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KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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PRESERVING GOD'S CREATION THREE LECTURES ON THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS

Editorial Note

We publish here the first of three lectures given by Professor Zizioulas at King's College, London, on January 16, 23 and 24, 1989. We hope to publish the other two in future editions of the journal. We are printing them as they were given, without revision, and not in the final form in which their author may eventually wish to develop them.

LECTURE ONE

INTRODUCTION

The subject of these lectures has to do with one of the most pressing and critical issues of our time. It is becoming increasingly evident that what has been named "the ecological crisis" is perhaps the number one problem facing the world-wide human community of our time. Unlike other problems this one is marked by the characteristic that it is a *global* problem, concerning all human beings regardless of the part of the world or the social class to which they belong, and that it is a problem that has to do not simply with the well-being but with the *very being* of humanity and perhaps of creation as a whole. It is, indeed, difficult to find any aspect of what we call "evil" or "sin" that would bear such an all-embracing and devastating power as the ecological evil. This way of describing the ecological problem may still sound to some ears as a gross exaggeration, and yet there are hardly any serious and responsible scientists and politicians today who would not agree with it. One has simply to look at the New Year issue of *Time* magazine in order to get a taste of the seriousness with which leading scientists from all quarters of the scientific world warn us about the situation. If we follow the present course of events, the prediction of the apocalyptic end of life on our planet at least is not a matter of prophecy but of sheer inevitability.

In view of this situation what does theology have to offer to humanity? The first obvious thing to be mentioned is that theology cannot and should not remain silent on an issue like this. If faith is about ultimate things, about life and death issues, this particular problem certainly falls within that category. Christian theology and the Church can hardly be excused for staying silent for such a long time on this matter. Particularly since, and not without good reason, they have both been accused of having something to do with the roots of the ecological problem. They, Church and theology, have to speak on this matter not so much in order to apologize and offer explanations in view of such accusations, but in order to offer their constructive contribution to the solution of the problem. For they must have something constructive to say on a matter like this. Otherwise they risk being irrelevant and unable to live up to their own claim to the Truth. For a truth which does not offer life is empty of all meaning.

If we try to identify the direction in which our Western societies are going regarding possible solutions to the ecological problem, we shall immediately realize that all our hopes seem to be placed in *ethics*. Whether enforced by State legislation or taught and instructed by Churches, academic institutions, etc., it is ethics that seems to contain the hopes of humankind in the present situation. If only we could behave better! If only we could use less energy! If only we could agree to lower a bit our standards of living! If, if. . . But ethics, whether enforced or free, presupposes other, more deeply existential motivations in order to function. People do not give up their standards of living because such a thing is "rational" or "moral". By appealing to human reason we do not necessarily make people better, while moral rules, especially after their dissociation from religious beliefs, prove to be more and more meaningless and unpleasant to modern man.

The experience of two world wars and their destructive consequences in our century came as a blow to the optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century prophets of the Enlightenment who thought that the way things were going, with the cultivation of reason and the spread of knowledge, the twentieth century would be the era of human paradise. Humanity does not always behave rationally and cannot be made to behave so either by force or by persuasion. There are other forces, besides the human intellect, that decide the direction in which the fate of the world moves. Theology and the Church ought to embrace areas other than the ethical – that is, the rational prescription of behaviour – if they are to be of any use in this case. Such areas must include all that in the pre-Enlightenment world used to belong to the mythological, the imaginative, the Sacred. We did our best in the post-Enlightenment world to destroy the mythological, to leave the non-rational to the *Belles Lettres*, which we separated sharply from hard thinking philosophy, and we thus destroyed "world-view" (the accent on *world*), the understanding of the world in which we live as a mysterious, sacred reality broader than the human mind can grasp or contain, a "cosmic liturgy" as the seventh century Greek Father St Maximus the Confessor would describe the world.

Of course, the fear of Paganism and all that it implies can justify a great deal of the attitude that led to sheer rationalism. But there could be, as indeed there have been, other responses to this fear than the total dichotomy between nature and history, the sacred and the profane, reason and myth, art and philosophy, etc., which have marked our modern way of thinking in the West. Certainly the Church and theology ought to have found better ways to respond to such a fear than the way of separating the rational from the mythical, the sacred from the secular. For they are, after all, claiming that faith in Christ implies a unity between the transcendent and the immanent, and an *anakephalaiosis* of all in the Person of Christ. Appealing, therefore, only to the ethical solution, as so many Christians seem to do today, would only reinforce the reasons that led to the ecological crisis in the first place. If we try to solve the ecological problem by introducing new ethical values or re-arranging the scale of the traditional ones, I fear that we shall not go very far in reaching a solution.

In the course of these lectures I shall try to show why I think we stand in need of a new culture in which the *liturgical dimension* would occupy the central place, and perhaps determine the ethical principle. If I were to give an overall title to this effort, a key notion for what I shall be trying to say to you here, this would probably be that of *Man as the Priest of Creation*. I used this expression in Patmos last summer in the context of the International Environmental Conference that took place there in connection with the 900th anniversary of the founding of the Monastery of St John, the author of the Book of Revelation. I feel that our culture stands in need of a revival of the consciousness that the superiority of the human being as compared with the rest of creation consists not in the reason it possesses but in its ability to *relate* in such a way as to create events of communion whereby individual beings are liberated from their self-centredness and thus from their limitations, and are referred to something greater than themselves, to a “beyond” – to God, if one wishes to use this traditional terminology. This man can do, not as a thinking agent but as a *person* – a notion that needs to be defined further in the course of these lectures. The notion of “priesthood” must be freed from its pejorative connotations and be seen as carrying with it the characteristic of “offering”, in the sense of opening up particular beings to a transcending relatedness with the “other” – an idea more or less corresponding to that of *love* in its deepest sense. In all this the underlying assumption is that there exists an interdependence between Man and Nature, and that the human being is not fulfilled until it becomes the *anakephalatosis*, the summing up of nature. Thus, Man and Nature do not stand in opposition to each other, in antagonism, but in positive relatedness. This cannot be achieved in any other way except through liturgical action, because it is only through such action that Nature is involved itself in the very event of this positive relatedness. Man has to become a liturgical being before he can hope to overcome his ecological crisis.

But before we come to an analysis of this thesis, we must become aware of the factors that have led to the present crisis and of the tools that history offers us towards its overcoming. A quick look at history is, therefore, our immediate task in these lectures.

I. A Glance at History: A. The First Centuries

The American historian Lynn White writing about the historical roots of the ecological problem in 1968 was quite categorical in attributing this problem to the Western intellectual tradition with its rationalistic view of man, and in assigning to theology and the Church an important role in this development. Regardless of the extent to which one agrees or disagrees with this judgement of a contemporary historian, it can hardly be disputed by anyone that history must have something to teach us about the roots of the present crisis and that religion, and Christianity in particular, being a dominant force in the shaping of our culture throughout the centuries – at least up to the Enlightenment – must have had some role to play in the background of this crisis. It will be necessary, therefore, to go back to the earliest stages of Christian history and to try to identify the forces that may have led to the subsequent developments up to our time.

If we accept the view that classical Christianity took shape in the context and perhaps under the influence of two cultures, the one dominated by the Hebrew or Semitic and the other by the Hellenic way of thinking, it would be instructive to try to see in what ways these two cultures conceived man's relationship to nature, and the place that God occupied in this relationship.

With regard to Hebrew and Jewish culture which formed the original milieu of Christianity, historians on the whole agree that the Hebrew mind tended to attach decisive importance to *history* (the history of the elect people of God in particular) and to see God as revealing Himself mainly in and through His acts in history. Nature played a secondary role in this revelation, and very often such a role was totally denied to it under the influence of an obsession with the fear of paganism that threatened the specific identity of the people of Israel.

This preoccupation with history rather than nature resulted in the development of prophetism at the expense of cosmology in Hebrew culture. Prophetism looked at the events marking the history of Israel, of other peoples – the “nations” – and often of individuals, and was concerned with the final outcome of these events. God was expected to reveal Himself in the final event that would supersede and at the same time give meaning to the previous events, and this final event – the *eschaton* as it came to be called in the Greek speaking Jewish communities of the New Testament period – would be all that mattered to the Hebrew mind.

Greek culture, on the other hand, attached little significance to history. In fact very soon in the circles of philosophers and scientists of classical Greece history was even looked upon with distrust and suspicion as the realm of change, flux and disorder. Nature offered to the Greek the sense of security he needed, through the regular movement of the stars, the cyclical repetition of the seasons, and the beauty and harmony which the balanced and moderate climate of Attica (at *that* time) offered. Cosmology was the main concern of the Greek philosophers who saw God present and operating in and through its laws of cyclical movement and natural reproduction. Even minds as cultivated and as reflective theologically as Aristotle could not avoid worshipping the stars, while Plato, the theologian *par excellence* of classical Greece, could reach no further than a creator God who would be an artist creating a universe in accordance with pre-existing matter, space and ideas.

This comparison between Hebrew and Greek attitudes to nature, allowing of course for all qualifications necessary to a generalized presentation of things such as the present one, implies, among other things, two points that are of immediate interest to our subject.

(a) The Hebrew mind seems to lack cosmological interest, while the Greek lacks prophetism. If Christianity were to make use of both Hebrew and Greek cultures it ought somehow to arrive at what may be called “cosmological prophecy”. It is this that I believe we find for the first time in the book of Revelation in which a Christian prophet following the best of typical Hebrew tradition rises above history and views the fate not of

Israel alone but of *creation*, i.e. of the *natural world*, from the angle of eschatology, of God's final act in history. Cosmological prophecy is thus seen as a new type of prophecy, and this marks the beginning of a new approach to Man's relationship with nature, which the Church would pick up and develop further later on.

(b) The comparison between these two cultures that lie at the root of classical Christianity reveals that whereas for the Greek the world was a reality which contained in itself sufficient energy to live for ever – hence the understanding of the universe as eternal – for the Hebrew the world was itself an *event*, a gift, that ought to be constantly referred back to its Creator in order to live. At this point the Early Church had to combine a world-view that trusted nature for what it was – i.e. believed in its rationality, in its *logos* or *logoi* – and one that regarded it as a *gift* and an *event*, constantly dependent upon its Creator and Giver. It is out of this combination that early Christianity developed its “Eucharistic cosmology”, which like cosmological prophecy took a view of the world as *finite* and subject to its limitations in its nature, nevertheless as trustworthy and capable of survival in and through its being referred back to its Creator. Thus, in a typically Greek fashion the world would be conceived as good and beautiful and would occupy a central place in man's consciousness, but its beauty and permanency and centrality in man's preoccupation would constantly depend on an event of reference back to what is not the world or nature, that is, to God. Thus, the earliest eucharistic prayers of the Church being composed in the best of typically Hebrew liturgical tradition, would involve a blessing over the fruits of the earth, but this would be done in such a way as to involve also an affirmation of faith in the survival of Creation and nature, as if this survival – and not simply the survival of a people or of the human being – were central in the Church's consciousness.

To sum up this point, both cosmological prophecy and eucharistic cosmology, which emerged out of the encounter between Hebrew and Hellenic thought on Christian soil, involved the view that the world is an *event* and not a self-explainable process, but that owing to another *event*, namely its being referred to the eternal and unperishable Creator, it can be said to *be* permanent and to survive. It is at this point that the responsibility of Man as the one who refers the world back to the Creator arises and forms the basis of what we have called here his capacity to be the “Priest of Creation”.

But we shall discuss this point later on in the course of our lectures. At the moment let us continue with our brief look at history.

What we have said so far shows that in primitive Christianity cosmology and interest in nature occupied a central place in the Church's consciousness, but this was done without falling into Paganism, owing to the fact that the reality or nature of the world had to be conditioned by an *event* – the event of referring the world to God. Thus, whereas in paganism faith in the survival of the world emerges from faith in the world's eternal and inevitable self-perpetuation, in Christian cosmology the world is contingent and contains in itself no guarantee of survival except in so far as it is in communion with *what*

is not world by nature – not with what is part of nature – namely God as understood in the Bible. The crucial point therefore, in the survival of the world lies in the act or the event of its communion with God as totally other than the world. Man's responsibility becomes in this way crucial for the survival of nature.

II. A Glance at History: B. The Middle Ages

All this describes the situation with regard to the first two or three centuries of the Christian era. Things, however, seem to change gradually, and the Church is eventually led to a seriously modified consciousness with regard to the relationship between Man and Nature. Very briefly the decisive steps in this development can be described in the following way.

1. A strong influence of Platonic and Gnostic dualism in the second and third centuries had the result of undermining the importance of the material world and regarding it at best as irrelevant and at worst as evil. The Christian Gnostics of Alexandria, above all the extremely influential Origen, represent classical examples of this development. Origen in particular who was widely read by the monks of Egypt influenced a considerable part of Eastern Monasticism which was fortunately rescued from this influence by monastic forces such as that of, Macarius of Egypt and St Maximus the Confessor.

2. In the West similar developments tended to introduce a dichotomy between Man and Nature by regarding the former as superior to the latter, and as the centre of everything. Typical examples of this development are to be found in St Augustine and Boethius, who defined the human being, or even the divine being, in terms of reason and intellect, and introduced consciousness and introspectiveness as the supreme aspects of human and indeed divine existence. Thus the human being was singled out from nature as being not only a higher kind of being but in fact the sole being that mattered eternally – apart of course from the angels who, owing to their spiritual and immaterial existence, were of an even higher value than the human souls. The kingdom of God in St Augustine's vision of the last things has no place for nature; it consists of the survival of spiritual beings, of the eternal souls. The Church was gradually losing consciousness of the importance and eternal value of the material creation, and this was particularly evident in the way it treated the sacraments and the Eucharist in particular: instead of being a blessing over the material world, the fruits of nature, and a reference of it with gratitude and dedication to the Creator, the Eucharist soon became primarily a memorial service of the sacrifice of Christ and a means of grace for the nourishment of the *soul*. The dimension of the cosmos soon disappeared from sacramental theology in the West giving its place to a soul- or spirit-centred world-view.

3. The Middle Ages and the Reformation did little to change this situation having in fact reinforced through Scholasticism the idea that the *imago Dei* consists in the *reason* of man. The sacraments still remained to a large extent in the West irrelevant to the material world, and the gap between Man and Nature widened even further. Descartes following the Augustinian tradition made the

thinking subject the centre of everything (“cogito ergo sum”), while the Enlightenment strengthened even further the view that the thinking rational being is all that matters in existence. Romanticism, while paying attention to nature, reinforced the dichotomy between the thinking, conscious subject and the non-thinking, non-conscious nature, clearly giving superiority to the former and allowing the latter to be of value only in so far as it contained in itself the presence of the former. Pietism, mysticism and other religious and theological movements still operated without any reference to nature, while Puritanism and mainstream Calvinism exploited to the utmost degree the Genesis verse urging man to “multiply and to dominate the earth”, thus giving rise to capitalism and eventually to technology and to our present-day civilization.

III. A Glance at History: C. Modern Times

To this man-centred and reason-dominated world-view, to which Christian theology has contributed the main factor, our modern Western world managed to produce two intellectual forces that acted as anti-bodies, both however outside the area of theology and the Church, which even remained for the greatest part hostile to these forces.

1. The first of them was *Darwinism*. A blessing in disguise as we might call it, Darwinism pointed out that the human being is by no means the only intelligent being in creation – a blow to the Scholastic view that the image of God in man is his reason and intellect – and that consciousness, even self-consciousness, is to be found in animals, too, the difference between them and Man being one of *degree* not of *kind*. Thus, Man was thrown back to his organic place in nature, and the question remained open as to what constitutes his difference from the animals, given now the fact that reason is no longer the *special* difference. The Church by defending on the whole its reason-centred culture failed to respond constructively to the challenge of Darwinism and preferred either to enter into antagonistic battle with it, or to succumb to it, by accepting its downward looking anthropology and refusing to seek in areas other than reason the difference of the human being. But Darwinism by having virtually won the science of biology for itself is still there, and theology has to make the best use of it – both positively and negatively – not least for the sake of overcoming the ecological crisis.

2. The second set of anti-bodies to this inherited man-centred and reason dominated culture of ours came in modern times from the area of natural philosophy through *Einstein* and the subsequent schools of modern quantum-physics. Here the blow was of a different and perhaps deeper kind. In the first instance it signified the end of the dichotomy between *nature* or substance and *event*. Everything that *is* at the same time *happens*, space and time coinciding one with the other. The world itself is an event, and cannot be conceived apart from an *act*, one might say a ritual, that takes place all the time. In addition, we have the blow on the subject-object structure dealt by quantum-mechanics. The observer and the observed form an unbreakable unity, the one influencing the other. The universe in its remotest parts is present in every single part of it. Even what is called by a

certain school of natural philosophy “the anthropic principle”, in spite of its anthropocentrism, cannot apply to a world-view in which Man can be isolated from the rest of the universe. Natural science as well as biology press hard on theology in our time demanding a review of our traditional theology. I believe that this pressure can be of decisive benefit to the Church in its attempt to face the ecological problem. This, however, presupposes a creative use of all the new developments in the areas of biological and natural sciences in connection with whatever Christian tradition can offer for the same purpose. Such elements from the Christian tradition can be drawn from the following areas of classical theology, especially from that of the Patristic era.

IV. Positive Elements From Tradition

1. From the liturgical experience of the ancient Church, the following elements must be underlined:

(a) All ancient liturgies, especially in the East, involve a sanctification of matter and of time. There is no introspective and self-conscious attitude of the human soul in the ancient liturgies, everything aimed at the involvement of the praying individual in an event of communion with the other members of the worshipping community and with the material context of the liturgy. Apart from the bread and wine, themselves parts of the material world, the ancient liturgies tried to involve all of man’s senses in the liturgical event: the eyes through the icons and the liturgical vestments; the ears through hymns and psalmody; the nose through the smell of incense, etc. In addition to that, the prayer for “seasonable weather, for the abundance of the fruit of the earth, etc.” places the liturgy right in the middle of creation.

(b) All ancient liturgies seem to be centred not so much on the consecration of the elements, even less so on a psychological anamnesis of the Cross of Christ, but on the *lifting up of the gifts of bread and wine to the Creator Father*, what is called in all the ancient Greek liturgies the *Anaphora* (= the lifting up). Liturgiologists today tend to stress this forgotten detail, which can be of particular significance for a theology of creation. For it attaches at least equal centrality – if not more – to Man’s act as the priest of creation as it does to God’s act of sending down the Holy Spirit to transform the offered Gifts into the body and the blood of Christ. This forgotten aspect was so central in the consciousness of the Early Church as to lend itself for identifying and naming the entire Eucharistic Service: in the ancient Church the service was called, not without significance, purely and simply *Anaphora* or *Eucharistia*, both terms having to do with Man’s priestly action as representative of creation.

In this connection it must be also underlined that all ancient Eucharistic liturgies began their eucharistic prayer or canon with thanksgiving for *creation* in the first place, and only afterwards for redemption through Christ. In certain cases, like that of the eucharistic liturgy commented upon by St Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Mystagogical Catecheses*, the thanksgiving for creation seems to be the only point

of the eucharistic canon with no mention at all of the sacrifice of Christ. Of course, this was not the norm, but it can serve as an illustration of how central the reference to creation was in the ancient liturgies. The priestly aspect of the Eucharist – and this is worth underlining – did not consist in the notion of sacrifice, as it came to be understood in the Middle Ages, but in that of *offering* back to God His own creation. It is a great pity, indeed, that sacrificial notions came to occupy the meaning of priesthood for centuries. It is a pity not so much because this gave rise to endless controversy between Roman Catholics and Protestants, preventing them from reaching a common mind on the Eucharist even today, but mainly because it has meant the loss of the dimension of creation from the notion of priesthood. It is important, therefore, to recover and restore this dimension for the purpose of facing the ecological problem.

2. A second area besides the eucharistic liturgy in which the ancient Church can help us recreate our theology today is that of *Asceticism*. Here things need some explanation, for asceticism has been normally associated with hostility or in the best of cases with contempt towards the material world. With the exception of certain trends in ancient monasticism that were under the direct influence of Origenism, asceticism was by no means associated with neglect or contempt of the material creation. In the earliest *Gerontikon* (collections of stories about monks and their sayings) we encounter stories of ascetics who wept over the death of birds or who lived in peace with wild animals. Even today on Mount Athos one can encounter monks who never kill serpents, but co-exist peacefully with them – something that would make even the best of Christians among us shiver and tremble.

Besides this respect for nature, it must be noted that it was in the circles of the desert theologians especially that the idea developed in the East that the “image of God” in Man is to be found also in his *body*, and not simply in his mind. Indeed, asceticism was accompanied in the Early Church by the breaking of one’s own selfish will so that the individual with his or her desires to dominate the external world and use it for their own satisfaction may learn not to make the individual the centre of creation. This is a spirit which is needed in order to teach modern man how to solve the ecological problem. But it should not be taken as part of an *ethical* education, for then it would lead nowhere. It can only be meaningful if, combined with the liturgical experience, it creates an *ethos* rather than a prescribed rule of behaviour, and it is in this sense that it can be useful to theology, which in turn can be helpful in facing the problem of our time.

One could add to the list of elements borrowed from tradition many others, such as the use of space and matter in architecture, the use of colour and shape in painting, of sound in music, etc. In general, it is, as I said at the beginning, a matter of *culture* which theology must aim at. But for the purposes of this first lecture, it may suffice to stop at this point. We have seen how history has contributed to the emergence of the ecological problem and how it can contribute to its solution. But history cannot be repeated and reconstituted intact. Nostalgic

voices of a return to Byzantine forms of art are abundant today among the Orthodox. We do not intend to offer here any support to such voices: our modern world has passed through changes that make a return to the past impossible, and therefore undesirable. Theology today must use the past with respect, for it has indeed managed to overcome paganism without falling into gnosticism, and it must try to learn from that. But it must try to adjust it to the present by creatively combining it with whatever our contemporary world has achieved or is trying to achieve in all areas of thought – science, art, philosophy, and the rest.

In the remaining two lectures we shall attempt to discuss in some depth the aspects of tradition that we believe can be of positive value in facing the ecological crisis today. We shall try to say something more about the idea of Man as the Priest of Creation, and about how this can affect our culture. We do not, of course, claim for a moment that the ecological crisis will be solved as soon as our lectures end. But we hope that these modest reflections may not be altogether irrelevant to the task facing theology in these critical times of ours.

A FAR-OFF GLEAM OF THE GOSPEL. SALVATION IN TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*

COLIN GUNTON

I. Three worlds of imagery

Some years ago, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was presented in dramatised form on the radio. In a preview of the production, two critics discussed what one of them called Tolkien's "flawed masterpiece". It was the reason given for the flaw which was of particular interest: what that great book lacks, one of them remarked, is a truly sacrificial death. There are, of course, deaths in the book, and, indeed, Gandalf goes through something like a death and resurrection in his fight with the Balrog. Whatever happens, and it seems that he does not die, there is a near death and a resulting transfiguration. The interesting point, however, is not in the book, but in the fact that the critic made that remark. Why did he believe that in a heroic study of this kind there is something lacking if there is no sacrificial death? He was not, so far as I could see, speaking as a Christian. In any case, it has to be remembered that Tolkien asks that we do not attempt to see the book as a kind of Christian allegory (p. 8). Yet in some way or other, in our modern society which is supposed to have left religion behind, here was an apparently secular critic arguing for the necessity of this very religious component in a story. That is the puzzle with which I want to begin this paper.

The Lord of the Rings may not be an overtly theological book, but it is certainly in a broad sense about salvation. It is about the winning back of Middle Earth from the powers of evil. In that respect, of course, a large proportion of our art and literature is about salvation: about achieving the good life on the good earth. And in much of that art and literature three themes recur with remarkable regularity: "salvation", or the creation of the conditions of a truly human life on earth, is understood with the help of a range of imagery coming from three main sources.

The first we have met already: it is the idea of sacrifice. Why have so many cultures had the practice of sacrifice? Why is it that in our language the word *sacrifice* continues to recur in many contexts, even though in so changed a meaning from the original? I want to suggest that it is because it appeals to something very deep in our human experience of life in the world. It has to do, at least in part, with pollution and its removal. When we have done something of which we are ashamed, we often feel dirty or unclean. And not only ourselves: we know that the world around takes on something of the pollution. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has suggested that many of our hygiene rituals are often more than merely hygienic. The rigour and fervour with which they are often performed suggests that they appeal to something deeper: to an almost religious feeling of uncleanness which must somehow or other be wiped away.²

As we know from some of their tragic dramas, the Greeks believed that certain evil acts brought pollution on the cities where their perpetrators lived. Oedipus' murder of his father and marriage to his widowed

mother, even though done – apparently – unawares, brought to his land a pollution which could not be cleansed until his guilt was admitted and required – by a kind of sacrifice. The fact that these plays, like those of Shakespeare, still speak so profoundly to us, suggests that we meet here something universal in the human condition. The ancient Israelites went deeper, in a realisation that the sense of uncleanness derived from the disruption of their relation with their God. God is holy, and cannot bear to look on iniquity. Therefore if the worshipper is to come before him, there must be a cleansing. The sacrificial system developed partly to meet that need. It is significant that in sacrifice there must be offered to God nothing that is unclean: nothing that shares in the pollutedness it is designed to cleanse. If the worshipper is truly to come to God, uncleanness must be purged by means of a gift that is free from all taint. Sacrifice, then, is a notion that sees salvation in terms of the removal of pollution. More positively, it is about coming to our maker in the fullness of our humanity: of living before God and each other with the pure heart that cannot be achieved unless God provides the means of its cleansing.

The second way of speaking about salvation uses a range of notions taken from the lawcourt. Here, at the centre is not uncleanness but ideas of right and wrong. Just as we sometimes feel unclean when we have erred, here we feel that we have broken the law or the moral code. In some modern circles, that would be thought to be an old-fashioned way of speaking. Are not moral codes simply conveniences, ways of ordering society, or, if the taste be Marxist, the way by which the ruling classes persuade the proletariat to remain submissive? I would like to argue for the contrary: that it is impossible to maintain a total cynicism about systems of rules and laws, because without structures of law and morality we are unable to be human. Of course, laws do become burdensome, and are sometimes used by oppressive rulers to maintain their own interest. But without some form of order, some structure, the human being cannot be free. To have the kind of absolute freedom that existentialists sometimes recommend is a recipe for both nervous and social breakdown.

Indeed, part of the problem of the modern world, with its pervasive and disastrous³ breakdown in belief in moral objectivity, is that the attempt has been made to live as if all values are centred in ourselves. Modern thinkers who urge shapeless, empty, freedom are in that respect at odds with the wisdom of the ages and the nature and needs of human community. What I have rashly called the wisdom of the ages is shown by the fact that almost all societies have believed that salvation has to do with living in harmony with the way that the universe is. It can be freely admitted that beliefs about what that is vary enormously, for that does not invalidate the main point: that the near universal experience of the human race is that the good life has something to do with living in the *right* way, and that our instinctive feelings of right and wrong are in some way related to that experience. To speak in such a way takes us some distance from direct appeal to legal metaphor and imagery, but that is because such direct appeal is not the chief concern of this paper. What is of interest in our context is the relation between conceptions of the kind of world we live in and our beliefs

about right and wrong. In what sense are our human actions and choices to do with reality, and reality understood in a wide sense? We shall see that this is one of the concerns underlying Tolkien's writing.

The third set of pictures comes from the battlefield. According to this tradition, the world is a great battleground between good and evil, light and darkness, and therefore life is a battle in which we take one side or the other. Just as there have been many conceptions of the way right and wrong are written into the structure of things, there have been many expressions and understandings of the battle. Sometimes it has been held that there are two powers, of almost equal strength, who wage an eternal battle in which the human race is in some way involved. But, whatever the differences, the central concern remains the same: to see the moral life as a real struggle against evil and salvation as a kind of victory of light over darkness.

Once again, the Christian tradition has a distinctive way of expressing the matter. According to it, there is a battle, God's battle, to be fought. But because it is a battle God has won and is going to win, Christian theology has a distinctive understanding of the nature of evil. The powers of evil have, theologically, two characteristics. First, they are really evil: evil is not merely in the mind as some philosophers have suggested, but is a force which enslaves the good creation. Evil is an essentially alien power which corrupts and destroys the work of God, and so has to be destroyed. Despite this – and this is the second point – evil is not as real or as powerful as the good. It is something that exists only by feeding upon the good, like a parasite. So, according to the old traditions, devils are fallen angels: the good corrupted.

In this tradition of thought, however, evil is less real than good because it is destined to be destroyed. The outcome is that, according to the gospel, the Christian life is a kind of battle, fought in the light of the victory that God has already won. "Take therefore the whole armour of God . . ."; "Our fight is against principalities and powers . . ." (Ephesians 6.11f). Whatever the writer means by that, we can see that he is drawing on a universal or near universal human experience of evil as a foe to be conquered. If, as sometimes happens, we feel today that money, technocracy and the weapons of war threaten to take control of civilisation, we can share something of that world of thought. It is a way of understanding the plight of our world, apart from salvation and the grace of God. I believe, also, that it is from this particular world of imagery that Tolkien takes his chief cue in his great story, but that at the same time he is able to draw freely also on the two other clusters of metaphors that we have identified.

II

One way of understanding *The Lord of the Rings* is as a telling of the tale of the struggle against the powers of darkness that is life on earth. It is not, as we have seen, an explicitly Christian work. Yet it can be argued that it is indeed concerned with the universal human condition, as, in a different way, is the Christian faith. Is there any basis for such a claim in the work of Tolkien as a whole? That question must first be faced if such a theological

treatment of Tolkien is not to appear a version of the allegorizing that he rejected. Two considerations in defence of a theological examination of *The Lord of the Rings* can be cited.

First there is evidence that Tolkien held a view that there are constant features to be found in human nature, constants that for him were reflected in the very existence and nature of language. T. A. Shippey refers to a remark of one of Tolkien's critics who was, he believes, somewhere close to the truth in "claiming that Tolkien was really interested in the eternal verities of human nature".⁴ Despite this, Shippey points out that one must be very careful in using such terms, in view of the fact that Tolkien worked not from ideas but from words (so that any systematic theologian using his work as the means to a theological end must be exceedingly way). Yet "isn't there something underneath the nets of custom that remains the same?" (p. 67). Shippey believes that there is, and traces through some of Tolkien's writing what he calls a continuum of greed. Numerous characters display, in different forms, a form of this vice so that, "the great corporate sin' (C. S. Lewis) of modernity must have had some ancient origin" (p. 68). That is to say, the shape that Tolkien's writing takes betrays at least awareness of some attempt at universality.

The second piece of evidence comes from Tolkien himself, and must again be used with caution in view of the essentially allusive way in which he speaks. In his paper "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien speaks of the artist's calling to be the creator of a "secondary world" which has its own truth and can at the same time throw light on the primary world in which we live. Or rather, and the choice of words is significant, the artist is not so much creator as *sub-creator*.⁵ Such a distinction is essentially theological in content, for it suggests a belief that there is only one to whom we can ascribe the act of creation. The human artist can operate only at a secondary, lower, level, by divine gift. Humphrey Carpenter includes the following in his report or reconstruction of the famous conversation of September 19, 1931 between Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and Hugo Dyson. They are discussing the claim of Owen Barfield that myths, though beautiful and moving, are lies:

No, said Tolkien. *They are not lies . . .*

Man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thoughts into lies, but he comes from God, and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals . . . Not merely the abstract thoughts of man *but also his imaginative inventions* must originate with God, and in consequence reflect something of eternal truth. In making a myth, in practising "mythopoeia" and peopling the world with elves and dragons and goblins, a story-teller . . . is actually fulfilling God's purpose, and reflecting a splintered fragment of the true light.⁶

Armed with such encouragement, but realising also its limits, I shall proceed to observe *The Lord of the Rings* through the eyes given by the gospel, and suggest all kinds of interesting parallels between the two.

The first – and most obvious – point is that the book is about a titanic struggle between the powers of good and

evil. On the one side are the forces of light: the free people, hobbits, those men who have not fallen into the thralldom of the Dark Lord and various other groups – groups that are often at odds with each other in the normal run of things. Over against these are the servants of Sauron, the Dark Lord, whose aim is to bring all into subjection to himself. The power of Sauron derives from the ring of power, which he forged long ago, but which has gone missing, found, apparently accidentally, by the hobbit Bilbo Baggins during an earlier quest. As the story opens, the powers of evil are regrouping, building up their strength after an earlier defeat. Their final victory depends upon the recovery of the ring: and that, as they are beginning to discover, is in the distant land of the Shire.

Frodo's quest is to destroy the power of the Dark Lord by taking the ring from the Shire and casting it down the furnace where it was forged, in the very heart of the enemy's domain. The way he goes about it is strongly marked by Christian notions. If we recall Jesus' temptation by the devil to worship him and gain power over all the cities of the world, we shall see the point of Frodo's behaviour. Again and again, actors in the drama are tempted to use the ring to overcome the Dark Lord. But Frodo, taught by Gandalf who, like him, has some of the marks of a Christ figure, realises that to use evil, even in the battle against evil, is to become enslaved by it. The Dark Lord might be overcome, but those who overcome him will in their turn be corrupted into playing the same role. The ring enslaves those who use it, even those who lust after it, as the tragedy of Boromir demonstrates. Similarly, Gollum, the wretched creature from whom Bilbo had first stolen the ring, is totally eaten up and destroyed by its evil power. Early in the story, it becomes evident that Bilbo himself has used the ring so much that without virtually being forced to do so by Gandalf, he could not give it up. It unaccountably finds its way from the mantelpiece where it was to be left for Frodo, not yet in its power, back into Bilbo's pocket, and there is a struggle of wills before he can be persuaded to give it up (pp. 45f). Thus at the very outset we are given indications of the dread power that the ring exerts upon all who come near it.

At the other end of the story, at the crack of doom where the ring is to be cast for its destruction, we find that Frodo has so long carried the hideous article that he has joined those in thrall to the ring and cannot voluntarily give it up. It is perhaps the most brilliant and sure touch of the author that he leaves it to the even more enslaved Gollum to bite the ring from Frodo's finger, and, falling into the inferno, to find for himself the rest of death and for the world release from the evil power. Here we see two themes that awake echoes from Christian thought. First, is the fact that, although the opportunity to kill Gollum had presented itself often enough, Frodo had refused to give in to what was little more than a desire for revenge, just as Jesus had resisted his own particular temptations. Had he succumbed, the outcome could not have been the same. And second, there is the fact pointed out by my colleague, Brian Horne, that here we have a kind of doctrine of providence. Gandalf has already predicted that Gollum may have his own positive contribution to make to the outcome of the story (p. 73). The fact that when Frodo, enslaved at the last, cannot free

himself of his obsession, it is the despised and wretched creature through whom release comes, is the work of a providence for whose working we have been prepared in previous stages of the story.

And there is something more to be said about the parallels between this aspect of the story and Christian theology. We noted before that evil is parasitic upon the good: it has an awful power, it corrupts and destroys, and yet has no true reality of its own. So it is with Tolkien's depiction of evil. The ring-wraiths represent some of the most horrifyingly evil agencies in literature. They are wraiths, only half real, but of a deadly and dreadful power. Their cries evoke despair – the incapacity to act – and terror in the forces of light. Their touch brings a dreadful coldness, like the coldness of Dante's hell. And yet they are finally insubstantial. When the ring is melted in the furnaces of Mount Doom, they "crackled, withered, and went out" (p. 982). Similarly, just as the devils of Christian mythology are fallen angels, so all the creatures of the dark Lord are hideous parodies of creatures from the true creation: goblins of elves, trolls of those splendid creatures, the ents, and so on (p. 507). Evil is the corruption of good, monstrous in power yet essentially parasitic.⁷

But the most marked parallel with Christian thought is to be found at the very heart of the story. *The Lord of the Rings* can best be seen as a telling of a tale of the battle of light against darkness, good against evil, which has interesting parallels to and borrowings from Christian theology. Like Jesus, Frodo goes into the heart of the enemy's realm in order to defeat him. And like him he is essentially weak and defenceless in worldly terms, but finally strong and invincible because he refuses to use the enemy's methods. The hobbits could almost be seen as childish or clownish figures but for the repeated references to their underlying physical and moral endurance. Their smallness and weakness become their strength, because the rulers of this age overlook them, so that the stone that was rejected becomes the head of the corner. Again and again we are reminded of biblical texts about the way the power of God works not through the great forces of history but through the cross. Too much must not be made of this, of course. But it seems to me that Tolkien's depiction of the war of good against evil has too many interesting parallels with the biblical story of Christ's victory on the cross to be ignored.

Nor should it be forgotten that there are aspects of the story that echo the two other ways of speaking of salvation also. Whatever the point made by the radio critic, there is an element of sacrifice. At the end of the story, it becomes clear that Frodo has worn himself out in the struggle, and departs, in a kind of death, across the waters from the Grey Havens. It is not a sacrificial death, but something very like it. He has worn himself out in the struggle with evil, and does not live to enjoy the new peace and contentment he has brought to the Shire. He is like Moses in seeing but not enjoying the promised land, for he is too worn to return to the old life. Similarly, if I am right in seeing a link between sacrifice and cleansing, it is to be noted that there is a chapter called "The Scouring of the Shire". The escaping forces of evil, represented by the wizard corrupted by greed and ambition, make their way to the Shire and pollute it,

destroying nature and introducing into the Shire pointless and filthy industries. Equally significant is the fact that wherever the servants of Sauron are to be found, there is pollution and decay. The orcs wantonly destroy trees. Like the renegade wizard, Saruman (p. 494), the orcs do not care for growing things, but delight in wanton destruction. In and near the land of Mordor, all is devastation and decay: it is a very abomination of desolation. The last part of Frodo's journey into Mordor is over a dead and dreary land, virtually empty of plant life and the water that maintains it in being. Where evil conquers, there is filth, devastation and death. Frodo's great sacrifice is to have taken the weight of that foulness upon him in order to cleanse the land for the return of life.

Again, if justice in the broader sense is about living in peace with the neighbour, each under vine and fig tree, we see also a concern for righteousness in Tolkien's vision of the scoured Shire. No doubt Tolkien's vision of life in the Shire owes something to idealised pictures of rural England, but that should not detract from the chief point. The hobbits are an idealised – and sometimes rather sentimentalised? – version of the meek who shall inherit the earth. They are not interested in world domination, or economic and technological development for its own sake. The great battle was fought to enable hobbits and men to live in peace in their homes; it was to provide the conditions for the development of community.⁸ Perhaps it is here that we can discern another central Christian influence on Tolkien's writing. At the heart of the Christian gospel is the concern with persons. To be human is to be a person in relation with other persons, a way of being that is possible only when the relationship is restored by the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross and the triumph crowned by his resurrection from the dead.

Tolkien's strength here is to have seen something of the importance of the person. To fall into the power of the evil one is to be depersonalised. Nowhere is this better illustrated than by the portrait of the herald of Sauron who rides to meet the army of Gondor as it waits apparently foolhardily at the gates of Mordor. "The Lieutenant of the Tower of Baradûr he was, and his name is remembered in no tale; for he himself had forgotten it, and he said: 'I am the mouth of Sauron'" (p. 922). To serve the power of evil is to lose one's name, that which we gain by virtue of our loving relationship with others: it is to enter a slavery in which our very identity is taken away. Similarly, wherever the Dark Lord's influence is felt, human relations are in danger. His power is to be found even among his foes, where it causes friends to fall out and quarrel (p. 366), but, more notably, in the fact that his own servants fight each other savagely. Evil alienates and destroys. It is against the depersonalising of Middle Earth with its accompanying slavery, pollution and lawlessness that the titanic battle takes place.

There are, of course, elements of magic and militarism in the tale which prevent us from taking it with too literal an allegorising. But underlying the whole is a sure sense that evil is a continuing threat which has to be fought. Frodo's achievement, like Christ's, is eschatological but not the eschaton. The possibility of a return to slavery remains, as the words of Gandalf make clear:

Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron himself is but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to muster all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule (p. 913).

III

Those words of Gandalf are like the allusions we have discerned in *The Lord of the Rings* to the action of providence: they take us near, but not quite, to theology proper. The stopping short is as it should be, for, as we have seen, Tolkien does not write as a theologian but as the teller of a story. In that telling he shares the directedness of so much art and literature to the theme of salvation, understood in its broadest sense. In the previous section there were outlined his use not only of the great theme of the battle of light against darkness, but also of other images of salvation. It was also shown that other echoes of Christian theology were to be discerned: the ways in which Frodo's bearing and behaviour echo that of Christ, and the overall concern for the reconciliation of persons in the context of a redeemed earth. What are the main differences that are to be seen?

The first is considerable. In the opening chapter of *Ephesians*, there is set before us a vision of salvation, which, the author makes clear, is not simply some religious idea but the completion of the creator's work for the whole creation: "a purpose . . . to unite all things in (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1.9f). There we see immediately a radical difference from Tolkien's tale. The latter does sometimes reveal a nostalgic pessimism: the old order has gone, is tired and soiled, and will never return. Elves will disappear, and the richness of Middle Earth diminish. It is a rather backward looking vision: the best was in the past, and will not return. By contrast, the vision of *Ephesians* is eschatological, and reminds us that hope is a primary Christian virtue. The creation looks forward to an end. It has, indeed, been subjected to futility, so that it groans like a woman in childbirth, but the work of Christ is at once to restore and to perfect.

The second major difference is that in the Christian version of the three great themes they are transfigured; take new and radically different shape by being understood through the lens provided by the life and death of Jesus. The crucial point here is that for Christian soteriology that life and death are not simply the victory of a man against temptation, the sacrificial death of a man on behalf of others and the death of the just who dies for the unjust. They are indeed all of these things. But they are also much more. As all of those things they are the act and involvement of God in and for our world. The victory over evil gains its universal significance by virtue of the fact that it is the power of God exercised through the weakness and suffering of a man. The sacrifice that is the cleansing of the earth is God's giving up to death of his Son, the one through whom the world was made, so that the creation may also through him be brought to its completion. The death of the just for the unjust is undergone in order that relationships we destroy by our

injustice may be forgiven and rebuilt. What Tolkien helps us to see, by both illumination and contrast, is that in the light of the cross of the Lord all the three themes are transfigured.

In both illumination and contrast it is noteworthy that the diagnosis of the ill is very similar: fearful and demonic evil, and the whole creation in thrall to desolating pollution and war. Tolkien's story can accordingly be seen as a vivid portrayal of the universal effects of human sin, countered with a mythological and highly illuminating account of their overcoming. What is different in the Christian scheme is the twofold emphasis: that such evil can be defeated and cleansed only by God, and that it can be done also only by a truly representative child of Adam. At the heart of the matter is the incarnation. The cleansing and completion of the creation comes about when the eternal Word of God, through whom all things were made, took flesh so that he might himself, as true man, bring together God and world which evil had sundered. Interestingly enough, there is even a kind of parallel to this in Tolkien's myth. "What was Gandalf? In what far time and place did he come into the world, and when would he leave it?" (p. 787: echoes of some the language Jesus uses of himself in John's Gospel).

What the Christian Gospel offers, by contrast, is not myth, but incarnation. God comes not to fight some mythological battle, but to engage as man in the heart of the human struggle for righteousness. And it is around that man that a community is formed, as his body, to realise the salvation that he won. That is why the Christian faith is concrete in a different way from *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter gains its strength, as we have seen, in part from its embodying in a story of universal appeal features which both answer to and illuminate the world in which we live. It is myth in the best sense of the word, encapsulating in concrete narrative central ways in which the human quest for salvation comes to expression. The former is concrete in that it embodies in a lived form not so much a quest for salvation as the recapitulation of human life in the victory, sacrifice and justification which is the life, death and resurrection of the incarnate Word.

The conclusion of this paper is, therefore, that the two focuses of its argument, Tolkien's masterpiece and the Christian tradition of atonement theology, can be mutually illuminating. Both are allowed to be what they separately are: a great story and a theology of salvation. Yet the story without doubt borrows from the Christian tradition in which its writer stood, while the theology cannot be expressed except in the metaphors which the literature of humanity provides. A final point brings the two even closer together, and provides something of a justification from Tolkien himself of the rash enterprise here attempted. At the close of "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien himself reflects on the distinctive "joy" that is the outcome of successful fantasy. It can be, he says, "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world", so that it may even enable us better to understand the true gospel:

The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the "inner consistency of

reality". There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation.⁹

May not, then, one reason for taking Tolkien's splendid tale seriously theologically be that it is in so many respects "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium*"; perhaps, indeed, not so very far-off a gleam?¹⁰

NOTES

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. Three parts in one volume, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968, pp. 523f. Whether he dies is not clearly stated in his narrative of the struggle, though compare p. 536: "I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words . . ." and p. 607: "I am Gandalf the White, who has returned from death". Further references to the work will be in parentheses in the text.
2. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984 (first edition, 1966), pp. 29-40.
3. See especially Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth, 1981, and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. London, Duckworth, 1988; and Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*, London: Penguin, 1988.
4. T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1982, p. 19.
5. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", in *Tree and Leaf*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, pp. 11-70 (pp. 43-50).
6. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings. C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and their Friends*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1978, p. 43. See also *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Ed. H. Carpenter, London: Allen and Unwin, 1981, p. 144: "Myth and fairy story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world".
7. It will be seen from these remarks that I find somewhat more consistent a theology of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* than does Shippey, who seems to me to make the mistake of drawing too absolute a distinction between "inner" and "objective" evil, op. cit. pp. 107-111.
8. "C. Williams who is reading it all says the great thing is that its *centre* is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace and ordinary life and good living. Yet he agrees that these very things require the existence of a great world outside the Shire - lest they should grow stale by custom and turn into the humdrum . . ." Tolkien, *Letters* pp. 105f.
9. "On Fairy Stories", op. cit., pp. 62f.
10. I am grateful to Francis Watson for criticism of a first draft of this paper, a result of which it is, I believe, much better than it would otherwise have been.

THE BIBLICAL CRITIC AND THE MORAL THEOLOGIAN

STEPHEN PLATTEN

Introduction

The significance of the Bible for both theology and the Christian life is taken for granted within all mainstream Christian traditions on one level which is not controversial. Furthermore, many of the assumptions at that level flow over into the area of moral life and moral theology since these are seen to form part of a wider whole. Protestant Christian ethics has thus always seen the Bible as formative in some sense. Roman Catholic theologians have also given scripture a higher profile since the Second Vatican Council, although in theory it has always been important. Indeed, amongst the schoolmen, Aquinas himself gave scripture a defined role under the heading of "divine law" within his wider moral theological schema. It is, however, at the next level of discussion that problems begin to make themselves known. Having accepted the commonplace, that moral theology cannot ignore scripture, how precisely is the moral theologian to make the link? In the foreword to a recent reader¹ on this subject, Charles Curran and Richard McCormick analyse the difficulties inherent here and separate out four stages in discussing the link. These four stages or aspects can be described in the following manner.

First of all, there is the process of determining the meaning of the scriptural text as it stands within its original context, both that is within the corpus of biblical literature and in the early Christian community from which the literature came. At this point, the skills and specialisms of the biblical critic remain paramount. The second stage is that of ascertaining the meaning of the text in our contemporary world, a world underpinned by at least some very different assumptions and cultural factors from that of the Old and New Testaments. It is at this level that the study of hermeneutics becomes important. The third aspect of the discussion relates to the different levels, or even different approaches, found within moral theology itself. Is scripture to be the means of formation of character or the source of authority for moral decision making? Does the Bible press the Christian to develop a distinctive ethic or does it rather inform a common moral theory which may be shared by society at large? The final question raised by this area of discussion is hinted at in the previous sentence. Assuming the significance of scripture for the moral theologian, how does it relate to other moral authorities, other sources of moral knowledge? Here we stand foursquare within the province of the moral theologian, and presumably also that inhabited by the moral philosopher, within the Christian tradition.

Our intention in this paper is to concentrate largely on the first two aspects of this debate. The first reason for this is that the background of the present writer was originally within the realm of New Testament studies and thus he may have something specific to contribute from that world. The second reason for focusing on this area is that with the increasing specialisation within theology it is an acute danger that separate disciplines will develop on

parallel lines with few transverse connections or intersections being made across the gap between these lines. The most minimal resultant danger here will be distortion within each specialism. The most serious danger is an ignoring of the research and requirements of the sister discipline, which can undermine the credibility of the moral theological enterprise, and indeed that of critical biblical study. There will be reference to the second two aspects of the entire discussion, but in only a brief compass, and as the starter for debate.

I

The prevailing perceptions of the debate over the place of the Bible within theology is that the debate traces its roots to the Enlightenment. Enlightenment is in this case generally used as a shorthand term for the past 150 years of intellectual/cultural history. Certainly, as has been noted earlier, this is not true in the case of the Bible and moral theology. One of the points of divergence at the Reformation was in just this area. Aquinas' natural law theory was criticised by a number of reformers, both for assuming too optimistic a view of human nature and for giving too little space to the Bible. Imperfect humanity thus requires the supplementary wisdom offered through the Bible. Fallen human nature tarnishes our reason and our ability to discern God through his creation. To allow for this God provides a more direct means of discerning his will through revelation, that is Holy Scripture. Paradoxically it has been primarily from within this reformed tradition that have evolved the instruments/tools which have made more difficult the appeal to revealed truth. Largely these difficulties issue from the growth in historical consciousness. A brief survey will demonstrate this point. Rather than sketch a detailed history from Lessing to the present day, we shall pick out some of the more significant developments in the critical approach.

The work of Reimarus and others on the synoptic gospels, alongside the later work of Julius Wellhausen on the Pentateuch inaugurated that family of approaches now designated source criticism. The broad outlines of the theories they enunciated are now widely accepted. The Pentateuch is seen to be the product of a long and complex editing process, drawing on at least four sources. The prophecy of Isaiah is now thought to be the conflation of at least three major prophetic sources from different periods in Israelite history. The three synoptic gospels are believed by many to have been formed from separate or discrete sources. Alongside the clarity gained for us through this process, there are also some warnings which sound in our ears. We cannot assume any longer a uniform theology necessarily within these texts, and we cannot assume that they recount history in the sense in which we might now understand the meaning of that term. These realisations are often seen as even more alarming in their implications for the New Testament than for the Old. What does this mean with regard to the life and teaching of Jesus? How does it affect the reliability of scripture? This source critical method continued well into this century and indeed continues to remain the foundation of much later scholarship. Overlapping with this method, however, stands the development of form criticism.

Form criticism traces its roots to the work of Hermann Gunkel in the last century. Gunkel identified a number of “Gattungen” or types of psalm. By analysing these types, Gunkel believed that it would be possible to trace the origins of the particular psalm being studied to its place within Israelite worship. Such analysis has proved to be notoriously difficult in terms of conclusive results. Nevertheless, the general point of being able to classify the psalms is now almost universally accepted. It was upon this pioneer work that Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius were able to build in the development of what became “classical” form criticism. By searching out the “seams” or “joints” within the gospel narratives, Bultmann was able to separate out numerous pericopae. These brief self-contained passages could then be classified into different “forms”, including parable, conflict narratives, apophthegms, etc. These were largely, he argued, sermon type material issuing from the early church, focusing on a story about Jesus. This highly atomistic approach to biblical study had two significant effects. First of all by its very nature it led to difficulties in gaining a broad perspective of teaching within the biblical material. Secondly, since it was seen to be hortatory or homiletic in origin it once again cast doubts upon the historical reliability of the material. To some extent in reaction to this, but also by building upon it, grew up the so-called “biblical theology” movement. This included the work of Joachim Jeremias in Germany and Alan Richardson in this country and many others working in the 1950s. It attempted to wrest from the Bible, utilising critical insights, broad elements of teaching, a “biblical view” of creation, redemption, etc. This movement had its effect upon the study of Christian, particularly biblical ethics, and probably the most famous outflow from it was T. W. Manson’s book on *New Testament Ethics*.² Manson believed once again that broad ethical themes could be derived from the biblical material, which held good across the diverse writings found in the Bible.

The death knell to this approach came with the advent of redaction criticism which developed in Germany in the 1950s with the work of Willi Marxsen, Hans Conzelmann and others. The insight here, which once again built upon the work of the earlier critics, is the positive affirmation of the creative contribution of the writers of particular books. This is often reflected in the titles of the monographs, e.g. *Mark the Evangelist*,³ *Mark – Evangelist and Theologian*,⁴ etc. Instead of simply stitching together disparate material, the various biblical writers are taken to be theologians in their own right, writing for a particular community with its own needs and assumptions. There are points in the synoptic gospels where this process can be viewed fairly vividly. It may be useful to look briefly at one such case, relating to an ethical issue. In Mark 10.2, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about the lawfulness of divorce. He replies by asking what Moses taught. The reply is that Moses allowed for divorce and presumably the reference here is to Deuteronomy 24.1-4. Jesus responds to this by quoting Genesis 1.27 and 5.2, reaffirming the unity of man and wife. He goes on to rule divorce out in an absolute manner, but then goes on to suggest that the same is true for a wife as for a husband; she must not divorce her husband. The parallel passage in Matthew 19.3-9 illustrates some interesting developments. Matthew has

Jesus reversing the order in which the Old Testament passages are quoted. The law of creation in Genesis now comes first and the Mosaic allowance of divorce now reads as an unfortunate but realistic relaxation of that law of creation. This paves the way for Matthew to allow an exception to the absolute prohibition of divorce. If the wife is guilty of unchastity, divorce is allowable. Matthew thus has Jesus following the same discipline as that followed by the stricter Shammaite rabbinic teachers of his time, which does allow divorce but only on this ground of unchastity. Matthew is also careful not to include any reference to the rights of a woman on divorce; such rights did not exist under the contemporary Jewish Law. The passage is then followed in Matthew by a brief discussion between Jesus and his disciples on whether or not it is expedient to marry. Again, there is a feeling of flexibility about the treatment here, which is absent in Mark’s account. Having illustrated the redaction critical approach from one brief pericope in Mark and Matthew, we should point out that such critics would not be happy to leave matters in this way. The entire thrust of the redaction critical approach is to suggest that we must look at the writer’s work as a whole and see how this sets the context for the passage being studied. If taken seriously this avoids the easy bandying of proof-texts. The best example of a redaction critical approach which investigates the total work of each writer on ethics in the New Testament is Leslie Houlden’s essay on *Ethics and the New Testament*.⁵ It is true to say that the insights of redaction critics remain seminal in New Testament studies and that more recent developments issue from this method and build upon it.

In very recent years, Old and New Testament studies have taken slightly different roads, in their attempt to build upon the work of earlier critics. In Old Testament studies, Brevard Childs has attempted to supplement the historical-critical approach with what he has described as “canonical criticism”.⁶ In this method, we are encouraged to read the Old Testament as part of scripture. We should be asking, he argues, what the text in its canonical form has to say to the modern Christian. What is the meaning of the text when it is read as part of the canon? How should it be understood from within the Christian community? Ostensibly, this method would seem to alleviate the “user of the Bible” from a number of difficulties. The moral theologian along with others ought to be able to read off from the text implications for our contemporary world. Canonical criticism has received, however, far from universal acclaim. James Barr, in a detailed monograph, has argued against this method.⁷ Also in more than one place, John Barton, another biblical scholar, has presented careful arguments which he believes discredit the canonical approach. One of the main points he makes is that canonical criticism cannot return us to the manner in which the biblical books were read in either the synagogue or the early Church. Canonical critical readings are as anachronistic, if not more so, as any other critical reading of a text.⁸

New Testament studies have taken a rather different turn but they too, building this time on the insights of the redaction critics, have focused their gaze upon the Christian community, but this time upon the community from which the documents sprang. The result of this has been a growth in “sociological analysis” of the New

Testament communities, particularly in the work of Howard Kee, Gerd Theissen, and Wayne Meeks. Meeks, for example, has studied the Pauline communities, their growth and background in his book *The First Urban Christians*.⁹ In a recent sequel to this book, Meeks has used similar sociological methods to investigate the growth and development of ethical thought in the early Christian communities.¹⁰ He looks particularly at the New Testament, the sub-apostolic and the early Patristic periods. If this method gives comfort to some by bypassing the classical historical-critical method, it does not make our task any easier if we are seeking the precise teaching of Jesus or indeed seeking only what was distinctive or innovative in the teaching of the early Christians. He notes:

I do not have a chapter on “the ethics of Jesus”. Interesting as that topic might be, it is both elusive – we probably do not have enough firm information to write anything like a rounded account of either Jesus’ moral behaviour or his moral teachings – and beside the point. This book is interested in Jesus, to put it baldly, only to the extent and in the ways that he is part of the moral world of the first Christians. Naturally, that role is by no means small.¹¹

Furthermore, in conclusion, he notes:

In order to understand the first Christians, it is not enough to abstract their novelties or to add up the “parallels” and “influences” from their environment. It is the patterns of the whole that we have been trying to discern.¹²

Both the broadly negative reception of canonical criticism and the flourishing of the sociological approach to the New Testament suggest that focusing upon the original Judaeo-Christian communities from which the documents sprang and their moral perceptions may be one way in which scripture can illuminate our own methodologies, but this is to pre-empt the hermeneutical process which belongs more properly to the second stage of the discussion of the Bible and moral theology.

The final critical method which should be mentioned before we conclude this brief survey is the contemporary “literary” approach. This requires of the reader two prerequisites. They are literary competence and the willingness to treat the text as a given. Literary competence can be seen as a prerequisite of any of the forms of critical study previously described. It is the ability to recognise the nature of the text which lays before us and to read it accordingly. This means that we need first to decide on the genre with which we are faced. Barton makes the point vividly in relation to apocalyptic:

Because of our competence, our “feel” for apocalyptic, we know that a text which began, “The stars will fall from heaven, and the sun will cease its shining; the moon will be turned to blood, and fire mingled with hail will fall from the heavens” would not be likely to continue, “the rest of the country will have sunny intervals and scattered showers”.¹³

The point is simple, we need to be clear about the nature of the text with which we are confronted. This

raises a number of issues for the moralist and the Christian community. Can all texts be similarly used by the moral theologian? How do we better inform the Christian community in order that they may appreciate the variety of material with which they are faced in Holy Scripture? The second point raised by the literary critical method is that of the givenness of the text. As with poetry or the visual arts it is vital to avoid the question of intentionality. Rather the text is to be reflected upon as it is. In this respect there are parallels with the canonical approach which could be seen as a sub-set of literary criticism. To employ the literary method alone could face us with two contrasting difficulties. The first is a collision with the historical assumptions of the redaction critics and the community assumptions of the sociological method. Avoidance of intentionality is opposed to each of these. Secondly to remove intentionality may have implicit effects upon any ethical reference point within the text. This suggests that the literary method is best used alongside the other methods, and that it may have more to offer us in the analysis of certain genres than in others.

In this rapid survey we have only been able to raise some points fleetingly. Nevertheless, the very vastness of the canvas suggests that biblical scholarship faces the moral theologian with an unenviable task. If we believe scripture to have a significant part to play in the making of moral theology, then it is vital that there be a dialogue between biblical and moral theologians. Without such a dialogue, a pre-critical use of scripture is always a danger to which the moral theologian may be prone. In addition to this, such dialogue may assist the biblical scholar in sharpening his/her own tools and perceptions. Alongside this general comment, some other more specific reflections are apposite. The variety of tools developed by the biblical scholars suggests that it is no longer possible to refer to the “biblical” or indeed the “Old or New Testament” view of a matter. Different genres, theologies, and cultural contexts demand that we use scripture more sensitively; there may be a number of scriptural insights upon one moral issue, be it a dilemma, a principle or a virtue. There is a diversity in the biblical witness. Then also, as we might expect, the results of biblical scholarship require that we make reference to books, to writers or to sources rather than to isolated texts. To understand Mark’s teaching on divorce it must stand within his wider theological framework. To appreciate Isaiah of Jerusalem’s condemnation of those who oppress the poor requires of us an understanding of both his theology and if possible the needs and background of the community out of which he writes. Finally, and this will be raised again in our second section, we need to develop a consistent approach to our use of scripture in moral theology. It is not sufficient to use texts where we have them on a specific issue, and then to go by a quite different route when no text is available. But this is to move us on to the questions of meaning of scripture within our own cultural context.

II

It is perhaps on this question of hermeneutics, of interpreting texts for a community, that most discussion has centred in recent years. There are at least four aspects

that provoke discussion in this area. The first is that which is generally termed cultural relativism, the second the issue of the canon of scripture, the third that of other ethical issues not covered in the biblical texts, and the final issue is that of the autonomy of ethics both then and now.

On one analysis, the final three issues noted above could be subsumed into a wider discussion of cultural relativism. For the sake of clarity, however, it is desirable to look briefly at the basic question of cultural relativism, as it has been discussed in the past 15 years and then to look at each of the other questions individually. One of the most extreme proponents of the relativist case in the realm of biblical study is Dennis Nineham, the most complete argument being set out in his monograph, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible*.¹⁴ The burden of his argument is well summarised in his quotation from the poet Louis MacNeice, who was writing about the Ancient Greeks, from his experience as a classical scholar:

These dead are dead
. . .
And how one can imagine oneself among them
I do not know;
It was all so unimaginably different
And all so long ago.

Nineham's argument is that human nature does not remain static, and that it is impossible for us to reclaim the original meaning of the biblical texts, since we cannot climb back into the skins of the first century Jews and Christians. His warning is timely and accurate. Certainly from within the Church of England there has been a tendency, almost uncritically, to make straight for the Bible fairly early on when preparing a report on an ethical issue.¹⁶ If scripture is to be used it is not clear that this is an appropriate manner for its use. Nineham goes on to argue, supporting himself with the thought of Ernst Troeltsch, that individual cultures exist as "totalities". Each totality includes a wide range of cultural assumptions and even empirical data that are comprehensible and assimilable only from within that culture. Of course, to some extent this is true. To borrow an analogy from music, however hard we seek after the original text of a Bach cantata, however far we seek after producing authentic instruments as of his time, we cannot recapture either the interpretation of the original performance, or indeed the ears of Bach and those who heard.

To press this argument, however, to the extreme could lead to trivial conclusions. It appears to assume that each culture, each totality and ultimately each community is isolated and hermetically sealed. Critics of Nineham's position have accepted his reflections on the non-static view of human nature. They have not accepted the "sealed-off" picture of cultures and totalities.¹⁷ The nineteenth century or the Victorian age, for example, are difficult to delimit in cultural terms. Thomas Hardy may be described as a nineteenth century novelist, when D. H. Lawrence is placed in the twentieth century, even though both novelists' dates overlapped both centuries. To seal off periods in this manner is to deny our ability to speak with a past age at all. Ultimately this could drive us in the direction of a total relativism and possibly even a solipsistic view of the world.¹⁸

The task of the interpreter (and this may be the moral theologian or the moral theologian in dialogue with the biblical scholar) is to understand the text as best he can in its original context. It may then be possible for those understandings and reflections to lend light to the problems that we face in our contemporary community. It will be at this point that reason and other sources of moral wisdom may conjoin in the process. The result may be a criticism of our present moral stance, a realisation that we can no longer live in that alien world, or perhaps more likely still a third possibility. This possibility is of receiving theological insight from our encounter with the text, which may at a fairly profound level alter our moral perception. This is particularly likely remembering how difficult it often is to separate out moral and theological reflections within Holy Scripture. Within the canonical books there are relatively few places where ethics stands alone and independent of theological reflection or conviction.

Talk of the canon moves us on to our second point of departure in this section of our argument. What exactly do we mean by a canon of scripture and how did we arrive at it? Answers to these questions are now more readily available, again due to historical research and to our more developed historical consciousness. We are now able to "see behind the scenes" and understand something of the process of the formation of the Christian Bible.¹⁹ This process now appears more haphazard than it appeared in previous centuries. Issues of heresy and the need to defend the Catholic Church from perversions of the gospel are seen to set the agenda. The canon was not received complete in its present form, direct from heaven. It was the result of a historical process. In retrospect the process of the formation of a canon of scripture may now seem to us to have been unavoidable. What is less certain is that the attitudes and methodology which later evolved and hardened the canon into a dogmatic basis of scriptural authority was a necessary development. For the moral theologian it has often presented a fixed and immovable set of texts which are not only to be dealt with differently from all other texts, but which also appear to preserve almost a power of veto over all other arguments and authorities.

Once again, John Barton has some important reflections here, which have issued from his discussion of the post-exilic use of ancient prophecy. He shows at one point that canonicity drives an artificial wedge between some books that are now part of holy scripture and others which now find themselves outside that corpus. The point at issue in arriving at a canon, in at least some cases, was rather pivoting on the distinction between books that were for the generality of people and those which were for the few who could cope with the secrets included therein.²⁰ Even more significant for our own purposes here is his argument that it was antiquity that gave books their authority in New Testament times and not canon or quality. He comments: "For the modern Christian the question is often posed 'How can such old writings possibly be relevant to today's concerns?' . . . Thus for many today, the antiquity of the Bible is a considerable problem. But for the people of New Testament times the antiquity of the Holy writings was their strongest appeal."²¹ The point that Barton goes on to make in a subtle and complex argument is that the notion of canon has been misunderstood over the centuries and that it has too easily been confused with the wider issue of

authority. The intention of this discussion is not to argue for the rejection of a canon of scripture. Even if that were felt to be desirable, it is impossible in the context of some 16-18 centuries of living with a fixed and authoritative body of scripture. Instead, the argument is for greater clarity in bringing together or distinguishing between concepts of canon and authority. This in turn should free the moral theologian from the straitjacket which requires the Bible to be the first court of appeal in any ethical discussion.

That the Bible is not obviously the first court of appeal in ethical discussion is manifest in the next stage of this particular argument. This relates to issues not dealt with specifically in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. There is a tendency to turn fairly swiftly to the Bible when the subject under discussion is marriage and divorce, homosexuality, the individual and the state, or the right treatment of the poor. In all of these cases there are texts which raise at least some of the issues, even if interpretation is often fraught with ambiguity. There is a great variety of issues where there is no direct reference whatsoever to the subject in hand. These range from "the peaceful uses of nuclear power" to "should airline pilots strike on Good Friday?". The approach to such issues beginning from a biblical perspective is bound to be more oblique. In the days of biblical theology there would be an attempt to adduce some general New Testament or biblical principle. We have seen that this general approach has been discredited.

Instead different starting points have been mooted. One such starting point is the attempt to define some general thrusts from the life and teaching of Jesus. These are arrived at through a critical appraisal of the gospel material, allowing for the specific theological themes within each gospel. These thrusts may be supplemented using insights from Pauline theology. Another approach is more self-consciously redaction critical. Each writer is allowed to contribute his own theological/moral reflections. Other insights are available too, using the methods of criticism outlined earlier. Whichever method is adopted, or indeed if a number of different methods is used, the overall methodology is similar. The recourse is first to general principles and reflections, then the individual texts (where they exist) are studied in the broader context of these principles. Ultimately this is likely to make for a more theological treatment of the themes due to the non-autonomy of ethics in much biblical material. Of equal importance to our argument here is that a more consistent approach to scripture will be the result. There will not be one rule operating where we apparently have specific teaching on texts relating to an issue, and another quite different rule being used where the issue was unknown to the various cultures of biblical times. In each case general reflection will precede the analysis of specific texts.

This tendency too easily to read off ethical maxims from biblical texts, or indeed to employ inconsistent approaches to scripture brings us to our final theme in this section on hermeneutics. This theme is that of the autonomy of ethics. At the present time a prevalent supposition is that morality stands independent of religious thought or conviction. This would be true of a number of Christian moralists as well as secular

philosophers. Certainly most would wish to distinguish sharply between the witness of scripture and the philosophical basis of moral thought. This distinction, however, was one which would not have entered the minds of the various biblical writers. In the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, for example, moral imperatives issue directly from an understanding of the individuals, or more often still the Israelite nation's relationship with Yahweh has elected the Jewish people to occupy a chosen place in the scheme of salvation. Their moral life should issue directly from this. Similar reflections could be made about the attitudes of the Deuteronomistic historian. Admittedly there are places in the wisdom literature, where an independent ethic appears to take pride of place. A commonsense code replaces the more high-sounding reflections of the prophets. So in Proverbs and, in a more sceptical framework within Ecclesiastes, commonsense maxims for ordering daily life predominate. Even in wisdom literature, however, theological ethics can pierce through to the foreground. The moral implications of the book of Job, a profoundly theological work, are perhaps the most obvious example.

This tendency towards theological ethics persists within the New Testament writings, although once again, there is a good deal of variety. Mark illustrates the principle of theology totally governing the moral life. Mark's primary concern is with the sovereignty of God²² and this overrides all else in the places in his gospel where moral issues are raised. Our reference to the divorce narrative in Chapter 10, earlier on, made this clear. It was the principle of God's creative design and intentions that governed right behaviour within marriage. Male and female are created for eternal union within the matrimonial relationship. Similar reflections could be made about Paul's theological/moral stance, particularly in Romans 1-8 and Galatians 1-3, although there are points (notably in I Corinthians) where standard judgements (which may relate as much to contemporary practice as to anything else), prevail. These judgements may or may not derive obviously from Paul's theological reflection at that point. Matthew, writing later, allows moral teaching to stand more clearly on its own, as in the three great chapters of teaching material which constitute the Sermon on the Mount. Nevertheless, here there are still theological reflections woven into the texture of these chapters. Mk. 5.48, for example, echoes the teaching of the pentateuchal, Levitical holiness code: "You shall be perfect, as your father in heaven is perfect". John's gospel, on the other hand, seems to be uninterested in moral teaching in the sense in which we would understand it; he is primarily theological in his thrust. In the later New Testament material, there is a movement towards tabulated codes of semi-autonomous moral pronouncements. This is most obvious in the secondary Pauline teaching of the Pastoral Epistles. The reasons for this change in atmosphere most likely relate to the shifts in eschatological teaching which can be traced throughout the pages of the New Testament. The end now appears to be farther off, the community has settled down to live a more mundane daily life. House rules and ethical maxims are now necessary to govern the extended time before God consummates all in the return of his Christ.

Of course, in comparison with twentieth century secular moral thought, the autonomy of ethics in these books is relative. Even so, these substantial differences in approach represent problems to those who would turn to scripture to inform their moral judgements and Christian life. The methodologies implied in these different texts are very varied and reinforce our need to take seriously the individual theological backgrounds of the various authors. This also means that if we are to take a consistent line in our use of scripture, that very consistency must now be modified by a sensitivity to the very different air breathed by the numerous writers in the Old and New Testaments. What is the theology that underpins the incipient moral codes of Matthew or of the writers of the Pastoral Epistles? How might that relate to the more thorough-going theological ethics issuing from the writings of Paul or Mark? The issues raised here are complex. In this section, then, we have been exploring some of the hermeneutical problems raised in the use of scripture within moral theology. How are we to understand the meaning of these texts within the context of our contemporary culture? A number of complex issues have been raised with regard to the relationship between the culture of the various communities within which the biblical writings were produced and our contemporary culture. Many of these reflections have pressed us once again, however, to examine the basic theological teaching of the different writers and to ask how such teaching can inform contemporary moral theory. That is to say, moral authority cannot be read off directly from the texts. Instead that which will inform will be the theological presuppositions of the writer. Whether this destines us irretrievably to a theological ethics is the substance of the next two sections. Our argument is that the relationship between scripture and Christian ethical thought is subtle. This may require of us a different mode of reflection on specific moral problems to that implied in at least some recent Anglican reports, as we hinted earlier.

III

In this section we intend to outline the two main areas of concern rather than attempt to legislate for how the Bible should be used. We shall distinguish between character and community, and moral justification or decision-making. Some moral theologians might argue for an extreme position on either of these approaches to Christian ethics. In other words, some would argue that Christian ethics is very largely, if not entirely, about the formation of character within a community, rather than about the informing of the mind to prepare it for specific moral decisions in areas of moral debate. Others would argue strongly in the other direction. There is an enormous variety of approaches even within these two main thrusts. In the case of character, they would include theories rooted in an Aristotelian emphasis on virtues, eudaemonistic approaches to Christian morality orientated towards the vision of God, or even the Christian intuitionism of Paul Lehmann's contextual ethics.

Certainly in the last two of these categories, scriptural formation has played a key part. In the eudaemonistic tradition, Kenneth Kirk traced a continuing tradition, beginning with Ancient Greece, following a pathway

through Holy Scripture, and finally sweeping up into later Christian tradition.²³ Kirk was keen to set his approach with scripture and to suggest that this context would form the Christian mind and character. Lehmann, coming from a Protestant tradition, saw the Christian community, where the scriptural word is proclaimed, as the focus of this formation and a similar approach can be identified in the more recent works of other writers, including Stanley Hauerwas.²⁴

Perhaps the essential comment to make here, issuing from the argument in the earlier sections, is that the biblical texts issued themselves from community contexts. This might lend weight to arguments which seek to use the theology underlying biblical moral teaching to contribute to the formation of the contemporary Christian community. The corollary of this is that it will always be easy for such an approach to slide into sectarianism, an accusation not infrequently aimed at Hauerwas himself.²⁵ Contrariwise, it is difficult to see how this approach could be applied to the increasingly diverse society in which the Christian Church finds itself set in western liberal countries. It is hard to see how scripture can now in any broad sense "form" the wider community.

The contrasting approach of looking first toward moral decision-making, however, has seen a continuing tradition within Britain of the Christian Churches contributing their reflections to wider debates within society. Government commissions on specific moral questions, ranging from divorce law to in vitro fertilisation, have included both representatives and evidence from the mainstream churches and religious groups. This is not to argue that scripture has directly influenced the reports of such commissions. Rather it is to suggest that the biblical material may have coloured the evidence offered from the various churches. The difficulties and issues to be considered in using scripture in this manner have been rehearsed both implicitly and explicitly in the earlier sections. If the Bible is to inform such debates and such decision-making, then the hermeneutical problems must first be faced. The question remains as to whether scripture can or should be used in both approaches to moral theory and indeed whether it is possible for both approaches to stand alongside each other within a broader context. This, however, is a broader question within moral theology itself.

IV

Finally we are faced with the broadest question of all. How should the place of the Bible be seen in relation to other sources of moral wisdom? Where does it stand with regard to the rest of Christian tradition? For much of Christian history a particular view of canonicity has elevated the biblical witness to a higher level. Even though we now accept that the scriptural writings are the product of the earliest Christian communities (in much the same way as later tradition), still the status of canon marks off the Bible in a particular way. The work of Barton, Barr, von Campenhausen and others now raises questions about this particular understanding of canonicity. This does not imply that the canon should be ignored, nor does it deny the fact of existence of a canon.

The Bible crystallises within its pages a “classical” focusing of the Christian gospel and, of course, the earliest records of the Christian community. Instead these reflections upon the canon raise questions about how canonicity ought to be used. Ought the Bible always to be the “court of final appeal”, or indeed in some circles the “court of initial appeal”? Some of our earlier reflections have suggested that it might instead be part of the means whereby the primary theological vision is established, and not a veto standing over against other authorities.

More broadly is raised the question of other sources of wisdom. These will include both human experience and the philosophical and cultural traditions of which we are the inheritors. These need to be discussed within the wider debate about our use of reason. Reason is not in itself another authority but rather the means by which these other sources are weighed, interpreted and evaluated. It may often be the case that moral debate and reflection will need to begin in this, the broadest of contexts, particularly in the light of the specialised empirical knowledge required to inform many moral decisions. As we saw earlier on, this empirical knowledge is simply not available in the biblical witness, nor was it available to the communities out of which scripture evolved.

The task of the moral theologian in relation to the Bible is more difficult now than ever before. These difficulties are the result of the increasing secularisation of western society, the growing sophistication of biblical scholarship (and thus the unavoidable growth in specialisation) and also the diversity of views on how we ought to engage upon the moral enterprise. This dilemma is exacerbated by the knowledge that the Bible is a seminal part of the Christian tradition and heritage. We know that it must not be taken in hand lightly or wantonly, but soberly and discreetly and in the fear of God. Having established the seminal part scripture has to play, then almost certainly the most urgent issue raised from these reflections is the need for increased dialogue between the biblical scholar and the moral theologian. Perhaps this will be most effectively achieved through the midwifery skills of the interpreters, the theological “go-betweens”. I refer, of course, to those latter-day descendants of the god Hermes, the increasing band of hermeneutic philosophers and theologians.

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16. Cf. Barton, John, “The Place of the Bible in Moral Debate”, *Theology*, May, 1985, pp. 204-209.
17. Cf. Barton, John, “Cultural Relativism I”, *Theology*, March, 1979, pp. 103-109.
Barton, John, “Cultural Relativism II. *Theology*, May, 1979, pp. 191-199.
18. Cf. here Roger Trigg’s comments in *Reason and Commitment*, Cambridge, 1973.
19. I am thinking here particularly of the work of Hans von Campenhausen in *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, E.T. London, 1972.
20. Barton, *Oracles of God*. Op. cit., p. 75.
21. Barton, *Oracles of God*. Op. cit., p. 140.
22. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament*. Op. cit., p. 41 ff.
23. Kirk, Kenneth, *The Vision of God* (abridged edition), London, 1934. Reprinted Cambridge, 1977
24. Hauerwas, Stanley, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, London, 1984.
Hauerwas, Stanley, *Character and the Christian Life*, San Antonio, 1975.
25. Curran and McCormick. Op. cit., pp. 299-300.

ALFRED ERNEST GARVIE: EARLY SCOTTISH CONGREGATIONALIST PROCESS THEOLOGIAN?

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One of Charles Hartshorne's literary habits is to provide lists of thinkers, past and present, who adopt similar positions on key theological issues to his own. There are a number of instances of the name of Alfred Ernest Garvie (1861-1945) appearing in those lists. Garvie was an eminent Scottish Congregationalist minister who, after ten years of pastoral ministry in Scotland, had a distinguished career as Professor and then Principal of Hackney and New College, London. His mature theological thought is found in a large three volume constructive theology published between 1925 and 1932.¹ Hartshorne credits him as being among those thinkers who suggest "that Christianity as such has no necessary ties with classical theism and no essential antagonism with panentheism".² In fact, according to Hartshorne, Garvie ranks as a panentheist "of genius or systematic ability".³ Furthermore, he maintains that Garvie is one of a number of "philosophically equipped theists" who are learning to remove the "ambiguities and contradictions" which surrumpund "the traditional concepts of omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity".⁴ The purpose of this paper is to examine Garvie's theology against the backcloth of Hartshorne's claims, and to ask and answer the question: "Was Alfred E. Garvie an early Congregationalist 'process theologian'?"

I

Garvie's theological sensibilities were governed by an apologetic concern to present the Christian Faith to his contemporaries in a way that lost none of its saving significance but made sense in a rapidly changing intellectual climate. Consequently, Christian theology became for him "an exposition, commendation and appreciation" of the significance of the fact of Christ for faith (CDG:22). However, for Garvie, theological work is not simply a matter of repeating the Christian Faith handed down from the past; rather, it is the revisionary exercise of presenting an account of the Christian Faith which, in responding to contemporary challenges to Christianity's credibility, is believable in the modern world. In following through his theological project, Garvie was not only certain that the Christian fact presents an effective challenge to contemporary atheism; he was also convinced that modern developments in historiography and science demanded a radical revision of traditional theological claims associated with the fact of Jesus. Indeed, until that revision is made, he believed the apologetic function of Christian theology is deficient.

Garvie's liberalism was nowhere more apparent than in his whole-hearted acceptance of the historical critical method which, he maintained, enables us "to interpret the significance and estimate the value of Christ" as never before (CDG:182-183). He insisted that an adequate Christian doctrine of God must reflect what has been revealed about God in the life and witness, death and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. The classical formulations

of the Christian Faith were too much under the influence of Aristotle. If they had taken their point of reference from "what the Father is seen to be in the Son", Garvie believed that they would have been duty bound to affirm the immanence as well as the transcendence of God; they would have seen human hope rest not so much on an aloof Deity, an impassible eternal bystander, but more on a "fellow-sufferer who is intimately involved with the world's life" (CDG:185).⁵

Garvie was equally aware of the challenge posed to Christian theology by the rise of modern science. He saw theology and science "as allies in the one common task of discovering truth" (CDG:245). It was science which now gave theology the clue as to the mode of divine creation. If cosmic evolution was to be "interpreted theistically", then it was obvious to Garvie that theology must not speak of "a transcendent static but an immanent dynamic God, a God who is present and active in His world". If reality is processive, as Darwin had taught, and the temporal process is consequently all-important, he concluded that "God's creative, educative, redemptive activity must be in and by that process". The important new task for theology was "the discovery in the full stream of history of those divine currents that show the direction of the flow" of cosmic evolution (CDG:15). A shift of emphasis had to occur, therefore, from conceiving God in transcendent isolation from the world, in obedience to the dictates of Greek metaphysics, to viewing Deity as immanently involved in the evolutionary process. On the ability of theology to take this step Garvie staked the ultimate future of theistic belief (CDG:432).

The new knowledge about the historical Jesus and the findings of biological science became the twin forces which drove Garvie to seek new ways for talking about the God-world relationship. And the adequacy of any proposed revision was clearly whether it was both appropriate to "the fact of Jesus" and credible in the modern scientific culture.⁶ It seemed to Garvie that the appropriate and credible revision of the God-world relationship must be sought through the idea of divine immanence "so conceived as to be complementary to and not contradictory of the divine transcendence, and as to be distinguished from the identity of God and the world".⁷ And to get the correct balance between transcendence and immanence, Garvie propounded a pantheistic model for the God-world relationship. The revisionary proposal sought to steer "the straight middle course" between the Scylla of Deism and the Charybdis of Pantheism to a safe harbour in Panentheism.⁸ The resulting concept of God distinguishes but does not separate God and the world; it relates God and the world, derived from and dependent on God, so "that no reality above or beyond God will be possible for our thought" (CBG:437). God includes the world but the world does not exhaust the divine reality. Hence, as Garvie puts it, "the God in and through all" is also "over all"; therefore the immanence and transcendence of God are held together in one concept as "complementary truths" (CDG:188).

A problem of all doctrines of divine immanence is their tendency to make God's relation with the world a matter of necessity rather than free choice, thus

undermining the transcendent sovereignty of God. Of this Garvie is fully aware. He forthrightly affirms that God is absolute and has no need of the world. The Absolute is also unchanging: "We cannot ascribe the conditions of development to God who eternally and infinitely is".⁹ But how then does Garvie do justice to his intention to speak of God's involvement in a world that brings joy and pain to the divine life? Just when the ship he is steering seems to have foundered upon the rocks of the Scylla of Classical Theism, Garvie adjusts the rudder by introducing the ideas of divine *kenosis* and divine *plerosis* in the context of his trinitarian theology.

Building upon the Pauline idea of *kenosis* (Phil.2:7), Garvie postulates an eternal activity of self-limitation in the Godhead which becomes the necessary condition not only for "the fact of Jesus" but also for the manifestation of God in the whole cosmic process. God does not create or redeem out of necessity; rather, by free and loving decision, God's purpose is worked out by *kenosis*. Therefore, "the incarnation is the supreme instance of an activity of God which is illustrated by all creation; it is only by self-limitation that the Infinite can create within time and space a finite and changing world" (CDG:20). In the creative process what resembles God the least, the Deity controls the most; that which is most akin to Deity, God leaves the most free. The more God enters into the life of the world, the more the Deity lays aside the divine absoluteness. The creatures therefore are endowed with real autonomy and may oppose or co-operate with the Creator. Despite sin and evil abounding in the world, Garvie is confident that God is still firmly in control of the creative process (CDG:243). He is a *meliorist*, accepting that the world is partly bad, but believing that it is becoming better and will one day be the best (CDG:236). However, it is significant that the terms in which Garvie speaks of evolution include "progress" as well as "process". Nevertheless, he set his confidence in the future firmly inside the perspective of the Christian hope (CIHS:200).

Using the notion of *plerosis* (Eph. 1:23), Garvie argues that the divine self-emptying leads to a form of self-expression in the world which is God's self-fulfilment. Not only does God achieve the divine purpose by self-emptying rooted in love, the Deity also derives joy when that love is returned. Garvie is critical of understandings of love which eschew the thought that God desires a response in personal relationship from those loved. When love is conceived solely in terms of giving benefits, he prefers the term "goodness". For him, love is a relational term, "a personal interchange, a giving as well as a receiving, a finding as well as a losing oneself in another" (CIHS:204). However, if God desires a loving response from the creatures, it is difficult to see what significance this can have for God, given Garvie's previous insistence that there is no development or change in God.¹⁰ Why should God desire my love if even an infinite amount of love cannot make a jot of difference to the divine life?

When talking of divine creativity, Garvie sees some benefit in continuing to assert that God creates *ex nihilo*. The classical doctrine makes a crucial point: "It is an assertion that God alone is self-subsistent reality; that no other reality exists, underived from or independent of Him; and that it is His causality alone to which all derived

and dependent reality is due" (CBG:454). It enables the theologian to give due recognition to the divine transcendence and hence to the essential distinction between Creator and creature. However, Garvie is hesitant to join tradition is assuming that the doctrine means that God created the world out of nothing. "If it is true", he argues, "that *ex nihilo nihil fit* . . . then we must not take the words 'out of nothing' literally, but qualify them thus: 'other than what is in Himself'" (CBG:454). Garvie's concern to account for God's transcendence over the world is met by his insistence that God does not need this world to meet divine needs: "We may not ascribe to God any need except love's need of loving and of freely giving of its fullness" (CDG:247). But, in order to affirm the divine immanence, Garvie wants to "supplement" the traditional idea of creation with "*generation* as affirming immanence, the resemblance of Creator to His creatures" (CBG:459). Against the charge that his understanding limits God from within and without, Garvie reminds his critics that God's whole operation in the evolving creation is by *self-limitation*, *kenosis* and *plerosis*. While God is limited by this world, the Deity is not *necessarily* dependent on this world; it is perfectly possible that God could and may have other worlds in which to express divine love. Just which world God chooses to create and generate, and thus to become partially limited by and dependent upon, is purely a matter for God and God alone to decide. Since it had been proved demonstrably that the evolutionary principle lay at the heart of the world's development, it no longer seemed appropriate to Garvie to focus the Christian doctrine of creation solely on the question of the origin of the universe. Unless the battle with mechanistic science was to be lost at the outset, the theologian had to show that God was the chief causative agent at each stage in the continuing process of evolution. In order to make the universe intelligible, divine creativity had to be seen not only in terms of bringing worlds into being, but particularly in terms of preserving what has come into being through the evolutionary process and creating that which the process has yet to bring into being. In all this, Garvie was heavily influenced by Bergson's conception of "creative evolution", in which "the new is not simply deduced from the old" but "produced" and, hence, "other and more than the old" (CDG:189). And, what makes the *élan vital* creative is God's creative activity.

Just how God works creatively in evolution is a question Garvie never seems to make clear. The assertion that God is a creative agential force in the world process is often made, but the metaphysical grounds for the assertion are noticeably absent. Using a human analogy, Garvie argues that the laws of nature represent God's *habits*. But God may have to resort in certain circumstances to acts which, "not inconsistent with but not conforming to those habits", are called miracles or "original acts". Garvie is perfectly clear that one must accept in principle the possibility of divine activity which is not explicable according to contemporary scientific knowledge. However, given that God will not contradict divine "habits", we must always examine claims for miracles on the assumption that further scientific knowledge may find a natural explanation for them.

Garvie's insistence upon giving a full account of the divine immanence necessitates him revising some of the

classical attributes of God, particularly omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. He argues that the first part of each term points to the divine transcendence and the second part refers to the divine immanence. So, first, God is “wholly present in every point of space and moment of time” (CDG:246). Implied here is a strong sense of immediacy between God and the world and a real sense of God being present in (and hence limited by) the conditions of earthly space-time. Secondly, God knows all that there is as it is. However, due to God’s self-limitation in space-time, divine fore-knowledge is ruled out. In this way, Garvie consistently attempts to protect the contingency of the world and human freedom. The Deity knows all the possibilities of contingent actions, the results of previous similar activity and the divine resources at hand to deal with each stage of the cosmic process as it arises. But regarding the future as it actually turns out God can only speculate. Thirdly, the divine self-limitation drives Garvie to affirm that “God’s omnipotence means that God can do and does, within nature and history, all that is possible within the constitution He has given created reality” (CBG:448). The evil in the world must not necessarily be laid at God’s door; nor must God be considered limited in any other way than by divine choice. God’s activity is perfect given the parameters within which the Deity has decided to work. To expect God to work in any other way represents “disbelief in the sufficient and sovereign efficacy of grace” (CDG:314).

If these radical revisions are not enough of a challenge to Classical Theism, Garvie aims at the centre of traditional conceptuality in his sustained attack on the notion of divine impassibility. The central thrust of his opposition lies in his conviction that it undermines our whole understanding of the Incarnation. God is present, involved and affected by what transpires. Further, the basis of the Atonement, he believes, rests upon the immanent God in nature and history, in unity with humankind in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to the divine-self. “What Christ did, God did in Him; what Christ suffered, God suffered in Him” (CDG:212). Further, Garvie considers the whole notion of a God who is totally aloof to the joy and pain of the world not only sub-Christian, but also a total irrelevance in a world torn apart by sin and evil. Writing soon after the horrors of the First World War had become apparent, he stresses that “the impassible God would be the monstrous heresy for the religious thought and life of today” (CDG:188). Garvie, therefore, conceives God as “fellow-sufferer”, rejects Classical Theism’s doctrine of the divine impassibility and adds to the usual list of divine attributes that of *omnipatience*. Despite the strictures of Classical Theism, God is affected by the divine experience of the world’s suffering and joy; the Christian Deity is after all a God of feeling.

II

Only a superficial awareness of the philosophical theology of Charles Hartshorne is needed to see why he felt an affinity with Garvie’s theological conclusions. The Congregationalist’s insistence on uniting the divine transcendence and the divine immanence within a panentheistic model for the God-world relationship was

thoroughly congenial to his own thought, as was Garvie’s revision of the classical divine attributes.¹¹

Hartshorne has attempted to develop a logically coherent and religiously satisfying concept of God which contains the positive insights of Classical Theism and Pantheism while avoiding their absurdities. The case for theism is proven, he believes, when it is freed from its usual conceptions and expressed in the often overlooked conceptuality of Panentheism, which conceives integrally both God’s relationship with the world and the world’s relationship with God.¹² Like Garvie, he believes Panentheism corrects the mistakes of both Classical Theism and Pantheism, while retaining their essential insights into the theistic issue. Classical Theism’s assertion that there is “zero interaction” between God and the world, such that “God may act, but cannot be acted upon”,¹³ and Classical Pantheism’s denial of any kind of independent existence of God and the world are both unacceptable. Panentheism corrects Classical Theism by showing that God is really involved in and affected by the world;¹⁴ on the other hand, it corrects Classical Pantheism by denying that God is totally identified with the world, showing how the Deity is the unique individual self which embraces the world. Hartshorne insists that his doctrine is distinct from Pantheism, being, in fact, the claim that “God includes all things”.¹⁵ As a whole is more than the sum of its parts, so God is more than the sum total of the processes which make up the world.

Both Garvie and Hartshorne are agreed, therefore, that Panentheism presents the most adequate way of conceiving the God-world relationship. But Garvie never really provides an adequate idea of how the relationship between God and the world is to be construed. Hartshorne, on the other hand, provides us with analogies to aid our understanding. He asserts that there is maximum interaction between God and the world similar to that between the mind and the body or the perfect ruler and the society ruled.¹⁶

God is conceived as “a social being, dominant or ruling over the world society, yet not merely from outside, in a tyrannical or non-social way; but rather as that member of the society which exerts the supreme conserving and co-ordinating influence”.¹⁷ This fits nicely with Garvie’s insistence of “a mediating immediacy of God in nature and history” as being the basis upon which God’s activity in the world is to be understood (CDG:185). God is then regarded as acting in two ways. First, the Deity enables what has come into being to continue as the condition of what is coming to be in the evolutionary process. Thus God *conserves* or *governs* the world. But, secondly, the main sphere of God’s initiating activity lies in the human realm: “As God has a personal relation to each man, a purpose for mankind which He is fulfilling in and by each man, there is an activity of God, both through the system of nature and the course of history, which is named His *Providence*” (CDG:250).

Whereas Garvie admits that there is “divine activity in the psychical process”, he repeatedly rejects a full blown panpsychism (CDG:465,248). Hartshorne, on the other hand, applies the mind/body analogy for the God/world

relationship strictly. God is intimately related to and acting upon *all* the constituent parts of the world which, to greater or lesser degrees, possess psychical characteristics that differ from those possessed by human beings in degree rather than kind.¹⁸ For many this appears to be blatant anthropomorphism of the highest order;¹⁹ and, inside the “Process Theology” school itself, Schubert Ogden has argued powerfully that Hartshorne’s use of analogy breaks down.²⁰ Not surprisingly, Garvie wants to restrict sentience to the higher forms of life. He notes that “when mind becomes conscious, and still more when consciousness becomes self-consciousness, fresh stages of evolution are reached”. It then follows, for him that “at these marked stages in the process, we may venture to speak of a divine initiative” (CDG:249). However, for many others, it will seem that Garvie is introducing God to explain what can be accounted for in purely scientific terms. It may be more plausible with David J. Bartholomew to limit the activity of God to determining the end and the lawfulness of the macro-universe and freely acknowledge the existence of indeterminism on the micro-scale.²¹

Like Garvie, Hartshorne radically revises the traditional attributes of God. Garvie’s commitment to the transcendence of God requires him to speak of God as absolute, eternal, unchanging, supra-personal, etc.; but his corresponding commitment to the immanence of God also forces him to speak of God, in a certain sense, as relative, temporal, changing, personal, etc. At every juncture, Garvie wants to do justice to the two sides of the divine nature. But his problem is always the same – that of asserting, at one and the same time, seemingly contradictory divine attributes. The nearest he comes to providing a clue how this might be achieved is when he talks of the apparently contradictory attributes as being “aspects” of the divine reality (CBG:443).

Among Hartshorne’s great achievements is that of providing us with metaphysical conceptuality to conceive the reality of God in a thoroughly dipolar manner.²² Consequently, his doctrine can be described as *dipolar panentheism*.²³ When we consider the traditional categories used for the Deity we notice a number of polarities (e.g. active-passive, eternal-temporal, necessary-contingent, absolute-relative). Both Classical Theism and Pantheism, Hartshorne argues, decide which pole of the terms is good and admirable; then they predicate it of deity while wholly denying the presence of the other pole in the being of God. Thus they develop a monopolar prejudice. Hartshorne revokes this tendency, insisting that our conception of God must move from being monopolar to being dipolar.²⁴

Hartshorne draws a tight distinction between the divine *actuality* (concrete, relative, passive) and the divine *existence* (abstract, absolute, impassive). Employing this careful distinction he argues that a dipolar conception of God, which takes account of the divine passivity, is not only more adequate but demanded. In dipolar panentheism, the concrete actuality of God is really related to the world and, hence, God can respond to it; while, when viewed abstractly in the divine existence God is all Classical Theism predicated of deity – “the immutable completeness of the One Who is Inclusively Loved”.²⁵ The divine love is necessary and unsurpassable

since it is inconceivable that God is not love or that there can be anyone more loving than the Deity; but it is also contingent and surpassable by God, but God *alone*. Likewise, Hartshorne holds that God is omniscient in the divine existence because it is of the divine nature to know all that there is to know; but God’s knowledge is contingent since in the divine actuality God is finite and can only know what there is actually to know.²⁶ What in fact emerges from Hartshorne’s work is a coherent and comprehensive panentheistic conceptuality which enables one to say all the things Garvie wishes to assert about the nature of God but without contradiction or recourse to paradoxical forms of expression.

A common criticism of Hartshorne’s neoclassical theism is that dipolar panentheism makes God’s relation to the world a matter of necessity rather than free grace, thus obliterating God’s transcendence over the world.²⁷ But, once the distinctions upon which dipolarism is based are understood, this objection is significantly blunted. Hartshorne holds *both* that the creation of *some* world, and the divine involvement in that world, is necessary to God, *and* also that any particular world the Deity creates is inessential to God, being wholly the result of divine choice. Another way of putting it is to say that God never possesses *negative* freedom (the freedom to do nothing at all) but always possesses *positive* freedom (the freedom to do this instead of that). But why does God’s existence make it “inevitable” that there be a world? Because “becoming” or “creativity” in neoclassical theism is of the divine essence in the same way that “being” is an essential attribute of God in Classical Theism. Also, God is love, and because *agape* is a relational term, it follows that God must always have *some* (though not necessarily *this*) world to love. In other words, all necessary restraints placed upon God are *either* the necessary consequence of God being God *or* the direct result of God choosing to create a world of free creatures who have power independent of the divine self.

Critics will continue, I suspect, to be uneasy about “relation-to-world-as-such” being constitutive of deity. However, unless contingency is somehow constitutive of God’s reality then it is impossible to account logically for creation; a wholly necessary God cannot be said to create a contingent world. As Keith Ward has said, neoclassical theism’s “view of the temporality and dipolarity of God does . . . provide the logical key to the ancient and central problem of reconciling creation and necessity. Only if God is temporal, can he be a free creator of a universe of free creatures; only if he is eternal, can he possess that necessity which is the foundation of the intelligibility of the world; only if he is dipolar, can he be both”.²⁸ Hartshorne’s critics need to examine further the logic of their demand that God be *totally* free to create or not to create.

Garvie, without the same metaphysical skill, appears to be driven along a similar path. He also wants to locate any limitation upon God in the divine self, or account for it in terms of the Deity’s self-limitation. In no way is he prepared to sanction unreservedly that God needs *this* world for self-fulfilment. However, when Garvie says that, “We may not ascribe to God any need except love’s need of loving and of freely giving of its fullness” (CDG:247) it is not at all clear what he means. Is “love’s

need” met by the existence of a social life inside the Triune life, as is often asserted? If this is what Garvie means, the familiar illogicality of a wholly necessary deity being said to create a contingent world returns because the Persons of the Trinity are non-contingent.²⁹ However, his insistence on the need for an economic as well as ontological Trinity perhaps suggests he means rather more than this. In fact, he refers to S. E. Stokes with approval as indicating what “seems to me to be the truth”. Stokes speaks of “a divine nature that is self-subsistent, timeless, and infinite in its perfection, and yet *infinitely needing* . . . The Divine Nature has inherent within it the means for the perfect satisfaction of its essential need, but were it possible to conceive the Divine Nature as apart from that which its need impels it ever to sustain in being, we should not be able to think of it as perfect or self-sufficient . . . The perfect unit of experiencing life is the divine timelessly self-sustaining Existent One *plus* that complementary and subordinate area of reality timelessly sustained in being by it” (CBG:454-455, Garvie quotes from S. E. Stokes, *Satyakama*, or *True Desires*). And, as far as I can see, this is remarkably similar to Hartshorne’s position.

III

Having discovered the main thrust of Garvie’s theology and noted its similarities and differences to Hartshorne’s neoclassical theism, we are now in a position to answer our question: “Was Alfred E. Garvie an early Congregationalist ‘process theologian’?”. The answer, of course, trades upon what we mean by “process theology”. John B. Cobb Jr. has pointed out three senses in which the term can be used. It can refer to “a theological movement that developed at the University of Chicago Divinity School during the 30s” or “theology which systematically employs the philosophical conceptuality of Alfred North Whitehead or Charles Hartshorne”.³⁰ Clearly, in neither of these senses can Garvie be called a “process theologian”. But Cobb observes, thirdly, that the term may refer “to all forms of theology that emphasise event, occurrence, or becoming over against substance”.³¹ This is clearly applicable to Garvie with his determination to conceive reality in an evolutionary manner and attempt to replace Greek philosophical categories with modes of thought belonging to the Judaeo-Christian tradition found in the Bible. Consequently, we can say that Garvie was an early English Congregationalist “process theologian”.

NOTES

1. The volumes in Garvie’s system of constructive theology are: *The Christian Doctrine of the Godhead* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1925), *The Christian Ideal for Human Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1930) and *The Christian Belief in God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1932). References to these books will be given in the text by use of the respective abbreviations: CDG, CIHS and CBG, followed by the appropriate page number. Garvie calls his three volume work, “a system of Christian thought, life, and work” (CIHS:21) and suggests that “the last in time should be regarded as the first in order” (CBG:21).
2. Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953: 270).
3. *Ibid.* 153.
4. Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953): 179.

5. Garvie frequently conceives God as “fellow sufferer” with human beings. In a typical example he says: “God is a fellow-sufferer with man, centrally, supremely in Christ and His Cross, but always and everywhere also where men suffer” (CDG:334). Cf. A. N. Whitehead’s famous description of God as “the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands” (*Process and Reality* corrected edition, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburn (New York and London: The Free Press, 1978): 35). Garvie and Whitehead were contemporaries on the staff of the University of London, although in different faculties. Could Whitehead have obtained this terminology from Garvie or vice versa?
6. For the terms “appropriateness” and “credibility” as warrants for theological adequacy see Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (London: SCM Press, 1982): 4.
7. Alfred E. Garvie, “The Divine Immanence as the Basis of Theological Statement”, *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910): 10.
8. *Ibid.* 133.
9. *Ibid.* 161.
10. *Ibid.* 163.
11. Hartshorne’s position can be found in the following books, which hereafter will be referred to by way of the indicated abbreviations: *MVG: Man’s Vision of God* (Chicago: Willett Clark & Co., 1941; recent edition 1964 Archum Books, Connecticut); *DR: The Divine Reality* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1948); *RSP: Reality As Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion*; *PSG: Philosophers Speak of God*; *LP: The Logic of Perfection* (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962); *ANT: A Natural Theology for Our Time* (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967); *CSPM: Creative Synthesis And Philosophic Method* (London: SCM Press, 1970). Hartshorne has also written on the subjects of psychology and bird song! See *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934) and *Born to Sing: An Interpretation and World Survey of Bird Song* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1972).
12. See *DR*: 116-119; *CSPM*: 261-274; *PSG*: 499-514; *RSP*: 110-125.
13. *ANT*: 68.
14. “Since God, to be worshipful, must be surpassable, his scope cannot be less than cosmic, and there can be no possibility of an individual beyond the reach of his influence or from which he could not receive influence. Likewise, whereas ordinary individuals maintain themselves only in some environments, not in all, the unsurpassable individual must have unlimited ability to adapt to varying states of reality.” *ANT*: 39.
15. See *RSP*: 120.
16. See *RSP*: 29-43 and *ANT*: 97.
17. *RSP*: 40.
18. For an interesting and informative discussion of the mind/body analogy for the God/World relationship from outside the sphere of Process Theology see Grace M. Jantzen, *God’s World, God’s Body* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984). A powerful criticism of the approach is found in Thomas F. Tracy, *God, Action and Embodiment* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).
19. See Maurice Wiles, *God’s Action in the World* (London: SCM Press, 1986): 32-33.
20. Schubert M. Ogden, “The Experience of God: Critical Reflections on Hartshorne’s Theory of Analogy”, eds. John B. Cobb Jr. and Franklin I. Gamwell, *Existence and Actuality: Conversations with Charles Hartshorne* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984): 16-36. Also, in a review of Grace M. Jantzen, *op. cit.*, Brian Hebblethwaite points out “the powerful disanalogy between the physical universe and a single organism. The universe is a field of interacting organized systems of matter or energy. There is nothing remotely comparable to a single central nervous system. Consequently, on no world model can the physical universe, however present to and aware of it God may be, be the means whereby God is aware and acts, still less suffers with his suffering creatures . . .” *Theology*, LXXXVIII, 723 (May 1985): 237.
21. See David J. Bartholomew, *God of Chance* (London: SCM Press, 1984).
22. For a thorough account of Hartshorne’s philosophical theism see Eugene H. Peters, *Hartshorne and Neoclassical Metaphysics: An Interpretation* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1970) and Santiago Sia, *God in Process: Thought* (Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).
23. For a discussion of the basic philosophical axioms which undergird Hartshorne’s position see Peters, *op. cit.*: 113-127.
24. For a full discussion of Hartshorne’s notion of dipolarity see *RSP*: 110-125 and *PSG*: 1-15.
25. *ANT*: 16.
26. See *PSG*: 510-511.
27. See Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
28. Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982): 230.
29. “. . . in so far as the three Persons implied an inner social life of deity, a believer in the social theory of reality must think there was truth in the idea . . . But he must also hold . . . that the notion of this divine life as having nothing temporal about it, or as involving no social relativity of God to the world as well as of God to God, tended to spoil the doctrine.” Charles Hartshorne. *RSP*: 24. See also *MVG*: 124.
30. John B. Cobb Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Manchester, England and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Manchester University Press and The Westminster Press, 1982): 19.
31. *Ibid.*

BOOK REVIEWS

The Genesis of Christology. Foundations for a Theology of the New Testament

Petr Pokorny. T.&T. Clark, 1987. Pp. xvi + 266. £14.95 (hb)

There have been many studies of the beginnings of christology in recent years. Why yet another one? What fresh light is there to be shed on such a well worked theme?

At first the answer is not very clear. The author is Professor of Theology and New Testament Exegesis at the Comenius Faculty of Protestant Theology in Prague, Czechoslovakia. An approach from an east European perspective might then hold prospects of something fresh. If that is our expectation, however, we will be disappointed. The perspective is not different because it is east European. The only difference at this point seems to be reference to texts which are less well known in the west, and lack of reference to others which may not be so well known in the east. For the rest Pokorny writes as a well informed and authoritative European New Testament scholar.

The opening chapter also whets the appetite to some degree. After critiquing some earlier studies Pokorny states his own objective: to look at the various early statements about Jesus, to see how they function in relation to the Christian communities and the developing Church; or, more briefly, to observe the interaction between social function and doctrinal (christological) statement. He wishes to take seriously the specific character of the Christian experience of faith, both as part of the historical data, and on the part of the investigator. The danger of dependence on a self-validating faith is not addressed. But Pokorny does make the important point that by taking faith seriously the investigation of the NT statements is able to relativize the distinction between a christology "from below" and a christology "from above". For the investigation will inevitably be "from below" in methodology. But the experience of faith assumes address from God and to that extent at least has a "from above" perspective (p. 11).

The second main chapter, however, on "Jesus of Nazareth", does not seem to advance discussion very far. The importance of recognizing that the earthly Jesus is the essential presupposition of christology is rightly emphasized. Pokorny will even maintain that "what Jesus said and did concerns us as the norm and presupposition of the tradition of the experience of faith" (p. 15). But the discussion thereafter simply covers well-trodden ground, in admirable summary style, to be sure, but with some uncomfortable gaps. On "the kingdom of God" in Jesus' preaching, for example, the problem of an imminent expectation unrealized is eased rather too easily (pp. 20-22). And the discussion of the Son of man sayings simply takes for granted the highly disputable claim that "the Son of man" was a title already current at the time of Jesus (pp. 23, 42, 57). The subsequent discussion also tends to be too heavily dependent on this too little examined assumption. On the other hand there are several keen insights sharply pointed, for example, a very neat treatment of faith on pp. 25-6, and of the last supper in pp. 48-52. And on pp. 32-3, the good point is made that

"Jesus distances himself from the predominant tone of the Jewish promises on behalf of the poor, which are practically always bound up with the expectation of judgment on opponents and enemies". He sums up his argument: Jesus "concentrated in the central questions of human existence and history and thereby identified himself with the will of God. In this way his message was bound up with his person" (p. 60).

But all this is really prolegomena. For the main thrust of the book begins to become clear at the end of chapter 2: "It was the Easter event that first revealed the true working of Jesus' inner life in its depth and present dimension." "Without Easter Jesus' life would be a shipwreck that would reveal only the negative side of things – the limits of human possibility" (p. 61). These statements form the launch pad from which the main investigation takes off.

Chapter 3 is the heart of the book, over a hundred pages focusing on "The Decisive Impulse". It starts simply enough with "the oldest credal formulae". But what looks at first as though it is yet another study of christological titles soon reveals itself as a highly sophisticated attempt to demonstrate that the resurrection kerygma is the fundamental christological claim. There are not a multiplicity of different christologies all with equal claim to originality. In particular, the concept of exaltation is not a different expression of the Easter event, but an interpretation which implies the resurrection kerygma (pp. 80-1). The Sayings Source may lack explicit reference to the resurrection but the authority of the words of Jesus in fact depended on the proclamation of the resurrection, so that it comes as no surprise that the sayings source did not survive independently within the canon (pp. 92-3). The differences in theological accent are to be explained not by reference to independent roots of Christianity but to their different *Sitze im Leben*. In short, all the different confessional statements in their extant form presuppose the resurrection of Jesus. Where groups did not bear testimony to this decisive impulse (the resurrection of Jesus) they could not properly be called Christian (p. 108).

Pokorny then turns to analysis of the decisive impulse itself – "the shock" which lies behind the confessional statements. He notes particularly the experience of ecstatic joy ("the earliest witness was not doctrine but joy..." – p. 235), and attempts to explain what the impulse behind it was, focusing particularly on the appearances, understood astonishingly in terms of the apocalyptic (*sic* = eschatological) category of "resurrection". This is the "something" without which the "Jesus thing" would have failed, experiences which were sufficiently strong to constitute a group identity for the first Christians and to differentiate them from others. It was in this context of enthusiastic joy that the resurrection kerygma was first formulated, though it was some time before it became crystallized in confessional statements.

The last two chapters contain a sequence of somewhat disconnected further reflections, in which Pokorny in effect attempts to substantiate the subtitle of his book, that is, to show the wider theological ramifications of

“the decisive impulse” in other facets of NT theology. He reflects, for example, on the tension between present experience and memories from the past, on the use of the OT in relation to the Easter experience, and on the relation of baptism to the resurrection kerygma. The emergence of the canon shows that the Pauline corpus, the synoptic gospels and the Johannine writings had become vital integrating traditions – all starting out from the resurrection kerygma or the variant conception of the exaltation. “The Bible”, he points out, “is not a sacred book in the manner of the Koran, which is itself intended to be the revelation. It is the witness which stands relatively nearest to the impulse and can therefore serve as a basis for further interpretation” (p. 232).

In all this there are naturally other matters with which one could take issue. There is a degree of repetition (not necessarily a bad thing) and some obscurity at times (whether of translation or text is unclear). Among many sharp and penetrating observations there are a few overstatements such as, “According to Jesus the kingdom of God has made the Old Testament now obsolete” (p. 190). The extent to which baptism was seen as an image of resurrection as well as of death is a good deal more questionable than Pokorny allows. And one could have wished that the professed interest in the social function of the confessional statements could have been developed a good deal more fully. But all in all what we have here is a most valuable and trenchant attempt to sustain in detail the highly important thesis that the Christianity of the New Testament springs from the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and nowhere else.

James D. G. Dunn

It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, SSF

ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson. CUP, 1988. Pp. xx + 381. £37.50 (hb)

Variety and tension may be seen as the characteristics of interpreting the Bible. Sometimes Scripture is a problem, valued as part of tradition yet with no clear word to the modern situation – to remain a living resource it must be struggled over in faith; at other times it is part of the air breathed, infusing new writing with its language. It can create images or rules, demand explanation or obedience. Some will search Scripture to compose an anthology which points to the present, others will translate it in the hope of strict faithfulness to the letter of the past. Sometimes it is not “Scripture” but only the tradition of the community, at others “what is written” is the source of authority and meaning. However much all this may seem to be true of the present, it is in fact a reflection on “Scripture citing Scripture”, on, as it were, the Biblical tradition’s use of itself.

This is the theme of a tribute to Barnabas Lindars; a worthy tribute, for not only has he made a substantial contribution to this area himself, but he has few equals in the range of Scripture which he has made the object of study. He has written about, taught and carried responsibility in learned societies for, both Old and New Testament; his writings range from detailed analyses of

short passages to commentaries on whole books, and from papers for the General Synod of the Church of England to articles for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, encompassing substantial monographs on the way. As a tribute to his 65th birthday the volume reflects a frequent dilemma for editors and publishers: should they invite students and colleagues of the honoree to make their own varied offering to a friend and mentor, or choose a consistent theme, with contributors selected with that theme in mind, in the hope that the book will be a contribution to the subject as well as to the scholar and purchased for the former reason as well as for the latter. This is the path chosen here – the editors see the book as a “textbook for the theological student – as well as a stimulus for more mature scholars”.

A survey of the contents gives sufficient indication of the theme. An introductory essay (I. H. Marshall) “assesses recent developments”, largely in the use of the Old Testament by the New and its influence on the development of Christian theology. There follow four essays on “the Old Testament in the Old Testament”, chiefly the use within one literary genre (history, prophecy, psalms and wisdom) of themes characteristic of the others. Five essays survey the period “Between the Testaments” (very broadly defined), exploring the treatment of the Old Testament in translations, in “retelling”, in commentaries, in the use of Scripture in Qumranic and other texts of the period, and in apocalyptic. The final nine essays focus on the use of the Old Testament within the major writings or groups of writings of the New, including a discussion of the important problem of determining the form of the text used (M. Wilcox).

It is evident that contributors were assigned – and most adhered to – a strict word limit despite the considerable variation in length of texts covered, and were asked to include both a survey of existing scholarship on the subject and a degree of personal assessment or contribution to it. This has not created a tedious uniformity: the balance between the two tasks varies as, of course, does the volume of existing scholarship to be assessed. Some adopt a broad, comprehensive perspective on their texts, others choose a few in-depth selected “probes”; some restrict themselves to clear citations, others allow even probable allusions. Yet the effect is one of uniform density; the programme allows none of the occasional lightness of touch or “kite-flying” that can enliven a *Festschrift* of the other kind. Neither is it easy to isolate one or more articles for offering particular insight or stimulus. Readers will allow their own interests to determine to which chapters they turn – and they will need to do so Bible in hand. Few will browse or read cover to cover in hope of sudden illumination. Whether this is the nature of a “text book” may be a matter for debate!

Yet undoubtedly the book will prove its value as a source for understanding the issues and as a basis for further work or reflection. That it does this through its individual components and not through the emergence of a common pattern is crucial to the question. Simplistic views of the way the New Testament uses the Old are prohibited, as too are dismissive comments about their greater lack of concern for the integrity of the text. S. P.

Brock's concluding comments ("Translating the Old Testament") merit reflection: biblical translation, and interpretation, demands not only linguistic and textual skills and knowledge but also insight into and empathy with the biblical texts. "Although it can be claimed that modern translators are often better equipped in the former respect than their predecessors in antiquity, it would be arrogant to assume that they excel them in the latter respect as well."

Judith Lieu

The Sermon on the Mount. An Exegetical Commentary

Georg Strecker. T.&T. Clark, 1988. Pp. 223. £9.95

Georg Strecker is one of the most respected names in Matthaean studies and this translation is to be welcomed respectfully, if (as far as this reviewer is concerned) somewhat ambivalently. His exegesis is thorough and professional, critical in a thoroughly responsible way – at least if one does not wish to apply Occam's razor to pre-Matthaean sources; Q (and Q *Matt.* and *Luke*) is taken for granted. He gives a clear and reasoned reconstruction of the tradition-history of the various elements of the Sermon, allowing more to go back to Jesus than some would, though his criteria are sometimes a bit wooden. A bibliography precedes each small section and there are extensive references in the endnotes, mostly to German writings naturally, but he has packed his immense learning into only 175 pages of text. He is well aware of the contemporary importance of the Sermon for a world bent on self-annihilation, but rightly eschews short cuts. "Before its meaning is translated into the present, we must hear its original statement. In the process we will find opening up, precisely in the strangeness of this text that belongs to the past, not only an unmistakable identity, but also a specific relevance for today" (p. 23). He has brief but pointed things to say about earlier types of interpretation, from Luther to the Peace Movement, and nails a number of false approaches in the final chapter.

Strecker himself distinguishes three levels: Jesus' radical call for repentance under the imminence of God's kingdom; the early communities' adaptation of Jesus' teaching to provide rules to live by; and Matthew's own masterful completion of this trajectory by resharpening Jesus' radical demand, while generalizing it into rules to guide the church on its journey through time, in the light of his failure to return.

Resharpening, yes; generalizing rules – here doubts begin. On the one hand Strecker denies that Matthew has an eye either on contemporary scribes and Pharisees (they are just a foil for Jesus' positive assertions), or on contemporary antinomians (the "false prophets" of 7:15 have no specific relevance, and are not to be connected with those who say "Lord, Lord" in 7:21 ff). He is right to warn against trying to relate every remark in the gospels to some contemporary phenomenon, yet dating Matthew after AD 70, as Strecker does, it is hard not to see Matthew arming Christians against a Jewish counter-reformation; and his additions to Mark at 24:10-12, picking up the warnings of 7:15 ff, do look more pointed than Strecker allows.

On the other hand he seems too ready to detect Matthew and his predecessors' provision of practical guidance for the present, and to interpret vivid and humorous pictures rather woodenly as rules. For example, 5:23-24 "contains a community rule", but five lines later "it contains a warning: reconciliation comes before cultic practice!". Exactly: a warning; and Strecker elsewhere sharply distinguishes Jesus' prophetic warnings and the community's rules. Then on oaths: in 5:36 he says Matthew meets the practical needs by making "Yes yes, No no" into a substitute oath. This far from obvious exegesis is perhaps influenced by the presupposition. As for alms-giving, prayer and fasting (6:1-18), these three rules of piety are pre-Matthaean, but cannot go back to Jesus: the "wisdom-like structure is quite different from the call to repentance based on the nearness of the kingdom of God and from the radical ethical demand of Jesus" (p. 102 – yet on p. 108 and in other places he notes that the mixture of apocalyptic and wisdom elements is characteristic of Jesus' proclamation). The Christian practice of fasting is very different from Jesus' word about the presence of the bridegroom (9.15; Mark 2:15). But why could Jesus not have said both? Strecker is blind to the possibility of current practices being humorously used to make a point, rather than to give rival rules. Though stressing the strangeness of the text, he is not always able to discard the spectacles of Western logic, and seems out of touch with Jewish rhetoric and humour. He mentions Schlatter's suggestion that 6:2 presupposes a custom that "the synagogue attendant blew into his trumpet (*sic* – for *in das Horn stieß*) when an especially large sum was given", but hope that his tongue is in his cheek is dashed by his inability to decide whether *tameion* (6:6) is a store-house or a lean-to shed, and by his dismissal of "the idea that the false prophets will actually be clothed in garments of sheepskin, as is often presumed on the basis of Mark 1:6" (p. 162), as "hardly likely".

Strecker seems often blind to the *character* of the Sermon's commands, which C. H. Dodd and John Robinson emphasized: not community rules but flashlight pictures, appealing through the imagination of the will. "If thine eye is evil . . ."

The feeling of woodenness is aggravated by the translation, which (e.g.) takes over the German numbering of the Commandments without comment (so that the fifth is about murder – *absit omen!*). It is unidiomatic, and often wrong (taking the first dictionary meaning of a word, regardless of fit), and the translator is sometimes out of his depth. Surely publishers should have a translation vetted.

It is a pity because the book has solid merits. It is in many respects acute, subtle and illuminating. Strecker is particularly good at bringing out the eschatological colouring of everything in the Sermon, but subordinating this to Matthew's magisterial Christology: everything is relevant still as bringing home Christ's total demand, brought to its sharpest point in love of the enemy.

John Sweet

Women and Early Christianity

Susanne Heine. SCM Press, 1987. Pp. vi + 182. £6.95

Christianity and the Goddesses

Susanne Heine. SCM Press, 1988. Pp. vi + 183. £6.95

The translation of these two books by Susanne Heine, who teaches in the Protestant Faculty of Theology at Vienna, makes available a self-critical assessment of feminist theological thinking which provides a valuable counter to some of its more extravagant claims but in no way belittles the insights it has offered. Her own hope is to distinguish “real results from the products of wishful thinking”, and in this she is largely successful.

Women and Early Christianity is essentially a methodological study: what are the limits of the historical method when applied to evaluating the place of women in the traditions about Jesus or Paul or the church fathers? Will claims made by Elaine Pagels and others in a feminist interest on behalf of Gnosticism stand up to serious scrutiny? Many shrewd points are made at the expense of both traditional forms of study and of feminist claims; each has too often been guilty of taking both biblical and patristic texts out of their cultural context. In this process both Paul and Tertullian receive some interesting rehabilitation. The “associative fantasy” indulged in both by feminists and by their opponents when sexual matters are at issue has meant that serious use of the social sciences to clarify the possible range of male-female relationships has in effect become impossible. But that does not necessarily mean that to understand the reasons for particular developments rules out any criticism; the last stage in the New Testament, represented by 1 Tim. 2, is seen as “a slap in the face for the Jesus movement” of a deeply regrettable kind.

In *Christianity and the Goddesses* the methodological points set out in the earlier book are taken for granted, and attention is now turned to claims made on behalf of a primitive matriarchy and the various Canaanite goddesses whose claims are so emphatically rejected by the Old Testament; we are here in a world “between myth and utopia” which has often prevented serious and balanced assessment of the assertions that are being made. This in turn leads to a consideration of the use of paternal and maternal language for the description of God. Some powerful points are made, reaching a climax in what is described as a sermon, *Jesa Christa, a Critique of the Ideal*, which warns that “those who divinize women and stylize them into an ideal are as guilty as those who brand them as demons”.

All those who attempt to take a mediating position are liable to come under attack from those who *know* that their views are the only proper ones, and Prof. Heine will no doubt bear that kind of criticism with equanimity. If her criticisms of extravagant feminist claims have been more prominent in this review it should certainly be noted that they are balanced by some equally trenchant comments on male chauvinist views. More difficult for the English-speaking reader will be the frequent references to contemporary debate within the German-speaking intellectual world, little of which is probably

known in this country; certain parts of *Christianity and the Goddesses*, in particular, become very obscure without detailed knowledge of that debate. But with that reservation these books should be warmly welcomed; they are translated with John Bowden’s customary clarity and offer an introduction to a range of issues not readily available from other sources.

Richard Coggins

The Moral World of the First Christians

Wayne Meeks. S.P.C.K., 1987. Pp. 182. £6.95

“I wonder what it all really felt like.” The question might pass across one’s mind as one thinks of a first-century *homme moyen sensuel* listening, say, to Paul expounding Isaiah. Were his reactions very different indeed from ours when he thought about life and death, politics and sex; when he heard the claims made about Jesus? If so, in what ways did he react differently from us? In the background of serious conversation in any age there lies an unspoken context of attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, taken entirely for granted by all concerned. Perhaps this is specially so when the conversation is about values and behaviour. If only we could “get at” this unspoken context of conversation about choices and duties in the case of the first Christians, how much more accurately we should read the texts they left behind!

It is this mental environment of moral discourse in the communities of first-century Christians that Professor Meeks investigates. For by the “moral world” of his title he means, at least roughly, what Clifford Geertz (whom he quotes at p. 15) intends by “ethos”: “the tone, character, and quality of [a people’s] life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; ... the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world”. With this end in view, Meeks offers a broad account, with sharply detailed illustrations, of the background and content of ethical theory in the Hellenistic world aside from Judaism, and then of moral stances – in the widest sense – among Jews and early Christians. A first chapter sets the social scene with the masterly touch we have already encountered in *The First Urban Christians*: here is a fine *tour d’horizon* of all that was connoted by the term *polis*. Platonism and the Stoa are then presented through succinct accounts of the moral outlook of Plutarch and Musonius Rufus. In his description of the Cynics the views of the more “austere” and the “mild” are distinguished (p. 55). On the Jewish side, Ben Sira and Qumran receive six pages each, Philo (who speaks, not for Jews “who will assimilate into the high culture of Alexandria, but [for] those who, like himself, want to be at home in both worlds”, p. 84) a little less. A brief treatment of the Mishna lays some stress on its social setting, which is that of the Palestinian village (endorsing Neusner, p. 89). In chapter 4, Meeks’ “stalking” (p. 97) of the first Christians brings him close to his quarry, whom he describes in a fine summary presentation of the sociologists’ overview of Christian origins. Likeness and distinctiveness in relation to existing models for communal self-awareness are succinctly indicated, as a prelude to showing how, in specifically moral matters, what was shared with the environment is to be balanced against what was innovative. This last concern is then made the subject of

the closing chapter, "The Grammar of Early Christian Morals". Meeks surveys in turn the morality of 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Matthew, the Apocalypse, the Didache, and Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.

Some of this will be familiar to most readers: the book is successfully designed to make good sense to those without previous reading in the subject. At the same time, Meeks corrects some current understandings ("it is debatable", for instance, "how distinctive the different [philosophical] schools really were in Roman times. Certainly they influenced each other considerably", p. 41) and has many fresh and stimulating things to say. The question remains, however: how far has he (or could he have) achieved his aim? This is a masterly contribution to the history of ideas. How far has it enabled us to grasp "what it all really felt like" – to sense the "moral... style and mood" of those about whom he writes?

One point at least emerges clearly. In the "essential dialectic between community and self" which has so much to do with character and identity (p. 12), the former term – insofar as we take it as indicating the total fabric of the social order – was a "given". It was not thinkable that one could, still less that one had a duty to, work for what we call "change" in society. Those Cynics who, as Meeks shows, wished to unsettle the "ethos" of their world perhaps faintly adumbrate that impossibility. They certainly did not attempt more (p. 55). In his valuable analysis of the moral thought of 1 Corinthians, Meeks has something to say about "reversal". But it is a reversal of perceptions, not, save at the level of private relationships, of praxis. Even the Apocalypse urges reversal of perceptions: it utters "no call for revolutionary action" (p. 146). The focus of moral attitudes was local: thus a recurrent topic in Meeks' account of both Jews and Christians is that of relations with neighbours. Perhaps, then, the "style and mood" – for most if not all of the groupings discussed – had to do with "what makes me different?" and "what makes us different?", in other words, with forms of self-image and self-awareness. So at least Meeks seems to judge. Specific issues in terms of which the "difference" might be expressed – duty to parents and to the indigent, slavery, sexual behaviour – receive relatively little space.

Nevertheless, there is nothing nebulous about this study. Where the focus can be sharp – and that is most of the way along Meeks' agenda – it is. No reader can put this book down without a better appreciation than before of the precise network of constraints, rather different from those we know, surrounding the choices the first Christians had to make in dealing both with fellow-believers and with outsiders.

C. J. A. Hickling

Biblical Hermeneutics. An Introduction

Duncan S. Ferguson. SCM, 1987. Pp. iv + 220. £7.95

This book falls into three main parts, entitled respectively "The Issues of Biblical Hermeneutics", "The Practice of Hermeneutics", and "Hermeneutics in the

Life of the Church". Ferguson's basic contention is that Scripture needs to be interpreted anew for each generation in its own categories of understanding and relevance, and that the interpreter should have an "internalist" position of faith but, equally, use the historical method in the interpretive task. The bulk of the book, however, while consistently advancing this argument, is less concerned with developing a thesis than with giving a brief outline and explanation of the main concerns and technical terms that hermeneutics involves.

Thus, Section 1 begins with an attempt to define what hermeneutics is basically about; Ferguson sees it primarily as the task of "hearing" what an ancient text has to say, which involves the rules and principles of interpretation, but so as to allow the past to inform the present and point to the future. In specifying more clearly what this "hearing" involves he lays great stress, here and throughout, on the importance of "preunderstanding", which he defines (p. 6) as "a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it". What he means by this is further spelt out in the "taxonomy" of preunderstanding that he sets out; that is, a list and brief explication of the categories, functions and correlations (with the subject to be interpreted) of preunderstanding. But Ferguson's emphasis is especially on faith as "the preunderstanding which is able to rightly grasp God's self-disclosure" (p. 18; those who do not like their infinitives split will find their teeth set on edge in this book!), integrally bound up with historical self-understanding (p. 22: "But the preunderstanding of faith is dependent upon God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ attested to in Scripture").

Yet, Ferguson argues, even with faith and historical method, the interpreter usually brings other assumptions as well, especially concerning Scripture, and he indicates some main positions relating to its unity, diversity, and character and style; he also gives a brief discussion of some principal concepts frequently used in relation to the bible: revelation, Word of God, inspiration, authority, tradition and function. Because "biblical faith has found revelation centered primarily in certain historical events, chief of which is the coming of Christ" (p. 40), Ferguson sees revelation, history and faith, and their interrelation, as the crucial issues of hermeneutics. He traces the developments, concerning revelation and history, from Kant through Schleiermacher and Hegel to the 20th century, especially Barth and Bultmann. With Bultmann we find effectively the separation of faith and history, but there is strong reaction against this in post-Bultmannian theology, particularly in Pannenberg's understanding of faith *as* history. This whole discussion has inevitably raised with it the questions of the historical Jesus and the resurrection; but in both cases, Ferguson contends, the historian's judgment is dependent on his preunderstanding, and he must have an open mind to weigh the evidence.

In Section II, Ferguson addresses the question of "ways of preserving the Bible as the Scripture of the church" (p. 68), and adopts the customary distinction between general and special hermeneutics. Hence first he takes up the issue of an overall methodology, related to basic principles about context, language, history and

culture. He stresses that “the Bible should be approached with all the resources that historical and linguistic scholarship make available” (p. 187): textual, literary, source, form and redaction criticism, and language analysis. It is, however, a further step from biblical criticism to a “conception of the Bible which preserves it as the Scripture of the church, as authoritative for theology and instructive for the common life of the Christian community” (p. 79), and to this end, Ferguson offers a brief discussion of the four traditional concepts of canon, history, Word of God and authority.

Special hermeneutics, on the other hand, is “concerned with establishing definitions and principles which guide in the interpretation of special literary forms and topical areas” (p. 85). Hence, Ferguson notes first the need for the interpreter to come to terms with the sheer diversity of the biblical material, and he therefore touches briefly on various attempts to impose some order and unity on the whole (by means of typology, allegory and analogy); he also notes the great variety of language and figures of speech used in the bible (introducing and explaining some technical terms) and varieties of genre within the biblical corpus (law, history, poetry, prophecy, doctrine, apocalyptic), and concludes with ten general principles of hermeneutics. Finally in this section, he deals with the question of how Scripture can be normative and authoritative for theology, and enunciates ten principles for how the theologian should operate in relation to Scripture. He then indicates how Scripture should be used in worship (preaching and liturgy), in teaching and pastoral care and in spiritual formation and ethical decision making, and concludes with seven hermeneutical maxims for using the Bible in Christian nurture.

Section III is concerned with examining the hermeneutical approaches of some representative interpreters of the Bible. Here, Ferguson devotes a fair amount of space to Origen, noting the creative value of his allegorical method but criticizing it for its failure to be truly historical, and to Luther, whom he sees as important for his emphasis on historical method, although at the same time uncritical in his use of Scripture and too prone to apply a christological hermeneutic to the whole of it. He then looks more briefly at Schleiermacher and Dilthey, approving of their emphasis on the need for creative empathy between interpreter and biblical author but criticizing their failure to escape from the limitations of the psychological method and its disregard for historical context; and finally, and again briefly, he deals with Bultmann and representatives of some of the main hermeneutical positions taken up in the post-Bultmannian period. He concludes that this survey shows clearly that all these interpreters bring some measure of preunderstanding to their work, and that the particular hermeneutic fails if either faith or proper historical method are lacking.

This summary does not do full justice to Ferguson’s work. It has to be said, however, that a great deal of the book (especially in Section I and II) reads too much like a catalogue of terms, with brief and rather bland definitions attached. Because of the way the book is organized, there is also a certain amount of repetition (for example, the same basic descriptive material about the

bible in both Sections I and II, and the discussions of 20th century theology in Section I and III). The book is deliberately intended as a limited basic outline, with brief sectional bibliographies, but even so it is surprising that there is no mention of, for example, Thistelton’s *Two Horizons* (although Gadamer is dealt with briefly), and very little of narrative theology or liberation theology as hermeneutical methods, while the brief mention of structuralism (p. 78) does not even touch on post-modernism, intertextuality or reader-response approaches.

Above all, it is a pity that there are no specific *examples* of hermeneutical methods applied to particular texts, which would have been potentially much more stimulating, and informative of what hermeneutics is really supposed to be about, than the rather turgid lists of terms and rules with which the book is replete. The book is of course meant to be merely a basic introduction to a complex area, but it is precisely for such a purpose and for a non-expert readership that well-chosen illustrations would be especially helpful, particularly since the “received” version of hermeneutics that Ferguson presents in fact draws on some rather outmoded and unsatisfactory classificatory categories (of which the various genres to which the biblical material is assigned are merely one example). Indeed, it would have been interesting to see more of Ferguson’s own hermeneutic approach, too briefly and self-deprecatingly set out at the end in what he terms a “Modest Proposal”, where he suggests that the guiding norm for the use of scripture in the church should be the inauguration of God’s kingly rule in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. He indicates, movingly, in outline how this might be worked out (p. 194):

“The purpose of God’s kingly rule, epitomized in Jesus, is the liberation of all peoples. This is the message of the Bible. This is the mission of the church, which claims the resurrected Jesus as Lord, to challenge all forms of oppression and to help relieve human suffering in all its diabolical manifestations. God is not indifferent to the plight of the poor, the hungry, the illiterate, the victims of war and prejudice, and those oppressed by military, political, and economic tyranny. The church has no choice but to dive in and help those whose worldly address lies within one of the many suburbs of hell. It has no choice but to accept the partnership with God in the creation of a better world”.

Thus, Ferguson shows clearly how he meets his own concern for Scripture to be “interpreted anew for each generation in its own categories of understanding and relevance”, and it is an approach that deserves to be taken very seriously, not least by those of us who, in our concern to find the “objective” meaning of the text, can properly be accused of failing to relate the text to the real world in which we live. This book, despite its limitations, is worth reading and using for reference. But if you want something to ponder and potentially apply to your own reading of Scripture, it might be worth beginning at the end!

Andrew Chester

The Gnostic Scriptures. A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions

Bentley Layton. SCM, 1987. Pp. xlii + 526. £25

Since the publication of the Nag Hammadi library, interest in the study of Gnostic literature has grown apace. This volume, which presents nearly all the relevant texts in a new English translation, is thus to be warmly welcomed. Prior to the discoveries at Nag Hammadi, much of our knowledge of Gnosticism came from reports of church fathers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius. One particularly valuable feature of the present collection is that Layton has included translations of all the relevant sections from patristic sources to place alongside the Gnostic texts themselves. As well as translating the texts, Layton has also given extended introductions to the various writings, dealing with different facets of Gnostic studies and placing the texts in their (possible) historical contexts. The result is an extremely useful resource for studying these Gnostic writings.

The volume must however be used critically. Every translation is itself an interpretation and hence Layton's translations involve interpretative decisions which are at times quite wide-ranging. However, the chosen format of the volume as a whole precludes noting such instances in the footnotes. Perhaps more questionable is Layton's decision to collect the texts chosen into various well-defined groupings of "Classic Gnostic Scripture", Valentinianism, Thomas literature, Hermetic literature, etc. The views represented by Layton are of course well known to specialists and by no means idiosyncratic. However, they are not universally held. *Do* the so-called "classic Gnostic" texts represent the views of a single, well-defined Gnostic community? *Is* all the Thomas literature to be considered on its own and separately from other (related) Gnostic texts? And *is* the Gospel of Thomas a source of very primitive forms of sayings of Jesus? The unwary reader might easily be misled here into thinking that scholarly views are more monochrome than in fact they are.

One slightly irritating feature of the volume is that the titles of various works, especially some of the Nag Hammadi texts, have been changed from what has, up till now, been their standard title. The Apocalypse of Adam is now the "Revelation of Adam" (abbreviated "RAd"). Were such changes necessary? Further, not quite all the texts one might have expected are included here. For example, the tractate Melchizedek from Nag Hammadi, and the Gospel of Mary from BG 8502 are not here. However, such omissions are amply counterbalanced by the wealth of patristic material included here as well as the fresh translations provided of some of the Hermetic literature. Used with care, this volume will undoubtedly be an invaluable resource for all students of Gnostic literature.

C. M. Tuckett

The Trinitarian Faith

Thomas F. Torrance. T.&T. Clark, 1988. Pp. 345. £18.95

There is an undoubted change in climate when moving north of the border theologically. This is expressed classically, perhaps, in the enduring contribution and even domination of Thomas Torrance on the theological scene in Scotland. Alongside the theological rigour runs a continuing respect for the work of Karl Barth, and this is manifest in this latest one-volume dogmatics. The entire argument is consistently Patristic, as the subject matter is the place of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed in the continuing life of the Church, and as the controlling basis of Christian faith. Indeed, so dominant is the Patristic material that well over 1000 footnotes catalogue Torrance's witnesses to the argument as his thesis unfolds. It is a pity that there is no concordance to these references, since almost certainly one of the continuing uses of this book will be as a compendium of learning in this realm of theological study. It is also regrettable that there is no index to modern authors cited, nor indeed more engagement with other contemporary writers, as we shall note later.

The book is clearly structured. Torrance begins by setting the scene and discussing the normative significance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan tradition. He then develops from this a chapter which makes clear why the Nicene fathers saw the need to develop incarnational theology in the manner in which they did, and why the *homoousion* played such a central part in this. The book then devotes two chapters to the nature of God, beginning with "the almighty Creator". Torrance then takes us through a discussion of "the incarnate Saviour" and finally in this part of his argument he moves on to a critical discussion of the development of the *homoousion* of the Spirit. The concluding chapters look at the nature of the Church, and finally at trinitarian belief. This brief outline, however, and even the chapter headings, conceal the remarkable dominance of a massive christological structure throughout his argument. One of the essential questions that must be asked of Torrance's thesis is: to what extent is a coherent model of the Trinity vitiated by an overdeveloped christological core? Despite the various headings relating to the nature of God and then to christology, chapters three to five all concentrate on the construction of this christological core. In classical Barthian manner, Torrance argues that we can know nothing of God, except that which he has revealed of himself through Jesus Christ. Ignoring for one moment the implicit denial of natural theology in this argument, a correlative question presents itself about the balance of the persons in the resultant Trinitarian model, which Torrance describes.

Part of this argument centres on Torrance's assertion that Patristic Christianity was not corrupted by Hellenistic thought in the way that many historical theologians have suggested. Instead, Torrance believes that Christian theology was revolutionary in its "Christianizing of the Hellenistic thought patterns" in which it found itself set. The Hebraic origins of the gospel were crucial in this process, Torrance argues. Other critical commentators may, however, want to suggest that the truth lies somewhere in between these

two extremes. No thought pattern is likely to remain uncoloured by the culture in which it finds itself set, and Patristic Christianity is no exception to this rule. Hellenistic and Hebraic influences combine in a complex manner, indeed at times may be radically metamorphosed by the circumstances of history. This seems to be disallowed by Torrance's implicit historiography. Hilary, Athanasius and the other Nicene Fathers are given blanket coverage, and at times these central chapters read rather like a rhythmic repetition of the Quincunque Vult.

There is a feeling that the book begins to loosen up, once Torrance feels he has established his over-riding point. There is a subtle and constructive discussion of passibility, for example, on pages 185 ff, where Torrance argues that God "redeems our passibility in his impassibility", and thus that God is not unaffected by the sufferings and afflictions of his people. His critical analysis of the part played by the Cappadocian Fathers in the establishment of the *homoousion* of the Spirit is also realistic and perceptive. He sees the Cappadocians as bequeathing two problems to their successors. The first is the danger of tritheism and incoherence within the Trinity itself; the second is an over-emphasis of the Father at the expense of the other two persons of the Trinity. Against this must be held the potential weakness of Torrance's own model with its radical emphasis on the person of Christ. Indeed in his model, even the Church is affected by this massive Christology, and the pneumatological models of the Church mooted by Schillebeeckx are not reflected at all in these pages.

It is in the final two chapters that there is the most lively and critical discussion. His reflections on the nature of catholicity and apostolicity are timely, as are his comments on second baptism. In the final chapter there is some repetition of earlier argument, but also some useful material on the changing directions of the early Fathers, and the different emphasis at different periods within patristic history.

Ultimately, despite the immense learning displayed in the book, I found myself disappointed. It was in the lively discussion of the final chapter that the reasons for my discontent became plain to me. Torrance's analytical reflection here was prepared to ask questions of points that he had hitherto taken for granted. There is an unassailable feeling throughout much of the rest of the book that Trinitarian dogma is revealed in much the same way that propositional views of revelation have argued for with regard to the biblical text. There is thus no engagement with modern writers and no attempt to broach issues raised by other notable Patristic theologians such as Geoffrey Lampe, in his various writings discussing Trinitarian faith. My dissatisfaction is, then, with Torrance's reluctance to use his immense erudition by allowing it to engage with contemporary historical-critical Patristic commentators.

Stephen Platten

Being and Relation. A Theological Critique of Western Dualism and Individualism

Carver T. Yu. Scottish Academic Press, 1987. Pp. xxiv + 239. £15.00 (hb)

Cultures are rather like pictures: if they are to be seen for what they are, a certain distancing is required. That is why we must always be grateful when observers from other traditions give us something of the gift of seeing ourselves as others see us. Carver Yu is one such: a Chinese theologian who is yet deeply immersed in the history of Western culture, which, with justification, he sees to be sunk in crisis. The latest in the "Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge" series, two others of which were reviewed with less than complete enthusiasm in a recent edition of this journal, this is an important book, and deserves wide influence.

An introduction charts the relativism and pessimism which the author observes in the West, and also remarks on the danger that China will suffer similarly. But while Chinese thought seeks the essence of Being in humanity, the Western tradition, he claims, conceives the world in abstraction from its relation with man. The Western problem is first charted with the help of writers like Christopher Dawson, Eliot, Kafka and Becket. What the author observes is an erosion of the personal, something which is not restored by those, like Husserl and Heidegger, who are aware of the crisis but fail to transcend it.

Carver Yu believes that the source of the malaise is not Descartes and modern philosophy, as is often claimed, but is to be sought far further back, in the very roots of the Western philosophical tradition. In reaction against the crude anthropomorphism and interventionism of the Greek gods, the pre-Socratic philosophers began a quest for the "thing-in-itself", reality identified in abstraction from its relation with the rest of the universe. The outcome is an understanding of the world in which the perceiving mind is unrelated to the world it perceives, and the "building blocks" of reality unrelated to other entities. The problem is seen at its worst in its effect on modern social philosophy, which, in the form it took after Descartes leads to an atomistic understanding of society which is also intellectualistic, contractual and utilitarian.

The urgent requirement in the face of this alienation is a rediscovery of human kinship with the world – "Man within the Community of Beings" as the final section heading has it. The heart of the book's major thesis is a long chapter on the contribution a biblical conception of being can make to a process of social reconstruction. The biblical orientation to history conceives human identity as a process of becoming through communion and involvement. Biblical openness to the future entails the openness of realms of being towards one another. "'Reality' is perceived more as a drama of unfolding and fulfilment of being through interaction and communion than as a mere collocation of things with distinct identities" (p. 199).

Despite the fact that what Dr Yu says about the biblical world view is important and true, he does not go far enough. It is not adequate simply to oppose a biblical relational view to Western dualism and individualism. The early Greek philosophers were surely right to reject the mythological theology of their tradition. Christianity rejects it too, but it rejects it on the basis of a different theology, a conceptuality by means of which the relation of God and world can be understood relationally without interventionist myth. The task which this book essays cannot succeed without closer attention to the doctrine of God, and that means here the Trinity. That is how the early theologians solved the problem, and that is how it must be approached now if we are to avoid an apparent biblicism.

But that is a counsel of perfection. In the analysis and diagnosis it provides, and in the steps it takes towards an alternative, this is a book to be greeted enthusiastically as an important theological contribution to one of the most important debates of our age.

Colin Gunton

Easter in Ordinary. Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God

Nicholas Lash. SCM Press, 1988. Pp. 311. £12.95

The aim of this book is said at the outset to be to “construct an argument in favour of one way of construing or interpreting human experience as experience of God”. In fact, however, there is a noticeable scarcity of direct and sustained argument, the case being instead made out through a series of reviews of previous thinkers who either support or oppose the author’s thesis, a procedure which reflects his conviction that human thinking must invariably consist of “a process of critical remembrance” of “the cultural, historical processes which produced us, and in which we find ourselves situated”. It also means that the book conforms fully to his daunting injunction that “serious theological reflection... is, and should always be made to be *hard work*”.

The first third of the book is devoted to a critique, by means of an extended consideration of William James, of a currently fashionable opposing view of “religious experience”, much in evidence in contemporary interest in “mysticism”, that it is a “state of excited feeling... private to the individual alone”, which is assumed to be “communion with some ‘superhuman consciousness’”. This notion, which is rejected on the grounds that since all experience is culturally mediated “there is no such thing as pure or raw experience”, is condemned as an “infantilist” and “dehumanizing” “abdication of social and intellectual responsibility”.

In its middle reaches, the book meanders through a series of less ambitious discussions of a variety of thinkers – Hegel, Fries, Schleiermacher, Newman and, above all, Von Hügel – all of whom in Lash’s view in one way or another are “getting warmer” in that they move towards the conception that the spiritual must be seen as one element in a triad of reciprocally influential factors,

the other two being the “scientific” or “intellectual” on the one hand, and the “social”, “personal” and “political” on the other.

Only in the closing chapters does it become clear that Lash’s position consists essentially of an endorsement of the later Rahner’s account of “transcendental experience” crossed with Buber’s personalism; that is, with Rahner, he regards “experience of God” as that “further dimension” said to suffuse *all* human experiences as the obscure sense of their overall “point” or “drift”, which is attended to, if at all, usually only in extreme situations such as the prospect of death. Rahner is, however, criticized for “underplaying” man’s social nature, an “individualism” attributed to “oversight or inattention”. Buber is invoked to remedy the defect, but Lash does not so much argue for the truth of his account of human nature as assume his pronouncements to be “prophetic”.

A wide range of controversial issues are raised in this book, and there is space to note only three possible inconsistencies in Lash’s position. First, while he repeatedly disavows “fideism”, he endorses Rahner’s description of transcendental experience as “dark, threatening and ambiguous”, and suggest that it therefore poses a “practical dilemma” resolvable only by an “effort of trust”, “commitment”, and “risk”, so that what we need is not “epistemology” but “ethics”. Lash therefore uses his intellect only to satisfy himself that the question of God must be resolved by “a choice between acceptance and rejection”. But, surely this brings his position well within the range of views which have come to be termed “fideist”?

Secondly, his insistence that one must avoid “falling into the trap of supposing God to be a person... which he certainly is not, for he is not *an anything*” is hard to square with his repeated endorsement of Buber’s dictum that “the relation to a human being is the proper metaphor for the relation to God”, for how can one have a personal relationship with what is not a person? Actually, Lash says that we can “use personal language” of God because he has “addressed” in “his *self*-statement in the flesh and texture of history... his imperishable *self*-gift”. But do we not mean by a human “person” precisely a “self” (and not “a thing”) which can “address” others (and so must be “a” person) even though the *persona* can never fully express its abidingly mysterious inner being? If so, the term “person” would seem to be a uniquely appropriate metaphor for what Lash has in mind by the term “God”.

Thirdly, Lash hedges around the few specifically Christian affirmations he makes with such radical qualifications that he appears to be moving to the margins of orthodox Christianity. Thus, immediately after his apparently unequivocal affirmation of the Incarnation he adds the caveat that “the utterance is not the utterer, that what we ‘see’ in him is the image of the Imageless One... the clarification which he supplies remaining... impenetrable darkness”. Besides, it remains a “contestable” notion and we are “brought to acknowledge our responsibility to recommend (it) to others” only because “doctrine authorizes” it. But is this submission to Christian doctrine the result of an impartial scrutiny of all religious traditions leading us to recognize the superiority of catholic Christianity? No,

because there is no “neutral standpoint, no place that is not some place” from which the claims of various traditions can be “tested and compared”. And yet Lash does eventually come up with a litmus test for the validity of religious traditions: we can retain our allegiance to Christianity in the last analysis, he says, only “in the measure that, through working with these (creedal) rules, we are again and again confronted with the possibility of conversion” to that “basic trust” in each other which is the *sine qua non* for the development of genuine personal relationships. But has Lash really grounds for denying that “basic trust” can never be found outside the Christian tradition? If he were to concede that it can, and also acknowledge that far from being hermetically locked into any one tradition, whether “Christian” or any other, we are all nowadays open to the four winds whether we like it or not, he would find he has worked himself well clear of any *exclusively* Christian allegiance.

R. M. Burns

Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis. A South African Perspective

John W. de Gruchy. Collins Flame, 1987. Pp. 183. £7.95

The author is professor of Christian studies at the University of Cape Town; his subject is the way in which both the practice of Christian theology and the exercise of the church’s ministry are qualified by their cultural context and historical “crisis”. Professor de Gruchy exemplifies this from his own situation where, it is obvious, he is passionately committed to the causes of freedom and justice.

In the first chapter, he considers the church’s ministry as an integral part of the “community of faith”. He observes that the image of the ministry has changed from one time and place to another, and notes the fact that in times of crisis it is likely that the minister will model himself uncritically upon such an image. Such images, he believes, are conditioned by culture: “as much influenced by that as it is by theology and Christian tradition” (p. 22). Here then is a dilemma. Ministry is exercised only within a particular culture, and, to be exercised effectively, it must serve the needs of the people of that culture. Does this make the church’s ministry a chameleon; taking its colour only from its immediate surroundings? This, the author argues, is the danger, for “while it is evangelically necessary for the ordained ministry to relate to its particular historical and cultural context, we also need to be aware that cultural adaptation often occurs in ways which are detrimental to ministry and mission” (pp.37 f). In place of this, de Gruchy seeks a concept that will embrace the diversities of the Christian tradition as well as the varieties of cultural context, finding the minister’s essential function in “practical theology”: “the pastor has to be a practical theologian who is able to discern the meaning of the gospel within the particular context of his or her ministry” (p. 40).

In the second chapter, he relates the practical theology of the pastor to the prophetic tradition of the Old

Testament. He traces the “domestication” of prophecy down the centuries, and argues that it is this which has led the church until very recently to ignore the important biblical concepts of justice and oppression. (Has the neglect really been as complete as all that? Perhaps St Thomas deserves more than his one reference on p. 51 . . .) Though he notes the “need to be constantly aware of equating one’s own perceptions with the prophetic ‘Thus says the Lord’” (p. 86), the means by which a prophet escapes this danger are not spelt out.

The third chapter, devoted to the problem of suffering, is a wide-ranging survey of recent contributions to the subject. The author’s views are summed up on p. 123: “The credibility of the church’s testimony today is bound up not so much with its intellectual ability to defend the faith, to solve the theodicy problem as traditionally stated, though I do not underestimate the importance of that, but far more with the willingness of the church to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the world. And this means to share in the struggle for justice.” Practical theology passes necessarily into practical (and political) commitment.

In the final chapter, he returns to the task of the ordained minister, and in particular the “theological formation of the People of God”. He needs to have given more attention to the criticism of prophecy; perhaps an argument should have been developed to the effect that the prophetic word of liberation, with all its attendant dangers, must be tested against the common mind of the church. Is part of the “practical theology” of the *whole* People of God the job of testing its prophets? There are parts of the world other than southern Africa (as the Lambeth bishops were acutely reminded) where the “struggle for justice” is an ambiguous concept; – where the spirits of the prophets need an urgent and a penetrating discernment.

Not all de Gruchy’s insights are new, as the writer of his preface remarks. His style makes laborious reading; and the appeal at every point to contemporary writers is at times wearisome, especially when the matter is as age-old as the problem of pain. Nonetheless, it is too easy to list the stylistic faults of a book conceived against a background of injustice, and written with so much personal commitment. As an insight into what it means to bear witness to the Gospel in southern Africa today, it is moving. And if some of his themes are familiar, it is heartening to know that familiar Christian truths can still be stated with integrity, passion, and effect, in the context of so great a crisis.

Peter Atkinson

The Option for Inclusive Democracy. A theological-ethical study of appropriate social values for South Africa.

Bernard Lategan, Johann Kinghorn, Lourens du Plessis, Etienne de Villiers. Centre for Hermeneutics, University of Stellenbosch, 1987. Pp. iv + 30.

A small ray of hope in a dark tunnel is better than no light at all. Although change must come in South Africa, no significant change is likely to be offered by the present government, nor is it likely that sanctions or bombs will force change in the short or medium term.

But one or two tiny rays. The struggle in South Africa is essentially one of two nationalisms. It is the opinions of Afrikaners and of Blacks that matter; liberal English views have little effect on (or welcome from) either side. As many Afrikaans people become more urbanized and more middle class, they become less willing to pay the cost of maintaining the apartheid state. A spirit of mild reformism has been in the air for some time, even in government circles. But with that distant prospect, how can the security of the white minority be protected? More important, how can Afrikaner cultural, national and linguistic identity, won at such cost from British imperialism, be maintained? Answer: A Bill of Rights! Influential organizations of Afrikaans intelligentsia have been hinting at this for some time; unthinkable when one occupies the seat of power, but more desirable if the seat is to be shared. Cynically, one might suspect that the newly discovered concern for the rights of minorities is not entirely altruistic. Nevertheless, a small ray of hope.

Another ray: in the past Afrikaner unity could best be described as monolithic, in contrast to the divided loyalties of black people. In recent years even the gentle reformism hinted at above has been enough to divide Afrikanerdom in half. Within the heart of the Afrikaans churches and universities – far more influential and respected than in an English community – even more radical voices are to be heard. First a tiny trickle of brave churchmen – Geyser, Naude, Engelbrecht – now quite a strong river of voices in Afrikaans academic and church circles protesting apartheid.

Herein lies the significance of this booklet. It is a very slight document, its ideas hardly new or revolutionary. In a nutshell, it argues that apartheid is not only economically unworkable but theologically/morally wrong. It is theologically wrong because all are created equal by God and because God commands us to love our neighbour and our enemy. Human diversity is a reason not for separation but for co-operation to our mutual enhancement. Human sinfulness will make that difficult; we will be tempted to ignore those who are marginalized. Therefore we need a participative democracy with an entrenched Bill of Rights, *not* for the protection of a separate identity but to ensure that the powerless poor are enabled to live in freedom and responsibility before God.

Its significance lies not in its views but in its authorship and origins. The authors are all Afrikaans churchmen; the publishers (even though there is a cautious disclaimer of necessary university approval) are the Department of Biblical Studies in the prestigious

Afrikaans University of Stellenbosch. If enough Afrikaans Christians come to share these views, apartheid will end. They alone have the power to end it. Almost all Afrikaans people are Christian, most of them regularly practising members of one of the Reformed Churches. They are a people with a profoundly sincere Christian conscience; and this is quite a respectable ray of hope.

The authors are not exactly representative of typical Dutch Reformed thinking yet. Kinghorn has previously published some radical criticisms of historical church support for apartheid. Lategan's wife stood as an independent candidate against the Nationalist party in the last election. But their influence, and that of those like them, is growing. Johann Heyns, present moderator of the largest of the Dutch Reformed Churches, almost certainly shares their views in secret, though he might not carry his Synod with him.

It would seem ungracious to raise objections from a less faithful point of view. I agree with the draft Bill of Rights in the appendix; I agree that Christianity can easily be interpreted to support these views. I am also, unhappily, aware that Christianity was easily made to appear compatible with apartheid; with the need to separate races because fallen humans are sinful and cannot be trusted to love each other; Christian belief fired the sense of purpose and hope in resurgent Afrikaans Christian Nationalism. Dr Malan, Dr Verwoerd, Lategan, Kinghorn et al – and also Archbishop Tutu and Dr Boesak – are all able to claim, with logic, sincerity, and reasonable exegetical consistency, that Christianity is on their side, that they are God's agents. Perhaps that raises questions about the propriety of claiming scriptural and divine sanction for whatever we regard as the most sensible and equitable political solution?

Ronald Nicolson

William Temple and Christian Social Ethics Today

Alan M. Suggate. T.&T. Clark, 1987. Pp. xvii + 286. £14.95 (hb)

The question bound to confront the reader of Alan Suggate's book is, precisely what intellectual purpose is it supposed to serve? In part, it is an intellectual biography of William Temple and a very thorough, concise and judicious one. But the story has been told before, and quite clearly Suggate does not see his new telling as a task sufficient in itself. As the title indicates, he tries to interweave into his account reflections on current Christian social ethics; thus the bulk of the book is interspersed with comments on Temple's ideas deriving from the thought of recent writers, and in the final section Suggate briefly enunciates his own standpoint, integrating Temple's best insights with those of Reinhold Niebuhr and some recent German Catholic and Lutheran writers (the book is useful as a source of information on thinkers not very well known in this country).

Presumably Suggate's real aim is to discuss the continuing relevance of the Anglican social tradition, if

one can speak of such a thing in the singular. This is more than timely, yet one has to ask, why focus on Temple? Although very influential, he was not a great social thinker, and did not creatively develop the tradition in the fashion of a Tawney, or a Demant. The intellectual treatment which Temple demands is surely one which takes the deeds and the writings together, and considers both primarily in their historical context. By contrast, Suggate too often avails himself of the judgment of historical hindsight, and is mainly concerned to fit Temple's story into a wider narrative about how the over-optimistic illusions of 19th century idealism are gradually left behind, and a more sober realism triumphs in Christian social thought.

There are two aspects to this "realism". Sin gets taken more seriously, so that the theological focus shifts from incarnation to redemption, while at the same time, moral reflection adopts a more empirical procedure which respects the resistance of social actuality to ideal aspirations. Suggate seeks to persuade us, in the wake of many other commentators, that these are the vital polarities in Christian social and political theology. However, the secret *rationale* behind choosing Temple as the lynch-pin for one's tentative musings is that one thereby personifies, but conveniently fails to identify in conceptual terms, an underlying factor of continuity which transcends these polarities. This factor is the perspective of establishment, of Church-state alliance, which encourages the idea that Christianity and humanism contribute ideals, maxims and principles, while the state is preoccupied with the merely pragmatic problems of putting them into effect. This, surely, is the key to what Suggate so rightly identifies as Temple's "comfortable fit" of Plato, utilitarianism and Christianity" (222). The "comfortable fit" indeed characterized much incarnationalism, but it *equally* characterizes Temple's later redemptivism, Niebuhr's realism, and Suggate's own outlook. In all these cases the notion persists that what theology contributes is a set of general principles, perhaps mediated by "middle axioms", which have to be modified in relation to an empirical investigation of "the facts".

Two things are wrong with this. First of all, Christian morality is not exemplified only in general ideas, but also in the concrete way of life of the ecclesial community, so that it is already about a real, factual possibility, and not just the vague desirability of certain aspirations. Secondly, the "experience" which Suggate so often invokes, is essentially experience of the conditions of a life coded under a various set of secular, often non-Christian assumptions. All we get to know here are the codes themselves, and the spontaneous modifications of these codes, but never the real, never more about "humanity", or life itself. Of course we have to reckon with these codes, but they cannot have any right to modify dialectically our own "code of conduct", our own Christian sense of social virtue and social purpose. This code itself develops, and it may indeed learn from elsewhere, but any modification has necessarily to be justified as emanating in accordance with its own peculiar and evolving logic. It does not intrinsically require an alien pole of "experience", but is, in itself, just a different experience. For there are no dialectical relationships between ideas and practices – this is pure metaphysics, the persisting Hegelianism of even Suggate – only differences

between practices which themselves construct ideas.

Temple, Niebuhr and Suggate all combine a Kantian exaltation of disembodied norms as starting points, with a quasi-utilitarian attitude to their implementation. Given the indeterminism inherent to the norms, this usually means that the prevailing worldly wisdom of political economy, state bureaucracy and total policing will be given the Christian stamp of approval. And in the last analysis, what Suggate is really celebrating is an assumed teleological drift towards the post-war social democratic consensus. Capitalist economic relations are seen as a simple empirical fact, the truth about human behaviour at last revealed, but it is thought that they can be tempered by the application of certain welfare measures. Yet now that this consensus has broken down, one ought to be able to see also the contingency of the "Platonic-utilitarian" ideology which was an ingredient within it. And once this is grasped, one might go on to suggest that in certain respects the trajectory traced by Suggate is really something of a retreat.

For within the British Hegelianism which was Temple's inheritance there was, despite an unwarranted logicizing of the real, and despite the unhegelian neo-Kantianism actually still going strong in Suggate, at least some recognition of the historical occasionality of ideals. This was superior to the ahistorical absolutizing of "the personal" which Suggate advocates as part of a new natural law; personalism is a contentless norm because freedom, society and participation can be claimed as occurring universally and everywhere, just like their opposites. What else could possibly be going on? Only the specification of social goals, desirable virtues, necessary hierarchies, distribution of roles, power and property, gives the context for discriminating between freedom and unfreedom, true friendship from false, the presence from the absence of participation.

Again, while Suggate is right to imply that the occasion for the incarnation is redemption, not the fulfilment of an eternal logical necessity, the writings of Forsyth and Barth at their worst tend to prove that if the fact of redemption is given priority over the incarnation it will become a purely extrinsic fact, without a recognizable shape or form that can make a difference to our social world. It becomes a matter of "we are redeemed by God, not ourselves, so therefore..., therefore *anything*", instead of "here among the body of Christians is the redeemed life, what circumstances are compatible with its flourishing and extension"? In the period when he was still influenced by incarnationalism, and to some extent Thomism, Temple found many modern economic practices to be not thus compatible. Surely this was not, as Suggate suggests, just because he was naïve about economics (though no doubt he was), but also because he recognized that both modern economic practice and modern economic thought concern a person not recognizable by the Church as one made and remade in the image of God?

So Suggate gives us the story of a transition: incarnation to redemption, idealism to empiricism; but he conceals the persisting factor, namely establishment Platonism/utilitarianism, and fails to see that, if anything, the transition confirms the persistence all the

more, and even overrides elements in idealism that do justice to historical occurrence and Christian particularity. Consistent with this, he declares his preference for a Neo-Lutheran approach concentrating on natural rights as a pure aspect of law and secularity, over Barth's later Neo-Calvinism which sees secular matters of justice as belonging to, and determinable in the light of, a single process of redemption (142-144). Many other voices speak in his book, but rarely, or only mutedly, voices of true Christian socialists, or of those critical of the liberal consensus: not Figgis, Gill, Sturzo, Macmurray, Mounier, Maritain, Demant, Macintyre, Grant, Yoder or Hauerwas. Suggate exhibits a systematic preference for the bland, which may have seemed like good sense in the 1950's or 60's when the Platonic/utilitarian balance appeared secure: what we now know is that when it suits itself, secular liberalism will follow its own logic with a remorselessness that allows no possible purchase in the public arena for principles or axioms, middle, middling or otherwise. Some of us, however, exotics to the end, are still trying to live elsewhere.

John Milbank

Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy

Dana Greene, ed. State University of New York Press, 1988. Pp. x + 260. \$10.95

Evelyn Underhill became prominent for her book *Mysticism*, first published in 1911; and although she wrote other major books and several hundred articles, she is still remembered chiefly for this early work. This is a pity, for although it was and continues to be a significant book, it was written from a perspective which underwent major modifications later in her career. One of the strengths of Dana Greene's collection of Underhill's essays is that she arranges them chronologically, so that it is possible to trace the movement in Underhill's thought. Greene also supplies an introductory essay and a comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Underhill.

I should like to mention three related aspects of the shift in Underhill's perception as illustrated by the essays in this collection. First is the movement from seeing mysticism as essentially about the subjective psychological state of the individual to a position which stresses the objective reality of union with God, whatever one's state of consciousness. Her early essay, "A Defence of Magic", is dependent for its argument on the assumptions that mysticism consists of esoteric states, that such states can be procured by all sorts of methods ranging from breathing techniques to correct participation in the liturgy of the Mass, and that it is the centre of all true religion and the quest of the magician. By contrast, her later essay on "Prayer" shows how by the time she wrote it she did not place ecstasy or indeed any psychological state at the centre, but rather trusting openness to God, whatever our feelings or state of consciousness. The practice of prayer requires discipline, and one can learn to do it better, but the criterion for praying well is not the achievement of unusual feelings but rather that it teaches us "to love, to suffer, and to work" (p. 142).

Such love, work, and suffering are modelled in this essay and in subsequent ones firmly on the life of Christ. This emphasis on the Incarnation marks the second major shift in Underhill's thinking. In her early work, for example in "Bergson and the Mystics", her outlook is strongly Neoplatonic. While this strand never disappeared altogether from her writing, it was heavily qualified in her later thinking by recognition of the Word made flesh. Once the Incarnation is seen to be crucial, faith and love and a centeredness on Jesus replace the abnormal consciousness with which she at first characterized mystics (p. 49), and in ontology her early Idealism makes way for Critical Realism.

Closely linked with these changes is her move from focussing on monistic union or ontological merging with the Absolute as the *desideratum*, to the much simpler and far more demanding task of working with the love of Christ for social justice. Although Underhill was never deaf to injustice, she did sometimes write dismissively of "busy social reformers" (p. 73); the extent of her change of perspective can be seen from her essay "Father Wainright" in which the spirituality of this priest is seen precisely in the social changes which his sanctity effected in the Dockland slums at the turn of the century.

Underlying these major shifts of perspective, and, in my view, enabling them, are some basic continuities. Throughout her life, Underhill believed that love and knowledge are inseparably linked. Her quest for knowledge of God and of truth was never disengaged. She thought with passion, with *love* of truth. This made her meticulous in her research and honest in her thinking; it also made her work a service of love, not an academic exercise. Secondly, her commitment to the link between love and truth led her to careful investigation of medieval Christian mystics in whom that linkage was lived out. Her acquaintance with primary source material was phenomenal, and her writings are greatly enriched by liberal quotation. I suggest, however, that their value to her was far more than illustrative; rather, it was through steady attention to actual mystics of the Christian tradition that she won through from her early Platonizing and psychologizing approach to mysticism (which was the received philosophical view of the time) to a thoroughly Incarnational stance.

Dana Green is mistaken, it seems to me, when she says in her Introduction that Underhill made *two* contributions, "one to an understanding of mysticism and the other to an understanding of the spiritual life" (p. 24). If I read these essays correctly, the truth is rather that through committed engagement with the writings of actual mystics, Underhill's *definition* of mysticism changed from something that philosophers called by that name to a life permeated and invigorated by the mystery of God in the Spirit of Christ. And that is what makes these essays important.

Grace M. Jantzen

Melchior Hoffman. Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation

Klaus Deppermann. Translated by Malcolm Wren, edited by Benjamin Drewery. T.&T. Clark, 1987. Pp. 432. £29.95 (hb)

Klaus Deppermann's excellent study of the radical Anabaptist furrier Melchior Hoffman was first published in German in 1979, and is now made available to an English-reading audience. Deppermann offers more than a mere biography of this fascinating figure, but also relates Hoffman to his social and political context and discusses the various groups of his followers. Hoffman's varied career is carefully analysed in all its phases, from his early preaching in Livonia, Stockholm, Schleswig-Holstein and East Friesland through to his imprisonment and death in Strasbourg. Deppermann provides a detailed analysis of Hoffman's complex theology, difficult to pin down because of its contrasts, near-contradictions and fertile derivation from many sources. The skill and value of this analysis become fully clear as he shows how Hoffman's followers could strike out in different directions as they emphasised one aspect or another of their mentor's thought, producing both peaceful and militant Melchiorites, who then split further into at least four distinct groupings. However, Deppermann's analysis goes well beyond a traditional church historical view of his subject by paying careful attention to the interaction of religious ideas and the social and political context in which they unfolded. His masterly discussion of Strasbourg's treatment of non-conformity is exemplary in this regard, showing how social and political pressures gradually led to a policy of tolerance being supplanted by one of enforced uniformity based on a modified Lutheranism, anticipating the arguments in Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation* (1985). The book is also a notable contribution to the study of 16th century chiliasm, although it lacks a systematic analysis of the phenomenon which would enable the reader to situate Hoffman in a wider context, and is uncertain on the origins of Hoffman's apocalyptic outlook. These are minor weaknesses in an excellent study which shows how effectively biography, social history and theology can work together. Works such as this will do much to cast light on the most neglected aspect of Reformation history, the "lost causes" of those radical reformers denied the attention devoted to the figures such as Luther or Calvin.

R. W. Scribner

The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind. The Case of Edward Carnell

Rudolph Nelson. CUP, 1987. Pp. xiii + 252. £27.50 (hb)

In April 1967, Edward Carnell, a prominent evangelical theologian, and former president of Fuller Seminary, was found dead of an overdose in a Californian hotel room. Some Fundamentalists, seeing Carnell as a liberalizing traitor within the evangelical camp, regarded his death as a fitting nemesis; others, like Rudolph

Nelson, who stood on evangelicalism's most liberal wing, and had suffered similar fundamentalist attacks, felt a strong sympathy for Carnell. In later years, Nelson moved out of the church altogether, becoming a freewheeling religious individualist. But he remained fascinated by Carnell and his fate. He felt sure that there was a story to be told, and that he was the man to tell it. The result is an absorbing and thought-provoking book. It may cause some frustration to the relatively few readers who come to it already having a keen interest in Carnell: this is a biography of the kind which tells us at least as much about the author as the subject. But the many readers who will come to the book knowing little or nothing about Carnell himself, but drawn by a more general interest in American evangelicalism and in some of the issues raised by his life, may enjoy, or at least appreciate, Nelson's account at several different levels. First there is the human drama and tragedy of the story, including the final mystery (was it suicide or was it accidental death?). Second, the book provides a fascinating account of the rise and decline of an academic career: the talented student who fell under the spell of his Philosophy professor, who published a prize-winning book before completing his PhD – and who worked a horrifying 35 hours a week in a restaurant while also pursuing full-time study; the "master pedagogue" lecturing to capacity audiences, but increasingly bogged down in administrative tasks for which he had no great talent; the brash rebel against puritanism, who liked holding forth to his ethics class on the delights of masturbation; the ultimately disappointed author, whose potboilers sold like hot cakes, but whose master-work was a flop; in his last years, increasing dependence on his psychotherapist and on various drugs, and the emergence of a Carnell who was in some ways more likable, but had lost much of his panache. Third, and this seems ultimately to be the book's main purpose, it is a polemic against the form of Christianity of which Carnell was a leading exponent.

Carnell first made his name as a writer on apologetics, and this remained the branch of Christian thought which most interested him. He aspired to devise an apologetic that would remain strictly orthodox, while winning the respect of the educated public, and avoiding the stigma of "fundamentalism". According to Nelson, he ended by getting the worst of both worlds. He alienated conservative Protestants by his ecumenical tendencies, his concessions to biblical criticism, and his assaults on puritanism. On the other hand, his position on such issues as evolution and biblical inspiration seemed to outsiders little different from that of the fundamentalists whom Carnell so much despised. Moreover, even in his later, more ecumenically-minded phase, he was temperamentally unsuited to dialogue with those of other persuasions; his aversion to nuance and paradox, and his insistence that every problem had a single "correct" solution was especially unattractive to liberal and neo-orthodox Protestants. Typical was Carnell's encounter with Karl Barth in 1962: while Barth's dislike for plain "Yes" or "No" answers to Carnell's questions led the latter, with characteristic bluntness, to accuse him of "weasel-words", Carnell in turn was being denounced by fundamentalists for making too many concessions to Barth's view of the Bible.

Though Nelson's analysis of Carnell's own weaknesses seems to me convincing, I am not persuaded that it is justifiable to treat these weaknesses as characteristic of conservative evangelicalism in general – still less, that Nelson is right to treat conservative evangelicalism as an anachronism. Since the book does not provide detailed consideration of any conservative evangelical other than Carnell himself, it is impossible to judge from the evidence adduced here in what sense, if any, Carnell was a representative figure. Nelson's claim that Carnell's religious approach was an anachronistic survival of 19th century common-sense rationalism seems to me to under-estimate the influence this kind of thinking has in the contemporary world. In this respect a more sociological approach might offer different conclusions from the literary-philosophical approach favoured by Nelson. Certainly, in terms of sheer numbers, evangelicalism would seem to have a wider appeal to contemporary Americans than the experience-oriented liberalism favoured by Nelson; and even though evangelicals are in a minority, the evangelical sub-culture must rank as one of the largest, the best organized, and the best protected against outside attack of the many sub-cultures in American society. Nelson would no doubt point out that Carnell's rationalism, his liking for common sense reasoning, his aversion to paradox, and his preference for simple dichotomies between "true" and "false", all ran counter to some of the most important trends in western literature, philosophy and theology. Yet Carnell's "19th century rationalism" remains remarkably widespread in many more influential branches of contemporary knowledge. For instance, while few biologists and psychologists appear to share the religious concerns of Carnell or Nelson, their general intellectual approach would seem in most other respects closer to the former than the latter. The continuing strength of conservative evangelicalism may arise not only, as Nelson seems to imply, from its ability to enclose itself within a sealed-off world, but from the fact that its ethos and modes of thinking are in certain respects so contemporary.

Hugh McLeod

The Myth of Christian Uniqueness

John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.). SCM, 1987. Pp. xii + 227. £8.50

The provocative title is qualified at the outset and the problems of modern theology in facing other religions and revelations emerge gradually and forcibly. "Myth" does not imply falsehood but it needs to be understood in context. Christianity is admittedly unique in the sense that every religion is, but questions of its superiority or finality are raised again and again. The veteran Wilfred Cantwell Smith remarks that it is one thing to condemn some religions as idolatrous but "for Christians to think that Christianity is true, or final, or salvific, is a form of idolatry", giving to an organization the honour that is due only to God.

In recent writings, notably those of Paul Knitter, three Christian attitudes have been distinguished: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism, and they are

discussed at length here and from several angles. There was general Exclusivism in the past, all other religions being considered wrong and their followers doomed to damnation. Langdon Gilkey finds that a stand must still be taken against fundamentalist intolerance, whether of Ayatollah Khomeini or of the Moral Majority which seeks to impose a theocracy on "Christian America". And John Hick shows that while Vatican II gave grudging recognition of what is "true and holy in these religions", it insisted at the same time that "all must be converted" and "all must be incorporated into the Church".

Inclusivism seeks to bring all religions into relationship with the others as partial revelations or ways leading up to Christianity, or Christ, as *The Crown of Hinduism*, as a famous missionary book once expressed it. But Marjorie Suchocki criticizes even Hans Küng, in *On Being a Christian*, for singling out negative characteristics in other religions but not applying this judgement to Christianity. Thus criticizing "their actual remoteness from their original positions", veneration of saints, use of amulets, icons, holy war, and general syncretism, can only lead to a "cheap feeling of superiority". More cautiously Raimundo Panikkar sees the Jordan, Tiber and Ganges not coalescing but being transformed into Spirit, like a cloud returning in rain to enrich the earth in new ways.

Most of these 12 writers give different expressions of Pluralism, recognizing that religions exist side by side, each with its own culture and offer of salvation, though Panikkar would prefer to call it Plurality which need not imply either equality or mixture of disparate elements.

Christian claims to universalism are linked by several writers with the triumphalism and imperialism which have been decried in recent years, though much remains. John Hick attacks assumptions of Christian superiority, first against Judaism and then above other races, black, brown and yellow, whose religions and cultures have been regarded as inferior to those of the West and due to be superseded. Rosemary Reuther and Marjorie Suchocki continue the onslaught from feminist perspectives against the patriarchal attitudes of the monotheistic religions, though not only there. Reuther declares that "the idea that Christianity, or even the biblical faiths, have a monopoly on religious truth is an outrageous and absurd religious chauvinism", for the divine is to be found in all religions and "God/ess is the ground of all beings".

But if Christianity is not unique is Christ, and in what way? Cantwell Smith says that the figure of Christ may have been "an idol through the centuries", transcendent but not mundane, or mundane and not transcendent. Stanley Samartha from an Indian perspective criticizes the World Council of Churches' statement that "Jesus is God" as unbiblical and tribal "over against the gods of other peoples". Aloysius Pieris considers the Buddha and the Christ as mediators of liberation, expressing knowledge and love in complementary ways, but there has been an obsession with "uniqueness" which led into blind alleys. Seiichi Yagi discusses "I" in the words of Jesus, the reign of God "or the son of man" speaking through him, and the risen Christ being "oneness of the divine and human at the depth of every human being".

Christianity is the largest and most universal of the religions, but it is in an overall minority and it is aware of other religions more than at any time in history. There are many questions for faith and mission, the latter hardly discussed here. If the full answers do not appear in this generation, at least the problems should be faced.

Geoffrey Parrinder

The Dialogical Imperative. A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter

David Lochhead. SCM, 1988. Pp. vii + 104. £5.50

David Lochhead's reflections on interfaith dialogue are welcome for two main reasons. Firstly, he brings a well-simmered and slightly souped-up combination of a Barthian-Wittgensteinian perspective to a topic that has often suffered from the neglect of such seasoning. His position is not dissimilar to that of George Lindbeck, neither is his style: sharp, succinct and sometimes almost too lean. Secondly, he interestingly investigates interreligious attitudes in terms of "ideological analysis" (3). He shows how theological positions can emerge often (although not exclusively) from the social situations in which religions find themselves.

Lochhead begins mapping various ideological stances towards other religions. His typology covers "isolationism" (the other as entirely ignorant), "hostility" (the other as wilfully erroneous), "competition" (the other as a genuine but inferior and deficient competitor), and the increasingly popular ideology of "partnership" (extended from Christian ecumenism, where the other is seen as an equal, holding common truths). Each stance is carefully related to ideological considerations present in the culture. For example, secularization, with its privatization of religion, often provides the conditions for isolationism. (It is remarkable that Lochhead never properly defines "ideological analysis". Neither does he apply ideological analysis to his own proposals.) His useful typology illuminates the complexity of the debate and undermines simple labelling.

What is Lochhead's alternative to these ideological stances? He stresses both *faithfulness* to one's own tradition and, in this faithfulness, discovers the basis for a genuine *openness* to the other. Barth is his mentor here. Lochhead rightly reads Barth's essay "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion" (*Church Dogmatics*, I/2) as a discussion on the nature of revelation and theological method, not as a negative criticism of non-Christian religions. He also shows that Barth allows for the voice of God in the secular world (*CD IV/3*, First Half), though the criterion for the discernment of this is profoundly Christocentric. Faithfulness to Christ does not require an a priori negative judgement upon the world religions but points to the sole norm and starting point for discerning truth: Jesus Christ. Lochhead further supports this view from an analysis of the Bible. He argues that the Bible "provides no warrant for an a priori valuation of other traditions" (44), except for a positive valuation of Judaism. Rightly he takes seriously the condemnation of idolatry but is acutely aware of the hermeneutical

problems surrounding its identification. Without a careful process of listening and learning (dialogue), the other is inevitably misunderstood, caricatured and marginalized. Buber's thoughts on dialogue come to the fore at this point of the book.

It is from this perspective that Lochhead criticizes the approaches outlined earlier. Each in their own way carries an a priori definition of the other, before the other is allowed self-definition. In the "competition" model, for example, the other is deemed to hold just so much of the truth but not quite the whole truth. Similarly, the "partnership" model assumes a common ground: God – which unnecessarily excludes non-theists such as Buddhists. Lochhead proposes that we view dialogue in terms of differing "language games", where no understanding of the other is possible without "bilinguality". Hence, there can be no a priori assessments or requirements of the dialogue partner. Lochhead acknowledges some qualifications. However, his stipulation about dialogue partners are problematic. Groups that display a paranoid or pathological mentality and are not "genuinely in touch with reality" (75) are to be avoided. This could easily result in isolationism and assumes a fair deal of prejudgment. Following his understanding of language games, Lochhead then appropriately stresses dialogue as *activity*, not just talking, but working together for peace and justice.

Dialogue is viewed as a Christian imperative, rooted in the injunction to love one's neighbour. This is a most important insight. Lochhead also argues (rightly I believe) that dialogue cannot be separated from mission, when it is understood primarily as witness and witness is the telling and living of narratives that shape our lives. If mission is conceived as stepping outside of a dialogical relationship it is rendered ineffective, thus becoming a monologue. It is a shame that Lochhead leaves his suggestions about story and narrative so underdeveloped as also with his final comments on the two nature doctrine of Chalcedon. At the heart of a high Christology, so he suggests, is a dialogical relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ, thereby calling the Church into "the same intimate dialogue with the world that is represented by the divine-human dialogue in Jesus" (97). That Lochhead ends on this note is odd. Firstly, because the strength and plausibility of his position demands a more developed Christology – despite the fact that he rightly points to non-theological factors as shaping our perceptions. Secondly, his Barthian premises dictate that he start the book with Christology and then show, through an ideological critique, the problems with alternative stances. Thirdly, there is strangely little mention of the Trinity which would offer a most helpful grounding to relationality and dialogue as the heart of the Christian life. To end on a questioning note, however, is to praise the book in as much as it raises some profound questions (and is thereby dialogical!) and makes some insightful and far-reaching suggestions.

Gavin D'Costa

Rationality and Mind in Early Buddhism

Frank J. Hoffman. Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. Pp. xii + 126.

The title of this short book is slightly misleading. In effect the book discusses a number of miscellaneous points arising from a contemporary philosophical reading of certain portions of the Pali Nikāyas. Hoffman states (p. 7) that there have been few works written on Pali Buddhism by scholars with philosophical training, and places his own work at “the interface between the philosophy of religion and Buddhology”.

Chapter 1 states Hoffman’s methodological premises: we can define early Buddhism in terms of the five Nakāyas (in practice Hoffman largely ignores the fifth); we can and need to try to make sense of these in isolation from the later Buddhist tradition; in doing so, philosophical reflection is a legitimate tool to wield. Accordingly Chapter 2 considers the charge that Nikāya thinking is “logically flawed” since the third lemma of the classic “four-fold logic” flouts the principle of contradiction. Hoffman throws out the charge. His restatement of the third lemma (“there exists an *x* such that both *y* and *z* apply in part”) is helpful; but while he shows how the third lemma can be logically intelligible, the Nikāyas’ rejection of all four lemmas might still appear to some as logically unintelligible, being an infringement of the law of excluded middle. In the next chapter Hoffman goes on to deal with the view that, on account of its teaching that all is “suffering” (*dukkha*), Buddhism must be seen as a species of pessimism. In what is the most successful section of this book, Hoffman exposes the distorted nature of such a view by considering the Nikāya use of the term *dukkha* and examining the notion of “pessimism”. Chapter 4 looks at some of the terminology the Nikāyas employ to discuss “mind” (viz. *mano*, *citta* and *viññāṇa*), and then turns to the problem of personal identity in the light of the teaching of “no-self” (*anattā*). Hoffman sums up the Nikāya position as “continuity without identity” (p. 53). But how is this conceived of as operating across lives? Not in terms of memory, bodily continuity or self-awareness. In fact, according to Hoffman, the texts fail to provide “conditions for the meaning of ‘the same person’ applied to a being reborn” (p. 76). Here an in-depth study of the understanding of “dependent origination” might have proved interesting. Hoffman turns instead in Chapter 5 to questions of epistemology and verification. He argues that Jayatilleke in particular has underplayed the “affective” content of the Buddhist conception of “faith” (*saddhā*); thus “faith” is not to be seen primarily as involving a set of “propositional beliefs”. Hoffman is surely right. Less happy is his treatment of “higher knowledge” (*abhiññā*). His warning against understanding Buddhism as a kind of empiricism is pertinent, but by focusing on the general categories of “religious belief” and “religious experience” he fails to give a convincing account of the nature of *abhiññā*. Finally, Hoffman discusses three terms, viz. “the deathless” (*amata*), *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna*, and maintains the distinction between *nibbāna* as an attainment reached during one’s lifetime, and *pari-nibbāna* as the subsequent attainment reached at death. He goes on to discuss why “neither the transcendental state view nor the extinction

view” (p. 105) of *parinibbāna* is in keeping with Buddhism.

These are all perennial problems of Buddhist studies. Hoffman continually raises interesting questions and consistently makes good points, but he fails to provide a really searching account of any one of the topics he discusses. This follows in part from his premise that the Nikāyas are to be investigated apart from the later tradition. The issue is practical and not one of theoretical principle. We are removed from the Nikāyas by over two millennia; the Abhidhamma by only a century or so; the commentaries by, say, a further six centuries. In trying to make sense of the Nikāyas we need all the help we can get, and certainly the help of the “sense” the subsequent tradition made of the same texts. (This does not imply slavishly following the tradition.)

In places Hoffman appears to leave important considerations out of account. On the question of whether or not early Buddhism countenanced the possibility of disembodied consciousness, he comments (p. 65) “[f]orm, feeling, sensation, disposition and consciousness are together said to constitute the person, and there is no talk of some of those being more basic in the sense of being able to exist without the other”. But what of the formless (*arūpa*) realms? Here beings precisely exist in a state of disembodied consciousness: the four “mental” aggregates exist without the support of “form”. This is explicit in the Abhidhamma (*Vibhaṅga* 407) but hardly an innovation (cf. *Majjhima-nikāya* I 436). Hoffman is also prone to error when commenting on matters relating to the later tradition: the notion of “death-consciousness” (*cuti-citta*) is not Sarvāstivādin but Theravādin (p. 64). Nor is he entirely happy handling basic philosophical matters. What precisely does he mean by describing *sacchikaraṇīyo* as an “emphatic *yo* form” (p. 94)? Pali *sacchikaroti* derives from Sanskrit *sākṣin* (“with one’s own eyes”) and means literally “to experience with one’s own eyes”. Hoffman, relating it to Pali *sacca* (“truth”), thinks he can take it to mean literally “to establish as true” (p. 94).

That Hoffman should please both philosophers and Buddhist scholars all of the time would be too much to expect. His reflections are both stimulating and useful, but in so far as this book lacks the perspective of a systematic and comprehensive enquiry based on the Pali sources, they must be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive.

R. M. L. Gethin

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