October/November 1988

In this issue

Editorial: Evangelical and liberal theology

Hebrews and the anticipation of completion
Paul Ellingworth

Truth, myth and incarnation
Melvin Tinker

The alien according to the Torah
Georges Chawkat Moucarry

Recent commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles
W. Ward Gasque

Women and the kingdom of God: three recent books
Sally Alford

Five Christian books on AIDS
John Wilkinson

Book reviews

An international journal for theological students
75p
Vol. 14 No. 1
Editorial:
Evangelical and liberal theology

The most significant division in Christendom today is not the division between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but rather between what we may call ‘traditional Christian orthodoxy’ on the one hand and ‘liberalism’ on the other.

This important division is described and discussed in an excellent new book entitled Evangelical and liberal theological dialogue by David Edwards, former editor of the SCM Press, and John Stott, formerly of All Souls Church in London ( Hodder, 1985, £3.95). They discuss, among other things, the authority and nature of Scripture, the cross of Christ, the miracles of Jesus, the Bible and behaviour, and the gospel for the world.

They have much in common, but many of their disagreements are what one might expect: John Stott believes in an infallible Bible to which we must submit our thinking, whereas David Edwards thinks that we must distinguish in the Bible between what is true revelation of God and what is not. John Stott believes that in Christ’s death God was taking on himself the judgment for our sins, whereas David Edwards finds such an idea unacceptable. John Stott accepts the historicity of the biblical miracles, whereas David Edwards has grave doubts about many of them, including the virgin birth (though not the physical resurrection of Jesus). David Edwards believes that it may be right for some people to live as practising homosexuals, whereas John Stott does not. John Stott is more critical than David Edwards on the reality of judgment and on Christ as the sole way to salvation.

The book is not new in setting out such differing opinions. What is new is to find a well-known liberal and evangelical discussing their opinions in one volume, and in a very charitable and Christian way. The more usual procedure is for evangelical or conservative scholars to write books condemning liberalism and for liberals to write books blasting conservatism. This book is far more valuable than most of such works, because it is a dialogue not a monologue and because the two authors are such able and good representatives of their respective positions. Here we have a comparison of two well and strongly presented positions, not sniping by either side at the excesses of the other. It is a book that will be helpful to students, whether of evangelical or liberal position, both in (a) helping them to understand ‘the other side’ and (b) in clarifying their own positions.

It is a book which may also help readers of Themelios who come from an evangelical or conservative background and who are perplexed about how to react to the liberal theology that is dominant in many colleges and university departments. There are two opposite tendencies among evangelical theological students facing the challenge of liberalism. The first is to be thoroughly negative and suspicious towards it. Many Christian students come to theological or religious studies with warnings ringing in their ears about the dangers of liberal theology. ‘Beware,’ they are told, ‘of the false prophets in the theology department, who will subtly poison you.’ The other tendency is to be overly positive and uncritical, and to ignore its as far as they can, except for purposes of passing exams.

The second and opposite tendency among evangelical theological students is to welcome liberal theology uncritically. Such students keep their practical Christianity in one compartment and their academic theology in another. In their private prayers they continue to treat the Bible the Word of God, but in the lecture room they accept the very different views put forward by their teachers without seriously questioning them. The arguments seem plausible, and the theologians putting them forward seem good and often Christian people. The two-compartment approach usually works for a while, but sooner or later the simple evangelical faith of the past is consciously or unconsciously discarded and grown out.

What are we to say of these two contrary approaches? Simply, that neither is satisfactory. More specifically, we suggest that four things come out of a reading of Essentials.

(1) The issues at stake between evangelicalism and liberalism are serious and of the greatest importance, and should be treated accordingly. It is fashionable these days to treat theological disagreement (and indeed the whole question of truth) as something trivial. This is the case in ecclesiastical circles, which tend to become ever wider circles embracing not just different denominations but even different faiths. It is true also in some charismatic and evangelical circles where unity in spiritual experience is felt to make doctrinal differences unimportant. There is a good side to this. Some of the matters that divide Christians are trivial. It is disastrous to have fellow Christians in the same village worshiping and working in separated congregations because of disagreement over forms of ecclesiastical government.

But not all our divisions are of that sort. The sorts of issues that David Edwards and John Stott discuss are very important indeed. It does matter enormously whether we regard the Bible’s teaching in its entirety as God’s Word and whether we see Jesus as a fallible or infallible teacher. It does matter enormously whether we believe that you can come to God through other religions than that of Jesus, and whether we believe that people who do not have a Christian destiny is decided by their response to Jesus in this life, or whether there is a second chance beyond. It does matter whether we believe that practising homosexuality is always wrong or sometimes right.
Editorial:
Evangelical and liberal theology

The most significant division in Christendom today is not the division between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but rather between what we may call ‘traditional Christian orthodoxy’ on the one hand and ‘liberalism’ on the other. This important division is described and discussed in an excellent new book entitled Edith S. Williams, A liberal and evangelical dialogue by David Edwards, former editor of the SCM Press, and John Stott, formerly of All Souls Church in London (Hodder, 1980, 354pp., £5.95). They discuss, among other things, the authority and nature of Scripture, the cross of Christ, the miracles of Jesus, the Bible and behaviour, the gospel for the world.

They have much in common, but many of their disagreements are what one might expect: John Stott believes in an infallible Bible to which we must submit our thinking, whereas David Edwards thinks that we must distinguish in the Bible between what is true revelation of God and what is not. John Stott believes that in Christ’s death God was taking on himself the judgment for our sins, whereas David Edwards finds such an idea unacceptable. John Stott accepts the historicality of the biblical miracles, whereas David Edwards has grave doubts about many of them, including the virgin birth (though not the physical resurrection of Jesus). David Edwards believes that it may be right for some people to live as practising homosexuals, whereas John Stott does not. John Stott is more emphatic than David Edwards on the reality of judgment and on Christ as the sole way to salvation.

The book is not new in setting out such differing opinions. What is new is to find a well-known liberal and evangelical discussing their opinions in one volume and in a very charitable and Christian way. The more usual procedure is for evangelical or conservative scholars to write books condemning liberalism and for liberals to write books blasting conservatism. This book is far more valuable than most of such works, because it is a dialogue not a monologue and because the two authors are such able and good representatives of their respective positions. Here we have a comparison of two well and strongly presented positions, not sniping by either side at the excesses of the other. It is a book that will be helpful to students, whether of evangelical or liberal position, both in (a) helping them to understand ‘the other side’ and (b) in clarifying their own positions.

It is a book which may also help readers of Themelios to come from an evangelical or agnostic background and who are perplexed about how to react to the liberal theology that is dominant in many colleges and university departments. There are two opposing tendencies among evangelical theological students facing the challenge of liberalism. The first is to be thoroughly negative and suspicious towards it. Many Christian students come to theological or religious studies with warnings ringing in their ears about the dangers of liberal theology. ‘Beware’, they are told, ‘of the false prophets in the theology of those who will surely Psys you, but rather between what we may call “traditional Christian orthodoxy” on the one hand and “liberalism” on the other.’

The second and opposite tendency among evangelical theological students is to welcome liberal theology uncritically. Such students keep their practical Christianity in one compartment and their academic theology in another. In their private prayers they continue to treat the Bible as the Word of God, but in the lecture room they accept the very different views put forward by their teachers without seriously questioning them. The arguments seem plausible, and the theologians putting them forward seem good and often Christian people. The two-compartment approach usually works for a while, but sooner or later the simple evangelical faith of the past is consciously or unconsciously discarded and grown out of.

What are we to say of these two contrary approaches? Simply, that neither is satisfactory. More specifically, we suggest that four things come out of a reading of Essentials.

(1) The issues at stake between evangelicalism and liberalism are serious and of the greatest importance, and should be treated accordingly. It is fashionable these days to treat theological disagreement (and indeed the whole question of truth) as something trivial. This is the case in eccumenical circles, which tend to become ever wider circles embracing not just different denominations but even different faiths. It is true also in some charismatic and evangelical circles where unity in spiritual experience is felt to make doctrinal differences unimportant. There is a good side to this. Some of the matters that divide Christians are trivial. It is desirable to have followers of Christ living in the same village worshipping and working in separated congregations because of disagreement over forms of ecclesiastical government.

But not all our divisions are of that sort. The sorts of issues that David Edwards and John Stott discuss are very important indeed. It does matter enormously whether we regard the Bible’s teaching in its entirety as God’s Word and whether we see Jesus as a fallible or infallible teacher. It does matter enormously whether we believe you can come to God through other religions than that of Jesus, and whether we believe that people’s eternal destiny is decided by their response to Jesus in this life, or whether there is a second chance beyond. It does matter whether we believe that practising homosexuality is always wrong or sometimes right.
Such issues do matter, and as theological students we need to be aware that we are dealing with life and death issues, which cannot be lightly treated. Those who warn of false prophecy are right, even if it is not always easy to recognize it when we see it. Jesus spoke of spiritual conflict with Satan and of ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’, and there is every reason to think that Satan and his wolves are as active in our theological faculties today as they were in the first century. We must be on our guard, for the trials and temptations of this world, not just in subverting our morals but also in subverting our ideas and thinking. It is sadly true that theological students do sometimes fail the first love of Christ and the love of the Lord. There is a popular, but dangerous, notion around that discussing theology is a neutral academic exercise – an academic game to be enjoyed. But the early church fathers, whom we sometimes ridicule for their argumenation and theological niceties, were at least right in perceiving that theology and theological error matter, and that we are involved in a spiritual battle.

What that means is that we must approach our studies alert to the dangers and with much prayer, remembering that what we teach will be judged with the greatest strictness (Jas. 3:1).

Not that we need to be daunted by the great privilege to study and then to teach others about God’s life-giving and liberating Word.

(2) A second lesson to be learned from Essentials is not to be dismissive of (or without knowledge or understanding of) the position their. This has often been a fault on the liberal side: the evangelical position on Scripture and on other issues has regularly been ridiculed, caricatured or just ignored as if it were not worth thinking about. Despite the increasing strength of evangelical scholarship in recent years, evangelical theology is still not taken as a serious and well-founded alternative to the liberal theological battle lines for the liberals’ dismissal of evangelicalism is that evangelicals have often had silly ideas. But it is quite incorrect to ignore evangelicalism as a whole just because of its unhink- maverick fringe. If Essentials suggests that liberals are beginning to respect the seriousness of evangelical theology, which in its basic tenets has been the position of a vast number of sensitive and intelligent Christian thinkers throughout church history, then this is a very welcome trend.

But the fault has not just been on the liberal side. Evangelicals and conservatives have also tended to be dismissive of liberalism, again partly because of the excesses of some on the fringe of liberalism. They have seen liberals as false prophets, not without reason in some cases; but they have not both sufficiently engaged with the genuine and Christian concerns of many liberal theologians. Even if it is true that liberalism is false doctrine, it does not necessarily follow that all or most liberal theologians are maliciously trying to deceive; in many cases their views arise out of a genuine Christian concern to understand and to communicate the Christian gospel in our modern context, and their teaching is often a genuine attempt to explain and defend the gospel rather than to subvert it.

Therefore, the need has come to understand liberalism, to attempt to see things from their perspective, and to think about these issues from the point of view of a liberal theologian. This is not just to engage in a debate of ideas; it is to be able to communicate with the Christian community in our current context.

(3) That leads into a third lesson to be learned from Essentials, a lesson about humility. It is one of the least emphasized lessons of the book. We have been unwilling to admit our own mistakes and to question the traditions of our own political party. Theologians often fall into the same habit. We must speak of our own personal growth in understanding, and both question aspects of our respective traditions.

Such humility is important. Whether we like it or not, we are all mixed-up people in the sense that we all have some level of sinfulness. It is essential for any understanding in this. In our lives we will never have a complete or perfectly accurate understanding of God’s Word and his ways, which is why continuous prayerful study and listening is vital. It is important when we approach theological studies: we should approach them wanting to learn and to have our own mixed-upness exposed and shown for what it is. The characteristics of evangelical theological students that endears them least to their teachers is their apparent unwillingness to be challenged. Sometimes the real problem may be that the student is unwilling to believe what the teacher believes with good reason – but sometimes there is a wrong resistance to change and learning. We all need to cultivate a humble spirit and learn to have our ideas corrected and modified where they are wrong.

This also applies to our own theological tradition. Evangelicals, like others, bring to their studies a whole range of traditional opinions, whether on questions of criticism of Scripture, or several non-opinions on questions of interpretation (e.g. on the interpretation of Genesis or Revelation). Such traditions are not to be despised. They often represent the conclusions of genera- tions of able and godly interpreters, which we should be slow to abandon. Indeed many evangelical opinions have been the opinions of the majority of Christians throughout church history. The arrogance that ignores the work of past generations and prefers the latest modern theory must be firmly resisted; it is an insult to the work of the Holy Spirit in past generations. God has often been seen as a great historical scholar ideas are no more than fads which last for a while and then are seen to be insubstantial (e.g. the tendency to dismiss John’s gospel as theological fiction rather than historical record).

Having said that (emphasis), we should not elevate the traditions of the church, let alone of our part of the church, to the status of the Word. It is necessary to accept that all or most theologians are fallible, not our interpretation. One such matter of interpretation on which John Stott raises questions is that of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. He (in common with orthodox evangelicals) has no doubt that Scripture warns of final and terrible judgment eternal in its effects on those who fail to repent, but he believes that the wicked will be destroyed but not maintained in everlasting torment. (The term evangelical, along with Catholicism, has in the main believed.) John Stott will undoubtedly be criticized by some fundamentalists for saying that the wicked are not maintained in everlasting punishment. Whether he is right or wrong in his interpretation, we suggest that he is right to be willing to question and think about his own tradition, not only lightly, but cautiously and tentatively.

There is a tendency in some evangelical circles to see any modification of the positions of the Reformers, the Puritans or the evangelicals of the earlier part of our own century as a betrayal. But that is absurd: evangelical scholarship is much stronger now than it was fifty years ago, and we should expect to see our own traditions developing and even being corrected as we listen to the Word of God anew. There is a fear among some evangelicals that anyone who admits that a traditional evangelical view may be wrong is slipping into liberalism on the one hand or into Roman Catholicism on the other. But this is to elevate our own traditions too highly. We must certainly beware of not abandoning our commitment to biblical Christian faith: the secular pressures are as great or greater than ever, and it is right to be aware of those pressures. But we must also be conscious of our need always to be reformed by and under the Word of God. John Stott sets an example in openness and yet faithfulness, being willing to rethink his own positions in the light of Scripture, but unwilling to abandon biblical positions (e.g. on homosexuality, or men and women in the church) under the pressure of secular liberalism.

(4) The final thing we note about Essentials is the loving, respectful tone of the book. There is a tendency among evangelicals to treat liberal Christians (and Roman Catholics too) with hostility and virtually as non-Christians. We find it difficult to disagree strongly with aspects of a person’s theology, and yet at the same time to recognize him or her as a fellow Christian. It is this aspect of Essentials that is perhaps most important. That is not in the least to say that there are a number of important and growing issues (e.g. in the abortion debate), but even in these, Christians can and should be willing to disagree strongly with aspects of another person’s theology, and yet at the same time recognize him or her as a fellow Christian. This is the tone of Essentials, and it is a tone that evangelicals should emulate.

Paul urges ‘speaking the truth in love’ as the way for the church to grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:15). May God make us faithful to his truth, strong in his love, and thus increasingly more united and effective as Christ’s body in the world.

Editorial note

We warmly welcome to new Associate Editors: Colin Chapman of University of Stirling, and Ken Runciman of Mansfield College, Oxford, as our church history editor. We also welcome Dr Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary, Colorado. As North American book review editor. Colin Chapman and Craig Blomberg will be known to many readers for their writings on the gospels (Christ in the Gospels and the Uses of History) and on the gospels (Christ in the Gospels and the Uses of History). Craig Blomberg, who read Essentials will, I suspect, be impressed by David Edwards’ sincere Christian profession, just as they often are by the commitment of someone like Mother Teresa. And yet there is often a lurking suspicion that this cannot be genuine Christianity because of the doctrinal issue. However, although doctrine does matter very much, correct doctrine does not guarantee the genuineness of a person’s Christian faith (as the NT makes very clear), nor does some incorrect doctrine automatically exclude a person from the kingdom of God (happily).

If it is true that there are evangelical and liberal Christians and not just evangelical Christians and liberal non-Christians, then it is imperative that we act in love towards each other and seek to understand each other and to overcome our divisions. Essentials represents a significant step in that direction, not by covering over the cracks with deceptively pretty ecumenical wallpaper, but by honestly discussing our differences and seeking under God to find and unite in his truth. Evangelicals may be tempted to question whether it is worth trying to do this, feeling that it is not a priority in a dying world and knowing the real practical difficulties that there are. But, although doctrinal differences do make some forms of ecumenical collaboration difficult or impossible, Essentials is a book which shows that progress can be made in bridging our divisions. In any case, if it is a priority of yours, you should remember that for Jesus it was a priority that his followers should live in love and unity; it was also a priority for Paul, great evangelist that he was.

Paul urges ‘speaking the truth in love’ as the way for the church to grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:15). May God make us faithful to his truth, strong in his love, and thus increasingly more united and effective as Christ’s body in the world.
Such issues do matter, and as theological students we need to be aware that we are dealing with life and death issues, which cannot be lightly treated. Those who warn of false prophecy are right, even if it is not always easy to recognize it when we see it. Jesus spoke of spiritual conflict with Satan and of ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’, and there is every reason to think that Satan and his wolves are as active in our theological families today as they ever were in the first love of the Lord. There is a popular, but dangerous, notion around that discussing theology is a neutral academic exercise – an academic game to be enjoyed. But the early church fathers, whom we sometimes ridicule for their argumenation in the world, not just in subverting our morals but also in subverting our ideas and thinking. It is sadly true that theological students do not always make the first love of God their own, and that the church, in all its branches, speaks of their own personal growth in understanding, and both question aspects of their respective traditions.

Such humility is important. Whether we like it or not, we are all mixed-up people in the sense that we all have some sort of theology, even if it is not well thought through. There are theological niceties, were least at right in perceiving that theology and theological error matter, and that we are involved in a spiritual battle.

What that means is that we must approach our studies alert to the dangers with much prayer, remembering that we will be judged with the greater stringency (Jas. 3:1). Not that we do not have the greatest privilege to study and then to teach others about God’s life-giving and liberating Word.

(2) A second lesson to be learned from Essentials is not to be dismissive in advance of having to think about and appreciate their position. This has often been a fault on the liberal side: the evangelical position on Scripture and on other issues has regularly been ridiculed, caricatured or just ignored. However, it is not worth thinking about. Despite the increased strength of evangelical scholarship in recent years, evangelical theology is still not taken as a serious and mature subject, and the questions of interpretation are often omitted or completely misunderstood.

For the liberals’ dismissal of evangelicalism is that evangelicals have often had silly ideas. It is quite inexcusable to ignore evangelicalism as a whole just because of its unhindering, maverick fringe. If Essentials suggests that liberals are beginning to respect the seriousness of evangelical theology, which has, in another sense, been a position of the vast majority of sensitive and intelligent Christian thinkers throughout church history, then this is a very welcome trend.

But the fault has not just been on the liberal side. Evangelical and conservatives have also tended to be dismissive of liberalism, again partly because of the excesses of some on the fringe of liberalism. They have seen liberals as false prophets, not without reason in some cases; but they have not bothered to think about the genuine Christian concerns of many liberal theologians. Even if it is true that liberalism is false doctrine, it does not necessarily follow that all or most liberal theologians are maliciously trying to deceive; in many cases their views arise out of a genuine Christian concern to understand and to communicate the Christian gospel in our modern context, and their errors are far more serious than the errors of evangelicals. For example, on the question of the virgin birth, evangelicals often tend to assume that liberal questions are devil-inspired when they are simply due to their anti-supernaturalism. But, although that has undoubtedly been a most influential factor, it is by no means the only consideration, and it is not fair or helpful to dismiss liberal questions about the traditional doctrines as though they simply arise out of a refusal to believe in miracles. It is important therefore to seek to understand and not just to denounce.

(3) That leads into a third lesson to be learned from Essentials, a lesson about humility. It is one of the least well understood and perhaps one we have been unwilling to admit our own mistakes and to question the traditions of our own political party. Theologians often fall into the same trap as their contemporaries and of the Puritans of the earlier part of our own century as a betrayal. But that is absurd: evangelical scholarship is much stronger now than it was fifty years ago, and we should expect to see our own traditions developing and even being corrected as we listen to the Word of God anew. There is a fear among some evangelicals that anyone who admits that a traditional evangelical view may be wrong is slipping into liberalism on the one hand or into Roman Catholicism on the other. But this is to elevate our own traditions too highly. We must certainly beware of not abandoning our commitment to biblical Christian faith: the secular pressures are as great or greater than ever, and it is right to beware of those pressures. But we must also be conscious of our need always to be reformed by and under the Word of God. John Stott takes an example in openness and yet faithfulness, being willing to rethink his own positions in the light of Scripture, but unwilling to abandon biblical positions (e.g. on homosexuality, or men and women in the church) under the pressure of secular liberalism.

(4) The final thing we note about Essentials is the loving, respectful tone of the book. There is a tendency among evangelicals to treat liberal Christians (and Roman Catholics too) with hostility and virtually as non-Christians. We find it difficult to disagree strongly with aspects of a person’s theology, and yet at the same time to recognize him or her as a fellow Christian. This is partly because we have a right perception about the danger and seriousness of false theology, and partly because some so-called Christians are so way-out as to make it very hard to see them as disciples of Jesus. But it is dangerous and wrong to generalize in a negative way. It is important to reach that all Christians are mixed-up people with mixed-up ideas to a greater or lesser extent. As John Stott says with the words of time, ‘Jesus who read Essentials will, I suspect, be impressed by David Edwards’ sincere Christian profession, just as they are often by the commitment of someone like Mother Teresa. And yet there is often a lurking suspicion that this cannot be genuine Christianity because of the doctrinal issue. However, although doctrine does matter very much, correct doctrine does not guarantee the genuineness of a person’s Christian faith (as the NT makes very clear), nor does some incorrect doctrine automatically exclude a person from the kingdom of God (happily).

If it is true that there are evangelical and liberal Christians and not just evangelical Christians and liberal non-Christians, then it is imperative that we act in love towards each other and seek to understand each other and to overcome our divisions. Essentials represents a significant attempt to do this, not by covering over the cracks with deceptively pretty ecumenical wallpaper, but by honestly discussing our differences and seeking under God to find and unite in his truth. Evangelicals may be tempted to question whether it is worth trying to do this, feeling that it is not a priority in a dying world and knowing the real practical difficulties that there are. But, although doctrinal differences do make some forms of ecumenical collaboration difficult or impossible, Essentials is a book which shows that progress can be made in bridging our divisions. In any case, if it is a question of priorities, we should remember that for Jesus it was a priority that his followers should live in love and unity; it was also a priority for Paul, great evangelist that he was.

Paul urges ‘speaking the truth in love’ as the way for the church to grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:15). May God make us faithful to his truth, strong in his love, and thus increasingly more united and effective as Christ’s body in the world.
Hebrews and the anticipation of completion

Paul Ellisworth

The author is translation consultant for the United Bible Societies: translation projects at the University of Aberdeen. Dr Ellisworth is currently completing a commentary on the Greek text of Hebrews (in the NICNT series); we are grateful to him for this article in anticipation.

The story is told of two young typists who were on holiday in Majorca.

'Where's that?' asked one of their friends.

'I don't know,' one of the travelling replied. 'We went by air.'

The fact that this is told as a funny story points to a central fact of human nature: we expect things to fit together, and find it odd when they do not. Is it the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer who has pointed out the 'anticipation of completion' (der Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit)? We understand something only in relation to something else. 'Only connect' is the motto of us all. In particular, we understand something new only in relation to other things that we know already. And the end of our understanding - an end we may reach at the same time as the beginning - is to make sense of our experience as a whole.

What, one might ask, has this to do with the Epistle to the Hebrews? The analogy may not be pressed very far, but Hebrews is just a little like the typists' first view of Majorca: at first it appears unconnected, unrelated to anything else to which it has any connection.

Our efforts to understand Hebrews are in large part efforts to relate it to other data which lie already in the circle of our knowledge and experience. We may be individuals mentioned in the NT, who for one reason or another may be candidates for the title of author of Hebrews, who are not mentioned in the Epistle, but whose names would be known to them. They may be individuals or groups who, or literary corpora which, may have influenced the writer of Hebrews, whether positively or negatively, or be influenced by the writer of Hebrews in turn. It may, of course, be the other way round, that is not our primary concern in this article: the thing to be explained is the influence of the Jewish Christians in Rome. The word 'may' also indicates the impulse, the constantly renewed hope, with which the reader of Hebrews sets out to understand it in the light of some other areas of his experience. The word 'may' also indicates that there is no guarantee against disappointment in this quest. 'Let us see,' the reader asks himself. If Hebrews makes any contribution to understanding the world of the Christians of Rome, then it is clear from the start that we are not going to see the whole truth of the Semitic background later on. Hebrews may, on a level not more than that of the general Christian background, offer a different view of some of the biblical material, but this view may be only one side of the truth.

Our repeated use of the word 'may' indicates the impulse, the constantly renewed hope, with which the reader of Hebrews sets out to understand it in the light of some other areas of his experience. The word 'may' also indicates that there is no guarantee against disappointment in this quest. 'Let us see,' the reader asks himself. If Hebrews makes any contribution to understanding the world of the Christians of Rome, then it is clear from the start that we are not going to see the whole truth of the Semitic background later on. Hebrews may, on a level not more than that of the general Christian background, offer a different view of some of the biblical material, but this view may be only one side of the truth.

The reader's mental databank is structured in such a way as to tell him, more or less accurately, how promising a particular line of research is likely to be; through here, too, there may be lines of context which the writer has not been aware of. And of course, this process is not peculiar to the understanding of Hebrews: it is merely more clearly necessary in the case of Hebrews. It is a matter of gratitude to the author of Hebrews who has drawn together the lessons from other parts of the NT. But it is important to emphasize from the outset that the aim of this comparative study is to relate Hebrews to a form of thinking current in the church and thus to understand it better. To learn that Hebrews was written by someone called, for example, Madonnah, about whom nothing else is known, and who is on no account to be confused with the Madonnahs of the bucket of Jakobus 15:31 and Chronicles 2:49, would not advance our understanding of Hebrews at all.

This general principle may be applied in at least three ways to the study of Hebrews. First, it may prove a useful thread to guide us through the maze of so-called questions of introduction.

Theories about its authorship are of two main kinds: they are intended to link Hebrews up, either with some other author and his writings, or with someone else who, from what we now know of him, sounds the kind of person who might have written Hebrews. In the first group, claims have been made for Paul, Clement of Rome, Luke, the author of the (Pseudoepigraph) Epistle of Barnabas, Peter, and Jude. Stephen may be placed in either group, depending on how precisely Acts 7 is thought to reproduce the form and content of his message. In the second group, those who have no writing extant, Apollines is now clearly the leading contender, followed at some distance by Philip the Deacon, Silas, Aristos, and Priscilla (with Aquila); but evidence for and against such hypotheses, in the nature of things, to be less firm than for members of the first group. The leading contender in the first group has traditionally been Paul, but he has steadily lost ground, first among those who are considered the apostles and later among Roman Catholics, as they came to sit freer to the 1914 decision of the Biblical Commission affirming Pauline authorship. As this development progresses, the theological question ('is this writing generally accepted as embodying orthodox, apostolic teaching?') has gradually become disentangled from the literary question ('Does this writing bear the personal mark of this author?'), and the literary question has come to predominate. A number of comments on this process are in order, since it relates to questions of authorship in general, not just to the question of Paul's possible authorship of Hebrews.

First, theories which attempt to judge the literary question by appealing too heavily to the activity of secretaries are methodologically defective: there comes a point at which they prove nothing, because they are stretched to prove anything. Second, it is a question unlikely ever to be resolved with mathematical precision, how much the language of a single author may change in the course of his (adult) lifetime, and how much in it remains constant. All that needs to be said is that the distinctive features of Hebrews' language (which secretaries would be likely to tend to place at such a distance from other NT writings as strongly to suggest a different author.

Third, a similar question may be asked about the author's theology, as long as it is asked sensitively, not polemically in the spirit of a de facto or non-type distinction, nor as part of a search for contradictions or inconsistencies in the biblical record; such an approach tends to provoke an equally impoverished, inept, and narrow-minded response. But whether Paul's faith is fundamentally different from that of the author of Hebrews (or how, for example, the theology of the Letter of James relates to either of them) is a different matter altogether, whether, in the forms in which that faith is expressed, its distinctive emphases, are so different as to suggest a different author. The questions of language and theology, though distinct, can thus not be treated in isolation from one another.

The last and perhaps the most interesting question under this heading is whether the pendulum of interest has not swung too far from the theological to the literary question, and whether, in this way, too, we are tempted to lose interest in them. It will always remain legitimate to ask whose pen wrote Hebrews, or whose voice dictated it. But for the unswerving adherence to a particular author, as is, in the ultimate aim, it is probably more important to see, for example, reflections in John of Hebrews' teaching about Jesus' high priesthood, or a common concern in Hebrews and the Letter of James, to mention and destroy in order to argue about authorship in the narrow sense. Another way of putting it is to ask whether it is not more profitable to plot (if necessary) a valuable relationship across the respective theological positons of NT writers; their respective distances from one another; and the direction in which one transition might be to another, rather than to concentrate attention exclusively on one individual or another. Such an approach would seem to be more in the spirit of the NT church itself. It may also produce more solid results. To take one example, the work of Frank Cross (Judaism, Paul's readers) and of James Leonard's The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews and P. J. Deshpande's St Jude as the Author of Hebrews continue to enrich and refresh the traditional and theological affinities of Hebrews, insights which are however obscured rather than clarified by untenable claims for Pauline and Judaic authorship respectively.

Origins, date and purpose

A somewhat similar situation is found when one turns from the anticipation of the authorship of Hebrews to its geographical and temporal setting, to the questions of when it was written, where, and why for readers, questions which clearly interact with one another and with the question of authorship. These questions, like that of authorship, may be asked and answered in a narrow or in a broad sense. An example of a narrow answer would be: Hebrews was written c. 68 from Corinth to the churches in Asia Minor. An example of a broad answer would be: Hebrews was probably written from one centre of diaspora Judaism to another at a time of social stress, but not yet direct persecution (c. 74), probably some considerable time after the establishment of the local church to which Hebrews is addressed (2:3f.; 12:7).

In practice, answers are likely to be somewhere between the two extremes, given the data at our disposal. Some of the data are of course available, though not as much as would be needed for an exhaustive narrow answer. But in practice also, answers tending towards the broader end of the scale are likely to be more common; the reasons are not hard to find. It is not, for example, the possibility that Hebrews was addressed to Rome that is in itself significant, but the possibility of drawing Hebrews within the network of everything else we know about Rome in the first century.

So broader answers are not to be automatically considered as a second best, to be offered and accepted grudgingly in the absence of something more specific. Broader answers are also likely to offer more fruitful points of contact for application in a distant and different setting, such as our own. From this point of view, the main point is that the original readers of Hebrews, whether the persecution was that of Nero or Domitian, though a valid and worthy subject of historical research, is likely to be less immediately significant now.

I. Let us test this line of enquiry first in relation to the question of the purpose. There is an area, in which, as J. A. T. Robinson's Redating the New Testament recalled, hard facts are few and far between, and speculation swirls around them like a vortex. In this area, the question is whether Hebrews was written after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD. There is general agreement that Hebrews was written (admittedly by Clement of Rome) whose epistle is generally dated c. 95. Other relatively firm dates which call for consideration include the expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius c. 49; the Roman persecution of 64 in Rome; and the more widespread, but also probably sporadic, persecution of Christians in that region. It is not clear how these are related to the situation in which Hebrews was written and first read, and to other, less chronologically precise, data, is a matter on which scholars are divided. Conclusively, an assessment of the situation is made on the basis of more precise data, and the precise data are then fitted in. In other words, chronological evidence is given priority over absolute chronology.

On the one hand, most continental scholars argue for a date after 70. For example, Braun (3) argues succinctly for a date about 86, and as early as 90, on the grounds (a) of Hebrews' high Christology, (b) the wearying of the local congregation... which conditions? the author's special insistence on the nearness of the parousia (2:1; 13:3; 9:26; 10:23; 35-39; 12:3; 12f.), and (c) the fact that these are not...
Hebrews and the antithesis of completion
Paul Ellingworth

The author is translation consultant for the United Bible Societies. He is also at the University of Aberdeen. Dr Ellingworth is currently completing a commentary on the Greek text of Hebrews (in the NICOT series); we will be publishing this article in anticipation.

The story is told of two young typists who happened to be on holiday in Majorca.

‘Where’s that?’ asked one of their friends.

‘I don’t know,’ one of the travellers replied. ‘We went by air.’

The fact that this is told as a funny story points to a central fact of human nature: we expect things to fit together, and find it odd when they do not. What is the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has called the 'anticipation of completion' (der Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit). 1 We understand something only in relation to something else. Only 'connect' is the motto of us all. In particular, we understand something new only in relation to other things that we know already. And the end of our understanding— an end we still hope for—is to make our experience of sense as a whole.

What, one might ask, has this to do with the Epistle to the Hebrews? The analogy must not be pressed very far, but Hebrews is just a little like the typists' first view of Majorca, if at first it appeared an isolated block, unrelated to anything else. The author's understanding of Hebrews is large part the effort to relate it to other data which lie already in the circle of our knowledge and experience. From this point of view, we can see several points of connection.

First, there is the fact that only the person who might have written Hebrews, and that we can only guess who he was, leather, whether individual mentioned in the NT, who for one reason or another may be candidates for the title of author of Hebrews, will be the one who, and the one to whom the letter may have been written, or to whom it has been sent. They may be individuals or groups who, or literary corpora which, or groups, or literary corpora which, may have influenced the writer of Hebrews, either positively or negatively, or been influenced by him in their turn. It may, of course, be the other way round, that is not our primary concern in this article: the thing to be explained would be the reluctance of Jewish Christians in Rome, to which we may hope that Hebrews may throw some light.

Our repeated use of the word 'may' indicates the impasse, the constantly renewed hope, with which the reader of Hebrews sets out to understand it in the light of some other area of his experience. The word 'may' also indicates that there is no guarantee against disappointment in this quest. 'Let us see, the reader asks himself: if Hebrews makes a little more sense in the light of what we know about ancient Rome; or early gnosticism; or the Psalms; or (in principle) anything else.'

The reader's mental data bank is structured in such a way as to tell him, more or less accurately, how promising a particular line of research is likely to be: there, too, his searching effort may seem to him to be much his own. And, of course, this process is not peculiar to the understanding of Hebrews: it is merely more clearly necessary in the case of Hebrews, since it is gratitude which, and not a comparison with other parts of the NT. But it is important to emphasize from the outset that all of this comparative study is to relate Hebrews to a field already there, and thus to understand it better. To learn that Hebrews was written by someone called, for example, Madanmahn, about whom nothing else is known, and who is on no account to be confused with the Madanmahnahs of Joshua 15:31 and 1 Chronicles 2:49, would not advance our understanding of Hebrews at all.

This general principle may be applied in at least three ways to the study of Hebrews. First, it may prove a useful thread to guide us through the maze of so-called questions of introduction.

Theories about the authorship of Hebrews are of two main kinds: they are intended to link Hebrews up, either with some other author and his writings, or with someone else who, from what we know of him, sounds the kind of person who might have written Hebrews. In the first group, claims have been made for Paul, Clement of Rome, Luke, the author of the (presumably) Epistle of Barnabas, Peter, and Judas, Stephen may be placed in either group, depending on how precisely Acts 7 is thought to reproduce the form and content of his message. In the second group, those who have no writing extant, Apollos is clearly the leading contender, followed at some distance by Philip the Deacon, Silas, Ariston, and Priscilla (with Aquila); but evidence for and against such hypotheses is, in the nature of things, to be less firm than for members of the first group.

The leading contender in the first group has traditionally been Paul, but he has steadily lost ground, first among critics of the book, and later among Roman Catholics, as they came to sit freer to the 1914 decision of the Biblical Commission affirming Pauline authorship. As this development progresses, the theological question ('Is this writing generally accepted as embodying orthodox, apostolic teaching?') has gradually become disentangled from the literary question ('Does this writing bear the personal mark of this author?'), and the literary question has come to predominate.

A number of comments on this process are in order, since they relate to questions of authorship in general, not just to the question of Paul's possible authorship of Hebrews.

First, theories which attempt to judge the literary question by appealing too heavily to the activity of secretaries are methodologically defective: there comes a point at which they prove nothing, because they are stretched to prove anything.

Second, it is a question unlikely ever to be resolved with mathematical precision, how much language of a single individual may change in the course of his (adult) lifetime, and how much it remains constant. All that needs to be said is that the distinctive features of Hebrews' language (with which the authorship question tends to place it) at such a distance from other NT writings as strongly to suggest a different author.

Third, a similar question may be asked about the author's theology, as long as it is asked sensitively, not polemically in the spirit of the so-called et cetera non type of discussion, nor as part of a search for contradictions or inconsistencies in the biblical record; such an approach tends to provoke an equally impoverished response to any such point in the text. Of course, not every Paul's faith is fundamentally different from that of the writer of Hebrews (or how, for example, the theology of the Letter of James relates to the other epistles), but whether the forms in which that faith is expressed, its distinctive emphases, are so different as to suggest a different author. The questions of language and theology, though distinct, can thus not be treated in isolation from one another.

The last and perhaps the most interesting question under this heading is whether the pendulum of interest has not swung too far from the theological to the literary question, and whether it is not time to move on to the way in which we think about authorship in the narrow sense. Of course, questions once asked cannot be unanswered, even if they remain unanswered for so long that people conclude that the book of interest is anything but a text of theological interest to them. It will always remain legitimate to ask whose pen wrote Hebrews, or whose voice dictated it. But for the understanding of Hebrews as a whole, and as, I think, the ultimate aim, it is probably more important to see, for example, reflections in John of Hebrews' teaching about Jesus' high priesthood, or a common concern in Hebrews and elsewhere with the issue of salvation and destiny. Whether we argue about authorship in the narrow sense. Another way of putting it is to ask whether it is not more profitable to plot (if necessary) valuable connections between Hebrews and the respective theological positions of NT writers; their respective distances from one another; and the direction in which one track might influence another, rather than to concentrate attention exclusively on one individual or another. Such an approach would seem to be more in the spirit of the NT church itself. 2 It may also produce more solid results. To take an example from the last of these, Leon's 'The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews' and P. J. Despard's 'St Jude as the Author of Hebrews' concern inter alia with the traditional and theological affinities of Hebrews, insights which are however obscured rather than clarified by untenable claims for Pauline and Judaism authorship respectively.

Origins, date and purpose

A somewhat similar situation is found when one turns from the understanding of Hebrews to its geographical and intellectual setting, the questions of when it was written, where and for who readers, questions which clearly interact with one another and with the question of authorship. These questions, like that of authorship, may be asked and answered in a narrow or in a broad sense. An example of a narrow answer would be: Hebrews was written c. 68 from Rome. A broader answer would be: Hebrews was probably written from one centre of diaspora Judaism to another at a time of threaten but not yet death persecution (c. 40), probably some considerable time after the establishment of the local church to which Hebrews is addressed (2:3f.; 12:7).

In practice, answers are likely to be somewhere between these two extremes, to be offered to readers by the author of Hebrews and his readers. As to the question of authorship itself, it is not, for example, the possibility that Hebrews was addressed to Rome that is in itself significant, but the possibility of drawing Hebrews within the network of everything else we know about Rome in the first Christian century.

So broader answers may be not to be automatically considered as a second best, to be offered and accepted grudgingly in the absence of something more precise. Broader answers are also likely to offer more fruitful points of contact with application in a distant and different setting, such as our own. From this point of view, the main point is that the original question itself, both of whether the destruction that was the persecution was that of Nero or Domitian, though a valid and worthy subject of historical research, is likely to be less immediately significant now.

Let us test this line of enquiry first in relation to the question of the authorship of Hebrews, an area in which, as J. A. T. Robinson's Redating the New Testament recalled, hard facts are few and far between, and speculation swirls around like a liquid in a centrifuge. The date of 68 is thought to be the date at which Hebrews was likely to have been written before or after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70. There is general agreement that Hebrews was written by the Christian Jewish community of Rome (or by Clement of Rome, whose genuine epistle is generally dated c. 95). Other relatively firm dates which call for consideration include the expected appearance of the Philippians letter (c. 49); the Nerionian persecution of 64 in Rome; and the more widespread, but also more sporadic, persecution of other sects, such as the Waldensians. But these are related to the situation in which Hebrews was written and first read, and to other, less chronologically precise, data, is a matter on which scholars by no means agree. Conclusively, an assessment of the situation is made on the basis of less precise data, and the precise data are then fitted in. In other words, critical chronology is given priority over absolute chronology.

On the one hand, most continental scholars argue for a date after 70. For example, Braun (3) argues succinctly for a date of 79-80. On the other hand, after 90, on the grounds (a) of Hebrews' high Christology, (b) the 'wearying of the local congregation . . . which conditions?' the author's special insistence on the nearness of the parousia (1:2; 3:3; 9:26; 10:25; 35-39; 12:3, 12f.), and (c) the fact that these are not
the distinction between old and new information may be extended in another way also. A great deal of attention is rightly paid to the study of possible influences on the formulation of a document such as Hebrews. How far, and in what degree, the OT is ‘re-echoed’ in the OT? By Philo? by Qumran? by pre-gnostic currents? The example of Philo is of particular interest. There is widespread agreement that the OT (and the continuing tradition of its exegesis) is the primary literary influence on Hebrews, and a growing reaction against earlier exaggerations of Qumran-Esene and gnostic influences. Opinion regarding the possible influence of Philo on Hebrews is more evenly divided.

The monumental work of R. Williamson21 notwithstanding, the verbal echoes of Philo in Hebrews remain as striking as the differences of thought between the two writers. The authors, with the notable exception of Philo himself, have been unwilling to accept the assumption that the writer to the Hebrews read Philo with the same selective understanding as Clement was later to read Hebrews. A filtering process was at work, similar mutatis mutandis to the process whereby a non-western people may select and develop certain aspects of western civilization, including the presentation of Christianity to the exclusion of others.

Once this process is detected, one may then seek to identify the factor which limits more complete understanding of the process. One factor is, in this wider sense, 'new' or 'old', creative (like Christianity for the pagans) (like Philo) or reactionary (like Clement's attempt to re-establish a form of Jewish sacrifice within the Christian church). If there is a second process, to deny the Philonic influence on Hebrews to agree that the heart of Hebrews' message is non-Philonic but Christian. That means that Hebrews is a product of the road to a positive understanding of what Hebrews' distinctive message is.

Content
A full statement of that message, or even a full survey of current discussion of the main problems in understanding that message, necessarily lies beyond the scope of a brief article. It may, however, be helpful to suggest ways in which the Philonic understanding of a reader standing in a particular exegetical tradition and of the complete corpus of Hebrews may influence his decisions on particular issues. Three such questions among others22 may be mentioned: (1) the nature of Hebrews' (vertical and horizontal) dualism; (2) Hebrews' teaching about apocalyptic.

(1) Pre-existence in Hebrews
That δει ου και ἐπηρέαζε τοις θείοις (11:2), 'The Son, through whom [God the Father] made the worlds' (6:4) presupposes. From the text in the context of the occurrence of Χριστός in 9-24 the very centre of the whole epistle. Now emphasis does not always indicate new information; but this is almost a truism. It is a truism that himself why this or that word or phrase has been emphasized, and what is its place in the development of the thought, within the sentence or over a longer span. In the present context he is stating and developing teaching about Christ's exaltation. The reference to Christ's role in creation appears to be thrown in, as an unexpected footnote, almost as an afterthought -- even though, in terms of the formal structure of the text, it is a teaching that is part of a highly wrought chiastic. Uncertainty remains on a number of secondary issues, such as the significance of 'today I have begotten you' in 11:22-24. It is true that the quotation is from the text of Isaiah 53, but the Joel reference, which is not quoted in full, is seen to the quotation in 1:6. But to deny any reference to Christ's pre-existence in 1:2 requires in the reader a negative prejudice. Crucial to the understanding of this reader as a person who, approaching this text with an open mind, accepts that its writer, and probably his readers, believed that Christ was present and was calling on the reader to emulate the understanding of the same belief in other texts such as 2:13; 10:1; 1 Cor. 8:6 and Col. 1:16. The reader may thus be encouraged, tentatively and without forced harmonization, to 'anticipate completion' of a new patrachaten knowledge in the teaching of the NT as a whole.

(2) Hebrews' dualism
'Dualism' in this context refers to an aspect of Hebrews' view of the world, namely the distinction between heaven and earth. I have argued elsewhere23 that the author of Hebrews works with two types of spatial language: one vertical, perhaps largely traditional, which presupposes but does not go beyond the statement described above (hereafter 'Philonic'); the other horizontal, owing more to the author's own reflection, used primarily in speaking of Christ's ascent (Hebrews 2:5). The dualism of Hebrews does not in any way reflect a New Testament stage of a broader medium sphere. At the end of the day, it is difficult to be sure whether this argument is unduly influenced by the pre-supposition of Hebrews' vertical theology (as distinct from his language), or whether it provides evidence to support or confirm that presupposition. In other words, is this historical criticism of this presupposition? A full account of the consideration of a much wider range of data; and even then, opinions may differ and conclusions be less than final. The question of Hebrews' dualism is thus of some importance in relation to the strength of biblical and extra-biblical influences on the writer. On this, I can only state a working hypothesis which I find (2) helpful to me. The writer's dualism indicates a full allowance has been made for the penetration of Hellenistic ideas and practices into (especially diaspora) Judaism,24 the author of Hebrews represents essentially a man of one book, and that book the Bible.25

(3) Hebrews' teaching about apostasy
There are two main aspects of this question: first, what does Hebrews' teaching about apostasy (6:4-6; cf. 10:26-28; 12:16) mean and second, what form of apostasy does the author fear for (some of) his readers?

To take the second, relatively simpler, question first, there has been much discussion of whether Hebrews was written in the Diaspora, and if it was, whether the author invites or incites them to world mission, to uphold the absoluteness of Christianity, or to combat some specific heresy.26 The more substantial attempts to define Hebrews' adversaries, the less convincing tend to be the arguments, perhaps...
is ample evidence that writers and indeed speakers may sometimes use complex and subtle patterns of verbal parallelism, but that does not mean it needs to apply to all cases, and it is not always the case that Hebrew transactors accurately reflect the oral tradition.

The distinction between old and new information may be extended in another way as well. A great deal of attention is paid to the study of possible influences on the form of a document such as Hebrews. For example, how might the author of Hebrews have been influenced by other early Christian literature? These are not isolated questions, but rather they contribute to a larger understanding of the historical development of the New Testament.

The central question remains: how effective was the author of Hebrews in creating a community that valued and hoped for the coming of the kingdom of God? The answer to this question is complex, as it involves understanding the historical context of the Second Temple period and the development of early Christian thought. The author of Hebrews likely drew on a variety of sources, including the Old Testament and the apocalyptic literature of the time, to create a message that resonated with his audience.

The problem of the author's identity is significant, as it affects our understanding of the message and its intended audience. The author of Hebrews is referred to in several places in the New Testament, but the identity of the author remains uncertain. Some scholars believe that the author was a Jewish Christian, while others suggest that the author was a Gentile Christian. The identity of the author is important because it affects our understanding of the message and its historical context.

The interpretation of Hebrews is also complicated by the fact that the text is not entirely free from redundancy and repetition. This may be due to the oral composition of the text, as oral traditions often emphasize repetition and repetition to reinforce the message. However, the redundancy and repetition also present challenges for the reader, as it requires careful attention to the text in order to discern the main points of the argument.

In conclusion, Hebrews is a complex and multifaceted text that presents a rich and varied message. The author's identity remains uncertain, but the message of the text is clear: the kingdom of God is near, and the reader is encouraged to respond by being faithful and dedicated to God.

The present context he is stating and developing teaching about Christ's exaltation. The reference to Christ's role in creation appears to be thrown in, an unexpected position, almost as an afterthought -- even though, in terms of the formal structure of the letter, it does follow logically from the preceding exaltative claims. This is a case of a highly wrought chiasmus. Uncertainty remains on a number of secondary issues, such as the significance of 'today I have begotten you' in 1:5; the account of the creation of the world in 1:1 to 2:3; and the reader's use of the text in the 1:6 to 2:18; but to deny any reference to Christ's pre-existence in 1:1 to 2:2 is either a negative pre-supposition or a desire to invoke ignorance. The argument of the writer, who, approaching this text with an open mind, accepts that his reader, and probably his readers, believed that Christ was pre-existent, has been stated; the conclusion which the unprejudiced reader can draw is the same belief reflected in the text of vv. 1:1, 3; 10-11; 1 Cor. 8:6 and Col. 1:16. The reader may thus be encouraged, tentatively and without forced harmonization, to 'anticipate completion' of a major messianic teaching in the teaching of the NT as a whole.24

2 (2) Hebrews' duality 'Dualism' in this context refers to an aspect of Hebrews' view of the world, namely the duality between heaven and earth. I have argued elsewhere21 that the author of Hebrews works with two types of spatial language: one, vertical, perhaps largely traditional, which presupposes but does not name a transcendent Godhead; and a second, which I would describe as 'theological' (for example, Hebrews 1), which seems to have been developed by the author of Hebrews (or by a Hellenistic audience). The vertical, transcendent Godhead is the highest of the created beings and is the source of all authority and power. The theological language, on the other hand, is more focused on the relationship between God and the world, and it emphasizes the importance of human beings in the creation process.

3 Hebrews' teaching about apostles There are two main aspects of this question: first, what does Hebrews say about the apostles? Second, how do Hebrews view the role of the apostles in the church?

The apostles were the first witnesses to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and they were given the authority to teach and preach the gospel. Hebrews emphasizes the importance of the apostles' teaching and preaching, and it stresses the need for Christians to follow their teaching and be faithful to the message they proclaimed.

The apostles' role in the church is crucial, as they were the foundation of the early Christian community. Hebrews highlights the importance of the apostles' teaching and preaching, and it reminds the readers of their responsibility to follow their teaching and be faithful to the message they proclaimed.

The role of the apostles in the church is also emphasized in Hebrews, as the author stresses the importance of following the teaching of the apostles and not偏离 their teaching. Hebrews highlights the need for Christians to be faithful to the teaching of the apostles and to live in accordance with their teaching.

The role of the apostles in the church is also emphasized in Hebrews, as the author stresses the importance of following the teaching of the apostles and not偏离 their teaching. Hebrews highlights the need for Christians to be faithful to the teaching of the apostles and to live in accordance with their teaching.

The role of the apostles in the church is also emphasized in Hebrews, as the author stresses the importance of following the teaching of the apostles and not偏离 their teaching. Hebrews highlights the need for Christians to be faithful to the teaching of the apostles and to live in accordance with their teaching.
Truth, myth and incarnation
Melvin Tinker

We are glad for this further contribution toThemelosis from the Anglican chaplain at the University of Keele. Many readers will recall his article a year ago on ‘The priority of Jesus: a look at the place of Jesus’ teaching and example in Christian ethics’. 

Introduction
It is now some ten years since the controversial volumeThe Myth of God Incarnateentered the theological scene, creating something of a major storm the likes of which had not been experienced in theological circles for many years. It was thewake of the future which followed, a wealth of literature was generated, the subject matter of which tended to revolve around some of the key issues raised by Wiles, Hick, Capcott et al. Hard on the heels ofMyth came another collection of essays entitledThe Truth of God Incarnate. This was followed by Incarnation and Myth – The Debate Continuedwhich formed the substance of a colloquium between some of the Myth of Jesus and others of a more orthodox persuasion. In the meantime a steady stream of articles and books emerged from the pens of scholars showing that the Christological/Incarnational debate is still very much on the theological agenda.

Of course, during the decade which has elapsed since the writing of the Myth of God Incarnate, many of the original contributors have moved on in their positions. John Hick no longer sees ‘Christianity at the Centre’ (the title of an earlier book) but presides as head of the ‘Centre of Christianity’. With the Christian religion being viewed as just one amongst many lying on the edge of a universe of faiths. Michael Goulder, feeling the tension between his personal convictions and his role as a Church of England priest in which he was an ordained priest, decided to resign his Anglican orders. Perhaps the most significant shift to have come in the past decade has been the acquisition of God altogether, at least in so far as God has been traditionally conceived by Christians down the ages, so much so that on one television programme the renowned Arthur J. Ayer claimed Capcott as one of his own!

Such developments in themselves provide a clear indication of the central place incarnation doctrine has in Christian belief, such that a reinterpretation of this necessitates a thoroughgoing revision of all the other major strands of the faith if some sort of coherence and consistency is to be achieved.

For example, it has long been recognised in Christian theology that questions concerning the ‘who’ of Jesus are to be distinguished from the ‘what’ - what has he achieved by way of the cross (function) cannot be divorced from who he is in himself (identity). Accordingly, in accordance with the above, one’s conception of Christology will mean a necessary shift in one’s understanding of soteriology, and vice versa. But it does not end there, for there will be other knock-on effects in the related areas of revelation, for example, Sabbath observance (a hallmark of nature of sin) and the uniqueness or otherwise of the Christian faith in relation to other religions. That such matters are still ‘alive’ is further indicated by the more recent public and media interest over what has become known as the ‘Durham Affair’.

The purpose of this article is not to retrace old ground but to stand back and take another look at some of the claims of the mythographers to see just how viable their case really is. Instead of approaching the subject head on, we shall take a more indirect route via a consideration of a trilogy of concepts: truth, myth and incarnation. Having examined each of these in turn, we shall then try and assess one major attempt at bringing the three together as made by one of the representatives of the Myth school, John Hick.

Truth
We begin with the notion of ‘truth’. What do we mean by this? How do we decide whether something is true or false? What is the criterion for truth? The question of truth has been the subject of much debate and discussion, with various philosophers and thinkers offering different perspectives on its nature and role in our understanding of the world.

One common approach to defining truth is based on correspondence, which holds that a statement is true if it corresponds to reality. For example, the statement “The sky is blue” is true because the color of the sky is objectively blue. This view suggests that truth is a matter of accurately reflecting or matching reality.

Another approach to truth is based on coherence, which asserts that a statement is true if it coheres well with other beliefs and statements. In other words, truth is determined by the consistency and interconnectedness of a system of beliefs. If a statement is coherent with other established truths, it is considered true.

A third approach to truth is based on verification, which holds that a statement is true if it can be verified through empirical observation or experimentation. This view suggests that truth is a matter of evidence and fact, and that truth is established through the process of testing and validating claims through observation and experience.

However, the concept of truth is not always straightforward to apply, and different contexts may require different criteria for determining what is true. For example, in scientific contexts, truth is often determined by empirical evidence and the ability to reproduce results. In ethical contexts, truth may be more subjective and based on cultural or moral norms. In artistic or literary contexts, truth may be a matter of personal interpretation and subjective experience.

In conclusion, the concept of truth is complex and multifaceted, with different criteria and standards for determining what is true in various contexts. Understanding and applying the concept of truth requires careful consideration of the specific circumstances and perspectives involved.
because Hebrews is essentially a pastoral, not a polemical, writing. Even if reference to a specific group of adversaries is left out of account, Hebrews describes the danger to the readers' faith in less detail than, for example, in Paul's attacks on the Jewish Christians, it is the writer of Hebrews leaves his readers any room for the hope that, if they abandon faith in Christ, they may find, so to speak, a fallback position in their former (in particular, Jewish) beliefs and practices. Christ has made the old covenant old (8:13), so that there is now nowhere else to go. To abandon Christ, or to abandon the hope for a new place in the universe, is not to adopt an alternative religious option, but simply 'to fall away from the living God' (5:12).

The author's stance, the position which he commends to his readers, is that which Simon Peter expressed as a rhetorical question: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn. 6:68).

An answer to the question of what Hebrews' teaching on apostasy means depends partly on the solution of a number of detailed exegetical questions. For example, for whom is it 'impossible' (6:6)? Does παραδόσεως ἐνίας ἐστὶν to imply that, in the author's view, some have in fact committed apostasy? How should one translate διασώτραπτος in 6:6, and, in the following λαύησθαι? These are legitimate and important questions which, however, exceed the scope of this article. In reading Hebrews, one must be careful not to be misled by the writer's apparently easy handling of these hard passages of Hebrews teaching which has no exact parallel in the NT, or which appears to conflict with other NT teaching; or, more generally, because it conflicts with his understanding of the nature of God as revealed in Christ in, or, in the most general sense, because it conflicts with his anticipation that the purpose of God will itself not stop short of completion.

There are several possible resolutions of this agonizing tension, some more satisfying than others, though none, perhaps, entirely so. First, one may abandon the struggle, and conclude that such problems are the result of theologically inadequate interpretation of the text. Second, one may attempt to overcome the tension by adjusting the theology to suit the contemporary understanding of the apocalyptic literature. Third, one may adopt a more restrained view of the expectations of a future world, and the acceptance of an agnostic view, even on matters on which the NT does have something to say; and, at worst, to a lowering of the authority of the NT itself. Third, one may attempt to bring the reading of Hebrews into line with the understanding of the nature of God as revealed in Christ in, or, in the most general sense, because it conflicts with his anticipation that the purpose of God will itself not stop short of completion.

Introduction

It is some ten years since the controversial volume The Myth of God Incarnate entered the theological scene, creating something of a storm in the theological world. This book, which deals with the nature and status of God, was published in 1984.


The book is written in a clear and concise style, and is divided into four parts: Part I: The Myth of God Incarnate; Part II: The Myth of Christ; Part III: The Myth of the Church; and Part IV: The Myth of the World.

The purpose of this article is not to retrace old ground but to stand back and take another look at some of the claims of the mythographers to see just how viable their case really is. Instead of approaching the subject head on, we shall take a more indirect route via a consideration of a trilogy of concepts that are central to the nature of truth: myth and incarnation.

We are glad for this further contribution to Themeicon from the Anglican chaplain at the University of Keele. Many readers will recall his article a year ago on 'The priority of Christ: a look at the place of Jesus teaching and example in Christian ethics'.

We begin with the notion of 'truth'. What does it mean for us to say that such and such a thing is true? Even a moment's reflection will reveal that no clear-cut universal answer can be given, for whatever answer might be proposed, it will largely depend upon what it is we are referring to and the given context in which it occurs. For
example, we might want to make the claim that ‘This man is true’ by believing that he is an honest and reliable fellow and can be counted on without question. This obviously carries a different sense to the claim that ‘2 + 2 = 4’ is true. But it is no less based on an axiomatic system of logic and mathematics, the relation between the numbers 2 and 4 is such that when added together they always yield the answer 4. Following Charles Sanders Peirce’s scheme of the logical contract, the consideration of the way the notion of truth functions within different disciplines underscores the fact that the sense of the term varies. A literary critic may claim that certain of Shelley’s works are ‘true’ in the sense that they resonate with the physicist’s contention that Einstein’s theory of relativity is ‘true’. Therefore J. R. Lucas is quite correct when he writes that there is no single concept of truth. Different disciplines have different criteria, often specified, sometimes where specified, liable to conflict. 

The plurality involved in establishing criteria for assessing a truth claim can be illustrated by three simple examples. First, that all electronics are male is the order of an analytical statement and as such is necessarily true since the idea of ‘bachelorhood’ by definition entails the notion of ‘maleness’ and to deny the latter would involve a logical contradiction. Here the veracity of such claims can be determined by formally examining the relation between the concepts involved. By way of contrast, the claim that ‘It is raining’ requires a different approach. Unlike the former example, this statement is necessarily true, but is dependent upon its correspondence with certain facts. As such it is known as a ‘synthetic’ statement. There is no way to directly define, and thus ignore the appropriate criteria. If the basic analogy of God’s relation to the world and its activity in that world is that of interaction between persons, then just as allowance is made for ambiguity and imprecision in the human domain, one would expect at least a similar degree of tolerance in the divine. Far from this being a fact, the statement is essentially a passage in which we take seriously the personal analogy between divine and human activity and recognize the useful insights it can yield in matters of doctrine as well. Setting defining criteria begins with the human and works towards an understanding of the divine (the weakness of natural theology), but that this is something that we do so as to give the divine revelation in Scripture and so should be taken seriously.

To summarize what has been said so far: the notion of truth is as varied as are the means of establishing it. As well as paying close attention to the context in which the concept functions, we also need to consider the concept itself. Here we may borrow a term from Wittgenstein and say that the notion of truth cannot be considered in isolation from the particular language game in which it operates. Accord- ingly, some philosophers have designed the concept of truth as being ‘polysemous’. Anthony Thielson aby (or perhaps likened it to a chessboard) will bear this out in identifying at least six different senses associated with the word according to context and function.

Although it is possible with some qualification to speak of truths varying according to context or language game, there must be some ‘common denominator’ between them which provide some sort of universal point of refer- ence, otherwise it would not be possible to associate ‘truth’ in one field with that in another. At least four such features will be suggested here. In the first place, to claim that we know the truth amounts to maintaining that we can see things as they really are without substantial distortion or conceal- ment. The second feature is that there is an inherent or essential aspect of a thing, and so come close to the Greek etymological root for truth – thea-leia – a state of unhidden- ness. In the second place, truth is contextual in that no truth claim can be considered independent of the wider frame of work of ideas in which it is a part. Thus the claim that ‘God is love’ by itself is thought to be meaningful. It begs the immediate question, ‘Which God are we speaking of?’ Is it that of Hinduism, Islam or the Judaean-Christian tradition? What is more, whatever meaning is thought to be conveyed by this statement in will in part be dependent upon purposed divine action, for the notion of ‘love’ cannot be conceived in the abstract, since it only takes on meaning in the context of events when a person is straight away drawn into a consideration of a constellation of other beliefs arising out of a desire to assess the truth status of one statement. Thirdly, we would propose that although context- dependent truth is not irrational, it depends upon the person and, man, he remains so regardless of culture or background beliefs. Finally, the actual perception of truth inevitably contains a personal element and as such something which makes its claim upon us for recognition. Although personal, truth is not subjective, the product of whim or fancy. In this way truth stands at an angle to the subjective, sometimes coming home to us with considerable force such that we exclaim ‘it hit me between the eyes’ or ‘the penny dropped’.

These four features of truth converge in the traditional Christian claim that in the person of Jesus and the events surrounding his life, death and resurrection, God’s truth has been fully and finally manifested (John 14:6; Hebrews 2:1-2). The doctrine of Incarnation is in part an attempt to express that conviction conceptually – not simply that in Christ we have an expression of ‘truth’ in an abstract way, but that he is ‘truth incarnate’. This makes of Christ an organizing principle with explanatory power. But as we shall see below, lying at the heart of the myth of the Myth debate is the challenge that such an understanding is both misplaced and outdated, requiring a radical change in the way we think about this challenge, however, we would do well to look at the way truth at one level can provide the basis for development at a higher level.

In a highly stimulating paper, John Macquarrie draws attention to three levels of truth constitutive in theological investigation. These are: historical truth, theological truth, and metaphysical truth. Macquarrie claims that the notion of progression in significance as one proceeds from one level to another is what means that theological truth builds upon historical. At the same time it is also means that at no point, the relations between the three levels tend to be conceived like three stories in a building. Thus

![Fig. 1](Image)

This problem with the model is this: it creates the impression that as one moves from a lower level to a higher level, the lower is left behind and is devoid of further relevance. Or to put it another way, metaphorically, it can be likened to the different stages of a rocket: once the upper stages have been launched into orbit, the lower stages can be jettisoned as superfluous.

One suspects that something like this is occurring in the writings of those who would advocate a more existential approach to theology. A much more satisfactory way of addressing these issues is to consider metaphysics and theology and metaphysical would be as a series of concentric rings or spheres, with the historical elements providing the inner core which is taken up into, and transcended by, the theological and metaphysical, thus

![Fig. 2](Image)

This representation safeguards the essentially historical nature of Christianity which has at its centre an historical person and particular events, providing not only the material for theological and metaphysical reflection, but checks and controls as well. It should be pointed out, however, that the actual relations are more subtle and complex than the diagram suggests since metaphysical presuppositions and beliefs will to some extent ‘colour’ one’s views in a completely different way. This need not be a problem, however. In speaking of historical truth, we are referring to what happened in the past. The problems involved in historical truth will involve some measure of sift ing through the available evidence and attempting some sort of reconstruction. The method arises out of a careful reflection upon that historical core, drawing out the significance in terms of God and man.

Metaphysical truth is the result of further exploration into what has been discovered in the investigation of the great creeds, themselves having historical roots. This is to say that it is a part that have occurred as having theological significance. To a large extent it is this process which underlies the formulation of the great creeds, themselves having historical roots. This is to say that it is not only to say that God is ‘chief osceous – with the Father’. But are any of the creedal formulations to be considered ‘mythical’? Traditionally, much theological language, including incarnational language, has been taken as factual, informative (telling us about something) and explanatory (unpacking the signifi- cance). But, like John Hick, arch of the opinion that while the idea of the incarnation might be mythically true, it is not literally true (i.e. factually true). Whether such a contention can be shown to have any solid foundation will in
example, we might want to make the claim that ‘This man is true’, by which we mean that he is an honest and reliable fellow and can be counted on without question. This obviously carries a different sense to the claim that ‘2 + 2 = 4’ is true. It is based on personal observation and inference. Within the personal sphere of activity, all of these factors come into play in determining the truth of a statement. However, for one to speak of something for which that is inherent in all human interaction, namely a degree of ‘opacity’ or ‘mystery’. Even when we disclose something of ourselves to another person, we at the same time keep back something which is not irrational and all the ambiguities that it can produce is vital for personal interaction since it elicits and fulfils that which is integral to such interaction, namely trust.

All of this has direct bearing upon our present discussion, for it should sound a note of caution to those who would discuss such talk about incarnation as ‘meaningless’ on the basis of applying to it an originally defined, and thus inappropriate, criteria. If the basic analogy of God’s relation to the world and his activity in that world is that of interaction between persons, then just as allowance is made for ambiguity and impression in the human domain, one would expect at least a similar degree of tolerance in the divine. Far from this being a lack of concern, it is the most passionate fact that we take seriously the personal analogy between divine and human activity and recognize the useful insights it can yield in matters of doctrine as well. Laying definitions aside, the incarnation begins with the human and works towards an understanding of the divine (the weakness of natural theology), but that this is something which is ever before we turn away from its purpose. On this challenge, however, we would do well to look at the way truth at one level can provide the basis for development at a higher level.

In a highly stimulating paper, John Macquarrie draws attention to three levels of truth constitutive in theological investigation. These are: historical truth, theological truth, and metaphysical truth. Macquarrie argues that biblical truth is a progression in significance as one proceeds from one level to another. This means that theological truth builds upon historical truth. Metaphysical truth is an outworking of the theological. Although there may not be one-to-one correspondence, it should be noted that the relations between the three levels tend to be conceived like three stories in a building, thus:

![Fig. 1](Image)

Fig. 1

Metaphysical Truth
Theological Truth
Historical Truth

Increasing order of significance

The problem with this model is that it creates the impression that as one moves from a lower level to a higher level, the lower is left behind and is devoid of further relevance. Or to put it metaphorically, it is like being assigned to the different stages of a rocket: once the upper stages have been launched into orbit, the lower stages can be jettisoned as superfluous.

One expects that something like this is occurring in the writings of those who advocate a more existential approach to theology. A much more satisfactory way of understanding the relationship between historical, theological, and metaphysical would be as a series of concentric rings or spheres, with the historical elements providing the inner core which is taken up into, and transcended by, the theological and metaphysical, thus:

![Fig. 2](Image)

Fig. 2

Metaphysical Truth
Theological Truth
Historical Truth

This representation safeguards the essentially historical nature of Christianity which has at its centre an historical person and particular events, providing not only a genuine material for theological and metaphysical reflection, but checks and controls as well. It should be pointed out, however, that the actual relations are more subtle and complex than the diagram suggests since metaphysical presuppositions and beliefs will to some extent ‘colour’ one’s vision of the relationships between history and theology. Nevertheless, in serving to underscore the main features of interdependence between the three levels of truth, the above model provides a useful aid.

In speaking of historical truth, we are referring to what happened. The problem arises in historical methodology which will involve some measure of sifting through the available evidence and attempting some sort of reconstruction. The historical truth arises out of a careful reflection upon that historical core, drawing out the significance in terms of God and man.

Metaphysical truth is the result of further exploration into that core. Thus, in saying that ‘Jesus was raised from the dead’, our continuing concern is to have occurred as having theological significance. To a large extent it is this process which underlies the formulation of the great creeds, themselves having historical content, but not to have occurred as having theological significance. To a large extent it is this process which underlies the formulation of the great creeds, themselves having historical content, but not to have occurred as having theological significance. To a large extent it is this process which underlies the formulation of the great creeds, themselves having historical content, but not to have occurred as having theological significance. To a large extent it is this process which underlies the formulation of the great creeds, themselves having historical content, but not
Myth

One of the major criticisms levied at the book *The Myth of God Incarnate* is that it uses a term ‘myth’ in a plurality of ways often without specifying in each case whether the term was historically used. Inevitably this led to some confusion and obscurity of thought which a book of such a highly provocative nature could not warrant. I believe the authors were trying to enter this area of debate for the first time would be well advised to read Maurice Wiles’ helpful paper, ‘Myth in Theology’ in which he discusses the use of the concept ‘myth’. This would alert the unsuspicious student to the ways in which this term can be used so slippery and evasive a manner.

Our starting point however will be George Caird’s work in *Language and the Bible* in which he undertakes a most illuminating analysis of the various categories of myth in relation to different disciplines. In so doing, he clears away a lot of the fog which tends to bedevil most discussions of the subject. He begins by pointing out that ‘myth’ is used in two general senses. In common parlance, a myth is something which is essentially untruth and is thus a synonym for falsehood. Indeed, this appears to be the way the NT writers handle the word (cf. 1 Tim.1:14; 4:7; Tit.1:14). It would not be surprising, by the way, if there was a large overlap in this use of the term ‘myth’ and the way it is used in the minds of many who, when the notion of myth lies behind the headlines and so was seen as an outright denial of the Christian faith. (This suspicion is corroborated by the appearance of two New Testament terms — *Lucifer* and *God Incarnate*.) In theological circles however, the term has become linked with a movement which uses it as an overarching concept embracing various such ‘God-Talk’. The name which is best known in this context is that of Rudolf Bultmann who advocated a programme of ‘demythologization’ in order to ‘release the living word’. That is what Bultmann has to say on the matter: ‘Mythology is the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other-worldly visible. The effect what Bultmann is claiming is that myth is a theological use of metaphor, a non-literal way of speaking. Caird on the other hand makes out a case that as far as the Bible is concerned, where myth is used it is a specialized form of metaphor.

According to Caird, this special literary class of myth is capable of fulfilling a number of different functions. It may be employed in a direct way, that is, in order to communicate with people a deeper sense of commitment. It may be evocative — appealing to the imagination through which is impressive, mysterious, sublime. Myth may have a cohesive effect, binding together a people’s identity through an inherited tradition. But myth may also be referential, pointing to something beyond itself — an ontological aspect of reality. Caird therefore lists the adjective *mythical* as a way to describe a person or a thing wherein the reference is to a conception of the divine. But contrary to Caird’s claim, myth is not analogical, it is not something which is to be found in the sphere of human activity which in some ways has an affinity with the divine, as God is in revelation. This criticism, however, is not simply linguistic, it stems from Bultmann’s own criteria of myth, his definition of ‘myth’ given earlier, ‘incarnation’ falls outside this classification because it is not the vehicle by which the divine reached human experience. Nevertheless, it still might be argued that while ‘incarnation’ provides an instance where theological language is being used in a way that is strictly speaking not ‘mythic’, it may be regarded as a metaphorical way of speaking, one which is akin to figurative speech and so in this sense might be termed ‘myth’ to distinguish it from something that is of a higher order, in the sense that it is closer to Hick, and it is to an assessment of his attempt to provide an account of the relations between truth, myth and incarnation that we now turn.

Truth, myth and incarnation — John Hick

In his book *God and the Universe of Faith*, published before *The Myth of God Incarnate*, John Hick defines myth in the following way: ‘[Myth] is a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to something which is not literally true, or a symbol which invites a particular attitude in the hearer. The truth of myth is a kind of “practical truth” consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude it evokes — the appropriateness of the attitude to its object which may be an event, a person or set of ideas. Here Hick distinguishes “myth” as a story which functions to evoke an “appropriate attitude” in the hearer (since it is designated, separately from what it does) from factual discourse, hypothesis or model. Hick maintains that mythical language is not “literally true”, which prevents its application to something which is being descriptive or explanatory except in a very oblique sort of way. By way of example, Hick cites the story in Genesis 2 of the fall of man, which he says has this mythical quality of being able to convey a timeless truth common to human experience. In his treatment of the story of the incarnation, Hick places it logically on a par with Genesis 2, pointing out that in the case of the myth of the fall, as being a poetic and theoretical nature, a type of theological hypothesis, this has led to a dead end as well as a morass of logical contradictions. The case of the incarnation, according to Hick, is that it is a story to be seen as ‘myth’. When that is done, it then functions perfectly well in evoking an appropriate attitude to Jesus as Son of God.

But one may ask, how did it come about, historically speaking, that Jesus of Nazareth, who was clearly human, was eventually conceived by his followers in terms of ‘God and Man’? Hick provides an explanation. He suggests that in experience the early followers of Jesus did seem to encounter God in a remarkable way through him and such was the nature of this encounter that their religious experience had to be interpreted in terms of the language of ‘ultimates’ — a step which occurred within two generations of Jesus’ death. The end result of this interpretive process was that the language of the ‘ultimates’ became part of the Christological language, or language to speak of Jesus of God incarnate. The result was a crystallization at Chalcedon. Thus according to this reconstruction of events, to say that Jesus is ‘God incarnate’ means not that Jesus was literally God, as Bultmann’s literal (i.e. as explanatory) is, incoherent. It appears to be of the same order as speaking of a ‘round square’. It is, however, a useful answer as far as Hick is concerned, his aim being to take account of the contribution to *Myth* that believes that the amount of reliable historical information that we actually have concerning Jesus is so scanty that it renders impossible to construct such a thing as a truly coherent doctrine as we find attempted at Chalcedon. This means that if one is working to the model proposed in Fig. 2, then the inner historical core is so insubstantial that the outer edges of the ‘myth’ can offer a way of accounting for this. It has the consequence for Hick he considers it an error of the greatest magnitude to view the incarnation as ‘metaphysical truth’ and as a matter of fact.

The then is, Hick’s basic thesis. But in the light of the foregoing discussion, how convincing is it? We would suggest that it is seriously to be found wanting for the following reasons:

1. Although there is some similarity between Hick’s presentation of myth and that forwarded by Caird, in the view of some, this is a means of seeing as, the function of myth on Hick’s view is severely limited. While not denying the possible evocative effect of true myth, surely it amounts to something more than an effective tool producing some kind of ‘practical truth’ (whatever that might be?) It is not at all clear why myth cannot have some explanatory role, providing a real and definite performance of the task. Neither has Hick satisfactorily demonstrated that the doctrine of the incarnation is of the same order as say Isaiah 44 or Genesis 2, rather it is simply claimed that performance and meaning are included within this category by default on the premise that it cannot be of a factual nature, which again is an assumption and is not demonstrated.

2. As William Abraham has argued, it is highly questionable whether there is any inner religious necessityJesus as Son of God and Man. He may be viewed as the inheritor of this understanding of Jesus as ultimate or at least the most basic of myth or sarcotis — God becoming man while ceasing to be divine. However, in Christian circles the term ‘incarnate’ is rarely used as a verb, it is almost always used as an adjective, indicating a state of ‘title’ — Jesus — God Incarnate. Even so, the verbal idea is the one which underlies this usage and is the most pertinent to our discussion.

Upon closer inspection, both the denotation and connotation of the term ‘incarnation’ are of more interest. In speaking of divine action, in the main we have to resort to analogy, usually the sort of personal analogies that are discussed earlier in the article. Accordingly, God can be spoken of as ‘revealing’, ‘saving’, ‘forgiving’ etc. activities which are equally found in human affairs, but in this case we are speaking of an extension to the divine. But contrary to Caird’s claim, ‘incarnation’ is not analogical, it is not something which is to be
Myth

One of the major criticisms levied at the book The Myth of God Incarnate is whether its definition of the term 'myth' is accurate, taking into account the many diverse uses of the term 'myth' in a plurality of ways often without specific definitions. This term was used in the book, but not in a consistent manner. Invarially this led some to confusion and obscurity of thought which a book of such a highly provocative nature could have avoided.

Caird remarks, that he is not an unambiguous expressionist who believes in the absolute nature of the concept of 'myth'. This would alert the unsuspicious student to the ways in which this term can be used to be slippery and evasive. A manner.

Our starting point however must be George Caird's work in Language and the Bible in which he undertakes an analysis of the various meanings of the word 'myth' in relation to different disciplines. In so doing, he clears away a lot of the fog which tends to bedevil most discussions of the subject. He begins by pointing out that 'myth' is used in two general senses. In common parlance, a myth is something which is essentially true and is thus a synonym for falsehood. Indeed, this appears to be the way the NT writers handle the word (cf. 1 Tim 1:14; 4:7; Tit 1:14). It would not be out of the question in this wide of usage of the word to be found in the New Testament. However, this is not the meaning of the word in the minds of many of the modern scholars, nor the meaning attached to the word by those with a more profound understanding of the word. One then might say that what Bultmann has to say on the matter is: 'Mythology is the utility of imagery to express the other-worldly aspects of the world and the divine in terms of human life, the other-worldly in our everyday life. It is a way of thinking that a myth is a metaphor and a part of the metaphysical world'.

The English word 'incarnate' can function either as an adjective or as a verb. Verbally, it literally means 'to render something incarnate', that is, to bring it into actual form or substance. In this sense, it is not a metaphor, but something more literal than that. The verb 'incarnate' is derived from the noun 'incarnation', which is the act of bringing something into actual form or substance. The noun 'incarnation' is derived from the verb 'incarnate', which is the act of bringing something into actual form or substance.

Incarnation

The English word 'incarnate' can function either as an adjective or as a verb. Verbally, it literally means 'to render something incarnate', that is, to bring it into actual form or substance. In this sense, it is not a metaphor, but something more literal than that. The verb 'incarnate' is derived from the noun 'incarnation', which is the act of bringing something into actual form or substance. The noun 'incarnation' is derived from the verb 'incarnate', which is the act of bringing something into actual form or substance.

However, in Christian circles the term 'incarnate' is rarely used as a verb. Primarily, it is used in the context of the divine, and more specifically, it is used to describe the person of Jesus. However, the term 'incarnation' is not always used in this way, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In fact, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In some cases, it is used to describe the person of another divine being, such as the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-divine being, such as a human being. In still other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-human being, such as an animal. In all of these cases, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In fact, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In some cases, it is used to describe the person of another divine being, such as the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-divine being, such as a human being. In still other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-human being, such as an animal. In all of these cases, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In fact, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In some cases, it is used to describe the person of another divine being, such as the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-divine being, such as a human being. In still other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-human being, such as an animal. In all of these cases, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In fact, the term 'incarnation' is used in a variety of ways, and it is not always used to describe the person of Jesus. In some cases, it is used to describe the person of another divine being, such as the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-divine being, such as a human being. In still other cases, it is used to describe the person of a non-human being, such as an animal.
The alien according to the Torah

Georges Chawkat Moucarry

This article was first published in French in the magazine Ichthus (no. 132, 1985, pp. 3-10). It has been translated by Joachim Courtois. The author, who grew up in Syria and then studied Christian and Islamic theology in France, is now on the IFE's staff in France.

The article is not a technical OT study, but rather an attempt to bring a broad sweep of OT teaching to bear on a sensitive issue that is of importance in most countries of the world. The original French article led to correspondence and an exchange of views in Ichthus no. 134 (1986), pp. 31-38. Ichthus is obtainable from 2 rue Antoine Pons, 30044 Marseille, France.

Jeb, Rahab, Ruth and Naomi were all foreigners whose lives became in some way intimately involved in the history of Israel. Yet, as two men and two women, they were outstanding as they were, represented only a small portion of the foreign population within the borders of Israel that numbered, at the time of Solomon, 153,600 people. Compared with the total Israeli population at that time, this was an impressive number of aliens.

What was the status of the foreigner in Israel? How was the native population to view them? What meaning did their presence have for Israel? When Gifer was promised them by the prophets, both the alien residing in Israel as well as all foreigners, including those living in their far-distant homeland, were given the question. This is the question we must ask if we are genuinely concerned by what is happening today in Israel between Israelis and Palestinians, or, for that matter, between aliens and natives in any part of the world.

A question of vocabulary

First, the Torah speaks of differing types of foreigners, employing a precise vocabulary to distinguish those aliens established in Israel from those living outside Israel. Within Israel are either (1) gér: from the verb yâqûb, meaning to live as a foreigner in a country not one’s own; it often follows the noun as if to emphasize the nature of the foreigner’s presence in Israel. In this article the word will be translated ‘alien’ or ‘immigrant’; or (2) tâlāb: from the verb yâqûb, which means to sojourn in a country that is not one’s own. We use the verb gèr, apparently for the same purpose. We will translate it ‘resident’ or ‘guest’. Gèr and tâlāb have similar meanings and are associated in many passages.

Those living outside Israel are either (3) nêkâr and nêkrâ: two nominal adjectives derived from the same root, designating the true foreigner, one who lives in his own land. This will be translated as ‘foreigner’; or (4) zîr: a term that also designates the foreigner settled in his own land. This will be translated as ‘stranger’ or ‘unknown’.

Because of the similarity of nêkâr and zîr they are associated in many texts. Apart from certain instances where they are distinguished, this tendency to blend these described individuals, though more often they refer to...
giving of the Holy Spirit, when taken together could cry out for some explanation, an organizing principle. Inevitably, the early Christians would have seized upon those categories which were ready to hand, especially those of the Jewish Scripture. In the light of the new inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Hick is therefore quite correct in saying that the followers of Jesus would need to search for a language of conceptual metaphor, but grossly wide of the mark in suggesting a sufficient cause.

3. Hick's comparison of the incarnation with the fall also leaves much to be desired in that he ignores some very significant differences between the two major themes which are major planks in his thesis. First of all, while it could be maintained that the story of the fall in some way reflects the common experience of man, that cannot be claimed with regard to the story of the incarnation. The fall is not a story to be interpreted from any flow from some general experience. In the second place, the story of the fall is set in antiquity, whereas the story of the incarnation is firmly placed within history, and relatively recent history at that. This fact creates a significant distance between the events related in the NT and their accompanying descriptions of the world. Adolf von Koeberle's comment is most apt at this point: The history of salvation that is directly linked to the name of Jesus is fundamentally different from the world of myths. By its very nature myth is an inventing process, whereas history describes events of nature that occur and recurr in cycles.18

4. Hick's main philosophical point is also open to question. Certainly the simple assertion 'Jesus is God' does appear to create the logical inconsistency that Hick describes.19 But when this is said (and note that it is not a term used in the NT; the nearest we get to it is 'The Word of God', which is a title for Jesus) it is not in the form of 'theological shorthand'. But surely, the great debates of the past resulting in the sophisticated formulations of the creeds of the church have not taken something to which it was involved; hence the painstaking way in which formulations have been arrived at to ensure that such contradictions are avoided. Neither the NT writers nor the early Fathers ever thought they were inventing a simple formula. Yet Hick - who convincingly showed that he was not 'totum dei (all that God is without remainder) he was totus deus (everything God himself is). Again this was forged out of the experience of Christ, moving towards some conceptualization of Jesus' relation to God within the confines of monothelia, and could not have been thought of in the terms of the earlier paradoxes, stretching human language to its limits, but nothing less than this would be expected if anything like the traditional doctrine of the incarnation is correct.20  As we saw earlier, when it comes to language, there is no need to have a large amount of ambiguity in the realm of the divine as they do not do in the sphere of human relations.

5. Following on from this, one might also question Hick's central treatment of the doctrine of the incarnation in a way similar to scientific models, i.e. as having explanatory value. If the reply is that it is a myth and myths are not to be taken at the letter of the word, then that is another question. What is more, the alleged gulf between the function of 'myths' and scientific hypotheses is perhaps not as great as some suppose. The American philosopher W.V.O. Quine has remarked that 'The myths of Homer's gods and the myths of scientific objects differ only in degree and not kind'. After all, what are models, but abstract representations of a reality formulated in accordance with the evidential data? Traditionally, the doctrine of the incarnation has been treated as a mythological or scriptural models, some of which are antinomies (apparently contradictory), it has proved highly successful as a means of a language of metaphors through which the biblical data decisively point, namely that in Jesus, God became man.

6. In our view Hick's historical scepticism is not wholly consonant with the function of the historiography of the Gospels is outside the immediate scope of this discussion and the reader is referred to other works which deal with this.21 Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that without sufficient historical data, without the events of the Jesus story can even function as 'myth' in the way Hick suggests. Certainly it might provide a 'good read', maybe being evocative in some way. But what reasons can be adduced to convince a person that it should be accepted, even as conveying some general religious truth, which in fact it does not purport to do? The traditional claim is that the story is rooted in actual events, whereas on Hick's account what these events are we do not really know, and so the story functions simply as story, perhaps begging on the heart strings, but having little, if any, epistemic bite.

What is more, if the amount of historical knowledge about Jesus is as scanty as Hick believes it to be, then why not look to some more recent figure in history about whom we know much more?22 Perhaps then we might have a more convincing form of 'theological shorthand'. But surely, the great debates of the past resulting in the sophisticated formulations of the creeds of the church have not taken something to which it was involved; hence the painstaking way in which formulations have been arrived at to ensure that such contradictions are avoided. Neither the NT writers nor the early Fathers ever thought they were inventing a simple formula. Yet Hick - who convincingly showed that he was not 'totum dei (all that God is without remainder) he was totus deus (everything God himself is). Again this was forged out of the experience of Christ, moving towards some conceptualization of Jesus' relation to God within the confines of monothelia, and could not have been thought of in the terms of the earlier paradoxes, stretching human language to its limits, but nothing less than this would be expected if anything like the traditional doctrine of the incarnation is correct. As we saw earlier, when it comes to language, there is no need to have a large amount of ambiguity in the realm of the divine as they do not do in the sphere of human relations.

This article was first published in French in the magazine Ichthus (no. 132, 1985, pp. 31-36). It has been translated by YOUR NAME for THE CHRISTIAN INTELLIGENCE PRESS. The author, who grew up in Syria and then studied Christian and Islamic theology in France, is now on the IFES staff in France.

The article is not a technical OT study, but rather an attempt to bring a broad sweep of OT teaching to bear on a sensitive issue that is of importance in most countries of the world. The original French article led to correspondence and an exchange of views in Ichthus no. 134 (1986), pp. 31-38. Ichthus is obtainable from 2 rue Antoine Ponts, 13004 Marseille, France.

Job, Rahab,1 Ruth and Naaman2 were all foreigners whose lives became in some way intimately involved in the history of Israel. Yet Hick presents them as mere women placed in a position of padding. Indeed, one suspects that the ideas of Hick and the other mythographers only gain credence by cashing in on traditional Christian currency which they have declared bankrupt. In other words, the basis for the Jesus parable is traditional Christianity and can only survive at the expense of the host doctrines which they are trying to sup of vitatality.

Concluding remarks
While it may be conceded that there is a literary category of 'myth' through which truth might be conveyed, it is not the category most applicable to the doctrine of the incarnation. When this is attempted, as in the case of Hick, the resulting construct is unable to bear the theological weight placed upon it. Neither is it able to provide as satisfactory an explanation either of the biblical data or historical and phenomenological factors leading to the formulation of the traditional doctrine of the incarnation. By far the most satisfactory understanding of the function of the doctrine is that it is informative, possessing great explanatory power and operative within the framework of factual discourse.

4 C. F. Harvey, God, Incarnation, Story and Belief (SPCK); D. F. Wells, The Person of Christ (Marshall, Morgan & Scott); George Carey, God, Incarnation and Arena (Aren).
7 C. F. Martin, Kultur: - without the Cross there is no Christology nor is there any feature in Christology which can escape justifying itself by the Cross', cited in J. Moffatt's The Crucified God (SCM, 1973), p. 85.

The alien according to the Torah
Georges Chawkat Moucarry

This article was first published in French in the magazine Ichthus (no. 132, 1985, pp. 31-36). It has been translated by YOUR NAME for THE CHRISTIAN INTELLIGENCE PRESS. The author, who grew up in Syria and then studied Christian and Islamic theology in France, is now on the IFES staff in France.

Job, Rahab,1 Ruth and Naaman2 were all foreigners whose lives became in some way intimately involved in the history of Israel. Yet Hick presents them as mere women placed in a position of padding. Indeed, one suspects that the ideas of Hick and the other mythographers only gain credence by cashing in on traditional Christian currency which they have declared bankrupt. In other words, the basis for the Jesus parable is traditional Christianity and can only survive at the expense of the host doctrines which they are trying to sup of vitatality.

Concluding remarks
While it may be conceded that there is a literary category of ‘myth’ through which truth might be conveyed, it is not the category most applicable to the doctrine of the incarnation. When this is attempted, as in the case of Hick, the resulting construct is unable to bear the theological weight placed upon it. Neither is it able to provide as satisfactory an explanation either of the biblical data or historical and phenomenological factors leading to the formulation of the traditional doctrine of the incarnation. By far the most satisfactory understanding of the function of the doctrine is that it is informative, possessing great explanatory power and operative within the framework of factual discourse.

2 John Macquarrie, Truth in Christology, God Incarnate, Story and Belief (SPCK, 1982).
4 G. Caird, Language, Imagery and the Bible (Duckworth, 1980).
5 W. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth (1953), p. 16.
11 See my paper for an excellent discussion of this see Richard Storrs’ paper, “Can one say “Jesus is God”?, in Christ the Lord, p. 336.
12 For a more recent and thoroughly readable presentation of this line of thought see Alister McGrath’s Understanding Jesus (Kingsway, 1987).
foreign peoples in a relation of conflict with Israel. In such a context, "foreigners" become imbued with antagonistic qualities: proud, menacing,37 pager, threatening.13
In order to understand what the Torah has to say in regard to foreigners, we need to be aware that the love-leader of the Promised Land did not make them its own, but rather its caretakers. We would do well to meditate on this lesson in humility, 0f the Righteous and the Israelites in a right perspective of their relationship to God. Abraham, their father, was more than an example: he was a historic ^and political model in the eyes of Muslims alike, who claim him as their spiritual forebear.

The status of the alien in Israel Once the Israelites were established in the land of Canaan, their community life was placed under the authority of Mosaic law. Given the significant number of aliens in their midst,29 it would have been imprudent for the law not to have taken them into account. However, the law does give precise instructions with regard to the status of aliens living in Israel. 

The celebration of the Passover represented for every Israelite the commemoration of a primal event for Israel; it would seem to be natural, therefore, to restrict this celebration to Israelites. However, with the exception of foreigners passing through the land and there only temporarily,30 all aliens who had linked their destiny to Israel and had undergone ritual circumcision could participate in the Passover. The law that was valid for Israelites was valid for them as well.31

Indeed, the validity of all laws in the land extended to these immigrants. The Sabbath32 was established, in part, to allow more time for the Jewish people to gather from the land they had already been gathered to feed all, native as well as immigrant.31 The laws regarding the Day of Atonement,33 offerings, the prohibition on taking the land34 and its produce,35 idolatry and blasphemy,36 the sacred meal,47 inability to pay one's debts,48 slavery,49 atonement for sins,50 the cities of refuge,51 and the law of the talmud52 all that aliens living in Israel and who were circumcised were included in this national life. The solemn act sealing this relationship probably was their participation in the making of the Covenant.53 It is clear from the law that since the law was both a religious constitution and a civil code, this commitment signified a dual allegiance, to the God of Israel and to the nation itself.

You will love the alien as yourself Without a doubt, the Torah encouraged the integration of the alien and, by extension, the rest of the world. Yet the Torah places the emphasis on the precariousness of the alien's situation. This is indicated by the fact that the commandments concerning the immigrant are often the same as those concerning either the poor,55 or the Levite,56 or the widow,57 or the orphan,58 or the Levite, the widow and the orphan,59 or the Levite, the widow and the orphan,59 or the widow and the orphan.60 This is not to say that these persons were fragile, so that the Torah gave them an attention and protection commensurate with their vulnerability.61 But the commandments concerning the alien are more numerous and more explicit.62 By integrating the Israelites themselves had been aliens in Egypt;63 they were well able to identify with the immigrants and to know how it feels to be an alien,63 So they are neither to exploit the alien nor to oppress him,64 but rather to render justice between his brothers and the immigrants without partiality.65 If they refuse to respect the rights of aliens, they will fall under the curse of the law.66
In day-to-day life, everything is not simply a matter of justice. God loves the alien and is partial to none;83 and it means a matter of kindness. For living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as a friend.61 - if, that is, they want to conform to God, take them as their fellow citizens and treat them as such. The Israelites will be generous to the aliens, giving them a share from their triennial tithe,66 leaving them the excess of the harvests,68 and inviting them to participate in the celebration.69 This was to be their way of saying that they too are in the sight of God.

The prayer of the alien; his intercession in favour of the foreigner We hear in the Psalms the echo of the Torah in the soul of the faithful Israelite. He recognizes his own inherent weakness, being an alien on the earth, and this leads him to ask God to show him the commandments so that he may follow the way of righteousness.70 He begs God to answer his prayers and to hear his cry, for, he says, I dwell with you as an alien in your land.71 This is not the expression of the Israelite Jew who, having no illusions about his lowly position before God, rejected by his own because of his loyalty to him, the psalmist gives vent to his suffering because he has become a foreigner to my benefit.72

In this context, it is not difficult for him to identify with the alien in his country who, as himself, endures the injustice of men [who] slay the widow and the alien; [who] murder the fatherless.73 He calls on the God of righteousness and compassion, [who] watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but [who] frustrates the ways of the sinner.74
On the eve of his death and at a time when the preparations for the construction of the temple were completed, David addresses a prayer to God that expresses, with a heightened sense of his own frailty, man's relationship to God:

Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But here again, have mercy on us in your kindness, for we know that we should be your servants and give you praise as generously as this. Everything comes from you, and we have nothing that we could offer you. We are your people and guests and guests in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.78

How better to express the nakedness and brevity of man's existence in the face of the generosity and eternity of God? In his prayer of inauguration of the temple, Solomon recalls the faithfulness of God to his promises concerning Israel. His prayer, which extolls the divine majesty, rises for a moment above the, so to speak, earthly concerns of the time: the former come from a distant country to pray to God in this house:

As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm - when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, so that your own people Israel may live in safety.23

This blessing of universalism will become, in the message of the prophets, a great light illuminating the immigrants in Israel, as well as more distant strangers.

The good news of the prophets to the aliens and foreigners Recalling the equality before the law of both Israelites and aliens,71 the prophets denounce the oppression of the alien to bring a message of salvation. Isaiah announces the coming of the Lord in person to judge those who violate the right of the alien, thus disdaining divine law.

But the prophets do not simply remind their listeners of the Old Testament law and the God of Egypt, but rather they announce that they will inherit the land in the same way as the Israelites.78 Isaiah announces to the immigrants79 as well as to the foreigners80 that they will be fully incorporated into the people of God. They will all come to pray in his house which will be called 'house of prayer for all nations'.81 They will be the people of God, with the Israelites, in the celebration of her rites.82 They will make her flocks to graze and will work her land83 with joy and peace.84 The city will be forever freed from all her enemies, and her inhabitants will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.85

Contemporary perspectives The debate over immigration is a burning issue in many parts of the Western world. A review of the biblical passages concerning the alien shows that God's Word calls believers to be as foreigners in this world, marked by a true spirit of charity, in the best sense of that term. Their precarious position should be an added motivation not to exploit the migrants, but rather to assist them, with good will and justice. This opening, welcoming attitude contrasts, of course, with the spirit of self-absorption, superiority and racism, which are being thrust so quickly in response to what is foreign to them. If I am content simply to exist alongside the foreigner, making no effort to know him or understand him, I will be more likely, in crisis, to conspire with others, on the one hand, to make the effort with me, I discover beneath his foreignness a neighbour who symbolizes God's call to love and to resist and to coexist and to live with my brother in a common humanity.

And how can we not see the connection between the remarkable teaching of the Torah on the foreigner, given in precise terms to Israel, and the present-day situation of "foreigners" in Israel? I intentionally put this word in quotation marks, for the irony of history is such that the Palestinian are considered by Israelis today to be strangers to the land, which is the very weight of history become heavy that this reversal of situations fails to provoke our indignation? Is not the responsibility of those who love Israel precisely to remind her, as did the prophets of old, of the teaching of her own scriptures? Should the messianic prophecies abolished the distinction between the Israelites and aliens remain but a dead letter until the coming of the Messiah? Or rather, do they not constitute a directive to
foreign peoples in a relation of conflict with Israel. In such a context, ‘foreigners’ become imbued with antagonistic qualities: proud, menacing, pagan, threatening.

In order to understand what the Torah has to say in regard to foreigners, we must first clarify that the differing terminology and in particular the distinction made between those living in Israel and those living outside.

The example of Abraham

The Bible begins with God calling Abraham to leave his native country for a country unknown to him. God’s call thus takes on the colour of exile. Abraham arrives in the land of Canaan, a land that God promises to his descendants. A severe famine strikes, forcing Abraham and his son Isaac to journey to Egypt for three years. While there, he returns to Canaan and makes a covenant with him, announcing that his descendants will be aliens in a foreign land. Abraham then moves on for a life in Gerar, in the south of the country. He seals a pact of peace with Abimelech, king of the Philistines. When Sarah dies at Hebron, in Canaan, Abraham asks the inhabitants of that land to send him ground in which to bury his wife. Generous with him, they make him a gift of the land. Abraham refuses this generosity, saying that he is an alien and a guest in the land.

This statement may surprise us since it refers to land that Abraham, by divine promise, could have considered his own. Indeed it reveals to us the noble mind of the patriarch. Abraham was not a conqueror coming to a foreign land in order to receive another in its place. One might think he was waiting for God himself to fulfill his promise. But quite aside from demonstrating his justice and his deep mistrust of material things, Abraham’s attitude indicates how the ‘father of believers’ saw himself in relation to the One who called him. To confer on an object, that one is an alien on earth. This is why God gave a signmark of a faith that holds him to be the possessor of all things and to be a passing shadow.

The Israelites: aliens and guests

After his father’s death, Isaac leaves for Gerar to live in the home of King Abimelech. Isaac then returns to Hebron where he will be buried. His son Jacob, leaves for the home of his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia. He will not return to Canaan until many years later. Like Abraham, Jacob and his sons are obliged to emigrate to Egypt; but their exile will be long. Their descendants will live and die in exile. Centuries later, Moses will come forth to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; and Moses, in turn, will take refuge in Midian. There he gives to his son the name of Gershon, for he says, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land.’ Twice an alien or immigrant, he could not consider himself as a citizen.

Did this experience as an alien, which was the condition of all the patriarchs in Canaan and of all the Israelites in Egypt, end with the conquest of the Promised Land? Yes, in one sense, since they thus found themselves in the land promised to God. But the question lingers: Did the land then become theirs?

Let us observe how the Torah justifies the law of the Jubilee in relation to the repurchase of property in Israel:

‘The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and guests. If, in other words, the law will distinguish between the borders of the Promised Land did not make them its owners, but rather its caretakers. We would do well to meditate on this lesson in humility. Thus, while the Israelites in a right perspective of their relationship to God. Abraham, their father, was more than an example: he was a model for the Jews, that model of the Prophet and Muslims alike, who claim him as their spiritual forebear.

The status of the alien in Israel

Once the Israelites were established in the land of Canaan, their community life was placed under the authority of Mosaic law. Given the significant number of aliens in their midst, it would have been surprising for this law not to have taken them into account. However, the law does give precise instructions with regard to the status of aliens living in Israel. The celebration of the Passover represented for every Israelite the commemoration of a primal event for Israel: it would seem to be natural, therefore, to restrict this celebration to Israelites. However, with the exception of foreigners passing through the land and there only temporarily, all aliens who had linked their destiny to Israel and had undergone ritual circumcision could participate in the feast. The law that was valid for Israelites was valid for them as well.

Indeed, the validity of all laws in the land extended to these immigrants. The Sabbath2 was established, in part, to allow for all the inhabitants of the land to rest. The products of the soil were gathered to feed all, native as well as immigrant.4 The laws regarding the Day of Atonement,5 offers, the prohibition on taking the name of the Lord in vain,6 the sabbatical year,7 the sabbatical year,8 the sacred meal,10 iniquity to pay one’s debts,11 slavery,12 atonement for sins,13 the cities of refuge,14 and the law of the talion,15 all show that aliens living in Israel were considered as integral part of the nation and not a small or alien group. The solemn act sealing this relationship probably was their participation in the making of the Covenant16, to commit himself to the law. Since the law was both a religious constitution and a civil code, this commitment signified a dual allegiance, to the God of Israel and to the nation itself.

You will love the alien as yourself

Without a doubt, the Torah encouraged the integration of the alien in the society. Yet the Torah also emphasizes the precariousness of the alien’s situation. This is indicated by the fact that the commandments concerning the immigrant are often the same as those concerning either the poor,20 or the Levite,21 or the widow,22 or the orphan,23 or the Levite, the widow and the orphan,24 or the Levite,25 or the widow,26 or the orphan,27 or the Levite, the widow and the orphan.31 In other words, we could have said that these persons were fragile, so that the Torah gave them an attention and protection commensurate with their vulnerability.

But the commandments concerning the alien prescribed far more severe rules. For example, the law states that the Israelites themselves had been aliens in Egypt;28 they were well able to identify with the immigrants and ‘to know how it feels to be aliens,’29 so they are neither to exploit the alien nor to oppress him,30 but rather to render justice between their brothers and the immigrants without partiality.31 If they refuse to respect the rights of aliens, they will fall under the curse of the law.32

In day-to-day life, everything is not simply a matter of justice. God loves the alien and is partial to one:33 and it means that God is present for living well you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself:34 if, that is, you want to conform to God, take the alien and make him like you. The Israelites will be generous to the aliens, giving them a share from their triennial tithe,35 leaving them the excess of the harvests,36 and inviting them to participate in the celebration.37 This was to be their way of saying that they are too the sight of God.

The prayer of the alien; his intercession in favour of the foreigner

We hear in the Psalms the echo of the Torah in the soul of the faithful Israelite. He recognizes his own inherent weakness, being an alien on the earth, and this leads him to ask God to show him the commandments so that he may follow the way of righteousness.38 He begs God to answer his prayers and to hear his cry, for, he says, ‘I dwell with you as an alien in your land.39’ There, the poet proposes an ideal: no illusions about his lowly position before God, rejected by his own because of his loyalty to him, the psalmist goes on to say that he has become ‘a foreigner to my brethren, an alien to my countrymen.40 In this context, it is not difficult for him to identify with the alien in his country who, as he himself, endures the injustice of men [who] say the widow and the alien; [who] murder the fatherless.41 He calls on the God of righteousness and compassion, [who] watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but [who] frustrates the ways of those who are ungodly.42

On the eve of his death and at a time when the preparations for the construction of the temple were completed, David addresses a prayer to God that expresses, with a heightened sense of his own frailty, man’s relationship to God:

Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But you have been exalting this day your name and have been exalting this day the name of your servant David your servant, saying: ‘You shall build a temple for me in Jerusalem, and I will establish your name forever. We are grateful to you and to your people who believe in you, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.43

How better to express the nakedness and brevity of man’s existence in the face of the generosity and eternity of God? In his prayer of inauguration of the temple, Solomon recalls the faithfulness of God to his promises concerning Israel. His prayer, which exalts the divine majesty, rises for a moment above the material, for he asks God to remember that the former come from a distant country to pray to God in this house.

As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outranked arm—when he comes and pray toward this temple, then hear from your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, so your dovory people forever.

This glimpse of universalism will become, in the message of the prophets, a great light illuminating the immigrants in Israel, as well as more distant strangers.

The good news of the prophets to the aliens and foreigners

Recalling the equality before the law of both Israelites and aliens,44 the prophets denounce the oppression of the alien in Israel.45 Ezekiel, who speaks in the name of God, announces the coming of the Lord in person to judge those who violate the right of the alien, thus disdaining divine law.

But the prophets do not simply remind their listeners of the example of the alien in Egypt; they emphasize that they will inherit the land in the same way as the Israelites.46 Isaiah announces to the immigrants47 as well as to the foreigners48 that they will be fully incorporated into the people of God. They will all come to pray in his house which will be called a ‘house of prayer for all nations’.49 They will all come to participate in the celebration of the rite.50 They will make her flocks to graze and will work her land51 with joy and peace.52 The city will be forever freed from all her enemies, and her inhabitants will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.53

Contemporary perspectives

The debate over immigration is an burning issue in many parts of the Western world. A review of the biblical passages concerning the alien shows that God’s word calls believers to enter into a relationship with aliens, marked by a true spirit of charity, in the best sense of that term. Their precarious position should be an added motivation not to exploit the immigrant. God is present to them with goodness and justice. This opening, welcoming attitude contrasts, of course, with the spirit of self-absorption, suspicion and fear, as well as notions about immigration that is nothing but a senseless and misplaced reaction to what is foreign to them. If I am content simply to exist alongside the foreigner, making no effort to know him or understand him, I will be more likely, in crisis, to consider himself an alien, unable to find a place to exist. If, on the other hand, I make the effort to meet with him, I discover beneath his foreignness a neighbour who symbolizes God’s call to his followers to reject their own barbarisms and to live with my brother in a common humanity.

And how can we not see the connection between the remarkable teaching of the Torah on the foreigner, given in precise terms to Israel, and the present-day situation of the ‘foreigners’ in Israel? I intentionally put this word in quotation marks, for the irony of history is such that the Palestinians are considered by Israelis today to be strangers in their land. But the weight of history becomes even heavier that this reversal of situations fails to provoke our indignation? Is not the responsibility of those who love Israel precisely to remind her, as did the prophets of old, of the teaching of her own scriptures? Should the messianic prophecies abolish the distinction between the Israelites and aliens remain but a dead letter until the coming of the Messiah? Or rather, do they not constitute a directive to
follow now, so as to announce the messianic reign? The mission of Christians, awaiting the return of Christ, is to inscribe in the present time the meaning of the history which his return will reveal. Would it be otherwise for those who transmitted to us the messianic hope?

Finally, the present human situation is in itself, for believers, a sign that believers themselves are aliens and immigrants before God. Their existence, in other words, is as fleeting as a shadow or a breath; and what goods they possess are but expressions of the generosity of their Creator. To be conscious of one's status of alien on the earth means, for the believer, not only to act accordingly with regard to the alien living within one's borders; it also means to marvel at the paradox of the great vocation given by God to his humble human creature:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care about?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.

You made him torule over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.

(Psalm 8:3-6)

(Scripture quotations have been taken from the New International Version of the Bible.)

1 Cor. 2:5. 1 Fz. 2:5.

2 Fz. C.2:16-17. Foreigners provided the bulk of the manpower for the building of the Lukan studies in each of the last 30 years. As a result, the position of Luke the theologian has become firmly established in NT scholarship. The latter position is a consequence of interpreting Luke's theology and little agreement concerning even the most basic issues. Today, however, the situation has radically changed. Gone is the shrill debate and sloganeering of the 'sixties, and even much of the uncertainty of the 'seventies; and in their place is a growing body of constructive research of a very high quality.

Some of the most recent work has been done cooperatively, as in the case of work on Luke--Acts held at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, in the symposiums at various 'eighties'. Other work has been done by individual younger and older scholars. Taken together, the Luke-Lukan writings focus on academic study and, as a result, have produced a host of significant contributions, monographs on certain thematic, cases, major controversies. If we choose to examine an image for the more recent research, we should select that of a garden. The soil of Luke studies has been well cultivated, a variety of promising seeds has been planted, it has been well watered, and there is evidence of much growth. Although it is not yet time for the full harvest, the 'first fruits' that are already evident give us reason to hope for a bumper crop in the not too distant future.

The student who begins his work on Luke--Acts today is well served by a number of excellent guides to the scholarly discussion. In a recent article, I have attempted to trace the broad contours of the discussion, to give an impression of some of the most fruitful conclusions, and suggest possible directions for further study. In the present essay I will comment on a few of the current commentaries. I will begin with the two-volume work of the Greek Septuagint.

The commentary of the Greek Septuagint by Siddans is a two-volume work by F. E. Garcia Martinez, and published in 1987 by the American University, Nashville, Tennessee.

Two decades ago W. C. van Unnik could speak of Luke--Acts as a 'research morsel'. Not only were there many differences of opinion among scholars concerning fundamental issues of interpretation, but there was a decided lack of time to some of the research, particularly in Germany. It was not simply that the older view of 'Luke the historian' was rejected and a new approach to the textual period of the apocryphal character established, but 'Luke' (certainly not the traditionally identified missionary companion and friend of Paul) was regarded as betrayer of the early Christian eschatology, preacher of a 'theology of glory' rather than 'theology of the cross', perpetrator of theologies of both the Jerusalem church and of Paul, and a formative force in the development of 'Early Catholicism'. The author's perspective was frequently confused and contrasted with that of Paul, generally to the detriment of Luke.

Building on the pioneering work of Martin Dibelius (1883-1947), Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Hachtken set the tone for the critical decade. In particular, the works of both Conzelmann and Hachtken are an overview of the passage as a whole, and verse by verse commentaries on the grammar, literal and historical setting, and, above all, the theology of Acts. Sandwiched in between the exegesis of individual passages are twelve important excurses, treating of the ascension of Jesus, the twelve apostles as witnesses, OT citations in Acts, Pentecost and the Holy Spirit, Peter in Acts, possessions and the possession of possessions, the miracle stories, the Christologies of Mark and Acts, the paroikia, the Helenismus and Samaria, Paul in Acts, and the sowing and reaping cycle. These excurses are often too long and give only a two-exorcuses in the second volume. Perhaps this is due to the limitations of space, but it leads to a bit of an imbalance between the two.

Siddans's commentary is by far the best work available on Acts to date: it is a generation more up-to-date than Hachtken, balanced and comprehensive in its evaluation of the breadth of recent scholarship, and chock-full of useful data. It is to be hoped that it will find a British or North American publisher willing to undertake its translation, thus making it available to a much wider audience.

Another significant German commentary is the one by Rudolf Pesch in the influential 'Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum NT'. This commentary on Luke--Acts is intended to link the text of the Scripture to the contemporary life of the church, including its renewal themes. The author himself, a Roman Catholic and a former professor of NT at the University of Freiburg, took the radical step of resigning his university appointment to join the movement for the renewal of the church, focusing his concern on the faith, theological education, Christian community and social action. Pesch's stance given his work a focus similar to that of Australia's Robert Banks, though he comes out of a very different ecclesiastical ethos.

The world of NT scholarship has been waiting impatiently for more than a decade for the publication of K. Barrett's commentary on Acts in the International Critical Commentary series, which is in the process of being up-dated. Meanwhile, we have to be content with
follow now, so as to announce the messianic reign? The mission of Christians, awaiting the return of Christ, is to inscribe in the present time the meaning of the history which his return will reveal. Would it be otherwise for those who transmitted to us the messianic hope?

Finally, the present eschatological events is in itself, for believers, a sign that believers themselves are aliens and immigrants before God. Their existence, in other words, is as fleeing as a shadow or a breath; and what goods they possess are but expressions of the generosity of their Creator. To be conscious of one's status of alien on the earth means, for the believer, not only to act accordingly with regard to the alien living within one's borders; it also means to marvel at the paradox of the great vocation given by God to his humble human creature:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him to rule over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.

(Psalm 8:3-6)

(Scripture quotations have been taken from the New International Version of the Bible.)

1 Gn 17:12, 27; Jdg 10:16; Ru 2:13; 2Sa 15:19; 1Ki 11:1, 8; 1Er 10:18, 11: 17, 18; 44: 9; 2Sa 13:26, 27; 30: 6; 2Es 6:2.
2 2Sa 22:45, 46; Ps 18:44-45, 54; 55:10; 109:11; 144: 11, 17; 1Sa 1: 7, 6; 2Ch 20:13; 20: 4, 9, 5: 21; 11: 52; 19: 3, 10; Ez 7: 31, 11: 9, 27: 6; 30: 12; 31: 12; Hs 7: 9; 8: 7; Ob 11.
5 Gn 12: 10.
7 Ex 2: 22; 18: 3.
9 De 23: 24.
10 Ex 23: 26.
11 Lk 26: 13.
12 See note 3.
14 Ex 12: 19; 19: 49, 49; Nu 9: 14; cf. 2Ch 30: 23.
15 Ex 31: 10; Dt 5: 4.
16 Ex 23: 12.
18 Lv 16: 29.
19 Lv 17: 22; 18: Nu 15:14-16.
20 Lv 16: 17-18.
21 Lv 17: 15; Nu 19: 10; Dt 14: 21 is the only text in which the immigrant is not specifically mentioned.
22 Ex 23: 26 allows the Israelite to take slaves from among the clans of the temporary residents, just as Lk 25:47-48 allows an immigrant or a guest to inherit property from the Israelites, on the condition that they guarantee them the right to be repossessed at any time and made free by the year of Jubilee.
23 Nu 26: 5, 29, 30.
25 Lv 26: 14.
26 Mt 10: 31-12; cf. Jos 3: 5.
27 Ex 15: 24; cf. Jos 3: 5. Note the consequences of Israel’s violation of the law with regard to the immigrant (Dt 28:43) and to the foreigner (Dt 29:1).
30 Lv 25: 7.
31 Lv 25: 25; 23: 35, 37; Nu 35: 15.
32 Ex 23: 13.
33 Ex 21: 22; 23; Dt 16: 10; 24: 17, 19, 20, 21; 27: 19; cf. Ps 94: 14-16; Jer 7: 6; 23: 21; Ezk 22:7; Mal 3: 5.
34 Ez 17: 27.
35 Ez 7: 10.
37 Ex 23: 29.
38 Ex 22: 20, 23; Lv 19: 33.;
39 Dt 24: 14, 17.
40 Hb 19: 15; 2Pt 3: 14; 3: 13, 5: 14; Ps 44: 21; 81: 9; 1Rs 22: 40; 1Ch 3: 13; 5: 9; 18; Ezk 16: 32; Hs 5: 7; Dt 11: 27; Mal 3: 21 (1.
41 Gn 19: 15; 17: 19; 15: 19 and 15: 19) and things (2 Ki 24: 19, Ps 33: 19, 233: 20; Hb 11: 42; Ez 20: 42, 21: 22; Je 17: 20; Je 22: 1) or simply refer to another person (1Ki 3: 18; Pr 14: 10, 27: 2).

Professor Gasque, author of the well-known work on the history of the criticism of Acts, is E. Marshall Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of South Carolina, and the author of On the Study of the Apocalypse. He is the editor of J. Omar Good Visting Distinguished Professor 1987-8 at Juniata College, Huntington, Pennsylvania.

Two decades ago W. C. van Unnik could speak of Luke-Acts as a ‘leading eschatological’ work. Not only were there many differences of opinion among scholars concerning fundamental issues of interpretation, but there was a decided lack of input concerning the role of the book, particularly in Germany. It was not simply that the elder view of ‘Luke the historian’ was rejected and a new, more theological interpretation of the suprascriptural realm (i.e. Luke’s concept of a new heaven and new earth and his ‘second time’ view), was established, but ‘Luke’ (certainly not the traditionally identified missionary companion and friend of Paul) was regarded as betrayer of the early Christian eschatology, preacher of a ‘theology of glory’ rather than the ‘theology of the cross’, pervert of the theologies of both the Jerusalem church and of Paul, and a formative force in the development of ‘Early Catholicism.’ The author’s perspective was frequently compared and contrasted with that of Paul, generally to the disadvantage of Luke.

Building on the pioneering work of Martin Delibes (1883-1947), Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Hacht set the tone for the critical dialogue. In their 1953 book, they established a link between the importance of the author of Luke-Acts as a theologian in his own right, and the need to be contested by no one today – the dogmatism with which both expressed their views on the most debatable issues indicated to Luke research in the mid-twentieth century, a small group of disciples and colleagues working in the Conzelmann-Hacht tradition and a much larger group reacting to what they saw as the extreme and speculative views put forward by the first group.

A decade later Charles H. Talbert used the image of shifting sands, which characterized the position of ‘Luke the theologian’ had become firmly established in NT scholarship. But even after 50 years, this image of Luke as an ‘ambiguous’ interpreter for interpreting Lukans theology and little agreement concerning even the most basic issues. Today, however, the situation has radically changed. Gone is the scholarly debate and slogation of the ‘sixties, and even much of the uncertainty of the ‘seventies and in place there now is a growing body of constructive research of a very high quality.

Some of the most recent work has been done cooperatively, as in the 1987 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held in Atlanta. ‘How to read Luke: The Lukian writing the focus of academic study and, as a result, have produced a host of significant conclusions, monographs, and essays. In some cases, major commentaries. If we were to choose an image for the more recent research, we would select that of a garden. The soil of Lukian scholarship has been carefully cultivated, a variety of promising seeds has been planted, it has been well watered, and there is evidence of much growth. Although it is not yet time for the full harvest, the ‘first fruits’ that are already evident give us reason to hope for a bumper crop in the not too distant future.

The world of NT scholarship has changed significantly for more than a decade for the publication of K. C. Barrett’s commentary on Acts in the International Critical Commentary series, which is in the process of being up-dated. Meanwhile, we have to be content with...
Women and the kingdom of God: three recent books

Sally Asfald

Dr Asfald is doing post-doctoral research and writing at Lunds Bible College. The books she reviews in this article are:


Beginning with the assumption that those already convinced of the truth of feminism (or those at least interested in the question) will need no persuasion to continue and those who have begun by addressing those who are not so convinced, or even interested. The emphasis of the books, which arise out of the 3 books reviewed, is on the emphasis on the kingdom of God. For feminism - the concern for women's interests and oppression - is a concern that breaks only with the OT and occasionally only with the debate over the ordination of women and the interpretation of the passages in Genesis, and in the NT - although this is where evangelical debate often begins and ends. To be sure,
Women and the kingdom of God: three recent books
Sally Alford

Dr Alford is doing post-doctoral research and writing at Lintong Bible College. The books she reviews in this article are:


Beginning with the assumption that those already convinced of the truth of women's equality in the church (or those at least interested in the question) will need no persuasion to continue, she then begins by addressing those who are not so convinced, or even interested. The main emphasis of the book, which arises out of the 3 books reviewed, is an emphasis on the Bible itself. She begins with a brief survey of early Christian feminism - the concern for women's interests and the rights of women in the OT and NT, and then only with the debate over the ordination of women and the interpretation of the passages in Genesis, and in the NT — although this is where evangelical debate often begins and ends. To be sure,
These are important questions, but they are not the only, or even the most important ones. A concern with women and their interests involves a wide range of issues and questions that extend beyond the narrow limits of practical politics. It is only possible, in the way that it is used in practice in virtually every area of our society. As such, these issues and debates are not of relevance to those who are concerned with "too liberal" or "too radical" to merit our attention. Although they may be relevant to women, the exclusion of these important questions and evangelical theologians should take account of the full extent of the debate and respond to it. The conclusion of this article is that this review article appears at first sight to be a rather heterogeneous and arbitrary selection. However, it is not just a collection of disconnected, unimportant, and important connections, and together they provide a good introduction to feminist issues within Christian theology, raising some of the most central and challenging themes of the doctrine. The thoughts which do, taken together, is present for the case for women and their interests because they have a close understanding and living in accordance with the Christian message. They do not propose a solution to the problem of women's interests, but instead show how the issues of women's interests are not a side issue for Christian theology and the church, but that it raises questions which are central to our faith, and that have implications extending into just about every area of life.

Within the three books are most obviously disparate in their authorship and in the level of authority they are pitched at. Men, Women, and God (MWG) is a collection of short chapters by a wide range of evangelical authors, from backgrounds and work situations as varied as the subjects of the chapters, covering the role of women in Scripture and in the church, the roles of men and women in society (considering education, work, politics, racism and the media), and finally biological questions about women (family and marriage). These are well-written, single-authored, informative, and very broad audience in view, being on the whole (though see below) very readable and fairly easy to understand. None of these issues are very controversial, although this is not at the cost of its which merits attention also from those who have a more critical attitude to the existence of the issues in literature and in postmodern academic discourse. Searching for Lost Cost (SLC) is written by Ann Loaude, a senior lecturer in religious studies at the University of New South Wales, and is also fairly accessible. Its style, and the range of material which is used, is much narrower, but the book is written in a clear and appealing way and it would be interesting and stimulating read for those with little or no theological background. Its argument, is however, rather clausive and subjective, and it is imperative that the central role of the awareness of the issues is necessary in order to draw out the significance of what Ann Loaude is saying, and the conclusions she comes to.

In Women in Early Christianity (WEC) is the most academic of the three, not only in its content, but also in its writing style. However, the quality of Professor of Theology in the University of Vienna. It is concerned with a particular understanding of the role of women in the use of historical sources — and it considers this complex subject in some detail. Susanne Heine explores how which are very important for Christian theology. However, as many have noted, this book will probably be most useful to those with some academic theological background.

Although this is certainly not all they do, MWG and SLC serve, in an important way, to introduce the topic of feminist issues within Christian feminism. Ann Loaude's book is a series of features and does not give a history or chronological account, but does give some of the historical context and a framework for understanding the range of the features of feminism in its connections with Christianity, as it began to be discussed in historical context. More particularly, the book provides an account of the reasons for the failure of feminism in its interactions with Christianity, as it began to be discussed in the previous section, and it does not provide an account of the spiritual and intellectual spheres — but it also raises the question as to how much it is possible to explain the reasons for the failure of feminism in its interactions with Christianity, as it began to be discussed in the previous section. The attitudinaries which lay behind the outdated legislation are not by any means unknown to us in the 1980s. (Professor Heine also makes this point in the Introduction). Moreover, the role of women is not just a natural or ideally inferior or subordinate is often now, as in the past, based on particular interpretations of Scripture.
are these important questions, but they are not the only, even the most important ones. A concern with women and their interests involves a wide range of issues and questions. These include, but are not limited to, questions that cut across practical issues in every area of our society. As such, these issues and debates are not of relevance only to issues in the sphere of women's studies or of feminist theory. However, they are too "liberal" or "too radical" really to merit our attention. Although they are not discussed here, I believe that empirical studies of women and their lives and educational and evangelical theologians should take account of the full extent of the debate and respond to it.

The purpose of this review article appears at first sight to be a rather heterogeneous and arbitrary selection. However, it raises important and interesting questions, and together they provide a good introduction to feminist issues within Christian theology, raising some of the basic issues of the debate. The approach of the articles will, taken together, be present for the case of the Bible as the key to the understanding and living in accordance with the Christian message. They do not attempt to deal with the theological case for feminism as such, since the "women's experience" is not a side-issue for Christian theology and the church, but that it raises questions which are central to our faith, and which have implications extending into just about every area of life.

While the three books are most obviously disparate in their authorship and in the level of audience they are pitched at. Men, Women and God (MWG) is a collection of short chapters by a wide range of evangelical authors, from backgrounds and work situations as varied as the subjects of the chapters, covering the role of women in Scripture and in the church, the roles of men and women in society (considering education, work, politics, race and the media), and finally 'biological' questions about women (family and parenthood, hormones, and so on). Talks to a broadened audience in view, being on the whole (though see below) very readable and very interesting, and certainly not unoriginal, although this is not at the cost of its content which merits attention also from those who have not and do not wish to explore the issues in greater depth.

Searching for Lost Costs (SLC) is written by Ann Loades, a senior lecturer on a New Testament course at the University of Manchester, and is also fairly accessible. Its style, and the range of material which is included will appeal to a wide range of readers, and it would be an interesting and stimulating read for those with little or no theological background. Its argument is, however, rather elusive, and so demanding of the reader awareness of the issues are necessary in order to draw out the significance of what Ann Loades is saying, and the conclusions she comes to.

Women in Early Christianity (WEC) is the most academic of the three, and at times is rather dense reading, and is written by a Professor of Theology in the University of Vienna. It is concerned with a particular subject matter, and the place of the use of historical sources - and it considers this complex subject in some detail. Susanne Heine's exploration which are very important and relevant for Christian theology, and this book will probably be most useful to those with some academic theological training.

Although this is certainly not all they do, MWG and SLC serve, in different ways, as a sort of "bridging" between feminist and non-feminist. Ann Loades' book is a series of texts and does not give a history or chronological account, but does show some of the limits of the arguments presented. Ann Loades' book is a good starting point for civil rights, social and educational reform. Her brief sketch highlights how much change there has been in the situation of women in the world in the last 50 years, and in particular the development of intellectual and intellectual spheres - but it also raises the question of how much this has been achieved. However, many of the attitudes which lay behind the outdated legislation are not by any means unknown to us in the 1980s. (Professor Heine also makes this point.) From a Christian perspective, the role of women as naturally or ideally inferior or subordinate is often now, as in the past, based on particular interpretations of Scripture.

Although this is not the central concern of Ann Loades' book (she looks briefly at some of the biblical questions in Chapter 4), she does, however, begin with an interpretation of the interpretations of the texts - as the present-day agenda. This is the basis of the "working assumption" that we are still concerned about Christian feminism - and that there is a difference between "liberal" or "radical" feminism and Christian feminism.

The interpretation of biblical texts is, where Men, Women and God begin, an interesting and challenging one. The key question is: what are the "views of feminism. There are three chapters particularly looking at the texts by Elaine Storkey, Andrew Kirk and Faith and Richardrop and the third by Peter C. H. Lim, who outlines a reinterpretation of Genesis 3:1-8 and thus interprets the text in a way that is more consistent with the original meaning.

This approach acknowledges the original understanding of "women's rights", but also recognizes the importance of understanding and living in accordance with the Christian message. They do not attempt to deal with the theological case for feminism as such, since the "women's experience" is not a side-issue for Christian theology and the church, but that it raises questions which are central to our faith, and which have implications extending into just about every area of life.

Part II of MWG provides further demonstration of the prevalence of the last century's attitudes to male and female roles in society. It is a testament to the "women's experience" that the question is not a matter of personal belief nor of moral or philosophical arguments, but rather of the ways in which society, culture, and religion influence the relationship between men and women, as well as of the "crushing" effects sexual inequality also has on many men.

More specifically Susanne Heine is concerned with distortions of historical interpretations and the ethical implications of those interpretations. She argues that Christianity was responsible for the brutality of women and men, and that the issue is not simply a matter of gender equality, but rather a matter of the way in which men and women are treated in society. She argues that there is an inherent sexism in many religious texts, and that it is not simply a matter of interpreting those texts in a more positive light, but of changing the way society as a whole works.

Whereas MWG indicates the breadth of the debate about feminist issues in a number of chapters, in various levels of spiritual, as well as theological, reflection, WEC and SLC indicate the breadth of the discussion in theological theory. Their main concerns are rather different. Susanne Heine argues that the debate, which tends to concentrate on the interpretation of texts and questions of church policy, diminishes much of the wide academic debate on the issues as too liberal. According to Susanne Heine, her conclusion about feminist theology must, however, be involved in questions which go beyond theological debate. She is discussing the relationship between theory and practice, the significance of feminist theology for the church, and the role of feminism in the church.

Both Susanne Heine and Ann Loades are concerned to explore why it is that some of the texts which are traditionally interpreted as "oppressive" can still be used, as Elaine Storkey suggests, to interpret the role of women in post-Reformation society. She uses the example of Genesis 3:1-8, where the "woman's role" is seen as inferior, and argues that this text has been misinterpreted.

She is committed to the idea that the Bible can be used to justify, or to interpret, or to provide a prototype, good or bad. Susanne Heine's work will be of most interest to those concerned to look at some depth into what is happening in feminism and its implications and significance for theology as such. She is concerned particularly about the negativity and prejudice within feminism, which often leads not only to a negative rejection of its ideas, but also to an unnecessary rejection. She sees feminism as an objective scientific method in our appropriation of history. This can then be used to inform our understanding of the Christian message, and thus to interpret the Bible in a way that is more consistent with the original meaning.

This approach acknowledges the traditional understandings of "women's rights", but also recognizes the importance of understanding and living in accordance with the Christian message. They do not attempt to deal with the theological case for feminism as such, since the "women's experience" is not a side-issue for Christian theology and the church, but that it raises questions which are central to our faith, and which have implications extending into just about every area of life.

Part II of MWG provides further demonstration of the prevalence of the last century's attitudes to male and female roles in society. It is a testament to the "women's experience" that the question is not a matter of personal belief nor of moral or philosophical arguments, but rather of the ways in which society, culture, and religion influence the relationship between men and women, as well as of the "crushing" effects sexual inequality also has on many men.

More specifically Susanne Heine is concerned with distortions of historical interpretations and the ethical implications of those interpretations. She argues that Christianity was responsible for the brutality of women and men, and that the issue is not simply a matter of gender equality, but rather a matter of the way in which men and women are treated in society. She argues that there is an inherent sexism in many religious texts, and that it is not simply a matter of interpreting those texts in a more positive light, but of changing the way society as a whole works.

Whereas MWG indicates the breadth of the debate about feminist issues in a number of chapters, in various levels of spiritual, as well as theological, reflection, WEC and SLC indicate the breadth of the discussion in theological theory. Their main concerns are rather different. Susanne Heine argues that the debate, which tends to concentrate on the interpretation of texts and questions of church policy, diminishes much of the wide academic debate on the issues as too liberal. According to Susanne Heine, her conclusion about feminist theology must, however, be involved in questions which go beyond the theological debate. She is discussing the relationship between theory and practice, the significance of feminist theology for the church, and the role of feminism in the church.

She is committed to the idea that the Bible can be used to justify, or to interpret, or to provide a prototype, good or bad. Susanne Heine's work will be of most interest to those concerned to look at some depth into what is happening in feminism and its implications and significance for theology as such. She is concerned particularly about the negativity and prejudice within feminism, which often leads not only to a negative rejection of its ideas, but also to an unnecessary rejection. She sees feminism as an objective scientific method in our appropriation of history. This can then be used to inform our understanding of the Christian message, and thus to interpret the Bible in a way that is more consistent with the original meaning.

This approach acknowledges the traditional understandings of "women's rights", but also recognizes the importance of understanding and living in accordance with the Christian message. They do not attempt to deal with the theological case for feminism as such, since the "women's experience" is not a side-issue for Christian theology and the church, but that it raises questions which are central to our faith, and which have implications extending into just about every area of life.
Five Christian books on AIDS

John Wilkinson

Dr Wilkinson, who comes from Edinburgh, is a community health specialist with expertise in medicine and theology. The book he reviews in this article is...


There can be few literate members of Western society who are unfamiliar with the acronym AIDS, or its French equivalent SIDA, for both terms have rapidly found a place in everyday speech. AIDS stands for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is acquired because it does not occur in utero, although an immune deficiency of similar type has been found in this 

demanding environment may be hereditary. It is an autoimmune disease which may vary in severity from a relatively mild condition to a rapidly progressive one which is quite capable, by the body to prevent it against infection. Finally, it is a disease of the immune system, which is recognised as a collection of symptoms which may occur together and which is the main mode of action of the speeding up of the defense mechanisms. AIDS is, in fact, the final stage of the infection of the body by the AIDS virus, which is known as the human immunodeficiency virus or HIV.

The emergence of AIDS

AIDS was first reported in June 1981 as occurring among homosexual men, intravenous drug users, and recipients of blood transfusions. By the end of 1981, AIDS had been reported from 41 states, Washington, D.C., and the west seaboard of the United States. Its cause was at first unknown although its behaviour resembled that of an infection. Two years later the virus was identified in the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Since its first recognition, the syndrome has been reported from most regions of the world, particularly from Africa where there is some evidence that the infection may have originated in Zaire.

Medical experience of AIDS

We have only known about AIDS for eight years and are ignorant of its nature in its long-term features. We do not know, for example, if everyone who is infected with HIV will eventually and inevitably progress to AIDS, or if some people will never develop it, or if the body will operate to prevent this progression. This means that we should be cautious in our usage of the term AIDS. All AIDS is HIV infection, but not all HIV infection is AIDS.

The Truth about AIDS

The best known of the five books and is most comprehensive in its coverage of the subject. Its author, Dr Patrick Dixon, is a Fellow in the School of Religion and Social Studies in the University of London and he has read and travelled widely in the field of this subject. It contains the greatest number of references (most notably medical), but still manages to be a readable and accessible book. If you can afford only one book on AIDS, this is the one to buy.

Sexual Integrity: The Answer to AIDS

The author of this book is Dr Jack Domanski who is a well-known consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in the ethical and social problems of sex and marriage. Domanski is a practising Roman Catholic who does not always find himself in agreement with the teaching of his Church, as this book illustrates. He regards the arrival of AIDS as a "moral crisis", one that he maintains should be acknowledged as such. So, in this era of mass media, only God is accountable to one another, in the light of Christ, in our theology as well as personal experience. He sees the theme of sin and its consequences as the whole theme of the book. Domanski's position is to explore the consequences of sexual promiscuity which he refers to the word chastity because of the unfortunate repressive associations which that word has acquired. He is careful reading for the use of psychological terms he needs not be "as always as precise as students of ethics and theology would prefer. Thus he appears to be able to find room in his phrase sexual integrity for the acceptance of homosexual relationships and even homosexual intercourse provided that these are based on loving personal relationships. Some of the author's arguments result in the justification of AIDS-promoting behaviour rather than forming the basis of the problems raised by AIDS.

AIDS: The Plain Meaning

This is the only book by a non-medical author amongst the five being reviewed. Bill Kirkpatrick, the author, is an Anglican minister who has written three previous books on AIDS. He writes this book to provide pastoral guidelines for those involved in caring for persons with HIV infection. It gives the impression that it originated as a commonplace book compiled out of the author's experience and reading in the course of his ministry to HIV-infected persons. He provides useful checklists concerning matters to be covered in pastoral counselling. The last forty pages of the book form a helpful repository of information on facts, literature and agencies related to AIDS and its problems. The book reflects the high Anglican tradition of its author, but will also be found valuable by those who do not belong to this tradition.

AIDS and the Positive Alternatives

Margaret Whittaker is a general practitioner in Croydon and an active supporter of the "positive" line. She has written previously on the Christian position on abortion. Her book on AIDS is popularly written, well-researched and contains some apt quotations from doctors and patients. It is mentioned in the title of the book as being "chastity before marriage and fidelity after marriage, the two pillars of Christian sexual ethics." It is a useful book for those who may be anxious about AIDS issues, but who do not want to be "preaching the word chastity."

The 20th Century Plague

Dr Caroline Coller was a general practitioner in Streatham until she was appointed the AIDS nurse and Resource Officer of the Christian Medical Fellowship in April 1987. Her book is the shortest and the cheapest of the five under review and she manages to pack a lot of information into its fifty-nine pages. However, because of its brevity the book tends to give a more dogmatic tone and less opportunity for the joy of promoting Christian concern. At the reception the book received from the Press who accused Dr Coller and the Christian Medical Fellowship of drawing up a plan for the destruction of the Christian church. It is a shame that the testing of the population for HIV infection and segregation of those four regions of the country in which it is most concentrated is not mentioned in the book. It was only mentioned as an option in the book and was not put forward as the official view of the author or the Christian Medical Fellowship.

The Book Reviews


This is the best one-volume dictionary of Christian theology I have read. The student wishing to possess a comprehensive and authoritative approach to theology would be well advised to buy this work. It has the advantage of being a relatively easy and interesting book to read, in the sense that the author avoids the temptation to write in a dry, academic style. It is a well-balanced work and will do no more than to introduce the student to the main areas of theology. It covers comparatively widely with its main rivals, such as *The New Oxford Dictionary of Theology* (Oxford Press), and the somewhat larger *Marshall-Pickering Encyclopaedia of Christian Dictionary*. It cannot be directly compared with the magisterial *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* by the editor, although it includes substantial blocks of material relating to the history, liturgy, spirituality and ordering of the church. It has the disadvantage that it is not up-to-date. The present volume can even hope to rival this most eminent publication from OUP.

Dr William Leitch, who wrote the chapter on "are those the strengths of this work? It may help the student reader if the present reviewer identifies some features which he thinks are lacking.

They gave the impression that the reader should be familiar with all the issues on one book on AIDS, then this is the one to buy.
Christianity because of its failure to respond adequately to their concerns. This is not to say that Christian theology and the Christian church should not be concerned with issues of identity and authenticity, but it is concerned to remain true to its own faith, to struggle for consistency between its beliefs and its social and cultural life, and its claims of redemption and oneness for all in Christ, the mutuality of all of whatever sex, class, background, race and so on is equally and together bearers of God's image. These books highlight also the fact of human fallibility, the fallibility of human thought and life, and this in turn makes the issue of identity a matter of concern to all, which is accountable to one another, in the light of Christ, in our theology as well as in society. It is in this context that we should be concerned to face the fact that the phrase "the sanctification of the entire person" which he prefers to the word "sanctifying" because of the unfortunate repressive associations which that word has acquired. [Still needs more careful reading for the use of psychological terms he needs not always as precise as students of ethics and theology would prefer. Thus it appears to be able to find room in his phrase "sanctifying the integrity for the acceptance of homosexual relationships and even homosexual intercourse provided that these are based on loving personal relationships. Some of the author's arguments result in the justification of AIDS-promoting behaviour rather than formulating the problems raised by AIDS.

AIDS: Sharing the Pain

This is the only book by a non-medical author among the five being reviewed. Bill Kirkpatrick, the author, is an Anglican minister who has written on health issues, writes this book to provide pastoral guidelines for those involved in caring for persons with HIV infection. It gives the impression that it originated as a commonplace book compiled out of the author's experience and reading in the course of his ministry to HIV-infected persons. He provides useful checklists concerning matters to be covered in counselling. The last forty pages of the book form a helpful repository of information on facts, literature and agencies related to AIDS and its problems. The book reflects the high Anglican tradition of its author, but will also be found valuable by those who do not belong to this tradition.

AIDS and the Positive Alternatives

Dr Margaret White is a general practitioner in Croydon and an academic at the University of Surrey. She has written previously on the Christian position on abortion. Her book on AIDS is popularly written, well-researched and contains some apt quotations. The logical structure of the little book is mentioned in the preface. The book is cassette before marriage and fidelity after marriage, the two pillars of Christian sexual ethics.

The 20th Century Plague

Dr Caroline Collier was a general practitioner in Steeple Bourne until 1984 when she was appointed the AIDS nurse and Resource Officer of the Christian Medical Fellowship in April 1987. Her book is the shortest and the cheapest of the five under review and she manages to pack a wealth of information into its ninety-five pages. However, because of its brevity the book tends to give a more dogmatic tone to its arguments. There are no footnotes or further reading. Reading the book the reviewer received from the Press who accused Dr Collier and the Christian Medical Fellowship of drawing up a plan for the destruction of the Christian church, and before the testing of the population for HIV infection and segregation of those found infected, and finally of the possible new forms of marriage, which was only mentioned as an option in the book and was not put forward as the official view of the author or the Christian Medical Fellowship.

The Truth about AIDS

We have only known about AIDS for eight years and are ignorant of its long-term features. We do not know, for example, if everyone who is infected with HIV will eventually and inevitably progress to the illness. Needless to say, the medical community will operate to prevent this progression. This means that we should be careful in our usage of the term AIDS. All AIDS is HIV infection, but not all HIV infection is AIDS and so the mass media seized on the term AIDS and used it exclusively. They gave the impression that all HIV infection was AIDS and so contributed to the initial panic which swept the United States. As medical experience of the infection increases we shall be able to see our present problems in a better perspective than we can now.

Sexual Integrity: The Answer to AIDS

The author of this book is Dr Jack Dominici who is a well-known consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in the ethical and social problems of sex and marriage. Dominici is a practising Roman Catholic who does not always find himself in agreement with the teaching of his Church, as this book illustrates. He regards the arrival of the AIDS epidemic as the most significant event of the 20th century. His response to it is to open the Church's teaching on human sexuality to a new understanding of the meaning of the call to chastity and the sanctity of human relationships. He is convinced that the Church's teaching on chastity is "a matter of faith and reason because the lack of order in relationships results in the sacralization of sexuality and estrangement from the love of God". He concludes that the Church acknowledges in this teaching a "moral imperative" in the sense that "the Church does not merely assert that certain conduct is wrong but that it is evil and wrong in its very essence".

The prevention of HIV infection

The World AIDS Summit held in London in January 1988 concluded that the single most important means for the prevention of AIDS was "heterosexual". Experts advise that promoting monogamy, fidelity, sexual abstinence and clear understanding of the meaning of fidelity is the most effective way to reduce the spread of HIV infection. The information contained in these books is of importance to all who are concerned about the ethical and moral context with and reference to Christian values. However, information is not enough. Man needs motivation. It is just too true that if we do not know why, then man does not do what he needs to be motivated to do it. It is just here that the Christian church can make its contribution. For man is not only a physical being, but a human being. His human nature is composed of the same things as a Cub Scout or a Cub Scout's mother. It is hard to see how the Christian church can make its contribution. The church's attitude to those at risk of HIV infection is not confined to biology, but firmly set in the context of Christian life and values. In this way the church will be practising true preventative health care.

The care of persons with HIV infection

At present there is no cure for AIDS, only drugs which may delay its progression. The treatment of AIDS is therefore palliative and needs to cover all aspects of the life of those affected by the syndrome. There will include personal, domestic, social and spiritual aspects. The final choice will rest with the patient. The Christian church can make a contribution. There is much useful guidance about ways in which this might be done in these five books, notably those by Dixon and Kirkpatrick.

The challenge of the future

It is widely believed that the world is still only in the early phase of the AIDS epidemic, and it is to be hoped that the efforts of Christian members of the caring professions and to the Christian community. There are signs that the church is beginning to respond to the appointments in caring for those with AIDS hospices, but much more will be needed in the years to come. It is not easy to imagine the church playing a part in effective public combating this twenty-first-century plague, and being found wanting in the hour of need.

Book Reviews

Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (eds.), Theologian's Theology of Theology (Clayton, Victoria, Grove, Ill., Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), viii + 738 pp., £17.95.

This is the best one-volume dictionary of Christian theology I have read. The student wishing to possess a comprehensive and authoritative source of information on Christian theology will find this book to be invaluable. The scope of the book is enormous. It is a work of reference rather than a textbook, and it is to be expected that it will be a book that will be used by both the general reader and the student. It is not a book that will be used by the beginner, but it will be a book that will be used by the student. It is a work of reference rather than a textbook, and it is to be expected that it will be a book that will be used by the general reader and the student. It is not a book that will be used by the beginner, but it will be a book that will be used by the student.

This clearly written book aims to "survey the legal texts of the Pentateuch and familiarize the reader with basic concepts and theories of current scholarship into biblical law". It may be said at once that the author succeeds admirably in attaining these objectives.

Patrick first of all deals helpfully with definitions of Law, before moving on to "Law and Law-Rites in the Old Testament". He then suggests that the development of Princethrough the ages is remarkably similar throughout many cultures. He concludes with a lucid sketch of source criticism (p. 14-19) highlighting the pivotal role of Deuteronomy in current hypotheses. Patrick's own contribution is made in the context of the standard source-critical framework. Interestingly, at no point in the discussion of source criticism or in the bibliography at the end of the chapter is any indication given that there might be any uncertainty in applying the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis to the composition of the Pentateuch. Nor is any writing given in the bibliography to support any views about this or other material as "evidence" to interpretation of the biblical texts.

The second part of the chapter discusses the types of legal corpora, and the categories of apodictic and casuistic law. Patrick himself notes that "the biblical law has an organizational structure, the categories of judicial decisions, which are repeated up the ranks of the leadership of the community. Although no ancient legal code is an unabridged collection, many of the laws of the Old Testament have a similar structure" (p. 16).

Patrick rather ends up in a blind alley over Dt 17:14-20 on kingship because of his late dating. He contends that the account depends particularly on Sa 8, but he goes on, 'It is noteworthy that D ignores those traditions in 1Sa 7-12 which depict the monarchy as instituted by God' (p. 20). In the same context he writes that 'legal arguments are not only not fully found in the case of Sa but are indeed not found in the argument of a legal code'.

Despite the caveats outlined above, this book has much to commend it. Few passages raised difficulties in my mind, with the possible exception of the treatment of the book of Joshua. However, I found Webb's conviction that there are themes which connect the stories convincingly. The most important contribution of the volume to my mind is the suggestion that the book of Samuel recapitulates the history of Israel in the period of Judges in a symbolic manner (e.g. the narrative of David as a symbol of Israel herself (p. 201)). Webb moreover sees the Samuel story as the climax of the book: this suggests that the concern of the book of Judges is to focus on Israel's wayward behaviour in its relationship with God, as mirrored in Samuel's relations with Philistine and Canaanite people (p. 201).

This is a good work. Of course it is a minor one. It looks at the role of the book of Judges in the development of Israel's story. The book of Samuel should be studied in detail to achieve this purpose. I found that this book has a number of weak points, but it is better than I expected. It is a useful book for those who want to understand better the role of Judges in the Old Testament.

David F. Penman, Nottingham.
the case here! Inevitably, there are more general weaknesses in a volume of this kind, which is obliged to draw upon a wide range of contributions. 210 international contributors are responsible for more than 70 articles that make up this work. Unfortunately some contributors are perhaps less able than others. Nevertheless, the book is reasonably well marked up, with flashes of brilliance evident on page after page.

In summary: an invaluable work of reference for the student, it will likely lose its active service on his or her shelf after many years.

Alistair McGrath, Wykefield Hall, Oxford.


This clearly written book aims to 'survey the legal texts of the Pentateuch and familiarize the reader with basic concepts and theories of current scholarship into biblical law'. It may be said at once that the author succeeds admirably in attaining these objectives.

Patrick first of all deals helpfully with definitions of Law, before moving on to what Law is in the Old Testament. Critically, he outlines the lucid sketch of source criticism (p.14-19) highlighting the pivotal role of Deuteronomy in current hypotheses. Patrick's own contribution is made in the context of the standard source-critical framework. Interestingly, at no point in the discussion of source criticism or in the bibliography at the end of the chapter is any indication given that there might be any uncertainty in applying the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis to the composition of the Pentateuch. Not at any point given even the slightest hint that Law should be taken as the ANOY material as 'aides' to interpretation of the biblical texts.

The second chapter considers the types of legal corpora, and the categories of apocryphic and casuistic law. Patrick offers a helpful distinction here, and begins to offer reasons why the 'canon ought to be used to guide the interpretation of the legal norms as they appear in the Old Testament.' For instance, the 'whole' of Israel goes out against the tribe of Benjamin, and at enormous cost (Jdg 20:21,25). And it is noteworthy that in both Jdt 13 and Jdg 20 those who are to be removed from the area, and who have changed the form of legal norms and casuistic law into 'casuistic primary law' and 'casuistic remedial law'.

The bulk of the following chapters are devoted to explaining certain major topics of OT Law: chapter 3: the Ten Commandments, 4: Biblical Prophetic Law, 5: Legal Writings, 6: The Holiness Code and Priestly Law, 7: Chapter 7 changes course to deal with the Levitical Code. The Worship Code. With a helpful view for the fact that the Israelite tradition was in formation, the law of God was an unwritten Law (p. 12). The 'law which the Israelite community retained was an unwritten one, only the fabric of society and discovered in the course of judicial deliberation. Patrick continues the analysis comparing the different approaches. Chapter 8 deals with Law and Covenant.

The concluding chapter attempts to address the question 'what is the meaning of law in the context of the Bible?'. The last chapter contains a critique of the concept of Law and society, and of legal ideas and institutions, and redefines the yardstick for measuring the fabric of society and discovered in the course of the judicial deliberations. Many approaches to the study of Law are based on a metaphorical way of seeing things. Patrick notes perspective that 'legal texts of ancient Israel were preserved and edited for the religious community that arose from the ancient nation'. The Law. Patrick was not intended to be used as evidence from the ancient past but was intended to be used as a 'source of inspiration for the actions of God'. The law contained in the Bible is meant to be an address to the members of that community and can be an address to the people who are different from the ancient past. Patrick's work is an approach to the Bible's 'political' and a phrase which he explains in detail. The book is an attempt to answer the question: what is the meaning of Law in the context of the Bible? Patrick concludes the book by highlighting the fact that the biblical writers were also deeply concerned with describing Israel's history and law, a concern that是要 the power of such topics as leadership, power, crime, political stability and instability, and the relationship between the king and the people. Such issues were common to other ancient Near Eastern monarchies and to the writers. Thus, Bushnell offers a helpful detail to any who might describe the Hebrew Law in terms of its 'political' or 'ethical' or 'metaphorical' office, such as the Great Commandments.


Joel Rosenberg's recent book provides a significant and stimulating discussion of the theoretical aspects of myth and allegory, which is to the Bible's 'political', a phrase he explains in detail. The book is an attempt to answer the question: what is the meaning of Law in the context of the Bible? Patrick concludes the book by highlighting the fact that the biblical writers were also deeply concerned with describing Israel's history and law, a concern that was connected to the power of such topics as leadership, power, crime, political stability and instability, and the relationship between the king and the people. Such issues were common to other ancient Near Eastern monarchies and to the writers. Thus, Bushnell offers a helpful detail to any who might describe the Hebrew Law in terms of its 'political' or 'ethical' or 'metaphorical' office, such as the Great Commandments.

By focusing on the structure, themes, and arguments that are found throughout the book, the book 'The Book of the Judges' is divided into three parts: (1) Part One: the Book of Judges


This book is a revision of Webb's Ph.D. thesis entitled Theme in the Book of Judges: A Literary Study of its Formed Finish (Sheffield University, 1985). Both works mark a somewhat new departure in study of the book of Judges, which has been the object of much classical criticism for a long time. Critics have been divided into two camps: those who view the Book of Judges as a unitary work (Stern, 299). Not all his suggestions for appropriating the message of the law will be accepted. Nevertheless, this work is a solid contribution to the study of the law of the Bible. In this connection, it is worth noting that there is little hope of a complete solution to the difficulties raised by the book of Judges. This work is an attempt to discuss in detail many of the exegetical issues raised by Patrick's study. Some of his methods of analysis seem to run through the different parts of the story. This procedure is then applied to the book as a whole in chapter 3. This is an important and useful study of Judges and the Deuteronomic History might be affected by Webb's reading of the book.
The strength of this book is its breadth and seriousness as a work of theology, weightily pursued in full loyalty to Scripture. It is aimed at the reader with a serious interest in the life of faith, and it will help the reader to understand and appreciate the theology of this prolific author.


This commentary by the influential NT professor at Göttingen University was first published in 1963 and revised in 1972. It has been a standard reference work for many years and is now being made available to a much wider audience through translation into English. It is a comprehensive commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, dealing with both the historical and theological aspects of the book.

Alfred Conzelmann’s monograph on the theology of Luke, *Luke’s Theology of the Lukean Gospels* (in German, 1963; in English, 1966), is one of the most important works in the field of New Testament theology. Although the book is primarily concerned with the theological implications of the Gospels, it also includes a careful study of the historical background of the text, and the influence of the historical setting on the theological message of the gospel.

This book will be an important resource for scholars interested in the theology of the Gospels, as well as for those who wish to understand the historical context of the text. The book is well-organized, and the author’s tone is scholarly but accessible. Overall, this is a valuable addition to the literature on the New Testament.

W. Ward Gasque, *The Early Christian Church*. (而这要成为一本书，学者都会欢迎，因为这本书不仅仅是对学术研究的贡献，也是对基督教信仰的深入了解。) The book is a comprehensive study of the early Christian church, including its history, beliefs, and practices. It is written in an accessible style, and is suitable for both scholars and laypeople.

This book provides a valuable resource for those interested in the history and development of the Christian church. It is well-researched, and the author’s tone is scholarly but accessible. Overall, this is a valuable addition to the literature on the early Christian church.
The strength of this book is its breadth and seriousness as a work of theology, vigorously pursued in full loyalty to Scripture. To put it simply, it begins with Christ as the key to our handling of the OT, and in particular to our understanding of what wisdom is, before taking us back to Genesis and on to the flowering of wisdom with David and Solomon. There follow three chapters which discuss in turn Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes as 'the perception of order', 'the biddeness of order' and 'the confusion of order'; then a selection of wisdom passages elsewhere: finally, for this part of the book, a chapter on Ecclesiastes itself. The plan is immediate, as is the argument: that the link between the Wisdom writings and those that deal with Davidic Song is manifest in the creative motifs and the idea of Creation. That is, in both, there is a strong consciousness of the original harmony of Creation and the need for it to be restored by the created world; and while Salvation History reveals God's progressive work of redemption and restoration, the Wisdom writings concentrate on the keeping of the original 'law' that is alluded to in which we ourselves confront. Returning to the NT, the final chapter (chapter six) begins with a discussion of Consultancy of Perfection of Order and 'Christians and the Transformation of Order'. Each chapter is preceded by a summary, and followed by a set of questions for further reflection.

In his preface the author points out the scarcity of books which attempt to locate wisdom as a genre within the corpus of Scripture, and in Part II he concentrates on a number of philosophical subjects. The focus here is Christ in particular, and to the Christian life. In making good this lack, he writes as non-technically as possible, but from a wide knowledge of specialist contributions and with a scholar's-advocate's conclusion. The result is a book which is exactly the opposite of what the title suggests, but one which is just as close to what Scripture is (as he would put it) 'on about'.

At any rate, the content of this book is clearly the sections on 'Christ's Wisdom' and 'The Christ in the Writings'. The section on 'Christ's Wisdom' appears to extend the doctrine of the imputed merit of Christ into a realm where it does not properly apply, with the apparent exception of the identity of God the Father with the pianist ('which is the Father that is in me', John 10:38). The section on 'The Christ in the Writings' is much more usually theologically consistent and correct.


A careful reader of the Pauline corpus will be aware of the differences between Paul's letters in such matters as theme and warmth and tone. In this book Spencer addresses the question of whether the differences are due primarily to differences in the content of the letters, or to the matter of the style of writing. She begins with a description of the style of writing as a 'composite idea of a whole genre of writing' (p. v). Having established certain 'stylistic operators' in order to obtain objective, verifiable data. Spencer uses ten operators, such as the analysis of the function of verbs in the writing of Paul. The historical context of the three books under investigation is then brought to bear on the three sets of Paul's letters and their conceptions of the relationship and the character of the three congregations addressed by Paul, whilst also noting the differences in the causes of this duality. In addition, the receptiveness, warmth and intimacy of relationship between the congregation and Paul also differs in each case. This is the argument of the book, which is based on a careful and skilful analysis of the way that Spencer examines letters and those ten stylistic operators, in order to determine which elements in Paul's style are variously in use. The book shows such constancy in the way that it treats Paul's tendency to use abstract nouns and general images, and the use of active rather than passive verbs. Noteworthy stylistic differences are in the use of the imperative mood and the use of Paul's letters in the Greek New Testament, and the length that the author has gone to in order to keep the book as concise as possible. The book is both informative and accessible, and will be of interest to all those who are interested in the study of Paul's letters and their use in the New Testament. Finally, the book is well-organized and easy to follow, and the author's writing style is clear and straightforward.
This book, which, as the title would suggest, is about hermeneutics, forms part of the Christian Studies Today series and consists of a quite substantial and highly stimulating article by the philosophical theologian Hans Blocher. Concluding reply by Outhuiss himself.

Dr. Stradalmns writes from the kind of standpoint associated with the Chicagoans, and he is agreed that the whole of the discussion is very much what he has to say will not be new to English-speaking readers. But he also writes from an unworldly point of view, and he makes a contribution to make to the topic. He singles out two themes in his book. The first is the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Writing, it would seem, from a standpoint which seems to be in the excess of radical scholarship, he concludes that no longer can we talk about a non-textual God: they are unlikely to be taken in by the excesses of radical scholarship, he claims. Another number of scholars who, in his opinion, do not go far enough in asserting the full inspiration of Scripture. Naturally Brunner and Barth come in for criticism, but also a number of scholars within the Pietistic wing of the church. Of course against them he shows how the evangelical doctrine of Scripture has had a distinct advantage as scholarship has moved within the church and he develops briefly the biblical doctrine for his readers.

His second theme is the interpretation of the Bible, and here Dr. Stradalmns pursues less familiar topics. He finds himself in contention with the modernist circles (and elsewhere) which relies on the Spirit and ignores the accepted text. He argues that the biblical concept is the Trichotomy, the Trichotomous variety. He stresses how the Holy Spirit works through our minds in study. He allies himself with D. H. Sriech in stressing the meaning of inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. And he further emphasizes the basic clarity of Scripture understood in its totality. Outhuiss must include application to the modern reader so that he can be brought to the point of obedience to the text. Here he grapples with the problem of the method of applying the text that will be a part of interpretation and not an optional addendum. He wants to be able to say: the interpreter finds the Word of God in and with the text, not somewhere behind the text (p. 102), and yet he recognizes that not all parts of the Bible contain equal amount of spiritual food for "spiritual" and "moralistic" exegesis. He makes an interesting plea for a salvation-historical approach which recognizes and takes into account the whole of the context in which he finds his text, and he adds in that he seeks to place the text spoken in a particular epoch is relevant for me in my epoch: "the Bible is the Word of God that is now spoken by God's Word". The conclusion which he reaches (p. 127), and therefore it is the principles behind some texts rather than the texts themselves which apply to us. What is gained and what is lost in the interpretation of the text is said in a particular epoch is directly relevant to us in ours.

Dr. Stradalmns's treatment of these difficult issues is always clear and simple. His book is probably too brief to offer a fully convincing defence of his view of biblical infallibility and inerrancy, my feeling is that an attempt at a broader, wider scope than he has attempted, is required. This is perhaps the case however, with the average person who does not already agree with him. This is not to say that the case is necessarily hopeless, but that the issue needs to be handled with more care, and that this book could be an introduction to a more detailed analysis. It could be a useful tool for anyone who is interested in the topic. I recommend this book for anyone who is interested in the topic.

2.0. Outhuiss seeks to develop a hermeneutics which is dependent upon (but not totally independent of) the pseudo-scientific discipline of literary criticism, he seeks to build a bridge between the insights of postitical thought. He points out that while all Christians may have a preference for one or the other, they must be in agreement as to what constitutes that authority. Because our view of the world and the text tied up with our belonging to a particular religious community, it is a commitment that cannot be written out of a text unless the text is rewritten. He declares all those whose concepts of biblical authority are not the text itself, it is a critical commitment.

Outhuiss calls on us to recognize the fact that the way in which we submit to the scriptures is not solely the product of a simple and pure faith, but rather it involves the articulation of that faith within a particular tradition, asking particular questions at particular points in history. In the light of this observation we ought to exercise a deep humility as regards both our submission to the scriptures and also the conclusions we draw from them, as wheat from under their submitting to them. Outhuiss concerned with the reader's response to Scripture can represent an encouraging redefinition of a balance which has been taken for granted. This approach is an interesting one to consider at the outset. Outhuiss sees it. He notes in this discussion great strides made since his days of writing and that the ideas are being expanded and developed further. He notes that the ideas of Outhuiss have been influential and have been taken up in many parts of the world. He notes that the ideas are being taken up in many parts of the world.

3.0. Outhuiss rejects Outhuiss's approach to the broad notion of hermeneutics as a whole is misleading. However, he does not deny the existence of differences among themselves, that is, the differences among themselves. He argues that the differences are not just superficial differences, but that they are actually important differences. He argues that the differences are not just superficial differences, but that they are actually important differences.

The second response to Outhuiss, by Donald Blocher, is rather more straightforward. Blocher is one of the most respected phenomenologists and is both encouraging and appreciative of Outhuiss's contribution, while being at the same time suspicious of its claims. Blocher argues that Outhuiss is overlooking the fact that the hermeneutical problem is not just a matter of understanding language, but that it is also a matter of understanding context. He argues that Outhuiss is being too quick to judge the thoughts of others and that his own thoughts are not necessarily the most important ones.

3.0. Outhuiss's ideas have not received much attention in this volume, although they are of great importance and could have been included in a more thorough treatment. Some readers may find the ideas presented here to be too new or too complex to be fully understood, but others may find them to be very helpful in their own studies.

The sub-title, 'The Debate Over God-Inclusive Language', gives indication of what the book covers, as well its title is an indication of what Blocher believes is the influence of the male-language debate, which is an issue of paramount importance in the theological tradition. The debate is at stake, and as one might expect from an evangelical author, the acuteness of the issue is dealt with in a very engaging and captivating way. The volume provides an excellent introduction to the debate and a valuable contribution to the understanding of the debate.

The debate over God-inclusive language is an issue that is of great importance in the theological tradition. The debate is at stake, and as one might expect from an evangelical author, the acuteness of the issue is dealt with in a very engaging and captivating way. The volume provides an excellent introduction to the debate and a valuable contribution to the understanding of the debate.

The sub-title, 'The Debate Over God-Inclusive Language', gives indication of what the book covers, as well its title is an indication of what Blocher believes is the influence of the male-language debate, which is an issue of paramount importance in the theological tradition. The debate is at stake, and as one might expect from an evangelical author, the acuteness of the issue is dealt with in a very engaging and captivating way. The volume provides an excellent introduction to the debate and a valuable contribution to the understanding of the debate.
The summaries or conclusions at the end of some chapters are good — so good, in fact, that where they are omitted they are greatly missed. A concluding sentence, like the closing sentence of a novel, is one of the most potent elements of style. A summary of a chapter's contents is like a guidebook that leads a reader to the next step of his journey. It need not be extensive, merely a firm reminder of what has been achieved. For example, the closing sentence of a book might be a summary of the main points of the story and a hint about what will happen next. Such sentences are important because they help to keep a reader engaged and interested, and they also provide a sense of closure and satisfaction. Overall, summarizing the content of a chapter is an effective way to reinforce the reader's understanding and to prepare them for the next chapter.

Peter Mansson, Spurgeon's College.


Readers of Therm Polly will be well inclined to attract Ritschl's attention towards integration of history, criticism and verification with ethics and theology. But they are likely to be disappointed with Ritsch's brief account of the relationship between basic concepts in theology. The latter are here discussed in an extended form, and with a new, internal, and historical presentation, and minimizes Christ's atonement and resurrection. Ritsch's theology is not about God, or God's cognitive revelation, but about man and his relationship with God. His views are based on a thoroughgoing and thoroughgoing study of the Bible and the Church Fathers, and he has discovered that God has not attained, but is 'on the way to his goal' (p. 142).

Dietrich Ritsch's discoveries turn up no supernatural revelation. The term 'revelation' in the 'total' sense should be avoided in theology, for that is something that cannot say itself (p. 103). The traditional statement that the meaning and goal of every being are to know God is no longer sufficient in Ritsch's view. Anything that can communicate to us, 'God himself is discovered with the help of significant analogies (my emphasis). As he admits, this 'raises a mass of difficulties'. The mass of difficulties does not keep people from talking about God, however. The task of theologians is not to be seen in the direct explanation of God but in the explanation of language about and to God (p. 35).

What Ritsch finds in the Bible is Jewish and Christian talk about and to God. The expectation that the Bible contains a collection of theorems that can be made in a 'biblical theology' is a fiction (p. 68). In place of revealed information he claims verification through the Spirit for his 'redications'. These may occur on the 'occasion of studying traditions which rest in the biblical writings. If many experiences or manifestations are arranged in the memory of believers, the total experiences and connections can be described as the 'revelation of God' (pp. 103-104). Ritsch's ultimate concern seems to be the idea of revelation as a 'form of knowing' (p. 104). In the process, however, he loses the heart of the biblical theologies explained and preserved, and of the prophets and apollos — the spiritually. He wants to enforce the conclusions of his earlier work in two books of the ancient and he very seldom goes to the Old Testament. This is the only piece of Ritsch's argument that he seeks to support by direct reference. The book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition. One can only applaud his enterprise, if one finds it, but not the book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition. One can only applaud his enterprise, if one finds it, but not the book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition.


Readers of Therm Polly will be well inclined to attract Ritsch's attention towards integration of history, criticism and verification with ethics and theology. But they are likely to be disappointed with Ritsch's brief account of the relationship between basic concepts in theology. The latter are here discussed in an extended form, and with a new, internal, and historical presentation, and minimizes Christ's atonement and resurrection. Ritsch's theology is not about God, or God's cognitive revelation, but about man and his relationship with God. His views are based on a thoroughgoing study of the Bible and the Church Fathers, and he has discovered that God has not attained, but is 'on the way to his goal' (p. 142).

Dietrich Ritsch's discoveries turn up no supernatural revelation. The term 'revelation' in the 'total' sense should be avoided in theology, for that is something that cannot say itself (p. 103). The traditional statement that the meaning and goal of every being are to know God is no longer sufficient in Ritsch's view. Anything that can communicate to us, 'God himself is discovered with the help of significant analogies (my emphasis). As he admits, this 'raises a mass of difficulties'. The mass of difficulties does not keep people from talking about God, however. The task of theologians is not to be seen in the direct explanation of God but in the explanation of language about and to God (p. 35).

What Ritsch finds in the Bible is Jewish and Christian talk about and to God. The expectation that the Bible contains a collection of theorems that can be made in a 'biblical theology' is a fiction (p. 68). In place of revealed information he claims verification through the Spirit for his 'redications'. These may occur on the 'occasion of studying traditions which rest in the biblical writings. If many experiences or manifestations are arranged in the memory of believers, the total experiences and connections can be described as the 'revelation of God' (pp. 103-104). Ritsch's ultimate concern seems to be the idea of revelation as a 'form of knowing' (p. 104). In the process, however, he loses the heart of the biblical theologies explained and preserved, and of the prophets and apollos — the spiritually. He wants to enforce the conclusions of his earlier work in two books of the ancient and he very seldom goes to the Old Testament. This is the only piece of Ritsch's argument that he seeks to support by direct reference. The book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition. One can only applaud his enterprise, if one finds it, but not the book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition.

As the author says in the introduction to the book, 'All the essays have been written in the last decade... and reflect the international theological dialogue that has taken place in Evangelical circles since the 1974 Lausanne Conference.' The pages were originally delivered as lectures at several different conferences, and this inevitably means that sometimes they have been modified.

Mr. Padilla addresses topical issues of the church today including Evangelicalism, charismatic venues, contextualization, and New Testament perspectives on Christian lifestyle. He urges us to ask ourselves big questions, i.e. 'The big question we Christians always have to answer is that of our own identification with the people we serve.' In this context, the charge of superficiality may be justified. On the other hand, where else is there such a magnificently biblical and historical approach to the problem of Christian lifestyle?

This is a masterly handbook. It covers concisely a biblical overview of evangelicalism, charismatic expressions and the problem of lifestyle. Of course, the charge of superficiality may be justified. On the other hand, where else is there such a magisterially biblical and historical approach to the problem of Christian lifestyle?

Derek Tidball, Skilled Shepherds (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 388 pp., £8.95.

This book is made up of five chapters that focus on one of the main areas of debate in the missionary scene today—the kingdom of God. I reached the conclusion that what was needed was to examine what would be Mr. Padilla's thinking on mission and the kingdom of God. The book is a valuable contribution to the literature on mission. The themes discussed throughout the book are robbers, the church, and what could be described as the current state of mission.

It begins with the Ministry of God, a theme repeatedly found in the OT but rarely discussed in pastoral theology. Sadly the promise of this early section is not developed further on in the book. The NT. Issues such as his Fatherhood, grace and redemption are missing and in that major sense the work is hanging. However, with what language and passion at the end of the book the church is obliged to re-examine mission. The book then moves on to look at the tension often seen, especially in the West, between priority of evangelization or/on social concern.

I was not disappointed when I came to the last three chapters. Particularly among the five chapters, it is the final chapter which outlines what Mr. Padilla has called 'a new missionary vision.' I was interested in the three aspects of our work and evangelism. We are called to preach, to love and to be free to respond to new challenges. There are many good things in this book. This has a great vision of pioneer work means asking Christ what we shall do, and being perpetually prepared to follow His lead.

'Open-minded freedom — the capacity to respond to love in the need of all.' How do we testify today anew, to the servant King of God?'

I would also recommend this book to the ends of chapters for church or missionary societies to discuss, and I would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss it with Mr. Padilla personally.

The book is stimulating and challenging to us and has left me wondering to know how as individuals and as a church we can increasingly move towards a life of 'deep love' and 'deep freedom.'

J. C. Hall, Durham

The summaries of conclusions at the end of some chapters are good — so good, in fact, that where they are omitted they are greatly missed. If a reader is interested in topics of this type, it would be a worthwhile task for the editor to provide a 'key' for some chapters of this book for the benefit of third/fourth year theological students. Peter Mansson, Spurgeon's College.


Since writing his book Animal Rights: A Christian Assesement (SCM, 1976), Andrew Linsey has been the unofficial chaplain of the animal rights movement. His new book shows that he has changed somewhat in the last 10 years, as he admits. There is a change of style. His first book was highly polemical. This one could not be so described, though it still has a sharp cutting edge. There is also a deeper appreciation of the theological issues involved, and of earlier discussion of them in Christian tradition. Most importantly, there is a significant shift in emphasis in regard to his basis for the defence of animal rights.

In his earlier book Linsey defended the concept of sentience (unanimity) as the basis for animal rights. He now recognizes that this is inadequate and that a more rounded theological citation is needed. He therefore proposes the concept of the theology of rights. By this he means that God as Creator has rights in his creation which is inherent value to him. The non-human creation therefore possesses an objective moral claim on us that is nothing less than God's claim on us. This basis is supported by a very strong scriptural and philosophical argument. Too Linsey responds to this point by arguing that in the Bible a special status is given to life and that this involves the right of the human being to be composed of flesh and blood and to be animated by spirit (Linsey always spells this with a capital 'S' in this context). Linsey takes this group to comprise all humans, both near and far, and all animals. The forests and fishes are created on a different day from humans and animals in Genesis I. However, he upholds the view that this distinction is not to be taken to mean that other creatures have no value. They must still be treated as having some, if lesser, value in God's eyes. Therefore the basis of animal rights is not Linsey.

This is the only sure core of Linsey's argument. He seeks to support this claim throughout the book by detailed arguments from Scripture and Christian tradition. One can only applaud his approach, if not always his theological basis for animal rights, even when he quotes the apostle Peter (e.g. his appeal to 3:9-12 to support the idea of animals having souls) or the animal rights movement (he also quotes John 16:15). The rest of the book has some thought-provoking discussions of practical issues of animal treatment, and a strong case for a judgmental attitude towards fellow-Christians who disagree with one. For example, in fact he argues without argument that the right of animal rights is the right to harm oneself and others.

Here is then a balanced, Christian, attempt to argue as far as it is possible in a debate in which a great deal of argument is not possible, it will enrich the debate about the issues. It is well worth reading.


Readers of Themenkuli could well be attracted to Ritschl's attempt at integrated history, criticism and verification with ethics and

Districh Ritschl's 'theological revolution' is not about God, or God's cognitive revelation, or the Church. It is not about the Church and Christians. He has no thesis because it allows him no freedom (p. 140), and the Christian community is Ritschl's discovery that God has not attained, but is 'on the way to his goal' (p. 140).

Ritschl's discovery turns up no supernatural revelation. The term 'revolution' in the 'traditional' sense should be avoided in theology, for it is a contradictio in terminis. 'Theology cannot say itself' (p. 103). The traditional statement that the meaning and goal of every living being are to know God is no longer possible (p. 179). Among the first things Ritschl himself appears to communicate to us, 'God himself is discovered with the discovery of implicit axioms' (my emphasis). As he admits, 'This raises a mass of difficulties.' The mass of difficulties does not keep people from talking about God, however. 'The task of theology is no longer to be seen in the direct explanation of God but in the explanation of language about and to God' (p. 35).

What Ritschl discovers in the Bible is Jewish and Christian talk about and to God. 'The expectation that the Bible contains a collection [of] statements that can ... be brought into our common use can be made in a "biblical theology" in a fiction' (p. 67). In place of revealed information he claims verification through the Spirit for his "rediscoveries." These may occur on the 'occasion of studying traditions which are still in the biblical writings. If many experiences or manifestations are arranged in the memory of believers, the total of these experiences and their connections can be described as the 'revelation of God' (pp. 103-104). Ritschl's ultimate concern seems to be to avoid any 'assumptions of secular wisdom and culturally specified axioms' (p. 104). In the process, however, he loses the heart of the Christian tradition. He neglects the prophets and the apostles — the gospel. Uncritically he endorses the conclusions of higher criticism for the last 200 years and rejects the Christian faith as a "fruitless product of the spirit of the age" (p. 103).

Ritschl's "linguistic phenomenalism" (p. 105) enables him to seek truth in every text. Ritschl's attitude is that the interpretation of the text can confirm the validity of every interpretation. The insight that becomes regulative for him finds that YHWH chose the people of Israel from all the nations and in Jesus Christ the church from the Jews. Hence only toward the Jews is Christian missionary activity illegitimate (p. 164). But Ritschl does not have a primarily Jewish church. Ritschl is a"Jewish spirit"? The basic question is answered with extreme brevity and little clarity. Jesus is 'God's participation in the suffering and death of humanity' (p. 177). A basic part of a theological understanding of the "life of God" is "theological speculation in its contemplation" (p. 189).

Ritschl's discussion of Christian beliefs focuses on the coherence of religious insights to the effect that God is the one who elects, who holds in suffering and heals in the Spirit (p. 174). The human task is that of cohesing what separates humanity through the hope of uniting Jews and Gentiles (p. 262). Ritschl's conclusion is that "I have shown that Gentiles minimize the one sound foundation which spiritually united the Jewish apostles with the first-century Samaritans and Gentiles is the holy Spirit" (p. 215). In the same vein, Ritschl's understanding of the incarnation, God's reality as the Menhisc, his suffering once for all and his exaltation, the problem of what separates humanity and the power and reconciliation of sinners, his supernatural mission to become the one who speaks, the "true one" — "the angelic proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit" for an evangelistic approach at integrating historical, biblical, systematic, and moral theologians — the "threefold" (p. 185) and B. Demerath, Integrative Theology (vol. 1: Zondervan, 1987).

Gordon Lewis, Denver Seminary.
BOOK REVIEWS

Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (eds.) New Dictionary of Theology (Alister McGrath)

Dale Patrick Old Testament Law (David G. Deboys)

B. G. Webb The Book of The Judges: An Integrated Reading (David F. Pennant)

Joel Rosenberg King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible (Kenneth M. Craig, Jr.)

Adele Berlin The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism (Kenneth M. Craig, Jr.)

Graeme Goldsworthy Gospel and Wisdom (Derek Kidner)


J. Stevenson A New Eusebius. Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337 (D. F. Wright)

Heide Stadelmann Grundlinien eines bibelfreuen Schriftverständnisses I. Howard Marshall)


Donald G. Bloeck The Battle For The Trinity (Gordon R. Palmer)

Roger Hooker and Christopher Lamb Love the Stranger (Christian Ministry in Multi-Faith Areas) (Colin Marchant)

C. René Padilla Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom (J. C. Hall)

Emilio Castro Sent Free. Mission and Unity in the Perspective of the Kingdom (J. C. Hall)

Derek Tidball Skilful Shepherds (Peter Manson)

A. Linzey Christianity and the Rights of Animals (E. C. Lucas)

Dietrich Ritschi The Logic of Theology (Gordon Lewis)

Special issue on the gospels

Editorial: The good news of the gospels

Matthew's gospel in recent study
Dick France

The Gospel of Mark in recent study
L. W. Hurtado

The present state of Lucan studies
I. Howard Marshall

Selected recent studies of the fourth gospel
D. A. Carson

Book reviews

An international journal for theological students

£1.00

Vol. 14 No. 2