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Editorial: Life after death

"He is not here; he has been raised again" (Mt. 28:6). We believe that Jesus died and rose again; and so it will be for those who died as Christians; God will bring them to life with Jesus (1 Thes. 4:14). At the heart of the Christian good news is the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead on the first Easter day. The central importance of the resurrection for the early church is obvious enough from the New Testament.

It was important for them apologetically. It was their meeting with the repentant Christ that decisively convinced the disciples that Jesus was Lord and God, and it was on the basis of what they had heard and seen that they went out confidently proclaiming Jesus in face of sustained opposition: "as we can bear witness" (Acts 2:23). Subsequent generations of Christians have not been witnesses in the same sense as the first disciples, but the evidence for the resurrection as a historical event remains extremely strong, and proclamation of the resurrection as a real event that happened and that cannot easily be explained away is still a centrally important ingredient in Christian apologetic.

The importance of the resurrection is, secondly, theological. The resurrection was not just a remarkable one-off event. It was rather, as Christians have recognized from New Testament times onwards, a clear demonstration that Jesus of Nazareth is truly Lord and Christ (not just a self-styled Messiah), that his death was an effective and triumphant defeat of sin and Satan, and that the new age of resurrection life has dawned.

Aris[ing] out of this, the importance of the resurrection is, thirdly, pastoral, bringing hope to the dying and to the bereaved, and giving purpose to life. Because of the resurrection Christian hope is not a vague hope for some sort of eternal survival; it is rather a confident anticipation of resurrection life with Christ and like Christ's. Because of this the Christian knows that his or her labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58); and because the resurrection was resurrection and transformation of the body, it gives value to the physical world in which we live and work.

In any Christian discussion of life after death the central and decisive importance of Jesus' resurrection is clear. But there are many questions connected with the subject to which the answers are less clear: some of these questions are addressed in the first three articles of this Themelios.

For example, most theologians (and indeed many scholars) are not sure what to make of the Old Testament teaching — or lack of teaching — about the after-life: is the Old Testament entirely this-worldly and thoroughly materialistic? Or does it teach that all who die survive in a dim half-life in Sheol? Or is there a variety of views in the Old Testament, and is it possible to detect a significant evolution of ideas within the Old Testament? If any of these views is correct, how is it to be squared with New Testament teaching, if at all?

There are also plenty of debated questions about life after death in the New Testament. For example, there is the question of the so-called 'intermediate' state: what happens to the Christian dead between death and the final resurrection? Also bolted, especially in some evangelical circles, are questions about the interpretation of the book of Revelation and in particular of the 'millennium' described in Revelation.

Perhaps as perplexing as any, because they are so serious, are questions about judgment: about the fate of those who have never heard the gospel of Christ, about the nature of hell and eternal judgment, about the universality of God's saving purposes. Questions such as these are carefully and helpfully discussed in this issue of Themelios, though the authors would not claim to have reached conclusive answers on many of the points discussed.

There are many other questions concerning death and life after death that are not addressed in this Themelios. For example, there are all sorts of questions raised by non-Christian religious and secular thinking about death and life after death and also by what we might call Christian speculative thinking, relatively easy to evaluate from a Christian point of view. For example, the idea of reincarnation, despite its popularity, is clearly contrary to the New Testament's consistent teaching about the finality and reality of judgment after death, and also about the life to come. Other ideas and claims are much harder to evaluate: for example, what are we to make of the supposedly scientific claims to knowledge about deaths made by people who have experienced clinical death but have then been revived? Or, what are we to make of the claims of spiritists and even of some professing Christians to have contact with the dead? Are their claims delusory, demonic or true?

The answer to that last question may be 'all three'! The power of human beings to be deceived themselves and to deceive others (deliberately or otherwise) is enormous. It is important for Christians to recognize this, and to be careful to base their ideas on the sure rock of biblical truth rather than on insincere and subjective interpretations of personal experiences. The reality of demons is made very clear by the Bible and should not be thought to be the figment of primitive people's imaginations. Demonic activity is characteristically deceptive, being intended to lead people away from Christ and from God's truth, and the deception may well be effected through the presentation of misleading 'spiritual' phenomena (as also through the presentation of misguided teaching cf. 2 Thes. 2:9, 10, 3). The possibility that people do sometimes have real
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contact with the dead can hardly be ruled out in view of the biblical evidence (e.g. the story of Saul and the witch of Endor in 1 Sam. 28).

However, although the Bible does not allow us to say that there is no possible contact with the dead, it does make it extremely clear that seeking such contact is wrong, and that dabbling in occult practices of any kind is evil and dangerous (e.g. Deut. 18:9-14; Rev. 21:8). It also discourages us, by its teaching and its example, from speculation about what has not been revealed (e.g. Acts 17:3). In the Bible God has given us a principle that we must submit to. The principle is that it is our task to concentrate on following the route indicated by the map (which is all we need to know), not to waste time speculating about what lies off the edge of the map. There is a huge amount concerning the spiritual world and the life to come that God has not chosen to reveal to us and that we do not need to know.

The only qualification to this statement which needs to be made is that there is a need for some Christians to take an interest in psychic and paranormal phenomena, if only in order to be able to react with non-Christians who are involved in research in the field. But it is an area fraught with more spiritual danger than most, and Christians involved in it need to be prayerfully alert and to be careful not to go beyond the bounds of biblical revelation; it is important that they make the Bible the basis of their interpretation of the phenomena rather than making the phenomena the basis of their biblical interpretation (as so easily happens).

Another important range of questions concerned with death and life after death that this Themelios does not cover are the pastoral questions that arise in the context of ministry to the dying and the bereaved. It is clear that the Christian minister has something vitally important to share with people in the face of death; but effective ministry in that situation requires not only knowledge of the truth of Christ, but also great sensitivity to people's needs and feelings. We need the love of Christ within us enabling us to weep with those who weep and the Spirit of Christ within us guiding us in what we say and do. Only so will we minister the wonderful gospel of the risen Christ appropriately and helpfully to people in pain and grief.

The fourth article in this Themelios is not on life after death but on Islam and Christianity. The author, Miss Ida Glaser, contributed an earlier article in the same area in Vol. 7.3 of Themelios under the title 'Towards a mutual understanding of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation'; we are glad to have a further contribution from her. She has recently taken up a position as Asian Project Worker with a church in the north of England.

Editorial notes
We warmly welcome as new international editors Professor Samuel Escobar and Dr Hans K.lohne. Professor Escobar comes from Peru, but has recently been appointed Professor of Missiology in the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Dr Koolhein from Norway is this year's guest professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

The need for committed Christians to be involved in theological research is as urgent as ever in our world where there is so much theological confusion and uncertainty. But many theological students who could do so never seriously consider whether God might be calling them to this vital (though sometimes unglamorous) ministry. A leaflet about research possibilities, Serving Christ through Biblical and Theological Research, is available free of charge from Tyndale House, Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge CB3 9BA.

The Old Testament view of death
Central to any discussion on the Old Testament view of the after-life is the Hebrew understanding of death. How was death perceived? What actually happened to an individual when he died? Did it mean the end of existence? Or was there something beyond death?

Initially it is important to note that the Hebrew term for 'death', mawer, has a variety of connotations in the Old Testament. According to W. Brueggemann, mawer is used in three distinctive ways: (a) biologically, indicating 'the end of historical life' (e.g. Gen. 21:16); (b) metaphorically, 'as a power, agent or principle' (e.g. Jb. 18:13; Ps. 22:21) and (c) symbolically, 'as the loss of rich, joyous existence as willed by God' (e.g. Deut. 30:15; Ps. 33:4). However, as these last two references reveal, it is not always possible to be completely certain when 'death' is being used in a symbolical or metaphorical sense; in both instances 'death' could be understood in its purely biological sense, 'the end of historical life'. A fourth possibility, not discussed by Brueggemann, is that mawer 'death' refers to the place of existence after biological cessation (e.g. Jb. 38:17; Is. 28:15). The fact that mawer 'death' can convey a variety of meanings creates real difficulties in interpreting some passages. Not surprisingly this can be a significant factor in attempting to appraise the Old Testament perception of the after-life.

'A good death' or a 'bad death'
A 'good' death or a 'bad' death. In a recent monograph, Death in the Literature of the Old Testament, L. R. Bailey suggests that within the Hebrew Bible descriptions of biological death fall into two basic categories: an individual may experience either a 'good' death or a 'bad' death. The account of Abraham's death in Genesis 25:8 conveys a certain sense of comfort and reassurance: 'Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people' (Gen. 15:15). A similar appraisal of death occurs in the words of Eliphaz to Job about the fate of the righteous: 'You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season' (Jb. 5:26, RSV). Such descriptions, however, contrast sharply with those which refer to a 'bad' death. Jacob, for example, finds no comfort in the death of Joseph: 'Then Jacob took his bones, put on his sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted' (Gen. 37:34-35). Jacob's unwillingness to be comforted arose from the fact that Joseph had encountered a 'bad death'.

Given that the ancient Hebrews appear to have distinguished between a 'good' and a 'bad' death, what factors separated these two types of death? Bailey, for his part,
The Old Testament view of life after death

Desmond Alexander

Dr Alexander is lecturer in Semitic Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

It is not uncommon to encounter statements which suggest that the Old Testament has almost nothing to say on the subject of life after death; and what little it does report is usually assessed in quite negative terms. Indeed, not a few writers give the distinct impression that for the Hebrews the after-life was envisaged as a dull, dreary existence, lacking any of those pleasures which make this present life enjoyable and fulfilling. It was not until the late post-Exilic period that immortality and resurrection became part of Jewish thinking on life after death.

Yet, does this portrayal do justice to the contents of the Old Testament? Was this really the way in which the Hebrew patriarchs, prophets, priests and people perceived their future? Did the grave represent for them nothing more than an empty, joyless form of existence? Such queries readily prompt the basic question: What was the Old Testament view of life after death?

However, at the very outset we confront another problem: Was there an Old Testament view of life after death? Does the Hebrew Bible present a single, uniform picture? Or ought we to look for a variety of positions reflecting, perhaps, different stages in the development of the Hebrew concept of the after-life, or, alternatively, distinctions between 'official' and 'popular' views?

The general trend in recent writings has been to distinguish clearly between pre- and post-Exilic developments in the Old Testament concept of the after-life. The pre-Exilic period is dominated by the belief that death is a purely natural phenomenon, marked the end of life. The after-life, if one can call it that, consisted of a silent existence in Sheol, the realm of the dead, where both righteous and wicked shared a common fate, isolated for eternity from God and the living. After the Exile the Hebrew view of the after-life underwent various transformations due to the influence of other ideas. According to J. Jeremias, three significant changes occurred:

(a) the concept of resurrection gave rise to the idea that the dead would not remain in Sheol for ever; (b) Greek and Persian views on retribution after death resulted in the division of the underworld into different compartments for the righteous and the wicked; (c) the Greek concept of immortality led to the idea that the righteous went directly to heaven whereas the wicked descended to Sheol, which consequently was perceived as a place of punishment.

Although it is now widely accepted that the Old Testament concept of the after-life developed, broadly speaking, along these lines, further considerations suggest that it may be necessary to modify this position somewhat.

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A 'good' death or a 'bad' death

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Given that the ancient Hebrews appear to have distinguished between a 'good' and a 'bad' death, what factors separated these two types of death? Bailey, for his part,
suggests three conditions which characterize a 'bad' death: (1) if it is premature (e.g. 2 Sa. 18:32-33; Is. 38:1-12); (2) if it is violent (e.g. 2 S. 26:23-33); (3) if there is no surviving heir (e.g. Gen. 55:1-2, 2 Sa. 18:18). On the other hand, those who live to a good old age with children to succeed them have no reason to fear death (e.g. Gen. 25:8; 26:25-29).

While these factors certainly deserve consideration, it is the present writer's conviction that they do not of themselves explain why the Hebrews distinguished between a 'good' and a 'bad' death. The distinction must be sought elsewhere. An initial reason for suggesting this is the fact that premature or violent deaths are not always viewed as 'bad'. Concerning premature death, we read in Isaiah 57:1-2: 'The righteous perisheth, and no man taketh him away; his eyes are uncovered,' and, in his heart, devout men are taken away, and no-one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.' Here premature death is clearly envisaged as good, bringing deliverance from evil. An actual case of this is King Josiah, who experienced not only a premature but also a violent death (2 Ki. 23:29-30). Prior to his death he received the following divine assurance: "I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place." (2 Ki. 22:20; cf. 2 Ch. 35:24). Although these passages may prove to be exceptional, they do raise the possibility that the distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' death may be due to factors other than those suggested by Bailey.

To appreciate fully Bailey's position it is essential to note that two important premises underlie his approach: (1) death in the Old Testament is viewed as a natural consequence of man's mortality. As Os Keel comments, 'As a land from which the Hebrews were expelled, the Dead Sea is a fitting symbol of the ultimate destiny of men. It is a fact that there are no springs of water in the Dead Sea, and this fact is a reminder of the fact that men will not be resurrected. They will be brought to the grave and there they will remain. The Dead Sea is a symbol of the final resting place of men. It is a symbol of the fact that men are mortal.

Death: natural or punitive

An important passage towards understanding the Old Testament perception of death is the account of its origin. Attention naturally focuses on the early chapters of Genesis where, in the Garden of Eden narrative (Gen. 2:4-3:4), death is introduced for the first time. Here discussions have tended to ask whether death is portrayed as natural, a consequence of sin, or as a result of God's punishment for man's disobedience. This issue is important in the study of the Old Testament's understanding of God's universe. The issue of death and its implications is both ancient and modern, and the question of whether death is natural or punitive is a central issue in the study of the Old Testament.

For his part Bailey follows the suggestion of E. Nielsen that there are two different conceptions of death underlying the present Old Testament. (1) A 'parasite-disease' myth that looks upon death as a punishment for arrogance; (2) 'The creation myth of death': a 'parasite-disease' myth that gives the idea that death is a natural consequence of sin, and a consequence of man's sin. The latter is a more accurate representation of the biblical perspective of death, as it provides a framework for understanding the nature of death in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is concerned with the problem of death and its implications for the individual and the community. It is a source of guidance for the individual and the community in the face of the problem of death, and it provides a framework for understanding the nature of death in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is concerned with the problem of death and its implications for the individual and the community. It is a source of guidance for the individual and the community in the face of the problem of death, and it provides a framework for understanding the nature of death in the Old Testament.
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For his part Bailey follows the suggestion of E. Nielsen that there are two different conceptions of death underlying the biblical text. As a result, Bailey argues that the phrase 'to die' (v. 2: 4 - 2: 24) should be distinguished from a 'passage-death' myth that looks upon death as a punishment for arrogance; (ii) a 'Creation myth that regards death as the natural termination of all things'. Bailey had no influence upon subsequent OT literature, although there is the related idea that human sin leads to premature death. However, the first passage that Bailey identifies as representing the basic perspective of the OT literature, is "because death was natural, there was no need to fear it. 'Death ... was not an illusion. Life is the beginning of suffering, and suffering is not a necessary concomitant of nature.' Biological life and death are not

separate phenomena, as the latter intruded to thwart the Creator's design. They are bound together as part of a single continuing process that will form a 'good' death or one that may be accepted by the other; despite one is to desolate the other. (iv) Thus the view of death, as a natural consequence of human existence, was only 'unnatural' when it occurred prematurely or violently."

This proposal, however, that death was perceived by the Hebrews as natural, runs counter to much of the evidence. Bailey himself acknowledges that the account in Genesis 2 - 3 continues to maintain a combination of two earlier and conflicting folk accounts; and, as Nielsen readily admits, these two accounts have been combined with the result that death appears unhappily as a punishment, for man's disobedience as well as for his arrogance. If, however, as Bailey suggests, 'the basic perspective of the OT literature was to view death as natural, we would not have expected this outlook to dominate the final form of the narrative in Genesis 2 - 3. Thus, although a number of writers suggest that death is viewed only as the logically expected consequence of man's disobedience, especially in the light of 2:17 and 3:3-4, for maintaining that death is portrayed as a divine punishment.

Support for the opinion that all deaths were understood as unnatural can be found from various regulations in Leviticus and Numbers. In Numbers 19:16 we read: "Any one out in the open who touches someone who has been sprinkled with "emuel" who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a hallowed thing which has been rubbed with ashes, shall be unclean for seven days." Thus corpses and objects closely associated with death define an individual. This fact is emphasized in the subsequent verses of the same chapter, verses 11-13 describe the process of purification necessary after touching a corpse, and verses 14-15 indicate that one is considered infected by contact with any of these corpse-related objects. Stricter rules limiting contact with corpses are applied to priests (Lev. 21:2-3, 10-11) and Nazirites (Nu. 6:6-12; cf. Jud. 14:3). Finally, Leviticus chapter 11 reveals that unless they have been ritually slaughtered, the carcasses of all animals are unclean. That death is the decisive factor here is demonstrated by the fact that whereas a Hebrew might have interacted with a corpse or corpse-related objects, he is not considered unclean if any of these objects is left standing. This is why the Levitical regulations are not considered to be a form of an abstract, non-naturalistic, law. Indeed, they are inconceivable within a non-naturalistic framework.

In all of these examples death is presented in negative terms: death, like sin, defiles and pollutes. If death was perceived by the Hebrews as 'unnatural,' it is not strange that they should have linked it with ritual defilement and uncleanness. Such a connection hardly supports the suggestion that death was part of an orderly, controlled, harmonious process of the creation of these beings. For example, the inability of the first Adam to live in this world because of his age represented the divine intention in creation, and that only premature death was unnatural, is mistaken. On the contrary, death is the weight of every living human being, for the one who has been punished in life also has been punished in death. It is even suggested that such a belief in death is a primary concern of the ancient Near Eastern Law Code. (Pentateuch, 2:23-31; Ex. 9:1-9; Pkt. 3:19).

While it is tempting to suggest, especially in the light of later Jewish thinking, that in Old Testament times Sheol was perceived as consisting of different regions, the biblical texts themselves do not support such a possibility. As has been clearly shown, the major distinction is made between Sheol and the grave, between the term 'emuel' and its various synonyms for Sheol, and ought not to be viewed as designating a separate lower region within the nether world. Similarly we may reject all suggestions that certain individuals are buried in a certain nether world. When examined more closely it is quite apparent that they do not presuppose such a concept of Sheol.

Sheol and the grave
More recently a quite different approach has been suggested by R. L. Harris. He argues that Sheol refers without exception to the grave, the place where the physical body is laid to rest. Significant, this proposal is motivated by the desire to avoid a difficulty which arises if one accepts that the souls of all men coexist in Sheol. "Does the OT teach, in contrast, that NT Sheol places men to a dark and dismal place where the dead know nothing and are cut off from God?" This theological problem disappears, however, if Sheol denotes merely the grave, the resting-place of the body, but not of the soul. For the ultimate destiny of men's souls we must look elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g. Ex. 3:6; Mt. 22:32).

Several factors, however, argue against this proposal. First, the NT context cannot be said to denote Sheol as a mere grave or the grave for the dead. Moreover, the NT testament never takes the definite article, suggesting that it may well have used as a proper name denoting the nether world. Secondly, although Harris is correct in pointing out that the grave is the place where the physical body is laid to rest, he is wrong in his assumption that the Palestinian tomb (e.g. Ezk. 32:26-27), this may result from the fact that the Hebrews viewed Sheol as an extension of the grave. As Os Kedams comments, "A land from which no one has ever yet returned (e.g. Ps. 88:10; Jb. 7:9-10; 102:2); Akkadain eret is tan ("land of no return"), the actual realm of the dead is a spiritual one, and the NT context was the only possible one for the empirical observation of the grave. Beyond that, very little can be said about the world of the dead. For that reason, it appears to us that the NT context is the only one that bears witness to the grave.

Suggestion within Sheol
One of the most important facts in the history, and which used to enjoy widespread support, is the idea that whereas on dying actually descends into Sheol, the dead are facing a domain of darkness, unlighted by any ray of hope. This idea is found, for example, in the Hebrew and English Lexicon of Brown, Driver and Briggs, where the Hebrew words 'abaddon, destruction, hori, pit' and 'sahat, corruption' or 'pit' are taken to denote 'a place of ruin in Sheol for los or ruined dead.' It can, however, be traced back as far as the intertestamental book of 1 Ennoch, where it is now generally thought to reflect a later development in Jewish thinking. Before the splitting of Sheol into two parts: (1) for the righteous (v. 9b; 2) for the wickled (v. 10f), there are mentioned two different compartments: (a) 'the land of the warlike righteous' (v. 12, cf. vv. 5-7; 4) for the wickled who have been punished in life (v. 13). It has even been suggested that such a belief is a primary concern of the ancient Near Eastern Law Code. (Pentateuch, 2:23-31; Ex. 9:1-9; Pkt. 3:19).

We are now in a better position to understand the ancient view of Sheol. The second major premise underlying Bailey's position is that all men, irrespective of their mortal character, share a similar destiny after death: all go down to Sheol. On account of death all will share a similar fate, and this fate is dependent entirely on whether or not one has been a good or bad. It is a basic fact that death must be based on events prior to rather than after death. Thus Bailey places "the circumstances of death: whether it is premature, violent or childless." The assumption is: that evil and the violation of the will are wrongs and that the sinful nature to which all men are born is a cosmic evil, a sin, that must be paid for. For the Old Testament it never takes the decisive argument, suggesting that it may well have been seen as a proper name denoting the nether world. Secondly, although Harris is correct in pointing out that "the grave is the place where the physical body is laid to rest", he is wrong in his assumption that the Palestinian tomb (e.g. Ezk. 32:26-27), this may result from the fact that the Hebrews viewed Sheol as an extension of the grave. As Os Kedams comments, "A land from which no one has ever yet returned (e.g. Ps. 88:10; Jb. 7:9-10; 102:2); Akkadain eret is tan ("land of no return"), the actual realm of the dead is a spiritual one, and the NT context was the only possible one for the empirical observation of the grave. Beyond that, very little can be said about the world of the dead. For that reason, it appears to us that the NT context is the only one that bears witness to the grave. The second major premise underlying Bailey's position is that all men, irrespective of their mortal character, share a similar destiny after death: all go down to Sheol. On account of death all will share a similar fate, and this fate is dependent entirely on whether or not one has been a good or bad.
between the destiny of the righteous and the wicked in the after-life, whereas the souls of the ungodly go down to Sheol, the souls of the pious ascend to heaven.

Although Heidel's thesis has the advantage of avoiding any theological positivism, and the co-existence of the righteous and the wicked in the nether world, it may, however, be objected that he interprets the biblical evidence in a somewhat arbitrary manner. If a "sheol" is taken to mean grave' (e.g. Gen. 37:35; 42:38; Is. 38:10); but when the wicked were mentioned, as in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 16:30; 14:13-15), although Heidel does allow that occasions merely denote a grave (e.g. Is. 14:11; Ezk. 32:26-27). The question then arises, to what extent is Heidel's view on the fate of the wicked dependent on his reading of Sheol as the 'grave'? Is his conclusion still viable if Sheol is understood to denote solely the 'nether world'?

Unfortunately, space does not permit us to discuss in detail every occurrence of Sheol. We must therefore restrict ourselves to a few references which are indicative (e.g. Ex. 9:10; Song 8:6). Sheol always conveys negative overtones: for example, it is somewhere fearful and to be avoided (e.g. 2 Sa. 22:6; Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 86:13); it is the antithesis of heaven (e.g. Job 11:18; Ps. 139:13; Am. 9:2). Secondly, in a significant proportion of passages, Sheol is associated with Sheol, and men are even promised a share of its consolations (e.g. Nu. 16:30; 13:3; 1 Ki. 2:6, 3; Pri. 19:24; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; Pr. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 19:15; 14:9; 11, 15; Ezk. 31:15-17; 32:21, 27). Taken together these observations would seem to indicate that Sheol does indeed denote the ultimate abode of the wicked alone.

There are, however, a few occurrences of Sheol which are generally thought to imply that the righteous were also to be found in the nether world. In mourning the untimely death of his son Joseph, Jacob laments, 'In mourning will I go down to the grave [Sheol] to my son' (Gen. 37:35). Similar comments come in Genesis 42:38 and 44:29, 31, this time motivated by Jacob's fear that his youngest son Benjamin will also be killed. Whereas Heidel takes Sheol to mean grave in 37:35, Jacob's unwillingness to be comforted following the apparent killing of Joseph by a wild animal could suggest that he considers Joseph to have been divinely punished, and hence with the wicked in the nether world. This understanding of Sheol would seem to be in line with the expression of Jacob's grief for his son Joseph. A similar explanation would account for the use of Sheol in 42:38 and 44:29, 31.

Another passage which seems to imply that the righteous descend to Sheol is Isaiah chapter 38. After the prophet Isaiah was ill, God promised to heal him (Isaiah 38:1; 2 Ki. 21:1-18). Whereas reference to Enoch is brief, in the case of Enoch it is clearly stated that he was taken up by God to heaven (2 Ki. 2:1). In both instances it is implied that God has the power to take to himself those who enjoy an intimate relationship with him (cf. Ps. 73:24). Secondly, the author of Psalm 49, troubled by the prosperity and success of the wicked, finds comfort in the knowledge that the fortunes of the godly and the ungodly will be put to rights in the world to come (Ps. 73:17). The psalmist clearly believes in different rewards in the life to come.

These two ideas: (a) the continuity beyond death of an intimate relationship with God, and (b) the assurance of some form of intermediate existence for the deceased, are hereafter of inadequate temporal rewards and punishments, obviously reflect Hebrew thinking on the after-life. Unfortunately many scholars have unfortunately neglected the significance of these, and other, passages, or have interpreted them in such a way as to remove any reference to the future life and its appearance, however, seems to be increased by the assumption that the concept of immortality and resurrection were late developments in Jewish religion, than by a detailed study of biblical texts in the light of other ancient Near Eastern documentation.

The belief that Sheol was the final abode of the wicked is in keeping with the idea, discussed above, that the Hebrews perceived death as punitive rather than as natural. Since mankind was considered to be under divine condemnation the normal consequence of death was that the deceased would enter a dark, gloomy region from which no one could ever escape. To go down to Sheol was to suffer a 'bad' death.

The righteous in the after-life

However, the righteous encountered a 'bad' death, the righteous, in contrast, were perceived as experiencing a 'good' death. The question arises, however: What happened to the righteous after death?

Surprisingly perhaps, the Old Testament contains no detailed account of the fate of the righteous immediately after death. As a result the best that one can do is piece together various snippets of information in the hope of producing a clear picture. One factor, however, which is especially significant in this regard is the concept of resurrection.

As noted earlier many modern writers consider the concept of resurrection to be a relatively late development in Jewish thought.1 Two main arguments are forward in support of this position. Firstly, those passages which refer explicitly to the resurrection of the dead can all be dated before the year 2619 (cf. Gen. 23:20; 35:18; 12:2). Secondly, the Jewish concept of the resurrection appears to have been influenced by the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, and this probably occurred in the early post-Exilic period when the Jews and Persians were in close contact.

In a recent study, however, L. J. Greenspoon has challenged the view that the belief in a resurrection was a post-Exilic development.2 Rejecting the influence of both early Christianity and Roman doctrines concerning 'dying-and-rising gods', and later Zoroastrian beliefs regarding the 'reconstitution of the body', he suggests that the Old Testament belief in bodily resurrection developed 'out of themes associated with YHWH as Divine Warrior'. In this capacity Yahweh is perceived as having the power to overcome death and release those under its control. Further, from a survey of relevant passages he concludes that the 'concept of bodily resurrection of the dead is expressed in biblical literature in date of composition in the ninth to the second centuries B.C.E.3 Although Greenspoon's arguments are unlikely to reverse the present consensus favouring a late date for the introduction of the concept into Jewish thought, his study, in line with the after-life, does present reasonable grounds for believing that the idea of bodily resurrection can be traced back to the pre-Exilic period.

An important implication of the doctrine of resurrection is that the concept of the continuity of the dead in Sheol is divinely raised to life again. This suggests that there must be some form of intermediate state between the time of death and resurrection. If, as many writers maintain, all men will rise from the dead, then in this intermediate state we must view the righteous as being resurrected from there. However, if Sheol is understood to be the abode of the wicked alone, then we must understand the righteous as being raised to life again. Unfortunately the Old Testament reveals little regarding the precise nature of the intermediate abode of the righteous.

One of the few indications of what became of the righteous after death is the expression 'to be gathered to one's people' (cf. Gen. 25:8, 17; 22:59; Nu. 23:27, 31; 32:30; or to be gathered to one's fathers' (DID 2:10; 2 Ki. 22:20; Ch. 34:28). That these figures of speech do not refer to the internment in the grave, or even to the tomb itself, is, from a theological standpoint, maintained, is clear from the fact that Abraham, Aaron and Moses were not united with their fathers in the grave. Nor do they occur when they are described as entering into the "gathering" of Abraham and Isaac it is expressly added that they were buried (Gen. 25:8, 39; 32:25). Jacob was then united with his patriarchal ancestors (Gen. 49:33) several months before his body was committed to the ground (50:1-13).4

Significantly, in their use of the expression 'to be gathered to one's fathers' or 'the people' the biblical writers seem to convey a sense of optimism regarding death (cf. Gen. 15:15). Although death may be seen as a separation from the life of this world, the righteous are reunited with those members of their families who have already died.

That death is sometimes described as falling asleep (e.g. Ps. 13:3; 34:19, 22) and the resurrection as reawakening (e.g. 2 Ki. 4:39; 13:21; Ezk. 37:14, 15; 39:2). In the New Testament an intermediate state of the righteous is one of comparative tranquillity and peace. Even so, they are still perceived as being in the realm of the dead. Perhaps for this reason the Old Testament frequently speaks of the intermediate state of the righteous but rather on their eventual resurrection.

Taking these factors into account we may now be in a better position to appreciate the somewhat ambivalent attitude, noted above, of the Old Testament writers towards Sheol. Although all men may have been viewed as initially dwelling in Sheol, the fact that the righteous would subsequently be resurrected, leaving behind the wicked, possibly explains why Sheol is generally presented in quite negative terms. Whereas the righteous would eventually enter into God's presence the wicked continued to languish in the depths of Sheol. Thus, in spirit of the temporary sojourn of the righteous there, Sheol represented for the Hebrews the ultimate and lasting abode of those who were excluded from the divine presence.

Conclusion

While some of the evidence is ambiguous, and questions remain to be answered, we are perhaps now in a position to discuss the Old Testament perception of the after-life. Firstly, we may reject the currently popular belief that in the pre-Exilic period death was viewed as a point of no return, divorce and mortality and that, as a consequence, little interest was shown in the after-life. Secondly, it seems probable that the term Sheol was primarily used for the temporariness of death and that as such it represented the continuing abode of the ungodly. Thirdly, whereas the wicked were thought to remain in the dark and gloomy region outside the divine presence in the hope that God would deliver them from the power of death and take them to himself (cf. Ps. 49:15).


2. Death, theology of, in DID Supplement 197, pp. 219-228. This threefold division is developed more fully by R. Bailey, Biblical Perspectives on Death (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 17-20.

3. Brueggemann comments, 'Israel's environment sustained a mythology which presented Death (Mit) as an active personal agent in combat with Yahweh (DID Suppl. 39:21-220).

between the deity of the righteous and the wicked in the after-life; whereas the souls of the ungodly go down to Sheol, the souls of the pious ascend to heaven.

Although Heidegger’s thesis has the advantage of avoiding any theological conclusions, he has criticized the co-existence of the righteous and the wicked in the nether world, it may, however, be objected that he interprets the biblical evidence in a somewhat artificial manner. If ‘Sheol’ refers to the state of the death of a righteous person, Sheol is taken literally to mean grave (e.g. Gn. 37:35; 42:38; Is. 38:10); but when the wicked are mentioned, Sheol is mentioned (e.g. Gn. 15:13; 31:15; 46:30; 16:16; 31:24; 14:15-13), although Heidegger does allow that sheol at the rare occasions merely denote a grave (e.g. Is. 14:11; Ezk. 31:26-27). The question then arises, to what extent is Heidegger’s view on the fate of the righteous and wicked dependent on his reading of sheol as the grave? Is his conclusion still viable if Sheol is understood to denote solely the nether world?

Unfortunately, space does not permit us to discuss in detail every occurrence of Sheol. We must therefore restrict ourselves to a few references which are indicative (e.g. Ec. 9:10; Song 8:6). Sheol always conveys negatives: for example, it is somewhere fearful and to be avoided (e.g. 2 Sa. 22:6; Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 86:13); it is the antithesis of heaven (e.g. Jb. 11:8; Ps. 139:18; Am. 9:2). Secondly, in a significant proportion of passages, sheol is in direct opposition to life; they are especially abundant from a few references which are indicative (e.g. Ec. 9:10; Song 8:6). Sheol always conveys negatives: for example, it is somewhere fearful and to be avoided (e.g. 2 Sa. 22:6; Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 86:13); it is the antithesis of heaven (e.g. Jb. 11:8; Ps. 139:18; Am. 9:2). Secondly, in a significant proportion of passages, sheol is in direct opposition to life; they are especially abundant

Firstly, the accounts of the translations of Enoch and Elijah suggest that this is the case (Gn. 5:21; 2 Ki. 2:1-18). Whereas the reference to Enoch is brief, in the case of Elijah it is clearly stated that he was taken up by God to heaven (2 Ki. 2:1). In both instances it is implied that God has the power to take to himself those who enjoy an intimate relationship with him (cf. Ps. 73:24). Secondly, the author of Psalm 94 is troubled by the prosperity and success of the wicked, finds comfort in the thought that the fortunes of the godly and the ungodly will be put to rights in the after-life. The psalmist clearly believes in different rewards in the life to come.

The belief that Sheol was the final abode of the wicked is in keeping with the idea, discussed above, that the Hebrews perceived death as punitive rather than as natural. Since mankind was considered to be under divine condemnation the normal consequence of death was eternal punishment in Sheol; this was a dark, gloomy region from which no one could ever escape. To go down to Sheol was to suffer a ‘bad’ death.

The righteous in the after-life

In contrast, the righteous, in contrast, were perceived as experiencing a ‘good’ death. The question arises, however: What happened to the righteous after death?

Surprisingly perhaps, the Old Testament contains no detailed account of the fate of the righteous immediately after death. As a result the best that one can do is piece together various snippets of information in the hope of producing a clear picture. One factor, however, which is especially significant in this regard is the concept of resurrection.

As noted earlier many modern writers consider the concept of resurrection to be a relatively late development in Jewish thought. Two main arguments are forward in support of this position. Firstly, those passages which refer explicitly to the resurrection of the dead can all be dated to after the Exile (26:19; 23:24; Dn. 12:2). Secondly, the Jewish concept of the resurrection appears to have been influenced by the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism both the god, and his prophet in turn during the early post-Exilic period when the Jews and Persians were in close contact.

In a recent study, however, L. J. Greenspoon has challenged the view that the belief in a resurrection was a post-Exilic development. Rejecting the influence of both early Christian and Zoroastrian religious thought concerning ‘dying-and-rising gods’, and later Zoroastrian beliefs regarding the ‘reconstitution of the body’, he suggests that the Old Testament belief in bodily resurrection developed ‘out of themes associated with YHWH as Divine Warrior’. In this capacity Yahweh is perceived as having the power to overcome death and release those under its control. Further, a survey of relevant passages he concludes that the ‘concept of bodily resurrection of the dead is expressed in biblical texts in the contexts of promise in date of composition in the ninth to the second centuries B.C.E. ’ Although Greenspoon’s arguments are unlikely to reverse the present consensus favouring a late date for the introduction of the concept of resurrection as applying to the after-life, he does present reasonable grounds for believing that the idea of bodily resurrection can be traced back to the pre-Exilic period.

An important implication of the doctrine of resurrection is that the quest of the righteous will end finally be raised to life again. This suggests that there be some form of intermediate state between the time of death and resurrection. If, as many writers maintain, all men remain in the nether world for some time, then we must view the righteous as being resurrected from there. However, if Sheol is understood to be the abode of the wicked alone, then the intermediate state must be understood to be being raised to life again. Unfortunately the Old Testament reveals little regarding the precise nature of the intermediate abode of the righteous.

One of the few indications of what became of the righteous after death is the expression ‘to be gathered to one’s people’ (Gn. 25:8; 17:35; 29; Nu. 23:17; 31:12; Dt. 32:50) or to be gathered to one’s fathers’ (Dg. 210:1. 22:20; Ch. 34:28). That these figures of speech do not refer to the intermediate in the after-life is beyond doubt. Also, the western conception is maintained, is clear from the fact that Abraham, Aaron and Moses were not united with their fathers in the grave. Nor do they seem to be present at the resurrection of the dead. In the case of the “gathering” of Abraham and Isaac it is expressly added that they were buried (Gn. 25:8-35; 29:22; 1 Th. 4:14). Jacob was expressly declared posthuma (Ps. 49:33) several months before his body was committed to the ground (50:1-13).

Significantly, in their use of the expression ‘to be gathered to one’s fathers’ (or ‘people’) the biblical writers seem to convey a sense of optimism regarding death (cf. Gn. 15:15). Although death may be the boundary between this life, the righteous are reunited with those members of their families who have already died.

That death is sometimes described as falling asleep (e.g. Ps. 133; Dn. 12:2) and the resurrection as reawakening (e.g. 2 Ki. 4:38; 21:2; Dn. 12:2). The intermediate state of the righteous is one of comparative tranquillity and peace. Even so, they are still perceived as being in the realm of death. Perhaps for this reason the Old Testament-speaking has no intermediate state of the righteous but rather on their eventual resurrection.

Taking these facts into account we may now be in a better position to appreciate the somewhat ambivalent attitude, noted above, of the Old Testament writers towards Sheol. Although all men may have been viewed as initially destined for death, the fact that the righteous would subsequently be resurrected, leaving behind the wicked, possibly explains why Sheol is generally perceived in quite negative terms. Whereas the righteous would evidently enter into God’s presence the wicked continued to languish in the depths of Sheol. Thus, in spite of the temporary sojourn of the righteous there, Sheol represented for the Hebrews the ultimate and lasting abode of those who were excluded from the divine presence.

Conclusion

While some of the evidence is ambiguous, and questions remain to be answered, we are perhaps now in a position to clarify the Old Testament perception of the after-life. Firstly, we must note the previously current trend in the post-Exilic period which was to be described as the belief in the resurrection of the righteous. Secondly, we have already seen that the life to come is perceived as punishment, whereas the righteous, who are resurrected, are in the participation of the divine life. And that as such it represented the continuing abode of the ungodly. Thirdly, whereas the wicked were thought to remain in the dark, gloomy region of Sheol, the righteous lived in the hope that God would deliver them from the power of death and take them to himself (cf. Ps. 49:15).


Death, theology, of. IBD Supplement (17b), pp. 219-228. This section of death is developed more fully by R. Bailey, Biblical Perspectives on Death (Overtures to Biblical Theology) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

Brueggemann, comments. Israel’s environment supported a mythology which presented Death (Moth) as an active personal agent in combat with Yahweh (Dn. 6:20-23).

The New Testament view of life after death

Murray J. Harris


We live in days of mounting concern about issues relating to human beginnings: Is the human fetus a person? Are there any circumstances in which the termination of a pregnancy is morally permissible? It is legitimate to conduct experiments on human embryos before they are viable? While the Bible is not lacking in guidance on these matters, it has much more to say about man’s life after death than about his life before, about eschatology than about anthropology.

Before we deal with man’s state immediately after death (the ‘immediate state’) and his state after the return of Christ (the ‘final state’), some comments should be made about the nature of death and immortality as depicted in the New Testament.

1. The nature of death

Apart from the passages where death is depicted as a realm where the evil one reigns (Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:13), as a ruler who dominates his subjects (Rom. 5:14, 17) or as a warrior bent on destruction (Acts 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 6:8; 20:14), there are four senses of the terms ‘die’ and ‘died’ which seem to have been ascribed to death by the New Testament. They denote the gradual debilitation of physical powers (2 Cor. 4:12, 16), or exposure to danger that could prove fatal (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 4:11), as well as the actual termination of bodily functions (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 15:42).

The second sense of death (1 Cor. 15:31), physical death, is the permanent separation from God that befalls those whose names are not found written in the book of life (Rev. 2:11; 20:16; 14:15, 21:4). It is precisely this second death which is in relation to the end of physical life (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:22).

2. The nature of immortality

Domains of life, not found in Scripture, but in Christian theology it traditionally refers to either the condition of all mankind between death and resurrection, or to the period of time that elapses (from an earthly viewpoint) between the death of the individual and the consummation of history. This condition or period is called ‘intermediate’ because it lies between the two, and because it is temporary, ultimately being eclipsed by the ‘final state’ of mankind.

Are the departed conscious and active as they await the End? Although the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

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(Lk. 16:19-31) was told to illustrate the danger of wealth (Lk. 6:24) and the necessity of repentance (Lk. 16:28-30), not to satisfy any natural or anthropological condition after death, it is not illegitimate to deduce from the setting the story the basic characteristics of the post mortem state of believers and the importance of our conscious of surrounding Lazarus: Lazarus is in Abraham’s bosom and comforted (vv. 22-23), the rich man is in Flades and tormented (v. 25-28, 29). There is memory of the past: the rich man is not satisfied with Abraham’s word of testimony (v. 24), and he can recall his family and their attitude to ‘Moses and the prophets’ (vv. 27-30). Moreover the whole dialogue with Abraham shows that the rich man, contrary to the rich man of the parable, has no capacity to reason, he can neither be deduced from the plea for vindication uttered by the martyrs who rest under the altar in God’s presence (Rev. 6:9-10): ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ (v. 10). Or again, it would have been inconceivable for Paul to express a preference (2 Cor. 5:8) or a desire (Phil. 1:25) to leave the securities of earthly existence and reside with the Lord unless that post mortem state involved fellowship with Christ that was even more profound than his experience of Christ on earth. Not only are departed believers safe in God’s hands (Lk. 23:46; cf. Acts 7:59) as they ‘rest’ from their labours in joyful satisfaction (Heb. 4:10; Rev. 14:13); they ‘live’ for God’s glory, they are not ‘dead’ but ‘asleep’ (1 Cor. 15:20, 22). In Paul’s case, then, ‘I know I will awake’ (1 Cor. 15:51-52). The next verse makes clear that our ‘sleep’ (1 Cor. 15:20) does not mean that a prolonged state of unconsciousness is involved (see Acts 2:24-27); there is no ‘slumbering’ or ‘snoozing’ (cp. Acts 2:28, 35; 1 Thess. 4:13).

But that of the word ‘sleep’ (koinaisma), used some fifteen times in reference to persons who are deceased does not imply that in the interval between death and resurrection the believer’s soul or ‘inner man’ is in a state of suspended animation, although some have advocated this view.

This view, known as psychopannychism (the doctrine of ‘soul sleep’), has found notable advocates at various stages of church history, and has often been celebrated in essays on ‘Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead’ (Lk. 23:46; cf. Acts 7:59). As a matter of fact, he is said to be ‘asleep’ (Phil. 1:22), to be the ‘first fruits’ of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), to be the ‘first fruits’ of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). Hence the verbal root κοιμάω (koinaisma) is used in this context, with the implication that the believer’s soul is also involved in this ‘sleeplike’ state.

The traditional view regarding departed believers is that they await the second advent of Christ and the resurrection of the body (Heb. 12:23). This state is referred to as ‘sleeping’ (Phil. 1:22), or being ‘asleep’ (1 Thess. 4:17) in an undisturbed state after death. Although many hold that death is the moment when believers acquire their heavenly embodiment, so that the interim state is not a period of sleep or unconsciousness, but a period of fellowship between resurrected disciple and risen Lord in anticipation of the corporate consummation of the church.

What is uniformly stressed through the New Testament is that the twofold basis of God’s judgment by Christ of the living and the dead is a person’s relationship to Christ (e.g. Mk. 8:38; Jn. 3:36; Rom. 5:9) and his people (Mt. 25:31-46), and works performed during his or her lifetime (Rom. 2:6, 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13). So far from being a preoccupation with the life before death (as was the case for some), the character of the believer and a further opportunity for repentance is afforded to the unbeliever; the intermediate state is characterized by ‘a parting of the ways’ after a preliminary judgment at death, the final judgment at the End (Heb. 9:27). The righteous attain to such heavenly bliss (cf. Rev. 14:13) as may be experienced by disembodied humanity. The building of his church is complete and the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in. The ungodly experience intense and unrelieved spiritual anguish and torment in Hades, the current state of the fallen (see 2 Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 20:10-15).

4. The final state

According to the Bible, there is no real distinction between the final state of the dead and the final state of the living. Both are in the presence of the Lord, united with Christ (2Cor. 5:1; Phil. 1:23). The Bible teaches that the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thess. 4:16) and will be changed into the likeness of the resurrected Christ (2Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:20-21).

We have already mentioned passages that demonstrate that the dead are not unconscious (see Lk. 16:19-31; 20:38; 1 Pet. 4:6). It is also clear that immediately after death the believer is ‘with the Lord’ (Rom. 8:11; 1Cor. 15:51-56). The death of a believer is not a temporary cessation of consciousness, but a complete transition to another domain of existence. The believer, after death, is present with Christ in paradise (Lk. 23:43). He is not promising a king's welcome when the gates of paradise were opened at the end of the age but his personal companionship in God's presence.

We can conveniently summarize the essential ingredients of New Testament teaching about the believer's final state in six adjectives.

(i) Embodied. In Orphic and Gnostic thought the summum bonum consisted of emancipation from the body. For the New Testament, on the contrary, embodiedness is the 'body of a tomb'. For example, the saying 'Soma semeia, the body is a tomb' is characteristic of this view. It is, of course, inadmissible that incorporeal conscious existence is possible in Jewish or Pauline thought. For it is instead the thought that true existence for human beings or a full life either on earth or beyond the grave is incoercible apart from embodiment. Somatic resurrection was the prerequisite for the resurrection of true life after the intervention of death. Paul makes clear that the object of his Christ's decision is the 'redemption of the body' from bondage to death and sin, more than the redemption of the spirit (Rom. 8:23). Somatosoma is an objective genitive, not a genitive of separation. When he spoke of the 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15:44), a body animated and guided by the redeemed human spirit and revitalized by the divine Spirit, he was implicitly rejecting not merely a materialistic view of resurrection (it was a spiritual body) but a spiritualistic view of immortality (it was a spiritual body).

Details of the anatomy and physiology of the spiritual body were of no more consequence to New Testament writers than was celestial topography. But its basic properties in addition to 'spirituality' are clear. It is of divine origin (1 Cor. 15:38), with a soul (1 Cor. 15:41) and a body that is imperishable, free from any form of decay; glorious, of radiant and unsurpassed beauty; powerful, with limitless energy and performance. It is the totality of things because it is sexless (sexual identity, an essential element in personality, is retained in the resurrection) but because it is deathless (1 Cor. 15:40 are) and thus the body that is not subject to death and decay; it is the body that is of the dead (1 Cor. 15:19; 2 Thess. 1:10). In one word, Paul emphasized that the new resurrected body is transformed but not destroyed; the redeemed believers will be; the risen Christ is the founts of perfected humanity.

For some believers the transition to spiritual corporeality will be by way of death and resurrection, but for others by transition of a spiritual body. In either case, the transition is not between those who die before the Parousia of Christ and those who are alive at the Parousia. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 deals with the relationship between those who did not die before the Parousia and those who did not. It is through the Parousia that the dead will be transformed, but the living will be preserved in the faith. The new resurrection body is capable of experiencing and realizing the fullness of God's love in a life of continuous spiritual growth and development, but it is not a pre-existent state of existence. The believer's final state is a new creation, a new beginning, a new life in Christ, a life that is not subject to death and decay.
We can conveniently summarize the essential ingredients of New Testament teaching about the believer's final state in six adjectival statements:

1. Immortal.
   a. The body is unashamedly immortal (2 Cor. 3:1).
   b. The resurrection body is the body of glory (Phil. 3:21).
   c. The new body is the body of Christ (Rom. 6:11).
   d. The resurrected body is the body of life (1 Cor. 15:42).
   e. The resurrected body is the body of the Spirit (Phil. 3:21).

2. Glorious.
   a. The body is glorified (2 Cor. 3:14).
   b. The body is made glorious (Phil. 3:20).
   c. The body is a kingdom of glory (1 Cor. 15:50).
   d. The body is a body of light (Phil. 3:20).
   e. The body is a body in the light of Christ (1 Cor. 12:28).

   a. The body is sovereign (1 Cor. 15:28).
   b. The body is sovereign over all things (1 Cor. 15:28).
   c. The body is sovereign in the glory of God (1 Cor. 15:28).
   d. The body is sovereign over the dead (1 Cor. 15:28).
   e. The body is sovereign over the body of Christ (1 Cor. 15:28).

4. Praiseworthy.
   a. The body is praiseworthy (Phil. 3:21).
   b. The body is praiseworthy to God (Phil. 3:21).
   c. The body is praiseworthy in heaven (Phil. 3:21).
   d. The body is praiseworthy in the sight of God (Phil. 3:21).
   e. The body is praiseworthy in the presence of Christ (Phil. 3:21).

5. Gift.
   a. The body is a gift (1 Cor. 15:28).
   b. The body is a gift of God (1 Cor. 15:28).
   c. The body is a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:28).
   d. The body is a gift to the body (1 Cor. 15:28).
   e. The body is a gift from Christ (1 Cor. 15:28).

6. Resurrection.
   a. The body is resurrection (Phil. 3:21).
   b. The body is resurrection in Christ (Phil. 3:21).
   c. The body is resurrection on high (Phil. 3:21).
   d. The body is resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:21).
   e. The body is resurrection from the dead in Christ (Phil. 3:21).

For some believers the transition to spiritual corporality will be by way of death and resurrection, but for others by means of a change in the physical body. The transition will be for some between those who die before the Parousia of Christ and those who are alive at the Parousia. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 deals with those who may not die before the Parousia, and the population explosion of the twentieth century and the expansion of Christianity, in fact outnumber the sum total of believers under the old and the new covenant who experience death (1). Paul recognizes in the case of Christians who live to witness the Parousia an exception to his rule that death is a prerequisite for resurrection (1 Cor. 15:56). By special revelation, Paul graciously tells those who did not die by a pre-Parousia death, qualify for the transformation that was necessary for the inheritance of the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and Paul tells these that they will inherit the kingdom at the Parousia (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Both the dead and the living will be transformed, but only the dead are raised. And for both groups the outcome of the transformation is the possession of a spiritual body comparable to Christ's 'glorious body' (Phil. 3:21).
Most proponents of post-millennialism and amillennialism envisage the millennium as occurring during the present age. This involves two different views of the millennium: a pre-millennial view—a view which perhaps generates fewer exegetical problems than either of the other interpretations of the millennium (Rev. 20:5-6, 12) and an amillennial view which maintains that the reign of Christ begins with the first stage of the eternal kingdom and is distinguishable from the final state of restoration when the redeemed will inhabit the new earth (Rev. 21:1a).

(iii) Personal. The doctrine of Christian resurrection is a safeguard against an infatuated view of mortality. Although the identity between the physical body and the spiritual body is neither material nor substantial, there is real continuity in that the same historically identifiable ego finds expression in two successive but different types of body. When the physical body is transformed into or replaced by the spiritual body, personal identity is preserved. God will supply the activity as they follow the Lord wherever he goes (Rev. 14:4; cf. 7:17). 'For ever and ever' they 'share Christ's universal reign (Rev. 21:3; 5:10; 20:22). Free from the taunt of sin and from the frustrations of spiritual powerlessness, they will worship and serve God and the Lamb enthusiastically and acceptively (Rev. 7:9-11; 19:22-24).

Corporative. The life of the Age to Come is not marked by an exclusive individual enjoyment of the beatific vision of God, but rather by a communal life of joyful service with God but in isolation from other worshippers. Unmediated inter-personal communion between the individual believer and God is absent. God's presence is proximate in the corporate context of the City of God, the capital of the pre-empted kingdom or new commonwealth and the centre of the 'new heaven and new earth'. In this classic description of this City of God (Matt. 5:34; Rev. 21:2-5; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22-24), attention is focused not only on its superlative beauty and its inviolate holiness but on its inhabitants among whom God will dwell (Rev. 21:4).

(ii) Localized. We have seen that heaven is the natural habitat of the resurrection body, its normal sphere of activity. But knowing and serving God, it is also always a place, the locality where God's presence is most perfectly expressed and felt. P. T. F. Buttry points out: 'a Christian's body is a temporary body, and the notion of a non-spatial heaven are irreconcilable. In reality the options are a resurrection body in a place or an amillennialism without location, for 'a body is spatial and a soul is non-spatial'.

An ever-present danger in the discussion of eschatology is an excessive preoccupation with the salvation of the individual to God, so that scriptural teaching about the destiny of the material universe is ignored. In fact the doctrine of man and the nonmaterial and material order are interlocked. As the Apostle Paul reminds us (Rom. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21): what affects one affects the other. Just as the entire material universe shared in the consequences of human sin, so the destiny of man's destiny is shared in the consequences of his relationship to the Creator (Heb. 8:18-25; Phil. 3:20-21). Creation will be emancipated from its frustrating imperfection and slavery to decay (Rom. 8:20-21) in the same way that man will be set free from sin and mortality. The 'new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will have its permanent home' (2 Pet. 3:13) correspond to man's new resurrection body. Whether this 'newness' of creation comes about by annihilation or by transformation (both concepts find expression in Rev. 21:1-5), the result will be that God is 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) and the whole material order will unsurprisingly serve the purposes of God.

Related to this matter of localization is the doctrine of the millennium. According to Revelation 20:10 (cf. 5:10) the people of God 'will dwell upon the earth a thousand years'. This period of a thousand years between the binding and release of Satan and between the first and the second resurrections. There are three schools of interpretation concerning the millennium (which may be sketched in broad terms as follows, although there are numerous variations within each of the systems).

Post-millennialism regards the millennium as the period of Christ's spiritual rule in and through the church on earth during the present era. The second coming of Christ occurs after the millennium. It interprets the millennium symbolically as the perfect and glorious reign of Christ and believers 'in heavenly places' during the present age, but it does not include the postmillennial interpretation that there is an actual rule of Christ on earth for 1,000 years either before or after his second coming. As in the postmillennial view, the first resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:5-6 is generally taken to represent the new birth of believers or their sharing in the spiritual benefits of Christ's resurrection, while the (implied) second resurrection of Revelation 20:5a is the advent of the reign of Christ. Postmillennialism according to pre-millennialism is the period between the resurrection of believers at Christ's Parousia (= the 'first resurrection') and the second resurrection, involving 'the rest of the dead', Rev. 20:5a. Christ's second advent takes place before (thus pre-) the millennium. Their hope for this future thousand-year period will administer a universal threnody of peace and righteousness on earth.

Medically this would be defined as the irreversible cessation of all postcardiac electrical activity (Note, in contrast, the conduction of atrioventricular (immotl) and psychic (soul) in 4 Mac. 14c; 18:23. 2 Cor. 5:17; Joh. 3:5). 3 (twice); 54 (twice). 4 On Plato's view, see R. L. Paterson, Plato on Immortality (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1970), esp. 1-230; this is based on ancient views of immortality in general, see E. Rohde, Psyche, The Cult of Souls and Relief in Immortality among the Greeks (Kegan, London, 1916); O. Raemakers, Ancient Theology of Immortality (Clarendon, Oxford, 1922); C. H. Moule, Ancient Beliefs in the Immortality of the Soul (Oxford, 1913).


It is particularly a day that is given to God. For 'the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:13-17) and seek for 'immortality' (Rom. 2:7), but in the final analysis they simply 'wait a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3:20) who will himself set in motion and superintend that series of events which will herald the arrival of this new age. In this view the New Testament exegesis focuses on the Last One rather than the last things; on the Father and the Son, both of whom are the title of Omega in the Apocalypse.

Secondly, all New Testament writers share the conviction that what a person believes about human destiny influences his present attitudes and conduct. For example, the most detailed discussion of death, resurrection and immortality found in the New Testament is that in 1 Corinthians 15:18-58, an exhortation to consistent and enthusiastic service: Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you, always devote yourselves to work full of love, because that your labour in the Lord is not futile (1 Cor. 15:58). Ethics and ethics are inextricably linked. The glimpses of the future afforded by the New Testament are designed not to satisfy our curiosity about the unknown but to stimulate holiness of life.

Thirdly, in their teaching about life after death New Testament authors focus their attention not on the fate of the unbeliever but on the destiny of the believer, and not on the penultimate 'intermediate state' of the righteous, but on their final destiny of resurrected saints: permanent residence in God's immediate presence, worshipping and serving him and the Lamb and the angels. In the New Testament there is no ecology of heaven and totally responsive to the dictates of the Spirit.


[Page 51]
An ever-present danger in the discussion of eschatology is an exclusive and determinative formulation of the destiny of the individual to God, so that scriptural teaching about the destiny of the material universe is ignored. In fact the destiny of man and the non-rationaL material order are intertwined. As the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:12; cf. Acts 3:21); what affects one affects the other. Just as the entire material universe shared in the consequences of human sin, the destiny of the material universe will determine if it will be renewed (8:18-25; Phil. 3:20-21). Creation will be emancipated from its frustrating imperfection and slavery to decay (Rom. 8:20-21) in the same way that man will be set free from sin and mortality. The 'new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will have its permanent home' (2 Pet. 3:13) correspond to man's new resurrection body. Whether this 'newness' of creation comes about by annihilation or by transformation (both concepts find expression in Rev. 21:1-5), the result will be that God is 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) and the material order will unsurprisingly serve the purposes of God.

Related to this matter of localization is the doctrine of the millennium. According to Revelation 20:10 (cf. 5:10) the people of God will reign in the earth for a period of 1,000 years between the binding and release of Satan and between the first and the second resurrections. There are three schools of interpretation concerning the millennium (which may be sketched in broad terms as follows, although there are numerous variations within each of the systems:...

Postmillennialists regard the millennium as the period of Christ's spiritual rule in and through the church on earth during the present era. The second coming of Christ occurs after this millennium, when all people who rejected Christ during the millennium will be judged and cast into the lake of fire. This view is actuated by God's faithfulness, not by His wrath, and it is interpreted as the period of the regrowth of souls with God and from the fruits of spiritual powerlessness, they will worship and serve God and the Lamb enthusiastically and acceptably (Rev. 7:9-11; 19:11, 22-24).

(v) Corporate. The life of the Age to Come is not marked by an exclusively individual enjoyment of the beatific vision of God. It is an age of souls, that is, a multitude which, though united with God but in isolation from other worshippers. Unmediated interpersonal communion between the individual believer and the risen Lord is an integral part of the corporate context of the City of God, the capital of the redeemed kingdom or new commonwealth and the centre of the 'new heaven and new earth'. In the classic description of this City (Rev. 21:9-22), the corporate aspect of God's reign is focused not only on its superlative beauty and its invariable holiness but on its inhabitants among whom God will dwell personified.
The problem of judgment

Stephen H. Travis

Dr Travis, who lectures at St John's College, Nottingham, has written extensively on New Testament apocalyptic, and has a major new book due to be published in 1986 entitled Christ and the Judgment of God (Marshalls/Nelsons).

The notion of divine judgment has never been particularly popular, except perhaps among those who were convinced that they, at least, were exempt from its terrors. J. A. T. Robinson made the interesting comment: 'We live, in the twentieth century, in a world without judgment, a world where at the last post you simply go on — and nothing happens. It is like coming to the customs and finding there are none any more. And the suspicion that this is in fact the case is one of the major things that make some people feel like apostates. We cannot believe. 3 So judgment is a problem. We prefer to manage without the idea of someone to whom we must give account of our lives, someone standing over us to remind us that we are both finite and guilty.

However, 'judgment' in itself is a neutral word. Whilst it implies accountability, it does not presuppose any particular verdict. According to the New Testament the Last Judgment, like an earthly judgment, may issue for any particular individual in a verdict of acquittal or of condemnation. So the real problem is not so much the prospect of judgment as the prospect that some people will receive a verdict of eternal condemnation. In that case the idea of eternal punishment be reconciled with the love of God as it is revealed in Christ? How can people be happy in heaven if they know that others are suffering? Can those who reject it be reconciled with the one, family and friends. But before we try to reflect on these questions, let us notice that there is also a problem if there is no judgment at all. Already in the Ancient Near East writers were questioning how the gods could be just when the righteous suffered at the hands of the wicked:

The first is all, therefore, one council, 2 He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.

Job and Ecclesiastes wrestle with the same problem: why does God? Is he just, allow the wicked to prosper and inflict disaster on the innocent? It is all, one council, therefore, it destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, then s看之为神的无情。

The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; hence all the promises of the innocent should be rejected, and worthless people who have lived good lives? Would it not be a defeat, for God if some human beings fail ultimately to find a place in his kingdom? Would it not be terribly unfair of God to condemn people who have had inadequate opportunity, or no opportunity, to understand and respond to the Christian message? Is it not peculiar, when one adherents of non-Christian religions? Surely a just and loving God would not write people off merely because they had to be born in a place and culture where Islam or Hinduism or one of the other religions is the norm?

So the questions keep coming. And they are deep and urgent questions, because they are not questions so much as a case for our entire society to reflect on what we believe. So judgment is a problem. We prefer to manage without the idea of someone to whom we must give account of our lives, someone standing over us to remind us that we are both finite and guilty.

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So the questions keep coming. And they are deep and urgent questions, because they are questions not so much about the ultimate fate of all sorts of people, but about the identity of our immediate friends and family. So we are forced, when we reflect on these questions, to notice that there is also a problem if there is no afterlife. Already in the Ancient Near East writers were questioning how the gods could be just when the righteous suffered at the hands of the wicked:

'They walk on a lucky path, those who do not seek [a god], those who devoutly pray to a goddess become sick and weak.

Job and Ecclesiastes wrestle with the same problem: why does God? Is it all, then, one answer, so he destroys both the blameless and the wicked?

When disaster brings sudden death, 

The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; 

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grace, involves the obligation to work out our new status in practice. The only kind of faith which Paul approves is the kind of faith which fruit it has: faith working through love (Gal. 5:6). And at the final judgment a man’s works will be the evidence of the kind of man he is. It is not enough that any man believes these things and works the evidence of the reality of the faith through which we are saved.

(e) The final judgment will be a moment of division between those who are revealed truly to belong to Christ and those who do not. This judgment will underlie and make known the self-judgment which we have chosen during the present life (Mt. 10:32; 25:31-46; Jn. 5:25-29; Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Ths. 5:1-11).

Some interpreters of the New Testament argue for two or more different judgments. For example, they may distinguish between a judgment of believers (2 Cor. 5:10), a judgment of the nations (Mt. 25:31-46) and a judgment of the unrighteous dead (Rev. 20:11-15). But it seems to me that these are variant ways of talking about the same thing, whose purpose is to reveal the true character of men and allot their destinies accordingly. It is hard to see how passages such as Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-9, 16, with their reference to ‘the day of judgment’, could imply separate judgments for different categories of people.

(f) The New Testament views salvation and condemnation basically in terms of relationship or non-relationship to God. A failure to grasp this truth causes many of our distortions of the biblical doctrine of judgment.

We should note first that the criterion by which men’s destinies will be determined is the attitude of Christ—relationship to him. This is of course implied in the word ‘faith’: commitment to someone in relationship. And on the negative side, in 2 Thes. 1:8 Paul speaks of those ‘who do not obey the truth of our gospel, but have taken pleasure in doing evil’. They are not in relationship to him and so will come under his wrath. As we saw above, this emphasis is not in conflict with the idea that God judges all men. Both, since works are the outward evidence of the relationship (or lack of relationship), 2 Thes. 1:8 itself makes plain the parallelism between ‘a man’s works’ and ‘obeying the gospel’ (which has moral implications).

Secondly, just as the criterion of judgment is expressed in terms of relationship to God or to Christ, so also is the result of the judgment. Condemnation means ‘exclusion from the presence of the Lord’ (2 Thes. 1:9), whilst the destiny of God’s people is to be ‘always…with the Lord’ (1 Thes. 4:17; cf. 2 Cor. 5:8). In Jesus’ teaching, too, the destiny of those who respond to him is pictured in terms of being in the presence of God (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 22:4). Hell, on the other hand, means to be excluded from God’s presence (Mt. 7:23; 8:12; 25:41). The same theme is differently expressed in Matthew (18:28-33).

Every one who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven (Mt. 10:32).

Thus we can understand the link between self-judgment in the present and judgment at the last day. The final judgment is related in character and in theme to the continuous testing and rejecting of God towards him which we have chosen in this life. If we have fellowship with God now, we shall enter into a fuller experience of rejection. If we do not know him now, we shall not know him then.

If this is so, we can see that both heaven and hell are best spoken of not as reward and punishment for the kind of life we have lived, but as the logical outcome of our relationship to God in this life. Heaven is not a reward for being a Christian any more than marriage is a reward for being engaged. And hell, we may say, is not a punishment for turning one’s back on Christ and choosing the road that leads to destruction. It is where the road leads.

The nature of ‘eternal punishment’
The biblical doctrine of judgment offers confidence to those who humbly seek to respond to the love of Christ. But it presents a stark picture for those who do not. One way of ‘shouting the blow’ has been seen in the idea of ‘conditional immortality’. On this view those who are condemned at the final judgment will not endure endless conscious torment (which traditionally has been the common view of Christians) but will be ‘annihilated’. Since in the biblical view men are not naturally immortal, and the gift of immortality or eternal life is conditional upon faith in Christ, those who do not have such faith will not receive immortality. They will simply cease to be.

The traditional view of eternal punishment has normally been defended on the grounds that the soul is immortal, that strict justice requires it, and that it is the plain teaching of Scripture. Murray Harris has recently argued for it, pointing to references to retributive punishment in Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8f; Hebrews 10:29; and to the judgment of God as ‘severe’ in Matthew 25:41. He quotes in support Matthew 25:46, 41, 42, 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2. Thus in Matthew 25:46, where aionios is applied to both ‘life’ and ‘punishment’, it is a life that is described as aionios without end, so too will be the punishment that is described in the same way. ‘That the concept of “destruction” (apóleia)…or “perishing” (apóllasis)…does not imply annihilation is clear from the use of the word aionios here’. The word God is love (John 11:53; Acts 5:37; 1 Corinthians 10:9-10). Jude 1:11. ‘There are…sufficient warnings of the dire, eternal consequences of rejecting Christ to be needed in the Church’. Further, he argues on the authority of Matthew and Mark that the warnings of judgment in Jesus’ teaching are “existential” statements, designed not to propose a theological theory but to goad his hearers to repentance.

Hick adds that since God has made us for himself, with a Gl towards love, we are destined to do so. God must need to think of God working against human freedom in bringing men to the response of love towards himself. We should think of him like a psychologist helping the patient—both before death and beyond death. It is not the case that the blockages which prevent our free response to his love are the result of human fault. Hick, like other universalists, has a fine emphasis on God’s love, and of the sorrow it must bring to God—and ought to bring to those who are not transformed. As he puts it, “God does not force itself on its object, even though resistance causes the utmost anguish. Hick invites us to picture God as a divinist psychologist who, his love created, gradually winning their free response of love. But that the child of God should not keep going to the psychiatrist? Hick underplays man’s ‘bias’ against God.

(b) A scheme which presupposes a period of purgation after death, during which a person moves from rebellion or imperfect response towards a complete openness to God, suffers from total lack of New Testament evidence. The idea of remembrance or of the steady transformation of persons after death is a guess which contradicts the general thrust of Scripture. There is something suspect about the interpretation of certain texts, often put forward that “the general thrust of Scripture”, with its revelation of God’s love, requires us to postulate a period of purification, or a ‘second chance’, after death. It is a leap of faith which, if not supremely displayed, must we regard with utter seriousness the fact that his teaching about God’s love (as recorded in the gospels) apparently included nothing about opportunities after death.

(c) Hick’s argument that warnings of eternal condemnation are a different type of statement from the statements about God’s universal plan of salvation fails to cope with the case of a man who refuses to heed the warnings. It presents the moral, of an existential threat which turns out to have no corresponding reality.

(d) New Testament texts which speak in universalist terms ought to be accompanied by traditional Christian texts which has usually taken them, and Hick is right to remind us of them. But they cannot justifiably be used as an argument for universal salvation. Nearly all of them occur alongside statements about the need for faith in order to experience salvation. In Colossians 1:19-23, for example (a passage not in Hick’s fort), God’s purpose is ‘reconciling to himself all things in Christ, having made peace through his blood’ (v. 20).

Hick further argues that a doctrinal system which offers only two outcomes—death or life—is ethically irresponsible. And alongside these ‘judgment’ passages we must set the ‘universalist’ passages which are present in particular Paul (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:10; 1 Thes. 4:16). The two sets of statements are not incompatible because they are different types of statement. Paul’s are ‘detached’ theological statements implying a transcendent God of death. The warnings of judgment in Jesus’ teaching are ‘existential’ statements, designed...
grace, involves the obligation to work out our new status in practice. The only kind of faith which Paul approves is the kind which allows one to eat meat with whomever: 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). And at the final judgment a man's works will be the evidence of the kind of man he is. If there is no question of a man's works, there are no evidence of the reality of the faith through which we are saved.

e) The final judgment will be a moment of division between those who are revealed truly to belong to Christ and those who do not. That judgment will underline and make known the self-judgment which we have chosen during the present life (Mt. 10:32; 25:31-46; Jn. 5:25-29; Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Thes. 5:1-11).

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The nature of eternal punishment

The biblical doctrine of judgment offers confidence to those who humbly seek to respond to the love of Christ. But it presents a stark picture for those who do not. One way of 'shooting the bloom has been the idea of 'conditional immortality'. On this view those who are condemned at the final judgment will not endure endless conscious torment (which traditionally has been the common view of Christians) but will be 'annihilated'. Since in the biblical view men are not naturally immortal, and the gift of immortality or eternal life is conditional upon faith in Christ, those who do not have such faith will not receive immortality. They will simply cease to be.

The traditional view of eternal punishment has normally been defended on the grounds that the soul is immortal, that strict justice requires it, and that it is the plain teaching of Scripture. Murray Harris has recently argued for it, pointing to references to retributive punishment in Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 10:29; and to the justice of God in the ‘speech of Christ’ in the Parable of Matthew 25:41, 46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2. Thus in Matthew 25:46, where aionios is applied to both 'life' and 'punishment', the life that is described as aionios is without end, so too will be the punishment that is described in the same way. 'That the concept of "destruction" (apоlisis) ... or "perishing" (apоllao) ... does not imply annihilation is clear in the use of the term ... the life that is saved is the life of God' (John 11:50; Acts 5:37; 1 Corinthians 15:55-60; Jude 7). 'There are ... sufficient warnings of the dire, eternal consequences of rejecting Christ to be effective. The Church rejected both universalism and annihilation.20"

Arguments for annihilation or conditional immortality include the following:

(a) Since the Bible teaches that immortality is not natural to man but is a gift given by God to believers, that logically implies that unbelievers do not exist indefinitely after death.

(b) Biblical images such as fire and destruction suggest annihilation more readily than they suggest continuing conscious existence. Harris's appeal to the use of apolhologiai in Matthew 25:46, etc., does not appear to make out a case for the opposite view.

(c) 'Eternal' in places such as Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2 may signify the permanence of the retribution rather than the continuous torment of the act of punishment itself. So 'eternal punishment' means an act of judgment whose results are irreversible.

(d) Eternal torment involves an eternal cosmic dualism which is impossible to reconcile with the conviction that ultimate salvation is an end of things. It leaves us with no solution to the problem of how God's people could be happy in heaven while others continue to suffer in hell.

In attempting to weigh up such arguments J. W. Wenham suggests, first, that the traditional case for eternal torment should not be lightly surrendered; but, secondly, that the case for conditional immortality deserves to be considered much more seriously than has been the case hitherto.

But it is important not to get the differences between the two views out of proportion. The very ambiguity of the biblical evidence should remind us that this issue is of secondary importance to the biblical writers. As we say, they understood judgment in terms of relationship to God. Thus the most significant thing about the destiny of unbelievers is that they will be separated from God. Compared with that tragic fact, there is from the perspective of the New Testament writers—little point in asking for a more precise definition of their destiny, whether it involves continued conscious existence or not.

Will it all be saved?

A more radical question to the problem posed by the prospect of God's condemnation of many of the people he has created lies in the doctrine of universalism, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. Harris's failure to offer a satisfying solution to this view that all will ultimately be saved will be considered as an example.

In evil and the God of love he argues that God 'will eventually succeed in his purpose of winning all men to himself in faith. But even after he has done this, the existence of a power in the universe which creates in the soul a will to be self-centred, in making his patients to find their true selves. We must be as frankly realists as we are as realistically prosaic, as olduğur is the virtually universalist, 21 we do not see the genuine Christian who has been supremely displayed, must we not regard with utter seriousness the fact that his teaching about God's love (as recorded in the gospels) apparently included nothing about oppor- tunism. God's love is not a matter of indifference.21"

(c) His argument that warnings of eternal condemnation are a different type of statement from the statements about God's universal plan of salvation fails to cope with the case of a man who refuses to heed the warning of the individual; for the person who has not even heard of God's love (John 3:18).

(d) New Testament texts which speak in universalist terms ought to be seen in the light of traditional Christian teaching. It is not unreasonable that Hick has usually taken this, and Hick is right to remind us of them. But they cannot justifiably be used as an argument for universal salvation. Nearly all of them occur alongside statements about the need for faith in order to experience salvation. In Colossians 1:19-23, for example (a passage not in Hick's fort), God's purpose of 'reconciling to himself all things through Christ' is provided that you continue in the faith. ... It seems better, therefore, to interpret these 'universalist' texts not as assertions of what will happen in the disembodied state but as a description of the universe, even though some people may refuse to enter into that purpose.22"

It may be objected to my argument, with its emphasis on human free will as the corollary of divine love, that it fails to take seriously enough the sovereign grace of God. Or it may
The concept of relationship as a key to the comparative understanding of Christianity and Islam

Ida Glaser

Religion concerns the interaction of finite and infinite: the relationship of entities that are essentially other. Sometimes the otherness may be stressed, and sometimes the relationship. The balance between the two is, I would suggest, a determinant of a system.

Where the idea of otherness is submerged, there are two possible outcomes. We may find an infinity that is almost humanistic (Rev. 11: 19, 20). In that case the humanists may remain untouched by the ancient Greek or modern liberal systems. Alternatively, we may find that humanity is absorbed into the infinite, as in Hinduism or Buddhism.

In this paper we shall seek to compare Christianity and Islam. Beginning with the nature of God himself, we shall ask whether the notion of relationship runs through a number of major areas of Christian doctrine, and that a weakening of this notion will produce doctrines that come close to an Islamic understanding. We shall go on to see how these differing ideas of relationship make some key areas of the Christian faith unacceptable to Muslims. The discussion will include a number of themes that are rather technical in nature and in need of qualification. This is necessary for brevity, and for clarity in comparison of emphases in the two systems.

The nature of God

The Christian doctrine of the nature of God is that of the Trinity: three persons in one God from eternity. It is also that of a God with certain characteristics, notably holiness and love.

All these imply relationship. What for us means a relationship to a person? The great characteristic of a person is that he relates to other persons, and to himself in relation to other persons. To say that God is three persons is to imply that those persons relate. It is a relationship that unites persons, so at least one way of understanding the unity of the three is as a unity of relationship.

When we grasp the infinite and the finite, we find that infinity is not a simple entity, but a multiplicity. It is not that the infinite contains the finite, but that the finite consists in the infinite. The concept of relationship makes this clear.
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Where the idea of otherwise is submerged, there are two possible outcomes. We may find an infinitude that is almost human-like, or an infinite that is otherworldly. There is a sense of the ancient Greek or modern liberal systems. Alternatively, we may find that humanity is absorbed into the infinite, as in Hinduism or Buddhism.

In this paper we shall seek to compare Christianity and Islam. Beginning with the nature of God himself, we shall ask whether the nature of relationship runs through a number of major areas of Christian doctrine, and that a weakening of this notion will produce doctrines that come close to an Islamic understanding. We shall go on to see how these differing ideas of relationship make some key areas of the Christian faith unacceptable to Muslims. The discussion will include a number of cross-system comparisons, rather than simply a static and need of qualification. This is necessary for brevity, and for clarity in comparison of emblems in the two systems.

The nature of God

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All this implies relationship. What do we mean by a person? The great characteristic of a person is that he relates to others. By nature he is social. He relates to other persons. To say that God is three persons is to imply that those persons relate. It is relationship that unites persons, so at least one way of understanding the unity of the three is as a unity of relationship.

Conclusion

We are reminded that the nature of God in relationship is both the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in Christianity. It is the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in Islam. It is also the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in all religion. It is the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in all of human culture. It is the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in all of human history. It is the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in all of human experience. It is the key to understanding the nature of God in relationship in all of human understanding.
What is holiness? It implies otherness, but it also implies mortality. The Trinity is set apart from us by its moral purity. Yet it would be a distortion of moral purity apart from relationship. Can one be good in a vacuum? I doubt it. Goodness is a quality, as is faithfulness, but we can only see it in action when it is applied in the context of some sort of relationship, just as we can only be aware of light when it enters our eyes. To say that a person is good without reference to anything but himself or herself is a contradiction. Goodness can only be seen — and hence known — with reference to its relative to others.

What about love? Love makes no sense without an object, for love has essentially to do with relationship. God is love from eternity not because he might potentially love, but because in his very being he does in fact love. There is love — and therefore relationship — between the persons of the Trinity.

So at the centre of the Christian idea of God we see the relationship of persons that are other. God is three — he is three persons that exist over against each other. But he is also one, for the three are united in a relationship of holiness and love.

If we remove the concept of relationship, what have we left? If we have the one, we cannot have the three. We can have the ‘holiness’, but not the love, and the moral dimension of holiness must be changed. This moves us towards the Islamic idea of God. There is no plurality in him: his essential characteristic is that of unity. He is not plural in himself, and he is to be associated with no other. He is not, therefore, in relationship in eternity, for there is no other with whom he might have such a relationship.

The characteristics of holiness and love are not absent from the Islamic concept of God. Both are predicated of him: but I would suggest that the words do not have the same content as they do in a Christian context. Thus God’s holiness sets him apart, and makes him holy, but it does not tie him down to mortality. In fact, nothing can tie him down. He is free to will as he wishes, and powerful to carry out his will. He can therefore be tied down to no one but one, and even one that he himself has made. In this sense, his moral character is secondary. It is subject to his will.

God’s love may cause him to have mercy on his creatures, to extend the community of communicating with them; but it is a love that is free to do as it pleases. God’s love that shares in relationship. God may love us if he so chooses, but his relationship with the objects of his love is very different from that envisaged in the Christian faith.

In Islam, God is certainly other than man. He is high and exalted, and powerful to do and will as he pleases. These are his fundamental characteristics, which can supercede both justice and love as the Christian would understand them. Both will and power are predicated of God himself, without necessary reference to anyone else, for God in eternity is not in relationship. The relationship characteristics of justice and love are secondary.

In Christianity, on the other hand, love and justice are primary. God is all-powerful, and can will as he pleases, but his character of faithfulness ensures that he does not act apart from his love towards his creatures, a gift to us. Beginning with the Christian, everything is limited. He is in relationship from eternity, and the relationship characteristics come first.

The nature of man

The fundamental difference between the relating-in-eternity of God and the relating-in-time of man is that the relating of Christ and the purely one God of Islam is reflected in other areas of religious understanding. Most importantly it is reflected in understandings of the nature of man.

In the Christian scheme we see man as a creature over against a creator, as true as false, as man can only be seen — and hence known — with reference to its relative to others.

This does not only mean that man can relate with his fellow man. The biblical picture indicates that the likeness between creature and creator is sufficient to make possible between them a loving relationship, a relationship of love and of God: there is a likeness between creature and creator. This likeness includes the quality of personhood: the essential characteristic that implies the ability to relate to present in man also.

This is an important point. Man can relate with God and be a fellow creature. The biblical picture indicates that the likeness between creature and creator is sufficient to make possible between them a loving relationship, of God and man: there is a likeness between creature and creator. This likeness includes the quality of personhood: the essential characteristic that implies the ability to relate to present in man also.

The Islamic picture is different. Man is, as in Christianity, a spiritual as well as a physical being. He is able, and responsive to receive God’s revelation and to act with reference to him. But the idea that he is made in the image of God is absent. Man cannot be said to be ‘like’ God — the very suggestion is considered blasphemy, since there is none here like him. The absence of likeness immediately removes the dimension of mutuality in any relationship between man and God.

In particular, man cannot affect God, since this would detract from his power and self-sufficiency. As the Hadith says, ‘O my servants, you can neither do Me any harm nor can you do Me any good.’

Not the combined races of men and Jin can in any way conspire to augment or reduce the power of God.

The Christian would largely agree with this, but the Muslim would push the idea to the conclusions that man cannot affect God in ANY WAY. He cannot cause him grief or joy. Thus, although God has designed to communicate with man in the same way that he creates, the relationship cannot be mutual since man’s response can make no difference to God. We read in the Qur’an:

‘I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.

I seek no livelihood from them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me.’

Lo! Allah! He is it that gives livelihood, the Lord of unbounded might.

The relationship becomes more like that between potestate and subject, and the relationship that gives to those who are already God’s covenant people. The regulations are given in the context of covenant relationship and are expressive of it. The New Testament has the same emphasis: it is as God’s chosen people, and in relationship with him, that we are to act in accordance with his will. We are to be perfect because we are children of the Heavenly Father. That is why, since the Christian understands relationship, nothing need be done to restore it. Secondly, since God’s holiness is subject to his
What is holiness? It implies otherness, but it also implies morality. The Trinity is set apart from us by its moral purity. Yet I would say that it is a moral morality apart from relationship. Can one be good in a vacuum? I doubt it! Goodness is a quality, as is faithfulness, but we can only see it when it is applied in the context of some sort of relationship, just as we can only be aware of light when it enters our eyes. To say that a person is good without reference to anything but himself or herself is true, but goodness can only be seen — and hence known — with reference to its results relative to others.

What about love? Love makes no sense without an object, for love has essentially to do with relationship. God is love from eternity not because he might potentially love, but because he does in fact love. There is love — and therefore relationship — between the persons of the Trinity.

So at the centre of the Christian idea of God we see the relationship of persons that are other. God is three — he is persons that exist over against each other. But he is also one, for the three are united in a relationship of holiness and love.

If we remove the concept of relationship, what have we left? If we have the one, we cannot have the three. We can have the holiness, but not the love, and the moral dimension of holiness must be changed. This moves us towards the Islamic idea of God. There is no plurality in him: his essential characteristic is that of unity. He is not plural in himself, and he is to be associated with no other. He is not, therefore, in relationship in eternity, for there is no other with whom he might be related.

The characteristics of holiness and love are not absent from the Islamic concept of God. Both are predicated of him: but I would suggest that the words do not have the same content as they do in a Christian context. Thus God’s holiness sets him apart, and also means that he is other. But it does not tie him down to mortality. In fact, nothing can tie him down. He is free to will as he wishes, and powerful to carry out his will. He can therefore tie in the love that he makes, but not even one that he has made.2 In this sense, his moral character is secondary. It is subject to his will.

God’s love may cause him to have mercy on his creatures, to the extent of communicating with them; but it is a love that is free to do this and to withhold it, for love that shares in relationship. God may love us if he so chooses, but his relationship with the objects of his love is very different from that envisaged in the Christian faith.

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In the Christian scheme we see man as a creature over against a real and true other — God. Islam’s view of God: there is a likeness between creature and creator. This likeness includes the quality of personhood: the essential character of God that implies the ability to relate is present in man also.

This does not only mean that man can relate with his fellow men. The biblical picture indicates that the likeness between creature and creator is sufficient to make possible between them a mutual love, a loving relationship. Man can relate with God himself: indeed, it is for this relationship that he is made. He is to relate with his maker in mutual love as a son relates with his father.

The Islamic picture is different. Man is, as in Christianity, a spiritual as well as a physical being. He is able, and responsive, to receive God’s revelation and to act with reference to him. But the idea that he is made in the image of God is absent. Man cannot be said to be ‘like God’ — the very suggestion is considered blasphemous, since there is none like him.3 The absence of likeness immediately removes the dimension of mutuality in any relationship between man and God.

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I seek from them livelihood from them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me.5
Lo! Allah! He it is that giveth livelihood, the Lord of unbounded might.

The relationship becomes more like that between potentiate and subject. Man does not give to God, since man is made primarily for worship rather than relationship. There is relationship between God and man, but it is not that of mutual love pictured in the Bible.

Khurshid Ahmad describes ‘realization of man’s relation to his Maker’ by a Muslim: ‘You should worship Allah as if you are seeing him, for he sees you though you do not see him.’ He tells us:

It means that all action should be performed with Allah in your vision. If that is not possible you must realize that Allah is seeing you. The idea of Allah as the creator of true and false is reflected in the idea of man who has identified his will with the will of God and has therefore acted correctly, completing the statement in the Divine Will. ... Man comes nearest to God by excelling in the way of identification of man’s will with the Divine Will.

Closeness between man and God is described in terms of knowledge rather than likeness, and the ultimate in relationship is salvation willingness rather than interaction.

The nature of sin

The fundamental question concerning the nature of sin is not so much to describe sin as what sin does, for the latter determines the former.

In the Christian scheme, the dreadful thing about sin is that it breaks relationship between God and man. This has an effect on the sinner — it cuts him off from God’s presence, makes him deaf to God’s communication, and puts him under judgment. However, since the relationship is mutual, sin also affects God. It offends him and grieves him so that he longs to restore the sinner, although his character of holiness means that he will not overlook the sinner.

In Islam, on the other hand, we have seen that God cannot be grieved or offended by anything that man does. Sin can only affect God and not man. In our relationship picture, since there was no mutual relationship in the first place there is no relationship to be broken. After sin, man is still the subject, his right remains as he way before. The difference is that sin makes him liable to punishment in the hereafter, and to all the consequences of not following the path that God has declared to be best in the present. When he sins, man iniquity is committed against God himself.6

This difference in the effects of sin is reflected in what constitutes sin in the two systems. In Islam, sin is essentially a violation of the law, of God-given instructions concerning religious, social and moral and social obligations. In Christianity, on the other hand, sin is often described in relationship terms: grieving the Holy Spirit, spurning the Son, being at enmity with the Heavenly Father. In Romans 6, for example, Paul speaks of men being in sin and under the dominion of sin: fundamentally, sin is a state of separation from God rather than a series of violations of his regulations.

Yet there is some overlap here: the Bible also describes sin as transgression and sin as perversity.7 Does this mean that the biblical and Qur’aanic understandings of sin are closer than I have suggested? I think not, for the biblical and Qur’aanic understanding are not meant to be kept separated.8

The differences can again be understood in terms of relationship. In the biblical system even the Old Testament law is given in the context of relationship. It is significant that Abraham’s relationship to God is that in which he is bound to those who are already God’s covenant people. The regulations are given in the context of covenant relationship and are expressive of it. The New Testament has the same emphasis: it is as God’s chosen people in relationship with his people, and we are to act in accordance with his will. We are to be perfect because we are children of the Heavenly Father.9 That is why sin is described in relationship terms: it defies the one with whom we ought to relate.

In Islam, the order is reversed. It is not that we become God’s people, and therefore act in a particular way, but that God’s people act in a particular way because God has made them his people. We make our rule of life and our laws in the first place. That is why violation of the commandments deprives him of the good that comes through acting according to what God has said.

Sin for the Christian, then, is anything that offends God and therefore breaks the relationship. In Islam, what God is a wandering from God’s laws that results in judgment.

These fundamental differences in understanding of God, man and sin are not found in modern religions. In particular, Christian doctrines about salvation and about the Lord Jesus Christ may appear unnecessary, nonsensical and even blasphemous to the Muslim. It is to these doctrines that we now turn.

The doctrine of salvation

In his book Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Devotation (Rengan Paul International, 1983, pp. 28-29), Muhammad Abu Qasim recognizes that, in the Christian faith, ‘salvation is primarily deliverance from sin.’ Such deliverance, he says of Christians, ‘is the central event of the New Testament, and the actual new spiritual life is achieved through which the interrupted communion or fellowship with God is restored.’ Such doctrine is non-Islamic.

Islamic teaching is that sin stands between man and God no doubt, but he is not dead in it; so no new birth of the spirit is needed; he must, however, repent. Man is not by nature a person himself and he must repent from the sin through which he has committed sin. He must repit; his repentance is not salvation, but only a means to it; salvation is safely from punishment from sin in the life after death (p. 29).

Quasim is clear here on the differences between the Christian and Islamic ideas of salvation. The Christian seeks salvation from the state of sin itself, and the Muslim from punishment for sin. Thus, of course, reflects the ideas of sin discussed above. The Christian wants to be saved from the state of sin; whereas the Muslim wants to be saved from the relationship with God. The Muslim does not see the need for such a salvation, since he does not believe that he has fallen out of relationship. Indeed, he does not believe this relation- and he is not even possible. He sees man as he is — fallen, out of relationship with God — and assumes that he has his natural state. He may therefore seek to approach closer to God, and to know more of him, but he will not seek the restoration of a relationship which he does not believe ever existed. Salvation for him, if we can rightly use the word in this context, can simply an escape from judgment and an entry into paradise.

Since the nature of salvation in the two systems is different, the means of attaining it is also different. The Christian believes that God’s primary holiness requires judgment on all sin, and that he must therefore be saved from sin; the Muslim believes in the relationship, hence the need for the work of Jesus Christ. The Muslim, however, would reject both of these ideas. Firstly, since God’s holiness is not to be done to restore it. Secondly, since God’s holiness is subject to his
will, there is no necessity that sin should be judged. The Qur’anic idea of justice differs from that in the Bible.

The idea of transference of the punishment of sins or vicarious punishment is not present in the Qur’an. But in the Qur’anic outlook, sin is not a matter that, according to the Qur’an, the punishment is not the necessary and unavoidable consequence of sin.

God, however, can forgive us by the mercy of God. God is not bound to punish. Contrary to Augustine’s understanding of badness, which is in the Qur’an means that God does not punish anyone without reason, or beyond that which is necessary. These two ideas also mean that no good of man is left by God unrecognized and unrewarded. It does not mean that God is not allowed to leave any sin unpunished.

God, then, is free to forgive, to show mercy, on whom He will. Nothing has been withheld from sinning beings, nothing needs to be asked. Nothing needs to be done in expiation for sin: sacrifice is unnecessary.

What, then, is necessary for salvation – escape from judgment – in Islam? From God, the Muslim needs not an act of salvation but an act of revelation. He needs guidance as to what he should do, and mercy to help him to do it. The guidance available in the Qur’an and in the Hadith – the words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and the records of his life. The believer’s response is to be twofold. He is to believe what he is shown in his messenger and message, and he is to accept the message directly. This will lead him both to the best in this life, and to paradise after death.

For the Muslim, therefore, the Christian means to salvation are quite simply unnecessary. God can forgive sin without requiring any external act. 11

At the same time Christianity is seen as lacking in what is really needed for salvation – the details of actions that will please God. A Muslim can choose the actions that are best, but his actions are not necessary to salvation. He is singularly lacking in regulations both about religious and social duties, since it primarily records the history of relationship between God and his people. The Muslim is content to develop this into the relationship that the Muslim seeks law that will lead him into salvation; biblical law makes sense only in the context of relationship of salvation of the Muslim that had already been established.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ

For the Muslim, there is simply no need for anyone to be sent from God in this world to be a prophet in a new capacity. Since guidance and warning are the ultimate needs of man, there can be no higher calling than that of bringing him the needed message.

Since the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet in Islam, there is no need for salvation. The same is true within the Islamic framework, Christian doctrines about his person are superfluous.

More than that, the Christian doctrine of Jesus is rooted in the idea of relationship between God and man. The essential work of Christ is to restore relationship, but there is more to it than that. The very idea that God can appear in human form implies a certain likeness, and therefore a possibility relationship, between God and Christ. God himself comes among his creatures and relates with them. Not only does he speak to them, guide them and judge them: he also teaches them, with his help, the way of righteousness and salvation. Him and them. If there is no likeness between God and man, this cannot be. The very thought of it is blasphemy.

When we consider the nature of Jesus himself, we find a profound difference between him and Christ. The Christ and Jesus have a plurality in unity. There, three persons in one God; here, two natures in


Book reviews


Many readers will by now be familiar with this series of commented and introduced studies about the OT books written by Dr. Auld. A prominent ear, J. C. L. Gibson, are twofold: to introduce the most important results of Old Testament scholarship and, secondly, to draw out the contemporary relevance of the text for the lay Christian reader. The model, and hence the format, is based on the hugely successful series of the late William Barclay.

Clearly, Graeme Auld’s contribution must be judged by the aims which his editor has set him. As regards the first, he is generally able to indicate how these books are presented in moderate contemporary academic circles. Without becoming technical, he introduces the Deuteronomistic history, relates certain sections to later religious ideas and so on. Curiously, however, it seems to have little effect on the exposition. Although Auld occasionally makes clear that he does not take a high view of the historical value of certain parts of the narrative, he nevertheless discusses them for the most part at face value; we might have hoped that he’d decide to treat them under the fashionable category of ‘story’, this would have had a greater effect.

The second aim of the series – that of Christian application – is not so successfully handled, and certainly is not given the central prominence which the editor and the publisher’s blurb lead us to expect. Indeed, most of Auld’s modern examples are drawn from the Arab-Israeli problems in the Middle East. Though these are sometimes pointed and thought-provoking, I suspect that most church-goers will be put off by the sermonizing tone of some of the comments. On the other hand, this model of application, even if not the only framework within which the Old Testament may be regarded as a Christian book, is one which can be of use to the most cathartic approach I seem to think that only little effort had been made under this rubric. All will be sympathetic to Auld in that Joshua, Judges and Ruth are by no means the easiest books to tackle in such a series. The need for expert guidance is therefore all the more necessary; it is difficult not to conclude that an important opportunity has here been lost.

H. G. M. Williamson, University of Cambridge.


This brilliant book is the most illuminating study of Esther I have read (and, indeed, expect ever to read). An exceptional piece of work. The book’s thesis is presented in four sections. The first section is a superbly clear interpretation of the story which focuses on plot and narrative development. Although Clines is at pains to do justice to the story as a whole in its familiar Hebrew, i.e., Masoretic, form, his understanding of the book is facilitated by the fact that the original text has survived later in the Septuagint. In both forms the story is it most likely that the story originally ended at the end of chapter five. Later additions may have enriched the story, or have been made to bring in subsequent additions that developed the story in new ways.

The next two sections are technical studies of textual history and development. However, Clines’ method is based on a research that is perhaps too technical for most non-specialists. The author argues, for example, that the Septuagint version of Esther should be regarded as a late, but in no way, inferior version of the story. The significant phrase which has significantly been discounted by scholars, is, in

its own original form, evidence for a similar story line and ending to Esther (and subsequent additions for the story in the Maccabean period), and that such differences as exist between the A text and the Masoretic text point to the A text being an older version of the story than the Masoretic text.

In a final, non-technical, section Clines outlines a possible development of the plot and themes of the story of Esther with a particular valuable discussion (pp. 151ff.) of its various theological dimensions.

Apart from arguments over details, one difficulty that some readers may have is the question of the historical reliability of the contents of the books. In dealing with this question as such, his argument clearly implies minimal historicity of material; since the concept of historical questions is likely to be largely beside the point. But if it is possible that evangelical scholars have sometimes made too sweeping claims in the past, then the truly historical and not a technical approach to the history of its content, this book may lead to a fresh understanding of the book’s message. A study of the Septuagint and the portion of Scripture.

R. W. L. Moberly, University of Durham.


George A. F. Knight, Servant Theology: Isaiah 40 - 55 (International Theological Commentary, gen. eds. George A. F. Knight & Frederick Carlson Holstrom; Edinburgh: T
cross Press/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 200 pp., £47.52.

Although they do not deal with the same chapters of Isaiah, these two commentaries invite comparison because they both set out to offer an interpretation of the book which is relevant to both the Christian and the church. Both aim to be of practical use to the non-specialist.

Sawyer’s commentary illustrates the approach to the Old Testament proposed by B. S. Childs in his Introduction to the Old Testament as a Cultural and Religious Text. He takes the material from the original words of the prophet Isaiah is therefore a feature of the commentary, rather than a commentary. It is thought of, and did with, the words which they received. Since this is seen to be more important than discerning separate major authors within the text, in their interpretation of Isaiah, only the major voices on Isaiah in this series are divided into the end of chapter 32 (the prophetic voice) and the end of chapter 32 (the prophetic voice).

It is also not surprising that the reader is introduced to addictions and editorial changes, not as explanations of or to be pruned away to reveal the original prophecic word, but as features worthy of the exegete’s attention, showing how subsequent generations of the community of faith have used the word. Often the term of judgment can be transformed into an expression of hope, and, in a new context, can eventually function as a预言 (p. 90). The last stage of such a development is no less significant than the original words, for any addition or adaptation ‘reminds us that Isaiah is consistently represented as a prophet whose words, visions and experiences transcend his eighth-century environment’ (p. 79).

The method naturally imparts into the task of exegesis all the subjectivity and pitfalls of the critical approaches on which it builds. For example, the contrast between the denunciation of Judah in chapter 1 and the future, apparently uncompromising, which is highlighted because they ‘enable us to distinguish between how things were in Isaiah’s time and how they still are (p. 79). Sawyer follows those who believe that 70 saw Jerusalem defeated and humiliated, the later story of the city’s miracles does not mean that the city’s moral development is no more significant that the contrasting prophecies need not point to that conclusion in the first place, this view naturally leads to a distinctive expression of those passages which speak in one breath of the humiliation of Jerusalem.
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For the Muslim, therefore, the meaning of salvation is quite simply unnecessary. God can forgive sin without any act required of the sinner.

At the same time Christianity is seen as lacking in what is really needed for salvation – the details of actions that will please God. The rigid formalism of the system, it is suggested, is singularly lacking in regulations about both religious and social duties, since it primarily records the history of relationship between God and his people, and not that relationship itself. The Muslim seeks law that will lead him into salvation; biblical law makes sense only in the context of relationship of salvation already achieved.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ

For the Muslim, there is simply no need for anyone to be sent from God, and therefore no need for the prophetical idea of a revelation. Since guidance and warning are the ultimate needs of man, there can be no higher calling than that of bringing him the needed message. Since there is no such need within the Islamic framework, Christian doctrines about his person are superfluous.

More than that, the Christian doctrine of Jesus is rooted in the idea of relationship between God and man. The essential work of Christ is to restore relationship, but there is more to it than that. The very idea that God can appear in human form implies a certain likeness, and therefore a possible relationship, between God and man. In the Christian concept of Jesus, God himself comes among his creatures and relates with them. Not only does he speak to them, guide them and judge them: he also touches them, heals them, works with them, gives them life with them. If there is no likeness between God and man, this cannot be. The very thought of it is blasphemy.

When we consider the nature of Jesus himself, we find a problem. If we cannot worship him as a man, we have a plurality of unity. There, three persons in one God; here, two natures in one person. Again, a possible key relationship. If God and man can relate, we can conceive of both being perfectly present in Christ. If not, then is he some ‘human being’ who represents God and is not really present, or a ‘sacrament’ which mediates God and is not a person. In an attempt to think in terms of relationship, this would imply a physical oneness – an idea as abhorrent to Christians as to Muslims.

Conclusion

It is therefore not surprising if Muslims vehemently deny the idea of sacrifice for sins. They see the salvation that he brings. At best these ideas are considered unnecessary and nonsensical; at worst, blasphemous. We need to understand that such responses may not be the result of the unconsciousness of the existence of Christian doctrines, nor of hostility towards them, nor even of spiritual blindness. They are the expected consequences of belief in a system that is fundamentally different from Christianity in its understanding of God and of his creatures. If Muslims and Christians are to understand each other, these differences must be recognized.

1 This paper deals with mainstream, Sunni Islam, although much of it is also relevant to other forms of Islam. An exception is Sufism, the esoteric, mystical branch of Islam. Sufis often use vocabulary that implies relationship ideas similar to those in Christianity, or even a pantheistic view. It is worth noting here that even such vocabulary must be interpreted within the Muslim understanding of the over- whelming transcendence of God. Thus, for example, the word Khalli, ‘I am God’, implies, according to some interpreters, not the absorption of man into God but the negation of man in relationship to God. Similarly, the word Islam means ‘obedience to God who is all’; and is a term used for the faith of the Qu’ayr writes. Every time the Qur’an states a definite promise or a constant law, it follows with a statement implying that all of its limitations and restrictions are based not on a promise from a Allah or a law of His. For His will is absolute beyond the limitations of man. ‘In the shade of the Qur’an’, vol. 30, p. 140, MWL London.

2 Garbage 15, Al-Hijr, vv. 26ff.

3 See Surah 117, The Unity, but note again the divergence with Sufism where the tradition that ‘God made Adam in his image’ is not really important, although it is the traditional statement as in Christianity.

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Many readers will by now be familiar with this series of commen- taries on the New Testament. Ideas about the nature of the New Testament are explained by a respected editor, J. C. L. Gibson, are twofold: to introduce some of the most important results of Old Testament scholarship and, secondly, to give due credit, to draw out the contemporary relevance of the text for the lay Christian reader. The model, and hence the format, is based on the hugest successful series of the late William Barclay.

Clearly, Graeme Auld’s contribution must be judged by the aims which his editor has set out. As regards the first, he is generally able to indicate how these books are presented in moderate contemporary academic circles. Without becoming technical, he introduces the Deuteronomistic history, relates certain sections to later developments and so on. Curiously, however, this seems to have little effect on the exposition. Although Auld occasionally makes clear that he does not hold a view of the historical value of certain parts of the narrative, he nevertheless discusses them for the most part at face value, we might have hoped that he’d decided to treat them under a fashionable category of ‘story’, this would have had a greater effect.

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It is also not surprising that the reader is introduced to additions and editorial changes, not as ecumenical devices designed to present a readable version of the prophetic wisdom, but as features worthy of the exegete’s attention, showing how subsequent generations of the community of readers have transformed the word. An original word of judgment can be transformed into an expression of hope, and, in a new context, eventually functionally serve as a new word (pp. 79). The last stage of such a development is no less significant than the original words, for any addition or adaptation ‘reminds us that Isaiah is consistently represented as a prophet whose words, visions and messages transcend his eighth-century environment’ (p. 79).

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The international character of this series is to be fore in the authorship of this volume: a French-speaking scholar from Switzerland (Erdmann), a Danish critic, and a Hebrew-Crisch Protestant to Spain. Lectures on the Creation and the Fall in the Old Testament literature XX: Grand Rapids: Erdmann, 1984, 120 pp., $14.95.

The interest in the creation of a new volume devoted to the subject of the creation and the fall in the Old Testament literature is a natural extension of the work already done in the series. The creation and the fall in the Old Testament are central themes in the religion and philosophy of the ancient Near East, and they have been the subject of much scholarly debate. The series seeks to provide a comprehensive and balanced treatment of the subject, drawing on the latest research and scholarship.

This volume includes contributions from a range of scholars from different traditions and perspectives. The editors have sought to present a variety of viewpoints, and the contributors have been selected to provide a broad and balanced perspective on the topic. The volume is divided into several sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the creation and the fall in the Old Testament.

The volume begins with an introduction by the editors, providing an overview of the topic and an introduction to the contributors. The first section presents a survey of the traditional interpretations of the creation and the fall, with contributions from scholars representing different traditions and perspectives. The second section focuses on the Hebrew text and its translation, with contributions from scholars who have studied the Hebrew language and its literature. The third section examines the role of the creation and the fall in the theology of the Old Testament, with contributions from scholars who have studied the religious and theological implications of the topic.

The volume continues with a series of essays that explore the creation and the fall in the context of other traditions and religions. The fourth section examines the creation and the fall in the context of ancient Near Eastern religions, with contributions from scholars who have studied the religious and cultural influences on the Hebrew tradition. The fifth section explores the creation and the fall in the context of Judaism and Christianity, with contributions from scholars who have studied the development of these traditions and their relationship to the Hebrew tradition.

The sixth section examines the creation and the fall in the context of the Christian church, with contributions from scholars who have studied the development of Christian thought and its relationship to the Hebrew tradition. The final section presents a summary and conclusion, providing an overview of the major themes and perspectives discussed in the volume.

Overall, this volume provides a comprehensive and balanced treatment of the creation and the fall in the Old Testament literature. It is a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in the subject, and it will be of interest to anyone with a broad interest in the history and development of religion and thought.

To order a copy of this volume, please contact the publisher directly. The volume is available in hardcover and paperback editions. Prices vary depending on the format and location of purchase. For more information, please visit the publisher's website or contact them directly.

The international character of this series is to the fore in the authorship of this volume: a French-speaking scholar from Switzerland and a Hebrew-Catholic from Israel expounds Lamentations. Familiarity with commentaries and articles in French, German and Hebrew makes for breadth of outlook and freshness of presentation, and both authors keep very much in mind the worldwide church as they expand the text. In keeping with the purpose of the series to move beyond the critical-historical approach to the Bible and offer a theological interpretation of the Hebrew text, there are no footnotes. This could be a serious disadvantage to a student who needs to verify information, though for the overview of these books in relation to the rest of Scripture it makes for modularity.

A brief introduction of eight pages (out of a total of seventy on Amos), having set the scene, ends, with a comment on the 'atheistic' reading of Amos by people such as Ernst Bloch, who miss the fundamental purpose of the prophet. Amos sought to confront his contemporaries with the truth: he saw what had to date escaped his contemporaries' theological understanding. The purpose of God's coming is to vindicate his people and his covenant relationship with them. In this text, an ecumenical conviction is expressed: a takes a conservative view of 'corrections' to the text, and prefers the Hebrew readings.

Professor Martin-Achard draws attention to literary forms used by Amos, pointing out their significance for his message. In particular he notes the unique use of the Hebrew word wa'ahal which has the sense of 'to threaten' and occurs in the book of Amos 5:15. This is the root of the English word 'wholly'. In 3:15, the book shows that this idea is 'a thematic concept of 'the end of the age'


This series seeks to provide a form-critical study rather than a philological, historical or theological commentary. This volume fulfils its aim well, although one might question whether the fruit of form-criticism justifies a complete series. Since the method tries to determine the nature of a text, it is based on the underlying structure by differentiating the typical from the unique, this volume could also be seen as a form-critical study of the book of Amos. It is a useful introduction to the study of the example of the apocalypse genre. One wonders how separate volumes on 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings will be justified if the triple volume on Daniel is to be accepted.

The first portion of the book introduces apocalyptic as a genre and compares it to other literary genres and to other-worldly literature (e.g. 2 Enoch and the Testament of Abraham) and histories (e.g. Daniel and Jubilees). Each of these has its own subgenres and forms of religious narratives, and their production of events which have already taken place' (p. 11). In other words, these works are different in kind from those in the Apocalyptic, the book of Daniel, the Testament of Abraham, and the other-worldly literature, but the arguments for its existence in the Bible must be carefully weighed, not least in the light of one's position regarding inspiration. It is by the other acceptable type of prophecy because there can be no predictive prophecy in a strictly secular-scientific world, or does one have a view of God such that predictive prophecy is possible, but still consider that this particular genre was chosen from among several possible prophetic genres? Collins appears to adopt the latter approach.

The body of the book looks firstly at Daniel as a whole. It is dated in the second half of the third century. It is divided into two parts: the union of Daniel 1–7 and 8–12. Each part is divided into the independent tales and visions. Individual units are then studied. Each unit is studied in the context of its overall relevance for the interpretation of its setting and intention, with an occasional bibliography. The book closes with a useful sixteen-page glossary defining form-critical terms and definitions of key concepts that are used throughout the book.

The bibliographies located in various parts in the book include works as recent in 1984 and are quite comprehensive. Critical works are not included, but the introduction gives an overview of the early history of the Daniel literature. Readers of this journal will miss reference to the articles in Thesaurus 3:2 and 3:5, and in the Cambridge Bible, but these works are generally current.

Some Problems in the Book of Daniel (Tyndale, 1965). The use of the biblical text and of the latest scholarly research is markedly superior to that listed at the start of major sections or the end of a sub-section, but this is not consistent.

Collins' work will be of interest to Theologians readers as presenting the current state of the critical discussion in this particular area. It accepts without discussion much more pseudonymity and ex pseudonymity ideas which need much more careful study by evangelicals (see B. Malherbe in Theologian, 56 (1979-80), as does the ultimate goal and use of the book of Daniel. He sees the book as either a kind of apocalyptic or as a kind of history. He says that one still need a full-fledged exegetical and theological discussion in order to determine the message of the book.

David W. Baker, University of Durham-Westville, South Africa.


In a foreword to the series' aim is stated as 'collecting and reproducing key studies' and giving a balanced overview of the problems and various approaches. The volume is approached by a new introductory essay by the editor followed by nine further essays.

English, all having been published during the past ninety years. Forty of these have been abridged, with one being updated. They explore Issues of Creation and the place of God in the natural and social world and the theological and cultural implications of these. They explore Issues of God and the relation of the created world to the divine, Issues of the relation of the created world to the divine, Issues of the religious, linguistic, form criticism, theology and ethics. The essays are divided into three sections: Issues of God and the created world (section I), Issues of the created world (section II) and Issues of God and the created world (section III). Each section contains essays on topics of particular significance, issues are distinguished, with a particular emphasis on the relation of the created world to the divine.

To give a concise outline of the ethical perspective of any one New Testament author is an easy task, and make an adequate assessment of two or more is definitely more difficult. misleading essays.
however, has tackled the problems with considerable skill and insight and has given us a book (originally a 1979 Oxford DPhil thesis) that is both balanced and balanced by comparison. The material about Matthew and Paul has fallen into the trap of reading too much into the life or chronology. The balance of phrases like 'authorial view' or 'earlier manuscript' are not easily expunged from the perspective of law (Matthew) and grace (Paul). But Mohrling follows a steady course between the two extremes, providing a clear framework while allowing their different perspectives and emphases to emerge.

As the title suggests, Mohrling follows a fundamental ethical principle of the historical method that the religious and legal materials are not separate, but that the religious principles of Jesus himself may be found in the work of the law. The 'Law of Love' in Romans 15:12-13 is a case in point. The interpretation of Scripture is not a matter of isolated 'models' (as in the Roman Catholic Church), but a matter of a larger context, in which the biblical authors themselves have contributed. Mohrling's approach is a significant contribution to the study of the New Testament.

The book is well written and the author has a gift for making the often difficult material accessible. The footnotes are extensive, allowing the reader to go deeper into the scholarship. The bibliography is comprehensive, covering a wide range of topics. The book is recommended for anyone interested in the study of the New Testament.

E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM, 1985), 447 pp., £14.95

E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM, 1985), 447 pp., £14.95

Jacob Neusner, Judaism in the beginning of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress/London: SPCK, 1984), 112 pp., £3.95


This text is a study in the New Testament century of the historical Jesus. It has been written in a manner that is both accessible and scholarly. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the study of the New Testament.

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The theological impact of this work is likely to be considerable. It could serve as a catalyst for further research and discussion among scholars in the field of New Testament studies. The book is well written and easy to read, with clear and concise arguments supported by a wealth of evidence from the New Testament and related materials.

One of the themes that I found particularly intriguing is the relationship between the Gospel of Matthew and the Pauline letters. This relationship has long been a topic of debate in New Testament studies, and the author provides a fresh perspective on it.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of early Christianity, the development of Christian theology, or the relationship between the Gospels and the Pauline letters. It is a valuable resource that will no doubt make a significant contribution to our understanding of these important texts.

E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM, 1985), 444 pp., £17.95.


One of my heroes is Hans Andersen's little boy who dared to say that the emperor had no clothes. In that sense, I think that his scholarly output has been largely devoted to following his example. E. P. Sanders first came to notice by challenging the basic tenets of form criticism. He showed that the actual composition of the Gospels and Paul's letters was probably much more complex than the traditional view and that the text had been subject to significant editorial manipulation. E. P. Sanders then attacked the dominant views of Judaism, arguing that Paul and his contemporaries were not as concerned with Jewish laws and customs as traditionally supposed. Instead, he emphasized the importance of the community's understanding of Jesus and his message, leading to a more inclusive view of Christianity.

In his latest book, Judaism in the beginning of Christianity, Sanders takes on the role of the Jews in the development of early Christianity. He argues that the Jews were not the exclusive inheritors of the Jewish tradition, but that they were actively engaged in dialogue with their Gentile neighbors, leading to the emergence of a new form of Judaism that was distinct from the traditional one.

This book is a stimulating and thought-provoking read, and it is sure to generate much discussion among scholars in the field. Sanders' approach is innovative and challenging, and it provides a fresh perspective on the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles in the first century.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of early Christianity, the development of Jewish and Christian traditions, or the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. It is a valuable resource that will no doubt make a significant contribution to our understanding of these important topics.
In depicting Jesus finally as a 'visionary who was mistaken about the implications of his words to his disciples' and a 'man who consciously dissociates himself from those who reconstruct Jesus to fit their own prior religious commitment. His own reconstruction, he claims, is unbacked by, and does not correspond to, his own religious beliefs. Whether this proudly asserted 'freedom from theologically defined historical propositions' may be open to debate. But in any case, it is surely 'novistic historian's view, for the conclusion that Jesus accepted the 'covenatial norm' ('pp. 356, which may not be taken as an assertion of the actual historical saliency of Jesus himself, which this view provides for Jesus, as it does for Paul and Palestinian Judaism. But my impression, for what it is worth, is that this very 'historical' approach is often, to some extent, an illusion, as that which will be prepared to adopt his position as a whole. He will probably find that this approach is in some respects incoherent and unsatisfactory. This viewpoint, which offers the most coherent, from the religious point of view, and from that social and cultural point of view which is most important to all historians of religion.

Such a trenchant, wide-ranging and clear-sighted attack on most people's cherished ideas cannot be expected to meet with instant acceptance. It is a book written in a style which, as was the case with Paul and Palestinian Judaism. But my impression, for what it is worth, is that this very 'historical' approach is often, to some extent, an illusion, as that which will be prepared to adopt his position as a whole. He will probably find that this approach is in some respects incoherent and unsatisfactory. This viewpoint, which offers the most coherent, from the religious point of view, and from that social and cultural point of view which is most important to all historians of religion.

Protest Professor Ellis recognizes that the greatest factor in the background to Judaism is Palestinian Judaism. Even though Paul did not use the other elements which, as was the case with Paul and Palestinian Judaism. But my impression, for what it is worth, is that this very 'historical' approach is often, to some extent, an illusion, as that which will be prepared to adopt his position as a whole. He will probably find that this approach is in some respects incoherent and unsatisfactory. This viewpoint, which offers the most coherent, from the religious point of view, and from that social and cultural point of view which is most important to all historians of religion.

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In depicting Jesus finally as a 'visionary who was mistaken about the issues of the day': Do not use. The author, who is research professor of New Testament Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, discusses the identity of Jesus and the ways in which he was perceived by his contemporaries. This paper was presented at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature in Boston, Massachusetts.

Professor Morris recognizes that the greater factor in the debates over Jesus's identity is Palestinian Judaism. Though John did not use the other expository methods of the Jewish tradition, the language of Jesus and the historical background of his sayings may be crucial to understanding his teaching. In this case, it is not true to say that modern historians have discovered a 'Jewish Jesus' which exists outside the historical context in which he lived.

A simple exposition of John's gospel is followed by an equally straightforward reading of the text. The author demonstrates that there is no evidence in John's gospel to support the idea that Jesus was a grassroots leader. Though John does not say that Jesus was a rabbi, the author argues that Jesus was not a social revolutionary.

The third and final chapter of the book concludes with the idea that the truth in love can help fellow Christians lead astray by false teachings. The third letter is one of appreciation to Gurus and the final one, a letter to the Church at Philadelphia, is one of the last words of Jesus in his earthly ministry.

In conclusion, the author argues that the meaning of the New Testament is better understood within the context of the historical Jesus. The meaning of the New Testament is not found in the text itself, but in the way it is interpreted by those who believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Mind or spirit? This question has occupied a large place in the history of our times (e.g. I Cor. 14) to our own day. Very often, so-called mind and spirit have been regarded as unimportant. This is in part because many historians have not recognized the role of the spirit in the development of the modern age. At the same time, the impact of the spirit is also evident in the lives of many people today. The spirit of the age is the subject of this book.

Harbison has drawn on the rich traditions of scholarship to provide an insightful and thought-provoking analysis of the relationship between mind and spirit. He argues that the spirit is an essential component of human experience, and that it has an important role to play in our understanding of the world.

This book is intended for those interested in the history of ideas, the history of religion, and the history of scholarship. It is also a valuable resource for those interested in the relationship between mind and spirit in contemporary society.


This book is an important contribution to the debate about the nature of God. Nash argues that the attributes of God are difficult to reconcile with the concept of God as a personal being. He argues that the attributes of God are not inherent in God, but are the result of human understanding.

Nash's arguments are well presented, and his conclusions are well supported. This book is an important contribution to the debate about the nature of God, and is highly recommended for those interested in the philosophy of religion.

The aim of this series is to introduce readers to important philosophical and religious ideas. The set consists of 12 volumes, each of which presents a particular philosophical or religious idea in a clear and concise manner.

This volume, which is the first in the series, introduces the concept of God. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the philosophy of religion, and is highly recommended for students and teachers alike.


This book is an important contribution to the debate about the nature of the world. Hasker argues that the world is constructed, and that the way in which we understand the world is influenced by our metaphysical beliefs.

Hasker's arguments are well presented, and his conclusions are well supported. This book is an important contribution to the debate about the nature of the world, and is highly recommended for those interested in the philosophy of metaphysics.

This volume, which is the second in the series, introduces the concept of the world. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the philosophy of metaphysics, and is highly recommended for students and teachers alike.

The aim of this series is to introduce readers to important philosophical and religious ideas. The set consists of 12 volumes, each of which presents a particular philosophical or religious idea in a clear and concise manner.

This volume, which is the first in the series, introduces the concept of the world. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the philosophy of metaphysics, and is highly recommended for students and teachers alike.
Finally, the portraits of Calvin and especially of Luther as scholars are particularly worthwhile and should be read by all students of the Reformation. The editor has insightfully explained how the author unfortunately put the New Testament books as late as he possibly could in Marcin’s ‘hersy’ was a perfectly legitimate development of Christian teaching. There is a chapter on the relationship between Marcin and Nicotianism which is broadly sound, though again subject to improvement. The chapter on Lutheran and Catholic politics, however, seems rather diffuse and uninteresting. It is primarily a question of whether Marcin is a ‘serious’ theological scholar or not. There is a chapter on the relationship between Luther and the Reformation in the late sixteenth century. The historical context is very well illustrated, but the presentation may be improved.

James Stamoolis.


An eighteenth-century Scottish Roman Catholic priest seems an unlikely pioneer of Old Testament criticism, but Alexander Geddes certainly came close. The book is a biographical study, but Geddes came close to criticism rather than by Scotland or the Roman Catholic Church. He was, in fact, one of the few British biblical scholars at that time who took any serious notice of German scholarship, and earned the regard of being himself taken seriously by the great German critics of the period. He was also able to contribute to the development of biblical criticism, and this was particularly important. Certainly he was outstanding in that it was an impressive view of the world from the principles on which biblical criticism is founded: that the biblical documents are to be studied like any other ancient literature. But his historical criticism seems to have consisted largely in a rationalistic approach to the miraculous and an application of the notion of myth which rather lacks the sophistication of its contemporary German critics. Geddes was not a great scholar, but his historical criticism seems interesting without the grounds for which Fuller claims his ‘professed allegiance to the person of his Saviour’, let alone the ‘full allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church’. His rationalistic interpretation of Old Testament history was supposed to remove the Greek Gospels, but in fact they provide the basis for the rationalistic interpretation, and arguments, they seem again to be rationalistic historical, rather than literary, ones.

Geddes is an illustration of the extent to which eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism contributed to the origins of biblical criticism. Its role, however, is not only the ultimate and only motive of credibility, the only solid pillar of faith, but in Germany it was integrated into a real conflict with its theological consequences. Geddes seems strangely silent about the grounds for which Fuller calls his ‘professed allegiance to the person of his Saviour’, let alone the ‘full allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church’. His rationalistic interpretation of Old Testament history was supposed to remove the Greek Gospels, but in fact they provide the basis for the rationalistic interpretation, and arguments, they seem again to be rationalistic historical, rather than literary, ones.

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This is a book intended for the student who is interested in the philosophy of religion. It is written for the Christian theologian who thinks that God is the creator of the universe. It sets out to demonstrate that God exists and that he is the author of the universe. It argues for the existence of God by examining the idea of a creator. In doing this, it brings together arguments from various areas of knowledge. It attempts to show that our ideas about God are consistent with the facts of the universe. It discusses the nature of God's existence and attributes, and considers the implications of these for human life. The book is written in an accessible style, and includes many examples from everyday experience to help illustrate the points being made. It is intended to be a helpful introduction to the subject for students and non-specialists alike.
The very important first chapter sets the stage for the ensuing discussion. Here Holmes cleary delineates the relationship of the Bible to ethics. He finds that there is a mutual interdependence in which biblical morality and philosophical ethics both derive their validity from the other. Noting that the Bible's primary emphasis is on near-sightedness. It is caught up in the "church business"—primarily concerned with maintaining a religious quorum. Required, then, is a radical rethinking of the church's purpose and service in God's kingdom. To this end, Snyder employs two key words: chiasm and worldview, on which the church is a collection of aspects of life on this planet; and therefore, the church does not exist in isolation. With these concepts, he drives home the church's responsibility to form and reform believers in God's kingdom.

In addition to the depth of reflection evident on every page, a major plus of Snyder's work is his ability to be practical in both general and specific terms. Importantly, such provisions are not made without a solid theological basis. Any reader can follow the reasoning and back the conclusions with solid reasoning. In this way, Snyder asserts, "the church's most potent role as community is in community building" (p. 128) —and then goes on to briefly spell out this kind of service in terms of the family, church, and neighborhood. One might wish, however, that Snyder had specifically addressed the practicalities involved in redirecting the course of theological education and pastoral training: long term, pervasive renewal that will only be possible until changes are made at this level.

Other readers may find Snyder's study lacking in his presuppositions about the character of the church. It is in the light of this passage for Snyder, is certainly important. However, it is debatable whether the above-mentioned provisions of community building and the very high regard that church leaders have for the church to the poor and on the role of women in the church. Above all, it would seem to the church to risk its own service in the kingdom of God. It should be noted that the book was written in the American church context—so that, nevertheless, it timely message will benefit a wider audience.

Joel B. Green, University of Aberdeen.

Gustavo Gutierrez, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual courtesy of People (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984 [Spanish 1983]), 181 pp., $7.95

We Drink from Our Own Wells was originally an annotated series of lectures delivered in 1962 by Gutierrez at his training center in Lima, Peru. The tone is both pastoral and apocalyptic, with thirty-four pages on the power of Jesus Christ as a transformation of society and source indexes.

Gutierrez's message is that the absolute beginning point for all authentic theology is "on encounter with the Lord" which through critical reflection then becomes relevant and tangible in the context of life. True life, according to Golz, is the church's greatest need is to be set free for the Kingdom of God, and therefore it is to be liberally and God intends. The church must be freed to participate fully in the economy of God." (p. 11). How the church can be thus liberated sets the agenda for the present book.

The title for Snyder Bible Church is a holistic perspective of the church's life generated from spiritual experience, anything less is not genuine life.

Part two serves as an analysis of Christian spirituality from two perspectives. First is a fairly detailed biblical study on the concepts of Jesus and the church, the latter of which the author seeks to clarify the wholeness of man. To the detriment of both his perspective and Jesus, Gutierrez describes the church as a "New Testament" and the concept of body resurrection.

The second perspective concerning spirituality derives from the testimonies of Augustine, Bonaventure, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola and many others. Through these historic examples, coupled with those of modern Latin America, Gutierrez develops his central thesis that every spirituality receives its initial impetus from an inner encounter with God. Only by means of individual experience with the Spirit and subsequent reflection is theology born.

In part three, Gutierrez sketches a profile, with five summary characteristics, of the "new way that is coming into existence among us" (p. 94). Primary is conversion, a break from old world and a solidarity with the "churc of the poor." Second is a sense of autonomy; seeing divine grace in all of history leading to the understanding of the kingdom of God and the church. Third is the church's movement is deep-let joy in the midst of suffering. Fourth is the aspect of spiritual childhood which the again yokes with unreserved commitment to the poor. He declares categorically, "Spiritual poverty is obligatory for every Christian and for the church as a whole." (p. 123). As a final characteristic, Gutierrez deals with the axes of spirituality and community, the two enriching one another. Gutierrez's perspective is personal and the church for the poor drives him more fervently to appreciate the fellowship of the church.

Amidst the objections to Gutierrez's theology, three stand central. The first, "we approach the Bible from our experience as being the church of Jesus as a New Testament" that we ask our questions (p. 34). We might ask, with John Golz, if it is impossible to elect of itself, or to see liberationists see at the bottom of the hierarchical well? (The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology, Homestead in Biblical Theology 4:2 1978) in this context com.

2. Christologically we remain with the suspicion that Jesus is a leeway. Against Golz balanced in the church. We encounter the church behind the lips of Jesus, the "Spirit of Jesus within the depth of our beings, questions arise. How do I know this experience is Jesus of the Bible? Is Jesus but a symbol of the church? As a church experience? As should we consider this Christology without the husks, therefore, just anthropology?

3. A practical view, however, Gutierrez should be careful in caring for the needy, can we not contend that Gutierrez has advanced a mythological of poverty? Do only the rich oppress the poor? Or are the poor who oppress the rich? Can we believe that they, simply, generally rampant with prostitution, addiction and violence, are in themselves, or are they in struggle, that rich are evil and poor are good? With this central premise, Gutierrez's theoretical energy creates a realistic concern. Surely, we need exist for biblical., God's cry for his, for reductionism, Gutierrez must fend with this weakness in his own vision.

We Drink from Our Own Wells may cause you anger or may leave you elated. It will certainly be both. Italic exhortations to all who care to understand the theological flow of the Third World.

J. Scott Harrell, Texas, USA.

John Fischer, The Olive Tree Connection (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979) 286 pp., $6.95.

The author, who introduces himself as a messianic Jew on p. 89 of this book, deals with the best ways of sharing the Messiah with Israel. He stresses the divine channel to communicate the message of Jesus (Yeshua) to the Jewish people as well as to the world, with the ultimate spiritual and the ultimate strategies when the prophecies of Luke 21:24 and Genesis 11:14-18 are being fulfilled. He points out that God is dealing with Israel today and that he can today "join those broken-off branches to their own tree again" (Rom. 11:24). These views I fully endorse, but I do not consider his statement on p. 46 that all the Jews will ultimately be "reconverted to God," with reference to Romans 11:26, to be in agreement with the trend of Romans 11 just as the 'fulness of the Gentiles' does not refer to all the Gentiles but to those who have been redeemed in Christ. There is no further reference to this statement in the rest of the book.

Illuminating information is furnished on the Jewish world view. The author mentions (among other things) appreciation of learning, and emphasis on individuals. He stresses the need for an increased concern about assimilation, the equating of Zionism with racism, and anti-Semitism. A survey of church-synagogue relations reveals an absence of Jewish sentiments in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as well as in the Protestant churches over many centuries up to the present time. This is a sad story, but it should be told.

The present war situation in the Middle East is referred to. The press coverage is described as one-sided (p. 71). The irreplaceability of the solution of a secular democratic state is exposed. The military victory over Israel did not give the Jews the largely isolated and assimilated significant fashion in which God subsequently worked spiritually amongst the Jews, is highlighted. Increasing numbers of Jews are seeking to comprehend their Jewishness. These factors combined have resulted in two to three thousand every year (p. 83). But there is also increased opposition in Jewish circles to evangelism and assimilation. Simultaneously there is a strong trend to be "thoroughly biblical as well as authentically Jewish" in commitment to Jesus Christ (p. 84). In the last chapter on church and synagogues or synagogues are formed in Jewish communities. This helps to "resolve the tension between Jewish openness to the Gospel and the maintenance of Jewish identity. Not only is this significant in the context of Israel" (p. 90). It is accepted that "observing the Jewish customs and ceremonies" is not a full,response in salvation, but "observance" (p. 90) and that salvation is "by grace through faith in Christ (p. 92)."

The author makes valuable practical suggestions regarding the sensitive communication of the Christian message to Jews. Some of these are: "the truth must be accurately communicated, 'from the heart'... the truth and good must come first" (p. 103), study the bible together, the "liturgical approach" (p. 157), the "sensitive approach" on "using the Jewish Bible" and "Responsing to questions and objectives" are a valuable addition. This book points the way to a well-established method of preserving the message of Jesus Christ with Jewish friends.

W. J. van der Meer, Sinteelenbosch, S. Africa.
The economy of God (p. 11). How the church can be thus liberated sets the agenda for the present book.

For Snyder Bible study is a holistic practice of personal and corporate spirituality, each person's individual journey towards God is viewed as a sacred and transformative process.

In addition to the depth of reflection evident on every page, a major plus of Snyder's work is that he succeeds in making a very important and detailed account of the church service in terms of the family, church, and neighbourhood. One might wish, however, that Snyder had specifically addressed the practicalities involved in redirecting the course of theological education and pastoral training: long-term, pervasive renewal of the church is likely to be a difficult dream that will hardly be possible until changes are made at this level.

Others may find Snyder's study lacking in his presuppositions about the characteristics of the church. It is in the light of these presuppositions that passage for Snyder, is certainly important. However, it is debatable whether the church in question is for Snyder an institution that is in the service of divine purposes. How does Snyder deal with the diversity of the New Testament parables of the kingdom? How does he deal with the New Testament parables of the kingdom? This is a crucial question in the context of Snyder's work.

Over-all, Liberating the Church should prove a helpful, provoking tool for pastors and church leaders. It contains one of the most thought-provoking and balanced arguments about a more participatory church to the poor and on the role of women in the church. Above all, it is not a book thatwritten with the American church in mind. Hopefully, this book will aid the church to risk itself in the service of the kingdom. It should be noted that the book was written with the American church in mind, but it is generally a timely message that will benefit a wider audience.

Joel B. Green, University of Aberdeen.

The value of this book lies in its unsupervised commitment to the idea that the church is the body of Christ (theos). One does not have to wait for the last paragraph of each chapter to be persuaded of the value of the church as a community of the redeemed. Clearly Holmes intends to develop a Christian ethic, and he never lets the reader drift away from this point.

The chief drawback of the book is that it is simply too amenable to the charge of being too scholarly. Whether one likes it or not, Holmes writes on the cutting edge of the current discussion about the church and its mission.

For Holmes, the church is not just a building or a set of rituals. It is a group of people who are united in their common faith and who work together to achieve the purposes of the kingdom of God. The church is not just a place where religious activities take place, but a community of believers who live and work together to fulfill the mission of Jesus.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable contribution to the study of the church. Holmes' insights into the relationship between the church and its mission are both challenging and thought-provoking. He reminds us that the church is not just a building, but a community of believers who are united in their common faith and who work together to achieve the purposes of the kingdom of God.
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Ronald H. Nash The Concept of God: an exploration of contemporary difficulties with the attributes of God (Peter Toon)
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