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Editorial:
Men and women in the church

Every Christian is committed to the good news that Jesus is a liberator. But Christians are thoroughly divided over the general question of women’s liberation and over the particular question of women’s place in the church’s ministry. Some believe that Christ’s liberating work includes liberation from bondage to traditional male/female roles; others believe that patriarchy is part of the divine design for creation and that liberation lies in recognizing the design not in seeking to escape from it.

What does the Bible have to say on the matter? The fact that Christians, including Bible-believing Christians, are so divided over the issue indicates that it is not easy to establish the Bible’s teaching. Three things make the task a difficult one: first, there is the fact that the issue is a very emotive one; second, there are problems in the relevant biblical texts; third, it is not easy, even when one has established the original meaning of a particular text, to think out how the text applies in today’s world. These three difficulties are present in all biblical interpretation to a greater or lesser extent; but they are particularly clearly illustrated in this case.

The problem of prejudice
Scholars sometimes tell us that we must approach the Bible without any presuppositions — with a totally open mind. However, although it is both an academic and theological ideal that we should come to Scripture seeking to listen to it and not to impose our own views and prejudices on it, we are foolish if we think that we can or do come with a blank mind to our studies. In fact the scholars who advocate presuppositionless exegesis often in practice betray their own presuppositions very clearly; and their plea that we should discard our presuppositions is in reality an invitation to those with traditional Christian presuppositions to discard those in favour of other more secular ones!

Few people who have thought about the question of the Bible’s teaching on man and woman can fail to be aware of the difficulty of approaching the issue with anything like objectivity. On the one hand, all of us have been brought up in churches and families (and in a society) where men and women have had particular roles; and the patterns with which we are familiar may well seem normal and right to us. We will be inclined to seize on the scriptural evidence that appears to confirm the rightness of these patterns, and we will feel threatened by those who question our views. Those of us who are men may also feel disinclined to see traditional patterns change, because we rather enjoy them; and, of course, some women enjoy them too, whether rightly or wrongly. On the other hand, there are now, particularly in Western society, very strong pressures in the other direction: it is, to say the least, fashionable to argue against traditional male/female stereotypes and to advocate the opening up of traditional male roles to women. The trend is so strong in some places that it can be very difficult and uncomfortable to question the new ‘orthodoxy’, even if you think such questioning to be right; and the pressure to read Scripture in a way that fits in with the dominant fashion is strong. Personal factors also enter in again: whereas many men find the feminist trend threatening, many women find it exhilarating and feel really hurt by the traditional patterns that still prevail in church and society, but despite having vested interests in the outcome of the theological debate.

How is the Christian interpreter to escape the distorting influences of his social situation and background in approaching vexed questions of gender interpretation? The fact is that we will never achieve perfect objectivity. But we can and should seek to reduce the distortion, first, by recognizing our own sinfulness and selfishness, and so coming to issues in humility and prayerfulness. We need to recognize that we are often wrong and that we are constantly tempted to read Scripture in ways that suit us; we need, therefore, to ask God to correct and mould our undertaking, however hard that may be for us. We must be prepared to change. Too often we come to issues with minds made up and in an almost histrionic spirit, which apart from anything else prevents us from really listening to our fellow Christians in the way that we should.

We need, second, to be aware of the social pressures that we are under: to pretend to be impartial is dangerous. To recognize that we are children of our times, influenced by our upbringing and by social trends, will enable us to allow for this in our interpretation of Scripture, and so to listen to Scripture more sensitively and accurately. Our goal must be to allow God’s Word to be the testing-stone of our ideas, and not (as is so easy) to allow our ideas to be the determinative of our understanding of Scripture; a recognition of the social pressures that colour our outlook will help us in this. The teaching of Scripture will not, of course, always contradict the traditions (ancient or modern) of society; many of our traditions are good and God-given. On the other hand, many other traditions and trends are evil, for example the trend towards sexual ‘freedom’ (so-called), and we must constantly be on our guard against allowing our thinking and our lives to be conformed to the ways of the world (Rom. 12.2). Yet other trends and traditions are a mixture of the good and the bad: for example, it is good that we today have begun to learn to respect the cultures and religions of non-Christians, but it is not good (though fashionable) to regard all religions as equally valid ways to God. The task of the Christian interpreter is to allow Scripture to judge us and our traditions — whether our ecclesiastical traditions (e.g. on questions such as baptism or ministry), our economic traditions (e.g. whether we are capitalists or socialists), our ethical traditions and our social traditions.

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How is the Christian interpreter to escape the distorting influence of his own social situation and background in approaching vexed issues of interpretation? The fact is that we will never achieve perfect objectivity. But we can and should seek to reduce the distortions, first, by recognizing our own sinfulness and selfishness, and so coming to issues in humility and prayerfulness. We need to recognize that we are often wrong and that we are constantly tempted to read Scripture in ways that suit us; we need, therefore, to ask God to correct and mould our undertaking, however hard that may be for us. We must be prepared to change. Too often we come to issues with minds made up and in an almost hermeneutic spirit, which apart from anything else prevents us from really listening to our fellow Christians in the way that we should.

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So on the issue of men and women in the church, the question is whether traditional patterns of male/female
relationships in family and society are supported or put in question by the teaching of Scripture, or whether — and this is perhaps even more important — a sinful and unrighteous practice affirms certain aspects of the tradition, and puts in doubt other aspects. Similarly with the modern feminist movement, the question is whether the movement is primarily biblical, fundamentally secular, or a mix of good and bad.

Although it is valuable to recognize the interests, traditions and trends that influence us, it is, of course, not always easy or even possible to do so accurately. Many of us are conscious of being influenced by one or both, and some may be influenced by the traditions of the church and of our childhood, and also by the pull of modern society; we are influenced by our own self-interest and also by a desire not to allow that to dominate our thinking, we are influenced in one direction or the other by the people we know — perhaps by women in ministry and/or by the way we have been brought up. To recognize that we are mixed up is no bad thing, if it leads us to humility, to a seeking of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, to a charitable attitude to other Christians and their views, and to a real and earnest desire to be true to the Word of God.

In reply to this last point, it might be argued that Paul sees authority structures only as a temporary necessity in a fallen world, and that he is therefore not laying down a permanent structure, but that if doubtful if other Pauline passages allow the view, or whether Paul could ever have envisaged the church outgrowing its need for such structures.

The next important passage to consider is 1 Corinthians 4:18, and more specifically 1 Corinthians 4:18. Paul argues that women prophesying or praying in the church should cover their heads with a veil. It seems likely that he is writing to the church at Corinth, which at that time was dominated by the feminine side of the household, and that he wished to have some interpretation Paul argues that women prophesying or praying in the church should cover their heads with a veil. It seems likely that he is writing to the church at Corinth, which at that time was dominated by the feminine side of the household, and that he wished to have some interpretation. Paul argues that women prophesying or praying in the church should cover their heads with a veil. It seems likely that he is writing to the church at Corinth, which at that time was dominated by the feminine side of the household, and that he wished to have some interpretation. Paul argues that women prophesying or praying in the church should cover their heads with a veil. It seems likely that he is writing to the church at Corinth, which at that time was dominated by the feminine side of the household, and that he wished to have some interpretation...
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The biblical data

It would be wrong to suggest that the problems of establishing the biblical teaching on men and women are only the result of an accidental and self-contradicting biblical text. The biblical data can be divided into two categories: there are particular passages that discuss men and women and their relationships, there are also more general considerations of men, women and God himself described in the Bible.

Specific passages

It is not possible to refer to all the relevant passages, but among the most important are, first, the creation narratives of Genesis 1-3. Genesis 1:27 is a key text and relatively uncontroversial, and Genesis 3:16 is a central passage that addresses the creation of Adam and Eve. It is clear that the two passages, variously fair, clearly point towards the creation of man: male and female he created him; male and female he created them: male and female together constitute God’s climactic creative act. The logical conclusion of this is that women possess divine-human potential and are created in the image of God — and therefore he is male and she is female.

The other OT passage that deserves a mention, even though it is not controversial, is Proverbs 31:10-31, where there is a description of the woman, unparalleled in Scripture, of the noble wife. She is a powerful and impressive person in her own right, an effective businesswoman, though one who makes no bones about it. There is no business in the management and provision for her household.

In the NT it is Paul who speaks most of male/female relationships and who controls most of our exegetical problems. However, before looking at some of the problems, variously fair, there is a point worth making. First, despite some common misunderstandings, Paul was a creationist. Second, he was a creationist and a female equality in Christ. This is made very clear in the much-quoted verse Galatians 3:28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all in Christ Jesus,’ and Galatians 6:9: ‘The man who loves his wife and does not wrong her is like a wise man.’ This brings us to the NT passage, probably the most significant in Paul’s teaching on male/female relationships. The setting is a church, and the passage is a response to the questioner, ‘Is it not possible to have a malevolent husband?’

Second, Paul is without question a believer in women’s ministry. This is clear from Romans 16, where he first commends Phoebe, ‘deacon’ from Cenchreae, for her faithful service towards the church. He also commends Andromache, his Christian wife, as a missionary. He then refers to the famous wife-husband team of Priscilla and Aquila as ‘my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus’. Whether Romans 16 shows that Paul believed in female apostles is probably an open question, although less certain is the interpretation that Junia, ‘feminine’, or ‘Juniach’, mascuine, but also more broadly on how Paul understands the phrase ‘they are outstanding among the apostles’. (Compare Col. 4:15, where it is clear that women are included, perhaps! And also Acts 15:23, rather than Nympha, a man. Probably she played a leading role in the church in her home, though exactly how this was controlled, not given over to the women and related to the wider Christian community is uncertain.)

But, although it is clear enough that Paul believed in male/ female equality and in women’s ministry, other aspects of his teaching are perhaps more controversial. To return to Galatians 3:28: there is no evidence of a different understanding for men and women. It is the implications of this (and other Pauline texts) that Paul believes that so far as salvation and church membership are concerned there is no difference. The issue of slavery, slave, free, male and female. What is less clear is what social implications Paul’s words may have, particularly for the question of male/female relations.

On the one hand, it is possible to argue that Paul is not speaking about the organization of society at all in this context, but only about salvation, and that we can see from other passages that his convictions about spiritual equality do not lead him to believe in identical leadership roles for men and women in family or church. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that Paul’s extensive teaching on spiritual equality certainly did have social import, for example, from Galatians itself where he is discussing relationships between Jewish and Gentile Christians. So far as Galatians 3:28 is concerned, it might be said, ‘neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free — neither male nor female’, it is argued that all Christians are willing to acknowledge the social equality and the effective equality between Jews and Gentiles, and they are not the same thing. On the other hand, he is concerned with the larger question of social patterns — male/female, slave/free — to be continued (transforming safeguards), but it is argued that this was an accommodation to a particular situation in an unusual and fallen world, and that, just as Christians came to recognize that the logic of Paul’s principles entailed the abolition of slavery, so now we are recognizing the logic of his principles for the emancipation of gender relations.

This position is plausible, and yet some would raise questions about it, and, in the end, Paul’s three pairs are not all of the same order, the distinction between slave and free is the clearest, least subtle, and therefore rightly eliminated, the distinction between man and female, on the other hand, being the good creation of God, and the last, the distinction between Jew and Gentile. They argue, secondly, that although Paul’s principle of spiritual equality must transform all relationships and rule out exploitation by any of those who have power, in the context of marriage and family (e.g. parents and children) and within the state, and does not see properly exercised authority as conflicting in any way with a mutual and loving recognition of each other as equal members of God’s family.

In reply to this last point, it might be argued that Paul sees authority structures only as a temporary necessity in a fallen world. However, Paul’s concern with negative slavery is not absolute; but it is doubtful if other Pauline passages allow the view, or whether Paul could ever have envisaged the church outgrowing its need for such structures.

The next important passage to consider is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and in many interpretations Paul argues that women prophesying or praying in the church should cover their heads with a veil. It seems likely that this is a reaction to a situation Paul witnessed, perhaps of women who, in response to the real measure of liberation that they had experienced in Christ and in the church, had thrown off their traditional head coverings for men, with uncovered head. (See 2 Cor. 3:7-18 for Paul’s explanation of the significance of Christians praying with and without veil. Contrast to Jewish custom.) In response to this situation, Paul argues that the women should cover their heads. He uses various arguments, appealing to what is ‘natural’ (v. 14) and to what is conventional in the church (v. 10), bringing significantly developing an argument about a man being ‘head’ of the woman and appealing to the order of creation. The argument about male ‘headship’ also features in Ephesians 5:23-24. In both cases the male/female relationship is compared to Christ’s relationship to God — his ‘head’ — and to the church’s relation to him.

All sorts of questions have been raised about the passage. There is agreement, for example, that the Greek word kēphale suggest a position of authority, as does the English word ‘head’? Or should it be understood as meaning ‘source’ (referring to the Genesis story about woman being created from Adam’s rib)? Or should we seek to understand the implications of Paul’s use of the word that is normally used for a woman (v. 15)? When Paul speaks of a woman who is veiled having ‘authority’ on her head (v. 10), does he mean that in veiling she acknowledges his authority, or does he mean that she thus has an authority of her own? Or does he mean both: by recognizing her husband’s authority, she has delegated authority (cf. Mt. 8:9 for delegated authority)?

There are broader questions also. For example, is Paul here referring to women in general (as we might surmise from his reference to creation) or is he referring particularly to wives (as we might surmise from the reference to the man being ‘head’ of the woman)? If his concern was with the relationships of wives and husbands in the congregation, do his remarks have any relevance for married women? The fact that the Greek word gýne can mean either ‘woman’ or ‘wife’ complicates our interpretative task in this and other passages.

A still more fundamental question concerns the theologico-legal force of Paul’s argument: he is dealing with a particular local problem in Corinth, and it is possible to hold that he is not providing some foundational principle of male/female relationships so much as seeking to remove an unnecessary cause of stumbling in the congregation. It can be argued that Galatians 3:28 represents Paul’s basic principle on the male/female relationship, and that the remaining passages represent variations on that principle (e.g. arguments in 1 Corinthians 11 and elsewhere are not qualifying that in any way, but are rather an application of another principle).
Christian liberty to eat meat if this will cause others to stumble, so he instructs Christian women to curtail their rights for the sake of harmony, as he also elsewhere urges slaves to submit to their masters. It is true that in the case of men/women relationships he appeals to the stories of creation. He may well be taking a similar approach when he speaks of the husband being the ‘head’ as it is used by Paul. It is hard to avoid the impression that in Ephesians 5 Paul understands the husband to have a leadership role in the family, which the wife should recognize and submit to.

It is worth noting that for Paul ‘submission’ is not some- thing demeaning or a mark of inferiority: the Greek word used for ‘submit’ means literally something like ‘order- follower’ or ‘one who submits oneself’ and is displayed Self by Paul of children and slaves in Ephesians 6:1,5. In fact, immediately before his instructions for wives, Paul urges all Christians to submit to one another (Phil 2:13). Paul is not thus a Christian virtue enjoined on all, but having particular applications within the family, within the state (Rom 13:1), within the local church (1 Cor 11:3), and even within Godhead (1 Cor 15:28). Paul evidently believes in divinely given order and leadership structures within human (and divine) society, which all (male and female) are to recognize. Of course, such structures can be oppressive, to human sinfulness and disobedience; but that is not the divine design, as is clear from Paul’s very strong emphasis on the theistic role of the husband in Ephesians.

The final Pauline passage to mention is 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Here the topic is again church worship, and the instructions are reminiscent of those in 1 Corinthians 14, with Paul telling the church that ‘a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent’. Paul explains this in terms of an idea of submission being extended to prayer (as we see used also in 1 Corinthians 11) and then by referring to the fact that it was Eve, not Adam, who was deceived in the garden of God. Paul’s reasoning is that women should be taught (so that) women may be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This passage, like the others, raises specific exegetical questions and more general issues. Specifically, does the Greek word translated ‘submissive’ mean something like ‘negative’ or ‘dominate’? When Paul speaks of women being saved ‘through childbirth’, does he mean that childbirth in itself is salvific? What then about justification by faith? Does he mean ‘through the birth of the child Jesus’, as some have suggested? Does he mean that motherhood is the character- istic role for women? It is difficult to know if Paul, knowing that Paul knew of childless saints! that women work out their salvation in the context of faith, love, holiness and sobriety (of Timoth. 6:11)?

The more general issues raised by the passage are the sort of issues we have noted in the context of the 1 Corinthians passages. Is Paul addressing a particular problem or laying down general principles? At least we may conclude that he is addressing a particular problem, because he leads into the question of authority and is he excluding women from the role of teaching ‘overseers’, as may be suggested by the following context (1 Tim 3:1-7), where the role of the overseer or bishop seems to be almost analogous to the role of the father in the family (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5) and characteristically includes teaching (3:2, cf. 1 Tim. 1:9)? There is also the question of Paul’s use of the OT language for leadership roles (e.g. 1 Tim 2:4). Is there any supportive or illustrative (say what he has compared his allegorical argument in Gal. 4:21-31) or does he derive principles from the context of OT times in the way of the ‘lesser model’?

There are other NT passages that could be mentioned, for example 1 Peter 3:1-7, with its emphasis on wife submission as a means of commending the gospel and with its comple- mentary language, but I think the support for the idea of the ‘weaker partner and as heirs with you of the grace of life’. But we cannot in this editorial go further in exploring particular passages.

**Broader questions**

As well as the particular passages, there are broader questions of biblical interpretation involved in the man/woman issue. Is there, for example, any significance in the OT restriction of the priesthood to men or in the selection by Jesus of twelve male apostles—the latter despite Jesus’ strikingly egalitarian attitude towards women? It is possible in both cases to explain the policy concerned as a necessary accommodation to the cultural context of the time rather than as expression of abiding principle, though not everyone would accept such an explanation.

Theologically more fundamental is the question of God’s own revelation of himself as Father and Son. Those in the Catholic tradition of Christendom argue that the saving work of Christ—celebrating the eucharist is representing Christ and that he must therefore be male. Evangelicals who reject the idea of a species distinction between the sexes (both of which are opposed to the priesthood of all believers) are unlikely to be impressed by this argument: for them the celebrant can be an ‘eucharistic priest’ (an argument that is upheld in his or her person as point away from him or herself to Christ). However, the question still remains as to whether there is not some significance in God’s revelation of himself in primarily male categories. God’s actions and attributes are revealed in male categories; there are biblical passages where God’s attributes or actions are described in distinctly feminine categories. It is not certain that this is an issue in most modern Christology, born of course of a human mother, and that the idea of the Fatherhood of God was central to Jesus’ teaching. The question is whether it is possible that the idea of God’s limited perspective to these facts: this was a case of divine accommodation to the social context? If so, can we in different cultural contexts substitute more language for ‘language without loss, as some suggest’. Does one think of a father as a child? The Church was founded on the body of his Father and Christ’s incarnation as a man fit in with Paul’s teaching about headship and submission (human fatherhood being a reflection of the Godhead). One can thus see the Church’s authority as somehow associated in biblical thought and divine design, then there is an appropriateness about God’s revelation of himself as Father and Son.

**Application to today**

This discussion does not end with the elucidation of the original meaning of the biblical passages, though, as we have seen, that is often very difficult in itself. Once the meaning of the original author is established (if it is estab- lished), how does the text relate to today’s situation? Western society in particular is very different from biblical society, and not least so far as women are concerned. Women’s rights and freedoms, and longer life expectancy mean that women are less dominated by the demands of the home and motherhood (though, of course, they still require support in their work roles), and many patterns of employment mean that women are able to participate more widely in the life of society than they once were. Society in general has also changed very considerably, so that it now accepts and does things that were previously unacceptable. Given this new context, how is the biblical teaching to be applied? Are women to be told that marriage and childbearing are their ministries whether they like it or not? There is certainly reason to think that the Bible values motherhood extremely highly in a way that it is written with much modern feminist teaching, and Paul’s advice to young widows in 1 Timothy 5:14-5 is of interest. However, he is there talking to those who have a clear duty to enter the marriage, as distinct from the unmarried in 1 Corinthians 7 about the opportunities afforded by celibacy suggest that marriage and children are not everyone’s calling.

So far as applying the biblical teaching in the church is concerned, that is also not straightforward. Our structures of teaching and decision-making still seem to have to obtain in Paul’s churches: instead of a group of elders/bishops in each local church, often we have one person, a number of whom are essentially the equivalent of bishops with oversight over a diocese or geographical area. Many of us consider that our modern patterns need reform in various ways (notably the division and role of a formal clerical ministry); but such reform is unlikely to be quick in coming.

And the question in the meantime is how to apply the biblical teaching to the situation as it is. The difficulty of doing this is evident from the different ways in which those who consider that the Bible does exclude women from certain leadership roles in the church: some deny women any role in teaching at all, others allow them to teach provided that women may minister in speaking and teaching under the authority of a ruling male ‘elder’—she may perhaps be one of a team of elders, though not the team leader. It is worth noting the line at celebrating the eucharist, whether of a Catholic view of representative priesthood or because they see Jesus’ own line of teaching is based on the image of the father at the head of this table; others with an episcopal view would suggest that a woman may be in charge of a local church, but that the bishop, who has oversight over her, is the final authority. Those who believe that there are no theological barriers to female ministry naturally have fewer problems of application; but even they have to face questions about the appropriate limits of their role. In particular, is it appropriate to press ahead with dispensing all the traditional restrictions on
Christian liberty to eat meat if this will cause others to stumble, so he instructs Christian women to curtail their rights for the sake of harmony, as he also elsewhere urges slaves to submit to their masters. It is true that in the case of men/women relationships he appeals to the stories of creation and to the words of Christ. As has been seen as a rabbinic-style argument in which OT texts are used to illustrate a point of view rather than as a profound theological argument about the basis for the view in question.

The above is not using OT texts in a more explicitly illustrative way, and that his argument in fact reflects a profound theological understanding of male and female relationships in that text as part of the divine order of creation.

Christian's relationship to the church is the model of the husband's relationship with his wife, and Christ's relationship with the Father, entailing as it does reflected glory, equality, and love in the model of the wife's relationship to her husband (cf. 1 Cor. 11, Eph. 5 and notably 1 Cor. 15:28). A comparable Pauline use of the creation stories may be the 'one flesh' teaching in Eph. 5 (and elsewhere).

The next debated Pauline passage is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Here Paul appears to take a distinctly negative line on women's ministry in the church: 'women should remain silent in the church. They are not allowed to speak... It is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.' The problem with this interpretation seems to find it difficult to understand the uncivilized nature of Paul's language. However, as with his treatment in the marriage context, once the uncivilized nature of Paul's language is taken into account, it becomes clear that Paul is not referring to women speaking in the church as a form of worship. Rather, Paul is exploring the idea that certain behaviors are inappropriate for women in the context of a male-dominated society. Paul is not forbidding women from speaking in the church, but rather he is suggesting that they should maintain a more passive role in the worship service.

The phrase 'women should remain silent in the church' is not a prescription for women to be silent in every context. So while it may be true that women should not speak in certain contexts, it does not necessarily mean that they should remain silent in every situation. The key to understanding this passage is to consider the historical and cultural context in which it was written. In the ancient world, women had limited opportunities to speak and be heard. Paul's language was not intended to be seen as a modern-day call to silence women in the church. Instead, it was a way of balancing the roles of men and women within the church community.

The Godhead speaks to this passage in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Here he emphasizes the importance of submission within the church, emphasizing that it is not only appropriate for women to submit to men, but also for men to submit to God. This passage also highlights the role of teaching and learning within the church, emphasizing that both men and women should be encouraged to participate actively in the life of the church.

The quote of Godhead is not the only relevant passage. 1 Corinthians 14:36-37 also speaks to the issue of women speaking in the church. It states that women should not prophesy or teach in the church, but rather be silent. This passage is often seen as a prescription for women to be silent in all contexts. However, a more careful reading of the passage suggests that it was intended to be a way of balancing the roles of men and women within the church community.

The quote of Godhead suggests that women should participate actively in the life of the church, while holding a role of submission and reverence. This is a nuanced passage that emphasizes the importance of balance and respect within the church community.

The final Pauline passage to mention is 1 Timothy 2:14-15. Here the topic is again church worship, and the instructions are reminiscent of those in 1 Corinthians 14, with Paul teaching that 'a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but she must be silent.' Paul explains this separation of authority by referencing the priestly order that was already established in the OT and that the church was to preserve. He states that women are created to be submissive and dependent on men, both in the home and in the church.

The question of women's roles in church worship is not a simple one, and it is important to consider the broader cultural and historical context in which these passages were written. Paul's language reflects the social norms of his time, which placed men in主导 roles and women in more passive roles. However, it is also important to consider the limitations and contradictions of these passages in light of contemporary understandings of gender and power.

Theologically more fundamental is the question of God's own revelation of himself as Father and Son. Those in the Catholic tradition of Christendom argue that the term 'Godhead' (used also in 1 Corinthians 11) and then by referring to the fact that it was Eve, not Adam, who was deceived in the garden of Eden (thus reversing the centuries) has led to women being kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This passage, like the others, raises specific exegetical questions and more general issues. Specifically, does the Greek word for 'authority' (archē) here mean 'rule' or 'domination'? When Paul speaks of woman being saved 'through childbirth', does he mean that childbirth in itself is salvific? What then about justification by faith? Does he mean 'through the birth of the child Jesus', as some have suggested? Does he mean that motherhood is the character of women in the church as a whole? Is this a case of 'childless saints' that women work out their salvation in the context of faith, love, holiness and sobriety (of the 'Timothy' order)?

The more general issues raised by the passage are the sort of issues we have noted in the context of the 1 Corinthians passages. Is Paul addressing a particular problem or laying down general principles? At least we may conclude that he is not addressing the problem of church worship in the life of a particular church, but is speaking to women throughout the church.
women's ministry if this will cause division and stumbling in the church? Paul considered it a matter of principle that we should consider the weaker brother, restricting our freedom and rights if necessary. He valued unity in the church much more highly than do many Protestants. If Paul's own teaching about women being submissive was a proper and justifiable accommodation to his context, may it still be right in our context? Against this it may be argued that the restriction of women in the church is in itself causing offence, so that we have to choose between one or other of two wrongs. And also the argument that the 'weaker brother' argument must be used with care, since it can be used to oppose almost any change and so to stifle growth in the life and ministry of the church.

Some concluding observations
It is not the purpose of this editorial to come up with definitive answers to the questions discussed, nor would the author be competent or sufficiently well read to do so. Its purpose has been more to describe some of the issues involved and to give readers a rough and ready map of the complex terrain. But, although no neat solutions can be offered, some concluding remarks may be in order. First, when faced with very complicated issues we may sometimes be tempted to despair of finding any solutions to our questions and so to acquiesce even in hurtful divisions. We must resist this temptation, sincerely seeking God's truth and his will, in the confidence that he wants the church to be united and that he has given the Holy Spirit to guide us. But it is worth emphasizing again that, if we are to make progress with a controversial and emotive subject like this, we must approach it with a humble desire to listen to Scripture, however uncomfortable that may be to us, with a serious commitment to listen in love to others from whom we differ, and with a willingness to change and grow in our understanding and outlook.

Second, it is important to realize that, although there are many difficult and controversial questions, there are also some things that are clear and that need emphasizing: these include the equality of men and women as created by God and as redeemed in Christ, the importance of men and women in Christian ministry, and the need for mutual respect and love in society, church and family. It is important to give substance and not just lip-service to these things, and it is right for men in particular to recognize with shame that they have often failed badly and exploited Peter what calls the 'weaker sex'.

Third, it is a fact of life, created by God, that men and women are different. This point should not be exaggerated — men and women have an enormous number of things in common as equal members of the human race, but in certain important respects they are different and they are unable to fulfil the role of the opposite sex. This is obvious on the biological level: men cannot fulfil that most important and costly role of bearing and raising children; it is also widely agreed, by non-Christians as well as Christians, to be true on a psychological level, even though there is a lot of controversy about which male and female characteristics are innate and which reflect the conditioning of society. Christians see the God-given differences between men and women as part of God's very good creation, as something to be respected and rejoiced in (though not to be exploited or misused, as has so often been the case). There are two opposite dangers to be avoided so far as male/female differences are concerned: the one to exaggerate the differences and to press on them, as men have often done when treating women as playthings for their pleasure or as bearers of their children rather than as equal partners. The opposite danger is to minimize the differences and to see them as mere chance circumstance to be concealed (e.g. in unwed styles of dress, etc.) or ignored; it is particularly serious how motherhood, a wonderful and high calling in one Christian view (as well as a painful one and also a demanding one), has become undervalued in many circles (though that tendency probably has as much to do with a loss in Western society of a strong concept of the family as with a particular view of the relationships of the sexes: personal and sexual fulfilment are seen as the all-important aims of marriage, with parenthood and the creating of a new family being optional extras). Christians can and should agree in the recognition of sexual differences as part of the glory of God's creation. Where Christians may — and do — disagree is over what implications, if any, these differences have for the ordering of family and church life.

Our fourth point is another on which people of differing theological perceptions should be able to agree, namely that the church teaches biblical and effective steps to recognize and honour women's ministry in the church. Not that the church should accede to a desire by women or men for status in God's church; our Christian calling, which we so often forget, is to take the lowest place of service, not to inveigle for power or authority over others. It is a fact of church history that women have often been outstanding in this respect: they have served at great cost in missionary and other situations, often with little recognition in the church. But, although humility and self-effacement are Christian virtues to be sought and striven for, it is emphatically not a Christian virtue to dishonour others and to fail to recognize their gifts and ministries.

It is a fact that women's ministries have very often not been honoured as they should have been, and this has caused real pain. Part of the problem has been the church's failure to outline the NT teaching about the church as a body and in particular the clericalization of the church's ministry: all lay ministry has tended to be seen as second-class (whether male or female), and ordination has come to have a misplaced mystique about it. As a church we need to take seriously the fact that the ministry of the church is of the human family in the fear of the Lord is quite as vital and important a vocation as that of the minister who baptizes, marries, buries and preaches. (The Roman Catholic reverence for Mary, though questionable in various ways, has good aspects, not least in giving recognition to motherhood.) We need also to support mothers practically, since bringing up children is a much less glamorous ministry than many others, makes enormous demands, often involves loneliness, and does not always bring quick rewards in terms of personal fulfilment and enjoyment.

The affirmation of the significance of motherhood must not, on the other hand, be allowed to lead to the undervaluing of other ministries for women, whether married or single, or to the effective denial of the varied gifts that God has given to women. Such denial is wrong in principle and hurtful in practice, both to the women affected (especially single and

childless women) but also to the life of the whole church, which is thereby impoverished. The church must give proper recognition and support to all women's ministry, including 'professional' ministries. There may be questions about whether male and female ministries should be identical; there should be no problem in principle about the ordination of women to ministry, and no question about equality of men and women in the faith and service of Christ.

Finally, a comment about so-called sexist language. Although opinions may differ on the question of women in ministry, the biblical language about God as Father and Son should surely be regarded as sacrosanct. However we understand the divine revelation, we dare not substitute our images of God for the divinely revealed images: the idea of divinity is too great, and it is human arrogance to suppose that we can better the divine revelation. Using inclusive language in worship is a different thing altogether: whether we like it or not, one of the effects of the feminist movement has been to make the generic use of the English word 'man' problematic in many contexts. We may regret that we can no longer speak of 'loving our fellow-men' without some people feeling that this is to leave out our 'fellow-women'; but it is a fact that language changes, and it is hardly a disaster if modern English is coming more and more into line with other languages (including Hebrew and Greek) in using different words for 'man' and 'human being' and 'man' and 'male'. Certainly it should be a small thing for Christians to seek to avoid causing hurt and offence in their choice of words.

The question of man and woman in the church is often divisive, and sometimes painfully so. All of us, both men and women, do well to take to heart Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:12: 'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothed yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.' Or, as he puts it more briefly in Ephesians 5:21: 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.'

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Jesus and the poor: two texts and a tentative conclusion

Hans Kvalbein

The author, who is an international editor of Themelios, is Professor of New Testament at the Free Faculty of Oslo in Norway. The article is (substantially) the text of a lecture given by Dr Kvalbein at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in January 1970.

The question of Jesus and the poor had no prominent place in NT research up to the early 1970s. The existentialist trend set by Bultmann and his school did not give priority to the social background of the NT and the socio-ethical dimension of its message. This was changed with the new awareness of the world situation in the seventies. The wave of Neo-Marxism and the widening gulf between poor and rich countries changed the theological agenda. Liberation theology challenged both the ecumenical and the evangelical movements. In recent years many biblical studies have been devoted to the question of the social setting and the ethical implications of the NT, and many authors have published studies relating to the question of Jesus and the poor.

In this paper I don't want to describe or comment on this discussion. I'll rather go directly to two of the most important texts for us, and more particularly to two of the most difficult: the beatitudes of the poor, Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20, and the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. And from my interpretation of these texts I want to suggest some biblical guidelines for the question of evangelism and social responsibility.

We start with a survey of the use of the word 'poor' in the texts. We distinguish four contexts: it is used (1) about those who receive alms, and (2) about those who receive the gospel or the kingdom of God.

1) The 'poor' as potential receivers of alms:

The rich man asking Jesus how to inherit eternal life was told to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Mk 10:21 and parallels). The poor are not emphasized here. They are simply the recipients of the rich man's protected. The dominant question is not the situation of the poor, but the rich man's salvation. He was called to follow Jesus, but he went away because he was very rich.

The tax collector Zacchaeus, however, responded positively when he was asked to sell and give away half of his wealth to the poor. Here again the rich man is the main person. The poor are the receivers of his gifts.

In the story about the anointing of Jesus (Mk 14:3-9 and parallels), the poor recluse is also richly protected. The precious ointment could have been sold and given to the poor. But Jesus defended the woman's action. You have the poor always with you. You can always help them.

In the story of the widow's mite (Mk 12:41-44 and parallel), we hear that she is as poor and insignificant as a probable point of this story is that she gave more than the rich who gave from their surplus. She was poor and needed support from others, but she proved her love for God with a whole heart.

The story about the rich man and Lazarus tells about a beggar living at the rich man's door (Lk 16:19-31). The poor are alms-receivers, dependent on other people's mercy and help to survive. Their need is social and material.

2) The 'poor' as the receivers of the gospel and the kingdom of God:

The Baptist once asked Jesus if he was the one to come or if he should wait for another (Mt 11:1-6 and parallel). Jesus answered by listing the miracles he did: 'The blind receive sight, the lame walk... and the good news is preached to the poor.' The last expression is a quotation from Isaiah 61:1f. This text is also the preaching text of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth according to Luke 4:16, and it is the basis text of the beatitudes of the poor in Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20. Isaiah 61:1-2 seems to be a sort of programmatic text for the ministry of Jesus. It is the background to all of these texts speaking about the 'poor' as the receivers of the gospel or the kingdom. These texts are not many, but they all have an emphasized position in presentations of the basic message of Jesus.

In the parable of the great banquet (Lk 14:15-24) the two different uses of the word 'poor' are combined. The new guests are invited, after the first had refused to come, are the 'poor' and the 'wretched' (Lk 14:13). In the story these are literally the beggars of the town. But the topic of the parable is how to receive the kingdom. From this interpretation these 'poor' seem to be a metaphor for those 'tax collectors and sinners' who received the message of Jesus, not a literal description of the receivers of the kingdom.

How can we understand the relationship between these two ways of using the word 'poor'? Is the kingdom and the gospel exclusively for beggars and receivers of alms who are in the first use of the word? Is Jesus' message of the kingdom a special comfort for the poor and oppressed or even part of a class struggle between the poor and their suppressors? We see that the social and ethical question of Jesus and the poor implies a semantic question about the meaning and reference of the word 'poor', especially when the word is used to designate the receivers of the kingdom. Let us first look at this question in the light of the beatitudes. Then we can discuss the position of the poor in a text about a 'potential receiver of alms', the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit: 'Blessed are you poor'

If you look at the form and context of the two versions of this text, you will find a striking similarity and some important differences.

Matthew has the expression 'poor in spirit' followed by a beatitude on 'those who mourn'. His addition to the blessing on the poor speaks of 'anointing and things for righteousness' (Mt 5:6). It makes evident that he is not speaking about people who are materially poor. They are not hungering for bread or rice, but for righteousness. The word 'anointing' and the form of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3 makes it clear that the word 'poor' is used in a metaphorical or transferred sense.

The text of Luke is different. The blessing is of the 'poor' which is immediately followed by a blessing on 'those who hunger and thirst' (Lk 6:20). Luke speaks about the needs of our body, and he contrasts the poverty of this present time with the glory and abundance of the world to come. And the poor are contrasted in the following woes with the rich and well-to-do in this world. They shall suffer in the coming age. For this and other reasons some scholars speak about Luke as the 'social gospel'. He brings the good news to the hungry and oppressed masses of the world.

But be cautious! Luke is different from Matthew in another way also. The beatitudes of Luke are not in the third person, but in the second person plural. His beatitudes are directed to 'you poor', to a specific group Jesus has in front of him. The context leaves no doubt as to whom Jesus is speaking: 'Looking at his disciples, he said (v. 20). The message of Jesus according to Luke is not that everybody who is poor is blessed, but that the disciples, in spite of their bad condition now, will be blessed, because they are the receivers of the kingdom of God.

In fact neither the text of Luke nor the text of Matthew pronounces a general blessing on all the poor and oppressed in the world. But many NT scholars say that these two texts mean the same. But I want to try to understand the text by eliminating all specific features in Matthew and Luke and retaining what they have in common. By methods of textual criticism the form of the three common beatitudes may be the following text:

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who hunger, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are those who weep, for they shall be comforted.

This reconstruction of the supposed original text may, in contrast to the text of Luke and Matthew, be understood as a broad social message of comfort to all suffering and destitute people. It speaks of God who is king and who is the one who cares for the poor and oppressed. In this way the message of the reconstructed text is interpreted as different from the message of our present text.

But according to this view, this original message of Jesus has been changed by the gospel writers. Matthew has changed this message into a moral catechism or a catalogue of virtues. To be poor, being hungry and thirsty, to aim for 'anointing and things for righteousness' in spirit' is possible. Luke has in a different way changed the beatitudes into a message of comfort for a church in distress. The poor of the new age have become the poor of the cosmos.

The most elaborate argument for this reconstruction and interpretation is given by the eminently Belgian scholar Jacques Dupont in his three-volume work, Les Beatitudes.

I don't want now to discuss this reconstruction of the text. I want to show that it is possible as a probable reconstruction of the common tradition behind the beatitudes, we don't need to accept this interpretation of it. In fact it is not very probable that Jesus declared all poor people happy and promised them a kingdom of God. In this context the word 'poor' does not refer to social position or material needs. I'll argue for this in four points.

1. The meaning of the word 'poor'

The most important word for 'poor' in the OT, the Hebrew an, has a wide range of meanings. The most modern European words for 'poor' (poor, pauvre, arm, fattig, etc.) could be translated 'miserable, unfortunate', like the English expression 'poor me', which is the common word one uses in many different contexts and with different meanings.

In the laws of the OT we find rules to protect the poor from the oppression of the rich and powerful. The law, the wisdom writings and the prophets again and again encourage the Israelites to take care of the poor and protect them against exploitation. In these contexts the words evidently refer to the material poverty of those in a weak social position.

But in other contexts we see that the word has another meaning. In many psalms of lamentation we find the expression 'Hear me God, because I am poor and needy'. But the psalms where this expression is used never describe a material or economic need. The typical need in these psalms is that they ask God to hear them in the sense that they are not heard by others, they are not heeded. The word poor can also be used in another religious meaning: to be 'humble'. In Zechariah 9:9 we find a description of the Messiah, the king, coming to Jerusalem. He is known and recognized by the people because he is humble. The word poor can also be used to describe Israel in Psalm 18:27 and 2 Samuel 22:28.

On the basis of these texts, A. Rahlfis a century ago maintained that the Psalms had their origin in groups of poor Jews in post-exilic times. These 'poor Jews' regarded their poverty as a part of their piety. They made a virtue out of their need and despised the rich and wealthy. The idea of the 'anamnesis' was taken up by NT scholars and used to explain the background of Jesus and the first Christians. They suggested that the beatitudes of Matthew and Luke refer to such groups: the poor as they are both piety and ideal of humility, Luke to their social position.

But in fact there are no references to such groups in the historical sources. OT scholarship has refuted Rahlfis' view of the Psalms and their background. The thesis of the 'pious poor', that the Psalms are a reflection of the real situation of the poor within the community, is no longer valid among NT scholars. It gives a sociological solution to a semantic problem. The use of the word 'ansi' with a religious meaning means that there was still another way being used to express the poverty of the pious. The Psalms is the official prayer book of the Israelites and not an apocalyptic work for separate communities. When the Israelite in his prayers describes himself as an 'humble man' he does not describe his religious position or his economic position, but his helplessness and need before God. This language is found also in other Jewish texts like the Psalms of Solomon, and the Hymn Scroll from Qumran.
Jesus and the poor: two texts and a tentative conclusion

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The question of Jesus and the poor had no prominent place in NT research up to the early 1970s. The existentialist trend set by Bultmann and his school did not give priority to the social background of the NT and the socio-ethical dimension of its message. This was changed with the new awareness of the world situation in the seventies. The wave of Neo-Marxism and the widening gulf between poor and rich countries changed the theological agenda. Liberation theology challenged both the ecumenical and the evangelical movements. In recent years many biblical studies have been devoted to the question of the social setting and the ethical implications of the NT, and many authors have published studies relating to the question of Jesus and the poor.

In this paper I don't want to describe or comment on this discussion. I'll rather go directly to two of the most important texts of the NT, the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, and try to establish the beatiudes of the poor, Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20, and the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. And from my interpretation of these texts I want to suggest some biblical guidelines for the question of evangelism and social responsibility.

We start with a survey of the use of the word 'poor' in the gospels. We have five different contexts: it is used (1) about those who receive alms, and (2) about those who receive the gospel or the kingdom of God.

(1) The poor as recipients of alms.

The rich man asking Jesus how to inherit eternal life was told to sell all he had and give it to poor (Mt. 10:21 and parallels). The poor are not emphasized here. They are simply the recipients of the rich man's alms. The dominant question is not the situation of the poor, but the rich man's salvation. He was called to follow Jesus, but he went away because he was very rich.

The tax collector Zacchaeus, however, responded positively to Jesus' invitation. He sold half of his wealth to the poor (Lk. 19:8-9). He wanted to sell and give away half of his wealth to the poor. Here again the rich man is the main person. The poor are the receivers of his gifts.

In the story about the anointing of Jesus (Mt. 26:6-13 and parallels) we have a similar situation. The rich man is not the protagonist. The dominant question is not the situation of the poor, but the rich man's healing. He was called by Jesus, but he went away because he was very rich.

In the parable of the great banquet (Lk. 14:15-24) the two different uses of the word 'poor' are combined. The new guests are invited, after the first had refused to come, are the 'poor' (v. 18) and blind and lame (v. 21, v. 13). In the story these are literally the beggars of the town. But the topic of the parable is how to receive the kingdom. From this interpretation these 'poor' seem to be a metaphor for those 'tax collectors and sinners' who received the message of Jesus, not a literal description of the receivers of the kingdom.

How can we understand the relationship between these two ways of using the word 'poor'? Is it the kingdom and the gospel exclusively for beggars and receivers of alms supported in the first use of the word? Is Jesus' message of the kingdom a special comfort for the poor and oppressed or even part of a class struggle between the poor and their suppressors? We see that the social and ethical question of Jesus and the poor implies a semantic question about the meaning and reference of the word 'poor', especially when the word is used to designate the receivers of the kingdom. Let us first look at this question in the light of the beatitudes. Then we can discuss the position of the poor in a text about a 'potential receiver of alms', the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are you poor.

If you look at the form and context of the two versions of this text, you'll find a striking similarity and some important differences.

Matthew has the expression 'poor in spirit' followed by a beatitude on 'those who mourn'. His addition to the blessing on the poor includes a word or phrase on righteousness. This is a matter of fact: it makes evident that he is not speaking about people who are materially poor. They are not hungering for bread or rice, but for righteousness. The form and the form of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3 makes it clear that the word 'poor' is used in a metaphorical or transferred sense.

The text of Luke is different. The blessing of the 'poor' is here immediately followed by a blessing on 'those who hunger and thirst for righteousness'. We have the same poverty of the poor. Luke speaks about the needs of our body, and he contrasts the poverty of this present time with the glory and abundance of the world to come. And the poor are contrasted in the following woes with the rich and well-to-do in this world. They shall suffer in the coming age. For this and other reasons some scholars speak about Luke as 'the social gospel'. He brings the good news to the hungry and oppressed masses of the world.

But be cautious! Luke is different from Matthew in another way also. The beatitudes of Luke are not the third person, but in the second person plural. His beatitudes are directed to you poor, to a specific group Jesus has in front of him. The context leaves no doubt as to whom Jesus is speaking: 'Looking at his disciples, he said: (v. 20). The message of Jesus according to Luke is not that everybody who is poor is blessed, but that the disciples, in spite of their bad condition now, are blessed because they are the receivers of the kingdom of God.

In fact neither the text of Luke nor the text of Matthew pronounces a general blessing on all the poor and oppressed in the world. But many NT scholars say that these two texts mean exactly the same thing. They try to explain the difference in this text by eliminating all specific features in Matthew and Luke and retaining what they have in common. By this method the form of the three common beatitudes may be the following text:

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who are poor, comforted. Blessed are those who hunger, they shall be satisfied.

This reconstruction of the supposed original text may, in contrast to the text of Luke and Matthew, be understood as a broad social message of comfort to all suffering and destitute people. Such a message we proclaim that God is king and he takes care for the poor and oppressed. In this way the message of the reconstructed text is interpreted as different from the message of our Lord Jesus.

But according to this view, this original message of Jesus has been changed by the gospel writers. Matthew has changed this message into a moral catechism or a catalogue of virtues. To be a good social message of comfort, it has to be changed in 'spirit' is possible. Luke has in a different way changed the beatitudes into a message of comfort for a church in distress. They are not personal; they have a wider social message.

The most elaborate argument for this reconstruction and interpretation is given by the eminent Belgian scholar Japont De Duque in his three-volume work, Les Beatitudes.

I don't want now to discuss this reconstruction of the text. What I want to argue is that in a probable reconstruction of the common tradition behind the beatitudes, we don't need to accept this interpretation of it. In fact it is not very probable that Jesus declared all poor people happy and promised them the kingdom of God. In this context the word 'poor' does not refer to social position or material needs.

I will argue for this in four points:

1. The meaning of the word 'poor'.

The most important word for 'poor' in the OT, the Hebrew ani, has a social meaning but it's also a moral word. The modern European words for 'poor' (poor, pauvre, arm, fattig, etc.) could translate it 'miserable, unhappu', like the English expression 'poor me', who is used in a very different sense and context. But we can use it in many different contexts and with many different meanings.

In the laws of the OT we find rules to protect the poor from the oppression of the rich and powerful. The law, the wisdom writings and the prophets again and again encourage the Israelites to take care of the poor and protect them against exploitation. In these contexts the words evidently refer to the material poverty of those in a weak social position.

But in other contexts we see that the word has another meaning. In many psalms of lamentation we find the expression 'Hear me God, because I am poor and needy' (Psa. 142:1). The Hebrew poor regarding their poverty as a way of life, not as a material or social sense, but 'humble'. Similarly the word ani is used to describe Israel in Psalm 18:27 and 2 Samuel 22:28.

On the basis of these texts, A. Rahlf's a century ago maintained that the Psalms had their origin in groups of poor Jews in post-exilic times. These 'poor Jews' regarded their poverty as a part of their piety. They made a virtue out of their need and despised the rich and wealthy. The idea of the 'anawim' - the poor, was taken up by first century scholars and used to explain the background of Jesus and the first Christians. They suggested that the beatitudes of Matthew and Luke refer to such groups: people who do good and are poor in spirit and ideal of humility, Luke to their social position.

But in fact there are no references to such groups in the historical sources. OT scholarship has refuted Rahlf's view of the Psalms and their background. The thesis of the 'pious poor' in the post-exilic era is still alive among NT scholars (especially among NT scholars). It gives a sociological solution to a semantic problem. The use of the word ani with a religious meaning is possible, but it is also possible that the word ani describes a social economic position, but his helplessness and need before God. This language is found also in later Jewish texts like Barak. The Psalms of Solomon, and the Hymn Scroll from Qumran.
Another interpretation is that children are suffering. They believe everything you say to them. Many think that the possibility of feeling pain is limited to the text. Nobody thinks it's possible that they don't think that there is a biblical interpretation either. The NT has many exhortations to Christians to grow in their faith, to be mature Christians, to think critically.

The second question is: What do you think that the idea of children suffering is? Children receive the kingdom not because of their virtue, but simply because they are small and helpless. And God gives his gift not because of something they did, or because they needed a child. Jesus says that children and people who have been ridiculed and who are in debt and those who are weak and those who have no one to turn to.

First, we note that the word 'poor' appears in the text. Children receive the kingdom not because of their virtues, but simply because they are helpless and small. And God gives his gift not because of something they did, or because they needed a child. Jesus says that children and people who have been ridiculed and who are in debt and those who are weak and those who have no one to turn to.

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From the OT background we see that the word ‘poor’ does not always have a material or social sense. We must consider the possibility that the word has the meaning of this text according to this liturgical language of prayer.

2. The narrow context of the meaning of the ‘poor’
The ‘poor’ are helpless and suffering. They are those who mourn and those who hunger. To the first word we must say that sorrow is not sociologically limited. You find sorrow and mourning people both among rich and poor. The word ‘hunger’ however describes a typical need of the materially poor. But this word can in the OT also be used metaphorically, e.g. about those who hunger for the Word of God (Am. 8:11). The famine of the figurative empty hand corresponds to the question of the meaning of the word ‘poor’ in the beatitudes.

3. The biblical reference to Isaiah 61:1-2
Isaiah 61:1-2 is a promise to the ‘poor’, the ‘brokenhearted’, the ‘captive’, the ‘prisoners’, it is a word of comfort to ‘all who mourn’ and ‘those who weep in Zion’. Two expressions in the beatitude are not found in Isaiah, but they are also mentioned in the NT: ‘those who are persecuted’ (Matt. 5:11) and ‘those who are rejected’ (Matt. 5:11). When we look at Daniel and the wider context of Isaiah 61 it is evident that the promise refers to Israel as a whole. It does not refer to a limited group of economically poor within the people, nor does it refer to all the poor and destitute in the world. These expressions describe the people living in the Babylonian exile for the people of Israel and cannot be taken literally. At least they are understood as metaphorical descriptions of Israel in later Jewish use of Isaiah 61:1-2 (see J. M. Ockheim, Tanach, Mechil). This corresponds to the ministry of Jesus. He never literally liberated prisoners or captives from jail. The OT text behind the beatitudes and the use of this text in Judaism points clearly in the direction of a metaphorical use of the word ‘poor’ in the first beatitude.

The decisive question we have to discuss is the meaning of the first beatitude: this is: what does Jesus in other contexts and in other speeches say about those who receive the kingdom of God? We have to look at the beatitude in the broader context of Jesus’ message about the kingdom.

4. Jesus’ message about admission to the kingdom of God
I summarize my argument in four points:

4.1 The children: ‘The kingdom of God belongs to such’ (Mark 10:14ff).
This sentence is in the Greek NT the one which is most similar to the second part of the blessing of the poor: ‘for the kingdom of God is theirs’. It is impossible to take this sentence as a literal promise of the kingdom to all children. What then could be the age limit? The word is both literally a warning not to exclude children from the fellowship of Jesus, and a parabolic word about admission to the kingdom for all men.

The Greek word meaning ‘such’ (toëuion) contains an element of hope that many of the children will believe in Jesus in some way. Some interpreters try to find virtues in children that we should live up to. A popular idea is that children are innocent, but this is not true in the Bible, but this is the Greek connection of sexuality (puberty) with sin. In the biblical view children are sinners too, like grown-ups.

Another interpretation is that children are so trusting. They believe everything you say to them. Many think that Jesus wrote the text with the idea in mind that children could not think and so could not sin. I do not think that this is a biblical interpretation either. The NT has many exhortations to Christians to grow in their faith, to be mature Christians, to think everything critically.

The second interpretation that try to find positive values in children fail to capture the meaning of the text. Children receive the kingdom not because of their virtues, but simply because they are small and helpless. And God gives his gift of salvation to those who do not have it without force. Only before he comes a savior, he receives Jesus. This will be confirmed when we look at what other words say about the recipients of the kingdom.

4.2 ‘Not the wise and prudent, but the simple’ (Matt. 11:25 and parallel)
This word does not talk directly about the kingdom, but its topic is closely related. The question is: who have received the revelation from God? The answer is given in the form of an antithesis: not the wise and prudent, but the simple. The opposite of wise and prudent is in fact silly or ‘unwise’. Jesus here excludes those who are normally highly esteemed and respected by everybody. Revelation from God and the kingdom of God is not dependent on intelligence.

In this verse there is a polemical note against the scribes and the Pharisees. They believed in their knowledge and in their ability to keep the law. Therefore they did not need to be ‘simple’. Jesus rejected them. The ‘simple’ in this context is Jesus himself, the ‘Son of Man’ (Gal. 4:13-17). The word does not here designate a virtue. Those who receive the kingdom are described negatively, in opposition to the positive description of the outsiders. This will be confirmed when we look at the most striking and paradoxical expressions about the recipients of salvation:

4.3 ‘Not the righteous, but sinners’ (Mk. 2:17 and parallels)
‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ This word is of course a further illustration of the meaning of the kingdom. Jesus wants sinners to be forgiven and the sick to be healed. The kingdom is given to them not because of, but in spite of, their situation. It is given to them because of the grace of the gift of God alone. This helps us to understand the other words about those who receive. They don’t describe virtues, but the basic position of men before God, in need of his wisdom and his healing.

Jesus as the friend of ‘tax collectors and sinners’ is a basic part of the picture of Jesus in the gospels, testified both through his words and his actions. At this point he was remarkable different from his contemporaries. He dared to cross borders within Jewish society in a new and radical way. And these borders were not set by economic or material standards. The tax collectors and sinners were rejected in the word. But they are not excluded from his ‘good news to the poor’. They shall be among the first to enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 21:22-31). They may also be the key to another important group of sayings about admission to the kingdom, which is expressed above all in many of Jesus’ parables:

4.4 ‘Not the first invited, but the outsiders’ (Lk. 14:15-24; cf. Mk. 12:11-12 and parallels; Mt. 8:11 and parallel)
In the parable about the great banquet (Lk. 14:15-24) the first invited did not want to come. Other activities seemed more important. But after several invitations the guests: the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. These beggars in the streets and marketplaces had never been to a banquet like this before. But now they were included. And there was still room for new guests from outside the town!

This is a parable of the kingdom. In the life of Jesus these beggars correspond to the ‘tax collectors and sinners’. They received the invitation to the kingdom, but the ‘righteous’ leaders of the people rejected it. The new groups from outside the town may correspond to the Gentiles. The parable warns the Jews not to reject Jesus’ invitation to the kingdom. And it shows that they will not be accepted. The parable shows that the invitation to the kingdom only one question counts: your relationship to Jesus. That is what Jesus said already in his answer to John the Baptist: ‘Blessed is he who takes no offence at me’ (Mt. 11:6f.). The blessing of the ‘poor’ should be read and understood in this broader context.

Conclusion
We have now argued in four steps about the possible meaning of the beatitude of the ‘poor’. We may summarize the results first negatively, and then positively.

The meaning of the word ‘poor’ is here not the economically poor, but those who do not have it better than the rich and well-to-do. ‘Poor’ here means ‘helpless’. The meaning is not ‘humble’ as a positive religious and ethical virtue. The word must here be interpreted as a negative description of those who receive salvation. In the broader context of Jesus’ ministry it is used in a parallel way to the description of those people as ‘like children’, ‘simple’, ‘sinners’. Jesus says about the nearest of his listeners: ‘speaking about the recipients as those who mourn’ and those who hunger’. These are all negative expressions. The meaning of the word ‘poor’ must therefore be found in what it has in common with these parallel expressions.

‘Poor’ here means ‘helpless’, dependent on others, unable to pay back. The recipients in this word indeed described as beggars. But the word does not refer to their economic or social status. There are others who lived in poverty and who tried to sustain themselves by their own work. But they were beggars before God. They were dependent on his grace as it was proclaimed and demonstrated in the preaching and person of Jesus. The word is used as a general term and describes the fundamental position of man before God.

One of Martin Luther’s last words was this: ‘We are beggars, that is true. As far as I know, Luther had never been a beggar. But he feared the words from both Scripture and life that we are dependent on God, we are beggars before him. The gospel is the message that God has taken pity on us and has come to our empty hands.

We have nothing with which to pay him back.

The reference of the beatitudes is therefore not to a socially limited group of poor and destitute, neither in Israel nor in the world. We think we can interpret the reference of the beatitudes, according to a historical development within the ministry of Jesus and the history of the early church.

First they refer to Israel as a whole corresponding to the promise of the covenant. Other beatitudes like about new guests from outside the town, ‘God’s fulfilment of his promises to his chosen people. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises. But we know that most of the Gentiles were never invited: ‘Blessed are those who take no offence at me.’ In this way he creates a new Israel of those who receive him and his message.

There is, secondly, the direct, literal reference of the beatitudes as we find them in Matthew and Luke. They refer to the disciples as the remnant of Israel. But this message is not only for the disciples in the past: there is, thirdly, also a direct reference to the Gentiles from the beginning. When you hear the invitation to the kingdom only one question counts: your relationship to Jesus. That is what Jesus said already in his answer to John the Baptist: ‘Blessed is he who takes no offence at me’ (Mt. 11:6f.). The blessing of the ‘poor’ should be read and understood in this broader context.

In my opinion Matthew (or the tradition before him), with his explanatory additions, is closest to the original meaning of the first three beatitudes. He makes it clear that Jesus speaks of the ‘poor’ and ‘those who hunger’ in a transferred sense. His first three beatitudes describe the basic for discipleship: the gift of the kingdom given into empty hands. And he adds the examples of the selfishly treated children of God (vv. 6-10) and their position in this world (vv. 11f.). The beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 are a basic text for the doctrine of the church.

Luke gives another version of the beatitudes when they are represented as a gift to all the disciples in the world. In spite of their material poverty, their hunger, the persecutions they meet, they should know that they are not forgotten by God. They are respected by God for what they are, not what they do. This is under the promise of the kingdom. The beatitudes and woes in Luke are a new and different application of the beatitudes: a warning to the first disciples. Luke warns them against the attitude of the rich. The Lukan text is closely related to James 2:5-7, which may be an early application of the beatitude. Luke’s use of the second person only in the second sentence in each beatitude is difficult to explain unless against the background of a fixed tradition in the church.

For an evangelical, biblical theology, the question of the origin and the development of the biblical traditions, is not
crucial unless it is used to undermine the authority of the real text of the Bible or the concept of a basic doctrinal unity of Scripture. Thus any interpretation of 'possible' original text may be useful as far as it may help us understand the given text. But it can never replace the biblical text as the only source of faith and conduct.

II. The rich man and the poor Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31
This text talks very seriously about the two possibilities for eternity. The rich man was lost and came to hell, the poor Lazarus came to heaven. God's destination and time is the bosom of Abraham. There are two possibilities, and after death there is no possibility of change.

But why did the rich man come to hell, and why did the poor man go to heaven? This is a text where interpretations go in different directions. A popular interpretation in modern theology is that this text expresses the hope of the poor. It presents us with the reversal of fortunes in the coming age. The poor, who have suffered much in this life, will be comforted then, but the rich, who have lived in luxury and affluence, are lost and shall suffer. The main point in the story is seen in verse 24 and this verse is interpreted as giving a sort of balance: suffering in this world will give comfort in the world to come, and the well-do-do in this world will suffer.

But verses 27-31 are seen as a secondary addition. These verses talk about conversion as the way to eternal life, and this does not fit into this theory of the reversal of fortunes as the main point of the story. For this reason you will find an interpretation in many studies of this story.

Against this interpretation I want to present another understanding of the text. This story does not teach how the poor are saved. It concentrates on the question of why the rich man is lost. It is a warning against greed and promiscuity to the poor. It corresponds to Luke's woes against the rich, but is no explanation of the beatitudes of the poor (Lk 6:20-26).
I argue for this second interpretation, making five points.

1. The structure of the story
When we read a long text in the Bible it may be important to see how it is structured in different sections. This story has two main parts: the two men die. The narrative part tells first about the life of the earth's two persons, then very briefly about their fate after death. So far it's true that there is a very clear structure: The poor Lazarus has his place at the gate of the house of the rich man, who is described as very rich indeed. He had to pass this beggar many times every day as he went in and out of his house. His situation was quite different to the rich man. But the relationship between these two persons is in this part described with ice-cold silence. The whole situation becomes clearer in the heavenly house. Everything happens.

When their fates after death are changed, then the rich man is in pain and needs help from Lazarus. And the first part of the dialogue is the request from the rich man. He knows how to treat people who are here to give me some water'! But now the situation is changed. The open gate is replaced by a deep gulf between them. Communication and help is impossible. It is too late. And now we find a very real and visible contrast of a man who is hellishly tried to think about his brothers and wants to warn them. But also his prayer for his brothers is refused. They have the Law and the Prophets, they should hear and obey them. It would not have been possible if Lazarus were raised from the dead and could warn them.

We can summarize the structure of the story like this:

1. Narrative part, verses 19-23:
   (a) Their life on earth, verses 19-21 (the open gate)
   (b) Their fate after death, verses 22-23 (the deep gulf, v. 26).

2. Dialogue, verses 24-31:
   (a) The request of the rich man for relief is refused, verses 24-26
   (b) The prayer of the rich man for his brothers is refused, verses 27-31.

From the structure of the story we see that only the rich man takes part in the dialogue. He is the main person. The last appeal of the story is directed to the five still-living brothers of the rich man, those who live like him. The story is a warning to the rich man and his brothers.

Lazarus is only a figure of contrast. He illustrates the unfulfilled possibility on earth: the rich man did not help him but left him to the dogs, the unclean animals. And he illustrates the lost possibility after death. He did reach the destination for people of Abraham, the destination which the rich man lost. The salvation of the poor is not discussed at all. I think it is simply presupposed that he is a son of Abraham living under the promises to Abraham. This is perhaps indicated by his Jewish name, Lazarus, which is the Greek form of ELIJAH, 'God helps'.

This interpretation will be supported by our next step:

2. The context of the story
In Luke 16:14 we see to whom this story is told. It is told to the Pharisees, 'who loved money'. This is the only place in the NT where the Pharisees are called 'love money'. And involves them to choose between God and Mammon. We don't know any other Jewish sources where money is pictured as an idol in this way. Verse 9 concludes the previous story about the unjust steward. But it can also be seen as an introduction to the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The verse gives an exhortation to use worldly wealth for those who are in need. They can help their helpers into eternal dwellings. This is the basic lesson: everything happens if you don't do this. He had a chance to gain a friend by helping the poor Lazarus. If he had done so, he might have been welcome in Lazarus' place (he didn't help, and he was excluded). The context speaks very much about wealth and the right use of wealth and confirms that this is a main concern in the story.

The context also speaks about another topic. Verses 16-18 speak about the Law. The Law retains its validity as long as heaven and earth exist. This corresponds to the last part of the story, the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man and his brothers should have listened to and obeyed 'Moses and the Prophets'.

You may object to this argument by saying that this context has been created by Luke or his sources. We have no reason to think that Luke or his sources had anything to do with this story in the ministry of Jesus. We have to interpret the story by itself and from a general picture of Jesus' message, not from the context given us by the final redaction of the gospel. I would answer that the Scripture is interpreted by such sources, the Book of Life is no way accidental. It is the oldest evidence we have for the understanding of the story in the early church. And in this case the context we have already found by a structural analysis of the story itself.

Let us now have a broader look at what Jesus says about these two topics: (1) wealth and the wealthy and (2) the Law.

3. Jesus teaching on possessions and the rich
We find quite a number of texts in the gospels where Jesus gives warnings against the power of money and wealth. These are not popular preaching texts today. Perhaps you needed to be suppressed in our rich churches in the rich part of the world. I can only briefly list the main points of some main texts.

(1) The rich man (Mk, 10:17-31 and parallel). The story of the rich man who came to Jesus to ask for the way to eternal life has a very unhappy end. The man went away sad because he did not want to sell all and follow Jesus. His great wealth was not useful to him. The man's problem is that he is not able to make this miracle's eye's wide or the small camel in order to make this possible. But in fact Jesus speaks about the smallest opening and the biggest animal because this is impossible. At least the main point of the text is impossible: 'with little is the rich man able to gain'.

(2) In another text (Mt. 6:24) Jesus speaks about the choice between Mammon and God. It sounds similar to the robbing coming to his victim saying, 'Your money or your life.' It is important to note that you have to choose. You cannot have both. Jesus doesn't say this with a gun in his hand. He says it with the love and the respect for the other person that gives him the freedom to make this choice.

Both these stories tell us that money and wealth are idols competing with God. Perhaps Mammon is much more dangerous than the Baals or the Buddhas or other idols that we are worshiped right up to our wealth today.

(3) The story of the rich farmer, Luke 12:16-21, shows us how a man gains and accumulates wealth all his life. But suddenly his life is taken from him. Who then shall have all he has gained and be able to say, 'I have enough and become economically rich but is not rich towards God'.

(4) In Luke 6:20-26 the beatitudes on the poor disciples are followed by the woes on the rich. Again the two possibilities are in direct opposition to each other. It is dangerous to be rich!

But Luke also has a story about the rich man for a rich man. The story about the wealthy chief tax collector Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) shows how a rich man can be changed. The incident shows Jesus' attitude towards Zacchaeus and his salvation. His attitude is completely changed. He gives half of his possessions to the poor, and wants to give fourfold back to those he may have cheated. His relationship to his money and to his fellow men is completely changed.

These examples may demonstrate how important are the warnings against the rich towards dangers from wealth in the message of Jesus. It's dangerous to be rich. We should immediately after Luke 16:19-31 ask: What are we able to be rich if not helpless at the road, in Luke 16 it is the poor Lazarus at the
crucial unless it is used to undermine the authority of the real text of the Bible or the concept of a basic doctrinal unity of Scripture. The instruction that the "original" text may be useful as far as it may help us understand the given text. But it can never replace the biblical text as the only source of faith and conduct.

II. The rich man and the poor Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31

This text talks very seriously about the two possibilities for eternity. The rich man was lost and came to hell, the poor man Lazarus was at Abraham's destination and is in the bosom of Abraham. There are two possibilities, and after death there is no possibility of change.

But why did the rich man come to hell, and why did the poor man Lazarus go to Abraham? This is a text where interpretations go in different directions. A popular interpretation in modern theology is that this text expresses the hope of the poor. It presents us with the reversal of fortunes in the coming age. The poor, who have suffered much in this life, will be comforted then, but the rich, who have lived in luxury and affluence, are lost and shall suffer. The main point in the story is seen in verse 24, and this verse is interpreted as giving a sort of balance: suffering in this world will give comfort in the world to come, and the well-do-do in this world will suffer. But verses 27-31 are seen as a supplementary addition. These verses talk about conversion as the way to eternal life, and this does not fit into the theory of the reversal of fortunes as the main point of the story. In this case, an interpretation you'll find in many studies of this text.

Against this interpretation I want to present another understanding of the text. This story does not teach how the poor are saved. It concentrates on the question of why the rich man is lost. It is a warning against the promo of the poor. It corresponds to Luke's woes against the rich, but it is no explanation of the beatitudes of the poor (Lk 6:20-26).

I'll argue for this second interpretation, making five points.

1. The structure of the story

When we read a long text in the Bible it may be important to see how it is structured in different sections. This story has two parts: the two main parts help. The narrative part tells first about the life of the two persons, then briefly about their fate after death. So far it's true that there is a logical structure to the text. It is true that the poor Lazarus has his place at the gate of the house of the rich man, who is described as very rich. He had to pass this beggar many times every day as he went in and out of his house, but his impression was a polite and promote to the poor. It corresponds to Luke's woes against the rich, but it is no explanation of the beatitudes of the poor.

2. The context of the story

In Luke 16:14 we see to whom this story is told. It is told to the Pharisees, 'who loved money'. This is the only place in the NT where the Pharisees are mentioned and invited to them by God and Mammon. We don't know any other Jewish sources where money is pictured as an idol in this way. Verse 9 concludes the previous story about the unrighteous steward. But it can also be seen as an introduction to the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The verse gives an exhortation to use worldly wealth as a storehouse that they can welcome their helpers into eternal dwellings. This is a warning about what happens if you don't do this. He had a chance to gain a friend by helping the poor Lazarus. If he had done so, he might have been forgiven in the afterlife for all his sins. It didn't help, and he was excluded. The context speaks very much about wealth and the right use of wealth and confirms that this is a main concern in the story.

The context also speaks about another topic. Verses 16-18 speak about the Law. The Law retains its validity as long as heaven and earth exist. This corresponds to the last part of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man and his brothers should have listened to and obeyed 'Moses and the Prophets'.

You may object to this argument by saying that this context has been created by Luke or his sources. We have no direct evidence that Luke has preserved this original text. But he may have thought about his brothers and wants to warn them. But also his prayer for his brothers is refused. He have the Law and the Prophets, they should hear and obey them. It would not have been appropriate for the rich man. Lazarus were raised from the dead and could warn them.

We can summarize the structure of the story like this:

1. Narrative part, verses 19-23:
   (a) Their life on earth, verses 19-21 (the open gate)
   (b) Their fate after death, verses 22-23 (the deep gulf, v. 26).
2. Dialogue, verses 24-31:
   (a) The request of the rich man for relief is refused, verses 24-26.
   (b) The prayer of the rich man for his brothers is refused, verses 27-31.

From the structure of the story we see that only the rich man takes part in the dialogue. He is the main person. The last appeal of the story is directed to the five still-living brothers of the rich man, those who live like him. The story is a warning to the rich man and his brothers.

Lazarus is only a figure of contrast. He illustrates the unfulfilled possibility on earth: the rich man did not help him but left him to the dogs, the unclean animals. And he illustrates the lost possibility after death. He died reach the destination for the people of Abraham, the destination which the rich man lost. The salvation of the poor is not discussed at all. I think it is simply presupposed that he is a son of Abraham living under the promises to Abraham. This is perhaps indicated by his Jewish name, Lazarus, which is the Greek form of Eliezer, 'God helps'.

This interpretation will be supported by our next step:

3. Jesus teaching on possessions and the rich

We find quite a number of texts in the gospels where Jesus gives warnings against the power of money and wealth. These are not popular preaching texts today. Perhaps they tend to be suppressed in our rich churches in the rich part of the world. We can only briefly list the main points of some main texts.

(1) The rich man (Mt. 10:17-31 and parallel). The rich man who came to Jesus to ask for the way to eternal life has a unhappy end. The man went away sad because he did not want to sell all and follow Jesus. His great wealth was the reason for his lack of repentance on his part.

The main point of the text is simple: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' It is quite interesting to read in commentaries how interpreters try to make the needle's eye wide or the camel small in order to make this possible. But in fact Jesus speaks about the smallest opening and the biggest animal because this is impossible. At least the main point of the text is impossible.

(2) In another text (Mt. 6:24) Jesus speaks about the choice between Mammon and God. It sounds similar to the robed coming to his victim saying, 'Your money or your life.' It is impossible to choose. You have to choose. If you don't choose it doesn't say this with a gun in his hand. He says it with the love and the respect for the other man who gives him the freedom to die or to live.

Both these stories tell us that money and wealth are idols competing with God. Perhaps Mammon is much more dangerous than the Baals or the Buddhas or other idols that we worshiped right up to our time.

(3) The story of the rich farmer, Luke 12:16-21, shows us how a man gains and accumulates wealth all his life but suddenly his life is taken from him. Who then shall have all he worked for? This corresponds to the rich man who has become economically rich 'but is not rich towards God'.

(4) In Luke 6:20-26 the beatitudes on the poor disciples are followed by the woes on the rich. Again the two possibilities are said to be mutually exclusive. It is dangerous to be rich!

(5) But Luke also has a story about a rich farmer. The story about the wealthy chief tax collector Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) shows how a rich man can be converted, and Zacchaeus gives Jesus 10 talents for his salvation and his salvation is completely changed. He gives half of his possessions to the poor, and wants to give fourfold back to those he may have cheated. His relationship to his money and his conversion are two sides of the same coin.

These examples may demonstrate how important are the warnings to the rich against dangers from wealth in the message of Jesus. It's dangerous to be rich. We should immediately live a life that is not full of riches. We have to think about our brothers and the poor. But also about our mother and father, and even our children. And we should be careful to note that the warnings against wealth do not necessarily imply an idealization of poverty. Poverty is in the Bible always seen as a blessing and the mourner is always fought against. It's the result of injustice or lack of care from fellow men, and is no desirable condition for human life.

4. Jesus teaching on the 'Laws and the Prophets'

This is a big and difficult question. For our purpose it's enough to state in what respect the Law has retained its value after the coming of Jesus. The answer to this is given when Jesus states the Law and the Prophets as the 2nd commandment of love (Mt. 22:34-40/Lk. 10:25-37). The whole NT unequivocally shows that this was the main improvement of the teaching of Jesus on the Law. And in Luke 10:25-37 Jesus gives a story illustrating one practical implication of the love for one's neighbour. Before we give a comparison between the teaching of Jesus and the stories of the rich man and Lazarus, we should try briefly to relate the warnings against riches to the double commandment of love.

In fact these warnings can be seen as an application of this summary of the Law. Love of money is dangerous first of all because it hinders the love of God. This is the main message of the text we have mentioned in section 3.2.4 above: Matthew 6:24, Luke 12:16;21, 23-26.

But, secondly, love of money is also dangerous because it hinders love for your neighbour. It makes it more important for you to gather wealth in order to secure yourself than to share it with your neighbour. This is the message of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was the rich man's neighbour, but the rich man overlooked him and did not think to help himself and his money instead of God and his neighbour.

And thirdly we may add that love for money is dangerous because it hinders discipleship. To follow Jesus is to leave everything behind and give the ministry for him first and the absolute priority. This is what we learn from texts like Mark 10:17-31 and parallels and Luke 6:23-26; 14:25-33.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is first and foremost an illustration of the second part of the double commandment of love, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour'. We have to listen to 'Moses and the Prophets' while there is still time for it. The Law speaks clearly about our duty to love God and our fellow men. In this story the king of God is not a God who says "Thou shalt love thy neighbour". To hear the message of Jesus. The judgment of the rich man and the appeal to conversion are derived from their failing to hear and receive the message of the kingdom.

5. A structural comparison of the story of the rich man and Lazarus with James 2:22-26

Finally, we want to illuminate our interpretation by a comparison of our text with the main illustration of the love of God. We have compared the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37. We look at the roles of the different actors in the stories in order to see similarities and differences.

Both stories have a person in need who is a potential object of the grace of God. The rich man and Lazarus, the poor poor man and the good Samaritan were not saved. The Samaritan has failed. He was supposed to "help" the poor man. In Luke 16 it is the poor Lazarus at the
gate of the rich man. Their situation is a cry for help; they need care and love from their fellow men.

Both stories also have negative examples. From these persons you should learn: don’t be like them. The priest and the Levite saw the helpless man, but did not stop to help him. In the same way the rich man did not care for the poor Lazarus.

Now we come to the difference in the structure of the two stories. One the story of the good Samaritan has a positive example. It is the good Samaritan. The message of the story is: Be like him! Do care for your suffering neighbour! He is the illustration of what love means. It’s action! It would be very wrong to regard poor Lazarus as a positive example in Luke 16. The hearers of the story should not identify with him. In the same way it would be wrong to make the man among robbers the positive example in the story of the good Samaritan. In these stories we are not encouraged to be robbed by others or to be beggars dependent on mercy from our fellow men. But we are encouraged to be like the good Samaritan, who comes into such situations, and we are warned not to overlook them because God doesn’t overlook them. He cares for them and has given us a duty to help them in his Law.

Lazarus is no ideal for imitation. Poverty is never idealized. Jesus doesn’t preach ascetism. The NT allows us to use and enjoy the world God has created. But it should be used according to the Law of God: don’t love the world, but love God with your whole heart — and your neighbour as yourself.

**Summary of Luke 16:19-31**

We now can summarize the message of the story of the rich man and Lazarus in two sentences, a negative and a positive.

*1. A life of affluence and luxury close your ears to the Word of God and your eyes to the need of your neighbour. Wealth is dangerous for your spiritual life, for your relationship to God, and for your relationship to your fellow man.*

- *2. Hear the Word of God and let it lead you to your neighbour in the hour of his distress. The gate is open now. You can help your suffering neighbour now and care for him. Your action now has consequences for eternity.*

### III. Some tentative concluding theses

We started with a simple question of Jesus and the poor. We saw that this question cannot simply be discussed as a question of social ethics. There also lurks the semantic question of the meaning of the word ‘poor’. This semantic question is urgent in those texts that talk about ‘the poor’ as those who hear the gospel and receive the kingdom. To speak biblically and clearly about Jesus and the poor, it is imperative to recognize the two basic meanings of the word ‘poor’ in its literal meaning it refers to beggars, to the material need of people not able to sustain themselves; in its transferred meaning it refers to the fundamental position of man before God, as helpless, as a sinner, regardless of material resources or social position.

On this basis I first want to offer three theses on the biblical teaching on poverty.

1. Poverty in the material and social sense of the word is neither a hindrance nor a condition for salvation. The Bible contains no promise that all poor and suffering people will be saved at last. Poverty is a distress to be helped, a human need that should not be made innocent by a false comfort on the promise of ‘a pie in the sky’. Poverty is never idealized. It challenges us to relieve it and work for justice. Therefore the church cannot remain passive or neutral when fellow men suffer from poverty.

2. Salvation is given to those who are poor in themselves. Notice now that the word ‘poor’ is used in a transferred sense. The kingdom of God can only be received by empty hands. Jesus warns against (a) worldly self-sufficiency: you trust yourself and your own resources and don’t need God. Example: the rich farmer; (b) religious self-sufficiency: you trust your religious attitude and moral life and don’t need Jesus. Example: the unbelieving Pharisees.

3. The people of God are sent to the poor, to suffering and oppressed fellow men. The empty hands receiving salvation are not made holy! They are strengthened and filled to serve the kingdom of God. They are prepared for bread, health, social security, justice (Jn. 3:16-18).

But our neighbour also has another need. Regardless of social position he has a need for the gospel: to hear the saving Word of God. The good news for ‘the poor’ is for all mankind! With this gospel we are sent to everybody. It is a human right to hear the gospel!

The word ‘poor’ describes two different needs of man. In its material and social sense it describes people dependent on others for bodily survival. In its transferred sense it describes everyone’s position before God: helpless, dependent on his grace. These two meanings correspond to the two different uses of the word in the gospels. When it is used in the material sense of the potential recipients of alms, we regularly find an explicit or implicit challenge for action from their fellow men: care for them, help them. When used in a transferred sense the context refers to Isaiah 61:1f. and the promise of God’s action of salvation for his people.

In this way the two different meanings and uses of the word seem to correspond to the classical evangelical distinction between law and gospel. The Law is what God demands from men, summarized in the commandment of love; the gospel is the good news of God’s fulfilled action of salvation, the message that he loves us. Preaching the gospel is not to tell men what to do, but to tell what God has done for us. But the preaching of the gospel should never be separated from the proclamation of the love, to mean his need of the Law.

The words on Jesus and the poor in the gospels can be related to the distinction between law and gospel in the way described on the next page.

The danger for evangelical Christians has been to stress the gospel in a way that has made them deaf to the demands from the Law. It challenges us to share our wealth with those in need, to care for all who suffer injustice of any kind, to support and cooperate with those who want to build a better world for human beings. The materially poor need bread, not only bread from heaven.

The danger in modern liberation theology is to confuse law and gospel by saying that we can bring salvation and build God’s kingdom by our social work or political action. That’s not biblical. The Bible teaches us that salvation in the full

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**THE GOSPEL:**

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- The commandment of love
- The great commission
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- Believers alone

**THE LAW:**

- man’s duty to act in love
- Social service, medical care, relief work, political action for the poor and suppressed

**GOD’S ANSWER:**

To these needs in his Word is twofold:

- The word ‘poor’ describes two different needs of men:
  - (1) material and social need, dependence on help from other people
  - (2) all men’s position before God, dependence on help from God by his grace alone


**A broader discussion on these texts and the other gospel texts on Jesus and the poor is given in my doctoral dissertation: H. Krvaklal, Jesus der Justiz (Osto, 1981).**

**F. W. Horn, Glaube und Handeln in der Theologie des Lukas (Gottingen, 1983).**

**H. Breekbosch, Ani und snaw in den Psalmen (Gottingen, 1982).**

**E. G. J. Schrander in his commentary to Mt. 5:3 in Das Evangelium nach Matthaeus (NTD, Gottingen, 1936).**

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III. Some tentative concluding theses
We started with a simple question of Jesus and the poor. We saw that this question cannot simply be discussed as a question of social ethics. It would also raise the semantically important question of the meaning of the word ‘poor’. This semantic question is urgent in those texts that talk about ‘the poor’ as those who have lost their hope and receive the kingdom. To speak biblically and clearly about ‘Jesus and the poor’, it is imperative to recognize the two basic meanings of the word ‘poor’: in its literal meaning it refers to beggars, to the material need of people not able to sustain themselves; in its transferred meaning it refers to the fundamental position of man before God, as helpless, as a sinner, regardless of material resources or social position.

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2. Salvation is given to those who are poor in themselves. Notice now that the word ‘poor’ is used in a transferred sense. The kingdom of God can only be received by empty hands. Jesus warns against (a) worldly self-sufficiency: you trust yourself and your own resources and don’t need God. Example: the rich farmer; (b) religious self-sufficiency: you trust your religious attitude and moral life and don’t need Jesus. Example: the unbelieving Pharisees.

3. The people of God are sent to the poor, to suffering and oppressed fellow men. The empty hands receiving salvation are not made ‘lame’! They are strengthened and filled to serve the task of being a place of bread, health, social security, justice (Jn 1:36-18).

But our neighbour also has another need. Regardless of social position he has a need for the gospel: to hear the saving Word of God. The good news for ‘the poor’ is for all mankind! With this gospel we are sent to everybody. It is a human right to hear the gospel!

The word ‘poor’ describes two different kinds of men. In its material and social sense it describes people dependent on others for bodily survival. In its transferred sense it describes everyone’s position before God: helpless, dependent on his grace. These two meanings correspond to the two different senses of the word in the gospels. When it is used in the material sense of the potential recipients of alms, we regularly find also an implicit or explicit challenge for action from their fellow men: care for them, help them. When used in a transferred sense the context refers to Isaiah 61:1f. and the promise of God’s action of salvation for his people.

In this way the two different meanings and uses of the word seem to correspond to the classical evangelical distinction between law and gospel. The Law is what God demands from men, summarized in the commandment of love; the gospel is the good news of God’s fulfilled action of salvation, the message that he loves us. Preaching the gospel is not to tell men what to do, but to tell what God has done for us. But the preaching of the gospel should never be separated from the practical help, to mean his need of the Law.

The words on Jesus and the poor in the gospels can be related to the distinction between law and gospel in the way described on the next page.

The danger for evangelical Christians has been to stress the gospel in a way that has made them deaf to the demands from the Law. It challenges us to share our wealth with those in need, to care for all who suffer injustice of any kind, to support and cooperate with those who want to build a better world for human beings. The materially poor need bread, not only bread from heaven.

The danger in modern liberation theology is to confuse law and gospel by saying that we can bring salvation and build God’s kingdom by our social work or political action. That’s not biblical. The Bible teaches us that salvation in the full theological sense is given by God alone. The kingdom does not come through our poverty programmes or political reforms. The kingdom can only be offered as a free gift through the gospel. And it is open for all men, regardless of social status, sex, race or nation. All men are beggars before God. And as ‘poor’ in this sense all men also need ‘the bread from heaven’.

The word ‘poor’ describes two different needs of men:
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GOD’S ANSWER to these needs in his Word is twofold:

THE LAW: man’s duty to act in love

THE GOD-SENT mission of love

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH as derived from law and gospel:

Social service, medical care, relief work, political action for the poor and suppressed

MOTIVATION:

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The great commission

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Believers and non-believers

Believers alone

ULTIMATE AIM:

Health, peace, justice on earth for all people according to the will of God as Creator of all men

Salvation in the kingdom of God for all people according to the will of God as Saviour for all men


* This reference to Israel is well argued and applied in the work of Sechehaye (see above, n. 1).

1. E. G. Schettini, Stegmann, Meekland and Horn (see above, n. 1).
Work, faith and freedom
John W Gladwin

The author is Secretary of the Church of England’s Board for Social Responsibility, and is also Associate Editor of Themelios in Social Ethics.

Hardly a week goes by without a new book or article appearing in the press about Christians about the subject of work and in an age of unemployment. It was Hitler’s concentration camps which displayed slogans proclaiming the virtues of work as the way to freedom. Christians believe that faith in Christ opens the door to liberty: so why all this concern about work and employment? Is not work a curse and a means of oppression? Should we not rejoice that the old exploitative labour is collapsing – is this not a day of opportunity if we can grasp it?

There are many pitfalls in this subject and Christians need to tread with caution. I can remember twenty years ago being told that working people looked forward to the day when some of the unpleasant, back-breaking, dirty tasks would be lifted from the lives of labouring people. Miners did not want their children condemned to dig coal under the ground. Now in an age of affluence the reality of unemployment every job protected. Better to dig coal from under the ground than to have no job at all. It would appear that we have regressed.

There has been a massive shake-out and shift in the whole experience of work and employment throughout the world over the past fifteen years. These changes have their roots deep in the history. The British experience of this goes back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The changes of recent years, however, are very real for those directly affected by them. Manufacturing industry has been shaken in two ways. There has been a collapse of some manufacturing industries and there has been a technological revolution. Both have hit traditional patterns of employment. Millions of jobs which once were filled by the semi-skilled have gone. For regions heavily dependent on such industrial work the results have been dramatic. Britain the West Midlands is probably the most striking region in this respect. From being the engine room of the country in the industrial age it has become one of the worst regions for unemployment and industrial collapse. Patterns which have become established in the developed world will lead to pressure on the developing world to follow this path.

At one and the same time other forms of work and employment have been developing. The post-1945 period has seen a significant development in the employment of women. Employment has not been without its problems. With great success, to protect women from exploitative practices based on the assumption that employment is essentially a male prerogative. Nevertheless, women expect to be able to find work and develop vocations.

As manufacturing industries have declined, other forms of employment have grown. Service industry work has been on the increase. Some of this is part-time and short-lived. More flexibility, insecurity and mobility have been introduced into patterns of employment.

Patterns of work and employment are among the basic factors which create community. The collapse of inherited patterns can have devastating effects on communities (witness the effect on people when traditional rural communities are being taking over by the industrial society). Other things test out in the ensuing uncertainty and instability. Marriages become vulnerable, home life is under threat, people suffer stress, and lose a sense of identity. The establishment plans on which many depend for the shape to their living are thrown into a measure of confusion. The changes may be necessary, even unavoidable; they are not, however, without cost. The costs are frequently borne by those sections of society least well equipped to pay them.

What are we Christians to say to all this? Frankly, it has to be said (and witness the vast pile of literature on the subject) that it is very hard to find a clear word from God. Confusion has hit us as well. The church has not been exempt from the fall-out from this period of change. Is there anything in our struggle with these matters to help others who struggle with them?

We should remind ourselves of some basic Christian values:

1. Work and Christian liberty (see especially Rom. 4)

One of the crucial truths of the gospel is that it is God who justifies us in Christ. It is God’s work rather than our works which establishes the foundations and the environment of human freedom. Christians must be careful not to be deceived by believing that it is our work which is critical. We have to justify ourselves by our work. We even describe people according to their work. ‘What do you do?’ is a first question in many a new conversation. Such is, of course, terribly debilitating for all who are not in some form of paid or professional employment. Yet it has been a particular problem for the unemployed and to ‘women: ‘Oh, I’m just a housewife.’

Once we accept the temptation to see things in terms of our work we look ourselves into a form of oppression in the world of work. We have to justify ourselves and achieve what is required of us by others. Work, however, is not the way to freedom. Liberation is a gift of God to the world in Jesus Christ discovered in the moment of faith. Our work must therefore be seen in the light of freedom, not as a means to it (Gal. 3:1-5). Yet Christians and the churches can be the worst of oppressors. The neglect of all this in this oppressive doctrine that we are justified by our work.

2. Work and vocation

If work is to be seen in the context of Christian liberty we can begin to appreciate the original positive understanding of it given in creation. Work need not be oppressive. Indeed, since the world is God’s creation and the object of God’s continued love and concern, a gift of God and a possibility for vocation (Gen. 2:15). God calls us to action. The garden needs tilling, the city needs building, the wealth of creation needs a husbanding to assist in proclaiming the worth of the God who calls us to freedom. For those therefore who see the liberty God gives in Jesus Christ, it is a shame and disgrace to find that some are not able to share in this.

For the freedom in Christ there is a deliberate prevention of people from discovering vocation and offering their worship to God through such calling as is an affront to Jesus Christ. That sort of unemployement which shunts people out of society is a disaster in the light of the message of freedom offered in Jesus Christ.

3. Labour and toll (Gal. 3:16-24)

So too is the sort of work which destroys people in the process. Work which undermines people’s humanity, exploits their gifts, and destroys their lives and their communities is offensive in the face of what we see in Jesus Christ. Work which proclaims God’s liberty must affirm human dignity, nurture rather than destroy human creativity, enhance rather than inhibit society and community. The Bible demonstrates that in a fallen world which does not know the redemptive love of God work can collapse into toil. That which could proclaim the liberty God offers becomes a means of oppression and injustice.

4. Idleness and the soul (Pr. 24:27-34; 26:14-16)

Work is always a balance between activity and reflection. It has moments of joyful movement and moments of quiet and peace. The actual worship offered to God by the church is a sign and symbol of the way all life is called to be in the light of Jesus Christ. God calls us to proclaim the liberty he offers in the glory of activity and the wonder of rest. Work and rest together make life into worship of God. This dialectic of experience which is rooted in the freedom of the God of the Bible is the experience in Jesus Christ. The life of the soul is furthered when the pattern of social life reflects the inner mystery of the gospel. Work and rest together make life into worship of God. This dialectic of balance of work and rest topples over into the disastrous duet of toil and idleness. Human life, instead of being enhanced and moved forward on its journey of work and rest, is torn apart and led into despair by the deadly choice between toil and idleness.

Society needs to see the cycles of oppressive exploitation and living outside society in the idleness of enforced unemployment, then how are we able to demonstrate the meaning of God’s offer of liberty? It is small wonder the church struggles with environments where are predomi- nantly about toil and labour or about idleness and unemployment. If it is true to Jesus Christ it is bound to be seen as call for all freedom which is based on doing away with the corrupted social order which has created this toil and unemployment. If it colludes with it becomes part of the grey and uninviting scenery of a world gone badly wrong.

What next?

It is clear for any who believe in God’s reign in our history that we cannot go backwards. We cannot return to the past. There is no going back to the old patterns of employment and, indeed, there are many who would not wish to return that way. The more mobile, less certain and more open pattern of working life is upon us. The challenge concerns whether we see such change as an opportunity to enhance the life chances of the members of our society or as the gateway to a new oppression. If work in its new form becomes an end, a means of justification, it will tear us apart as certainly in the future as it has done in the past. If it is put into the proportion implied in the Christian experience of God’s gift to us in the work of Jesus Christ, it might yet be able to open the way to new creativities and to the chance for it, at least in a measure, become feared and revered. Governmental, educational, employers, financial institutions, Trades Unions and all corporate institutions concerned with the future of work and employment need to collaborate with this purpose in mind.

Our futures may depend on it.

1 Recent literature on the subject includes: Roger Clarke, Work in Crisis (IS Aswed, 1982); David Bealeksky, Work – the Shadow and the Substance (SCM, 1981); David Bealeksky, The Place of Work – The Myth and the Reality (SCM, 1985); Davis and David Gooling, Making Unemployment Work (WCC, 1985); P. Elsom and D. Porter, 400 Jobs in 10 Days to Care for the Community (Chatham Publishing, 1982); John Bell, Living with Unemployment (Hodder, 1986).

Three commentaries on Matthew: a review
Gerhard Maier


Matthew exegesis is on the move again! 1981 saw the appearance of two very well regarded books by W. W. Beare (after a long interval); even before that a two-volume popular-level commentary on Matthew was published in the Our Daily Bread series by V. M. Snyder, then in 1986 and 1988 three remarkable commentaries were published, by D. A. Carson, R. T. France and U. Luz on Matthew 1-7. So 1984/5 was a great year for Matthew. Incidentally, Theodor Zahn’s commentary on Matthew was also re-edited and published in 1984.

The current trend of new Matthew commentaries is to attempt a mastery of the text with the aim of a succinct and clear exposition of what the text has to say for today. The text of Matthew is read against the background of the life of Jesus, against the background of the whole life of the church, and against the background of the contemporary world of their readers. The text is read not as a historical record of events, but rather as an account of events in which all make sense even in the light of the events of the cross and resurrection. The events of the gospels are not seen as history, but rather as showing the nature of God and the nature of man. The issues in Matthew are not simply those of first century Galilean society, but speak of issues in the world of today. The gospels are not simply a record of events, but rather an account of the nature of God and the nature of man in the light of God’s action. The events of the gospels are not simply a record of events, but rather an account of the nature of God and the nature of man in the light of God’s action. The events of the gospels are not simply a record of events, but rather an account of the nature of God and the nature of man in the light of God’s action.
Work, faith and freedom
John W Gladwin

The author is Secretary of the Church of England’s Board for Social Responsibility, and is also Associate Editor of Theology in Social Ethics.

Hardly a week seems to pass without a new book or article appearing warning Christians about the subject of work and employment in an age of unemployment. It was Hitler’s concentration camps which displayed slogans proclaiming the virtues of work as the way to freedom. Christians believe that faith in Christ opens the door to liberty: so why all this concern about work and employment? Is not work a curse and a means of oppression? Should we not rejoice that the old exploitative labour system is collapsing – this is not a day of opportunity if we care to grasp it?

There are many pitfalls in this subject and Christians need to tread with caution. I remember twenty years ago being told that working people looked forward to the day when some of the unpleasant, back-breaking, dirty tasks would be lifted from the lives of working people. Miners did not want their children condemned to dig coal under the ground. Now in an age of affluence, the reality of unemployment everywhere is now protected. Better to dig coal from under the ground than to have no job at all. It would appear that we have regressed.

There has been a massive shake-out and shift in the whole experience of work and employment throughout the world over the past fifteen years. These changes have their roots deep in the history of Britain. The British experience of this goes back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The changes of the 1980s, however, are very real for those directly affected by them. Manufacturing industry has been shaken in two ways. There has been a collapse of some manufacturing industries and there has been a technological revolution. Both have hit traditional patterns of employment. Millions of jobs which once were filled by the semi-skilled have gone. For regions heavily dependent on such industrial work the results have been dramatic. Britain in the West Midlands is probably the most striking region in this respect. From being the engine room of Victorian engineering and coal mining life, it has become one of the worst regions for unemployment and industrial collapse. Patterns which have become established in the developed world will lead to pressure on the developing world to provide an escape.

At one and the same time other forms of work and employment have been developing. The post-1945 period has seen a significant development in the employment of women. Secondly, not only has there been great success, to protect women from exploitative practices based on the assumption that employment is essentially a male prerogative. Nevertheless, women expect to be able to find work and develop vocations.

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Patterns of work and employment are among the basic factors which create community. The collapse of inherited patterns can have devastating effects on communities (witness the effect on people when traditional rural communities are undermined by industrial society). Other things get tested out in the ensuing uncertainty and instability. Marriages become vulnerable, home life is under threat, people suffer stress and lose a sense of identity. The established patterns on which many depend for the shape to their living are thrown into a measure of confusion. The changes may be necessary, even unavoidable; they are, however, without cost. The costs are frequently borne by those sections of society least equipped to pay them.

What are we Christians to say to all this? Frankly, it has to be said (and witness the vast pile of literature on the subject) that we struggle to find a clear word from God. Confusion has hit us as well. The church has not been exempt from the fallout from this period of change. Is there anything in our struggle with these matters to help others who struggle with them?

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One of the crucial truths of the gospel is that it is God who justifies us in Christ. It is God’s work rather than ours which establishes the foundations and the environment of human freedom and life. Christians have the responsibility of believing that it is our work which is critical. We have to justify ourselves by our work. We even describe people according to the work which they do. What do you do? It is a first question in many a new conversation. Such is, of course, terribly debilitating for all who are not in some form of paid or professional employment. It has been a particular put-down for the unemployed and to women: ‘Oh, I’m just a housewife.’

Once we accept the temptation to see things in terms of our work we look ourselves into a form of opposition in the world of work. We have to justify ourselves and achieve what is required of us by others. Work, however, is not the way to freedom. Liberation is a gift of God to the world in Jesus Christ discovered in the moment of faith. Our work must therefore be seen in the light of freedom, not as a means to it (Gal. 3:1-5). Yet Christians and the churches can be the worst offenders in this field. The very load of our mission and the power of this oppressive doctrine that we are justified by our work.

2. Work and vocation

If work is to be seen in the context of Christian liberty we can begin to appreciate the original positive understanding of it

given in creation. Work need not be oppressive. Indeed, since the world is God’s creation and the object of God’s continued love, the act of creating is a gift of God and a possible opportunity for vocation (Gen. 2:4-5). God calls us to action. The garden needs tilling, the city needs building, the wealth of creation needs a husbanding to assist in proclaiming the worth of the God who calls us to freedom. For those therefore who see the liberty God gives in Jesus Christ, it is a shame and disgrace to find that some are not able to share in the opportunities which God has through the basis of the church to bring about a deliberate prevention of people from discovering vocation and offering their worship to God through such calling is an affront to Jesus Christ. That sort of unemployment which shunts people out of society is a disaster in the light of the message of freedom offered in Jesus Christ.

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Too is so the work which destroys people in the process.

Work which undermines people’s humanity, exploits their gifts, and destroys their lives and communities is offensive in the face of what we see in Jesus Christ. Work which proclaims God’s liberty must affirm human dignity, nurture rather than destroy human creativity, enhance rather than inhibit society and community. The Bible demonstrates that in a fallen world which does not know the redemptive love of God work can collapse into toil. Thus when we proclaim the liberty God offers becomes a means of oppression and injustice.

4. Idolisation and the soul (Pr. 24:27-34; 26:14-16)

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What next?

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Three commentaries on Matthew: a review

Gerhard Maier


Matthew exegesis is on the move again! 1981 saw the appearance of the two-volume commentary of D. A. Carson, followed by R. T. France and U. Luz in 1984. Other two-volume commentaries on Matthew were published in the Cologne-Bonn series in 1985 and in 1986 and in 1986 three remarkable commentaries were published, by D. A. Carson, R. T. France and U. Luz on Matthew 1-7. So 1984/5 was a great year for Matthew. Incidentally, Theodor Zahn’s commentary on Matthew was also re-edited and published in 1984.

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1. Luz

It will be helpful to look at Ulrich Luz first. In the series of EKK Commentaries (Einzelkommentar zum Neuen Testament) he published in 1985 the first volume of Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, which expounds Matthew chapter by chapter and also gives a practical application of the text. If he proceeds at the same rate through the gospel, by the end he will have produced five volumes with a total of 2,100 pages (whereas a Nestle-Aland text requires 87 pages for Matthew 17 alone). It is interesting to see whether and how Luz sticks with the present structure in the coming volumes.

On the back cover we read: This commentary is part of an international series on Matthew's gospel for twenty years.' If at all, this can only be the case on the Continent (note Beare 1981, Carson 1984). The introduction is about 70 pages long, the exposition of the whole gospel occupies about 500 pages and the main emphasis very clearly. Of particular importance for the user is the section in which the author explains the intention behind his commentary and his methodology. After the preliminary descriptive of his commentary for his attempt to make fruitful use of the history of interpretation and of the study of the historical influence of the gospel (its Wirkungsgeschichte). Through this he hopes to achieve two things: first to show 'what we have become through the texts' (p. 79); we will thus learn to understand more of ourselves as we are now. And second to offer correctives, showing us 'what we could be through the texts' (p. 80). The author says explicitly that he wants to help 'overcome a deficiency in historical-critical exegesis': the text has been the distant past back into the present. Luz is aware - and it is good that he mentions it - that 'doing this involves an element of personal and political, subjective limitation' into his work (p. 82). One can detect this, for example, in his view of the peace issue. On the other hand, Luz feels thoroughly committed to historical-critical exegesis. He is determined to make the same tool that the first gospel writers used to bring the distant past back into the present. Luz is aware - and it is good that he mentions it - that 'doing this involves an element of personal and political, subjective limitation' into his work (p. 82). One can detect this, for example, in his view of the peace issue. On the other hand, Luz feels thoroughly committed to historical-critical exegesis. He is determined to make the same tool that the first gospel writers used to bring the distant past back into the present.

Concerning the dating of Matthew, Luz says: 'The writing of Mark's gospel and the destruction of Jerusalem constitute the terminus post quem (227)" (p. 75). He takes it completely for granted (on the basis of the delay after the event), and finally concludes that Matthew can be dated 'not long after the year 80' (p. 76).

On the authorship of the gospel, Luz honestly admits that a lot of arguments have been brought against him. Nevertheless he remains convinced that the author of Matthew was a Jewish Christian (pp. 76f.). He is a Jewish Christian, coming from a Jewish-Christian community (p. 62). It is sure that... his brother- tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63). It is sure that... his brother-tongued is Greek (p. 63).

Concerning Matthew's gospel, Luz points out that it is a book of discipline through which the community of the first century was formed. The community was a new form of the church. Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. The four gospels are the books of the New Testament.

2. Carson

Carson will compare Luz's commentary first with that of Don A. Carson. The latter is a man who has written two important works: W. W. Wessel's commentary on Luke and W. L. Morey's commentary on Luke as volume 8 of the Expositor's Bible Commentary. It is a commentary on the whole of Matthew's gospel, running to almost 1,000 pages. Apart from F. W. Beare's, this is to my knowledge the most detailed of all English commentaries on Matthew in the last few decades (with the exception of Carson and W. L. Morey). In many ways Carson's work is at the opposite pole to Luz's. This applies, first, to its hermeneutical position. The Expositor's Bible Commentary is an international and inter-denominational work, with many contributors, according to the back cover, 'the best in evangelical scholarship.' It is substantially directed to the divine inspiration, complete trustworthiness, and full authority of the Bible. In terms of scholarship Carson is comparable to Luz. Both obviously draw their information primarily from the literature of their own theological background. So we have here two top-class exegetical works from different theological backgrounds, which is what makes a comparison of the two particularly exciting and instructive. How does an evangelical exposition of Matthew on the same academic level differ from a middle-of-the-road, critical exposition?

Carson devotes about 60 pages (10% of his commentary) to introduction. After a short overview of historical research he emphasizes that the evangelist did intend to convey historical information as well as theology (p. 10). An interest in faith and historical research - the evangelist makes the Bible of Jesus (p. 17). So is Matthew anti-Semitic, a Jewish Christian against Judaism?

Carson criticizes Luz by pointing out that Matthew is not just 'disciple-ethics': he asserts, 'The gospel on the Mount lays claim on the world' (p. 190). In that statement he turns against the gospel on the Mount a common criticism of the gospel on the Mount (p. 418). The New Covenant helps us to 'allow' (pp. 191ff.). This idea comes into sharp focus towards the end of the first volume. On p. 416ff. Luz offers thoughts about the practical impression left by Matthew on the churches of today. His thoughts lead in two main directions: (a) Matthew, as exponent of a minority community, can help the church today in the necessary task of coming to terms with a minority church, now that the era of the nation church has come to an end (p. 417); and (b) The peace movement poses a serious question about the 'form of the church', as Luz says (p. 418). The New Covenant helps us to acknowledge our obedience to the will of the Father in all secular fields, and that also includes politics, especially a responsible and prophetic role in the cause of peace (p. 420), involving Christians and non-Christians.

It would be good to mention many other points, but lack of space does not permit it. The style of the commentary became quite chatty, and there is a clear impression of the book, especially in the bibliography, almost reaches encyclopedic dimensions. Once finished, these discussions are bound to become one of the major critical-and historical-critical commentaries in English-speaking world for some time.
1. Luz

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Let us turn to some examples of exegesis which enable us to compare Carson and Luz. Over against Luz, Carson is a belief that there is a good case for treating chapters 1-2 as both history and theology (p. 7). The vistg of the magna is also historical: 'Matthew records history so as to bring out its theological significance and its relation to Scripture' (p. 83). Similarly, Matthew 2:13f.: 'there is nothing historically improbable about this story' (p. 90). Although Carson is willing to treat any option, he is seriously, we can note a fundamental difference from Luz in this respect. Carson's interest in history is far greater than that of his historical-critical counterpart.

The classification of the Sermon on the Mount leads us to another difference. In Luz's volume it is qualitatively and quantitatively an unparalleled high point. This is evident from the way he divides the prologue (1:1-4:22) and the three great discourses (4:23-15:41). In Luz first volume of nothing but 'A. The Sermon on the Mount'. Carson, however, groups 3:1-7:29 together under the heading 'The gospel of the kingdom', seeing as one of several main sections in Matthew's gospel. And this (second) main section chapter is again divided into two main sections: 'A. theoretical narrative' (3:1-4:25) and 'B. First discourse: The Sermon on the Mount' (5:1-7:29). In this way the Sermon on the Mount is seen more strongly than Luz as part of the general development of the story.

And the difference continues. Carson places importance on the author's position - which is clearly marked in Matthew 5:17, 7:21, that includes 5:17-20 (pp. 12ff., 144), whereas Luz believes that Matthew 5:17-20 is without doubt the work of Matthew himself (pp. 125ff., 144). The normal discourse of Matthew 5:17-20 is seen by Carson to be authentic and historical: 'The authorship of this context must be assumed' (p. 125). Carson differs different ways of interpreting the Sermon on the Mount: he prefers the 'theologically more complete' starting-point from a Matthew community, the Baptism ('Anabaptist-Menonite'), the existentialist, the 'Lutheran (i.e. lutheran is the OT) and the classic-dispersive approach (p. 120f.). Luz sees himself as closest to the 'minority community of Matthew' or the Anabaptist interpretation. Carson refuses both these interpretations. The first is 'reductionistic in his eyes, because
the gospel is more than a community catechism, and we have to interpret it in terms of salvation history (pp. 126f.). The second lesson is that Jesus’ work is not just a moral principle, but that it flows from the Gospel world and does not fit in with the Scriptures as a whole (p. 127). The other possibilities mentioned above do not satisfy him either. So Carson decides in favour of an interpretation in terms of salvation history, with the kingdom of God as the starting-point (pp. 127ff.). This means for him that the Sermon on the Mount has to be Christologically, Gott die Seele zu gleichen Stunde. But this interpretation allows for the unity of Old and New Testaments, of Matthew and Paul, of Palestinian Jewish Christians and of Pauline Christianity, quite early. The NT and the two Testaments together can be interpreted as a unison if we follow Carson.

After the Sermon on the Mount the comparison between Jesus and the scribes is continued. The context is typically in a series of sections, and the second half of the fifth main section. It is a theme followed through to Matthew 28:16-20, 'The Risen Messiah and His Disciples'. Let us have a look at the conclusion of the commentary. Carson talks about 'historical reminiscence' used by Matthew 28:16-17 (p. 594). Carson’s interpretation of Matthew 28:17-20 has a continuity between the authority of the Risen One and the earthly Jesus in his ministry (p. 594). Disagreeing with Hill, Carson asserts the authenticity and integrity of scripture in all of Matthew’s Johannine passages (p. 596f.). In the same way he defends the authenticity of the reference to the Trinity in Matthew 28:19, which he, with D. Westham, traces back to Jesus (p. 598). On the last page Carson writes: 'The revelation of Jesus as Messiah at this late stage in salvation history brings the fulfillment of everything to which the OT Scriptures pointed and constitutes the final, general, and necessary focus on Jesus' (p. 599). This masterly commentary is notable for its discussion of historical issues, of salvation history and of Christianity.

3. France

Finally, let us have a look at the commentary of Richard T. France. It is in a series of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries and was published in 1985. France has only 410 pages for his commentary on the whole Gospel. This does not allow him to go into the depth of the text, and one of the conclusions we have to remember is that the purpose of the whole Tyndale series of commentaries is to bring out the contemporary relevance of the biblical text (see the preface by Leon Morris). So the academic discussion of the text is of secondary importance, and France’s commentary has to be read in the context of the series. Carson and France. Comparison of the three is only possible to a limited extent.

The relatively large introduction to France’s commentary, extending over eight pages, shows that he, like the others, has done his work thoroughly. He stresses his close connection of Matthew with the OT (p. 16). It is a Jewish Christian gospel (p. 17) and at the same time universal (pp. 18ff.). Despite its 'eclesiastical' features it should not be interpreted in a narrow context, as France points out (p. 20ff.). France, like Carson, speaks out against the opinion, represented most recently and notably by Gundry, that Matthew is a pseudonymous author, trying to defend the historical authenticity of the gospel (pp. 26).

The place of composition could either be Palestine or Syria (pp. 27f.). Like Carson, France prefers a date in the sixties for the final publication of Matthew (p. 30), but he remains as cautious as Carson that this is not a certain date. France is at the point of view of someone on the Continent two things stand out: the cautious evangelical argumentation, and the tendency to date Matthew as late. The synoptic Matthew is possibly the author, though here we cannot be completely certain: 'we simply do not know the extent of the synoptic middle way' (p. 31). In France’s opinion Matthew is the Gospel, but the tradition of the early church encourages us to believe that it was a major one' (p. 34).

The synoptic problem is also treated with great caution by France (pp. 34f.). He refers to 'am's interesting uncertainty (p. 35) with regard to the classical two-source hypothesis and notes the questions both about the priority of Mark and about the direct literary dependence of Matthew. Nevertheless, like Carson, he works from the assumption of Markan priority, taking Mark and Q to be Matthew’s sources (p. 38).

A long section deals with the central theological themes of the gospel (pp. 38-56). Like Carson, France deals with themes such as passion, death, resurrection, only, of course, for a law, community, and then turns to the structure of the gospel. As we have already referred to parallels with Carson several times, it has to be said, that France is also taken by the same ideas: how Carson’s commentary when he was writing his (see p. 14).

It is characteristic of France that he structures his commentary on geographical lines. Following the first major section of narrative, he points out that Matthew is not a local, but there follow two major sections on the ‘Ministry in Galilee’, ‘public’ (4:17-16:20) and ‘private’ (16:21-18:33), then the ‘Ministry in Judaea’ (19:3-25:46), and finally ‘Death and Resurrection’ (26:1-28:20).

In his exposition France emphasizes firmly the historical credibility of the fervently debated chapters 1 and 2. We are dealing here with ‘facts’; it would be a strange cognition, which invented ‘facts’ in order to defend them’ (p. 71). Concerning the Sermon on the Mount, the discussion of the different possible interpretations is much shorter than that in Carson. France and this is not without reason, as much of the structure derives from Matthew (p. 106). France points out that we are dealing with teaching for the disciples and not for all, ‘indeed much of what we call a “universal code” (p. 106). Of the three commentators, France stands closest to the two-kingsdom theory of the Lutheran-Falangist tradition. France also places Matthew 25:31-46 in a closer alliance with Carson and the Sermon on the Mount compels us first to think about who is speaking here, i.e., about the identity of the preacher of the parables. He differs from the others in his view that man cannot fulfill the law (p. 106f.). Evangelical exposition is at a lower section – closer to the ‘majority Reformation’ view of the text. This is the advantage Matthew 5:7 and 5:8, and that highlighted the ‘unparalleled authority of Jesus the Messiah’ (p. 151).

France is also convinced of the historicity of the miracles. One reflection of this conviction is his ability to accommodate the fiercely debated ‘Messianic Secret’ in his historical understanding of Jesus’ life. He has to interpret it as an artificial construction of the later community.

The reader will be very grateful for the careful and down-to-earth approach France takes on many questions that cause problems in the Christian community. He says, for instance, that the language of Jesus’ ‘Gospel’ way he does not have to reiterate it as an artificial construction of the later community.

The book reviews


The fact that this commentary more than adequately fulfills the purpose for which it was intended. Holistically the understanding of Scripture, should not deter anyone interested in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is of great profit especially to those who are new to the book. Williamson is a valuable introduction to the study of these books, it is written clearly and concisely, bringing into clearer light the nature of the material contained in them.

The normal pattern of the series is followed, with a full introduction, a historical commentary divided into Bibliography, Translation, Notes on the Hebrew text, an introduction to the Form, Structure and Setting of each major division of the text, together with a detailed Commentary and Explanation of each section.

The Introduction sets the direction for the commentary which covers all the major elements of the book. Ezra, which is the first book in the series, is treated carefully and should be regarded as complete as it stands and not the conclusion to the history of the ancient Israelites as generally supposed. The sources used were the Ezra Memoir and the Nehemiah Memoria independent records and lists which have been supplemented by the final section.

Dr. Williamson seeks to explain the text in its present form, but at the same time points out that it has been compiled with a theological message. He states, ‘we must start by noting that although the books have an initial appearance of straightforward historical narrative, they do not regard chronology in the same way we do. This means, for example, that although Ezra is considered to precede Nehemiah, the events that are described in the book of Ezra actually overlap the events described in Nehemiah.’

The first major redaction, about 400 BC, mainly consisted of the integration of the Nehemiah Memoir with the Ezra Memoir, which involves writing down the events that describe. Nehemiah, frequently regarded as a later addition to the books, is considered to be part of the Nehemiah Memoir. This was written over a period of 15 years in two stages: the initial wall-building, and later insertions which concluded with the so-called ‘remained formula (Neh. 5:19; 13:14 etc.). The Ezra Memoir, in which Dr. Williamson concludes

that Neh. 8. originally stood between Ezra 7 - 8 and 9 - 10, was originally written by Ezra, and the events it records covered a period of just one year.

It is also found that Ezra 1 - 6, describing the return from exile and rebuilding of the temple, are based for the most part on historical sources within the book, with the possible exception of the time of the second redaction of the book, about 300 BC. Some of the material, however, are defied as "typological accounts" rather than as historical records. Thus Ezra 3 is found to be "extremely stylized, for almost every turn parallels are drawn, either by phraseology or by content of the building of the first temple under Solomon." At most places, however, the integrity of the material is maintained, which was then reworked and reencoded by the compiler, as in the case of Neh. 9.

One most helpful parts of the commentary is the extensive Bibliography, notes, and cross-reference section of each sub-section being interpreted. This provides the most useful starting point for any further study of these books, or for the time of the restoration in general.

The book is well supported by Notes on the Hebrew text containing significant alternative readings and frequently supplying new insights into the meanings of difficult words and phrases. For example, the phrase in Neh 4:15 (English text) is helpfully discussed in some detail: 'the Dwelling Place of God, or, rather, the temple building, that ‘Nehemianah the governor’ is removed from the text at Neh. 8:9 on linguistic, theological and literary grounds.

Detailed discussion of the Hebrew text, however, does not mean that the commentary will confuse those without a knowledge of Hebrew, for translation of Hebrew script is always provided and the arguments are easy to follow.

The Form/Structure/Setting section of each passage surveys and appraises current interpretations, and frequently offers new ones. He argues, for instance, that the name of the prophet of Ezra, Neh. 9. Dr. Williamson concludes that the author has woven several traditions into the book of Ezra. ‘It is virtually certain that the conclusion of these two sections of 2 Kings 22:1-23:20, 2 Kings 23:21-25:21, could be that “Garun’ would be too much of its forcefulness’. This introductory section is followed by a detailed Commentary on almost every verse of the book.

The Explanation clearly expresses the theological meaning of each section. Each section is treated as a whole, showing its relevance for our own time. However, some difficulties, like the issue of the divinities in Ezra 9-10, are resolved more on a pragmatic basis (the lesser of two evils) than a theological
the gospel is more than a community catechism, and we have to interpret it in terms of salvation history (pp. 126ff.). The second lesson is that there is no way out of this problem and does not fit in with the Scriptures as a whole (p. 127). The other possibilities mentioned above do not satisfy him either. So Carson decides in favour of an interpreter's interpretation in terms of salvation history, with the kingdom of God as the starting-point (pp. 127ff.). This means for him that the Sermon on the Mount has to be seen Christologically, pointing to Jesus as the one who fulfills it. This interpretation allows for the unity of Old and New Testaments, of Matthew and Paul, of Palestinian Jewish Christians and of Pauline Gentiles (p. 214). The NT and the two Testaments together can be interpreted as a unity if we follow Carson.

After the Sermon on the Mount the comparison between Jesus and the Law continues until its close. Carson follows his path consistently in the following chapters, i.e. he interprets them in the light of salvation history and Christology, and combines this with his interest in historicity.

Let us start by examining the outline. 'The kingdom' is also part of the hearing of the third and fourth sections and of the second half of the fifth main section. It is a theme followed through to Matthew 28:16-20, 'The Risen Messiah and His Disciples'. Let us have a look at the conclusion of the commentary. Carson talks about 'historical reminiscence' used by Matthew in 28:16-17 (p. 394). Carson's interpretation of Matthew 28:18 is continuous with the view of the authority of the Risen One and the earthly Jesus in his ministry (p. 394). Disagreeing with Hill, Carson asserts the authenticity of the reference in all of Matthew's use of the word (pp. 396f.). In the same way he defends the authentic- ity of the reference to the Trinity in Matthew 28:19, which he, with D. Wenthem, traces back to Jesus (p. 398). On the last page Carson writes: 'The revelation of Jesus as Messiah at this late stage in salvation history brings the fulfillment of everything to which the OT Scriptures pointed and consti- tutes their fulfillment, and thus, as a whole, the general, or in this case necessarily on Jesus' (p. 599). This masterly commentary is notable for its discussion of historical issues, of salvation history and of Christology.

3. France

Finally, let us have a look at the commentary of Richard T. France on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is in the series of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries and was published in 1985. France has only 410 pages for his commentary on the whole gospel. This does not allow him to go into high detail and draws on the commentary of Carson. France has to remember that the purpose of the whole Tyndale series of commentaries is to bring out the overall meaning of the text. He has to discuss the text in this major whole, and then to compare the text with the other two sections.

France is also convinced of the historicity of the miracles.

France is also convinced of the historicity of the miracles. One reflection of this conviction is his ability to accound for the disaster of the Babylonian exile. The New Testament does not have to reinterpret it as an artificial construction of the later community.

The reader will be very grateful for the careful and down-to-earth approach France takes on many questions that cause problems in the Christian community. He says, for instance, that the Levites who were to be the priests of Jesus' tribe were not under Levitical authority, but peace to the author of the commentary, there are of course many points where the reader would have liked a more detailed exposition (e.g. on 1:17 or 23:39).

Towards the end of the commentary France's convictions about the importance of the Pauline writings are evident. France concludes that Jesus speaks to the disciples after his resurrection, and gives them the Great Commission referring to God the Father as 'our God' (pp. 412f.). Whether Carson nor France reflects on the significance of the order 'baptizing' and 'teaching' in 28:19. The commentary ends pointing to the glory of Jesus Christ: 'That the risen Lord can now make such a promise (in 28:20) as God made to his people in the past brings the Gospel's portrait of Jesus ... to a spiritual climax' (p. 416).

Although he writes independently of Carson and at a different level, France agrees with Carson in emphasizing the same three important things: salvation history, Christology, and the interpreter's opinion is no accident, but by law, in the first section of a logical exegesis, at least in NT studies. Despite its brevity, France provides the reader with an excellent commentary.


In R. Brockhaus (Theologische Verlagsgemeinschaft).

We are grateful for the help of Marie-Louise Rood in the translating of this article.

A further review of France's commentary in the book review section (below).

Book reviews


The commentary does not come into the text in its present form, and at the same time points out that it has been composed with a theological message. He states: 'We must start by noting that although the books have an initial appearance of straightforward historical narrative, they do not regard chronology in the same way we do. This means, for example, that although Ezra is considered to precede Nehemiah, the order is not always followed in the text. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah usually follow each other in the order of their composition.'

The first major redaction, about 400 BC, mainly consisted of the addition of Nehemiah to the Book of Ezra. This was written shortly before (or after) the events described. In the Book of Nehemiah, the author frequently referred to this as a later addition to the books, is considered to be a part of the Book of Nehemiah. This is written over a period of 15 years in two stages: the initial wall-building, and later insertions which concluded with the so-called "reformers' formula" (Neh. 5:19; 13:14 etc.). The Ezra Memoir, in which Dr Williamson concludes that Neh. 8 originally stood between Ezra 7 - 8 and 9 - 10, was originally written by Ezra, and the events it records covered a period of just one year.

It is also found that Ezra 1 - 6, describing the return from exile and rebuilding of the temple, are based on the most important historical sources in the latest years of the time of the second redaction of the books, about 370 BC.

Some parts of the books are based on 'typological accounts' rather than as historical records. Thus Ezra 3 is found to be 'extremely stylised, for almost every turn parallel is drawn, either by phrase or by context, to content of the building of the first temple under Solomon'. At most places, however, the integrity of these memories does not seem to have been reworked or recycled by the compiler, as in the case of Neh. 9.

One of the most helpful parts of the commentary is the extensive Bibliography, nothing less than enough material to justify each sub-section being interpreted. This provides the most useful starting point for any further study of these books, or for the time of the restoration in general.

The volume is supported by Notes on the Hebrew text containing significant alternative readings and frequently supplying new insights into the meanings of difficult words and phrases. For example, the author states: "in the context of the debate, a combination of Ezra 4:4 and the translation of the opposite in Neh. 4:15 (English text) are helpful discussed in some detail. This is a typical feature of a conservative commentary, that 'Nehemiah's governor' is removed from the text at Neh. 8:9 on linguistic, theological and literary grounds.

Detailed discussion of the Hebrew text, however, does not mean that the commentary will confuse those who do not have a knowledge of Hebrew, for translation of Hebrew script is always provided and the arguments are easy to follow.

The Form/Structure/Setting section of each passage surveys and appraises current interpretations, and frequently offers new ones. For example, the author states: "in the context of the debate, a combination of Ezra 4:4 and the translation of the opposite in Neh. 4:15 (English text) are helpful discussed in some detail. This is a typical feature of a conservative commentary, that 'Nehemiah's governor' is removed from the text at Neh. 8:9 on linguistic, theological and literary grounds.

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The Form/Structure/Setting section of each passage surveys and appraises current interpretations, and frequently offers new ones.
one, but NT teaching and ethical deliberation is given for modern interpretation.


To produce a commentary on an OT book from a Christian perspective is one of the most formidable tasks of theological writing. The editors of the International Theological Commentary, therefore, are to be applauded for their declared aim, "to develop the theological significance of the OT and, secondly, to emphasize the relevance of each book for the life of the Church." Though Nahum, Obadiah, and Esther are not major books of the OT through which to make such attempts, yet each book in its own way involves an interplay between the OT and the Church, how, and why should people of God live when subject to the domination of an unfriendly political power?

Two of these commentaries have approached their task in very different ways. Coggins, who teaches at King's College, London, has written on Nahum and Obadiah in the traditional mould. In many ways it is a most useful commentary, whose main strength is a carefree and judicious verse-by-verse exegesis. There is a special concern for the historical context, and to translate the text is generally unavoidable. One is also encouraged to Nahum and Obadiah as books of war, and Nahum as a prophet of the terrible, not a prophet of the light rather than being treated as examples of false prophets, as is sometimes alleged.

Obadiah, however, is more persuaded of the literary rather than historical merits of both prophets, and those who look for precise historical and geographical data will be disappointed. The theological contribution is also less satisfying than one might have been able to expect from an editor who has been careful for the emphasis on the prophetic theological tradition, a consistent Christian approach must surely give more attention to the theological Gilead of Nahum and Obadiah. The author is well aware that some issues of the 7th and 6th centuries BC are still very much live today, but he inculcates a detailed knowledge of Obadiah's work that can match. The non-technical character of the bulk of the book will increase its value for many readers who are studying the text today. They will find, for example, much stimulus in Obadiah's work to understand the nature of God and the justice of God. Obadiah's work is thus characterized throughout not by credibility, but by a consistently appropriate respect for the text.


This is a very useful commentary, a comprehensive and lucid treatment of Nahum and Obadiah, and Esther. The commentary is written by F.J. Watson, who is a well-known commentator and a leading figure in the Church of England. The commentary is well-organized and easy to follow, providing a clear and concise overview of the texts.


This excellent new commentary, replacing the 1961 commentary of R. V. G. Tasker, admirably accomplishes the aim of the new series as articulated by the general editor, Leon Morris, and is a model of what a concise exegetical commentary should be.

In a fine section devoted to introductory matters, about 30 pages cover the Guthrie-Habermünd book, and a few of the 300 pages of chapters of the book's analysis. It is an exceptional value in Coggins' exegetical foundation, which will be useful to anyone who wants to know about the OT. However, recent studies of Nahum and the Gilead, not mentioned in this work, would provide more reliable and up-to-date information.

Martin J. Selman, Spurgeon's College, London.

To produce a commentary on an OT book from a Christian perspective is one of the most challenging tasks in systematic theology. The editors of the International Theological Commentary, therefore, are to be applauded for their declared aim, 'first, to develop the theological significance of the OT and, second, to emphasize the relevance of each book for the life of the Church.' Though Nahum, Obadiah, and Esther are not the most famous books of the OT through which to make such attempts, yet each book in its own way notes an aspect of the human condition that matters to people: how should the people of God live when subject to the domination of an unjustified political power?

These two commentators have approached their task in two very different ways. Coggins, who teaches at King's College, London, has written on Nahum and Obadiah in the traditional mould. In many ways it is a most useful commentary, whose major strength is a carefull and judicious verse-by-verse exegesis. There is a special concern for the signification of the text for today and the commentary is generally welcoming. One is also encouraged that Nahum and Obadiah are used in the church throughout the year and that the life of the Church is seen as lived out in the text of these books.

On the other hand, Coggins is more persuaded of the literary rather than historical merits of both prophets, and those who look for precise historical and geographical data will be disappointed. The theological contribution is also less satisfying than one might have been led to believe by the title. Indeed, the exegesis is often less helpful for the emphasis on the prophetic theological tradition, a consistent Christian approach must surely give more weight to the theological attention to the context of the author's life. It is to be noted, however, that some issues of the 7th and 6th centuries BC are still the subject of lively today. For example, when one accepts the common predictions of judgment and the call to true repentance, it is difficult to argue that the reader will be given any real guide to interpretation. For example, while one accepts that the prophetic message of judgment supports neither an exclusive religious tolerance nor a rigid dogmatism of any kind, Christian religion, one looks for clearer principles by which we may recognize the judgement of God. This is not the commentary to discover that the whole question of biblical relevance in far more urgent than appears at first.

The contribution of Esther is neither scholarly and limited in scope. The introduction particularly is confusing on various historical and literary issues, and reads more like a hastily assembled collection of short notes. The commentary itself is unremarkable, often repetitive, and even, at times, from a perspective of religious interpretation of the Hebrew text but in accepting the minority view that the Persian king was Artaxerxes I rather than Xerxes. The author, however, seems to show greater interest in Jewish matters than in "the life of the Church."

There is a curious imbalance in this volume. Four chapters of Nahum and Obadiah receive 102 pages, but 38 pages cover all ten chapters of Esther. The book's choice of value lies in Coggins' exegetical foundation, which will be useful to anyone who wants to study the Esther. However, the recent commentaries of Baldwin and Clines, not mentioned in this work, would seem to provide more reliable

Martin J. Selman, Spurgeon's College, London.


It is a pleasure to welcome a book which fills a glaring gap. The lack, prior to this work by the doyen of British Calvin scholars, of a study of such a fundamental aspect of his thought (and one that has strict English translation) of so distinguished a commentator as John Calvin is truly remarkable. As Calvin studies also for a second reason, in that, 'like an ice-breaker opening a frozen channel of religious thought' he has shown the way for so much terrain awaiting further exploration. There is scope for many a Ph.D. in this vast territory.

Parker's earlier work on Calvin's New Testament Commentaries will be well advised to read carefully his historical work and then to refer to the cross references between the two books. They are considerable. Dr Parker's concern here is largely expository, with four chapters dealing rather with the relation between the Testaments, and three with the application of Calvin's Commentaries. The first chapter alone deals with more technical matters, presenting a very useful account of Calvin's three forms of OT exposition - sermons, lectures and commentaries. Only in this chapter does the writer make any attempt of understanding the relationship between the oral and written (printed) form, and between Calvin's only three commentaries proper (on Psalms, his Harvard-Deuteronomy, Joshua, and John) and his commentaries and lectures. All students of Calvin will learn a good deal from this chapter.

The remaining four chapters, which deal only with the lectures and commentaries (the two being normally, if loosely, grouped together), tackle more familiar subjects. Parker has some deft touch of hand, but one is left with the conclusion that Calvin's works with which few can match. The non-technical character of the bulk of the book will increase its value for their readers.

One of the major reasons that Calvin's work remains unexplored today. They will find, for example, much stimulus in Calvin's presentation of the eschatological themes of the book. The method of exposition is primarily historical, as in fact much more than a harmony.

The commentary, as one would expect, is a telling one. He is particularly interested in some of the aspects of the text of Parker's interpretation of the Commentaries. The reviewer may be advised to refer to his own notes on the minor of the Moabite commentary in Feuerz. Journ. of Biblical Literature, 96 (1977), 63-70 and compare to see the advantages and disadvantages of his views (63-35). But one can say with much more confidence that many a commentator of the sixteenth century (the age of the Reformation) has been able to guide the readers with the help of Karel Bart, who once avowed, in a letter quoted by Parker, 'I could gladly and profitably set myself down and spend my life in the study of the Bible.'

D. F. Wright, New College, Edinburgh.


This excellent new commentary, replacing the 1961 commentary of R. V. G. Tasker, admirably accomplishes the aim of the new series as articulated by the general editor, Leon Morris, and is a model of what a concise exegetical commentary should be.

In a fine section devoted to introductory matters, about 50 pages are devoted to the main ideas and cautions that are not only the origin of the gospel but also to the theological distinctive. All of the chapters are drawn from the long tradition of Matthew scholarship. Indeed, despite its non-technological nature and the limitations of space, which allow only occasional reference to any other source, this is a very successful and a logistic centre commentary is clearly based on scholarship of a high calibre.

The first two chapters deal admirably with the subject of the historical setting of Matthew 1-11. Matthew probably had a major role in the origin of the gospel. He
him to his execution march to Jerusalem. In this context 'everything' he had (14:35) is more than the discipline his bank balance; in the context of the extreme situation before him and in the context of the limitless sacrifice Luke's point for his readers has nothing to do with an ideal of personal freedom or of individual rights but with a moral ideal that transcends any extreme form, but that at any time it might.

The pericope of the rich ruler (16:18-30) is a typical in its demand too. That is the case in the sense of freedom from the yoke of the law (cf. 29:30), where a disciple who has left all for the sake of the kingdom of God is given the kingdom. Luke, however, is not interested in this as well as eternal life, and from the Zachaeus story (19:8, where Zacchaeus too is given the kingdom, where life and eternal life appear in the form of yet another landmark in the prestigious life of this figure) a way is opened that could possibly lead to a conflict of interest in the Faith. And from the Hefousis, a series which is distinguishing itself as perhaps the most prominent German outlet for dissertations and essays of relatively recent years, a few questions are frequently asked that show how incomplete the occupation of a gender is with the academic faith we could accomplish as effectivity.

But, it is useless to ask whether Luke has specialized in the question of riches and poverty to the point where they have become mere cynosures for different types of existential relation to the gospel (a danger not successfully circumvented by, e.g., L. T. Johnson). In chapter 4 he gives a good exegesis of Luke's warnings concerning greed (see especially his treatment of the parable of the rich fool (12:16-21)); and he nicely saves Lk 12:33-34 from the banality of teaching that word is psychologically damaging. The same holds for the first time reference to the parable of the dishonest steward (16:1-15). This parable is true due to the persecution that he should persist in disciplship, for the harassed and oppressed... Luke clearly shows that the Father will provide. Indeed, the disciple need not save for the rainy day, but may without worry give generously, for as he does so he will surely receive, and that's what the Father means when he says God's blissful kingdom is near, (Lk 12:33), so available now, not merely future eschatological joy. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus which is emphasized that the follower of Jesus is not to shun the 'mammon of this world'. For this reason the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus is used to help those who are in an outrage against the Law and the Prophets which are fulfilled in the gospel. Jesus' ethic in Luke is thus portrayed as an ethic of anachronistic magnanimity. If Jesus is authentic, then, Beyer concludes that Jesus did anticipate his own 'omotic resurrection', and that the post-Lazarus parables and sayings are accompanied by divine abandonment and judgment. Subsequently God would vindicate him; both rejection and exaltation were equally involved. The result of the Holy Spirit's work would be views concerning resurrection and the post mortem destiny of God's people. The division of the church was a metaphorical detail, invariably arguing for a Palestinian Jewish, Christian, pre-Markan origin of the triple tradition material and for a development of the triple tradition in the churches of God's blessed people. This could lead to no more significant variations in those two gospels. This kind of labour and consideration of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an unanswerable argument in favor of an authentic acclimation of the postmen of God's salvation is of this age, but not of the age to come. John 12:34-40. A much shorter section then considers the explicit resurrection predictions. These include the three relatively detailed statements in Mt 8:33 par.; 9:31 par.; 10:33-34 par., as well as the briefier references in Mt 9:9 and 14:27-28. The third concluding part very briefly examined the correlation, background and thematic integration of these various sayings into the wider message of Jesus.

The book falls into three parts of unequal length. More than half of the book's total number of chapters is dedicated to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:14-20) which includes Jesus' promise not to eat of the fruit of the vines anew until he eat it in God's kingdom (Mt 14:25 par., his references to the establishment of the new temple in Jerusalem (Lk 19:28-40), the time in which he must be baptized (Mt 10:14 par.; Lk 12:50 and the hour which was to come upon him (Lk 14:41 par.; Lk 23:28), his citation of the cornerstone passage (Ps 118:22) at the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; and the statement of the Christian's mission concerning the sign of Jesus (Mt 12:38-40 par.). A much shorter section then considers the explicit resurrection predictions. These include the three relatively detailed statements in Mt 8:33 par.; 9:31 par.; 10:33-34 par., as well as the briefier references in Mt 9:9 and 14:27-28. The third concluding part very briefly examined the correlation, background and thematic integration of these various sayings into the wider message of Jesus.

Carley L. Williams, Denver Seminary, Colorado, USA.


My personal indebtedness to John Robinson. Let me begin by saying that he has been one of the most influential teachers of the New Testament in recent years. The entire range of his work is significant and important. In John Robinson I have found a person who is not only knowledgeable and skilled in his field, but also someone who is a model of what a Christian scholar should be. His insights into the New Testament are profound, and his interpretations are always grounded in a deep respect for the text.

In the context of my own work, I have been particularly influenced by Robinson's emphasis on the centrality of the Johannine tradition. His work on the Gospel of John has been particularly significant, and has shaped the way I think about this important text.

One of the key issues Robinson addresses is the question of the priority of John's Gospel. He argues that John's Gospel should be considered the earliest of the four canonical Gospels, and that it is likely that the other three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are derivative in some way from John's.

This is an important claim, and one that has been widely debated. However, I believe that Robinson's arguments are compelling. He points out that John's Gospel contains a number of features that are not found in the other three Gospels, and that these features are consistent with an early date for the Gospel. For example, the use of "the Word" as a title for Jesus is unique to John's Gospel, and this title is often interpreted as a reference to a pre-existent Christ. Robinson argues that this suggests that John was writing at a time when the concept of the pre-existent Christ was already well established in Jewish and Hellenistic circles.

Robinson also argues that the Gospel of John is characterized by a distinctive theology that is not found in the other three Gospels. For example, the concept of the Logos, or Word, which is central to John's theology, is not found in the other Gospels. Robinson argues that this suggests that John was writing at a time when the concept of the Logos was already well developed in other Jewish and Hellenistic circles.

In conclusion, I believe that Robinson's arguments for the priority of John's Gospel are compelling. His work is rigorous and well-supported, and his insights into the Gospel of John are particularly insightful. I highly recommend his work to anyone interested in the New Testament.
standard reference for all studies of John.
Robertson's commentary on John's gospel is worth reading and lengthy.
But he puts himself into all that he writes; and, even of the facts
footnotes with their ample quotations might have been somewhat
rewritten in a more concise style. He is a master of
comments and criticisms. The volume as a whole is beautifully
accurately produced, and Chip Couldey's editorship has
front of the dust-cover is a picture of the beloved disciple. It is a detail
from the Giotto crucifix in the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella,
Florence. It is a fitting adornment for a book of John,
finishing his final book: John reflectively gazing at another.
No doubt, there are some minor editorial errors.
their lines are altogether easier, and another sight is dawning upon them.

Stephan S. Smalley, Coventry Cathedral.

Stephan S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John (Word Bible Commentary

Judith Lieu, The Second and Third Epistles of John: History
and Background (T & T. Clark, 1986), x + 264 pp., £12.95.

The publication of R. E. Brown's Anchor Bible commentary on 1 - 3 John — all 400 pages of it — might be thought to put an end to all further scholarly commentary on the epistles for some time to come.
Students, however, will welcome this new contribution by a
conservative scholar, partly because it says everything essential in
(exactly) what is needed, but also because it is at the same time
reliable and scholarly. Dr Smalley argues that the letters are to be
seen as the fruit of a Jewish group which questioned the full divinity of Jesus, and (b) a Hellenistic group which questioned his full humanity. The letters are written to deal with the growing tendency to deny Christ's humanity and to
reassert the true Christ teaching enshrined in the gospel.
The volume contains six comprehensive chapters, and three
sections of key secondary writers, which display the writer's familiarity with Johannine scholarship and his use of the latest journals, which are helpful in showing what certain readings are preferred to others; (4) a discussion of 'Form/Structure/Setting' which places the section in its ancient context and presents its own form and structure, which gives a detailed discussion of the Greek text; and (5) 'Explanations', which attempts to understand the background of some of the key words.


G. S. Millar, The Second and Third Epistles of John (Westminster

Dr Smalley's treatment is lucid, thorough and judicious, and tackles the exegetical problems in an exemplary fashion, setting out the various options and weighing them on the basis of the evidence, which gives a detailed discussion of the Greek text; and (5) 'Explanations', which attempts to understand the background of some of the key words.

I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen.

A. E. Harvey (ed.), Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study
(London: SPCK, 1985), 144 pp., £4.95.


J. D. Derrrers essay, 'Taking up the Cross and Turning the Church Right Side Up', offers a challenging, practical treatment of the New Testament.

The book is a valuable resource for students of the New Testament, and it is highly recommended.

Olive O'Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for

The importance of this book lies in the correctives it provides to two equally erroneous Christian approaches to ethics. The one is the pseudo 'immanent' approach as an essentially 'spiritual' phenomenon has obliged them to neglect ethical reasoning and the other is the 'legalistic' approach, which is sometimes included in ethical discussions (but not in the essays of the book). Others, disappointed by this apparent failure to address the world's problems, have taken refuge in 'natural law', a celebration of the essence of Christianity at the expense of the practical beliefs concerning the person and work of Christ.

Olive D'Onovan proceeds with his contention that 'Christian ethics must arise from a Christian theology' and that 'Christian realism rest upon a false dualism more proper to the Gnostic systems than to a Christianity which takes seriously the redeeming event of Jesus'.

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conservative scholar, partly because it says everything essential in (exactly) the
right order. It is in a form that is immediately attractive and readable. Dr Smalley argues that the letters are to be seen as a unit, based on a second-century Jewish group which questioned the full divinity of Jesus, and (b) a Hellenistic
church which questioned his full humanity. The letters are written to deal with the two problems. This

Dr Smalley's approach is to a priori, in the
sense of the original sections, bibliographies, which display the author's familiarity with Johannine scholarship.

The sections are very useful, and the notes, which are helpful in showing why certain readings are preferred to others, are a discussion of 'Form/Structure/Setting' which places the section in its

content and setting. This is a useful section, which gives a detailed discussion of the Greek text; and 'Exposition', which

Dr Smalley's treatment is lucid, thorough and judicious, and tackles the exegetical problems in an exemplary fashion, setting out the various options available to the interpreter, which can be included

A. E. Harvey (ed.), Alternative Approaches to New Testament
(London: SPCK, 1985), 144 pp., £4.95.

The book consists of seven uninitiated essays. M. Goulder, 'A House
Built on Sand', offers a perspicuous rejection of critical
approaches; he argues that the gospels are not apologetic
arguments for Q (in particular), and more generally of the methods by which scholars seek to identify which worst of a passage come from a 'synthetic tradition', and which (from a methodological point
of view) try to show that many so-called Mattheanisms are actually there in Q

This is a thorough and judicious study, and

John Drury, 'Mark 1:1-15: An Interpretation', attempts to give a

John Drury, 'Mark 1:1-15: An Interpretation', attempts to give a systematic
approach to the problem of the dynamic and the shape of this section.

Unfortunately the essay does not provide a clear elucidation of
structures and of the issue of how the narrative is

The essay is a clear and

John Riches and Alan Miller, 'Conceputal Change in the Synoptic
Tradition', begin with a commonplace of linguistic philology (even

more so of Semantics and Pragmatics), namely that
determination of the version is not a sufficient condition for

J. D. Derrrert offers an original essay on 'Taking up the Cross
and Turning the Cheek' in the light of recent psychological
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added. the inclusion of John Riches (above) and also A. E. Harvey and E. G. F. Dowd

Harvey's essay, 'Forty Strakes Give One Social: Aspects of Judaising and

the dangers of the Christian disciples who might come upon a Jew who converted to Christianity. He might not find it easy to explain to non-believers why he was a Jew, but it is

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Olive O'Donovan proceeds with his contention that 'Christian ethics must
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realm of ethics than a 'hypothetical' one. This book sets out to

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Theology and Ethics (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 284 pp., £14.95.
The renewed scholarly interest in justification, encouraged no doubt by ARB/C faith for thanksgiving, although it scarcely merits a topic of conversation at peak level. These essays may help to stimulate that interest. The Oak Hill faculty, past and present, to celebrate the college’s Golden Anniversary.

Each of the eight essays has its place, ranging from Butterworth’s ‘Justification as the Reformed Faith: Minister at Work and Literature for the Justified’ to Bray’s ‘Essay on ‘Justification and the Christian Mind’. Shakespeare is fascinating, and the only short essay available introduces a matter of subject. Carey brings us up to date on ‘Justification and Roman Catholic Theology’, following the earlier one, ‘Justification by Faith in the Roman Catholic Church’, in The Great Apologist (1980). The present essay includes a discussion of McGrath’s evaluation of King, and concludes, ‘we need not share the current fashion of disparaging the doctrine of justification’. There is an agreement between some Protestant and some Roman Catholic theologians.

However, for this reviewer these three essays were notable: Packer’s ‘Justification in Protestant Theology’ gives in 18 pages a remarkably lucid and new humanist exposition of the doctrine. Such clear definitions of the original sin and of justification by faith in the New Testament are rare. It is hard to imagine a clearer condemnation of the historical and philosophical accuracy the way the doctrine has been distorted. Atkinson’s ‘Justification is God’s Grace’ is full of insights into the language of the doctrine. It is exquisitely drawn out. If you have listened to a bad exposition of the doctrine of justification you have a good reason to be skeptical; but I refer you to this essay. If you have done that, you will be rewarded.

In the same way, Stott’s ‘Morgan’s Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament’. It is worth buying the book for this stimulating essay alone. Beginning with ‘Righteousness in Matthew’ before moving on to the recognition of ‘Righteousness in the Ephesian’ and then returning to Christ, and the meaning of faith really form an exposition of Galatians. The thinking is fresh and the writing is crisp. An odd statement on p. 122, ‘The New Testament concept of the final judge’, which I think might be an important issue to be taken seriously. The book is highly recommended. It is an excellent resource to be used in the classroom. It should not prejudice the reader against the essays as a whole. Altogether, a useful collection.

Troy Baker, Christ Church, Beckenham.


For many Christians, the question of healing and the miracles of God is of great concern.

It is impossible to do justice in so little space to the breadth of this book, incorporating as it does studies on the facts of biblical healing and the various methods of explaining these facts. This book is an excellent resource to be used in the classroom. It should not prejudice the reader against the essays as a whole. Altogether, a useful collection.

Trevor Hart, Aberdeen.


It is clear that the relationship of Christ and Christianity to other


It is clear that the relationship of Christ and Christianity to other

faiths is a key contemporary debate for theology as well as for

misology. We therefore welcome this further contribution from the prize winning author of Understanding Particularly of Islam and the Jewish World. Although the contents of this book are primarily theological, the reader will detect slightly more empathy in those contexts, especially with Buddhism in its Theravada form. He does, however, sidestep the ever increasing complexity of the various religions of the world. This is understandable, since Craig’s book is primarily a brief introduction to the way that the faith of Christ and Christianity is related to the religions of the world. It is not a comprehensive treatment of the topic of comparative religions or a detailed analysis of the relationship of Christianity to other religions. It is a brief introduction to the topic of comparative religions and Christianity.

Dr Craig is not directly addressing the burning theological issues of our time. His book is a rather basic attempt to see vital points of inter-relation and possible areas for significant debate between Christianity and other religions. It is a useful tool for the layman, particularly for the one who is evangelically not well informed. His book is a book for the layman, particularly for the one who is evangelically not well informed. His book is a book for the layman, particularly for the one who is evangelically not well informed.

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before us in judgment as well as grace (here, as elsewhere, we see that the influence of Burt is not limited to its fact content of material discourse in small print). The responsibility which this knowledge imposes upon us, the Church, is that of being a prophetic voice in the world, of continually and publicly setting before the people of God the true meaning of their covenant. Therefore, we must have a clear sense of moral order from the perspective of man's participation in the new creation. So far as we can see, this is not the case. Thus while O'Donnell is equal to our point of view and more intelligent than we are, it is equally a case of error, because God's word is the final authority in matters of faith and practice.


I. I. Packer, 'Unto This Last', in Packer, Reformation Theology, 1980.

Having mentioned the influence of O'Donnell's work in this manner, let us turn to the question of the relationship between the Church and the state. This is the central theme of the present chapter. The Church is the Body of Christ, the spiritual community of all believers, and its mission is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples of all nations. The Church is not a political entity, but it must be present in the political arena, engaged in the affairs of the world, and it must exercise its influence in order to bring about the transformation of society. The Church's role is to be a prophetic voice in the world, to speak the truth to power, and to resist the forces of evil and oppression. The Church must be willing to sacrifice its own interests in order to serve the interests of the kingdom of God. The Church must be willing to engage in political action, to participate in the political process, and to use its influence to bring about just and righteousness. The Church must be willing to challenge the status quo, to resist the powers of this world, and to seek to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

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doctrine any bearing on the Christian desire for the good of society and neighbour? What salvation can there be if there is no self? Christ is not a spirit, but an act. "God is a knowledge," writes C. S. Lewis in "The Problem of Pain," and "One can be a Christian without being religious, and one can be religious without being a Christian," he adds.

Chapter 10 deals with the call to interpretation especially of the Bible, the Church, the person of Jesus, the Cross, the Christian doctrine of God and the Church. Chapter 11 discusses first and foremost the nature of Jesus and God and the social and ethical implications of their birth and death.

As for the sacraments themselves, how little they have been consecrated by historical and cultural processes, first and foremost the systems of theology and church history, their hypocrisy and their observance. As often as we wash before prayer, posture in prayer, the qiblah toward Mecca, pilgrimage, and Ramadan – all these and much more are exercises of the sheer will and material and cultural conventions, and their style demands conception. It may not give the answers we are looking for, but it will stretch us and stimulate us with perceptive questions.

Martin Goldsmith, All Nations Christian College, Ware.


I am very grateful for this revised, enlarged edition of Bishop Craig's book first published in 1966. It concludes both editions with words which will speak to every generation: "We who, in our generation, listen to the first and last call of the minaret from the muezin over Gethsemane. There shall we understand what our eyes have not seen and how and why (p. 126). It is not surprising, therefore, that Craig, after describing Islam at the beginning of its new century (1976) in change and continuity and having presented a sympathetic and thought-provoking account of Muslim beliefs and practices, discusses how and why. He notes that Islam is the most important singular fact of the new century" (p. 8). However, he does not ignore the folk Islam of the ordinary, often in a way that is both prayerful and prescriptive. He describes as a double assurance the blessing of the holy man corroborating the skills of the minister. As Craig observes, "a man can believe a single, supreme, sovereign Creator-God but describe him differently (p. 30).

In Part II of his book Craig asks what the minaret says to the Muslim. He argues that the minaret belongs to the Islamic community. It is one supreme, sovereign Creator-God but describe him differently (p. 30).

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The historical Peter has faced hard badly in scholarship. The references to him in the NT hardly amount to a connected narrative even of a part of his career, and their historical validity can be questioned by a growing number of scholars. Dr Thiede's exhaustively-hardware lists less than half a dozen books on Peter in his bibliography. In the last ten years, however, a number of new books, theologically critical, have appeared, which offers a thorough study of the career of Peter, based on first-hand acquaintance with the scholarly literature, is much to be welcomed.

What we are offered here is a careful reconstruction of all that can be deduced from the NT about the career of Peter, and the NT evidence through each incident in which he is involved. He compares the gospel accounts, which add little to the information already available, and the traditions which they offer to a more complete picture. Interesting light is shed at various points, but this is the discussion of Peter as character, not as disciple. We are asked to consider who Peter might be from the tradition. He claims that it would be Peter from whom Paul got his knowledge of Jesus in Gal. 1:18. Thiede does not accept the hypothesis of the apostle Peter as author of the Gospel of Mark, which I consider is right to call those who make easy assumptions about inauthenticity and authenticity to provide arguments for their positions. If he is correct, the history behind the NT is going to be undervalued. It is imperative, therefore, to develop a more informed and critical understanding of the historical tradition, which will be even more apparent in English and be expected to substitute for palaeographers who have no particular axe to grind.

I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen.


Professor Grant's latest book is one of the first in a promising new series of textbooks for theological students. It is a comprehensive, up-to-date theological research more readily accessible to the student and teacher of modern theological education. "The book is an attempt to confine the church period, with a reputation for clear and attractive writing which is fully maintained in the present volume. It is an attractive book of which the first deals with the relationship between the early Christians, and especially the apostles, and the Greek-Roman world and in which the nature of popular paganism, whilst the third book itself with basic doctrines and the origins of Christian theology, is written for people of interest for most people will be the detailed discussion of paganism, which includes many important aspects of the Christian world, like the role played by paganism in the life of Jesus. Here Professor Grant takes what amounts to a sociological approach to the Greek-Roman world, and the result is quite fascinating. Many students who perhaps have only a vague knowledge of Greek-Roman paganism will find appreciation of this book an easy way to read and consult, thanks to a liberal use of sub-headings.
Chapter 12 deals with the call to interpretation especially of the Bible, the doctrine of Jesus, the Cross, the Christian doctrine of God and the Church. In this the call and the Church are interrelated. As for the sacraments themselves, how little they have been through the centuries and how much we have been overconcerned about them. Washing before prayer, posture in prayer, the oblation towards Mecca, pilgrimage, and Ramadan – all these and much more are examples of the surface materialism and ignorance which the Church needs. But it will stretch us and stimulate us with perceptive questions.

Martin Goldsmith, All Nations Christian College, Ware.


I am very grateful for this revised, enlarged edition of Bishop Craig’s book first published in 1956. He concludes both editions with words which will speak to every generation: ‘We who, in our generation, listen to the call of the mosque and to the minaret, have been taught to listen from the muzzar over Gethsemane. There we shall understand well what we want and what we hate, and why’ (p. 126). It is not surprising, therefore, that Craig, after describing Islam at the beginning of its new century (1970 in change and continuity and having presented a sympathetic and thought-provoking account of Muslim beliefs and practices, discusses how that and why. He notes that ‘The only thing that is truly religious in Islam is the one monotheistic belief one supreme, sovereign Creator-God but describes him differently (p. 36). Revelation is conceived of as a communication of the divine being, but only of the divine will. It is a revelation that, is of, love, of personality (p. 41). The Qur’an gives men enough knowledge to know what, and how, to behave. Islam begins towards the Hijrah in AD 622 when Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Mecca to Medina. At that point Muhammad decided that prophetship must be absolutely. The Muslim decision here is formative of all else in Islam. It was decided for community, for recognition of the laws and for the revelation of his message. The decision for the Coos – no conscious decision, no formative, no more inclusive – was the contrary decision’ (p. 45). In chapters 4 and 5 Craig discuss Prayer and Religious Life in Islamic and the Islamic Order for Society.

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The historical Peter has fired hardly in scholarship. The references to him in the NT hardly amount to a connected narrative even of a part of his career, and there are serious challenges to the traditional understandings. A new look at the life and career of Peter, who has dominated the attention of Christian writers since the early church, is indispensable to the understanding of the new Testament. This book, which has been translated into a number of languages, is a key contribution to an understanding of the historical Peter and his place in the early Christian church. The book is a comprehensive and balanced reassessment of the life and career of Peter, with a particular focus on his role as a leader in the early church.

Vivienne Stacey, I.L.E.S.


It is heartwarming and deeply encouraging to find that after a lifetime of Christian work as missionary in India, as missiologist in England and as a writer and teacher in the USA, Leslie Newbigin is still thinking fresh thoughts, breaking new ground, making us rethink what we have been doing all these years. His books have become cornerstones in the teaching of missiology and have been treasured by many. In this new volume he continues his work with the same insight and profundity. He has renewed the discussion of mission and the place of the church in the world. He has deepened our understanding of the nature of paganism, and the qualities that make a good Christian. He has asked questions which are important for all Christians.

Writing on the call to retrieval, Craig pithily sums up the situation. ‘The retrieval is spiritual. It aims not to have the map more Christian, but to have the map more Christian. It is an act of opening pictures and seeing the Christ. Jesus, Craig notes that the verses are less than the silence (p. 24).

Just as the good news has challenged other cultures, so now it must be challenged by the church. Newbigin posits that this requires a cultural, a social, and a psychological change in our understanding of the gospel. This change is not just about the materialism and ignorance of the church, but about the way we understand and use our resources. The retrieval is a call to re-evaluate and to think about how we use our resources. It is a call to think about how we use our resources in the world.

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Professor Grant’s latest book is one of the first in a promising new series of studies of the relationship between Christian theology and the Graeco-Roman world. This book is a detailed and scholarly study of the relationship between Christian theology and the Graeco-Roman world. It is a valuable and important contribution to the study of the relationship between Christian theology and the Graeco-Roman world, and the result is quite fascinating. Many students who perhaps have only a vague knowledge of Graeco-Roman pagan culture will find this book easy to read and understand, thanks to a liberal use of sub-headings.
The third part, which concerns itself with the philosophical challenge to Christianity and the church’s response to it, is less satisfactory than the first two. The attempt to conceptualize matters in a non-Christological framework is unsuited to the subject matter in the same way, and the author does not have the space to develop the issues adequately. The resultant partiality is likely to get confused among the names and theories which are put forward here in rapid succession. Particularly unsatisfactory is the impression, given towards the end, that Christian theology represented a compromising takeover of the pagan philosophical inheritance.

That the early Christians were influenced by the latter is hardly to be doubted, but Professor Grant’s analysis borders on syncretism and must, I think, be balanced by an awareness that Christians rejected the philosophers—and were in turn rejected by them! The hostility of the ancient world to the new faith is consistently played down, with the result that the final picture is distorted. On the other hand, Grant rejects the extreme liberalization of Harnack and Baucke, preferring to see the growth of Christian theology more in terms of a continuous, logical development than in terms of increasing corruption of the gospel.

The list of books for further reading, at the end, gives the impression that the first two parts have been more carefully thought out and researched than the third part, which may help to explain why it is unsatisfactory. Grant’s reliance on the general representation of J. N. D. Kelly’s classic studies must be followed by the student who reads this book, if an adequate picture of this particular theme is to be had.

Gerald Bray, Oak Hill College, London.


In his analysis and critique of modern Jewish research on Jesus, Hagner adds to the Judeo-Christian debate. Instead of following current trends and concentrating on issues common to both faiths, he takes an uncompromising evangelical Protestant view and brings into question the very value of the Jewish approach which seeks to show Jesus and his teaching as entirely Jewish.

In Chapters 1-2 Hagner develops the history of Jewish literature and attitude to Jesus. Two conclusions arise from this. First, the willingness of Judaism to reclaim Jesus reflects an improvement in Jewish-Christian relations. Secondly, the readiness to reclaim Jesus has not brought any fundamental change in accepting the teachings of the gospels.

In Chapters 3-6 Hagner analyses Jewish attitudes to various aspects of the teachings of Jesus, his ministers and his person. These include the ‘law’ and Jesus’ ‘claim’ of authority over it, particularly as the Jews are first and foremost the people of the law; the kingdom of God; its nature and the eschatological perspective at the heart of Jesus’ message, with its ethical teaching, of which various aspects are dealt with, particularly his teaching on love and its implications; Jesus’ religious teaching, which includes an examination of justice and grace at work, repeatedaton and prayer, God as father and the place of Jesus. In these chapters Hagner outlines the views of major Jewish scholars, the way they try to reclaim Jesus and his teaching for Rabbinic Judaism, and particularly the way in which the problem topics are dealt with. Their general attitude may be summed up by saying that all is good in the gospels is not new and can be found in Rabbinic Judaism, and what is new in Jesus’ ministry is either argued away as theological invention by the early church or concealed as a mistaken view developed by Jesus.

Hagner then deals with the persons of Jesus, assessing the categories into which Jewish scholarship attempts to place them (i.e. Pharisee, prophet, etc.). He then looks at the Christian titles of Jesus and Jewish reaction to them, showing that even if they could accept Jesus as Messiah, the Jewish understanding of this term would differ from the Christian understanding.

In the concluding chapter Hagner assesses the contribution the Jewish reclamation of Jesus has made in making Christians more aware of the Jewish context of the gospel, but concludes that this reclamation is an imperative because of the lack of desire to face the central message of the gospels, thereby concentrating merely on peripheral issues.

In three chapters Hagner deals with Pharisaism and the question of originality in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. The subject dealt with in the book are highly controversial and sensitive, but although Hagner’s stand and approach are challenging, he writes in a precise and constructive way.

Finally, Hagner shows how the emancipation opened the way for liberal Jewish scholars to try and reclaim Jesus. The return of the Jew to Israel and will, in bringing to the nation of Israel to reclaim Jesus not into Rabbinic Judaism but as Saviour.

John Woodhead, Jerusalem.


‘Sometimes, on a hundredth birthday, we may be rediscovered and people may look at us and read something about us, but a fortnight later they will no longer speak about people who are long since gone (extract from a sermon by Barth with reference to the centenary of Nietzsche’s birth, quoted on p. 11).

This little book was prepared in celebration of the Barthcentennial and, in the process of arranging selections of his writing under eight thematic headings (usually in chronological order), makes accessible various writings not previously available in English. The well-chosen extracts reveal again the humour, concern and humility that are typical of the man and (as always) little is lost in Geoffrey Bromiley’s lucid translation. Typical is the following extract from a sermon preached at Battle prison in 1962 on the text ‘My grace is sufficient for thee’.

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However, I sincerely hope that I will fulfill Bromiley’s expectation of providing some form of brief and accessible introduction to Barth’s thought for those with ‘neither the time nor perhaps the desire to plunge into his bulky output for themselves’ (p. viii). Indeed the extracts appear to have been chosen with the aim of demonstrating the breadth of Barth’s thought and the argument that Barth’s teaching is relevant to the main concerns of Christology and election which dominate the Church Dogmatics and from which all else derives. Probably the passage which gives the clearest indication of the main spring of Barth’s theological thought is an article entitled ‘The Great Yes’, prepared in 1959 for the Barmen works pp. 107f.

As a ‘reader’ and a celebration of the Barthcentennial this booklet will be a source of considerable delight to scholars already familiar with Barth’s thought. Nonetheless, while I for one am grateful for this little book, and for the précis and review of the Dogmatics previously provided by Bromiley, the need remains outstanding for a work that can truly introduce the theology of Karl Barth to the non-specialist reader.

John E. Calvin, London.

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Gospel Perspectives


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