomed to failure – as apparent in Simon's own attempts, for example, to provide a framework for the Christian arguments about their unity with the Old Testament, or to describe Jewish Christianity as a coherent movement with a traceable history.

In other ways too the course of scholarship, prompted in part by Simon's work, has brought new evidence to bear or raised questions about old "certainties". Today we would need to bring in the implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls or Gnostic literature; we have been reminded of the enormous difficulties in using the Rabbinic material as direct historical evidence and warned against assuming that that evidence can then be used to understand the Judaism of the diaspora; we would be more cautious both in identifying the *minim* ("heretics") of Jewish sources and in the use of the term "semi-proselytes"; we would look to the Pseudo-Clementine literature far more in studying Jewish Christianity. But perhaps what the modern reader most misses is an awareness of the social dimensions of the problem. This is nowhere more marked than in the concluding attempt to explain the eventual success of Christianity and withdrawal of Judaism. The two religions too often remain bodies of ideas and practice devoid of any social setting or significance. The variety and complexity Simon reveals must in part be a reflection of the various geographical, temporal or social settings of the sources. Historical study of the relation between the two religions must focus on particular contexts before attempting a global picture.

Yet, while new questions are being asked and new methods and sources used, *Verus Israel* remains a classic, indispensable as a model of careful analysis and for the wealth of material it contains. If in its own time it marked paths for future research, it still suggests others. Its translation is long overdue and we must be grateful to H. McKeating for a smooth and highly readable rendering.

J. M. Lieu

Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey

Samuel N. C. Lieu. Manchester University Press, 1985. Pp. xiii + 360. £35.00 hb

The academic understanding of Manichaeism has been radically transformed over the last century due to repeated archaeological and textual discoveries. Slowly the picture has been drawn of a religion, no longer a

Christianity and War in a Nuclear Age

RICHARD HARRIES
Dean of King's College, London

How can we reconcile our Christian faith, whose ethic is a love ethic, with war? How does an ethic of the kingdom of God bear on present realities? How in a world of radically different perceptions, a world organized into states which pursue their own interests, is war avoided? Does the principle of noncombatant immunity rule out any use of nuclear weapons?

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Christian sect, flourishing for a millenium and more over areas as diverse as North Africa and South China, and yet retaining a true inner unity based on the religious experience and scriptures of its founder, Mani. Samuel Lieu's book breaks new ground, and has no rival in its scope as a history of Manichaeism. Much of the new material was scattered through (often obscure) journals, and in a multitude of languages. Certainly Lieu's book will stimulate specialists, but it is most important for its making available disparate information, and for its judicious sifting of the evidence. Few scholars have the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural skills necessary for such an overview.

The author's doctoral thesis was a comparative study of the diffusion and persecution of Manichaeism in Rome and China. The present work is more comprehensive, but still reflects this polarity. Thus Lieu begins with the life and teachings of Mani, and the context of the early church's origins in Mesopotamia and Sassanid Persia. He turns next to the expansion of Manichaeism through the Roman Empire, and the reasons for its persecution and eventual disappearance. The reader is then led along the Silk Road following the missionary progress of the religion, via its political successes in Central Asia, finally to the long twilight in China (until the 16th century). The extraordinary history of the Religion of Light in the Far East will be of most immediate interest to those intelligent readers still accustomed to regarding Manichaeism through the eyes of centuries of Christian polemicists.

Lieu acknowledges the above emphasis in his title, and himself makes the point that the later history of the religion in the lands of its origin still needs to be written. However, his tentative hints towards such a history (pp. 81-85) are themselves as concise as can be found anywhere, and should encourage a scholar competent in Arab and Persian studies to take up this unexplored area.

To return to the original influences upon Mani: Lieu makes great play of the vitally important *Cologne Mani-Codex*, which evidences Mani's upbringing in an Elchasaite community. However, this reviewer suspects that the present stress on the Jewish-Christian background, in the wake of the new text's discovery (signalled in 1970), is itself somewhat of a distortion; rather as the vogue earlier this century for an Iranian basis to Manichaeism certainly was. Two points may be made: Lieu goes too far in suggesting that the notion that Mani fused together Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Christian elements must be "decisively abandoned" (e.g. pp. 53, 56). Certain core Manichaean notions (e.g. the dualism, the two-tier community structure, the apocalyptic teaching) surely owe more to Iranian and Indian religions, and not just as mediated via Judaism, Christianity, or Marcionism. I expect that academic opinion will make a gradual return in this direction. Secondly, this reviewer cannot agree with Lieu in his scant attention to the links between Manichaeism and the predecessors of the modern Mandaeans (pp. 30-31). Lieu himself is certainly aware of the studies by such as Säve-Söderbergh which prove (to my mind) textual links between the two communities. While there is no scope here for a proper exploration of the subject, suffice it to suggest that Lieu's comment about the anti-Christian nature of Mandaeism (p. 30) may begin to be countered by reference to the figure of Anoš-'Uthra. Here is hidden a docetic Jesus most closely linked to that of Mani and Marcion, both of whom also polemicised against the Jesus of the Christians.

These more specific comments must not be weighed against this reviewer's great admiration for Samuel Lieu's precise and judicious handling of extremely difficult material. For instance: the detailed Chapter V on Augustine deals with the most widely known aspect of Manichaean studies, yet Lieu's account of the appeal made by Manichaeism is the best available. It is to be hoped that the residual vilification of this most persecuted of faiths, still alive today, may at last be put to rest.

Finally, it is unfortunately necessary to mention briefly the many misprints in the book, due apparently to the short printing schedule. The author has made great efforts to trace all copies and supply them with a lengthy corrigenda. Unfortunately this is by no means complete; I casually noted down at least half as many misprints again. While this is a shame, it does not counter the excellent research presented in this much-needed book.

I. Gardner

Restoring the Kingdom. The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement

Andrew Walker. Hodder and Stoughton, 1985. Pp. 303. £5.95

Whether or not a particular Christian individual is interested in the House Church movement may depend to a large extent on matters of geography or denominational allegiance. Some will profess never to have heard of it, whereas others will find themselves invited to participate in its activities and may have noted the ways in which their own church services have been influenced by it. Certainly the more radical edge of Protestantism is being more subtly and deeply affected by it than are the more central streams of Church life. Baptists, Brethren and Pentecostalists, along with Evangelical Free Churches are almost certain to have been caught up in it, while others will know next to nothing about it. In part it has developed as a movement within existing Churches and in part it has become a kind of "alternative" Church, discounting and repudiating the moulds and measures of all existing ecclesiastical institutions and claiming to offer the possibility of a return to the apostolic pattern of the early Christian Church of the New Testament. It regards the preaching of the Kingdom of God and the simple loyalties of Christian discipleship as all that may truly be expressed as the authentic message of Jesus and his Kingdom. It displays a number of striking contrasts, being at the same time intensely committed to the historical Jesus, and yet rejecting critical attempts to understand the historical setting of Jesus. It is committed to a rigid ecclesiology, while at the same time often repudiating all but the simplest definition of the Church as the followers of Jesus Christ. It contains strongly "this worldly" manners and fashions, while at the same time being decidedly "other worldly" in its hope and its ethical commitment.

Dr Walker does an excellent job in tracing the history of the movement from its origins in the Charismatic Renewal movement of the 1960's through to the present. For the most part it is an otherwise unchronicled story, save in the reminiscences of the various personalities involved and the broadsheets and newsletters which announced events and recorded their taking place. The many personalities involved, their characteristic emphases and inter-relationships are all set down with eminent care and fairness. It is often not an easy story to follow since there have been many offshoots and by-forms. Much has taken place within existing Churches, but the great Dales Bible Weeks have become focal events which can more or less be considered in their own right.

In the second part of the study, Dr Walker looks at the characteristic teaching emphasis of the movement and offers some doctrinal, sociological and ecclesiological critique. The doctrinal emphases are fairly straightforward in their essentials: a strong emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit with the foremost sign of this being the gift of speaking in tongues. The Kingdom replaces the Church as the central embodiment of the human social response to the Word of God, and this carries with it a deep suspicion of all existing Church traditions as either moribund or deviant from the true New Testament pattern. In a sense, the "true" Church is understood to be no Church but a movement of Spirit-filled people witnessing to Jesus as their Lord. The apostolic ministry is regarded as a contemporary reality through the direct action of God's call. Along with this there goes a deep dissatisfaction with contemporary moral standards, as attested by such rallies as "The Festival of Light".

The appeal of the movement is undoubtedly very strong, and it is not uncommon to find many Christian ministers sincerely and deeply nonplussed by it. Some, so I am led to believe, go along with it out of a feeling that it is going somewhere and that it does represent a genuine grassroots movement of spiritual awakening. It is after all not all that different from earlier Revivalist movements of the mid-19th century, although it tends to go much further in establishing small fellowships of disciples, rather than showing a concern to shepherd them into existing Church communities.

I hope that this book will be widely read and pondered on. It provides a sound basis of factual history and evaluation, which is so often lacking for those who find themselves faced with a new, earnest, and apparently highly successful, Church movement of our day. Within contemporary Christianity it must certainly rank as one of the most powerful and effective developments that have taken place. Yet Dr Walker is rightly critical, and perhaps almost not critical enough, of a movement that purports to be newer and more radical than it really is. He notes that the essential features of the movement are to be found in the early 19th century with the work of Edward Irving and J. N. Darby, so that the movement marks a combination of features drawn from the early Brethren fellowships, the Charismatic Renewal movement, and not a little of the revivalist theology of C. G. Finney. Add to this the Kiergaardian slogan that "Christianity no longer exists" as a reason for setting aside the centuries of the Churches' history as a continuing witness to the work of God, and most of the features of the House Church Movement are to be found. Yet it is not sufficient to feel that one has arrived at some explanation for the popularity of the movement. It is a powerful fact of our time and is likely to remain so. That a greater balance and theological perspective is called for than is offered by it should be evident to the more discerning of Christians. They will have to work hard however if this fuller balance and perspective are to avoid the confusion and divisions that have so often coloured such movements in the past.

Ronald E. Clements

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Philip West was formerly a student in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. He now teaches theology in the Episcopal Theological College in Edinburgh.

BOOKS RECEIVED

John Ashton (ed.) *The Interpretation of John.* SPCK. Pp. x + 182. £3.95

P. Avis *Foundations of Modern Historical Thought from Machiavelli to Vico.* Croom Helm. Pp. 179. £19.95 hb

P. Avis *The Methods of Modern Theology. The Dream of Reason.* Marshall Pickering. Pp. xiii + 240. £12.95

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