

# Foundations

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If the foundations  
be destroyed, what  
can the righteous do?



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C O N T E N T S

'FUNDAMENTALISM'	p. 1
Eryl Davies	
THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE: SOME OLD TESTAMENT PROBLEMS	p.10
Rev John C.J.Waite BD	
THE DANGERS OF AN INTELLECTUAL APPROACH	p.27
Rev Donald MacLeod MA	
EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL ACTION	p.34
Rev Alan F.Gibson BD	
MYSTICISM - AND A TOUCH OF EASTERN PROMISE	p.38
Dr R.M.Jones	
BOOK REVIEWS	p.48

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## 'FUNDAMENTALISM'

Eryl Davies

The message is loud and clear. Conservative evangelicals are wrong. Our doctrinal position and entire intellectual apologetic are 'incoherent' and wrong; Yes, affirms James Barr, "Completely wrong" (*Fundamentalism*, p8, SCM, £4.95). That is not all. He describes us as "a pathological condition of Christianity" (p318). Clearly the Oxford Professor feels strongly and passionately about us; in fact, his intolerant, bitter approach is hardly the best way to debate theological questions.

Barr is convinced that 'Fundamentalism' (a term he does not define) is based on a particular kind of religious tradition in which Biblical authority functions only as a 'form' providing a shield for its cherished tradition (p11). The point is basic in his analysis. This tradition includes an emphasis on the necessity of personal conversion and an insistence on true doctrine which Barr finds distasteful. Coupled with this there is also a distrust of existing churches, the emergence of evangelical organisations like U.C.C.F. which "provide a remarkably stable ideological centre and point of reference" as well as the importance of preaching, prayer, evangelism and eschatology. Our distinctive view and use of the Bible are then seen as a basic, dominating and cohesive force within the tradition. At this point, Barr rightly concludes that the point of conflict between ourselves and others is not over literality but over inerrancy. However, our hermeneutic procedure is deemed inconsistent, swinging between literal and non-literal interpretations in a desperate attempt to preserve inerrancy. The Harmonisation Principle is firmly rejected and ridiculed (pp55-70) while our reasons for affirming inerrancy fare no better. For example, the appeal to our Lord's attitude to Scripture is described as a "grotesque argument" (p74) while, in Barr's view, it is nonsense to

talk of the Bible's "claims" about itself. "There is no 'the Bible' that 'claims' to be divinely inspired, there is no 'it' that has a view of itself." There is only this or that source, like 2 Timothy or 2 Peter, which make statements about certain other writings, these rather undefined ...."(p78)

His conclusion which we must challenge is that the link between inspiration and inerrancy "rests on one basis only: supposition. Here evangelicals go over to a purely philosophical and non-Biblical argument; if it was inspired by God, then how could there be error of any kind in it?" (p84). Our attitude to 'sound' literature as well as the quality and inconsistency of our scholarship are then deplored (pp120-159) and Barr accuses us at the same time of "large-scale rationalizing and naturalizing of miracle stories" (p259). Professor Barr concludes his book with the provocative statement that "we have to recognise that the liberal quest is in principle a fully legitimate form of Christian obedience within the church, and one that has deep roots within the older Christian theological tradition and even within the Bible itself" (p344).

Despite its underlying bitterness, this is an important book likely to exercise a significant influence upon contemporary religious thought. The author - Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford University - is a Biblical scholar of renown and his aim in this book is to provide a theological analysis of 'Fundamentalist' beliefs and practices, while he is addressing the whole church, he feels a particular concern to write for those people who remain uncertain concerning their view of the Bible yet who are at the same time attracted by the conservative evangelical position. He hopes that through the reading of this book such people will be dissuaded from accepting our position and will make instead what he calls a more "intelligent and deliberate decision" (p10). For these reasons alone we dare not ignore this

book nor deal with it in a perfunctory manner.

Another reason for the importance of the book is Barr's sustained attack on our doctrine of Scripture and, in particular, inerrancy. Inerrancy is a key doctrine currently overshadowing all other issues. Barr's book illustrates this and indicates how controversy over the Bible is at boiling point. We dare not remain silent at such a critical time. For example, he denies that our position is 'orthodox' (p168) and views inerrancy as a development of the later nineteenth century with its roots in the scholastic Calvinism of theologians like Turretin. At the same time Barr regards inspiration as involving a long process of development involving the use of sources, multiple previous editions, textual changes and additions. The implications of such a view are far-reaching. "There was in fact", affirms Barr, "no single point at which the Scriptural text was 'originally given'" (p294). These and other arguments need to be answered responsibly.

I want to suggest another reason why we should consider Barr's book. Some of his observations are perceptive and accurate. He chastises non-evangelicals for their inconsistency in accepting a critical view of the Bible while representing to their congregations the incidents and sayings in the Gospels as if they were real incidents and actual words of Jesus (p335). Their approach is dishonest. Barr also feels strongly that it would be a "more honest and sincere position" (p332) for evangelical clergy within the Church of England and other mixed denominations to withdraw and form "strictly fundamentalist" churches. We heartily agree. Barr is also perceptive enough to recognise the emergence of a "newer current of evangelical opinion" (p228) which he also calls the "younger" and "new conservatives" (p229) who have since the sixties adopted a more open, critical approach to the Bible. He illustrates extensively how conservative evangelical scholarship has compromised increasingly by "moving markedly

towards the acceptance of standard critical procedures and results ...." (p145). Some of his examples are taken from the New Bible Commentary and Dictionary. In addition, he criticises our failure to grapple in depth with complex ethical questions (p328) and our lack of creative theological thinking (p161ff). He describes us as having doctrines rather than a theology and what theology we have is fossilised, fragmented and uncreative. There is considerable truth in this charge. For some years now we have tended to stagnate in theology and to concentrate on isolated doctrines like that of scripture to the neglect of others.

I mention these details in order to indicate the importance and, surprisingly, the usefulness of Barr's book. Our reaction should not be entirely negative. 'Fundamentalism' provides us with the opportunity of looking more critically at ourselves and, at the same time, of grappling with some of the more important issues raised by Barr and other critics.

We intend to discuss these questions and criticisms in some depth in our Journal. We are not prepared to ignore them. For example, in this issue we have included an article on the subject of inerrancy in the Old Testament. This article is introductory in its aim and is not intended as a reply to Barr; its role is the more restricted and useful one of indicating what is our right approach to the Scripture. The author not only emphasises our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament but, in addition, he touches on the question of literalism and refers to some of the apparent contradictions which Barr argues not only disprove inerrancy but also make it appear ludicrous (p225).

Barr's claim that there is no essential connection between inspiration and inerrancy will be discussed in the next issue of the Journal. This is a question of major importance which will be considered alongside the historical argument that inerrancy is a

post-Reformation scholastic doctrine with a concomitant rational apologetic unfortunately adopted, it is claimed, by the Princeton Theologians Hodge and Warfield. Many critics like Barr argue that, apart from the unwholesome influence of Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy, which allegedly came into Protestantism via Turretin, there is no support for the doctrine of inerrancy. We are told that even men like Augustine, Luther and Calvin rejected inerrancy. In addition, we intend to include articles in the next two issues on form and redaction criticism and a more general article on the theology of James Barr.

Why are we discussing these questions and taking notice of contemporary theological thinking?

Basically, we want to express, discuss and contend for Biblical truth in a relevant, theological manner without, like many critics, jettisoning the faith "which was once delivered to the saints"! Our consciences are captive to the Word of God but we are not obscurantists; by contrast, we are prepared to give "a reason for the hope that is in us".

A final word by way of introduction. One immediate criticism of Barr is that he uses important terms without careful definition and such an imprecise use of terms does not facilitate theological discussion.

One term that needs careful handling is 'Fundamentalism'! Barr is not prepared to define the term because he claims it is part of a "complex religious movement" which is easier to describe than define. He submits that 'fundamentalism' has three pronounced characteristics: (a) a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible (b) a strong hostility to modern theology and critical methods and (c) a conviction that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really "true Christians" at all (p1).

According to its original meaning in the period 1910-20 when it referred to those in North America who upheld the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, every



evangelical should be a 'fundamentalist'. More recently, however, the term has acquired an unfortunate connotation and some evangelicals are partly to blame. Some have implied that inerrancy involves a crude literalist interpretation of the Bible and this has often been coupled with an opposition to scholarship as being intrinsically devilish. This segment of evangelicalism has often been obscurantist and sensationalist employing evangelistic methods that many of us deplore. As early as 1947, Carl Henry in the United States expressed this disquiet in his book *'The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism'* and in the fifties a considerable number of evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic attempted to remove the fundamentalist label. For example, in America H.J. Ockenga was one of the first to propose 'New Evangelical' as an alternative descriptive term. In 1958 Dr Packer in his *'Fundamentalism and the Word of God'* rightly described 'fundamentalism' as an objectionable term used more often as a term of 'ecclesiastical abuse' and a 'theological swear-word' (p30). While Barr's use of the term is elastic and his terminology fluctuates from 'old-fashioned Christian fundamentalism', 'average fundamentalist', 'normal fundamentalist', 'extreme and consistent fundamentalism' to 'fundamentalist-evangelical' etc. yet he is not prepared to distinguish between fundamentalists or 'extremists' and 'moderates'! We are all tarred with the same brush. This is unfortunate because there are very important differences between us. We accept inerrancy without reservation and insist that inerrancy is a distinctive tenet of evangelicalism. On the other hand, we reject the label 'fundamentalist' because inerrancy does not commit us to a naïve literalism nor does it entail the despising of scholarship.

Furthermore, Barr's knowledge of evangelicalism is extremely limited. To claim, for example, that the Scofield Reference Bible is "perhaps the most important single document in all fundamentalist

literature" (p45) and a "pillar of conservatism" (p348) is to betray his ignorance of wide areas of evangelicalism in Great Britain where this particular Bible is neither read nor consulted. Barr's failure to define what he is attacking leads him to make generalisations and a caricature that is far removed from reality. His real target of attack, of course, is not so much the extreme literalist but the doctrine of inerrancy. In this major line of attack he is prepared to be imprecise and to import into a term like 'fundamentalism' what he personally finds to be offensive.

A precise use of terms in the contemporary theological debate is extremely important if only for the reason that complex and disturbing changes are taking place within evangelicalism itself. A new type of evangelical has appeared who accepts the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel yet acknowledges in the light of higher criticism that the Bible contains error and that some of its teaching is culturally and historically conditioned. Terms even like 'inerrancy' and 'infallible' have been re-interpreted and adjusted to critical thought, thus emphasising the need for precision and vigilance. Clark Pinnock, for example, claims to believe in an 'inerrant' Bible yet he also maintains that the Bible contains error. He thinks it is an 'overbelief' to "identify God's Word with the words of the Bible" (*Biblical Authority* edited by Jack Rogers; Word, 1977). "Minute inerrancy", he claims, "may be a central issue for the telephone book but not for Psalms, Proverbs, Apocalyptic and Parables" and he goes on to argue that belief in inerrancy of detail is possible only for those, like Warfield, who do not take the difficulties of the Bible seriously" (see Hywel Jones, *The Bible under Attack* pp 9-31; Evangelical Press, for other examples). Terms like 'inerrancy', 'infallible', 'trustworthy', etc. are all being qualified in the contemporary debate by critics and evangelicals.

Similarly, Barr's attempt to bend the term

'evangelical' to embrace modern theology and Biblical criticism illustrates the present ambiguity of the term. One can also criticise Barr's use of a term like 'scholarship' which he assumes to be synonymous with a liberal, critical method. For Barr this method is unquestionably right. His position, he claims, is an 'open' one whereas ours is 'a closed position' (p185). But the Professor needs to be more self-critical. Furthermore, if a 'closed position' means refusing to believe that God has lied or made mistakes in his self-revelation, we accept the description. We prefer to believe that the Scripture is the inerrant Word of God rather than the fallible words of men. Believing this we cannot approach the Bible in the same way as Barr. This does not mean that we stop thinking. Far from it. It does mean, however, that we stop thinking sinfully and unbiblically.

Certainly the results of Barr's allegedly 'open' approach are clear for all to see. It is significant that on the same day *'Fundamentalism'* was published the same press published *'The Myth of God Incarnate'*. Barr is unrepentant. "The Fundamentalists", he acknowledges, "have perhaps been right in one major point, more right, indeed, than the main body of Christian opinion. They have perceived, however dimly, that modern theology and the critical study of the Bible have initiated, and are initiating, massive changes in the way in which Christians understand God and Jesus Christ. Well-meaning persons, dazed and perplexed by the fury of fundamentalist attacks on modern developments, have often answered that no essential of the faith is changed ... Conservatives are perhaps right in their instinct that this is not so, and that major changes are taking place, with perhaps even greater ones to come" (pp185-6).

We are aware of these radical changes in belief and deem it crucial that we insist on the doctrine of Scripture taught by our Lord and His Apostles. Those who reject inerrancy will, as Barr

acknowledges, reject other cardinal doctrines, sooner or later. What is at stake is nothing less than Christianity itself.

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Reply to Article by Hywel Jones in Foundations 1,  
(Nov 1978)

In his discussion of The Bearing of Regeneration on Some Aspects of Pastoral Work (Foundations,1), Hywel Jones argues the value of distinguishing theologically between begetting and bearing. In begetting, the Spirit works secretly and without the means of the Word. However, when scripture speaks of regeneration being 'by the Word of God' (Jas 1:18, 1 Pet.1:23) we are to understand it of the conscious possession of the new birth which comes with effectual calling and conversion.

From one point of view it matters little whether the distinction is made or not, in that writers on either side are equally concerned to maintain the sovereignty of God in salvation. What causes anxiety is the use to which such a distinction is put. The danger lies in positing a temporal gap between regeneration and calling or conversion. Archibald Alexander uses it in this way when discussing the regeneration of people brought under conviction during the 18th century awakening at Northampton. Berkhof and Hywel Jones are more concerned with the spiritual experience of the children of believers. Berkhof speaks of a seed of regeneration lying 'ungerminated' (?) until perhaps years after, and goes as far as to say that '*in the case of those who are regenerated in infancy there is necessarily a temporal separation between regeneration and conversion*' [Systematic Theology, p491].

While the distinction may be safe in Hywel Jones' hands, it is open to much potential abuse. It clearly implies, for instance, that a person may die uncalled, unconverted and yet regenerate ('*If God has regenerated them they will be brought to birth apart from death intervening*' H.Jones, p26). Is such a person

10.

saved or not?

The biblical position is that regeneration, calling and conversion stand and fall together. Regeneration has no meaning apart from the truth of the gospel addressed to our consciousness. There is no biblical or theological warrant for preachers to expect a time lag between the effective work of the Spirit and the exercise of faith. Pastoral difficulties of discerning spiritual experiences should not lead us away from the clear teaching of scripture.

What, then, of infants? John Murray's position on this is safe and scriptural:

*'The salvation which is of the gospel is never apart from faith. This is true even in the case of infants, for in regeneration the germ of faith (not, notice, of regeneration - IS) is implanted ... The person who is merely regenerate is not saved, the simple reason being that there is no such person. The saved person is also called, justified and adopted.'*

J.Murray, 'Romans' p27

The blind man must open his eyes before he can see, but this gap between the two is not one of time. In Thomas Boston's words, *'When the Lord opens the sluices of grace on the soul's new birthday, the waters run through the whole man'*.

Ian Shaw (Cardiff)

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## THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE:

### SOME OLD TESTAMENT PROBLEMS

Rev John C.J.Waite BD  
(Barry)

Our belief in the inerrancy of the Old Testament Scriptures rests upon the unambiguous declarations of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as recorded in the Gospels. It is evident to any unbiased mind

that the Saviour went out of His way to vouch for the total trustworthiness of the Old Testament, when He affirmed: *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled"* [Matt.5:17,18]. *"Without doubt"*, says Robert Lightner, *"the last part of this quotation grants inspiration to the most minute part of Scripture and it thus also emphatically gives Christ's view of the inspiration of the whole."* [T.S.T.S.p.61] On every occasion that He appeals to the Old Testament, we are left in not the slightest doubt that the Lord holds it to be the very word of God written. It is worth remembering that when He thus validated the inerrancy of the entire Old Testament, none of the original autographs was in existence. The text of the Old Testament writings had by this time suffered minor defects through scribal transmission. The standard authoritative Hebrew text was not established until at least the end of the first century A.D. It will not do, then, to urge that it is now pointless to insist on the inerrancy of the Old Testament seeing that the original autographs have been irretrievably lost.

Many modern evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic are uneasy about using the term 'inerrancy' with reference to the Scriptures. Indeed, we can put it more strongly. They are actually contending against the use of this term. This is not in fact something altogether new. James Orr as early as 1910 raises the point: *"Does the Bible itself claim or inspiration necessitate such an errorless record in matters of minor detail? ... this is a violent assumption which there is nothing in the Bible really to support"* [R & I p.214] His statement was made with reference to what he considered to be minute matters of historical, geographical, and scientific detail. Everett F.Harrison writing in 1958 concludes an essay on The Phenomena of Scripture with this astonishing statement: *"Unquestionably the Bible teaches its own*

*inspiration. It is the Book of God. It does not require us to hold inerrancy, though this is a natural corollary of full inspiration."* The whole tenor of his essay implies that he himself has doubts on the score of inerrancy.

Are we being pedantic and unnecessarily precise in insisting upon the Biblical doctrine of inerrancy? Is it something worth contending for? Is it an essential part of our contending for the Faith once delivered to the saints? This is no minor or secondary doctrine. It is by no means enough to claim merely, as Bernard Ramm does, that the language of Scripture *"is trustworthy for all the theological and moral requirements of the historical existence of the Church"* [S.R. & W.G.p.179]. Nor to say with another *"... it was not God's intention or purpose to secure inerrancy in peripheral matters. 'Peripheral matters' include Scriptural data which have nothing to do with faith and life, such as minor historical details, grammatical constructions and the like"* [T.S.T.S. p.158 - Joseph A.Hill]. But these 'peripheral matters' turn out to be not so peripheral. They may include anything that, in the subjective opinion of an individual, is not essential to faith and life.

Our Lord's view of the Old Testament was that it was entirely free from error of any kind. He made no distinction between facts of history, geography, science or theology. What some are pleased today to call 'minutiae' or 'peripheral matters', the Saviour encompassed within His clear and unequivocal assertions regarding the absolute trustworthiness of the Old Testament Scriptures - *"Thy word is truth". "The Scripture cannot be broken"*. Dr J.I.Packer has put the matter most pointedly, *"The question, 'What think ye of the Old Testament?' resolves into the question, 'What think ye of Christ?'"* and our answer to the first proclaims our answer to the second ... To undercut Christ's teaching about the authority of the Old Testament

*is to strike at His own authority at the most fundamental point" [F. & W.G. pp59f]* The Old Testament is divinely authoritative on all the matters of which it treats. We are not at liberty to set aside nor to explain away any statement in any part of the Old Testament writings. It has all been out-breathed by the God of truth who cannot lie. Says E.J.Young, *"If God has communicated wrong information even in so-called unimportant matters, He is not a trustworthy God"* [T.W.I.T.p.164]. A.A.Hodge and B.B.Warfield plainly reveal what is at stake in contending for an inerrant Bible when they jointly declared, *"A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine, but the Scripture claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims"* [P.R. Vol.IIp.245].

Seeing then that the inerrancy of the Old Testament was clearly taught by Christ, to deny it is at the least to falter in our submission to His Lordship and at the most to impugn His character as the only wise God. We hold to the doctrine because Christ taught it. Taking this as our starting-point, we confront the difficulties and problems which this doctrine gives rise to. Some of these problems are due to the present state of the Hebrew text; some arise through conflict with modern scientific theory; others stem from the difficulty of harmonising Biblical history and chronology with archaeological research and extra-Biblical chronological data, and yet others may be traced to wide differences of interpretation resulting from divergent hermeneutic principles. At the same time it has to be acknowledged that many alleged discrepancies and contradictions are due simply to a superficial misreading of the text, while a host of real problems yield fully to patient and reverent study.

There is a tendency among us to subscribe wholeheartedly to this doctrine because we see it to be clearly taught in the Bible and yet to fail to come to terms with the problems that inevitably arise when we relate the doctrine to what we find in the



Scriptures as they have come down to us. There are errors in the extant Hebrew text of the Old Testament. There are what appear to be contradictions and discrepancies. All these must be honestly confronted and examined in the light of the doctrine. We may have to admit that some of these problems cannot be satisfactorily explained for the present. If this is the case, we ought not to hesitate to say so. This does not invalidate the doctrine. What we can be certain about is that none of these problems constitutes an error in the Scriptures as they were originally given. Our inability to solve them is due to the incompleteness of our knowledge.

### The Most Basic Question of Interpretation

As we approach the various types of problems occasioned by the doctrine of inerrancy, we do well to remind ourselves of the extraordinary diversity of subject-matter and literary forms which are to be found within these thirty-nine books of the Old Testament - a veritable Divine library! Historical narrative occupies about a third and prophetic discourses about a quarter of the whole. Sublime poetry is to be found not only in the Psalms, Job, the Song of Songs and Proverbs, but extensively in the Prophets and elsewhere. There are parables and allegories and apocalyptic with its special use of symbols. Even in what is straightforward narrative the Biblical writers make use of vivid metaphor and simile. The doctrine of inerrancy implies that the Bible means what it says. So often problems arise for us because we have mistaken the real meaning of what the Bible says. For example, when we read in Exodus in the account of the crossing of the Red Sea that *"the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left"*, we are not necessarily to think of the waters piled up perpendicularly like a literal wall. Moses is using metaphorical language here. The parted waters of the Red Sea gave

the Israelites complete protection on both flanks so that they were immune from attack. Similarly, when we read in Joshua that the waters of the Jordan "*stood and rose up upon an heap*" when the feet of the priests carrying the ark of the covenant touched the brink of the river, it is probable that we are not to understand the language literally but metaphorically. The damming of the Jordan some miles upstream from where the Israelites were to cross, was still an extraordinary event fully miraculous in its timing if not altogether supernatural in its character.

We must be careful that we do not unwittingly disparage the doctrine of inerrancy by literalizing what is intended to be understood metaphorically, analogically, symbolically or typically. In Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon in chapter 51, he employs a number of vivid metaphors which would be sheer nonsense if taken literally. He describes Babylon as a "*destroying mountain*" though the city was situated in an alluvial plain with not a mountain in sight. Babylon is so described either because of its high walls or its inordinate pride and ambition. Later in the same chapter the overthrow of Babylon is expressed thus: "*The sea is come upon Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof*". Yet the very next verse seems to state the exact opposite! "*Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land where no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby*". But there is no contradiction here. Jeremiah represents the invasion of the Babylonian kingdom by the Medo-Persian army as a tidal wave that overwhelms the entire nation.

On the other hand, we are not to take what was clearly intended to be understood literally as a metaphor or a parable or an allegory. The third chapter of Genesis is presented as an historical event and is so treated in the New Testament. It is a record of what actually transpired. (See 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 2 Timothy 2:13). The Book of Jonah is not a parable but sober history through and through. The words of the

Lord Jesus in Matthew 12: 39-41 settle the matter, surely, beyond any doubt. At least one would have thought so. Yet the tutor in Hebrew Literature and Language at London Bible College does not hesitate to classify the literary form of the book as "*a parable with certain allegorical features*" [N.I.C. p.181]. For one who would claim to be an evangelical it is astonishing to see how he disposes of the Saviour's testimony. "... *it is not strict exegesis that is reflected in Jesus' use of the narrative of Jonah and the fish, but the popular Jewish understanding, which the Lord took up and employed as a vehicle for truth concerning Himself*". Elsewhere Dr Allen affirms his belief in verbal inspiration, but he seems to be merely playing with words. If we deplore such a misuse of Scripture, we must be careful that we do not fall into the prevalent error of far-fetched spiritualizations. If we hold the doctrine of inerrancy dear to us, let us beware that we are not guilty of imposing a meaning upon the Scriptures which does not rightly belong to them.

We pay mere lip-service to the doctrine of inerrancy if we fail to take into account the variety of literary forms to be found within the Old Testament. Our aim must be to arrive at the meaning which was intended by the Holy Spirit when He moved the minds and the pens of the men He used to record infallibly His revelation. Poetry must be treated as poetry. Hence when Isaiah prophesies that "*the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills*" [Isa.2:2] he is not to be taken to mean that little Mount Zion will rise higher than Everest! This is a poetic way of describing the spiritual pre-eminence of Zion through the coming of the Son of God Himself and His great work of redemption so that the glorious Gospel first sounded forth from Jerusalem. So Zion would become so conspicuous as to be known eventually in the remotest parts of the earth. When godly Job declares, "*I brake the jaws of the wicked*" [Job 29:17], he is far from saying

that he resorted to physical violence to curb the power and oppression of unscrupulous men. This is the language of poetry. He means that he used his authority and influence to bring to an end their rapacious cruelty.

Historical narrative must be treated as historical narrative and not allegorized, though we must recognize that metaphorical language can be found in the record of historical events. We not infrequently find anthropomorphic descriptions of God in prose narrative. This is a unique form of metaphor. When we read in Genesis chapter 11, "*And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men had builded*", we are not to infer that this points to any limitation in God. This language is an accommodation to us that we may know that God is a Person though He be an infinite Spirit. Such language as this must be interpreted in the light of those statements which declare that God is both omnipresent and omniscient.

Especial care must be taken in interpreting the language of prophetic prediction lest we claim a meaning for Scripture which was not intended. Take for example the remarkable prophecy concerning God and Magog in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. Ezekiel represents the land of Israel as being invaded by a vast army comprising contingents from both remote nations and more adjacent kingdoms equipped with cavalry, chariots, bows, spears and swords. This army is almost entirely destroyed upon the mountains of Israel. The magnitude of God's victory over His people's enemies is vividly portrayed: their discarded weapons will provide Israel with a supply of wood for their fires which will last seven years and the corpses of the slain soldiers will take seven months to bury. Now are we to take Ezekiel's language literally? Is there to be some future war in which the nations will make an assault upon Palestine and revert to the use of cavalry and chariots and all the primitive weapons of war? Patrick Fairburn rightly points out the absurd consequences of a

literal approach. *"It would be but a very moderate allowance, on the literal supposition, to say that a million men would be thus engaged, and that on an average each would consign two corpses to the tomb in one day; which, for the 180 working days of the seven months, would make an aggregate of 360,000,000 of corpses! Then the putrefaction, the pestilential vapours arising from such masses of slain victims before they were all buried! Who could live at such a time? It bids defiance to all the laws of nature, as well as the known principles of human action; and to insist on such a description being understood according to the letter, is to make it rank with the most extravagant tales of romance, or the most absurd legends of Popery". [Com. on Ezek.p.423].*

In contending for the doctrine of inerrancy we must spare no pains to ensure that we are not misrepresenting the true meaning of the Scriptures by insisting upon a literal interpretation where such was not intended. It is of the utmost importance that we formulate and implement valid principles of interpretation. This may mean parting with some cherished notions that we have always assumed to be correct. It may even revolutionize our whole understanding of Old Testament prophecy. It is, however, a necessary corollary of the doctrine of inerrancy that our interpretation should be in harmony with the meaning that the Holy Spirit intended to convey through the variety of literary media that He has seen fit to employ.

Having said that, we must also add that because we are fallible and sinful men, our application of valid principles of interpretation may still be coloured unwittingly by prejudice and presupposition. Therefore, we must be careful not to insist that our interpretation is the only correct one. For example, the meaning of the word 'day' in Genesis chapter one; is it to be understood of a literal day of twenty-four hours? It might seem in

the light of Exodus 20:9-11 that this must be so. The reason given for the keeping of the sabbath day holy is, *"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ..."* Yet the late Professor E.J.Young who was a firm upholder of the doctrine of inerrancy states, *"For our part, we incline toward the view that the days were periods of time longer than twenty-four hours. We do this, however, not in order to find an expedient for harmonizing Scripture with geology but simply upon exegetical grounds. We are inclined to think that the Bible itself implies that the days were longer than twenty-four hours in length"* [T.W.I.T p.167]. Some of us may feel that it is precisely on exegetical grounds that we are driven to a literal interpretation here. It is interesting and perhaps significant that Professor Young's son, Dr David A. Young, is an associate professor of geology at the University of North Carolina and in a recent book has found fault with what he terms the *"flood-geologists"*! The fact remains, however, that we must not claim that our interpretation is inerrant. We may have to say with regard to certain statements and passages in the Old Testament, "I believe that this is what the Scripture teaches, though others with equal sincerity have interpreted it differently".

Having dealt with this basic question of how to interpret the Old Testament, we now turn to consider other problems to which the doctrine of inerrancy gives rise. First we deal with:

#### Problems due to the Present State of the Hebrew Text

None can dispute the fact that the text of the Hebrew Old Testament has not been preserved faultless. Errors have crept into the text through scribal transmission. There are about 1353 variant readings in the margin of the Hebrew Bible noted by the Massoretes - those generations of Jewish scholars who sedulously worked on the Hebrew text between AD 500-1000 to ensure its accurate preservation. Most of these variant readings

are of minor importance amounting to no more than a difference in spelling. Some of the marginal readings appear more appropriate than those in the text. But what is important is that the Jewish scribes did not attempt to alter the text itself even when there was an obvious scribal mistake. Their suggestions were always placed in the margin. So that we may say that these very errors in the text are remarkable evidence of the reverence with which the scribes handled the Scriptures. They were so concerned to hand on the text exactly as it had come down to them. No other writings in the whole of human history have been handled with such care and faithfulness as the Old Testament writings.

Clearly it is possible to give only one or two examples of this kind of transcriptional error. Frequently numbers suffer in transmission. For example in 1 Kings 4:26 we read, "*And Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and 12,000 horsemen*". A little later in chapter 10:26 we find, "*And Solomon ... had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen.*" The identical statement is found in 2 Chronicles 1:14. But in 2 Chronicles 9:25 there is the statement, "*And Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots and 12,000 horsemen*". Taking the four statements together we can easily see that 40,000 figure in 1 Kings 4:26 should read "4,000". In the parallel records of Kings and Chronicles there are a number of places where a transcriptional error can be detected and put right with confidence.

One other example must suffice. In 2 Chronicles 22:2 we read that Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah was 42 years old when he began to reign. In the previous chapter his father Jehoram is twice stated to have been 32 years old when he began to reign and that his reign lasted only eight years (2 Ch.21:5,20). Further in this same chapter we are told that Ahaziah was the youngest son of Jehoram (v.17), and also in chapter 22:1. Ahaziah's age is clearly wrong and by looking at the parallel passage

in 2 Kings 8:26, we find that his age when he succeeded his father was in fact 22 years. Of course, the Jewish scribes were every bit as much aware of the obvious discrepancy as you and I are, but on no account would they amend the text.

These transcriptional errors in no way affect the doctrine of inerrancy. For the most part they are not difficult to resolve. They are to be found mainly in the realm of statistics. Sometimes names of people and places have suffered distortion. When it is remembered that Hebrew was originally a consonantal language with no vowel letters, similar words were more easily confused. The marvel is that the Hebrew text has been preserved so largely free from scribal mistakes.

#### Problems in the Realm of Biblical Chronology

It is customary in many quarters these days to sneer at the chronological system devised by Archbishop James Ussher in the 17th Century from the biblical data. But Ussher was not only a distinguished scholar, he also believed implicitly in the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He took the chronological data of the Bible seriously. We may agree perhaps that the matter is less straightforward than he assumed. It is possible that the genealogical lists in Genesis chapters 5 and 11 are incomplete. There may well be gaps in these lists which seem to display evidence of a symmetrical arrangement. If this is so we cannot insist upon the year 4004 B.C. as the year in which creation took place. The date of creation must be pushed back well before this, it would seem. Even so, in the light of Scripture it does not seem conceivable that this date can be earlier than about 10,000 B.C. Instead of ridiculing Ussher, we ought to applaud him for his consistency. Believing the Scriptures to be inerrant, he placed the utmost confidence in their statements relating to chronology.

We might wish that there were more statements in the Old Testament giving precise details of chronology. Those that occur are clearly of great importance. We



learn from Exodus 12:40,41 that Israel spent 430 years in Egypt. This figure is given twice in these verses and therefore has some stress laid upon it. It is not an approximate or round figure but an exact figure. The other date of crucial importance for Old Testament chronology is that given in 1 Kings 6:1. This states that the fourth year of Solomon's reign - the year in which he commenced to build the temple - coincided with the four hundred and eightieth year after the Exodus. The two periods together enable us to account for over nine hundred years of Israel's history. Few evangelical scholars are prepared to take the second date at its face value because it would point to an Exodus in the 15th century and this conflicts with most of the archaeological evidence we are told. The figure of 480 years is reduced by regarding it as an ideal figure corresponding to twelve generations of 40 years each. But as a generation would be strictly nearer 25 years than 40, the period can be reduced to about 300 years which is much more convenient from the archaeological point of view. The New Bible Commentary (R) deals with the statement in a still more high-handed way by suggesting, "*There are indications that this verse may be a late gloss in the text*". In fact there is no evidence to cast any doubt upon the accuracy of the text at this point. If we believe in the inerrancy of the Old Testament, that figure must be taken as it stands and it must be regarded as a key-stone in Biblical chronology. That it conflicts with archaeological evidence is a problem that has to be faced. But we will come to that in a moment.

Another area of difficulty in the realm of Biblical chronology concerns the regnal years given for the kings of Israel and Judah during the period of the divided monarchy. The problem is how to harmonize the two sets of data for Judah and Israel. A date which all are agreed upon is that for the fall of Samaria, i.e. 722 B.C. It is also generally agreed that Solomon's reign commenced about 971 B.C. This

latter date is arrived at on the assumption that two names in Assyrian records refer to the Ahab and Jehu of the Bible. The only way of fitting all the regnal years mentioned in the Books of Kings into this period of 250 years is by postulating that there were several co-regencies in Judah. The work of Edwin R. Thiele in solving many of the problems of the chronology of this period in this way has certainly demonstrated that all the figures can be satisfactorily harmonized. But everything depends upon the correctness of identifying two names in Assyrian records with the Biblical Ahab and Jehu. The late Dr. Oswald T. Allis, an Old Testament scholar of great stature, was unconvinced by Theile's thesis and held that the almost universal assumption that the kings mentioned in the Assyrian records are the Biblical Ahab and Jehu, was unproved. Allis was uneasy that some of Theile's harmonizations were at the expense of some of the Biblical data.

Again the point for us to bear in mind is that we must not claim that such solutions as Theile and others have proposed are unquestionably correct. We do value all reverent endeavours to deal with the problems of Biblical chronology. We may not be completely successful in our efforts to find solutions. But whatever be the degree of our success, the chronological data in the Old Testament are self-consistent. That we may not be able to prove them to be so does not impair the doctrine of inerrancy.

#### Problems Arising from the Conflict Between Archaeology and the Old Testament

Let us acknowledge right away that the science of archaeology has in many ways provided background information which has shed no little light upon the text of the Old Testament. Ancient Near Eastern studies came into their own during the nineteenth century. Through the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs and Mesopotamian cuneiform along with extensive excavations of ancient ruins, centuries of

human history have been unveiled and vanished civilisations have been rediscovered. The Hittites, so frequently mentioned in the Bible were completely unknown outside the Scriptures until the latter part of the last century. Their state archives were recovered through archaeological excavations in Asia Minor, providing a wealth of information about their history and culture. Yet we must be careful not to exaggerate the importance of archaeology for the study of the Old Testament. Allis puts the whole matter into proper perspective when he comments, *"We need however to remember that while in many cases the biblical writers assume and presuppose, on the part of their readers, knowledge which we of today do not possess and which we must obtain, if at all, from extra-biblical sources, the reason that much of the information of this nature is not recorded in the Bible itself is that, however interesting and even valuable it may be, it is not of vital importance"*. (T.O.T.I.C.C. p.3)

There is a very real danger that we may pay too much attention to the evidence provided by archaeological research and accept its findings uncritically. With all sciences we confront the problem of how to interpret the objective evidence set before us. In archaeology this problem is further complicated by the possibility that a site being excavated has been wrongly identified. This possibility is a very real one in Palestine. The very fact of its being the land-bridge between the two great civilizations of the Ancient Near East, meant that it was relatively densely populated and that many diverse races settled there in the course of the centuries. Add to this the fact that only a small part of any site is normally excavated, and it becomes rather evident that our confidence in archaeology must be less than total. The classic example is surely Jericho. The site of what is believed to be ancient Jericho has received a great deal of attention from successive generations of archaeologists. Professor John Garstang was confident as a result of the

excavations which he carried out in the 1930s that the Bronze Age city of Jericho was destroyed about 1400 B.C. For the next twenty years or so a 15th century date for the Exodus was widely accepted. Since 1952, Miss Kathleen Kenyon has carried out further explorations and her conclusion is that there is almost nothing left of the town which Joshua captured. She insists that the town he captured "*must have been very small*". Although the narrative in Joshua makes it clear that Jericho was a formidable city and immensely strong, the modern archaeologist on the basis of his very slender and ambiguous evidence is ready to correct the biblical account. Dr G.E.Wright makes this pronouncement: "*Investigations at the site of Jericho itself, however, have been inconclusive ... Perhaps in Joshua's time Jericho was already an uninhabited tell or mound or ruins; or perhaps the centuries have merely eroded all signs of the Israelite victory*". [N.G.M. 1957].

Yet it is precisely on the basis of archaeological findings that Old Testament scholars who consider themselves thoroughly evangelical are prepared to modify and alter the clear statements of Scripture, whether chronological or circumstantial, to tie in with archaeology. For example, Arthur Cundall in his Tyndale Commentary on Judges reduces the entire period of the Judges to a bare two centuries on the basis of the archaeological evidence for the destruction of sites in Palestine. Yet Jephthah whose career falls well within the Judges period speaks of Israel's occupation of Transjordan for 300 years (Jdg.11:26). Mr Cundall remarks on how closely this period of time corresponds to the total years given for the various judges up to this point. But he goes on to say "*the actual interval between Israel's conquest of Transjordania and the rise of Jephthah was no more than 160 years*". [T.C. p.145]. What do we do about Jephthah's precise statement? Mr Cundall's solution cuts at the roots of Biblical inerrancy. "*The reference to the 300 years*", he says, "*may be an editorial amplification of the remainder of the*

*verse, or it may be a broad generalization for approximately seven or eight generations, or it may represent Jephthah's rough guess, since he would hardly have access to reliable historical records."*

This, alas, is rather typical of much so-called evangelical scholarship today. Archaeology is the final court of appeal. The Old Testament must be adjusted so that its statements do not conflict with what the archaeologist claims the objective evidence of excavated Biblical sites implies. A more recent example of this is to be found in Dr Allen's commentary on Jonah. He considers the author of the Book wrote long after the city of Ninevah had been destroyed. One reason he advances for this is *"Its colossal size in 3:3 reflects the exaggerated tradition echoed by the fourth-century Ctesias rather than literal fact"* [N.I.C. p.186].

The tendency to rely upon archaeology on the part of conservative scholars stems from the earlier years of this century when the spade seemed to be confirming the Bible and confounding the critics. But its help was grasped for the wrong reasons. It was as though the Old Testament needed this kind of evidence to confirm its veracity. So that confidence in the truth of the Scriptures was not built upon the doctrine of inerrancy, but upon external evidence brought to light through archaeological explorations. Having leaned upon archaeology for support, many evangelicals find themselves in a difficult position when its findings do not corroborate the Biblical record.

The salutary lesson that we may learn from this is surely that our confidence in the complete trustworthiness of the Old Testament must rest not upon the availability of external corroboration whether in the realms of history, geology or archaeology, but solely upon the claims which the Scriptures make for themselves - supremely upon the categorical declarations of the Son of God Himself.

# Abbreviations used in 'The Inerrancy of Scripture'

T.S.T.S.	The Saviour and the Scriptures
R & I	Revelation and Inspiration
S.R. & W.G.	Special Revelation and the Word of God
F. & W.G.	Fundamentalism and the Word of God.
T.W.I.T.	Thy Word is Truth
P.R.	Presbyterian Review
T.O.T.I.C.C.	The Old Testament its Claims and Critics
N.I.C.	New International Commentary
N.G.M.	National Geographical Magazine

\* \* \*

## THE DANGERS OF AN INTELLECTUAL APPROACH

Rev Donald MacLeod MA (Glasgow)

Let me first of all make clear my own position. *"My relation to real scholarship will probably remain all my life that of an unfortunate lover"* - these words of Emil Brunner express it perfectly. I am not a scholar, but I do share Machen's conviction that, *"Never was there a stronger call of God than there is today for a vigorous and scholarly defence of the faith"*. In the wilderness of contemporary irrationalism, evangelical Christianity must project itself as an oasis of reasonableness.

Nevertheless, there are very real perils in the habits of the studious and book-minded Christian, and my duty for the present is to draw attention to some of these.

The basic danger is that we shall forget the depravity of the human intellect. We quite willingly grant that sin has enslaved the will and alienated our affections from what is good and true. But we are inclined to overlook the effects of sin in the realm of pure reason, to imagine that the Fall has left our cognitive faculty intact and that if we only lived up to our convictions all would be

well. The Biblical representation, however, is quite different. Our understandings are darkened, and this has been only partially corrected even in the case of the regenerate. The Fall has left in the mind a carnal bias and prejudice which will always seriously hinder us in our efforts to arrive at truly spiritual judgements. There is no more difficult task in the believer's life than to think Christianly, and to do so consistently. It requires constant and conscious effort, and in all our reading and study we have to remember the many affinities with the world, the flesh and the Devil which our minds still retain.

Again, orthodoxy, vitally important though it is, is not salvation. We may be interested in the truth; we may be enamoured of the theological process; we may be meticulously accurate both in our apprehension and exposition of the Christian faith; we may be zealous in its propagation and defence as we understand it - we may be all these and still be strangers to the grace of God. We may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we may have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and yet be nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-2). *"Men may continue to maintain in theory an orthodox creed, and yet may manifest such deadly hostility to vital piety that they must be considered the enemies of the cause of God and the work of the Spirit"*. These solemn words from Archibald Alexander place in clear focus before those of us who cherish our orthodoxy the need for constant self-examination. And there is, of course, a corollary - the need for charity in our judgment of the less orthodox. *"The deepest life of godliness,"* said 'Rabbi' Duncan, *"may coexist with muddled doctrine. But that is no argument in favour of obscurity"*.

The third danger is that reading and study may become a cult in its own right, engrossing our attention to the neglect or exclusion of other duties. It may become a tyrant intolerant of prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship and even public worship.

This is insufferable. To be in a position where we prefer any book of human composition to the Word of God is to be backslidden. We must ruthlessly subordinate all our study to the glory of God, our own edification and the evangelisation of the world. *"I have no interest whatever,"* said James Denney, *"in theology which does not help us to evangelise"*. Nor should we be blind to the fact that one may study theology and related subjects from very wrong motives. Since study of any kind is an exhilarating, pleasurable activity, the desire of theological knowledge, as Cunningham pointed out, *"may originate in a mere love of knowledge as a means of intellectual exercise and cultivation"*; or in what is worse - *"a regard to wealth or power or fame"*.

Another very real danger is that we may give the impression, or succumb to the impression, that Scripture can be understood only by the academically initiated. It would be utterly wrong to deride the value of a knowledge of the original languages and of commentaries, expositions, dictionaries and other helps, to those who are interested in arriving at a true understanding of the Word of God. The logical conclusion of such an argument would be to put the preacher himself out of business, since, in the last analysis, his office is simply to be a 'help' towards a practical understanding of the Scriptures. But we must not institute a priesthood of the expert, nor imbibe that habit whereby men despair of understanding a particular passage simply because they have no commentary to hand. Every such tendency must be met with a firm emphasis upon the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of the Word. It is for wayfaring men. *"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all,"* says the Westminster Confession; *"yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient*



*understanding of them".* This applies equally to Christian doctrine. The ordinary Christian commonly regards such doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Sovereignty of God, and so on, as somehow beyond him and irrelevant to him. Yet these doctrines are the stuff of the most elementary Christian experiences. Every believer, however deficient his acquirements in theological literature, should make it his habit to meditate upon them and learn to handle them to his comfort and edification in every kind of spiritual situation.

Yet another danger facing us as evangelicals is that of becoming pre-occupied with intellectual respectability. Symptoms of this abound: the desire among students for the ministry to secure the imprimatur of the universities, regardless of the fact that the courses of study are seldom evangelical and have but little bearing upon the real work of the ministry; the tendency to demonstrate ostentatiously that we are academically contemporary, having read all the most recent works, especially of non-Evangelicals, regardless of their intrinsic value; the willingness to concede to science as much as Evangelicals possibly can; the interest in ecumenical involvement (which has tragically diverted our best scholars from the desperately needed work of positive exposition, especially in Biblical and Systematic Theology); a growing reluctance to link inspiration with inerrancy; and such an over-eagerness to welcome the pro-Christian utterances of the famous that we often give the impression that Christ is immeasurably indebted to any leader of public opinion who does Him the honour of being converted. Behind all these is the fact that we are far too much intimidated by the brilliant array of scholarship which stands against the Church; we forget that the world is inevitably against the Church; we forget that by and large the scholars, especially the second-rate ones, have always been in opposition; that it was the princes of this

world who crucified the Lord of glory, and the leaders of public opinion who rejected Him. *"True Christianity, now as always"*, said Machen, *"is radically contrary to the natural man, and it cannot possibly be maintained without a constant struggle"*. To expect a rapprochement is utterly futile.

We must further remember the spiritual peril involved in reading the arguments of other men against the Christian faith. This is not to say that we are at liberty to opt out of this labour. Intelligent and meaningful contact with the world must be based on an understanding of its principles and priorities; and the task of theological demolition (one of the most urgent of the hour), demands an expert knowledge of the structural weaknesses of non-Evangelical systems. But our attitude to the books and arguments of unbelievers must never be cavalier. It may be fatal to approach them in a self-confident spirit. After all, our basic premise is the depravity of even the regenerate intellect. In other words, our minds continue to have affinities with the sceptical arguments; which, in addition (and let us make no mistake about this), are often highly plausible and unsettling. Every time we approach an anti-Christian or anti-Evangelical book, we need to put on the whole armour of God. Otherwise we most certainly shall not be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. The danger is particularly acute for those students who are attending non-Evangelical colleges. With only a minimal prior knowledge of the content of the Christian faith, and the arguments in favour of its validity, they venture, sometimes with a boundless confidence, into the lions' den of the world's specious arguments, imagining themselves immune. It is not surprising that the casualty-rate should be high.

Finally, there are dangers in the application of philosophy, reason and scholarship to the theological process itself.

We must abandon, for example, the hope of

demonstrating, upon the ground of logic alone, the validity of Christian doctrine. Not even the article of the divine existence is a truth of reason. It is a truth of revelation. Not that we have less than certainty upon this question, but that the being of God is an ineradicable datum of the human consciousness, and not a fact which requires speculative demonstration. We believe in order to understand.

Then there is a precisely opposite danger - that familiarity with Christian teaching may blind us to the sheer marvellousness of its central emphasis upon the love of God. The fact of such a love is very far from being self-evident. Conscience does not teach it; providence does not teach it; the mind of man did not conceive it. It is a sovereign, optional thing, certainty upon which is possible only because God has revealed it by His Spirit..

Again, we must beware of reluctance to accept one truth because we cannot reconcile it with another. This is especially true of such doctrines as divine sovereignty and human responsibility. *"Those who will only believe what they can reconcile",* said Spurgeon, *"will necessarily disbelieve much of divine revelation. It were much better to believe the truths and leave the Lord to show their consistency."* *"I believe in predestination without cutting and trimming it",* he writes later, *"and I believe in responsibility without adulterating and weakening it."* We must be prepared to receive a doctrine on its own independent evidence, irrespective of whether or not we can reconcile it with others.

Similarly, we must beware of trying to impose our system upon the Word of God. This charge is often brought against Calvinism, but here, I trust, is where it is least applicable. Calvin's system, according to Professor J.K.S.Reid, *"is certainly logical in the sense that the argument moves*

*carefully step by step from one point to the next. But, including elements not easily (or at all) capable of being harmonised - a complexio oppositorum."* It is against Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism that this charge may most aptly be brought, since both of these start out from the philosophical premise that ability limits obligation. "Man is not able to believe, therefore he cannot be required to believe," says the Hyper-Calvinist. "Man is required to believe, therefore he must be able to believe," says the Arminian. But we are all liable to this error, even in our treatment of single texts. "*That is truth,*" James Denney would sometimes reply to a suggested exegesis, "*but it is not the truth taught in the text.*"

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves of the need to be careful that all our opinions are brought to the bar of Scripture. It is very easy, in support of a particular opinion, to cite a great name, and to be content with that. But no extra-Biblical writers - not the Fathers, not the Reformers, not the Puritans - are to be followed implicitly. Let us follow the maxim, "*See this in the New Testament for yourself*", and then we shall not have cause to lament with Hamish MacKenzie, "*Some who were trained in a theological school which scorned 'proof texts' and looked upon the employment of Holy Writ almost as a sign of cultural barrenness, are now deeply ashamed of their lack of facility there. They will never make it up in this life.*" Certainly experience teaches that many Evangelicals profoundly loyal to such doctrines as the deity of Christ, the substitutionary nature of His work, the personality of the Holy Spirit and the endlessness of future woe are seriously embarrassed when asked to substantiate these convictions from the Word of God. The consequences for the effectiveness of our witness are incalculable.

Evangelicals today are gradually recovering their confidence after a long period of intellectual inertia. They are awakening to the fact that the conflict between them and Modernism is not, even on the

academic level, by any means an unequal one. But, even as we enter with a new zest and zeal into the struggle we must exercise a constant watchfulness. The symptoms of intellectualism already exist - not to afford opportunity to hurl the one at the other the charge of backsliding and apostasy; but to alert us together to the dangers which lurk in the Church's perennial commitment to give a reason for the hope that is in her.

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EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL ACTION - an agenda for  
consideration

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NECOSE is the mnemonic not for a little known trade union but for a little known conference held in the Autumn of 1978. Its full title was the National Evangelical Conference On Social Ethics and it was a refreshingly frank brotherly (and sisterly!) exploration of the theoretical basis for evangelical engagement in the realm of social action. Like many other conferences it managed to ask more questions than it answered and it would be salutary for us to consider what some of these questions are. They are suggested here as an agenda for evangelical discussion, in the hope that readers of this journal might also be among those being provoked to think and write about them for our mutual good.

For starters, as they say, current positions need to be explored. Social ethics is a growth industry among evangelicals and any who have followed developments since Lausanne will be aware of this. In this country the activities of the Shaftesbury

Project and the emergence of the Third Way magazine, although neither owes their origin to Lausanne, are indications of the trend. Those of us who are not yet 'into social ethics' will need to be appraised of what is being thought, said and proposed as this is the chief area of theological reconstruction in Third World countries. We ourselves do not live in a vacuum and we cannot afford to be insulated from all this. Since, theologically speaking, this is where the action is, then we ought to be asking what our brothers are saying to us and why.

To be specific we shall need to make a critical assessment of the theology of contextualisation. The word 'critical' is not used here to be deliberately negative but, theological band-wagons being what they are, it is better to look carefully before we leap on. There is already evidence that some are too ready to discard most traditional theological insight as 'out-dated'. We are even being told that it is no longer justifiable to speak of one theology for the world Church and we must have a particular theology worked out for each cultural context. Does this thinking involve our rejecting all the 'absolutes' Schaeffer speaks of? Or should we rather be learning how to apply one timeless theology to each cultural situation? When Paul urges Timothy to "*keep the pattern of sound teaching*" [2 Tim.1:13] he uses the noun ὑποτύπωμα, a word used for the architect's outline sketch of the building he is planning. He will later go on to fill in the details, but he does not discard the original outline. Orthodox evangelicals have humbly recognised that what has been revealed to them is God's outline pattern. We shall need to fill in the details for that part of the building to be occupied by each cultural group, but is that the same as insisting that the whole plan has to be re-drawn?

The positive value for us of theological thinking in other contexts, however, must not be overlooked. The colonial days of exporting the white man's missionary

complete with pith helmet and pre-packed theology have given way to a cross-fertilisation of ideas as reciprocal as international trade. In some places our brothers are hammering out their ideas in churches seeing a growth rate much more rapid than our own. Interaction with them is going to be an essential feature of any theology which claims to be contemporary and the social dimension is one of its striking features. How else could we expect churches in revolutionary Latin America, crisis-ridden Africa or famine-stricken Asia to speak to us?

Since true evangelicalism is defined in terms of our attitude to the authority of Scripture it is often the interpretation of that Scripture which gives rise to differences among us. This is certainly the case in respect of social ethics and a consideration of current hermeneutical principles might uncover the bases underlying the variety of practical policies within the evangelical world. Such a study would take in the relationship of Old Testament moral teaching to the fuller light of New Testament revelation. Our methods of exegetical study would also come under this heading and especially the validity of inductionism when applied to ethics. Is this an attractive short-cut to solve today's pressing problems or does it have particular dangers? What is being called the 'new hermeneutic' also raises the matter of deriving our principles of interpretation from within Scripture itself. A man may be an evangelical but not a consistent evangelical and unaware of his departure from Biblical principles. In a loving spirit we should reflect on the implications of this for ourselves as well as others.

Another issue to be faced today is the relationship between social action and the verbal communication of the gospel. Is the current vogue for evangelical engagement in the world diverting some from their preaching ministry to the world? There are

evangelicals who seem to suggest that the Kingdom of God can be brought in without evangelism. Is it valid to speak of structures being redeemed without the men who comprise and operate these structures being redeemed? Would we be better to view social action as an imitation of God's work as Creator rather than His work as Redeemer? Since there is clear Biblical mandate for both good works and good words as part of our Christian testimony how are they to be related?

Perhaps the answer to this last question lies in a study of the role of the local church in nurturing social action as well as worship and evangelism. It is understandable that those Christians who give most thought to the field of ethics are those with a professional interest in society's moral issues. But are their churches providing them with the theological tools and Biblical support for their work? How can we expect the pastor to do this when many of the moral dilemmas faced by the church members are posed by a fast moving technological society in which the pastor is a layman? Unless he is aware of their problems, however, he will be ill-fitted to include truly relevant applications in his preaching ministry. Think too, of the pressures being faced by our members, missionaries or otherwise, who are working in developing countries overseas. Are these brothers and sisters right to look to their home church for moral guidance? And just how successful are the churches in the U.K. in influencing a society so largely indifferent to the clamant needs of the stranger next door in our global village?

The Rev John Stott closed the NECOSE discussions by urging those present first of all to "*go beyond questions to answers*". There is, however, just one prior obligation; we must be sure that the questions we are asking are the right questions. Only then will we have any confidence to "*go on from words to actions*".

This is modestly offered as a draft agenda of topics, inviting readers' reactions. It is being proposed to the executive of the British Evangelical Council in the



hope that they can arrange some means by which these matters can be considered more fully. Like a few other difficulties facing the servants of Christ in these days, we can be sure of this, that if we shut our eyes to them they will not go away.

### MYSTICISM - AND A TOUCH OF EASTERN PROMISE

Dr R. M. Jones (Aberystwyth)

Drugs, the occult and gurus on the pop-scene have combined to bring mysticism into popular focus during recent years. Amongst theologians, the influx of experience-centred religion together with ecumenical lack of discrimination (proverbial 'tolerance') have consorted to import numerous eastern cults into the centre of much contemporary religious discussion in the west. A new book *'The Inner Eye of Love, Mysticism and Religion'* written by a Jesuit, William Johnston, and published by Collins at £4.95, provides a useful and stimulating survey of some of the considerations facing the Christian at such a juncture.

For evangelicals there are many obvious warning signals in the volume. For example, the author says *"I came to the conclusion that mystical nothingness ... is dynamite. It is the power that moves the universe and creates revolutions in human minds and hearts"*. He also gives some hints on how to get into contact with the All:

*"Concretely, one can concentrate on a part of the body - the space between the eyebrows, the tip of the nose, the lower abdomen ... The second point was control of the breathing"*. All this is frivolous and hopelessly irrelevant, hardly the type of thing Paul or Augustine or Athanasius, Calvin or John Owen, Whitefield or William Williams, Spurgeon or Ann Griffiths would indulge in.

The main theme of this volume is suggested in the title, and a quotation from Jean Gerson may underline it: *"Mystical theology is experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love"*. We cannot perhaps be reminded too often that our first thought or duty or action as Christians is not to serve God, not even to testify to His grace, but to love Him and that to concentrate or even work towards the single end of *"raising the mind to God through the desire of love"*, as Bonaventure puts it, is our greatest joy and purpose.

Living, however, at a time when all sorts of rubbish masquerade as Christian discussion, what are the safeguards, or discriminating criteria, that an evangelical should adopt when considering the significance of mysticism? To put it another way, in the so-called dialogue or confrontation with the great religions of the East, what are the key questions that need to be answered?

One of the dangers in placing Christianity near the same melting-pot as other world religions is that terms are too readily confused and the most important term that immediately becomes meaningless is 'God' Himself. In Christianity God has 'defined' Himself very clearly: He has not only told us what sort of a God He is, but He has appeared to us concretely, and there is no compromise between such a reality and the idea of God that may vaguely float about in other less blessed spheres, however mystical they may be.

What we are discussing now is infallible and complete truth that needs no addition. What gain is there for such a truth by putting it in the same pot as erroneous religions, however many good points they may have 'in common'? Eclecticism is hardly good will, nor is it common sense. Professor Johnston suggests that one happy method for a useful encounter between religions would be in silence. The silence, of course, should be contentless, non-historical, subjective and impersonal. In other words, such an encounter must necessarily be non-Christian.

The author assumes that we do not try to convert the Buddhist. We accept him as he is, and try to find common ground in some mystical process that he shares with the Christian. In such an attempt he tends to emphasise the dilution and weakness within certain individual Christians. He also takes certain end-products, such as 'unrestricted love', as his aim in life rather than the worship and service of a real known and living God, who according to His own will and restrictions (with clear limitations against sinful imaginings) gives of His grace to needy men. He makes a subtle distinction between belief and faith, and is prepared to scuttle beliefs as long as faith - that nebulous link that he tells us binds Jew and Gentile, Hindu and Buddhist, Christian and Moslem in one happy bundle - remains.

Now, God's dealings with us are certainly diverse. He wounds: He is a God who brings low and subdues. He can be a terror to our hearts, and a convictor of our consciences. He is, of course, too, Creator: He is Saviour. He can also be a shepherd and guide. But William Johnston's emphasis in this volume is that of a loving knowledge of God, a knowledge that God Himself gives us. We were conceived to embrace our Lord Jesus and He is therefore to be the object of our deepest affections. He refers to Origen's claim that no-one can fully understand John's gospel *"who has not, like its author, lain upon the breast of Jesus"*. Such, of course, was the experience of a Calvinistic Methodist mystic of the beginning of the 19th century, such as Ann Griffiths. And within the unbending framework of His truth, her hymns express ecstatically her chaste and glorified love of God.

Let us enumerate, however, certain tests that should be applied in examining religious experience.

1. Christian truth is centred not on man's experience but on God's nature and will. Certainly,

unless knowledge of God is a reality in experience too, then it is nothing. Abstract statements or theological generalities are as so much wind unless they are felt and known personally by the believer who is being dealt with by a personal living God.

Yet the centre is not the individual, but the living God who, as He has chosen to reveal Himself in His spoken Word and in the Word made flesh, was certainly no void nor solely subjective. Discussions of mysticism tend to over concentrate on man's reactions and vague sentiments and ignore God's own character as it has already been infallibly revealed and stated, and such discussions easily run off the rails.

2. God and Christian truth are personal, not impersonal. Denial of the wholeness of Christian experience and any attempt to forego the use of the senses or the operations of the intellect are not in harmony with the life portrayed in holy scripture. The author mentions the familiar Church fathers' comparison of our immersion in Christ to *"the drop of water which falls into the wine or the glowing iron or coal which becomes part of the fire"*. The extinguishing or dissolving of personality in some sort of engulfing whole is quite different from individual salvation and individual resurrection in Christ. Oblivion or deletion of identity has nothing to do with being a Christian, however well it may describe the Hindu or Buddhist experience.

3. Christian truth is revealed and stated conceptually in the Bible. The negation of knowledge, which includes the ignoring of clear information about God Himself and His actions in history, is obviously not in conformity with God's self-revelation. There is a great deal of play by mystics with paradoxes that are on the borders of the truth: Professor Johnston describes the mystic: *"He knows God by unknowing ... One is in darkness, in emptiness ..."* The Christian has certainly known conviction of sin (although this is not what is meant here), and felt to his depths the reality of his own

inherent poverty before God: he has abandoned himself absolutely to God's grace: there is complete and utter surrender. But, because of God's immediate response and promise to all spiritual paupers, and because God is a God who speaks and has spoken, over-emphasis on the emptiness rather than on fullness and on the silence of death at the expense of the clarity of life is a departure from the obvious intentions of the gospel.

The vocabulary of negation must be watched assiduously. "*Non-self ... no-mind*". It can be subtly attractive to speak of experiences that a believing Christian might suspect 'approximate' to genuine enjoyment of grace. There is real and glorious peace in Him: there is an ascent that transcends thought in communion with God. But Christian truth is also propositional and communicative; and the further one launches into free-for-all experience-hunting and turns one's back on the guidelines set down with such loving care by the Holy Spirit in His Word, the more one is likely to err. The negative theory of Dionysius with its vocabulary of darkness, nothingness, emptiness and unknowing has received a certain currency in our own days under the auspices of Simone Weil, particularly in Wales. It must be viewed with great caution. Yet, the inexpressible joy of God's light, the unutterable loveliness of His presence, though they are beyond human comprehension, should not be denied merely because the Holy Spirit can fill our hearts with feelings beyond our words.

The usual well-known semantical tactic nowadays of persuading ourselves that light is darkness, and emptiness fullness, and presence absence and so on - oxymoron - is indulged in here and there in this volume as in most neo-modernistic discussions since the fifties, but these are thankfully just occasional bouts, and on the whole the author succeeds in following an uncompromisingly lucid course through a very complex subject.

4. The method of contemplating God should not be

humanly devised or depend on artificial physical or mental exercises. How is the Christian to gaze at Him and enjoy His presence? God has provided us with stated knowledge about Himself, about His nature and His works in Scripture. It is glorious knowledge. He has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, who once again is presented to us in His breathed Word. We are led to Him in prayer and in silent adoration through the Holy Spirit, but not independently following our own imaginations about whom He may be, but within the revealed portrayal He has made of Himself. We do not, of course, worship the Bible, but neither do we depart from the Bible in order to cook up our own machinations. God is exactly as He has told us He is and He has provided us, in His Word, with an unfailing means of distinguishing between true and false experiences of His presence. One criticism of Johnston's book is that he does not consistently set down sufficient discriminating criteria to recognise the phony phenomena which are rampant in this dangerous field of mysticism. His own fundamental belief, however, is interesting: *"The source of all Christian mysticism is - and must be - the Bible and in particular the Gospel ... If, then, there is to be an updating of Christian mystical theology the first step is a return to the Gospel"*.

Roman Catholic study of mysticism has undoubtedly on the whole been more diligent than orthodox Protestant discussion, perhaps because personal and 'felt' knowledge of God was accepted as more normal and part of the usual Christian experience among Protestants, whereas it was rather odd and esoteric in the Roman Church. One of the pitfalls that ensued from the particular approach adopted by the sacramentalist tradition is the rather mechanical (and planned) training often outlined for potential mystics, the do-it-yourself kit.

5. Christian life is not divorced from Christian action. He who 'loves' Christ keeps His commandments. The Christian mystic does not remain apart from the needs of his fellows in divine adoration, or he would

not be 'Christian'. As Professor Johnston puts it: *"it is better for the candle to give light than just to burn"*. Neither is Christian experience in the present divorced from the historical events in the past. Professor Johnston, on the other hand, warns us: *"the theology of Paul is based not only on a historical event in the past but also on a living mystical experience in the present"*. This is undeniable; but at the same time, with the experience-centred, highly subjective and unguided imaginings that are dressed up as 'Christian' teaching in our own day, the contrary emphasis, that the basis of our faith is in historical, concrete and objective happenings and personages, needs to be the safe starting-point even for the experience of the present.

The evangelical Christian has a faith rooted in the 'external', which has become internal through the grace of God. But it is a meaningful faith: it has content and is related, at all points and in every facet, to the expressed Word of God. It is an ordered and complete faith that satisfies the redeemed mind, heart and will. Professor Johnston's other warning: *"theology which is divorced from the inner experience of the theologian is arid and carries no conviction"*, has of course always been acceptable to most evangelicals; but he should be at the same time mindful that a 'felt' religion ungoverned by meaningful truth about the actions of our Lord and His objective teachings for our life before His throne is even more arid and devoid of proper conviction.

6. The proof of Christian mysticism is not in any account of elevated experiences nor in claims of felt visions in the midst of good deeds. It is in complete obedience and acceptance. If we find someone describing highfalutin knowledge of the presence of Christ, who then departs from complete trust in His holy Word, we should naturally be suspicious. Passionate visions paralleled with moderate scepticism regarding the historical revelation of

scripture are just not on. In chapter 6 he attempts to describe a 'general' all-encompassing mysticism, undeterred by the more definite and precise demands of historical Christianity and the details of biblical revelation. Mystics are to be treated with immense caution. Regrettably Professor Johnston is gullible: if a man makes the right mystical noises, his defences are down. His ability to present an argument clearly and attractively is not matched by a constant detection of error. He confuses too readily the impersonal or self-obliterating meditation of the East with specific Christian wholeness. He fails to perceive (e.g. p.46) the basic necessity of setting limits to mysticism; the 'magnanimity' towards other religions is a popular ecumenical stance; but an evangelical regards it as the direct opposite of real love. On the whole, Professor Johnston's presentation of the Christian position is infinitely better than the run-of-the-mill ecumenical; but when confronted with Buddhism he tends to fall to pieces. Here he conforms to type, *"I would like to sketch the beginnings of a mystical theology that will be universal in scope - that is to say, a mystical theology that will include the mystical experience of believers in all the great religions and, indeed, of those people who belong to no specific religion but have been endowed with profound mystical gifts."* He clearly denies the uniqueness of Christ as Lord and Saviour alone and Christ is just considered as one way amongst many of climbing this tedious mountain. Mention is made of *"the inherent goodness of the human race"*, and recognition of the virtues of believers in other religions seems to lead the writer away from a true analysis of their actual situation as revealed in scripture.

He suggests common prayer instead of discussion as a way over the difficulty, as precise discrimination in presenting the case for Christianity leads to controversy and anger. But avoiding the controversial was not Christ's way - nor Peter's way: the flight from discrimination leads not only to fuddled thinking but also to a fuddled gospel - which is no gospel; and



common prayer with those outside Christianity is absolutely impossible for those whose only way to the throne of grace is through Jesus Christ. The author's plan of compromise between Christians and Buddhists is the most painful section of his otherwise interesting study. He has really ducked the problem.

I find Part 3 of his study (pp 87-153) a most profitable part of the work. Most Roman Catholic meditation on mysticism traces the various steps in the deepening of this experience, and in this volume the chapter headings reflect more or less the sort of pattern frequently followed: - The Call; Journey into the void; Oriental nothingness; Christian nothingness; Journey towards union; Journey of love; Enlightenment and Conversion. Once again, we must ask the question, is this just subjective fancy, or is there some objective basis to such a plan?

Scripture reveals that there is a definite order of application of God's redemption in our lives, e.g. Romans 8:30. The more detailed steps recorded by John Murray in his *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* are a reminder of the many Biblical references to this 'mystical journey', viz Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Faith and Repentance, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Perseverance, Union with Christ, Glorification. There can hardly be a more cogent scriptural treatment of the experience of the Christian than is found in this profound volume. One immediately detects some correspondence between the Calvinistic and Biblical path traced by Professor Murray and the more eclectic back and forth journey followed by Professor Johnston.

What distinguishes the genuine Christian mystic (unadulterated with eastern paraphernalia) from the born-again Christian? I venture to say - absolutely nothing.

A description of genuine Christian mysticism is

merely a concentration on one aspect of every re-born Christian's life fully led - and underlines the loving union with God which is meant for every believer. Some gifted writers such as John of the Cross or Isaiah, (the latter under the inerrant direction of the Holy Spirit), have written marvellous descriptions of this experience far beyond the reach of the ordinary Christian. But something of the transformation they describe in approaching the throne of grace is a delight that many believers have known and should know.

When writing about mysticism, what happens to the Christian writer is this: instead of dealing with the whole counsel of God, and reviewing His saving powers or His common grace, or say His cultural mandate, or His will for the organisation of the Church, he merely devotes attention to the simple contemplation of God: gazing at Him, and nothing else. This, I agree with Professor Johnston, is not reserved for an elite amongst Christians, but is intended - although in very diversified ways - for all believers, namely, true adoration of our Lord.

Let me conclude with another brief quotation from amongst many excellent points made by the author that are sweet to any believer's ears. *"Not one step is made except by the power of the same Spirit. This is the path of one who has seen the footprints of the ox or the treasure hidden in the field and sells everything joyfully to follow the ox or to buy the field. It is the renunciation of one who has heard the voice of the beloved: 'Hark! my beloved is knocking' [Song of Songs 5:2]".* Here we are on familiar ground; it is such a pity that so many other issues are confused by the now so frequent eclecticism and rampant compromise that loses the distinctiveness of a faith for which God sent His only begotten Son to testify to and fulfil once and for all in perfection.

BOOK REVIEWSMORE EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT

- historical evidence for the Christian Scriptures compiled by J. Macdowell; 362pp; £4; kivar. Campus Crusade.

This book was prepared by a research team from American colleges in order to furnish Bible students with practical answers to counter those who challenge the historical accuracy and integrity of the Bible. There appear to be very few available textbooks written by conservative evangelicals to answer those who seek to undermine, e.g., either the Pentateuch by the Documentary theory or the gospel records by Form criticism. Sadly there is evidence of concessions being made in this realm to the critics by those who claim to speak for the evangelical position. This is a very useful handbook which marshals a mass of evidence to refute the liberals and it rests unequivocally on the basis of the full inspiration of the scriptures as the word of God.

The book consists of three main sections. The first outlines the presuppositions of anti-supernaturalism, the relationship of science to the miraculous as well as dealing with the link between archaeology and criticism. The second part examines the documentary hypothesis and shows its false assumptions, and at the same time gives the nature and history of biblical criticism tracing the three main schools of thought. The book also provides us with the internal and external evidence for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and it thoroughly examines the various documentary theories and presuppositions including the evolutionary and legendary view of the patriarchal narratives. The various Divine Names are considered while the alleged contradictions, repetitions, anachronisms, incongruities and internal diversities are also discussed.

The last section considers the basic tenets of Form

Criticism looking at its chief proponents, defining its terminology, examining the nature of oral tradition, pericopes, form classification and the alleged role of the church as a 'creative community'. Separate chapters are devoted to answering the critics' denials of the biographical, chronological and geographical value of the gospel records. The views of Dibelius, Kasemann and Bultmann are summarised and assessed.

Each section is prefaced by an outline which makes it a handy reference book rather than a weighty theological tome that is complex, forbidding and probably never completely read. Each section concludes with a summary of the main points and each chapter is clearly set out under numbered headings. The body of the material consists of carefully chosen quotations from a wealth of sources both from the critics and their opponents. Each section is followed by a lengthy and helpful bibliography of works referred to in the text. The book concludes with a few brief essays on kindred themes as well as an appendix giving autobiographical sketches of the evangelical contributors from Allis to Young.

I warmly recommend this as an inexpensive handbook which will prove useful for students and pastors and may save them a great deal of time wading through other volumes. Here is a reliable handbook for those who like their material distilled and lucid. Let no one be biassed against this book because of the 'stable' from which it proceeds.

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#### CHRISTIANITY AND THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

(A Short Introduction and Bibliography)

by Michael Miles. Published by The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship, obtainable from the Paternoster Press, pp.40, 65p.

This is an interesting booklet being No.7 in a series of Occasional Papers published under the auspices of the above Research Fellowship. The word 'Christianity'

in the title is used in its widest possible sense. Attention is drawn to the works of Roman Catholics on the one hand, also to those who *"are learning all the time through sharing and prayer with people of other faiths who bring their own beliefs and traditions to the community"* [p.22], and on the other hand to the work of Corrie ten Boom. One might assume that coming from among the Christian Brethren the writer would start from a clearly Evangelical position, unfortunately this is not the case. Dealing with the issue of integrating the mentally handicapped into worship, he writes, *"Again a willingness to experiment under God's own hand is called for, and no hard and fast rules should be laid down. It is quite possible that an hour long Quaker style meeting entirely in silence could bring as powerful sense of God's presence to one particularly handicapped person as a Charismatic Catholic mass would to another"* [p.34]. This comment presumably gives some insight into the author's theological position. At the same time it raises questions in our mind about tendencies currently present in modern Brethrenism, under whose auspices the booklet is published.

The booklet is divided into seven sections, the last two of which are a useful Bibliography and list of relevant Addresses. These will prove most helpful to anyone desiring to enquire further into the issues raised in the earlier part of the book. The first section is introductory and in it certain basic issues are raised. First of all is the vital one of whether the mentally handicapped may enter into a firm personal relationship with God. The point is also made that the Church has tended to evade its Christian responsibility for those deprived of normal mental powers. In this connection it is relevant to recollect the character of Mr Feeble-mind in Pilgrim's Progress Part 2. Bunyan writes most lovingly and understandingly of this character and presumably he was drawn from a person or persons whom Bunyan had met with in his life. His

appearance in Pilgrim's Progress indicates that at least one Christian writer of earlier centuries was acutely aware of the problems raised by those of limited mental capacity. Furthermore those who are familiar with Kennedy's 'The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire' (see p.203f) will no doubt recollect Mary Macrae who came to Killearnan and was there converted. Kennedy wrote of her *"I used to know her then as 'foolish Mary' and wondered what could move my father to admit her to his study but the time came when I accounted it one of the highest privileges of my lot that I could admit her to my own"*. Anyone concerned with working among the mentally deprived would be greatly encouraged to read about God's glorious work in her and her spiritual discernment and usefulness. Two such random illustrations should prevent us from making too harsh judgments about the Church's failure here, great though it may be. The second issue raised is that of the difficulties of parents who find a child born to them who lacks normal intellectual capacity, and the feelings of guilt and despair which can come to them. The writer has a sensitivity to the needs of all concerned and has obviously thought deeply about the issues raised.

The second section is entitled *'Some Theological Considerations'* and is divided into three main parts. This is probably the least satisfactory part of the booklet. We are confronted here with some pretty massive problems and due allowance must be made for the difficulty of dealing with such weighty matters in such a short space. At the beginning a very unpleasant remark is quoted that Luther is alleged to have made, but no source is given so we do not know from whom the allegation originates. If such a remark can be authenticated then we will have to face its implications, if not it should not be repeated. In the first section which is *'The Sins of the Parents'* the issue is raised *"Does God take out his righteous anger at the sins of the parents by punishing the child?"* and the author goes on to comment *"The witness of both Old and New Testaments is against such*

*interpretation". A number of relevant texts are then examined such as Deuteronomy 24 v.16 and Exodus 20 v.5. It is then asserted "It is the consequences of parental sins that may fall upon their children, not the guilt or direct punishment. And even those consequences are not necessarily a bad thing when one remembers it is a just and loving Father who oversees them".* Apart from the apparent belief in the universal Fatherhood of God which is not scriptural, there is a failure here to get to grips with the issues. It is clear from the observation of the world around us that children do suffer for their parents' sins. It is also clear from Scripture that children are involved in the punishment of their parents' sins. Such passages as 2 Kings 5 v.27, Leviticus 24 v.14f, Deuteronomy 28 v.15f, 2 Kings 6 v.24f need to be considered as do also Matthew 27 v.25 and Luke 19 v.44, 23 vv.28-30, these three latter passages in conjunction with an account of the siege of Jerusalem. It is also imperative that attention be paid to a verse such as Romans 5 v.14. Why do little children die? If a child is not guilty of sin then why does it die when death is punishment for sin? The issue is an intensely painful one, not least to those who have seen little children suffering, but it must be faced, and relates to the whole character of the human race. The writer is of course absolutely right to refer to John 9 v.3 and Luke 13 vv.1-5; such passages together with the message of the book of Job will restrain any tendency to harsh and unjust comments and judgments about the sins and sufferings of others.

The second section is headed 'Accountability'. This deals with the very relevant issue of how far the mentally retarded are to be held accountable for their sins. Again very large issues are raised relating to Infant Salvation, but again the issues are not dealt with in a very helpful way. Calvin and George Macdonald are both quoted and in fairness it is obviously impossible to deal with such matters in two pages. Finally 'Moral Judgment' is under

consideration. The author himself here seems to feel his difficulties. He writes "*There is some danger in ploughing across so wide a field encompassing 'children and the mentally handicapped'*". Quite rightly here and elsewhere he remarks that the mentally handicapped can on occasion show far clearer moral insight than supposedly normal adults and children. Corrie ten Boom makes the same point (see p.30). Intellectual competence should never be taken as a ground for assuming moral or spiritual superiority. "*The first shall be last and the last first*". Perhaps in heaven we shall find some, who on earth had little natural talent but used what they had fully for the glory of God, raised to far higher glory and responsibility than those who, proud of their natural gifts, failed to use them for Christ's kingdom. As the author demonstrates, to approach the mentally retarded with a sense of our own superiority is utterly alien to a truly Christian spirit.

The next section is '*Achievement*' and brief accounts are given of the works of Corrie ten Boom, Jean Vanier at L'Arche, Algrade School, Humbie nr. Edinburgh, and of David Watson at St Joseph's Centre (R.C) at Hendon. This is most useful and it is helpful to read of what is being done by a variety of people and organisations. Then follows '*Barriers to be Broken*'; this focuses attention on difficulties to be overcome in helping the handicapped and is again valuable. The fifth and final main section is '*Opportunities for Action*' containing practical recommendations. Certainly one could not agree with all that is said, nevertheless there is much here of real worth.

Readers of *The Evangelical Times* will have read of the work of Christian Concern for the Mentally Handicapped and their project at Aberystwyth, and will already have been confronted with a number of issues raised here. In reviewing such a book great care and balance is needed. While it is necessary to make the comments, which have been made, about the grave theological inadequacies of the booklet, yet one respects the desire behind it to promote the physical and spiritual



welfare of the mentally handicapped. It is easier to write a review of such a booklet than to bear the burden and strain of caring for a member of one's family who is thus afflicted. Read with care and discernment it would be of use for ministers who are looking for some introduction to the subject. No doubt Christian Concern for the Mentally Handicapped, 135 Wantage Road, READING, Berks RG3 2SL would be happy to supply further information to anyone interested in the subject.

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#### ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

by J.W. Rogerson. Published by Blackwells in 'Growing Points in Theology' series; pp 128; £7.95

This is an important work from within the critical school (the author is a lecturer in Durham University Theological Department) which encourages O.T. scholarship to reassess many of its conclusions in the light of modern anthropological developments, especially those 'assured results' which have been based upon a faulty anthropological methodology. It is a must for every theological college library and for students studying the O.T. in liberal contexts for there is good mileage here in repudiation of many critical assumptions in O.T. theological study.

Rogerson confines his study to social anthropology (the study of human societies) and then proceeds to make the most important point of his thesis in chapter 1 viz O.T. students have rarely been conversant with social anthropology but have based their conclusions upon (usually outdated) anthropological assumptions. Dividing the history of anthropological study into three he notes that the second period was characterised by the evolutionary assumption that all societies had passed through similar stages of social, mental and

religious development, by a tendency to study 'culture' apart from its social contexts, and by a reliance upon second hand (and often unreliable) evidence. This approach, completely rejected in the current third period, is yet the basis of many of the histories of Israelite religion which thus become subject to the same criticisms, viz (i) conclusions are usually unjustified and unverifiable since there is no evidence of the postulated evolution of societies; (ii) according to the modern anthropological approach material is usually insufficient to reconstruct past societies with any certainty.

In the second chapter the author takes into consideration two early theories which have greatly influenced O.T. study. The first, evolutionism (mentioned above) traced the development of Israelite religion by 'survivals' - features of culture which allegedly reflected an earlier and more primitive stage (as for e.g. K in knock in the English language). Widespread comparison was made with Arabic studies.

The latter and conflicting approach was diffusionism which leant heavily on Babylonian material and on the basis of a belief in degeneration of societies traced certain features of Israelite culture back to earlier and 'purer' forms.

Both these approaches have been subject to considerable criticism by anthropologists because Biblical material is taken out of context, interpreted by alleged parallels elsewhere and, in the former case in societies which must have changed considerably in the intervening millenia. In addition they founder on lack of evidence and an unwillingness to assess the evidence we do have (i.e. the O.T.) properly.

However, present study continues to flourish by appealing to such material, a situation made the more bizare since two conflicting methodologies are employed together. So Robertson - Smith's theory of sacrifice as "*communion with the deity*" still

persists without any evidence and the Passover is still regarded as a relic of semi-nomadism (a concept itself subject to contemporary criticism). We might add that theories such as New Year Festivals, death/resurrection of God-King in cosmic battles are widely found though they cannot be substantiated.

The third chapter of the book is extremely important. Rogerson begins by outlining the theories on primitive mentality advanced by Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, and Cassirer which have been very influential in O.T. studies (e.g. in the work of Wheeler Robinson and Aubrey Johnson). These views he subjects to criticism in the light of modern anthropological research, noting again that these theories were advanced in the pre-field work period of the second stage. He observes (i) these theories were based upon a comparison of material culture without reference to the social context, so that like was not compared with like and material relevant for comparison was ignored; (ii) we need to be sure that we understand how we think and not assume we know.

However, such theories especially with reference to magic or a magical world-view are still advanced or assumed even though recent studies of magic have emphasised its symbolic character and studies in oral tradition have suggested that apparent contradictions in thought (e.g. Proverbs 26:4-5) are not evidence of primitive mentality (as Von Rad) but *"invite us rather to see a mutually enriching combination of insights based upon the juxtaposition of sayings"* [p.118].

The study of folklore as it relates to O.T. study is the subject of the fourth chapter and is somewhat unsatisfactory since it presupposes that O.T. narrative is not inerrant history, but tradition that can be assessed by such comparison. Moreover, the attempt to find a basic structure discernible in all folklore and, therefore, a reflection of basic categories of the mind is questionable. However, Rogerson's conclusions may be useful in certain areas of conservative O.T. apologetic. The author notes (i) since the so-called basic structures

of folklore are discernible in the Jacob narratives, for example, a major question-mark must be placed against literary methods which fragment it; (ii) the existence of folklore parallels to O.T. events is not an adequate ground for the rejection of an historical core to the material; (iii) since a coherent symbolic structure has been revealed in folklore studies certain apparently archaic or strange elements cannot be used as the basis for developing a history of religious belief.

Chapter 5 brings us back to more useful ground being especially concerned to discuss social and political structure. Rogerson points out that O.T. students have too often used a concept lacking rigour of definition (e.g. tribe) and then, on the basis of a comparative approach, mistaken a formal resemblance for a real one, without consideration of the relative functions of each, and imposed an unsatisfactory model on the O.T. material (e.g. amphictiony). This has made a nonsense of the Biblical data. A similar approach, he notes, has been made with genealogies in an endeavour (without any warrant) to reconstruct early history.

Further, there has been a tendency in the use of vocabulary to impose a definition upon a context rather than let the context determine the meaning. This serious methodological error has been compounded by an unwillingness to assess the Biblical data itself. For example, without studying social or kinship material which often lie behind a rough and ready use of language (as in English), it has been assumed that the terminology scientifically reflects social structure.

The reviewer suggests that the points made in this chapter have a widespread application in the field of O.T. studies. All too often ill-defined models, concepts and definitions based less on a study of Biblical material but more on the assumption of the existence of a parallel have been imposed upon the O.T. and led to quite unsupported theories gaining widespread credence.

The final chapter traces the recent development of

Structural Anthropology by making a brief survey of the complex field, following this by a discussion of the applicability of its findings to the O.T. Two important points are made: (i) structural anthropology re-enforces the criticisms made against views of primitive mentality by discovering common structures in the thought processes of all men. (ii) the universal concern men manifest for classification and definition might prove useful, says Rogerson, in understanding some of the prohibitions of the O.T. laws of diet etc. as helping people to discover and maintain a proper relationship with God.

Concluding Remarks This book fulfils, as least partially, a major need which has existed for a considerable time. As such it ought to open the closed minds of O.T. scholars to reassess some of their pet theories. For conservative believers proper use and reference to the work ought to prove extremely useful in O.T. studies notwithstanding the limitations imposed by the size of the book and the actual stance of the author, which must always be borne in mind.

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SEARCHING FOR TRUTH - A Personal View of Roman Catholicism. By Peter Kelly; published by Collins; pp.192; £3.50

This is a significant book because it deals with some of the major problems and developments within contemporary Roman Catholicism. The author, an Australian, entered the Jesuit Order in 1938 and 30 years later became Jesuit Provincial Leader for South-East Asia. He was troubled, in these later years, by the church's official self-definition and after meticulous research he concluded that the claims the Roman church makes for itself could neither be defended historically nor reconciled with critical Biblical scholarship. This important conclusion led to his resignation from the priest-

hood as recently as 1975.

The drama of this autobiography needs to be read against the background of the turmoil produced by the encounter of Christendom with science and philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries. While many Protestant churches were deeply affected at an early stage, the Roman church was able to postpone the encounter - officially at least - until the Papal Encyclical during World War II. Although Romanists were technically free afterwards to approach the Bible more critically, Biblical scholarship found itself under ecclesiastical censure during the fifties and it was only fully approved and recognised at Vatican Council II, although the Vatican continued to impose a form of medieval scholasticism on Catholic schools and seminaries, using its canonical power to prevent its theologians from dialogue with contemporary philosophy. However, it was too late for the flood-gates had already been opened. For example, Maurice Blondel and others developed philosophical ideas which interpreted the human, cosmic reality in evolutionary terms perceiving God as the Divine mystery operative at its centre. On this view history was the locus of the Divine self-communication. Blondel also corresponded with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and also influenced Marechal, the initiator in the Roman church of the Transcendental Method (the adaptation of Kantian philosophy and modern phenomenology) which is now the central philosophy used by catholic theologians.

These new trends within catholic theological and Biblical scholarship are to some extent still confined to the professionals and the trends are expressed more boldly in some areas and continents than in others. As Gregory Baum recognises in his introduction, this poses a problem; *"If a catholic brought up in pre-Vatican II catholicism suddenly encounters this new presentation of the catholic faith, the shock may well be considerable"* [p.10].

It was this kind of shock that Peter Kelly received. His early catholic training was 'orthodox' and

sheltered; he accepted without questioning that the Roman church was 'right'. Before the completion of his legal studies in Adelaide, it occurred quite suddenly to him that he should become a priest. After a little time, despite his worldly life, his mind was made up. His commitment was total and he entered the Jesuit Order. The following 12 years were involved in the usual Jesuit training and teaching. Ordained in 1949, he was sent in that same year to Rome to commence a three-year study of canon law. He was intensely disappointed with what he saw in Rome: *"The parade of Papal stateliness, the pomp of ceremony that seemed the exact opposite of the Gospels, the wire-pulling and cheating to get places, the official deviousness and high-handedness ... the whole system was far from edifying"* [p.26].

The disappointment and questionings of this period remained with him and deepened until his final decision to resign the priesthood 25 years later. He suspected that there was something seriously wrong with the church and slowly he began to see a gap between the essential preaching of Christ by the Apostles and the development of the Roman system. Added to this in the sixties was the new spirit of questioning which was widespread within the church and the uncertainties created by the Vatican Council itself. His sabbatical in Germany in 1973 gave him the opportunity of reading and assessing the implications of critical, Biblical scholarship and two years later his decision to resign from the priesthood was made but not without immense emotional pain.

It is interesting to notice the influences upon Kelly which contributed to this important decision.

He was clearly impressed by the success of the sciences and, in particular, the new knowledge gained of the universe by astro and micro physics. For example, what does "God" mean in such an unfathomable vastness? Did He really choose a small planet of an insignificant star in which to reveal

Himself? In this context he grapples with the existence and 'otherness' of God. Concerning God's existence, he believes that the traditional arguments only provide "*suggestive thoughts*" [p.41] but the vast discoveries of modern science raise new questions which cannot be ignored. For example, physical scientists of the calibre of Fred Hoyle, Julian Huxley and Heisenberg are groping for the ultimate reality. Hoyle refers to a hierarchy of intelligences formed out of gas which are bundles of energy. Kelly regards this attempt to find and describe the ultimate reality as significant and thinks the German term '*Gesamtzusammenhang*' (the way everything hangs together) is a good definition of God. His main argument in favour of God's existence is that without something permanent which he calls 'God' he cannot see how human beings can be human.

His agnosticism comes through clearly when he asks, "*What positively is this God?*" He replies, "*I am completely at a loss*" [p.52]. He also wrestles with the question of life after death and the problem of evil. For him there is no appeal to infallible teaching whether in the Bible or church. To the rescue again comes physical science. The soul is connected in some way with matter which in the final analysis is energy and if the soul is something akin to it then possibly the soul is to be regarded as the person. After death the body "*is nothing but a mass of manifold molecules ... but the person is the energy disposition that made him what he was and will keep him the individual he is ... what lives on after death is not a split person, body here, soul there, both one day to come together again; but it is the whole person who lives on*" [p.64]. Concerning evil, the author rejects the classical formulation of, and answers to, the problem and advocates that God should be regarded as the Creator who left the universe to evolve itself. He rejects the idea of fixed laws of nature, preferring to think of a more chaotic struggle at first leading to an improving order with humans as part of this clumsy development (p.70).



In addition to science, another major influence contributing to the author's resignation from the priesthood was modern Biblical scholarship. After sketching the origins and development of the critical study of the Bible (pp.76-119), he concludes that "*the Gospels are not histories of the earthly life of Jesus ... there are very few of the words put in His mouth that we can be sure He actually spoke; very few of the scenes and the actions that we can be sure took place as described*" [p.100]. His faith is largely determined by what he calls "*sound modern critical Biblical scholarship*" [p.127]. This same scholarship regards the resurrection narratives as being "*born from that after-Easter faith. They are not historical and factual in our sense*"! Similarly he regards the statement that "*Jesus is God*" as false if taken as "*real identification*" [p.142].

The author found chapter five - entitled "*Church and Authority*" - the most difficult of all to write largely because it is the matters discussed here that caused such radical changes in his life.

He acknowledges that much of the evidence for the Papal claim can no longer stand critical scrutiny. For example, Matthew 16 verse 18 does not apply to the successors of Peter nor did our Lord here give to Peter supreme authority over the Church. Historically, he concedes that much is disputed and unknown of what happened in the first two or three centuries (p.160). "*It is certain*", he adds, "*that a great advance in Papal authority followed the public recognition of Christianity by Constantine .. the church was building its public system on the lines of Roman Imperial institutions*". Another advance took place in the medieval period, especially after the late 11th Century. Peter Kelly then speaks of the church running "*wild*" [p.161].

But what of the future? "*We are entering upon a great period now, and we cannot see very well so far where the lights and shadows blend, and what*

*the new illumination means" [p.173]. One aspect of this enlightenment is that doctrine has a new and broader meaning while statements from Rome can no longer be considered as absolute truths.*

The Roman church is now "*a groping church*" and no longer "*a slot-machine giver of answers*".

The book is desperately honest; it is also informative and intriguing. Changes are taking place within the Roman church. A great deal of its traditional life and teaching is in a process of flux and turmoil. This book will help us to be more aware of what is happening in Rome.

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### THE BIBLE UNDER ATTACK

published by Evangelical Press at 95p

Three main articles -

Rev Hywel Jones on *THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE*

Prof Edgar Andrews on *CREATION & EVOLUTION*

Rev Iain Murray on *OUR TIMES AND THEIR  
LESSONS*

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