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Book Reviews
Spirit and Life: Some Reflections on Johannine Theology

David Wenham

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1. Introduction
John's gospel is one of the most wonderful books in the New Testament; but, at least for the theological student, it is also often one of the most problematic. It is internally problematic, in that the gospel's different theological ideas and themes seem hard to fit together; and it is externally problematic, because it differs so noticeably in language and ideas from other parts of the New Testament, most significantly from the synoptic gospels. This brief study looks at a few key Johannine ideas, suggesting how they can be fitted together and arguing that they have striking parallels elsewhere in the New Testament.

2. Spirit and life in John
2.1. The problem: 'eternal life' and 'the Holy Spirit' two unrelated blessings for the believer?
Two of John's most important and distinctive themes are 'eternal life' and the coming of the Spirit. John is clear that the way to receive both is
through believing in the Son (e.g. 3: 15; 7: 39), but what is not so clear is how the two blessings are related. On the basis of John 3 we might conclude that the Spirit is the one who initiates us into the experience of eternal life; but from other passages it is clear that the Spirit is much more than the midwife in the new birth. The new birth is indeed through the Spirit, but it is also birth into the Spirit: the Spirit is received through faith in Jesus. What then is the relationship between the Spirit and eternal life, both of which are received through faith in Christ? We cannot say that one is present and the other is future, since in John’s realized eschatology eternal life is something received here and now (3: 18; 5: 24, etc.). The fact that various New Testament theologians in discussing John’s theology treat the two topics quite separately may lead us to conclude that we must simply accept that the two ideas cannot be closely related. It is, however, the argument of this study that the two ideas have a definite and close connection in Johannine thought.

2.2. John 17: 3: eternal life as fellowship with Father and Son
A key verse for seeing the connection between life and Spirit is John 17: 3, where the fourth evangelist gives his definition of ‘eternal life’. Eternal life for John is not (or is not only) endless existence; it is something much more. The Greek phrase αἰώνιος ζωή may itself be better understood to mean ‘life of the age’ (i.e. life of the new age of the kingdom) rather than to mean ‘everlasting life’, and here in 17: 3 John defines the life of the new age as ‘knowing thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’. The word ‘know’ here, as elsewhere in John, may be understood in the Hebraic sense of ‘have fellowship or personal relationship with’, and so eternal life in John is primarily and essentially ‘fellowship with the Father and the Son’.

2.3. John 14: 15-24: Father and Son come to the believer through the Spirit
It is when the definition of eternal life in 17: 3 is borne in mind that the relationship between eternal life and the Holy Spirit may begin to become clear, especially if we compare 17: 3 with 14: 15-24. In this passage we find a promise and a condition three times: (a) verses 15, 16: ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.’ (b) verse 21: ‘He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.’ (c) verse 23: ‘If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’ The parallelism between these three promises/conditions within the one discourse makes it very probable that we have here the same thing being said in different ways; and, if that is so, then we see that the gift of the Spirit (verses 15, 16) is the same thing as Jesus manifesting himself to the believer (verse 21), and the same thing as Jesus and the Father coming to the believer and making their home with him (verse 23). To put the matter more accurately, it is through the Spirit that Father and Son come to the believer.

2.4. Thus the coming of the Spirit, fellowship with Father and Son equals eternal life
When the point from John 14: 15-24 is appreciated, the relationship between ‘eternal life’ and the coming of the Spirit becomes clearer. ‘Eternal life’ is, more than anything else, fellowship with Father and Son, and this fellowship is realized in the believer’s experience through the coming of the Spirit. The phrase in 14: 23, ‘We will come to him and make our home with him’ (which we take to be a reference to the coming of the Spirit—see above), is similar to John’s definition of eternal life in 17: 3, ‘that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ We could conclude that eternal life in John is the Father and the Son ‘making their home’ with the believer—through the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit and receiving eternal life are thus to be seen not as two separate blessings, but in a very real sense as the same blessing.

2.5. But the future experience of eternal life is fuller than the present experience
Although eternal life and the Spirit are in a real sense one blessing, not two, it would be a mistake to identify them entirely. In John, eternal life (equals fellowship with Father and Son) has a present and a future tense. John indeed emphasizes that eternal life is experienced now in the present, as the believer has fellowship with Father and Son through the Spirit; but eternal life will also be more fully and completely experienced in the future (e.g. 4: 14, 5: 29), when the believer will be personally
in the presence of Jesus and of the Father. At present paradoxically we may say that Jesus and the Father are present with the believer (through the Spirit), and yet at the same time they are absent. In the future they will be present in a more complete and glorious sense—not only through the Spirit, but in person face to face.

2.6. Conclusion: the present experience of eternal life equals the experience of the Spirit

The observation of the difference between the present and future of eternal life in John means that we must qualify our earlier conclusion that eternal life is the same blessing as the gift of the Spirit: eternal life in the future is a greater fellowship than that experienced in the present through the Spirit. What we may say is that the present experience of eternal life is the experience of the Holy Spirit, but the future experience will be something more. Not that they are different experiences—both are experiences of fellowship with Father and Son—but the future experience will be a greater one.

3. The Johannine understanding of Spirit and life compared with parallel ideas elsewhere in the New Testament

3.1. Jesus present with and absent from the believer

If our analysis of Spirit and life in John is anywhere near correct, then it is interesting to note the similarity between John’s ideas and those of other New Testament writers. In John we found the idea of Father and Son having present fellowship with the believer (through the Spirit), but also the idea of Jesus going away and of a future greater fellowship face-to-face. The same seemingly paradoxical thought of Jesus being present with the church in one sense and yet absent from it in another sense can be found in several other New Testament writings or writers. Compare, e.g., Matthew 24:3, 27 with 28:20, or Philippians 1:23 with Romans 8:10.

3.2. The Spirit in Paul as a firstfruit of our future fellowship in God’s family

More striking and significant is the parallelism between John’s view of the Spirit as the present experience of eternal life and Paul’s teaching on the Spirit of ‘firstfruits’ or ‘downpayment’ of our future inheritance (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13f). The Holy Spirit in Paul gives us a first experience of living as sons of God who call God ‘Abba’, but the full experience of this fellowship lies in the future. (This idea of fellowship as members in the family of God has parallels in John, e.g., 1:12; cf. 1 Jn. 3:1.)

3.3. The synoptics: the kingdom is present and future

The thought of a present first experience and a fuller final experience is, of course, also present in the synoptic gospels in Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom. Scholars are now almost all agreed that Jesus taught both a present and a future kingdom: the longed-for kingdom of God had indeed come near in Jesus’ ministry and was ‘in your midst’ in the person of Jesus: the blessings of the kingdom were beginning to be experienced through Jesus’ miracles, life and preaching. But the present experience of the kingdom was like a minute mustard seed when compared with the future kingdom that would one day be revealed. The future kingdom would not be something different from the present kingdom; it would be the same, but in far greater, more glorious measure. It will be something complete and not partial.

3.4. The synoptics: the kingdom equals fellowship with God

The parallelism between the present and the future of the synoptic kingdom and the present and the future of Johannine eternal life is clear, and the parallelism is the more striking when we recall that eternal life in John is essentially fellowship with Father and Son and that the kingdom in the synoptics means (among other things and perhaps pre-eminently) a restoration of fellowship between God and sinners. This restored fellowship is already experienced now as Jesus, in God’s stead, feasts with reconciled sinners, and it will be consummated in the future at the messianic banquet.

3.5. The synoptics: the supreme blessing of the kingdom is the Holy Spirit

We have seen certain parallels between the synoptic view of the kingdom and the Johannine view of eternal life, but we should beware of oversimplifying the picture by concentrating on the similarities and ignoring the differences. We need to consider two differences. In the first place we recall that the present experience of eternal life in John is the experience of the Holy Spirit; but at first sight at least this is not the case with the synoptic idea of the present kingdom. Indeed the Holy Spirit seems to be notably absent from the synoptics. A second related difference between John and the synoptics is that, although John and the synoptics have a
present/future tension, in the synoptics the present of the kingdom is the ministry of Jesus, but in John the present experience of eternal life through the Holy Spirit is a post-Easter experience, since John makes it clear that the Spirit was not given until Jesus’ glorification (7: 39).

With regard to the first point—the absence of the Spirit in the synoptics—it is true that during Jesus’ ministry, as the synoptics describe it, receiving the kingdom does not lead to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; rather Jesus’ followers experience the kingdom, the rule of God, in Jesus’ works and words (which, however, we should note, are Spirit-inspired).¹ But all the synoptics are unanimous in recording John the Baptist’s prediction that ‘he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’. Interestingly all the evangelists give a prominent place to this prediction at the start of their gospels and are then remarkably silent about it for most of their gospels. The reason for this silence in Luke’s case is made clear at the end of the Gospel and in Acts: although the Holy Spirit is the supreme blessing of the new age of the kingdom (looked forward to by the Old Testament and proclaimed by John the Baptist), the blessing was not in fact given by Jesus or experienced until after his resurrection; and so it does not receive much attention during the course of Luke’s Gospel.

If we may assume that the same understanding was shared by Matthew and Mark—and I see no other satisfactory explanation of the prominent recording of the Baptist’s prediction—then the synoptic view is that the Holy Spirit is both the power of the kingdom at work in Jesus and the supreme blessing of the kingdom in the believer’s experience; but the Holy Spirit was not given to believers until after Jesus’ ministry. If this is a correct understanding of the synoptics, then John and the Synoptics are evidently much closer to each other than might at first appear.²

3.6. The synoptics and John: three tenses of kingdom/eternal life?

Our observation about the significance of the Spirit in the synoptic gospels throws light on the second point of difference between John and the synoptics that we noted, namely that in the synoptic present/future tension the present is the ministry of Jesus, whereas in John it is the post-resurrection age of the church. Now it seems that we should more carefully describe the synoptic view of the kingdom;

³ Cf. Mt. 12: 28-32; Mk. 3: 28-30; Lk. 4: 14-17; Acts 10: 38.

⁴ For the Spirit upon Jesus see 1: 32, 33; 3: 34f.; for the Spirit being given to believers after Jesus’ exaltation see 7: 39 and chapters 14-16.

in the synoptics the kingdom is experienced in one way in Jesus’ ministry; it is to be experienced in a very important new way with the coming of the Spirit; and it will come in final power and glory at the end. Thus we may think of a three stage coming of the kingdom.⁵ If we compare this with John’s view of eternal life, then evidently he has equivalents to stages 2 and 3: eternal life is experienced after Jesus’ glorification through the Spirit, and it will be experienced completely at the parousia. But what of stage 1, the ministry of Jesus? Can we say that eternal life in John is experienced even before the giving of the Spirit? This might be hard to prove very directly from John,⁶ although we may well argue that Jesus’ promises of eternal life in John to people like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman seem to have immediate relevance to them and are not promises that will take effect only at a later time.⁷ However, if we approach the question through the definition of eternal life given in John 17: 3, then the probable Johannine answer to the question becomes clear. If eternal life is knowing Father and Son—fellowship with Father and Son—then John’s gospel suggests that this was indeed possible during Jesus’ ministry. Although the disciples’ understanding is faltering, yet they do believe and come to know Jesus, who is the manifestation of the glory of God (e.g. 6: 69; 17: 6f.). They do experience fellowship with him, albeit not so close a fellowship as that which the Holy Spirit will bring into their very hearts. If, as we suggested before, an alternative Johannine definition of eternal life would be ‘Father and Son making their home with the believer,’ then we can find an exact parallel to the kingdom idea of the synoptics: (a) in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus ‘the Word . . . dwell among us’ (1: 14); (b) through the Holy Spirit Father and Son dwell with the believer now; (c) in the future believers will be with Father and Son in glory face to face.

4. Postscript: the love command in John

Having completed the main argument of this paper and suggested (a) that the two Johannine ideas of

⁵ Maybe it would be better to retain the idea of a two-stage coming, but the first stage is itself in two parts—the giving of the Spirit is the completion of Jesus’ historical bringing of the kingdom.

⁶ Some would argue that such a historical question would not be of interest to John, since he was writing from and for a church situation. We do not deny that John’s writing does reflect his situation, but we cannot so quickly dismiss John as a-historical in outlook, as the new not so ‘new look’ on the fourth gospel has made clear.

⁷ We would wish to maintain this point, even if it is granted that John has expressed Jesus’ teaching in the terminology of his (John’s) own day and situation.
of relating John to other parts of the New Testament; but taking 17:3 as my starting-point I have attempted to show how various of the Johannine themes, e.g. eternal life, the Spirit, unity, the love of God, may cohere, and also that these distinctively Johannine themes have important and often quite close parallels elsewhere in the New Testament. My contention is that not only has the fourth gospel more internal coherence within itself, but also more external coherence with the rest of the New Testament, than is often recognized. I have, of course, bypassed many difficult questions (e.g. about the precise connotation of Johannine terms such as 'eternal life'); but whether or not my whole analysis is valid, I hope that certain of the lines of thought suggested may be useful in the important and exciting task of interpreting John's gospel.

5. Conclusion
I began this paper by commenting on the difficulty of relating different themes in the fourth gospel and

As well as having parallels elsewhere in the New Testament, John's ideas have important links with the Old Testament, where the eschatological hope for the future includes as important elements (a) the 'knowledge' of God, (b) the thought of relationship/fellowship between God and his people (e.g. 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people'), (c) the hope for the presence of God among his people, (d) the giving of the Spirit to God's people (as well as the coming of a Spirit-filled Messiah). See Is. 11:9, 60:19, 61:1f.; Je. 31:33ff., 32:38; Ezek. 37:14, 27ff.; Ho. 2:23; Joel 2:27, 28; etc. These ideas, as in John, are closely related to each other.

This is made much more explicit in 1 John than it is in the gospel, e.g. 1:6, 2:4ff., 3:14, 4:7, etc. 1 John specifically points out that love is the nature of God. The love between Father and Son and the love which reached out to save us must be reflected in our lives, if we know or are in fellowship with him.

It is interesting to compare the teaching in John on love and unity with that in Ephesians. Paul there speaks of God's plan to 'unite all things in him' (i.e. Christ; Eph. 1:10), and goes on to speak of the church, in which Jew and Gentile are united, as a demonstration of this divine plan of universal unification (3:9, 10); in line with this he urges his readers to live out this unity (4:1f.). So in John's gospel Jesus' followers are to live in unity as a demonstration to the world of the glory and life of God. They are to live out eternal life now in their relationships with each other.

The Johannine and Pauline teaching on this point may be related to the synoptic picture of Jesus' teaching and life: one of the effects of the eschatological kingdom in Jesus' ministry is the breaking down of barriers between men (e.g. Jew and Samaritan). Jesus in his lifetime, and his community afterwards, are (or in the case of the church should be) a living demonstration (or prototype or first-fruits) of the unity that God is going to bring completely at the parousia.
The Old Testament prophets’ self-understanding of their prophecy

Douglas Stuart

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Our concern is to answer the question, ‘How did Old Testament prophets themselves view what they were doing in fulfilling their prophetic call from God?’ This is not the same as asking, ‘What roles did Old Testament prophets in fact have?’, though it is closely related.

For the answer to our question, we have relatively little explicit data. It was obviously not the primary intention of either the authors or the compilers of the Old Testament to satisfy our curiosity about what prophets thought of themselves vis-à-vis their prophecies. Nevertheless, from an intelligent look at what they say and do, i.e. the nature of their message and actions, we may make some reasonable extrapolations about their own views toward the message they preached, and their sense of what they were doing in preaching that message.

In service of this goal, one might ask any or all of the following questions:

Did prophets consciously think that God was speaking directly to them, or is this something that later generations attributed to their messages which were in fact creations of their own intellects and nothing more?

Did prophets actually get ‘taken over’ by God’s Spirit? Was this always/sometimes/only rarely the case? Could it be that most of the time their words were their own inventions, created along the lines of and in support of the more occasional special direct revelations from God?

Did prophets simplify speak convincingly and authoritatively as a modern day preacher tries to do? And did their disciples or later redactors then collect and edit just those words (among the many they spoke) which came true in a way that makes the whole seem divine?

Did prophets actually understand all that much of what they were saying even if it was said under God’s inspiration? Did they perhaps fashion highly ambiguous, symbolic, ‘deep’ sayings to which people of faith later assigned a significance that the prophets themselves would not necessarily have understood?

Did prophets in fact understand that their message was fully from God, and what it meant and how it would apply to their own generation? Could they have had any inkling of things so distant in time from them as the new covenant, the church, the reign of Cyrus, the ministry of the Messiah? Or would they be nonplussed to find that thousands of years later parts of their oracles are exegeted by theological students as presaging these very things —the students then going on after graduation to proclaim such interpretations to congregations of Christians?

It is obvious that fully convincingly, thoroughly documented answers to all these questions are not going to be found in a brief article such as this. Complete answers require in the first place an enormous amount of exegetically sound study of Old Testament narrative passages about the prophets, of the prophetic corpus itself, and of extra-biblical evidence from the acient near east where prophecy as an institution was hardly limited to Israel and Judah. Even then, one’s chosen affirmations, via four affirmations, my own understanding of the issues, and to suggest, with a modicum of documentation from which we can only extrapolate, what sort of evidence one would draw on to support these affirmations. It is my hope that this format will at least bring the matter into clear focus for the reader, even if it does not fully address all the relevant concerns.

Four affirmations

1. The prophets considered themselves servants of God, vehicles through whom God himself spoke.
2. They considered the content of their message unoriginal.
3. They considered themselves as occupying a
divinely appointed societal office, correcting illegal beliefs and practices. 4. They understood what they preached. We shall comment on these affirmations in order, offering a sampling of evidence from the Old Testament, and considerations based thereon. Our discussion will be motivated by the way, to refer to the orthodox, true prophets, as opposed to the many professional pretenders (cf. 1 Kgs. 22: 1–28).

1. The prophets considered themselves vehicles through whom God himself spoke. In Exodus 7: 1 Yahweh says to Moses, 'I have chosen you to be a mouthpiece for Me.' Moses, the paradigm prophet in the Old Testament, speaks with an authority not his own. So it was with the other Old Testament prophets. It is their consistent contention and the general biblical description of them, that they spoke God's word, not their own. In every case, it is God who decides who shall be a prophet (cf. Ex. 3: 1ff.; Is. 6; Je. 1: Ezk. 1: 3–2: Ho. 1: 2; Am. 7: 14–15; Jon. 1: 1, etc.). Indeed, if one were to take the office of prophet upon himself, this would constitute evidence that he was in fact a false prophet (cf. Je. 14: 14; 23: 21). From the veneration and 'pleasant oracles' of these false prophets the true prophets took pains to dissociate themselves (cf. Am. 3: 5, 14).

All of them came to their work as the result of an experience of a divine call. Because the word they spoke was Yahweh's word and not their own, they prefixed it, concluded it, or even intermittently interspersed it with reminders like 'Thus says Yahweh' (koh 'amar yhwh) and 'oracle of Yahweh' (ne'em yhwh). Indeed the vast majority of the time they phrased their message in the first person, quoting Yahweh directly, as if their mouth was his mouth. Many prophets felt permitted to do this—they clearly consider themselves required to do this. Regardless of how personally risky this task sometimes was, or how likely the message was or was not to be believed, they represented God and said what he told them to say. For example, Jeremiah had to relay God's message to Judah that submission to Babylon (as far as his message was concerned)—was their only option (Je. 27–28). In his Book Jeremiah reports he says, 'This is what Yahweh said to me... (27: 2); and quote God's words: 'Then send word... (27: 3); 'Give them a message... (27: 4); 'Say, This is what Yahweh Almighty, the God of Israel says... (27: 4); and adds (Oracle of Yahweh' (27: 11); etc. He knows that those prophets who oppose him are ipso facto false prophets because God himself says so (27: 16ff.). On what authority does he so firmly reject prophecies contrary to his own? On the authority of the word of Yahweh (28: 15, 16). How could he, then, (or we) be sure? They couldn't of course, and we can't, except according to faith. Jeremiah however could be sure, because he knew God had given him that message to pass on. That was his self-understanding.

The prophets got some of their oracles by being allowed by God to overhear heavenly deliberations or to be told directly by God the content of his plans (cf. 1 Kgs. 17: 1; 22: 19; Je. 23: 22; Am. 7). The prophet as a 'man of the heavenly god' (council and or 'counsel') understand themselves to have knowledge not otherwise available to humans. The very word prophet (ne'emah) in the Hebrew means 'one called', i.e. of a special commission directly from God. They saw themselves in a special position among mankind. Whether in ecstatic bands, accompanied by music (1 Sm. 10: 5–13) or standing alone in prayer against the moral collapse of Israel (1 Kgs. 18: 16–39), the prophets were God's men and women. Sometimes called 'men of God' (Dt. 33: 1; 1 Sa. 2: 27; 9: 6; 1 Kgs. 13: 1), often called by God 'my servants' or the like (2 Kgs. 17: 13; Je. 7: 25). The prophets report their self-understanding of their prophecy in a servant mode. The master's word 'came to them'. Some of their commissions were rather dramatic (Je. 1: 9). Some were made to prophesy even against their will (Nun's 28, Balaam's 13–19) or tried to avoid their commission—though without success (Jon. 1: 1ff.) but it was God who was behind all. They attributed their inspiration directly to the Holy Spirit. There are eighteen Old Testament prophecies which list the inspiration of the prophets to the Holy Spirit. Indeed it is only as the prophets themselves knew with utter confidence that the word they spoke was fully God's Word that we can expect to understand the message. We may not choose to believe their words. They had no choice.

2. They considered the content of their message unoriginal. Some years ago I served briefly as a translation consultant to a project preparing for publication a study edition of the Authorized Version of the Bible. One unusual feature of this edition was to be

its 'red letter' Old Testament. On the analogy of so-called red-letter New Testament editions which print in red ink the words of Jesus, the Old Testament text was to print in red ink the words recorded as spoken by God. If you think about this for a moment, I believe you can guess quite easily where the printer had to use most of the red ink. Red predominated in two large blocks of sacred text: (1) the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 24: 12ff.) and (2) the prophetic books.

This may perhaps serve to illustrate the role the Old Testament prophets played. They were of course spokespersons for God, persons through whom he proclaimed his word, both to his own covenant people and to the world. The word he spoke through them was almost exclusively related to the original covenant he had given through Moses. If there had not been a covenant, it is hard to imagine what sorts of things Israelite prophets, if they had been proclhed at the time, might be expected to say. Perhaps they would have introduced particular aspects of Yahweh's will to particular people at particular times.4 In the absence of any previous covenant revelation, perhaps they might have developed a particular and perhaps enlightened social ethics as a counter force to the oppressive characteristics of the society they lived in.

1 These editions of the New Testament have not generally been popular precisely because marking Jesus' words in red is not given to the reader that they are more important—perhaps even more sacred—than the 'regular' words printed in black. In the case of the Old Testament, to print the words of God in red is to concentrate on just a bit less directly the words of God. Thus the red letter approach in practice unfortunately may serve to promote a kind of theologically oriented reading of some kind of biblical statements above others.

The OT prophets, the editors usually found it impossible to decide when the prophet was speaking and when God was speaking, so closely does prophetic speech blend with the words of God. We need not here concern ourselves with a purely literary approach, e.g. says Yahweh' to quote God (e.g. 1 Kgs. 21: 20–22).

In the case of the Mosaic law, for example, it is relatively easy to reach a clear, unambiguous, editorial, evolutionary approach to OT history tends to conclude. In the case of the Mosaic law, for example, it is relatively easy to reach a clear, unambiguous, editorial, evolutionary approach. The predominant innovators gained prominence in past generations on the theory that the Mosaic law had been in existence, the prophets would have cited it more as the basis for their ethics. This theory prevailed because its proponents were unaware of two facts: (1) No ancient law codes were ever cited precisely in court cases or prophetic oracles anywhere in the ancient world. Numbers 33: 52–56 citation of legal formulations or precedents is strictly a modern legal development. (2) The Old Testament prophets do refer to the Mosaic law as a whole, and more or less, in a perfectly consistent and largely periphrastically and paraeumatically as opposed to verbatim. This would make little sense for God to assign them the task simply of repeating the words of the pentateuchal covenant. We cannot go through the prophets was assigned the task of motivating the people to return to the covenant already revealed.

In this connection, note that the New Testament speakers and writers, including Jesus, cite the Old Testament verbatim only rarely. The percentage of word-for-word citations of the Old Testament in the New Testament is out of all proportion to what the Mosaic law was in the prophets. The vast majority of the ample references in later portions of scripture to earlier portions take the form of allusions rather than citations.

2. This assumes a date in the mid-fifteenth century for the exodus. This early date, once out of favor with archaelogists, has recently gained a number of adherents among biblical critics and Old Testament scholars.

Cf. provisionally J. Rimbord, Redating the Exodus and Conquest (JSOT Supplement Series 3, Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1974). But there was a covenant, and the prophets were raised up by God to summon people back to obedience to that covenant. The Old Testament prophets did not think of themselves as innovators. Consider the situation of Hosea, for example. He was a 'prophet to his people' (Hos. 1: 1) and the several succeeding northern kings (i.e., circa 750–722 BC). This means that the legal stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, ritual, religious, ethical and civil, had been known in Israel for as much as a thousand years by the time he, the second earliest of the 'writing prophets', came on the scene.

When one carefully examines the message that Hosea advanced it becomes evident that this message has in essence two facets only: (1) to call people back to obedience to the Mosaic covenant; (2) to remind them of the blessings and curses contained in that covenant. There is no passage in the book of Hosea which refers to the Mosaic covenant as its basis. God's words of judgment or blessing fall into the categories already proclaimed in the covenant curse and blessings passages, especially those of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–33. Indeed, a basic characteristic of the prophetic word and metaphors in Hosea reflect the previous revelation of a single chapter of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 32.

For a single example of Pentateuchal allusion in a single chapter has Hosea 4: 2–4:

Cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery and breach forth, and the idols crowd against one another.

Here in this verse, six of the 'ten commandments' are mentioned, though not strictly 'cited'. In three cases (murder, stealing, adultery) the very vocabulary of the word of the two-prohibition in Exodus
divinely appointed societal office, correcting illegal beliefs and practices. 4. They understood what they preached.  We shall comment on these affirmations in order, offering a sampling of evidence from the Old Testament, and considerations based thereon. Our discussion will be based primarily on the way, to refer to the orthodox, true prophets, as opposed to the many professional pretenders (cf. 1 Kgs 22: 1-28).

1. The prophets considered themselves vehicles through whom God himself spoke.

In Exod 7: 1 Yahweh says to Moses, 'I have chosen you to be God to Pharaoh.' Moses, the paradigm prophet in the Old Testament, speaks with an authority not his own. So it was with the other Old Testament prophets. It is their consistent contention and the consistent biblical description of them, that they spoke God's word, not their own. In every case, it is God who decides who shall be a prophet (cf. Ex 3: 1ff.; Is 6; Je 1: Ezek 1:3; Ho 1: 2; Am 7: 14-15; Jon 1: 1, etc.). Indeed, if one were to take the office of prophet upon himself, this would constitute evidence that he was in fact a false prophet (cf. Je 14: 14; 23: 21). From the veneration and 'pious oracles' of these false prophets, the true prophets took pains to dissociate themselves (cf. Am 3: 5ff.). All of them came to their work as the result of an experience of a divine call. Because the word they spoke was Yahweh's word and not their own, they prefixed it, concluded it, or even interminably punctuated it with reminders like 'Thus says Yahweh' (kôh 'dâmar yôhwh) and 'oracle of Yahweh (mûm yôhwh). Indeed the vast majority of the time they phrased their message in the first person, quoting Yahweh directly, as if their mouth were his mouth. But God had permitted to do this—they clearly consider themselves required to do it. Regardless of how personally risky this task sometimes was, or how likely the message was or was not to be believed, they represented God, and said what he told them to say. For example, Jeremiah had to relay God's message to Judah that submission to Babylon (tрезон, as far as his contemporaries' thoughts—were their only option (Je 27: 28). In his own words he says, 'This is what Yahweh said to me...' (27: 2); and God quotes words: 'Then send word...' (27: 3); 'Give them a message...' (27: 4). 'Say, This is what Yahweh Almighty, the God of Israel says...'


(27-4); and adds (Oracle of Yahweh' (27: 11); etc. He knows that those prophets who oppose him are ipso facto false prophets because God himself says so (27: 16ff.). On what authority does he so firmly reject prophecies contradictory to his own? On the authority of 15,000 or 15,000 hearers of God's word (or we be sure? They couldn't of course, and we can't, except according to faith. Jeremiah however could be sure, because he knew God had given him that message to pass on. That was his self-understanding. The prophets got some of their oracles by being allowed by God to overhear heavenly deliberations or to be told directly by God the content of his plans (cf. 1 Kgs 17: 1; 22: 19; Je 23: 22; Am 7: 7). The prophets as agents of the heavenly god (council and/or 'counsel') understand themselves to have knowledge not otherwise available to humans. The very word prophet (nâbî) in the Hebrew means one called', being a special commission directly from God. They saw themselves in a special position among mankind. Whether in ecstatic bands, accompanied by music (1 Sm 10: 5-13) or standing alone in prayer against the moral decay of the land (Is 6: 1-8), they are held in a key sort of secret knowledge. More (1 Kgs 18: 16-19), the prophets were God's men and women. Sometimes called 'men of God' (Dt 33: 1; 1 Sa 2: 27; 9: 6; 1 Kgs 13: 1), often called by God 'my servants' or the like (2 Kgs 17: 13; 16: 7); Je 23: 1. The prophets report their self-understanding of their prophecy in a servant mode. The master's word 'come to them.' Some of their commissions were rather formal (Je 1: 9). Some were made to prophesy even against their will (Nun'a, Balaam, Zippor, Balak, 19: 19) or tried to avoid their commission—though without success (Jon 1: 1ff.). But it was God who was behind all. They attributed their inspiration directly to the Father, the Holy Spirit. There are eighteen Old Testament prophecies where the Spirit used the prophet to inspire the prophecy of the prophets to the Holy Spirit.4 Indeed it is only as the prophets themselves knew with utter confidence that the word they spoke was fully God's word that we can expect to understand it. We may not choose to believe their words. They had no choice.

2. They considered the content of their message unoriginal

Some years ago I served briefly as a translation consultant to a project preparing for publication a study edition of the Authorized Version of the Bible. One unusual feature of this edition was to be its 'red letter' Old Testament. On the analogy of so-called red-letter New Testament editions which print in red ink the words of Jesus, the Old Testament text was to print in red ink the words recorded as spoken by God.5 If you think about that for a moment, I believe you can guess quite easily where the printer had to use most of the red ink. Red predominated in two large blocks of sacred text: (1) the Mosaic covenant Ezek (28: 17) and the prophetic passages.

This may perhaps serve to illustrate the role the Old Testament prophets played. They were of course spokesmen for God, persons through whom he proclaimed his word, both to his own covenant people and to the world. The message they spoke through them was almost exclusively related to the original covenant he had given through Moses. If there had not been a covenant, it was hard to imagine what sorts of things Israelite prophets, if the Bible was forbidden, had to say. Perhaps they would have introduced particular aspects of Yahweh's will to particular people at particular times.6 In the absence of any previous covenantal revelation, perhaps they might have developed certain codes of specified religious and enlightened social ethics as a counterforce to the oppressive characteristics of the society they lived in.7

5 These editions of the New Testament have not generally been popular precisely because marking Jesus' words in red ink gives to the reader the notion that they are more important—perhaps even more sacred—than the regular "words printed in black.

In the case of the Old Testament, to print the words of God as such would introduce a bit less directly the words of God. Thus the red letter approach in practice unfortunately may serve to promote a deliberately false impression of some kind of biblical statements above others.

The OT prophets, the editors usually found it impossible to decide when the prophet was speaking and when was speaking, so closely does prophet speech blend with the words which need not be those says Yahweh' to quote God (e.g. 1 Kgs 21: 20-22).

A prophetic approach, and a strictly literal, historical, evolutionary approach to OT history tends to conclude.

6 It is true that innovations gained prominence in past generations on the theory that if the Mosaic law had been in existence, the prophets would have cited it more as the basis for their ethics. This theory prevailed because its proponents were unaware of two facts: (1) No ancient law codes were ever cited precisely in court cases or prophetic oracles anywhere in the ancient world. (2) Exemplary citation of legal formulations or precedents is strictly a modern legal development.

7 The Old Testament prophets do so refer to the Mosaic law. They do not, however, ever exactly cite or paraphrase portions of legal formulations or precedents in the Mosaic law in the prophets. The vast majority of the ample references in later portions of scripture to earlier portions take the form of allusions rather than citations.

This assumes a date in the mid-fifteenth century for the Exodus. This early date, once out of favor with archaeologists, has recently gained a number of adherents among both conservative and liberal line of scholars.


A complete documentation of the interconnection of Hosea's and Amos' prophetic word is the author's forthcoming commentary on Hosea. On Dt 32 and Hose, see especially M. Noth, Law and Prophecy (Uehlen: Berlin, 1964), pp. 42-50.


22 The words of the prophets were transmitted orally by the oral tradition, and rather constantly, and largely peripherally and para-somatically as opposed to verbal. It would make little sense for God to assign them the task simply of repeating the words of the prophetic covenant. With the creation of the prophetic tradition, through the prophets was transmitted a tradition, otherwise motivate the people to return to the covenant already revealed.

In this connection, note that the New Testament speakers But there was a covenant, and the prophets were raised up by God to summon people back to obedience to that covenant. The Old Testament prophets did not think of themselves as innovators.

Consider the situation of Hosea, for example. Hosea was a prophet to the northern tribes and the several succeeding northern kings (i.e. circa 750-722 BC). This means that the legal stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, ritual, religious, ethical and civil, had been known in Israel for as much as a century by the time he, the second earliest of the 'writing prophets', came on the scene.

When one carefully examines the message that Hosea entrusted it becomes evident that this message has in essence two facets only: (1) to call people back to obedience to the Mosaic covenant; (2) to remind them of the blessings and cures contained in that covenant. There is no passage in the book of Hosea which shows any other basis. God's words of judgment or blessing fall into the categories already proclaimed in the covenant curse and blessings passages, especially those of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-33. Indeed, a bare glance at the words and metaphors in Hosea reflect the previous revelation of a single chapter of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 32.

9 For a single example of Pentateuchal allusion in a single verse in Hosea 4: 2-4

Cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery and breach, and the idols crowd against one another.

Here in this verse, six of the 'ten commandments' are mentioned, though not strictly cited. In three cases (murder, stealing, adultery) the very vocabulary word of the two-word prohibition in Exodus

and writers, including Jesus, cite the Old Testament verbatim only rarely. The percentage of word-for-word citations of the Old Testament in the New Testament is quite small compared with such citation from the Mosaic law in the prophets. The vast majority of the ample references in later portions of scripture to earlier portions take the form of allusions rather than citations.

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20/Desternomey 5 is repeated. In the remaining instances (cursing, lying, idols, etc.) the term used in Hosea 4:2 summarizes a relatively longer commandment that in its entirety could hardly be cited in the poetic text of Hosea 4 without utterly distorting the poetry. This example is only one among hundreds that could be adduced from the prophetic books. But it makes our point adequately. According to their inspiration, the prophets rebuke and re-order the covenant stipulations. They took the most prole legal material and shaped it (mostly poetically) especially employing a rich imagery via metaphors and allegories. God’s purpose through them was the renewal of the covenant message effectively. Their inventiveness is always in service of the long-extant Mosaic covenant. What they do cannot be described as innovation, i.e. making new theological points.

3. They considered themselves as occupying a divinely appointed societal office, correcting by divine word illegal beliefs and practices

When the prophets are called to exorcise Israel or the nation, what pock in effect are crimes against the covenant. These crimes were sometimes religious-doctrinal, that is, of heresy (cf. Hos. 2:4–13; Ezk. 8:16) and sometimes civil-ethical, that is, crimes of heterodoxy (cf. Am. 8:2–6; 5:15). On both sorts, intermixed (Mic. 3:8–12; Ezk. 7:15–27). The covenant provided a paradigm for all the nations of the earth and Israel alike (cf. Am. 1:3–2:2; Mic. 5:5–16).

Such a ministry was sometimes considered the equivalent of treason (Am. 7:10–11). It was not anything that the prophets themselves initiated, however. Yahweh’s word was the agent of correction, not the prophet. As Amos answers the complaint that his preaching was unfairly negative, he offers no response of his own. His appointment to office was God’s doing (Yahweh took me... and said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”). He answers Amaziah not with his own rejoinder, but with God’s: ‘Therefore, this is what Yahweh says...’ (Am. 7:14–17).

Indeed the prophets were neither radical social reformers nor great religious thinkers or pioneers. It was Yahweh’s word that accomplished these tasks. Yahweh was the reformer, the theologian, the author of words and events. The nature of his reforms and his religious demands was contained already in the law. The prophets were ardent patriots, as the covenant demanded. For those to whom the covenant sanctions demanded punish-

ment, they insisted on that punishment at God’s behest, denouncing the guilty party, even if king (2 Sa. 12:1–14; 2 Sa. 24:11ff.; 1 Kgs. 18:4; 20:42; Ho. 1:4) or priest (Ho. 4:4–10; Am. 7:17; Mal. 1:9–16). By God’s command, kings (1 Kgs. 19:10) and deposed kings (1 Kgs. 21:17–22), or even declared war (2 Kgs. 3:18–19; 2 Chr. 20:14–17) or against war (1 Kgs. 12:22–24; Je. 27:8–22).

By the mid-eighth century, prophecy as a national institution appears to have hit a low point in its responsiveness to Yahweh, comparable in some ways to the days of Ahab (874–853) when prophets of Baal and Asherah dominated the religion of the nation. The mid-eighth century saw the corruption of the nation by pagan worship and a largely paganized Yahwism (Ho. 2:4–13; 3:1; 5:4–7) as well as social and moral decay. The rich oppressed the poor openly and greedily (Am. 2:6–8; 4:1; 6:1–7) and the people were brought against this sin their sole weapon: Yahweh’s word. Denouncing the sin and the sinner, proclaiming judgment according to the covenant curses of deprivation, devastation, disease, deporation (cf. Am. 1:3; 6:1–6). It is clear from their language and their demeanor that the prophets consciously accepted this role to plead the case of the oppressed (Dt. 24:19–22) against the oppressor (Lv. 19:9–18). In some cases this brought them even into the role of counselor (cf. Am. 7:16; 9:15); the role of both sorts, intermixed (Mic. 3:8–12; Ezk. 7:15–27). The covenant provided a paradigm for all the nations of the earth and Israel alike (cf. Am. 1:3–2:2; Mic. 5:5–19).

The evidence suggests that even those prophets delivered in a manner called ‘ecstatic’ were comprehensible to the prophets who spoke them. There is nothing to support the idea that the rational, cognitive faculties were bypassed in the course of any inspiration. We judge that there is something arresting, convulsive for this contention, though largely inferential in nature, and sometimes involving speculation.

a. The prophets display a keen awareness of events around them that resulted in a result. Jonah flees at first from his divinely appointed task but his predictions are carried out. Because he understands well his cry against Nineveh might serve as a vehicle for Assyrian repentance and therefore avoidance of God’s wrath, an eventuality, he finds intolerable (4:3). Micah knows exactly how objectionable his true prophecy will be to Ahab, so first sarcastically delivers a false prophecy (2 Chr. 18:14). He knows very well how the destruction he prophesies will affect even the prophet who opposes him (verse 24) as well as the king (verse 27).

b. The intercessory stance sometimes assumed by the prophets demonstrates their awareness of the implications of their revelations. Even the symbolic visions of their clients (cf. 1 Kgs. 3:4–11) that indicate to Amos the unsparing wrath of God, against which he intercedes. Jeremiah is actually forbidden by God to intercede for Israel against the wrath to come (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). God’s message to him is to be silent. The violence and destruction of the land happen no matter what. The prophet who would be the first to see the implication of this message would have been inclined to intercede with God had he not been proscribed from it. By the same token, the problems of the future appear quite comprehensible to the prophets. This is partly because the oracles themselves are so clear. After all, how could Ezekiel misunderstand what God was saying to him. In Ezk. 37:1–14 he concludes: ‘The Israel will be reconstructed and returned from exile is crystal-clear. But the evidence goes even beyond this. Hosea’s artfully alarming portrayal of the coming disaster is set on the context of an already in the situation. God’s word through Isaiah about the deliverance of Jerusalem (Isa. 37:33–35) was hardly the right answer for Jeremiah to give in the days of Zedekiah (cf. Je. 27). In this case could not apply (for example) 2 Kgs. 22–25.

The personal involvement of the prophets in seeking acceptance for their divinely appointed word suggests that they fully understood its significance. How otherwise would they have contended so ardently for the authority of their message before kings, prophets, priests and people if they did not share God’s sense of urgency that the word be believed. It is not unreasonable to conclude that they saw then, just as well as we can see now, how important belief in God’s word through them would be for Israel and the nations.

c. The prophetic oracles were so carefully composed that it seems unlikely that the prophets did not fully comprehend them. Group oracles (cheristic of the earlier books, or the most part).
20/Destoronomy 5 is repeated. In the remaining instances (cursing, lying, idols . . .) the term used in Hosea 4: 2 summarizes a relatively longer commandment that in its entirety could hardly be cited in the context. The extent of Hosea 4: 2 without utterly distorting the point is reasonable. This example is only one among hundreds that could be adduced from the prophetic books. But it makes our point adequately. According to their inspiration to prophets, oracles are not arranged and re-ordered the covenant stipulations. They took the most plausible legal material and shaped it (mostly poetically) especially employing a rich imagery via metaphors and allegories. God's purpose through the oracles is to communicate the message effectively. Their inveniveness is always in service of the long-extant Mosaic covenant. What they do cannot be described as innovation, i.e. making new theological points.

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—ment, the interpretations of the future appear quite comprehensible to the prophets. This is partly because the oracles themselves are so clear. After all, how could Ezekiel misunderstand what God was going to do in Jerusalem after the conquest (Ezk. 37: 1–14)? Nor had the Israelites been reconstituted and returned from exile is crystal-clear. But the evidence goes even beyond this. Hosea's artfully alarming portrayal of the covenant-breakers, God's disavowal of the covenant in 732 bc (Ho. 5: 8–10) includes this con- fident assertion: 'I proclaim what is certain.' Amos' statements about prophetic insight are paradigmatic: 'Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants the prophets.' (3: 7). Indeed, the process is not really a voluntary one: 'The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (3: 8). It is noteworthy that God's revelation is given to his prophets as well as through them.

Oracles of future deliverance and blessing display the same level of creative involvement stylistically, and the same level of specificity as regards the application of covenant blessings (renewal of people and land, agricultural abundance, changes in natural phenomena, etc.) that characterize other types of oracular utterance and to consider the prophets 'vague' on the future. Their oracles are usually just as clear about the future as about the past; for they have Mosaic precedent (e.g. Dt. 4: 25–31). Virtually all the prophets functioned as taxonomists but their predictions are consistently related to contemporary circumstances and events, so that those actually hearing the message are motivated by its portents to respond to the covenant. (cf. Is. 10: 30–6; 10: 30–6; and not just regaled with glimmers of the future. In other words, there is a practicality to futurism, which implies a comprehensibility. An irrational apocalypticism (and the Old Testament contains none of that) could hardly be applied to people's existing concerns in the way that the Old Testament prophets, whether apocalyptic or not, are led to apply these.
Tensions in Calvin's idea of predestination

Wing-hung Lam

Wing-hung Lam is Professor of Church history at the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong. This is his first contribution to Themelios.

A couple of weeks ago I had an opportunity of talking with a friend about the credibility of the Christian faith. When the conversation became somewhat personal, he bluntly said: 'You don't need to urge me to consider Christianity. I know there is a thing called 'predestination' in your religion. Now, if I am elected by God, I will be saved with or without your persuasion. If I am not chosen to heaven, why waste your time to convince me of the Christian belief?' In either way, human effort has little place.' The theological implication of this comment is significant.

Many an educated evangelical layman knows that the doctrine of freedom in the past has been strong advocates in John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer. But not many are familiar with the strength and the weakness of his theology of predestination which is a central theme in the era of Reformation. As Philip Schaff, a prolific church historian, has observed: 'All the Reformers of the sixteenth century, ... under a controlling sense of human depravity and saving grace, in extreme antagonism to Pelagianism and self-righteousness, and ... in full harmony not only with the greatest of the fathers, but also with the inspired St Paul, came to the same doctrine of a double predestination which satisfies the eternal destiny of all men.'

In this essay we attempt to analyse several areas of tension in Calvin's thought.

In the first edition of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536, the doctrine of predestination is only briefly discussed in connection with the Apostle's Creed and the definition of the church. During his exile in Strasbourg, Calvin expanded his concept which betrays his Augustinianism and attentive reading of Martin Bucer's Commentary on Romans. In the final edition of the Institutes in 1559, the setting of the doctrine is changed but not the essential content. Certainly, Calvin's controversies with Bolese, Pighius, Melanchthon, and Castello over the years had enriched his thought.

Calvin regarded soteriological predestination as God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition: rather, some are predestined for life, others for eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.*

The logical counterpart of election is reprobation, since election is not, in Calvin's view, since unless it is set over against reprobation. He continued:

God is said to set apart those whom he adopts into salvation; it will be highly absurd to say that others acquire by chance or by their own effort what election alone confers on a few.

Therefore, whom God passes over, he condemns: and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.°

Theological tensions in the idea of predestination are symbolized by the definition of the doctrine. And in Calvin's exposition the motivation in resolving them is easily recognizable.

The first tension is epistemological. Since the decree is eternal, how can we identify the God-foreordained with the God-informed? In the Institutes of 1536, Calvin warned against wishing to know too much about the mystery of predestination, probably as a reply to Zwingli's The Providence of God. He acknowledged the incomprehensibility of God but not divine unknowability. However, he approved Melanchthon's fear that investigation of the subject would harm the faith of believers. It is wrong to expose only that part of the doctrine understandable to our mind in order to make it more acceptable as if God's honour were protected by our hiding the truth. He was willing to go as far as scriptural revelation allowed.

Predestination, in Calvin's thought, is an article of faith, and reprobation, a doctrine of the elect. The non-elect never know that they are the reprobate. The logical opposite of the grace of salvation is known only to the believer who has experienced redemption, from which perspective the double destiny of God is theologically related. Every age has its mundane explication. Calvin never spoke specifically of the reprobate in the present or future tense. Even Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Geneva, was not regarded as such in his time. It is sacrilegious to exclude from the number of the chosen a sinner as being already lost. Calvin taught a 'certain judgment of charity' that Christians should consider as elect those who profess faith (Rom. 10:10). Upon the inspiration of St Augustine's The City of God, Calvin admitted that the reprobate will dwell side by side with the elect until the Day of Judgment.

How is election confirmed? Although it is impossible to be certain of the electing activity of God, assurance can be secured in Christ. The grace of election is where Christ is. Calvin regarded Christ as the 'mirror of election' in whom to contemplate our final state and who did not imply a passive role occupied by Christ, for Christ also 'claims for himself, in common with the Father, the right to choose.' No human factor would have influenced the electing process or would undo the benefits of it. Both Scripture and the sentiments of the church are objective evidences of Christ's presence in the community of the elect, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit enlightens and convinces us of its reality. Thus divine election is to be apprehended by faith alone, not by works, as Calvin pointed out two misconceptions regarding faith: 'Some make man God's co-worker, to ratify election by his consent' and others 'make election depend upon faith, as if it were doubtful and also insecure.' Calvin's answer was: 'For he who spoke of faith, he often came back to the conviction that the elect cannot lose their salvation, for Christ will not let his members be estranged from him. The second tension in Calvin's doctrine is: If God foreknew who is to be saved, is he the author of evil in reprobation? This question involves the relation of predestination to providence, foreknowledge, and causality.

Predestination presupposes providence, and in Calvin there is a remarkable continuity between the two. The notion of providence means that God's rule is extended to all parts of the world by his infinite wisdom and justice. Some medieval theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, regarded predestination as a particular application of the universal providence to the redemptive activity of God. Calvin saw the unifying cause of all phenomena in an omnipotent and omniscient deity, who is the author of all that happens. For him, not only the heaven and the earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are.

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° Institutes, III, 23, 1.
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Many an educated evangelical layman knows that the doctrine of predestination has a strong advocate in John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer. But not many are familiar with the strength and the weakness of his theology of predestination which is a central theme in the era of Reformation. As Philip Schaff, a prolific church historian, has observed: 'All the Reformers of the sixteenth century, . . . under a controlling sense of human depravity and saving grace, in extreme antagonism to Pelagianism and self-righteousness, and . . . in full harmony not only with the greatest of the fathers, but also with the inspired St Paul, came to the same doctrine of a double predestination which decides the eternal destiny of all men."

In this essay we attempt to analyse several areas of tension in Calvin's thought.

In the first edition of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536, the doctrine of predestination is only briefly discussed in connection with the Apostle's Creed and the definition of the church. During his exile in Strasbourg, Calvin expanded his concept which betrays his Augustinianism and attentive reading of Martin Bucer's Commentary on Romans. In the final edition of the Institutes in 1559, the setting of the doctrine is changed but not the essential content. Certainly, Calvin's controversies with Bolese, Pighius, Melancthon, and Castellio over the years had enriched his thought.

Calvin regarded soteriological predestination as God's eternal decree, by which he compelled with himself what he will to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition: rather, the eternal life is reserved to one, the eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.

The logical counterpart of election is reprobation, since election is not, in Calvin's view, since unless it is set over against reprobation. He continued:

God is said to set apart those whom he adopts into salvation; it will be highly absurd to say that others acquire by chance or by their own effort what election alone confers on a few. Therefore, whom God passes over, he condemns: and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.

Theological tensions in the idea of predestination are defined by the definition of the doctrine. In Calvin's exposition the motivation in resolving them is easily recognizable.

The first tension is epistemological. Since the decree is eternal, how can we identify the God who foreknows the mystery of predestination? In the Institutes of the statistical unless confirmed by faith.

When he 1539 Calvin warned against wishing to know too much about the mystery of predestination, probably as a reply to Zwinglei's The Providence of God. He acknowledged the incomprehensibility of God but not divine unknowability. However, he disapproved Melancthon's fear that investigation of the subject would harm the faith of believers. It is wrong to expect only that part of the doctrine understandable to our mind in order to make it more acceptable as if God's honour were protected by our hiding the truth. He was willing to go as far as scriptural revelation allowed.

Predestination, in Calvin's thought, is an article of faith, and reprobation, a doctrine of the elect. The non-elect never know that they are the reprobate. The logical opposite of the grace of salvation is known only to the believer who has experienced redemption, from which perspective the double designation is inherent. Every age has its mandate to reprove. Calvin never spoke specifically of the reprobate in the present or future tense. Even

3 Institutes, III, 23, 1.


Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Geneva, was not regarded as such in his time. It is sacrilegious to exclude from the number of the chosen a sinner as being already lost. Calvin taught a 'certain judgment of charity' that Christians should consider as elect those who profess faith Christ's act in the inspiration of St Augustine's The City of God, Calvin admitted that the reprobate will dwell side by side with the elect until the Day of Judgment.

How is election confirmed? Although it is impossible to be certain of the electing activity of God, assurance can be secured in Christ. The grace of election is where Christ is. Calvin regarded Christ as the 'mirror of election' in whom to contemplate our election. He did not imply a passive role occupied by Christ, for Christ also 'claims for himself, in common with the Father, the right to choose. No human factor would have influenced the electing process or would undo the benefits of it. Both Scripture and the sentiments of the church are objective evidences of Christ's presence in the community of the elect, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit enlightens and convinces us of its reality. Thus divine election is to be apprehended by faith. Therefore, how could Calvin point out two misconceptions regarding faith: 'Some make man God's co-worker, to ratify election by his consent' and others 'make election depend upon faith, as if it were doubtful and also uncertain. He who spoke of faith, he often came back to the conviction that the elect cannot lose their salvation, for Christ will not let his members be estranged from him.

The second tension in Calvin's doctrine is: If God foreknows our future, is he not the author of evil in reprobation? This question involves the relation of predestination to providence, foreknowledge, and causality.

Predestination presupposes providence, and in Calvin there is a remarkable continuity between the two. The notion of providence means that God's rule is extended to all parts of the world by his infinite wisdom and justice. Some medieval theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, regard predestination as a particular application of the universal providence to the redemptive activity of God. Calvin saw the unifying cause of all phenomena in an omnipotent and omniscient deity, who is the author of all things and dependent upon him. For 'not only the heaven and the earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are
Tensions in Calvin’s idea of predestination

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Calvin regarded soteriological predestination as God’s eternal decree, by which he compensated with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition: rather, God’s eternal life is claimed for some, God’s eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.

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Theological tensions in the idea of predestination are generated by the definitions of the doctrine. And in Calvin’s exposition the motivation in resolving them is easily recognizable.

The first tension is epistemological. Since the decree is eternal, how can we identify the God-forsaken with the God-chosen? In the Institutes of the Christian Religion, when in 1559 Calvin warned against wishing to know too much about the mystery of predestination, probably as a reply to Zwinglei’s The Providence of God. He acknowledged the incomprehensibility of God but not divine unknowability. However, he disapproved of Melanchthon’s fear that investigation of the subject would harm the faith of believers. It is wrong to expose only that part of the doctrine understandable to our mind in order to make it more acceptable as if God’s honour were protected by our hiding the truth. He was willing to go as far as scriptural revelation allowed.

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The second tension in Calvin’s doctrine is: If God is sovereign in his predestination, is he then author of evil in reprobation? This question involves the relation of predestination to providence, foreknowledge, and causality.

Predestination presupposes providence, and in Calvin there is a remarkable continuity between the two. The notion of providence means that God’s rule is extended to all parts of the world by his infinite wisdom and justice. Some medieval theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, regarded predestination as a particular application of the universal providence to the redemptive activity of God. Calvin saw the unifying cause of all phenomena in an omnipotent and omniscient deity, who is the author of everything, dependent upon him. For ‘not only the heavenly and the earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are
borne by it straight to their appointed end" (Institutes, I, 16, 8).

In late medieval time, the nominalist idea of potestas absoluta and potestas ordinata of God was popular. This signified divine, gratuitous mercy according to which 'he chose, absolutely free from external interference, undetermined by any cause whatever apart from himself, to accept man's moral virtue as meritorious for his salvation'.

God does not impart salvation without merits. Man's free will should be preserved to the greatest extent possible. And foreknowledge therefore depends on divine knowledge of man's future response. To help man attain personal virtues God has graciously assisted him to do his best. On the principle that the end includes the means, Thomists Aquinas held that predestination of the individual to eternal life includes in it all necessary graces and qualifications as effects, not causes, of predestination. In Thomas's view, God predetermines grace to the elect that they may merit glory. Following this tradition, Pighius, Calvin's contemporary, argued that the reprobate are those foreknown by God to be unworthy of his goodness. This was the case with God's discrimination between Esau and Jacob.

But in Calvin's understanding, foreknowledge does not mean prior in time but transcendent in time. God operates in the realm of eternity, which is qualitatively, not quantitatively, different from the temporal continuum. He embraces the entire human history. This continuity of simul- taneous knowledge implies that God does not make a decision at some past moment and then, after an interval, brings it into action. Only human activity goes this way. God does not only conceive events through ideas alone (he sees them and discerns them as things placed before him). He is no passive observer of events to occur.

Like foreknowledge, predestination is not to be understood in the same way as the former. It does not depend on foreknowledge. Both belong to God, and it is preterpositional to represent one as contingent upon the other. No causal connection between foreknow- ledge and predestination can be established, whether as cause of effect or cause of predestination of divine grace imparted to man. To say that predestination is conditioned by foreknowledge is to introduce an indirect human factor, outside the divine intellect, that will destroy the absoluteness of the sovereign will.

Calvin maintained two important premises regarding foreknowledge and causality. First, foreknowledge is properly so called only if what it foreknows happens. Secondly, purely on the level of foreknowledge, no causal necessity is imposed on men. These two assertions exposed Calvin to the criticism, launched by Jerome Bolese, that he had made God the author of sin. As Bolese argued, if God foreknows grace of God, he is supposed to enable him to believe in Christ if he wishes. The cause of predestination, conceived by God in eternity, is not to be found in God's will but in man's work. Election and reprobation are divine confirmation of what men have already done.

The whole issue has much to do with the meaning of causality in Calvin's double decree. Predestina- tion, according to his definition, is an a priori, exclusive business within the trine Godhead. It is an ignorable decision for the eternal destiny of each individual human. Nothing about the temporal world is yet mentioned. Viewing from this perspec- tive, the question, Is God the author of evil? is wrongly asked, because it is an a posteriori question, taking the ethics of human history into considera- tion. Sin and evil are categories of the created order, and they cannot be applied to the Creator. If man were to peer into the realm of divine logic, he would from that standpoint comprehend the rationality of God's decision, yet to say this much was not enough to silence his foes in the controversial situation of Calvin's day.

Calvin continued to point out two kinds of causality. Primary causality belongs to God and is not the same as predestination. This difference is different from the human understanding of cause and effect, such as smoke coming from fire. Predestination has been wrongly regarded as a grapple for this kind of causality in the divine plan. Understood in this manner, when God predestines some to damnation, he cannot escape the title of being the author of evil. But Calvin's view of primary causation is different. He admitted his ignorance as to what God's action would produce. In predestination he referred to the eternal and concealed counsel of God in predestination. The question 'Is God the author of evil?' is a challenge to God's primary causality, which Calvin could not answer logically. He only dogmatically called it 'God's will' as the first cause by affirming that God's will is just and that God is not the author of evil. He appealed to the holy and gracious nature of deity rather than the consistency of human logic which he disparaged as inferior to divine wisdom.

However, when predestination is to be preached and historical contingency is considered, another kind of causality comes into play: proximate causality. God displays his power through secondary media and his power is never separated from these media. In rebutting Pighius, Calvin argued that the origin of man's ruin was in Adam and that each man finds the proximate cause of his ruin in himself. There is no parallel treatment between election and reprobation. In election there is a direct relation between God and man. But in reprobation, there is a proximate factor in the process. A judicial element is present which has no counterpart in election.

Election presupposes no human merits, but sheer grace. Reproduction results in the same form, but at the same time, with unmerited grace. Such proximate cause, the solution offered by Calvin, enabled him to ascribe all praise to God for his election and all blame to man for his damnation. For him the two causalities always harmonize in the sovereign will. Thus a twofold theology is developed.

The third tension deals with morality. If man's destiny has been fixed from eternity, how can he be a free and responsible agent? If he is made unable by God to choose for salvation, why should he be condemned?

In criticizing Calvin's view of predestination, Pighius, followed by the Armenians in the seven-teenth century, argued from the assumption that the free action of the creatures is not an absolute interaction of man's and God's will. God's will is simple, never at war with itself, although it appears manifold to us because of our mental incapacity to understand how in diverse manner it can will and does not will the same thing. Both God's will and man's will stands in a relation to be judged and God's will, to judge. With this dynamic relationship of wills, Calvin dismissed the charge of fatalism and determinism.

With respect to evangelism, Calvin sought to reconcile the two factors that external preaching all are called to repentance and yet that the Spirit of repentance is not given to all. Would God be contrary to himself if he universally invites all but admits only to election the fourth tension?

In Calvin's opinion, vocation is the work of the Spirit employing the means of the external word. Word and Spirit have to proceed together for effectual calling. The preaching of the Word itself does not do this alone. The efficacy of divine vocation depend on the receptivity of man, otherwise man may at least boast that he has answered the call and has offered himself.

Calvin acknowledged the reality of an external call in preaching and yet the call is not accompanied by the internal testimony of the Spirit. This is seen in the history of salvation and in the development of the covenant relationship. After the creation of Adam, a universal covenant was established between God and man. Man is categorically dif-

* H. Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology, p. 186.

* Commentary on Romans, 9:11, 20.


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However, when predestination is to be preached and historical contingency is considered, another kind of causality comes into play: proximate causality. God displays his power through secondary media and his power is never separated from these media. In rebutting Pighius, Calvin argued that the origin of man's ruin was in Adam and that each man finds the proximate cause of his ruin in himself. There is no parallel treatment between election and reprobation. In election there is a direct relation between God and man. But in reprobation, there is a proximate factor in the process. A judicial element is present which has no counterpart in election. Election presupposes no human merits, but sheer grace. Reproduction results in sin, and the sin which temporarily and necessarily accompanies sin. Such proximate cause, the solution offered by Calvin, enabled him to ascribe all praise to God for his election and all blame to man for his damnation. For him the two causality always harmonize in the sovereign will. Thus a twofold theology is developed.

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In criticizing Calvin's view of predestination, Pighius, followed by the Armenians in the seventeenth century, argued from the assumption that all human responsibility are mutually exclusive. The fall has not disrupted man's volitional faculty in such a way that he cannot choose what is good. God has never forced man to sin, and so would violate his principle of justice. Faith is not divinely given, but generated and sustained by the believer himself. The entire human race is elected in Christ, and only personal refusal can relinquish it. God's will is extremely holy, just, and good. From this conviction Calvin derived courage to defend the ethics of God's will by asserting that it is the 'highest rule of perfection' and 'the law of all laws'. There is an intrinsic correlation between goodness and dignity of divine will. In predestination God's ethical nature conditions his will; therefore, God is not the author of sin. Reciprocally, God's will governs his nature as he is the author of reprobation. Absolute sovereignty is the the condition in predestination and the final court of appeal for Calvin. The divine will is self-reasoning and self-judging, and is entirely beyond human understanding. Consequently it is impious to investigate the cause of the will of God, than which nothing is more incomprehensible.

How does man's will operate? In the original creation Adam was given an integral, free will to choose good or evil. But after the Fall, this genuine liberty has been forfeited to his posteriority. Calvin accepted St. Bernard's threefold analysis of liberty that man is free from necessity, which characterizes man as man, but not free from sin and misery. Because of this man is thus inevitably 'yet responsibly', and it is man's own choice without coercion. As far as man's own behavior different and the coincidence of God's will and man's will. He maintained with St. Augustine that both man and apostate angels, as far as they were themselves concerned, did that which God willed not, or which was contrary to his will; but that, as far as God's overruling omnipotence was concerned, they could not, in any manner, have done it without his will.

Man may will 'contrary to God's will' but 'not without his will'. In the same event two different wills, sinful and holy, are in joint function. For 'it came to pass that by this will of the creature God, though in one sense unwilling, yet accomplished what He willed'. In one sense unwilling is to be understood as due to the disobedience of man, but the omnipotence of God overrules the situation that will of the creature. God's will is simple, never at war with itself, although it appears manifold to us because of our mental incapacity to understand how in diverse manner it can will and does not will the same thing. Both the divine and man's will stands to be judged and God's will, to judge. With this dynamic relationship of wills, Calvin dismissed the charge of fatalism and determinism.

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sensitive approach to the subtle and delicate theological and practical issues with which Romans deals. The author richly deserves the chair in Durham to which he has recently been elevated. To think his thoughts after him is to be given a lesson in theological scholarship at its very best—indeed, in the peculiarly delightful combination of godliness and good learning.

Any treatment of Romans in this detail is bound to make considerable demands on the reader. Cranfield's approach is thorough. Although most Hebrew words are transliterated, they are usually left untranslated, as are quotations from (e.g.) Chrysostom, Pelagius, Bengel and the modern French and German exegetes. At the same time, it should quickly be said that almost all non-English material occurs in the footnotes, so that readers with only English and Greek will have no trouble with the text: and that it is of course in the interests of exact scholarship that they should be encouraged to make their own closer acquaintance with these sources (Cranfield is quick to point out weaknesses in these translations). Otherwise the commentary is easy to use. It follows the Nestle text (though Cranfield disagrees with it at certain points, and diverges from the standard Greek text of the variant readings, except that of the manuscript 'Codex Vaticanus' which he regards as 'mendacible') and the use of heavy type ensures that one can see at a glance (in contrast, for instance, with Käsemann) exactly where one is. The pagination runs from the first to the second volume, except for the Psalms (which are numbered separately), so that the reader can easily refer to earlier references. The indices are very full and helpful, with the odd exception that sub-apostolic literature is not listed in the usual way, but instead occurs, by author's name only, in the general index. This means that, though the Martyrdom of Polycarp is cited (e.g. p. 809), one cannot tell at a glance whether use is made elsewhere of this or other early Christian writings. The bibliographies, though occasionally needing supplementation from Käsemann, are extremely helpful. In particular, the list of commentaries at the start compares well with Käsemann (109 in the 1973 edition, against Käsemann's 40): and Cranfield has made careful use of almost every one he lists. This use of, and debate with, his predecessors, is an important feature of the work: unlike many writers, he has cast the net wide and culled the best of Christian scholarship of the last two thousand years. The index reveals that his favourites are Barrett, Barth, Bengel, Calvin, Chrysostom, Gaugler, Käsemann, Lagrange, Michel, and of course Sanday and Headlam. Others who crop up regularly are Huby, Origen, Pelagius (who emerges with more credit than one might have thought) and Zahn. This underlines Cranfield's stated intention of making exegesis prior to the wider theological issues: and it is no doubt because of this that one can still readily in recent commentaries—Davies, Schoeps, Stendahl, Wrede, Schweitzer—are hardly mentioned at all. Riddersport is one of the most striking absentees, in view of the fact that his commentary takes a theological stance fairly close to Cranfield's own. But in general the coverage is extremely full: and Cranfield is always scrupulously fair to his opponents.

In one respect Cranfield stands out from most modern commentaries, namely, the full coverage he gives to every single part of the epistle. After 44 pages of introduction (authenticity, structure, purpose, the church in Rome, etc.: and a good brief history of exegesis), chs. 1-8 occupy 400 pages, with chs. 9-11 taking 100. As Cranfield says of Michel is just as true of himself: it is very difficult to find him unaware of questions which need to be asked. The section on chs. 12-13 reproduces almost exactly the earlier Commentary (pp. 630-5) and on ch. 14, though minor, the detailed practical applications in the earlier volume are missing, and one or two others, including a rare peep into the author's background, are added. The only significant modification of stance is that, though Cranfield thinks warning and correction are needed, he dismisses the idea of a double reference for exordia in 13.1 (i.e. to heavenly powers as well as to earthly ones), he has 'now come to regard it as less probable than the interpretation according to which Paul in warning against idolatry was dead in mind simply the civil authorities as such'.

The commentary is then concluded with two essays. The first deals with Paul's purposes in writing Romans and is entitled, 'Concluding remarks on some aspects of the theology of Romans'. Of this, about one-third is taken up with a revised form of Cranfield's deservedly famous article 'St Paul and the Law', the other two-thirds are a new essay, 'Käsemann, Black and Schiller appeared too late to be used in vol. 1: the third volume of Kuss, and the first of Wilckens, came too late for either volume.  

1 Cf. pp. 1, 22ff.  
2 Cf. e.g. p. 778 re Michel.  
3 P. 688.  
5 P. 688.  
6 Cf. e.g. p. 778 re 'quite often even in others' in the last sentence on 13: 10 (p. 679).  
7 P. 659.  
8 Pp. 814-23.  
sensitive approach to the subtle and delicate theological and practical issues with which Romans deals. The author richly deserves the chair in Durham to which he has recently been elevated. To think his thoughts after him is to be given a lesson in theological scholarship at its very best—be it in the peculiarly delightful combination of godliness and good learning.

Any treatment of Romans in this detail is bound to make considerable demands on the reader. Cranfield must have been a thorough master of Hebrew words are transliterated, they are usually left untranslated, as are quotations from (e.g.) Chrysostom, Pelagius, Bengel and the modern French and German exegetes. At the same time, it should quickly be said that almost all non-English material occurs in the footnotes, so that readers with only English and Greek will have no trouble with the text: and that it is of course in the interests of exact scholarship that readers should speak for themselves (Cranfield is quick to point out weaknesses in some translations).6 Otherwise the commentary is easy to use. It follows the Nestle text (though Cranfield disagrees with it at certain points, and directs the reader to the variants with which he himself is inerrant),7 and the use of heavy type ensures that one can see at a glance (in contrast, for instance, with Käsemann) exactly where one is. The pagination runs from the first to the second volume covers the first five chapters (1:5), so that the references are simplified. The indices are very full and helpful, with the odd exception that subapostolic literature is not listed in the usual way, but instead occurs, by author’s name only, in the general index (e.g. that, though the Martyrdom of Polycarp is cited (e.g. p. 809), one cannot tell at a glance whether use is made elsewhere of this or other early Christian writings. The bibliographies, though occasionally lacking a full listing of the works of Käsemann, are extremely helpful. In particular, the list of commentaries at the start compares well with Käsemann (109 in the 1973 edition, against Käsemann’s 40); and Cranfield has made careful use of almost every one he lists. This use of, and debate with, his predecessors, is an important feature of the work: unlike many writers, he has cast the net wide and culled the best of Christian scholarship of the last two thousand years. The index reveals that his favourites are Barrett, Barth, Bengel, Calvin, Chrysostom, Gaugler, Käsemann, Lagrange, Michel, and of course Sandy and Headlam. Others who crop up regularly are Huby, Origen.

Pelagius (who emerges with more credit than one might have thought) and Zahn.8 This underlines Cranfield’s stated intention of making exegesis prior to the wider theological issues: and it is no doubt because of this that certain well known in recent years—Davies, Schoeps, Stendahl, Wrede, Schweitzer—are hardly mentioned at all. Ridderso is one of the most striking absentees, in view of the fact that his commentary takes a theological stance fairly close to Cranfield’s own. But in general the coverage is extremely full: and Cranfield is always scrupulously fair to his opponents.6

In one respect Cranfield stands out from most recent writings. As it were, the full coverage he gives to every single part of the epistle. After 44 pages of introduction (authenticity, structure, purpose, the church in Rome, etc.: and a good brief history of exegesis), chs. 1-8 occupy 400 pages, with ch. 9. 10, 11, 12 putting them firmly in their place.9 Cranfield says of Michel10 it is just as true of himself: it is very difficult to find him unaware of questions which need to be asked. The section on chs. 12-13 reproduces almost exactly the earlier Commentary on Romans, but it is more critical, more the work of the Cranfield of the detailed practical applications in the earlier volume are missing, and one or two others, including a rare peep into the author’s background, are added. The only significant modification of stance is that, though Cranfield still thinks it right to dismiss the idea of a double reference for exortation in 13.1 (i.e. to heaven and as to earthly ones), he has ‘now come to regard it as less probable than the interpretation according to which Paul in using it is not meant to dismiss in mind the civil authorities as such’.11

The commentary is then concluded with two essays. The first deals with Paul’s purposes in writing Romans, and the other, entitled ‘Concluding remarks on some aspects of the theology of Romans’. Of this, about one-third is taken up with a revised form of Cranfield’s deservedly famous article ‘St Paul and the Law’,12 the other two-thirds are devoted to a more detailed treatment of the theme of justification. Generally, the main point is that the whole of Romans, and this includes the first 11 chapters, is a theological discussion of how sinners can be made right with God: this is the whole message of the apostle’s preaching. The essay concludes with a summary of the main points of the commentary and a brief outline of the remaining chapters of Romans.

The great work is finished at last. Four years after the first volume, Cranfield’s commentary on Romans (the first in the new series of the International Critical Commentary, of which he is joint editor) has now been completed by the arrival of the second.13 And a great work it truly is. It represents the best part of a lifetime of patient and careful exegetical study, an easy grasp of the classical languages, a thorough familiarity with the work of commentators from the earliest times to the present day, and, by no means least, a godly, wise and

Godliness and Good Learning: Cranfield’s Romans

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2. Cf. p. 329. The first three volumes have been reviewed in the Evangelical Quarterly (1975), p. 229.
4. P. 688. These are not merely church trivialities: but it is not surprising to see them in the final volume. Cranfield has an especial affection for Käsemann.
5. The first two volumes (102, 103) have already been reviewed in the Evangelical Quarterly.
6. E.g. p. 43 n. 3 (Barth’s shorter commentary). E.g. p. 784 n. 2, re 16:2-3.
7. P. 659.
10. P. 777 re Michel.
11. P. 814: ‘In my view, it is possible to “quasi” and ‘even in others’ in the last sentence on 13: 10 (p. 679).
12. P. 784-23.
13. P. 777 re Michel.
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Cranfield's Romans

The first volume of Cranfield's commentary on Romans consists of a discussion of the first two thousand years of the church's understanding of the work of God as revealed in the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. The commentary is divided into three parts: the theological framework, the historical background, and the exegetical study of the text of Paul's letter. The first part of the commentary provides an overview of the theological framework of Romans, including an introduction to the book's purpose and structure. The second part provides a historical background to the letter, including an examination of the Roman church at the time of Paul's writing. The third part of the commentary is an exegetical study of the text of Romans, including a word-for-word analysis of the meaning of each passage of the letter. The commentary is written in a clear and concise manner, making it accessible to both scholars and students of the Bible.

Critical Commentary on Romans

Cranfield's commentary on Romans is part of the International Critical Commentary series, which is known for its thorough and detailed analysis of the text of the Bible. The series is edited by James Moffatt and is intended to provide a comprehensive and scholarly commentary on the Bible. Cranfield's commentary is no exception, providing a detailed and insightful analysis of the text of Romans. The commentary is written in a clear and concise manner, making it accessible to both scholars and students of the Bible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Cranfield's commentary on Romans is a valuable resource for anyone studying the book of Romans. It provides a thorough and detailed analysis of the text, and is written in a clear and concise manner. The commentary is highly recommended for both scholars and students of the Bible.

References

3. P. 688. This phrase is found in 2 Cor. 6:18: "For the husband is not lord over his own body, but the Lord is over him."
revisions consisting mainly of the deletion of material now covered in the body of the commentary. For the rest, the reader is offered a useful summary of Cranfield’s understanding of Paul, particularly of his Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, and his hold on the argument that Paul has been, as the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, the ‘legitimate freedom ... from time to time to take a certain liberty with a particular passage, in order thereby to bring out the more faithful sense of the OT witness’, as opposed to the idea that Paul shows ‘a readiness to force [the text] to render service to the interpreter’s own purpose, in other words, a freedom of arbitrariness’. I suspect that Cranfield had to curtail these essays—some sections of which are very brief—in the interests of the publisher’s plans: he was to enlarge some of them (perhaps particularly his welcome rejection of the common assumption that Paul wrongly believed that the Parousia would certainly occur in the very near future) he would win considerable further gratitude.

Three features of this commentary, hinted at in the title of this review, call for particular comment. First, Cranfield usually does not fail to point out the difficulty of points in Romans, reading Cranfield is always refreshing, because of the painstaking clarity and honesty with which he sets out the alternative options and their implications. This is something that is sometimes the matter must be left undecided between two or more possibilities. Even where one argument is stronger than the other, Cranfield does not fail to point out clearly just where the issues lie. I think particularly of his discussion of 8: 28 (in which he understands ‘all things’ as the subject of ‘work together’), his arguments for treating 3:1, not 6:1, as the start of the second section of the epistle; and his masterly analysis of 11: 30ff.; 14: 16ff.: and 15: 4, 7, and 9.

Second, the sensitivity to the finer points of grammar, and their theological significance. It is good to have pointed out the significance of the presence of εἰς in 1: 16, 18 of 9: 5, 9: 16 and of the present tense in 5: 6. In the two sections there is a nice distinction between γερ in its explanatory and confirmatory senses (Cranfield never tires of pointing out the importance of Paul’s connecting words, and the significance of the occasional sentence that is cast in the active rather than passive voice). In the latter case, he notes that Persis may have already completed a significant amount of Christian work; and countless other similar points. I particularly like his fine English and German readers not to assume that, just because ‘so’ in both languages could translate ἡστερεῖ in the sense of ‘therefore’, ἡστερεῖ could also carry the meaning of ‘in the ... sequence—all by this way of pointing out that 7: 1-3 is not an allegory but an argument. With this kind of thing always present throughout, one feels one has learnt more from the commentary than just theology, however analysable. The book is tied in to the central theological themes.

Third, godliness (I can think of no better word. ‘Pieté’ sounds a bit wet, and ‘devotion’ suggests that the book is ‘devotional’ which, though heartfelt, I don’t think it is. It is always apparent, though again never obtrusive, that Cranfield takes very seriously indeed the responsibility of the theological exegete towards the task he handles and towards the church he serves, as well as the necessity of the church’s being able to see clearly just where the issues lie. I think particularly of his discussion of 8: 28 (in which he understands ‘all things’ as the subject of ‘work together’), his arguments for treating 3:1, not 6:1, as the start of the second section of the epistle; and his masterly analysis of 11: 30ff.; 14: 16ff.: and 15: 4, 7, and 9.

has purposes for the Jews (Romans 9:11 is no mere apologetic dream), purposes whose all-embracing end is mercy. It is good to see Marcion, and his many modern followers, thus put in their place, though one would wish that Cranfield had attached more weight to the question of the OT’s place in Galatians in two typically Cranfieldian sentences, from p. 867: Because he kept his eyes so steadily fixed on Jesus, the author of Romans was able to hear and to comprehend the message proclaimed by the OT; and, because in his total commitment to Jesus as Saviour and Lord he never ceased to be seriously engaged with the OT scriptures, he perceived with amazing clarity of vision vast and splendid reaches of the truth of Christ which he believed to be the sum of all Marcionites and semi-, crypto-, and unwitting, Marcionites. Because he saw Christ steadily in the light of the OT—not abandoning the real Christ, who is the Christ of Israel, for any imaginary Christ more flattering to his own understanding and quite as ready to grapple with the mystery of God’s gracious election or fail to hold firmly to the truth of God’s faithfulness—His faithfulness (which does not exclude, but includes, severity) to the Jewish people, all human unbelief and disobedience notwithstanding. His faithfulness to all mankind (Paul saw the Gentile mission foretold in the OT) and His faithfulness as the Creator of heaven and earth to His whole creation.

From these two sentences there emerges Cranfield’s main theological contention. Against all suggestions that God has had two plans of salvation, that Jews were to obey the law but that, when they failed to do so, God made an easier way of justification (i.e. faith), or that Israel was to be got rid of as a problem for God, Cranfield argues against such suggestions, standard though many of them have been in NT scholarship (not to mention evangelicalism), Cranfield reasserts the Reformed position which often goes by default in these dialogues. But Cranfield, I believe, will be fulfilled: faith is not a work, but the surrender of man to the gospel in which all the ‘work’ is done for him: 19 Jesus Christ, by his obedience culminating in but not to be reduced to his death, has earned righteousness for all people. In the same way, Israel is not abolished: God still
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caritative identity of the member of that church, the many challenges and 
exhortations the text provides. His practical comments are always worth pondering and his various remarks on prayer, though brief, are excellent.

Any analysis of the new Testament epistle and masterly analysis of 1: 30-4; 14: 16-19 and 15: 4, 7 and 9.

throughout. It is hard to think that anyone could 
work humbly and attentively through this com-

menary and not be a better Christian for it: and it is not every work of massive NT scholarship of that which could be said.

Cranfield is able to present his comments as a theological treatise in which to argue a point of view.

Nevertheless, a definite theological stance emerges: and it is so distinctive, and so important, that we must describe it a little and direct some 
questioning about it. The only direct evidence for Cranfield's position in two typically Cranfieldian sentences, from p. 867:

Because he kept his eyes so steadily fixed on 
Jesus, the author of Romans was able to hear 
and to comprehend the message proclaimed by the OT; and, because in his total commitment to Jesus as Saviour and Lord he never ceased to be 
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attention to the significance of the 

resolution above! They have for too long had the field of 
Pauline studies all to themselves, with the only 
debate being within the Lutheran or a 

Rabbin. And at virtually no point can Cranfield be 

challenged by special pleading. He has outgunned his opponents by good 

fashioned exegesis.

Yet there remain questions. Without any desire 
at all to do as much as to point of its forms, it may be suggested that the stress on the 
continuity of the purposes of God (it is important to see the 

argument against Marcionism and that against 
anti-Semitism, the arguments that the law is not 
abolished because that if Israel is not 'repent in the church', as essentially the same point), right 

and proper though we believe it to be not least as 
a correction of current imbalance, needs in turn to 
be balanced by the emphasis on the discontinuity 

in God's dealings with each nation. It is not that Paul 

allows at all. This discontinuity is not a Marcionite 
invention, nor need it be understood in a Marcionite 

fashion. It is there in Paul, particularly in Galatians, 

at which Cranfield is clearly uncomfortable. We 

probably warmheartedly agree with him, and 

are also of course aware that our disagreement may 

be mostly at the point where Paul explicitly says that the law (while 

no doubt retaining a permanent validity in the sense of 

Gal 5:14: this is most important) held neverthe-

less a temporary function, as the over-arching par-

adox in Galatians, at function ceases when the 

Messiah comes. Bound up with this is of course 
the exegesis of Romans 10:4, particularly the 

meaning of relo:

Here it may be asked whether the language 

of Galatians 3:25, which Cranfield 

supports and 'termination' (which he rejects) are 

necessarily mutually exclusive. If I travel by train 

from Edinburgh to King's Cross, the latter station 

is surely the goal, fulfilment and termination of 

the journey. Until a solution is found in which the 


temporary purpose of the law, and its abolition in

18 The obvious Marianian overtones of this— to which we 
will return—are symptomatic of Cranfield's deep 

Marianism. Baris. (e.g. p. 372ff.; see also p. 111), but very 

occasionally leads the exeges into unusual conclusions, 

which I. 759f. on 15: 15f.

G. ep. 222 n. 2, 858 point (21).
that sense by Christ, can be explained in a non-Marcionite sense (i.e. within a wider view of the single and unchanged purpose of God), one of the most pressing of all Pauline problems remains on the agenda.

This problem can also be expressed as follows. Granted that Marcionism presents an odd picture of God, setting out on an impossible plan and changing his mind half way, is it not equally odd to think of God promulgating a law with the intention of one man, the Messiah, eventually coming to keep it all for himself and for his people, but equally with the intention that his people should in the meantime understand the law quite differently, namely, as something to provoke not works but faith? In other words, does not Cranfield's theology either crucify Christ or exalt Christ? The denial of the crucifixion is logically inconsistent with the claim that Paul had in mind the crucifixion of Christ for his people, by extending the work of his death to them. The denial of the crucifixion is also inconsistent with the crucifixion of Christ as a righteous offering, as something to provoke faith. The crucifixion of Christ is a declaration of God's righteousness and a demonstration of his power, both of which are necessary for the justification of all the Gentiles. If God had in mind the crucifixion of Christ for his people, by extending the work of his death to them, then it is inconsistent with the crucifixion of Christ as a righteous offering, as something to provoke faith, to deny the crucifixion of Christ as a righteous offering, as something to provoke faith.

A further consequence is that he is unable to attack the Luthersans here with the corresponding, and equally Pauline, theologia resurrectionis, which does not reverse the verdict of the cross so much as break out into newness of life beyond it. This, I believe, points the way to the resolution of some of the difficulties we have faced so far. This decision indeed, the abolition of the law without Marcinism, so we need to state the theologia crucis, and its implications for Israel, without anti-Semitism. In other words, Cranfield's perfectly valid points need to be set in a different context, which would include the strengths of the opposing case as well.

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The law is also central in the issue which many will regard as the most controversial in the whole commentary, namely, Cranfield's powerful support for the 'minority' position that sees in Rom. 7: 13-25 a description of (one aspect at least of) normal Christian experience. As usual, Cranfield has unerringly put his finger on important weaknesses in the opposing majority view (which, contrary to usual suppositions, is not so much that the passage describes how Paul remembers feeling before his conversion, but rather that it is how Paul, the Christian, analyses what in fact had been the situation of his Jewish forebears). In particular, he exposes the shallow view of the Christian life, and of sin and ethics, that presumes to have left behind a state in which the believer says 'the evil I would not, that I do.' He is right to see, beyond the normal (existentialist) view, the same incipient Marcinism which he attacks elsewhere. But I am not quite convinced. It seems to me that Cranfield has not fully allowed for the fact that the passage is not first and foremost describing anyone's experience (though no doubt, in some sense at least, it does that even if incidentally): the passage is basically about the law, and its conclusion is that the law is God's law, holy and just and good, but at the same time impotent to rescue man from the power of sin. This does not settle the burning issue, since it could still be the Christian who realizes that the law by itself could not save him, but only (8:1-11) the law fulfilled by the Spirit. It is possible, however, to maintain on the one hand, that Paul is not in agreement with Cranfield's view of the Christian life as a struggle for obedience in which one is always conscious of indwelling sin, while asserting on the other hand that this does not happen so much to be what he is talking about. While, therefore, I refer Cranfield's interpretation to any others I have read—and particularly to the standard Kümmel-Bultmann-

Kümmel line—I cannot help feeling that the last word has not been said on the subject.

Finally, the vexed question of Romans 9-11. One cannot but applaud Cranfield's determination to wrestle seriously throughout with this notorious passage, and there are several discussions which I shall often return to for illumination. But I do not feel he has done full justice either to the section itself, or to its integration within the whole epistle (though his exposition of the latter point is better than most). But 9-11 is not merely a discussion that Paul cannot omit without loss of integrity, but a vital part of the same argument that has occupied him in the first eight chapters. Though Cranfield suggests that this may be so, he does not develop the point, and, when it comes to the connection between 9-11 and 12ff., he notices the link of 'mercy of God' in 12:1 with 9-11 rather than with 1-8 specifically and yet seems to play it down. For the detail, he appears to regard the questions of election and predestination, rather than the issue of God's purposes for the Jews, as the main problem in these chapters: and this, I believe, starts off a false (though well-trodden) trial which results in distortion at several points. Thus in 10:11 Cranfield says that Paul is in connection with predestination in ch. 9 of 'sonship and glory', coming so soon after ch. 8, he takes the old line that predestination is not here to salvation but to a place in God's purposes. Again, in ch. 11 on the line that the unity of Jew and Gentile in 10:9ff., he seems to regard this as incidental to the real point of the passage, which he takes to be the proof of the Jews' responsibility. This in turn leads to the point of Jew and Gentile in 11:10ff.: it is as though the Gentiles, hearing and obeying (or not) of the gospel. Despite p. 533, it is surely more natural to identify the subject of 'call' in v. 14 with that of the same verb in the previous verse rather than with a wide circle of Jewish (and possibly Gentile) believers, not merely Jews. To maintain that in vv. 18-19 Paul was proving that the Jews must have heard the gospel by saying that the Gentiles had heard it is surely much more accurately to identify the basic passage as in vv. 18-19 itself, but here again the point is that 9:30ff. where this section begins, the inclusion of Gentiles within the people of God. Cranfield's very proper concern to counter any suggestion that Paul had fallen into anti-Semitism, I believe, led him astray in a great cause. Finally, more weightily, Paul himself champions fully in ch. 11. By that stage, though, Cranfield is on course for a Barthism solution, which is duly propounded: though universalism is not required by ch. 11 (since Paul 'may actually in this context only have meant that God has shut in the various groups he has mentioned as who knows what,' and the question of whether was then the case, in the light of Cranfield's interpretation of the text, in the context of the God's strange ways (not in men in general but) with Israel).
that sense by Christ, can be explained in a non-Marcionite sense (i.e. within a wider view of the single and unchanging purpose of God), one of the most pressing of all Pauline problems remains on the agenda.

This problem can also be expressed as follows. Granted that Marcionism presents an odd picture of God, setting out on an impossible plan and changing his mind half way, is it not equally odd to think of God promulgating a law with the intention of one man, the Messiah, eventually coming to keep it all?** And not just for himself, but equally for his people, but equally with the intention that his people should in the meantime understand the law quite differently, namely, as something to provoke or not works but faith? In other words, does not Cranfield's theologoy** either make Christ either a legalist (i.e. one who misunderstood the law's purpose, wrongly imagining it to be a means of acquiring merit or 'righteousness' by works), or imply that, when the Jews treated the Messiah as a legalist's charter (assuming for the moment that they did) they were not misunderstanding it at all, but merely doing with it what God intended the Messiah to do? I suspect that this view, like the one it opposes, makes too much in ethical meaning of 'righteousness' and fully grasped the forensic nature of the word: though to take up that question would require several more articles at least as long as this one.** (To avoid misunderstanding the following paragraph, I should say that Paul would have dismissed any suggestion that Jesus Christ disobeyed the law—though some, in their eagerness to save the Messiah from legalism, have suggested this.)**

Another aspect of the same problem is the use made by archaeologists of the term 'incipient Marcionism'. Granted his splendid treatment of the doctrine of the atonement, in which he does not shrink from the always unpopular conclusion that God 'purposed to direct against his own very Self in the person of His Son' (p. 76), Cranfield's wrath against what [sincere] men have dared,** it is not clear that he has seen (as the Germans, particularly Käsemann, seem to see) the implications of the cross for the place of Israel and the law in the purposes of God.

** This is odd in itself: why should the Messiah, if (as Cranfield argues) he is the divine, need to earn anything for himself? Is he not already God's beloved Son? Yet Cranfield's frequent stress on the weakness of that body of people to whom the gospel is to be preached suffers, perhaps, from his concentrating as well for himself as others: see the references in the next section.
** See e.g., pp. 240, 290ff., 505 (though see n. 1 there), 522.
** See e.g., B. C. Bain, Review of 'Judaism in Palestine under Roman Supremacy', in JTS n.s. 29, 1978, p. 560ff.
** P. 217 et seq. (e.g., p. 647ff., 827ff.).

(A further consequence is that he is unable to attack the Lutherners here with the corresponding, and equally Pauline, theologia resurrectionis, which does not reverse the vividness of the case so much as break out into newness of life beyond it. This, I believe, points the way to the resolution of some of the present problems, the issue is that of the abolition of the law without Marcionism, so we need to state the theologia crucis, and its implications for Israel, without anti-Semitism. In other words, Cranfield's perfectly valid points need to be set up as a counterpoint which will include the strengths of the opposing case as well.

The law is also central in the issue which many will regard as the most controversial in the whole commentary, namely, Cranfield's powerful support for the 'minority' position that sees in Rom. 7: 13-25 a description of (one aspect at least of) normal Christian experience. As usual, Cranfield has unerringly put his finger on important weaknesses in the opposing majority view (which, contrary to usual suppositions, is not so much that the passage describes how Paul remembers feeling before his conversion, but rather that it is how Paul, the Christian, analyses what in fact had been the situation. In particular, he exposes the shallow view of the Christian life, and of sin and ethics, that presumes to have left behind a state in which the believer says 'the evil I would not, that I may do.' He is right to see, beyond the formal (existentialist) view, the same incipient Marcinson which he attacks elsewhere. But I am not quite convinced. It seems to me that Cranfield has not fully allowed for the fact that the passage is not first and foremost describing anyone's experience (though no doubt, in some sense at least, it does that even if incidentally): the passage is basically about the law, and its conclusion is that the law is God's law, holy and just and good, but at the same time impotent to rescue man from the penalty of sin. This does not settle the burning issue, since it could still be the Christian who realises that the law by itself could not save him, but only (8: 1-11) the law fulfilled by the Spirit. It is possible, however, to maintain on the one hand that Paul agrees with Cranfield's view of the Christian life as a struggle for obedience in which one is always conscious of indwelling sin, while asserting on the other hand that this does not happen so much that he is talking about the flesh. While, on the other hand, I refer Cranfield's interpretation to any others I have read—and particularly to the standard Kümmel-Bultmann-
from the deliberately high praise given above. Cranfield's theological judgments are a breath of fresh air and an incentive to hard work and further debate, and it is towards that task, not to destroy but to fulfill his true intentions, that my questions are directed. My one critical objection, a masterpiece of Christian scholarship: to presume even to criticize it makes me feel uncomfortably like the thistle challenging the cedars. Before I am trampled down for my impudence, let me conclude with a bold assertion and prediction: this book is the finest work on Romans to appear in English this century, and has a good chance of remaining at the top of the list for several decades to come.

Book Review

William McKane, Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives (Edinburgh: Handsell Press, 1979), x + 262 pp., £5.50.

This work shows considerably sympathy with the growing trend in recent work that it is argued that the Patriarchal narratives cannot be established on the basis of historical and archaeological data. McKane, however, argues that Genesis 12-50 is not a form of history waiting to be confirmed by archeological evidence. Hence, he points to the methods and conclusions of authors such as Bright, Spence, and Dahl as being in need of reexamination. McKane's argument is that the material of Genesis 12-50 is that of a religious text for the Jews, and that it is an attempt to convey the message and themes of the covenant. McKane concludes that these themes are the basis of the Patriarchal narratives.

McKane is undoubtedly correct to draw attention to the importance of the literary problems posed by the patriarchal narratives, though uncorrected versions are in my opinion less difficult. His concern for genre has become an obsession, producing a fortunate divorce between the literary and the historical. To study the text, and will hardly spoil the fires of the preacher's heart. Nevertheless, this means of biblical interpretation is popular and has its merits. It enables the reader to examine the text in a way that is accessible and not too demanding.

The major part of the book is therefore devoted to literary analysis. The material is divided into two parts: a detailed examination of the contents of Genesis 12-50 and a historical interpretation of the narrative.


Professor Kaiser divides his work into three parts: I. 'Definition and Method', II. 'Materials for an Old Testament Theology', where he applies his method defended in Part I, and III. The New Testament, a brief treatment of seven pages.

According to his preface and title I think it fair to say that he is chiefly concerned with the Old Testament. He says clearly in the introduction (Part I) that the approach here to be taken is that of a theologian, who sees the primary context of the biblical text is the tradition of the church, and that the work of the theologian is to see how the text has been interpreted and understood by the church. The book is well-researched and filled with delightful and helpful excursions on various texts and theological issues. It is unfortunate, however, that he ended this part of the book in the lack of any attempt to discuss the subject of 'diachronic' to describe his method without informing us of what he has described with new meaning.

Regarding the nature of an Old Testament theology Kaiser concludes that it should be a presentation of the theologies of the Old Testament, revelation which he finds to be both progressive and unified. To find a method that satisfies this inherent nature he looks for a centre progressively revealed throughout the Old Testament, and proposes to uncover this theme inductively from the text. This Jewish claim, he suggests, is in agreement with the biblical canon. This centre, to each writer, he contends, constitutes the law, which he lists as the word of the Lord and the antecedent theological context behind the later authors on faith and works.

The centre, he argues, is promise, a promise that essentially includes the provisions found in Genesis 12:1-3 and 17:8. McKane makes clear, also, includes the 'Mosaic Law, the 'fear of the Lord', etc. Accordingly he develops the materials of the Old Testament chronologically around this theme.

Regarding the nature of Old Testament theology, his handling of the nature of Old Testament theology gives expression to the Westminister tradition of biblical interpretation. He is true to this tradition, and his understanding of the Old Testament text to the witness to the event, the dissection of the text into concentric theological theories, and the imposition of modern categories of thought upon the text. But he does not probe deeply into the Old Testament and its relationship to biblical introduction to biblical theology. Since the materials of the Old Testament are to be arranged chronologically, the accuracy of this chronology must be demonstrated. It cannot be assumed, for example, that the Patriarchs are prior to Moses.

The author of the book has been accused of being presumptuous in his attempt to arrive at a centre from the text, the selection of certain texts (p. 11) instead of using the whole text leads to some logical fallacies. By selecting certain texts as significant and excluding others as insignificant and then appealing to these texts to prove his thesis, the reasoning is at fault. He is right to insist on the importance of literary context, but sincerely hope that the author of the book will take the advice of his professor and begin to sing the anthem of the Old Testament more studiously.

Regarding the centre, Kaiser supports his case for 'promise', as he argues this is the theme which we can afford to ignore the importance of this theme. His contribution here is outstanding and will win for his work its place in the discussion of this is an important part of the Hebraic philosophy. Kaiser observes the essential difference between the covenants based on God's promise (Noah, Abraham, David, and New), and the Mosaic covenant based on Israel's promise. Paul diagnostically contrasts the promises of the New Testament with the covenants of the Old Testament, and he has chosen to focus on the Mosaic Law which for a time was added alongside of it (Galatians 3). Kaiser admits that the Mosaic covenant is not identical, and that it is not necessarily the same covenant. Kaiser says that the new covenant is simply the Old Testament, and that the Old Testament is superior to the Mosaic covenant in its 'deliberately built-in planned obsolescence'. But this is not the contrast the writer of Hebrews has in mind. Although the old covenant was found fault with the people's (8: 8) and then contrasts the provisions of the new covenant in Hebrews 8: 8-12. Kaiser has constructed a model for his covenants and he does this by comparing the covenant in a way that is not completely thought through and distorts its true character. Moreover, the writer of Hebrews is not concerned with the covenants as parts of the 'promise', Kaiser obscures the essential difference between the covenants based on God's promise (Noah, Abraham, David, and New), and the Mosaic covenant based on Israel's promise. Paul diagnostically contrasts the promises of the New Testament with the covenants of the Old Testament, and he has chosen to focus on the Mosaic Law which for a time was added alongside of it (Galatians 3). Kaiser admits that the Mosaic covenant is not identical, and that it is not necessarily the same covenant.