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# TSF BULLETIN

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situation appears when economics are discussed. The right (capitalism) and the left (socialism) are at their cores both materialistic. Weber calls for an evangelical "centrist" position that continues to be a prophetic voice and model in the world. The seminaries could provide a context for developing such new approaches if they would resist taking refuge in their party-line positions.

Professors trapped by all styles of fundamentalism fail to encourage students to seek understanding of other viewpoints. This is especially evident, for example, in bibliographic bigotry. Scholars on the left, limited by prejudice or stunted learning, omit evangelical scholars like F. F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, George Ladd, Leonhard Goppelt, Dale Moody, Helmut Thielicke, Donald Bloesch, Gabriel Fackre, Dewey Beegle, William LaSor and many others. Even moderates like Pannenberg, Bright, Childs, R. Brown, Dunn, and Wainwright too easily get dismissed. The reading assignments of professors on the right are usually broader, but too often the only purpose of excursions into Bultmann, Tillich, Cobb or Fohrer is to prepare an assault. Instead, honest, clean critiques are needed. Students could benefit greatly if professors would discuss their views openly with colleagues or neighboring professors. They would benefit even more if those professors would show their own ability to learn, change, and appreciate the viewpoints of others.

Perhaps professors face a failure of nerve. There is a certain vulnerability required in opening oneself and one's students to serious study of other viewpoints. Too many educators on the left work with hidden agendas, chipping away toward a goal rather than openly "professing" an opinion and then seeking truth within the accountability of Christian community. It is far easier to say, "Most scholars agree . . . " than to admit, "I currently believe this, and have the support of several other scholars. I have worked hard. However, these other writers express different opinions, so our discussions can move us further now into the issues." Some professors work at creating anxiety, even humiliation as they chisel away at a student's tradition. This fairly violent form of education witnesses to an unbiblical view of humanness and a lack of respect for the individual's integrity. Little learning can take place; defensiveness is forced and pervades not only the student's countenance but the professor's as well. Furthermore, the seminarian hardly has here an appropriate model for further pastoral work.

Is there an alternative to such fundamentalistic approaches? Yes! And Christians should be the first to discover them. Martin Marty, in *The Public Church: Mainline–Evangelical–Catholic*, claims that the well-known standoffs have been overcome in some quarters. We can see a convergence of several groups which witnesses to common elements in both the inner life of the church and in the ways it faces the public sphere with a unique message and ministry. I also see such possibilities at seminaries and hope for the benefits of realigned priorities and reformulated content.

Education needs to be done within the context of such community as is represented by Marty's "public church." Such community in the seminaries will have all the strengths of accountability, faithful submission to Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the call of the Lord for the church to serve the world in the name of Jesus; and it will also have all the weaknesses of human frailty, limited vision, selfish agendas and pride. Henri Nouwen, in *Creative Ministry*, provides a model: "redemptive teaching." It is dialogical and prayerful. It calls for clear, open scholarship.

Seminary students and professors should work to provide such "redemptive education." Bible study should be the primary source of truth, light and power. Scholarship is only a tool, to be used as we seek God and his salvation. Relationships are intended for love, not antagonism. Disagreements are a path toward learning, mutual submission and wisdom. The church must receive more than fundamentalism offers. Seminaries can provide more, by God's grace.

# FOUNDATIONS

*(Doing theology on the basics of classical faith)*

## HERMENEUTICS: A NEGLECTED AREA

**By Clark H. Pinnock, Professor of Theology, McMaster Divinity College.**

Conservatives have tended to imagine that once they have successfully defended the Bible as God's written Word the rest is easy. All you have to do is read and apply the text, is it not? Operating with this simple-minded approach, we have tended to sit out the debates raging around hermeneutics, figuring that they result from a low view of Scripture and are probably heretical. We did not suppose that *we* might have a problem here. So like ostriches we stuck our head in the sand and let Bultmann and Gadamer go on their merry way. Not that we were wrong to believe in the importance of recognising the Bible to be divinely authoritative as the first step in biblical interpretation—that is correct. Where we went wrong was in supposing that *applying* the Bible after you did your historical exegesis was a simple, straightforward matter. We did not reckon on the *second step* in hermeneutics being so problematic. We did not think enough about how the authority of the Bible *works*.

What has been waking us up out of our hermeneutical slumbers is a set of nitty gritty issues that dramtise the problem for us.

***Both radicals and fundamentalists pick up the whole package—demons, atonement, miracles, recent creation—and either throw it out or try to stuff it down people's throats.***

We have begun to ask such questions as these: do you always have to submit to authority? are there miracles today? can there be a just war? what about other religions? should women always wear veils in church? can people be demon-possessed? Questions like these force us to recognise that applying the Bible is not at all a simple matter. Getting solid answers to them is no easy business.

So hermeneutics is our problem too. It will no longer do to scoff at the liberals' solutions to this problem when we have no alternative to offer. At least they are trying! It will not do just to play it by ear and make all kinds of inconsistent moves and dump the problem in the lap of the church. After all, if anything we have a *larger* problem than others, in that our higher view of biblical infallibility compels us to bring more truths into the twentieth century to make sense of. Because of our concern to be faithful to the Bible, we deprive ourselves of the liberty and flexibility available to others. The challenge we have to face is this: what do we propose to do about the fact that twentieth-century people do not think the way scriptural writers think about many important topics? Whatever you think of Bultmann, you cannot deny that he faced up to a serious question here, and one which we dare not continue to sidestep.

In my opinion we do not get much help from left or right on this matter. Both the radicals and the fundamentalists are heavy handed. They both pick up the whole package—demons, atone-

ment, near parousia, miracles, recent creation, etc.—and either throw it out or try to stuff it down people's throats. Neither of them try very hard to help us *understand* the gospel. Bultmann gives the honest seeker another message altogether, while the fundamentalist chokes that inquirer half to death. There has to be a better solution!

The answer comes through seeing that hermeneutics involves a *two-step* process. First, you want to ascertain profoundly what the text really means in its language and context; and second, you want to consider what the modern hearers are going to pick up when you explain that to them. In other words, hermeneutics is like *good translation*—the skilful rendering of an original communication into contemporary speech and idiom. It is not so much a technique to master, as it is a skill to perfect, like downhill skiing or painting or swimming. The translation (*not* transformation) ought to be dynamic (*not* boring) and equivalent (*not* a replacement). Let's see how it can work.

The gospel talks about the death of Jesus, how he atoned for the sins of the world by sacrificing himself. Now here is a strange idea to humans in the secular tribe (a small but important group found mainly in the West). First of all we have to make known the rich thinking underlying the biblical material (see Leon Morris). After all, these people do not know everything important. Re-education is always part of our job. Second, we have to think of creative ways to show how meaningful this category is (Gilkey is good at doing this for what he believes—problem is, his list of beliefs is lamentably short). One line exploited in the past century is the idea that forgiveness is often costly to the one who forgives (see Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*). In this way we keep the biblical truth (vs. Bultmann) and render it in a creative manner (vs. the fundamentalist). Our high doctrine of Scripture functions to keep us hopeful that this will always work even if it is difficult. The liberals give up too soon because for them the Bible is just human tradition anyway. When they hit an awkward notion they despair and miss the joyful results that come after a little struggle with the text.

The hermeneutical two-step applies to all doctrines more or less in the same manner. We must avoid hopping about on one leg. Take the resurrection of Jesus for example. Certainly this is an odd idea to a modern person on campus. What you do is to start by learning what the resurrection meant to the early Christians who proclaimed it so enthusiastically. Look at George Ladd's *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, and you will see how it signified the vindication of Jesus' pre-Easter claims and signalled the redemption of the entire cosmos. Then you step into the twentieth century and take note of the importance both these notions have today. They answer two important questions: how can the claim of Jesus be verified? and is there hope for the world? As Pannenberg notes, the resurrection speaks rather powerfully to them both. Modern secular men and women have nothing to compare with it.

To mention another tricky topic, take belief in Satan and his cohorts. Now there is a hard one, much complicated by the superstitious ideas and imagery that have gotten tied up with the subject. But the solution is the same. Go back to the Scriptures and rediscover what biblical demonology really is, and then think about how the present historical situation reveals a bondage to evil very much like what the New Testament describes. J. Kallas, H. Berkhof, and J. Yoder are good authors to help you make the translation. It turns out that belief in Satan is not so silly after all, and can even be seen to be an essential element in any realistic social analysis. Just do not sell the Bible short or sacrifice it to modernity. Hang in there until the correlation comes through for you. Our confidence in the Bible as evangelicals is the guarantee that it will.

But what about the so-called failure of the Parousia? Is is not true that Jesus and Paul expected the second coming, and that it failed to materialise? How can we translate that? First by correcting the false assumption about the Bible: it becomes pretty obvious when you look at the prophetic corpus that God's spokespeople always associated ultimate events with penultimate ones. Nearness was always their appeal. They were not interested in events thousands of years distant. Nor did God give an awareness of such time gaps. What they knew was that the present time was a time of decision and that ultimate issues were hanging on it. Beyond that they knew that one day (not known to them) God would bring the curtain down on history. We need not be impressed either by hand-wringing demythologisers or slick date setters. There is a basis for neither approach. What we have to do is live in such a way that when the Lord comes (as he surely will, praise God) we are ready to greet him, and conduct ourselves in such a way that others sense the glint of hope in this time of abandonment. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Bultmann also proposed that we get rid of belief in the Spirit, at least in the sense of an active power in the church doing wonders and giving gifts. I doubt if many of us are even tempted to go along with him here. The biblical doctrine of the Spirit is so rich (see George Montague and James Dunn), and the current experience of his ministries so widespread today that the whole idea of demythologising it seems absurd. In this case, at least, our hermeneutical task would seem to be easy. If anything, it only causes us to marvel at the bankruptcy of the academic theology which is so out of touch with the Lord and his people as to suggest there was even a problem here. It is also ironical that a theology that calls itself "existential" and which talks boldly about the "act of God in the Christ event" should cut the ground from under itself by doubting the viability of the doctrine of the Spirit, who alone can make happen what they only talk about.

The hermeneutical two-step applies across the board. The Bible speaks plainly (though not simply) to the problem of poverty, and how God's people should take it to be a concern of theirs. It speaks about the use and abuse of power and of the struggle going on in history between the powers of the kingdom and the powers of this fallen order. *Sojourners* would be an obvious example of evangelicals striving to obey what they see as the implications of these texts. But even on the other side of the political spectrum, in such alternatives as the Moral Majority or the Reformed efforts for a just society, other believers are wrestling with the Scriptures and striving to elicit their meaning for our time. It will require a profound acquaintance with the Bible, a thoughtful analysis of the current situation, and a prayerful dependence on the Lord for guidance.

Occasionally there are items in the Bible which do not need to be brought forward. Many things were said to Israel to enable their life as a covenant people of God in Palestine which do not apply to us as Gentile believers today. Even when these writings have been set aside by the gospel, however, the wisdom latent in them can often be put to new uses once we take the time to dig it out. I do not personally think that Jesus meant for us to wash each other's feet perpetually in order to show how we care for each other, when such caring can be shown in other ways as well. On the other hand, let us take care to substitute other such signs, and not just to drop this one, leaving an empty space. Let us bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Similarly, consider the veils Paul advised married women to wear at Corinth. It would seem that his point, which had to do with sustaining the important creation ordinance of marriage, could be adhered to by some other sign such as a wedding ring. Whenever we decide to set the text aside in some particular like this, we ought always to be sure that the Bible justifies it by means of the actual context or some incontrovertable general principle. If

in doubt, observe. For example, to me the arguments that God approves of homosexual behavior are specious and Scripture twisting, and therefore we ought to regard it as displeasing to him. In this case the first step of hermeneutics prevents us from adopting the current permissiveness in this matter. In the end, of course, such things are not decided by some scholar, but by the whole community who lives with the Scriptures and with these questions and eventually arrives at a consensus or *modus vivendi.*

In conclusion, my advice is to observe both steps in the hermeneutical two-step. Be sure to give the Bible its full due as the written Word of God. Do not sell it short. Do not despair over the text just because some professor of yours has. Reserve your judgment and strive to see the issue through to a resolution. For we live in the hermeneutical hope that what the Bible says will prove to be the very Word which modern men and women need to hear even if at present they may resist hearing it. Our job is to let the Bible stand tall and do our utmost to understand the contemporary experiences so as to explain the claim of God in the most lucid way possible. Often we will find an interpretive breakthrough with God's help which will loose the Scriptures powerfully into the current situation. But if it should happen that they will not hear the Word whatever we do to explain it, let us stand strong in it and not yield an inch to unbelief. Like Ezekiel let us sit where they sit and help them understand, but if they refuse, the message must be given, and it remains the same.

### For Further Reading

To get some help with the "new hermeneutic" consult A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Eerdmans), even though the book is dense and lacks sufficient positive directness. Thiselton is promising more of these in a forthcoming book.

For a guided tour through some of the difficult interpretive issues such as sex-roles and inspiration, check Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse, Biblical Authority in Practice* (John Knox).

David Kelsey makes us think twice about the question, "what kind of authority does the Bible have over us?" in *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Fortress). He ends up sounding too relativistic for me, giving the impression that the Bible can mean more or less what you decide and want it to mean, but at least he forces us to think about that and not take it for granted. My own view is that the Bible has that authority which it indicates it wants to have when you expound it. It differs from Psalms to Isaiah to Acts to Romans. The Bible exercises authority in many modes—but not according to *our* decision.

*Politics of Jesus*, by John Yoder (Eerdmans) illustrates a creative use of Scripture, whether he is right or not. He goes back to the text and brings it right into the present in a powerful move. The problem with the actual view he presents is that for many readers of the whole Bible it will set up difficulties of interpretation once you stray too far from the Sermon on the Mount, which Yoder gives a radical anabaptist reading.

**STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS NEEDED**

Each year TSF accepts applications from students wishing to serve as Contributors to *TSF Bulletin.* For 1982-83, the job description includes (1) contributing to the editorial content of the *Bulletin* by filling out brief evaluative questionnaires on each issue, and (2) submitting at least one book review as arranged in cooperation with an Associate Editor.

Letters of application must include current degree program, area of concentration, a sample of your writing, and summer and fall addresses. All applications should be received by June 15, 1982. Send them to the Editor, *TSF Bulletin*, 233 Langdon, Madison, WI 53703.

## HERMENEUTICS AND HISTORY

**By Vaughn Baker, M.Div. student, Perkins School of Theology.**

In his book, *History and Hermeneutics* (Westminster, 1966), Carl Braaten reviews the debate in Protestant theology concerning the importance of history for faith. After discussing the role that nineteenth-century "questers" such as D. F. Strauss, dialectical theologians such as Barth, existentialist theologians such as Bultmann, and post-Bultmannians such as Ebeling, Fuchs, and Kasemann have all played in this debate, Braaten concludes along with Wolfhart Pannenberg that "the historical character of redemptive events must therefore be asserted today in discussion with the theology of existence, with the theology of redemptive history, and with the methodological principles of critical-historical investigation" (p. 28). Braaten calls for theology to find its locus once again in history, and not merely in an existential or transcendent history.

Carl Braaten notes that since the nineteenth century, hermeneutics has assumed a positivistic world-view in the historical-critical method. Such a method assumes a natural continuum and uniformity of events (Hume). The historical method also assumes that history consists of two layers: bare historical facts and their existential meanings (*Historie* and *Geschichte*). These two layers are separate and non-interdependent. The result of theology having accepted these historical assumptions is that history is seen as meaningless, and therefore theology must retreat into the safe harbors of existence or pre-history. The problem of such a retreat, however, is that the kerygma is divorced from history. Theology as a result becomes indifferent

***Braaten rightly chooses to throw off the shackles of nineteenth-century positivism***

to historical questions. Braaten believes that such a divorce of kerygma from history (or facts from meaning) is fatal for the following reaons: (1) The full meaning of the Incarnation implies that revelation is history happening. A separation of kerygma from history would contradict the meaning of the Incarnation. (2) An adequate apologetic must refer to the historical events from which the statements of faith arose, otherwise the truthfulness of the Christian faith would be in doubt. (3) Such an indifference to history does not do justice to the Old and New Testaments which purport to be witnesses to God's redemptive acts in history. (4) A merely existential interpretation is too limiting a principle. Both Testaments are concerned with more than one's self-understanding. (5) Event and its meaning are indissoluable. Meaning and interpretation are themselves historical, and therefore events and their significance are but two dimensions of the same historical reality. (6) A separation of event and meaning reduces eschatology to something either transcendental or radically existentialized. To view history as a uniformity of natural causes results in an eschatology which does not focus on the future, denying the possibility of something really new happening.

Does this mean, therefore, that we should reject the historical-critical method and return to a pre-critical understanding of history, existence, and the cosmos? By no means, says Braaten. While he maintains that kerygma and history are bound up with each other, and that a dichotomy between the two cannot be maintained, Braaten agrees with both Pannen-

berg and Moltmann that the historical-critical method is not necessarily bound to a closed naturalistic world view, and must be liberated from it. This is necessary, lest we end up with an existential (individualized and interiorized) historicism.

If history is not to be understood in a positivistic sense, and faith not merely as an existential act of decision which is in no way dependent upon history, how then are we to understand faith's relation to history? Again Braaten returns to Pannenberg, who proposes a theology of world history (*Universalgeschichte*) as a solution to the hermeneutical problem. Such a theology would seek to find "an over-arching perspective that can bring the horizons of the past and present together without obliterating their distinctive characteristics" (p. 145). The historical process which includes (and unifies) Old and New Testament history, church history, and world history is regarded as the work of the biblical God. Therefore, theology has the task of seeing the connection between the acts of God recorded in Scripture, and the events of world and church history. History is therefore no longer meaningless, but becomes the arena and locus of God's unfolding plan for the world. History is no longer bifurcated, but is seen in its totality as a whole from the perspective of the end of history (Hegel), i.e., Jesus of Nazareth. History is now understood in the light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Moltmann), and as a result history's future glows with the anticipation of God doing a new thing in history (as opposed to uniformitarianism). Eschatology regains its rightful place, eagerly awaiting the coming of God's Kingdom on this earth. Eschatology is not reduced merely to Epiphany, but is understood in the biblical framework of promise and fulfillment.

Braaten's volume is helpful as a quick survey of where theology has gone in the last hundred years, and provides a new perspective from which the hermeneutical issues of modern Protestantism may be seen and discussed. Braaten's critique of Bultmann's existentialist method of interpretation helps show its limitedness and inadequacy to explicate the breadth of the whole biblical message. Helpful also is Braaten's criticism of modern theology's separation of kerygma from history. Such a dualism sounds reminiscent of ancient dualistic thought (cf. Moltmann's allusion to gnosticism in the *Theology of Hope*, p. 92). By employing Pannenberg's theology of world history, Braaten avoids such a dualism. Also the Old Testament is restored to its proper place along with the New in the scheme of promise and fulfillment. Perhaps most importantly of all, Braaten seeks to take the future seriously as the place where God will do a new thing. A transcendent eschatology is no eschatology, and an existentialized interpretation is too limiting and individualistic. Braaten rightly chooses to throw off the shackles of nineteenth-century positivism and allow the present and the future of history to be understood in the light of Jesus' resurrection. For those who were raised on dialectical and existential theology, but want to dive into the waters of the hope school, this volume is a good springboard.

Since the time that *History and Hermeneutics* was published, a number of other works have come out which develop to a greater extent the issues raised in Braaten's volume. One of these works is: *New Frontiers In Theology Volume III: Theology As History*, edited by James M. Robinson & John B. Cobb, Jr. (Harper & Row, 1967). This volume provides a provocative study of that school of thought which finds its center in Wolfhart Pannenberg and his thesis that any relevant theology must develop from an assumption of the ultimate revelation of God through history. Another work along these lines is one edited by Pannenberg himself, entitled *Revelation As History*, (MacMillan, 1968). In this volume one should pay particular attention to Pannenberg's own chapter, "Dogmatic Theses On The Doctrine of Revelation," in which he explains his understanding of history (pp. 125–158). Also, in Pannenberg's *Basic Questions in Theology Vol. II* (Fortress, 1971) the chapter on "What Is Truth?" (pp. 1–27) provides some helpful insights in his proleptic view of history. One last work of Pannenberg's that I would note is his article "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in *History and Hermeneutic*, Robert W. Funk, ed., (Harper & Row, 1967).

For those who wish to go even further in this school of thought I would recommend two more references, both by Jurgen Moltmann: *Theology of Hope* (Harper & Row, 1967), and *Hope and Planning* (Harper & Row, 1971). In the latter please note chapter three, "Exegesis and the Eschatology of History" (p. 56–98).

Finally, Anthony Thiselton's *The Two Horizons* (Eerdmans, 1980) is the most comprehensive work on hermeneutics in recent years. Section III, on "Hermeneutics and History: The Issue of Historical Distance" includes comments on Nineham, Lessing, Hereder, Hegel, Ranke, Troeltsch, and Pannenberg.

### WOMEN AND THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION

The Evangelical Women's Caucus will hold its fifth plenary conference in Seattle, July 21–24, 1982. Plenary meetings, workshops, seminars, and small-group sessions will provide a variety of opportunities for conference participants to explore aspects of biblical feminism. Session leaders include Patricia Gundry, Roberta Hestenes, David Scholer, and Nancy Hardesty. During the conference, Linda Mercadante, Nancy Hardesty and Mark Lau Branson will also lead an informal roundtable discussion about issues facing women in seminary. The EWC has as its purpose to present God's teaching in Scripture on female-male equality to the whole body of Christ's church, and to call both women and men to mutual submission and active discipleship. Those who would like more information about this conference should write: Evangelical Women's Caucus, Helen Estep, Registrar, P.O. Box 31613, Seattle, WA 98103.

### EUROPEAN THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS' CONFERENCE

The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students will sponsor this conference, to be held September 1–8, 1982 at Schloss Mittersill in Austria. The conference aim is to establish a deeper understanding of evangelical theology and to stimulate closer fellowship among theology students from the countries of Europe. The main speakers at the conference will be Dick France (England), who will speak on "Jesus' use of Scripture and our use of Scripture;" and Peter Kuzmic (Yugoslavia), who will do Bible exposition related to the conference theme, "The Word of the Lord and the Lord of the Word." The registration deadline is June 30, 1982. For more information, write IFES, 10 College Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1BE, England.

### SAN FRANCISCO INSTITUTE ON URBAN MISSIONS

Simpson College in San Francisco has developed its Summer Institute for Urban Missions in response to the fact of rapid worldwide urbanization. The Institute will provide intensive cross-cultural/urban training that is biblically based and interdisciplinary. Course credit should transfer to most colleges and seminaries under any one of several disciplines. Eleven courses are offered in two sessions, June 7–July 1 and July 6–30, 1982. Course topics include urban family and youth ministries, urban church planting and growth, and urban social problems. Faculty include Craig Ellison, Donald Buteyn, Bennie Goodwin, and John Perkins. For more information write Summer Institute for Urban Missions, Simpson College, 801 Silver Ave., San Francisco, CA 94134.