

# Foundations

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## Contents

### **Is the Princeton View of Scripture an Enlightenment Innovation?**

Carl R. Trueman

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Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia*

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### **Lost in the Old Testament? Literary Genres and Evangelical Hermeneutics**

Peter Naylor

*Minister, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Cardiff*

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### **The Right Doctrine, Wrong Texts: Can we follow the Apostles' Doctrine but not their Hermeneutic?**

Greg Beale

*Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at  
Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia*

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### **The Use of the Bible in the Church**

Stephen Clark

*Minister, Freeschool Evangelical Church, Bridgend and  
Tutor at London Theological Seminary*

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### **Preaching the Word in the Power of the Holy Spirit**

Hywel R. Jones

*Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster  
Theological Seminary, California*

# Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical

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# **‘The Truth Shall Set You Free: The Doctrine and Function of Scripture in the 21st Century’ – The Affinity Theological Studies Conference 2011**

## Introduction

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Welcome to the first online edition of *Foundations*. The articles in this edition are some of the papers which were given at the Affinity Theological Studies Conference, held in February 2011. The overall theme of the conference was *The Truth Shall Set You Free* and considered the Doctrine and Function of Scripture in the 21st Century.

In his introduction to the Conference the Chairman, Stephen Clark, wrote:

Making disciples, gathering them into the church, and then teaching them to observe all that Christ commands is the very heart and essence of the Church’s task and mission upon earth. An essential element of the fulfilment of this commission is to ensure that the Christ who is proclaimed is the true Christ, the Christ of Scripture, and that whatever he taught – including his teaching on the nature and authority of Scripture – is part of the Church’s message. Evangelicals have always regarded Scripture as of fundamental importance.

In recent years, however, essentially liberal ideas have infiltrated evangelicalism, and respected evangelical scholars and publishers have called into question aspects of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Although these views are not new and have been answered in the past, they are now gaining influence in some evangelical circles and cannot but have a harmful effect upon the Church’s evangelistic, missionary, and pastoral task. The Affinity Theological Studies Conference brings together a range of speakers who are wholeheartedly committed to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, in order to address some of these issues.

Although seeking to engage the issues at the highest level of scholarly responsibility, the papers are aimed at pastors and students, as well as scholars, so that the evangelical doctrine of Scripture may be restated for the twenty-first century, that gospel workers may be the better equipped for the task of mission.

In this first online edition of *Foundations* we are making the important issues considered at the Theological Studies Conference available to a wider audience.

# Is the Princeton View of Scripture an Enlightenment Innovation?

Carl R. Trueman, Westminster Theological Seminary, PA.

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Before addressing the subject of the title of this paper, I would like to make a couple of comments about the nature and scope of the argument which I wish to present.

First, this is not an exercise in systematic theology. I am not a systematician and have no desire to be one; rather, I am an historian, and thus that which I present here is an attempt at historical, rather than theological, analysis. My aim in this paper is thus comparatively modest: I will not argue that the Princetonian approach to scripture, articulated most fully and forcefully by B.B. Warfield is right or wrong; the case for, as the case against, needs to be made on exegetical and theological, not historical grounds. Rather, I will argue simply that there is little that is particularly innovative in the nineteenth century Princeton doctrine, and that the various aspects of the basic Protestant doctrine of scripture find antecedents in earlier points of church history. This is not to argue that the fully-fledged Princetonian doctrine can be found in mature form in earlier periods; but simply that its various elements can be found there. This should be sufficient to cause pause for thought among those who confidently dismiss it as rationalism.<sup>1</sup>

Second, I am acutely aware of the classic historian's dilemma, of demanding that texts written in one time and context should provide answers to questions raised in another time and another place. There is an acute danger in such circumstances of anachronism and the danger of over-reading brief statements or, even worse, cryptic comments and even silences; and this is particularly the case when doctrinal issues are at stake. Thus, I stress at the outset that I offer in this paper an analysis which is self-consciously provisional in nature.

As to structure, I will follow a broadly chronological framework: early church; middle ages; Reformation and post-Reformation. First, however, I want to establish the basic outlines of the Princeton doctrine.

## The Princeton Doctrine

The Princeton doctrine of scripture involves a number of basic points.<sup>2</sup>

First, God's revelation is verbal; that is, God reveals himself through words. This is not to reduce God's revelation to words, since, in accordance with Westminster Confession 1.1, Warfield understood that God revealed himself in his acts of creation and of providence; nevertheless, God's actual words possess a normative interpretive value and thus provide the key to understanding his revelation elsewhere.

Second, the words of scripture are divinely inspired. That is, there is a connection between the minds and hands of the human authors of scripture and that of God, such that the written record of scripture is that which God would have it to be. To clarify further, this should not be understood to mean that scripture says what God says in the sense that, as Academic Dean at Westminster, I have authority to send out memos on behalf of the seminary's administration which represent the word of the President, even though he may never have been involved in their composition. It is not, if you like, a form of delegated authority or inspiration; the connection is a prior one which means that, deep and mysterious as the connection is, the words of scripture are both the words of the human authors and also the very words of God.

Third, the Princetonians argued for the inerrancy of original autographs. In other words, apparent conflicts between different texts are to be understood as the result of the process of textual transmission. It is this accent on the autographs that has garnered most hostility towards the Princetonians, and that from various quarters: those who see it as a function of an Enlightenment need for certainty (or control), to those who, with remarkable condescension, dismiss it as an 'American' doctrine, as if the fact that something is developed by somebody in the US renders it of only parochial significance.

While the three points are formally separable, there is clearly a very close connection between them, as becomes clear if we pose a series of questions to those who might wish to view them as entirely discrete issues. If God reveals himself through words, then what is the connection between the human words of God's human agent and God's intention? And if God's inspiration of his words is prior to, or simultaneous with, their inscripturation, then how or why would errors appear in what is written? If God's word does contain errors in its original delivery, is there an incipient spirit-letter opposition at work, where God's word says one thing, but God actually says or intends something quite different? And, if such an opposition is there, how do we resolve it?

## The Early Church

As hinted above, it is not my intention to demonstrate that the Princetonian view of scripture meets the criteria of the Vincentian canon – of that which was believed everywhere, at all times, by everyone – but the more modest one, that its basic elements were held by somebody, somewhere, at some time prior to the nineteenth century. Thus, in approaching the early church fathers, I do not claim to offer either an exhaustive, or even a representative, account of what they all believed about scripture. The documents we have from this period are too numerous to allow for such in a short paper, but also arguably only a sample of all the material actually written. Instead, I offer evidence that aspects of patristic thinking are consistent with later positions on scripture.

One of the most striking things about the writings now commonly known as the Apostolic Fathers, is the way in which scripture<sup>3</sup> is central to the life of the church, is quoted with straightforward confidence, and with the apparent assumptions both that its meaning is clear and it is authoritative and thus quite capable of playing an important part in theological argument. For example, the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians* says at one point:

For I am convinced that you are all well trained in the sacred scriptures and that nothing is hidden from you (something not granted to me). Only as it is said in these scriptures 'be angry and do not sin,' [Eph. 4:26/Ps. 4:5] and 'do not let the sun set on your anger.' [Eph. 4:26]<sup>4</sup>

This use of scriptural writings indicates two things. First, it suggests that some kind of embryonic canon exists, whereby particular writings are deemed to have an authoritative quality. Second, and more important for the topic in hand, there is an assumption that God has revealed himself in the words of these writings, that what they say is binding because it is said by God.

This then raises the question about how the words of these writings are to be connected to God. Certainly, the idea that they are the speech of God, rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit, is present in these early writings. For example, 1 Clement 1:45 states the following: 'Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit.' The writer goes on just a few chapters later to identify the words of scripture with the prophetic utterances of God himself.<sup>5</sup>

These statements in 1 Clement do not offer an opinion on exactly how the process of inspiration should be understood in terms of its mechanics, just an assumption that the words of scripture are the Spirit-inspired words of God; but we do find such speculation elsewhere. Thus, the Greek Apologist of the second century, Athenagoras, makes the following statement:

We have the prophets as witnesses of the things we understand and believe. Men like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets declared things about God and the things of God. It would be irrational of us to disbelieve God's Spirit and accept mere human opinions instead, for God moved the mouths of the prophets as if they were musical instruments.<sup>6</sup>

Now, without wishing to argue that what Athenagoras proposes here is at all adequate as an account of the process of inspiration, it is worth noting that this is an example of the 'dictation' theory of inspiration, something not held by Hodge and Warfield, but also something which renders the role of human agent as so minimal in the process that the resulting text would presumably be precisely as God would want it; and that is, presumably, the assumption which underlies Athenagoras's thought at this point – what scripture says, God says, in a very direct manner.

This disregard for, or lack of interest in, the human authorship of scripture is evident elsewhere in the early church writers. Compare these following quotations:

First, Gregory the Great:

It is pointless to ask who wrote the book of Job, since the Holy Spirit is rightly believed to have been its author. In other words, the one who wrote it is the one who dictated what is to be written.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the Muratorian Fragment:

Although different things are taught in the different Gospels, there is no difference with respect to the faith of believers, because all of them were inspired by the same controlling Spirit.

Third, Theodoret of Cyr:

Some have said that not all the psalms come from David, but that some are the work of others. I have no opinion either way. What difference does it make to me whether they are all David's or whether some are the compositions of others, when it is clear that they are all the fruit of the Holy Spirit's inspiration?<sup>8</sup>

Of course, these writers are not necessarily saying that human authorship is of no significance. They were presumably aware that languages used were human languages and that the books of the Bible were of diverse literary genres and evidenced the different literary styles of their human authors. The point is not to deny the human but to underscore that the really important fact is the divine authorship, that it is this which is decisive for the content and authority of what is written. This reflects the fact that the main point at issue here is that of scripture's authority; and this authority is grounded upon the relationship between the words of the text and the words of God; human authorship is of only remote interest to this matter.

Of course, no treatment of any doctrinal issue in the early church is complete without some reference to Augustine and, as usual, he does not disappoint. In two letters to his contemporary, the Bible translator Jerome, the bishop of Hippo gives some fascinating insights into his own approach to scripture. In the first, Letter 28, Augustine is addressing the idea that scripture may contain incorrect statements in order to achieve a particular desired goal, as, for example, I might tell my children that the bogey man comes out at night, in order to make them stay in their bedrooms after lights out. Here is what Augustine says to such:

Once you admit that a false statement has been made out of a sense of duty, there will not be a single sentence in the entire Bible that will be free of such suspicion if it seems difficult in practice or hard to believe. In such circumstances it would be all too easy to explain the passage away by saying that the writer deceived his readers out of a sense of duty.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Augustine has no patience with this notion of 'godly deception' when applied to the Bible. We might also note that such a passage in Augustine seems to point away from a purely functional understanding of scripture's authority, where it is considered infallible because it achieves that which it is intended to achieve in terms of its impact upon the listener or the reader. Such approaches always involve some separation, or even opposition, between the letter and the spirit, between what is actually said and what is really intended. Augustine's argument here is akin to the kind of slippery slope argument sometimes used to defend post-Princetonian views of inerrancy: countenance an error in one place, and the whole edifice is eventually mired in uncertainty.

Further, Augustine also understands the moral ethical implications of such a position, and that not primarily in terms of the idea that God has engaged in deception but that the human interpreter now has another reason for avoiding the challenge of the Bible's message: any passage which I do not like, I can simply dismiss it as a contextual deception.

A second important passage on the nature of scripture occurs in Augustine's Letter 82, again to Jerome. Here is what the bishop says:

Of all the books of the world, I believe that only the authors of holy Scripture were totally free from error, and if I am puzzled by anything in them that seems to go against the truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty or the translator has not caught the sense of what was said, or I have failed to understand it for myself.<sup>10</sup>

This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, Augustine makes a clear statement that the authors of scripture were totally free from error. Given his statement in the earlier letter, it seems reasonable to take this statement at face value and assume that he is using the notion of 'error' to mean incorrect information or misleading statement, rather than some more slippery concept. Second, Augustine gives three reasons for perceived errors in scripture: faulty manuscripts, poor translation, or a fault in his own understanding. Of particular interest, in relation to later Princeton, is the first: faulty manuscripts. While the comment is too brief to build any elaborate theory of textual transmission relative to inspiration, it nonetheless clearly roots error in the manuscript tradition; and the implication, therefore, would seem to be that the originals were not prone to error but that these crept in by some other means, such as copyist error.

## **Thomas Aquinas**

Given the vast nature of the medieval period, I want to focus on the figure of most theological significance for the church in the Middle Ages and, indeed, for later Catholicism: Thomas Aquinas. Despite the popular image of medieval theologians as overly preoccupied with fine logic and abstruse metaphysical speculation, medieval theologians had to work at significant exegetical engagement with the biblical text in order to qualify as teachers; further, many, like Aquinas, also continued to preach regularly throughout their careers. Thus, it is worth noting at the outset that the typical medieval scholastic theologian was probably more deeply and comprehensively acquainted with the text of scripture, albeit in Latin rather than the original languages, than the typical seminary graduate today.<sup>11</sup>

Aquinas's doctrine of scripture includes a number of important points. Central to this is his notion of prophecy, and the implications this has for his understanding of inspiration and revelation. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he comments that:

It is requisite to prophecy that the intention of the mind be raised to the perception of Divine things: wherefore it is written (Ezekiel 2:1): 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to thee.' This raising of the intention is brought about by the motion of the Holy Ghost, wherefore the text goes on to say: 'And the Spirit entered into me... and He set me upon my feet.' After the mind's intention has been raised to heavenly things, it perceives the things of God; hence the text continues: 'And I heard Him speaking to me.' Accordingly inspiration is requisite for prophecy, as regards the raising of the mind, according to Job 32:8, 'The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding': while revelation is necessary, as regards the very perception of Divine things, whereby prophecy is completed; by its means the veil of darkness and ignorance is removed, according to Job 12:22, 'He discovereth great things out of darkness.'<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting, first, that Aquinas here builds his understanding of prophecy on the text of scripture itself, not on some prior dogmatic position, and also that he identifies the giving of prophecy with the exaltation of the human intellect in some way. This in fact allows him to make another key distinction, that between inspiration and revelation.<sup>13</sup> Whereas revelation involves the direct transmission of some item of information to the prophet via a vision, or dictation, or some such, inspiration involves the exaltation of the human mind by the Spirit of God, such that the prophet is enabled to say or write supernatural truths to which he would not naturally have access.

The importance of the distinction is that it allows Aquinas to move away from a simple theory of verbal dictation as the means by which scripture is inspired. This is important, and it is worth remembering in all discussions of biblical inspiration, that neither the Bible nor the creedal and confessional traditions of the church, ever reduce the theory of inspiration to a single model. Yet for Aquinas, as for others, this refusal to reduce inspiration to dictation does not mean that the Holy Spirit does not superintend the words which are to be used.<sup>14</sup>

This role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the scriptures was defined as a dogma of the Catholic faith by Pope Eugenius IV in his decretal, *pro Iacobitis*, in 1441, where it was declared that one and the same God is author of both Old and New Testaments, and that these books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which is the reason why they are received as canonical and venerated.<sup>15</sup> Yet again, it is worth noting that the definition of the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit leaves out the details of how the mechanics of this inspiration should be understood – entirely appropriate in what is essentially a confessional document.

## **Scripture in the Reformation**

### **Martin Luther**

As with the patristic and medieval periods, it is important to understand that the context for discussion of scripture and its authority in the Reformation is considerably different from that of the nineteenth century. For the Reformers, the key issues were the sufficiency and perspicuity or clarity of scripture, with the matter of canon being a significant theme as well.<sup>16</sup> These concerns generated an interest in linguistic and textual study which was ultimately to bear fruit in the kind of text-critical questions which informed the world of the Princetonians but they were not major concerns during the Reformation.



Nevertheless, scriptural sufficiency and clarity were involved with a number of assumptions about the text of scripture, as is clear from the writings of Luther. Indeed, in *The Bondage of the Will*, which is in part a response to Erasmus's assertion of the obscurity of the Bible on many points and of a Christianity conceived primarily as practical morality, Luther boldly and famously asserts the centrality of assertions in this oft-quoted passage:

Nothing is better known or more common among Christians than assertion. Take away assertions and you take away Christianity. Why, the Holy Spirit is given them from heaven, that he may glorify Christ [in them] and confess him even unto death – unless it is not asserting when one dies for one's confession and assertion.<sup>17</sup>

What is less frequently quoted is a statement he made just a few paragraphs before, which actually sets up the context for understanding what he means by *assertions*:

[I]t is not the mark of a Christian mind to take no delight in assertions; on the contrary, a man must delight in assertions or he will be no Christian. And by assertion – in order that we may not be misled by words – I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, maintaining, and an invincible persevering; nor, I think, does the word mean anything else either as used by the Latins or by us in our time.

I am speaking, moreover, about the assertion of those things which have been divinely transmitted to us in the sacred writings.<sup>18</sup>

Luther's theology, placing law and gospel at its centre as the two fundamental categories whereby the relationship between God and humanity must be understood, inevitably sets the word, and also assertions, declarations of states of affairs, at the heart of the Christian faith; and this is reflected in his understanding of scripture – what it is and how it connects to God.

As far as inspiration is concerned, he can on occasion use language which points towards dictation. This, in his early lectures on the Psalms, the *Dictata*, he makes the following comment on Psalm 45:

[A]s he who waters and plants is nothing, but God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7), so he who has the stylus or is the stylus or puts it to the tablet is nothing, but He who writes, namely, the writer writing swiftly, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, O prophet, it is for you to utter and be the pen.<sup>19</sup>

More typically, however, Luther prefers simply to use language of prophetic inspiration or the movement of the Holy Spirit to describe what happens in the writing of scripture, without giving details on the precise mechanics (for want of a better term) of how this connected to inscripturation. Thus, in commenting on Joel 2:28, he says:

Here he sets down three kinds of divine illumination: first, prophecy. This occurs when the mystery of Christ or the grace shown to the world through Christ is preached in clear detail, as when Jeremiah says (Jer. 31:33): 'I will put My law within them.' Also, when Paul or the other apostles are manifestly interpreting Scripture, this interpretation is prophecy.<sup>20</sup>

*Scripture* here clearly refers to the Old Testament; thus, when Paul and the other apostles interpret the Old Testament in their letters, this is an action facilitated by the illumination of the Holy Spirit which guards the human writer from error.

Much has been made of Luther's apparently critical comments on the text of scripture and, of course, his rejection of the book of James. The latter must be understood first as an issue of canon; as to his critical remarks, it is important to bear in mind the comment of Mark Thompson, that such occasional comments need to be set in the context of his overwhelming confidence in the text of

scripture.<sup>21</sup> This, for example, in commenting on Gal. 3:14 in his 1535 commentary on the letter, he declares the following:

Therefore if He Himself is the price of my redemption, if He Himself became sin and a curse in order to justify and bless me, I am not put off at all by passages of Scripture, even if you were to produce six hundred in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith, and if you were to scream that Scripture contradicts itself. I have the Author and the Lord of Scripture, and I want to stand on His side rather than believe you. Nevertheless, it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself except at the hands of senseless and stubborn hypocrites; at the hands of those who are godly and understanding it gives testimony to its Lord. Therefore see to it how you can reconcile Scripture, which, as you say, contradicts itself. I for my part shall stay with the Author of Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Earlier in his career, responding to the critique of his views by Sylvester Prierias, he cites Augustine and affirms that:

I have learned to give this honour only to those books which are called canonical: to believe most assuredly that none of their writers erred.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, such brief comments are insufficient to allow us to reconstruct Luther's doctrine of inspiration and authority in any elaborate way, but they are nonetheless suggestive of, and consistent with, the kind of statements about verbal inerrancy later advocated by the Princetonians. Certainly, Luther has such a high view of the biblical text and its absolute truthfulness that he is quite comfortable in hanging an entire argument on a single text. Thus, in addressing the issue of monastic vows, he refers to 1 Tim. 4:1-3 and declares:

On the authority of this text alone (since it is a word of the Holy Spirit, who is our God blessed forever, Amen), I am bold enough to declare that all monks be absolved from their vows, and I pronounce with confidence that their vows are unacceptable and worthless in the sight of God.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, we find no elaborate theory of inspiration in the works of Luther, nor do we find significant wrestling with textual problems, but we do find a robust assertion of the full truthfulness of scripture, its identity as the speech of God, the importance of its verbal form and content, and its inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

## Heinrich Bullinger

The Swiss Reformation did not differ substantially in the high view of scripture we find in Luther. This, in *The Ten Theses of Bern* (1528) the first two articles establish the priority of the Word over the church (in opposition to Catholic claims to the contrary) 'and the normative, regulative nature of the Word regarding church laws and statutes.'<sup>25</sup> The most significant Swiss theologian of the sixteenth century, Heinrich Bullinger, devoted one of the sermons in his monumental treatment of theology, the *Decades*, to the nature of the Word of God. Given that the *Decades* was, in its day, a work of equal significance and influence to Calvin's *Institutes* and, under Archbishop Whitgift, the standard theological textbook for ministerial students in Elizabethan England, his thinking in this area is worthy of note.

For Bullinger, the word of God is authoritative because it is spoken by God, who cannot lie: God of himself naturally speaketh truth; he is just, good, pure, immortal, eternal: therefore it followeth that the word of God also, which cometh out of the mouth of God, is true, just, without deceit and guile, without error or evil affection, holy, pure, good, immortal, and everlasting.<sup>26</sup>

True to his historical interest, Bullinger then proceeds to outline the history of revelation, how God initially spoke to the patriarchs and then eventually came to Moses, whom he inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the words down:

The Holy Ghost, which was wholly in the mind of Moses, directed his hand as he writ. There was no ability wanting in Moses that was necessary for a most absolute writer. He was abundantly instructed by his ancestors: for he was born of the holiest progeny of those fathers, who God appointed to be witnesses of his will, commandments, and judgments... He was able, therefore, to write a true and certain history, from the beginning of the world even until his own time. Whereunto he added those things which were done among the people of God in his own life-time, whereof he was a very true witness as one that saw and heard them.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to note here that Bullinger clearly does not conceive of the inspiration of Moses as necessarily requiring something akin to dictation as the only means of inscripturation. He sees Moses as heir to an oral tradition, and as witness to the great saving acts of God in his own lifetime; thus, from a human perspective, Moses acts as author and editor of the written material; yet this is still clearly under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the lecture, he applies the same kind of thinking to the prophets, who both expound and apply Moses teaching, and do so under the special inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit who was thus the primary author.<sup>28</sup> Further, the New Testament writers, using the cumulative testimony of the Old Testament books, did the same in writing the Gospels and the Letters.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, as with Luther, so with Bullinger: here we have a theologian who is committed to the notion that scripture is divine speech, inspired by the Holy Ghost. Like Luther, Bullinger does not articulate a hard-and-fast single model for explaining the precise mechanics of the process of inspired inscripturation; further, and perhaps in a way that Luther did not, Bullinger exhibits sensitivity to the historical process issue of revelation and inscripturation.

## John Calvin

In a brief essay such as this, it is impossible to do justice to Calvin's thoughts on scripture (any more than those of Luther, Bullinger or any other major Reformer of the sixteenth century). Nevertheless, a few basic points can be made. First, Calvin stands with Luther and Bullinger as seeing the text of scripture as providing the basic objective cognitive ground for the construction of theology. This should not be understood as pointing towards a kind of 'no creed but the Bible' theology in the sense that Calvin just read his Bible and thought up his theology from scratch. Far from it: Calvin's theological and exegetical works clearly demonstrate that he read widely in the history of theology and exegesis and developed his theology in conscious dialogue with writers from the past and from his own generation.

Second, Calvin's emphasis (typical of reformation era Protestantism) on the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit in applying the word to its readers and, even more, its hearers, should not be set in opposition to the objectivity of the text as truth. The opposition between dynamic Spirit and static word is something of a modern preoccupation, and not an issue of any great significance for the Reformers.<sup>30</sup>

With this as background, it is evident in Calvin's writing that he did not simply regard the content but also the form, the words, of scripture as of divine origin. Indeed, in his comment on 2 Tim. 3:16, he refers to the prophets as not speaking by themselves but rather as 'organs of the Holy Spirit,' a comment whose most natural meaning would seem to indicate some form of dictation. Further, in the *Institutes*, he declares that:

[n]o other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writing of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word. From this also we infer that the only thing granted to the apostles was that which the prophets had of old. They were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught there has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ's Spirit as precursor in a certain measure dictating the words.<sup>31</sup>

While this is far removed from an elaborate theory of inspiration and from any later discussion of autographs and inerrancy, the concept of verbal inspiration is clearly present. What is said here is consistent with what we have seen elsewhere in both Luther and Bullinger.

### **Scripture in Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy**

In the century after the initial reforming impulses of Luther and his contemporaries, debates about scripture underwent significant development. In large part, this was driven by the polemical context, as Roman Catholic authors, such as Robert Bellarmine, responded to Protestantism's opposition of scripture to the authority of the papacy by pressing hard on matters of perspicuity and sufficiency, and also defending the authority of the Vulgate translation. This, combined with the establishment of Protestantism within the cultural context of the university, meant that its theologians, reformed and Lutheran, asked new questions pertaining to scripture.

Thus, we find at the end of the sixteenth century William Whitaker responding at length in his *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (1588) to Bellarmine on issues of canon, authority, perspicuity, and sufficiency; yet the kind of critical questions with which we are now so familiar had not yet developed as significant topics for discussion. This is also evident from the *Irish Articles* of 1615, which devote 6 articles to the nature and function of scripture, and, while asserting inspiration, give no detailed account of the ways in which this is to be conceived as having taken place. By the time of the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s, critical debates about the text of scripture, particularly relating to the antiquity of the Masoretic vowel points, were emerging, and thus the Westminster Confession offers in Chapter 1 a much more elaborate statement on the nature and authority of scripture. Again, however, it is worth noting that, while inspiration is asserted, it is not defined – an entirely appropriate move in a confessional document, given the diversity of models of inspiration in scripture itself and in the history of the church's reflection on the matter. Even so, a basic commitment to what we now call inerrancy is evident in the era of orthodoxy.

While it is important to bear in mind Richard Muller's comment on the different function which the original autographs play in post-Reformation Orthodoxy to the specific logical arguments of Hodge and Warfield, there is nonetheless significant continuity between the Orthodox and the Princetonians both in terms of the conception of verbal inspiration and the historical reality of inerrant autographs, albeit now lost.<sup>32</sup> Thus Lutheran theologian Johann Wilhelm Baier (1647-95) defines inspiration as follows:

Divine inspiration was that agency by which God supernaturally communicated to the intellect of those who wrote, not only the correct conception of all that was to be written, but also the conception of the words themselves and of everything by which they were to be expressed, and by which He also instigated their will to the act of writing.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, Lutheran Orthodox theologians were capable of revisiting the language of dictation, not so much to articulate the precise mechanics of inspiration as to underscore the fact that the very words of scripture were themselves inspired. Thus, David Hollaz (1648-1713):

- I. The conceptions of all that is contained in the Holy Scriptures were immediately communicated by the Holy Spirit to the prophets and apostles.
- II. All the words, without exception, contained in the Holy Manuscript, were dictated by the Holy Spirit to the pen of the prophets and apostles.<sup>34</sup>

Such statements are not unique to Lutheran Orthodoxy and, indeed, the same sentiments can be found frequently among Reformed Orthodox authors. Thus, we find John Owen also referring to the inerrancy of the autographs in his rather bad tempered debate with Brian Walton. Here, he acknowledges that the original autographs are lost and, indeed, in the case of the New Testament, were never actually gathered together in a single volume, since the originals were very quickly copied, circulated, and recopied.<sup>35</sup> Owen is also very clear that this copying process was not divinely inspired and that this is the source of the various variant readings that occur, although Owen absolutely repudiates the idea that the copies are susceptible to the same casual errors as one might find in other profane works of literature. On the contrary, the care and precision used by the copyists, deriving from their knowledge that they were handling sacred texts, was used providentially by God to ensure a remarkably high level of textual accuracy in transmission.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, Owen also states the following:

[T]he whole scripture, entire as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the copies of the originals yet remaining.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, whilst the collation of various manuscripts does indicate a number of variant readings and textual problems, the whole content of the original autographs is preserved in some form or another. It is not the purpose of this paper to address the problems this position itself raises; but merely to indicate that the origin of the extant texts in inerrant autographs is as basic to Owen as it was to Augustine; it is no innovation of the nineteenth century Princeton school.

Of course, in the seventeenth century the orthodox are developing these arguments against the background of the increasing critical pressure produced by the attention to linguistic and textual matters which commitment to scripture in the original languages produced in its wake. This led to a number of specific challenges. For the Reformed, we might note in particular the work of the Saumurian theologian, Louis Cappel, and the production of the London Polyglot Bible (1654-57) by Brian Walton and the work of Saumurian theologian, Louis Cappel, particularly his *Critica Sacra* (1650). These works both highlighted the textual variants of the manuscripts and, particularly in the case of Cappel, made the case for the historical development of the Hebrew language. Most significantly, Cappel (followed by Walton) argued for a late date for the Masoretic vowel points in the Hebrew text. This position would have been unexceptionable in the early years of the Reformation, when it had been assumed that the consonantal text was quite sufficient in itself for translation and interpretation; but, by the mid-seventeenth century, the nature of Catholic polemic, pressing hard against the issue of the sufficiency and perspicuity of scripture, had caused something of a revision of thinking among some Protestants.

Nevertheless, the impulse to defend the antiquity of the vowel points, as in the work of Francis Turretin and John Owen, should not be seen as positive evidence of a rationalizing move within Protestant Orthodoxy; given the plausibility structures of the philological and linguistic work at the time, defence of such was perfectly explicable. As we have noted above, a high view of verbal inspiration and of the biblical text is not something which emerges in the seventeenth century but which has been central to Christianity from its very inception, even as the precise nature of the challenges and their significance altered over time.

## Conclusion

In looking at the doctrine of scripture from the early church to the seventeenth century, a number of points emerge. First, the notion that the very words of scripture are inspired, truthful, and exactly what God wants them to be, is present from the Apostolic Fathers onwards. Second, *that* scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and exactly *how* this inspiration takes place, are two separate points, and theologians exhibit a variety of opinions on the latter, ranging from early theories of dictation, through the crucial distinction between revelation and inspiration made by Thomas Aquinas, to the broad consensus statements of the post-Reformation Protestant confessions. Arguably, this consensus reflects the Bible's own account of inspiration and inscripturation, which is not tied to one single model. Third, the kind of critical textual questions to which the Princetonians were responding arise in the seventeenth century as a result of Protestant prioritizing of scripture over church tradition in terms of the former's sufficiency and perspicuity, and the linguistic and textual studies which Protestantism's scripture principle brought in its wake. It is at this point that significant discussion of autographs and scribal error develops, alongside an understanding of textual history (though, as we noted, these issues were adumbrated in the correspondence of Augustine to Jerome).

As a result, if the Princetonians are to be seen as innovators, it cannot be in terms of their articulation of the concept of inerrant autographs or in their concern for verbal inspiration and the connection of this to notions of truth. On these points, they stand within an established tradition of Christian discourse which goes back beyond the Reformation to the early church.

We might, however, simply note in conclusion that the challenges faced by Protestants today are closely analogous to those faced by the seventeenth century orthodox: text critical issues will not go away and demand that Protestants continue to work in areas of textual and linguistic study; but (more importantly) the post-critical mindset is no more of an ally to orthodoxy than the critical, on the grounds that, through its assertion of the primacy of hermeneutical theory and thus the obscurity of the text in itself, it represents a challenge very similar to that mounted against the sufficiency and clarity of scripture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Roman Catholic scholars such as Bellarmine.

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on the Princetonians' approach to scripture is extensive, and frequently linked to theological and ecclesiastical debates within the contemporary church. See especially: Jack Rogers and Donald B. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: an Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: a Critique of the Rogers-McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); A.T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997); Richard B. Gaffin, *God's Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Reformed Academic Press: Jackson, 2008). Though not addressing Princeton in any great depth, Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics II: Holy Scripture* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2003), is now the starting-point for any future discussion of the development of the doctrine of scripture in Reformed theology.

<sup>2</sup> The classic statement of this position is that of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, 'Inspiration,' in *The Presbyterian Review* 6 (1881), 225-60. Further articles by Warfield can be found in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948) and *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927)

<sup>3</sup> I am aware that the question of which scriptures are considered canonical in the immediate post-Apostolic period is a complex one; my point here is simply that the Apostolic Fathers quoted certain writings, later recognized as canonical, as straightforwardly authoritative.

<sup>4</sup> *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians* 12, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 219

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<sup>5</sup> 'Beloved, you understand the holy Scriptures very well. You have looked deeply into the prophecies of God.' 1 Clem. 1:53

<sup>6</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea Regarding Christians*, 9

<sup>7</sup> *Morals on the Book of Job*, Preface 1.2

<sup>8</sup> Preface to the Psalms

<sup>9</sup> Letter 28.3. Cf. Athanasius, Festal Letter 19 (Easter 347), 3: 'Now, it is the opinion, of some, that the Scriptures do not agree together, or that God, Who gave the commandment, is false. But there is no disagreement whatever, far from it, neither can the father, Who is truth, lie.'

<sup>10</sup> Letter 82.3

<sup>11</sup> 'Granting... that the typical progress of the medieval doctor was from *cursor Biblicus*, responsible for the basic course on the Bible; to *baccalaureus sententiarum*, responsible for the introductory theology course; to commentator and doctor, the amount of biblical knowledge available to virtually all of the major medieval formulators of theology was considerable.' Muller, *PRRD* II, 44

<sup>12</sup> *Summa* 2a2ae 171.1

<sup>13</sup> *Summa* 2a2ae 171.5

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Summa* 3a 60 5, resp. ad obj. 1

<sup>15</sup> 'Unum atque eundem Deum Veteris et Novi Testamenti, hoc est, Legis et Prophetarum atque Evangelii profitetur auctorem: quoniam eodem Spiritu Sancto inspirante utriusque Testamenti Sancti locuti sunt: quorum libros suscipit et venerator qui titulis sequentibus continentur.' Denzinger, 706. As an interesting aside, in his encyclical, *De studiis s. Scripturae* (1893), Leo XIII reaffirms the inspiration of scripture by the Holy Spirit and also declares that God's authorship of scripture means that the Bible is without error: Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1937) 1951

<sup>16</sup> The issue of canon in the reformation primarily focuses on the status of the so-called Apocryphal Books (see, for example, Belgic Confession VI, Thirty-Nine Articles VI, Westminster Confession I.3), but also famously touched upon the status of the Book of James, given Luther's profound reservations about its lack of Christ and its contradiction of Paul on justification.

<sup>17</sup> LW 31, 21

<sup>18</sup> LW 31, 19-20

<sup>19</sup> LW 10, 212

<sup>20</sup> LW 18,108. Cf. 'However, we do not let ourselves be troubled by the blasphemies which the devil, through the mouths of his lying servants, speaks against Christ the Lord—now against His divinity, now against His humanity—and by the attacks which he then makes against Christ's office and work. But we cling to the Scriptures of the prophets and apostles, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).' LW 22, 23 (commenting on John 1:3); 'Paul is profoundly moved, and in great zeal and fervor of the Spirit he speaks sheer thunderbolts against the Law and against circumcision. In his anger over the great wickedness of it all, the Holy Spirit wrests such passionate words out of him.' LW 27, 9 (commenting on Gal. 5:2)

<sup>21</sup> Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on which to Stand: the Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005) 140

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-86) 26.295

<sup>23</sup> WA 1, 647.22-24 (my translation)

<sup>24</sup> LW 44, 282

<sup>25</sup> *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) 41-42

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<sup>26</sup> *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), I.i, 37

<sup>27</sup> *Decades* I.i, 47

<sup>28</sup> '[I]t is well perceived by many arguments that they [the prophetic books] took not their beginning of the prophets themselves as chief authors; but were inspired from God out of heaven by the Holy Spirit of God: for it is God which, dwelling by his Spirit in the minds of the prophets, speaketh to us by their mouths. And for that cause have they a most large testimony at the hand of Christ, and his elect apostles.' *Decades* I.i, 50.

<sup>29</sup> 'For some, verily, writ an history of the words and deeds of Christ, and some of the words and deeds of the apostles. Other some sent sundry epistles to diverse nations. In all which, to confirm the truth, they use the scripture of the law and the prophets, even as we read that the Lord oftentimes did... Although therefore that the apostles were men, yet their doctrine, first of all taught by a lively expressed voice, and after that set down in writing with pen and ink, is the doctrine of God and the very true word of God.' *Decades* I.i, 53-54.

<sup>30</sup> The Reformers did make a routine distinction between mere intellectual assent to the truth of scripture (what Melancthon dubbed 'historical faith') and true, saving faith; but the difference was in the mode by which the individual grasped the truth, not a quality of the objective basis of the truth in God's revelation.

<sup>31</sup> *Institutes* IV.viii.8

<sup>32</sup> *PRRD* II, 413-15

<sup>33</sup> Heinrich Schmid (ed.), *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 39

<sup>34</sup> Schmid, 45

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Works* 16, 353-54

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 355-57

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 357



# Lost in the Old Testament? Literary Genres and Evangelical Hermeneutics

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Do you believe that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish? Do you believe that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into a furnace and came out alive and unhurt? Was Daniel actually cast into the lions' den and saved by the angel of the Lord? Do you believe that Genesis 1-2 present a factual account of the creation? Are Adam and Eve real historical figures just as Robert Boyle (1627-1691) and Michael Faraday (1791-1867)?

This paper has two elements. I have been asked to consider the *interpretation* of the Old Testament and the use of genre recognition in that task. I have also been asked to consider whether the ancient Near Eastern literature discovered during the past two centuries or so compels us to re-examine our view of the Old Testament and our doctrine of the *inspiration of the Bible*.

Within this huge field of study, I propose to concentrate on three specific questions and the answers proposed by three scholars widely regarded as evangelicals.

1. Should we read the book of Jonah as historical narrative or is that naive? Does it belong to an entirely different genre, a parable? I wish to examine Leslie C. Allen's treatment of this matter.<sup>1</sup>
  2. What are the first six chapters of the book of Daniel; historical accounts or invented tales? I will look at Ernest C. Lucas' commentary on this text.<sup>2</sup>
  3. Does Genesis stand in such a close relationship to the Babylonian accounts of creation and the flood (*Enuma Elish*<sup>3</sup> and *The Gilgamesh Epic*<sup>4</sup>) as to cast doubt upon its being a revelation from almighty God? Similarly, is Moses' Law dependent on the Laws of Hammurabi<sup>5</sup> or a similar law code? I want to look closely at Peter Enns' handling of this matter in his book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*.<sup>6</sup>
- These are not questions that can be answered without detailed study of the evidence and the logic applied to it. Our conclusions will have relevance to the whole field of study.

## Preliminary Considerations

*Do we believe in the supernatural?*

In 1963, Harry Blamires wrote: 'There is no longer a Christian mind. It is commonplace that the mind of modern man has been secularized. For instance, it has been deprived of any orientation towards the supernatural... [A]s a *thinking* being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization.'<sup>7</sup> *Christians*, while still behaving as Christians and worshipping as Christians, are operating with secularist presuppositions and perspectives.

Dale Ralph Davis notes:

For nearly two hundred years a skeptical brand of Old Testament criticism has largely held sway in our universities and divinity halls; it 'un-godded' the Old Testament, implied the Old Testament documents were extremely complex and involved, and managed to make Old Testament studies mostly boring, lifeless, and dull..... Old Testament criticism has had the effect of killing the Old Testament for the church.<sup>8</sup>

Yes, *Old Testament studies* seem to have offered liberals almost limitless scope for undermining the church's confidence in the Bible. Remember 'the assured results of higher criticism'? Remember the critical apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Kittel* – 'the standard critical edition for a generation of scholars' – and the astonishing inclusion of thousands of textual emendations lacking any manuscript support?<sup>9</sup> How many commentators have written reams on illusory documentary sources yet

offered virtually nothing of spiritual value to the church? How many ministers have floundered when handling the Old Testament? How many churches have closed as a result? There are enormous pastoral consequences to this study.

The Christian believes in God, the supernatural and miracles. He knows that the created universe consists of things visible and invisible, and that beyond the reach of the senses there is a transcendent realm. He believes that God reigns over all the affairs of men and that he is constantly involved in his world. The Bible declares it, the Holy Spirit has persuaded him of it, and general revelation agrees. The secularist, the atheist, says, 'I do not believe it. Miracles are impossible.'<sup>10</sup>

Gresham Machen sought to present this issue as sharply as possible. 'The Church of Rome may represent a perversion of the Christian religion; but naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all... The chief modern rival of Christianity is "liberalism"... the two movements are in direct opposition.'<sup>11</sup>

E. J. Young wrote:

Ever since her founding, the Church of God has been engaged in a spiritual battle... It is, we confidently assert, the old one between supernatural and man-made religion... Today also there are many points at which the battle between supernaturalism and naturalism expresses itself. There is, however, one battleground in particular where the fighting is raging and the battle must be fought to the finish. It has to do with the relationship between the Bible and the Church. More properly, it has to do with the very nature of the Bible itself. What is the Bible?<sup>12</sup>

A battleground! This is not a subject for abstract curiosity: it is a matter of vital pastoral significance.

### *The Inspiration of Scripture*

In 1957, Young referred to the 'constant demand for a new doctrine of inspiration'.<sup>13</sup> We still face it today.<sup>14</sup> We need to be clear what that evangelical doctrine is. Machen has protested:

This doctrine of 'plenary inspiration' has been made the subject of persistent misrepresentation. Its opponents speak of it as though it involved a mechanical theory of the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, it is said, is represented in this doctrine as dictating the Bible to writers who were really little more than stenographers. But of course, all such caricatures are without basis in fact.<sup>15</sup>

What then are the plain lines of the Reformed doctrine? How does the Scripture speak about itself? First, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20, 21). Accordingly, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) says that God was 'the author' of Scripture, that it was 'immediately inspired by God', and that the Holy Spirit is 'speaking in the Scripture' (1:4, 8, 10).<sup>16</sup> The *Chicago Statement of Inerrancy* (1978) further affirms 'the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture' and 'the inerrancy of Scripture'. Second, 'Moses and the Prophets wrote' (John 1:45). God used specially chosen men, each with his own personality, character, style, experience and training, to write the Scriptures. They did not act mechanically. The Holy Spirit did not override their minds but 'utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared' (*Chicago Statement*, Article VIII). Donald Carson writes that the Bible 'is not the product of a flat divine dictation... [but] an astonishingly human document.'<sup>17</sup> Some of its writers were highly educated men – Moses was trained in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Paul at the feet of Gamaliel – yet others were fishermen. Some had access to sources and 'researched' their material (Jos. 10:13; 1 Chr. 29:29; Luke 1:1-4). The individual books display various Hebrew and Greek styles. All of this was employed by the Holy Spirit to place on leather, parchment and papyrus, exactly the words, the letters, the 'jots and tittles', that he willed to be there.

There is no inconsistency in this synthesis of divine and human authorship.<sup>18</sup> If the church has given more energy to establishing the former, it is because the former is what differentiates the Bible from every other book in the world, and it is this which comes under endless assault. The Bible uniquely is *holy*, since it alone comes from God. Davis keeps the balance:

In facing Scripture one must take account of two realities: Spirit and text. This fact forces me to one of my operating presuppositions: *God has given his word in the form of literature, part of which is narrative; I should therefore use all available tools for understanding such literature.* So I seek the Spirit's aid and use an approach suited to the form of his word. I ask *questions* of the text.<sup>19</sup>

This is so different from the much earlier position of Rivetus (1627). 'His view of inspiration was so high that he considered all discussion of the questions of Special Introduction to be without meaning.'<sup>20</sup>

## 1. Genre and Interpretation

There are numerous genres in the Bible (narrative, genealogy, law, prophecy, psalm, proverb, parable, gospel, letter, etc.) and there are many texts which belong to one genre but incorporate material of other genres (psalm within narrative etc.). 'Genre recognition, then, is an important step in the understanding of a text'.<sup>21</sup> Attention to the literary forms of the text is essential to sound exegesis and enriches our understanding of the message and our insights into the nuances of the text. Already, numerous studies are available to help us.<sup>22</sup>

If there is any point at which genre identification becomes critical, it is in the case of *narrative* and, in particular, whether certain narratives are history or myth.<sup>23</sup> The Pentateuch and the Gospels are the primary targets. Genesis 1:1 lights the blue touch paper – 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' – and the fuse is still burning, so to speak, when Mark informs us that Christ commanded the sea, 'Peace, be still!' (Mark 4:39). However, we shall now turn our attention to two other cases, to Jonah and Daniel 1-6.

### a. What is the Book of Jonah?

When the scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign, Christ answered:

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:39-42).

The visit of the Queen of Sheba and our Lord's death and resurrection were historical events. Juxtaposition and comparison suggest that Nineveh's repentance and Jonah's experiences were likewise historical. He is introduced as a historical figure, the son of Amittai, a prophet from Gath Hepher, who ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II, c. 783-743 BC (2 Kgs. 14:25).<sup>24</sup>

The historical interpretation of Jonah has not been universally accepted. Some have held to an allegorical interpretation, others to a parabolic one.<sup>25</sup> Leslie C. Allen (whose commentary is widely

referred to) rejects the historicity of Jonah and assigns it to the genre of satirical parable.<sup>26</sup> His reasoning can be summarised as follows.

1. The Book of Jonah is not an ordinary prophetic narrative.
  - a. It differs from the other Minor Prophets: it is narrative, whereas they are mainly oracles.
  - b. Further, the Jonah narrative is different from other prophetic narratives (such as 1 and 2 Kings): the prophet is ridiculed, not vindicated.
2. The Jonah narrative is not history but parable.
  - a. The narrative of Jonah contains many 'surprises': being sent to Nineveh, his disobedience, the storm, the fish, Nineveh's repentance, the plant and the worm. While one or two exciting events would raise no question, the bombardment of the reader with surprise after surprise in a provocative manner suggests that the author's intention is other than simply to describe historical facts... Not impossible but improbable is how they strike the ordinary reader.<sup>27</sup>
  - b. Allen suggests that the account has an 'old world air' (like Gen. 6 and 19) and that it exhibits a *creative* use of the Elijah-Elisha narratives. Hence he concludes that it is parable. Allen does not accept that Jesus' words confirm Jonah's historicity. Rather, he suggests, our Lord was employing the popular Jewish understanding of it as a preacher today might quote Macbeth.
3. Its tone is satirical.

If it is correct to describe the literary genre of the book of Jonah by the loose designation of parable, as the majority of commentators conclude, then it is possible to add that its literary tone is that of parody or satire. Jonah is made to appear a ridiculous figure that none would be prepared to defend... There are extensive parallels between the parable of the Prodigal Son and our story.

Support for this view comes from Jacob Licht, who adds further reasons not found in Allen.

The Book of Jonah has no connection with the grand sequence of sacred history. It stands by itself. It is the single longest piece of narrative in the Old Testament that is no history at all, but fiction pure and simple. Its fondness for wonders, in the manner of folktales, is less decisive in determining its fictional character than its clear subservience to a moral. It is a story made up to convey an idea, not a piece of history told in a way that shows its significance. The narrative materials – or fictional events – are obviously chosen and arranged to express the idea; the aesthetics follow directly from the requirement of the idea. It is this freedom from the awkwardness of fact, that makes this little book a perfect example of the narrator's art, on a higher, more complex level than usual in the Old Testament.<sup>28</sup>

Notice the logic in Allen and Licht; reasoning from literary form or genre to historical significance. Are they correct in their analysis and logic?

1. Parables are narrative! The gap between prophetic narratives and parables is narrow. Both relate a sequence of events, both are highly selective, and both have a didactic purpose. Licht's observation that the 'narrative materials... are obviously chosen and arranged to express the idea...' is correct, but has no bearing whatsoever on whether Jonah is parable or history. The historical narratives of scripture are invariably highly selective and creatively composed. Witness John 20:30, 31 and 21:25. This is typical of biblical narrators. Thus,

Genesis 17:1 passes over 13 years of Abraham's life; Numbers 20:1 leaps a gap of 38 years.<sup>29</sup> Oswald T. Allis speaks about 'the silences of Scripture'.<sup>30</sup> Douglas Stuart rightly states: 'All biblical narratives are didactic to some degree; but in the case of the book of Jonah, the narrator has carefully shaped the story by selectivity'.<sup>31</sup>

2. It is not possible to decide historicity from genre with certainty. Allen quotes Aalders: 'It is impossible to argue from the form of the book of Jonah that it must have been meant as a record of historical events.'<sup>32</sup> The reverse is equally the case: it is impossible to argue from its genre *against* historicity. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), are usually categorised as parables. We do not know whether the Lord was referring to historical individuals or using fictitious characters. When he names Lazarus, we may begin to wonder whether he is speaking about a real person, but who can be dogmatic either way? In such cases as these, we do not need to answer the question.
3. Several features differentiate parables from historical narratives.
  - a. **Length.** Parables are usually short. Jonah is long. Licht recognizes it as the longest piece of (in his opinion) fictitious narrative in the Old Testament. Its length does distinguish it from the parables of Scripture.
  - b. **Identity.** Parables do not usually identify their characters with men of history. The Good Samaritan is not named. Lazarus is, but it is a common name, and nothing enables us to identify him. This is not the case with Jonah.
  - c. **Comparison.** Parables involve explicit or implicit comparison. God is never one of the characters; the parable speaks instead of a farmer, builder, father or judge. In the book of Jonah, God speaks and acts.
  - d. **Natural, not miraculous.** Parables use everyday things to teach spiritual lessons. Which New Testament parable includes a miraculous event?<sup>33</sup> Parables deal in sheep, coins, seed and treasure. Where are the miracles? They flood the histories.<sup>34</sup> The catena of 'surprises', far from supporting the view that Jonah belongs to the genre of parable, actually weighs heavily against it and supports the view that it is a historical narrative (notwithstanding differences from the Elijah-Elisha narratives).
4. Contrary to Licht's additional line of argumentation not found in Allen, that 'The Book of Jonah has no connection with the grand sequence of sacred history', in fact it *does*! Jonah fits the immediate historical situation and it stands upon the covenant foundations. Indeed, it is grappling with the tension between the two: the situation and the promise to bless the nations in Abraham's seed. Gentile Assyria, threatening and cruel, deserves divine judgment, but is also within the scope of promised mercy.<sup>35</sup> Sent to warn of the former but convinced of the latter, Jonah flees, not wanting to appear to be a false prophet when assessed by the law's tests.<sup>36</sup> This does not bring the prophet into ridicule. Far from it. It highlights how difficult it can be to accept that God's grace 'super-abounds' over sin (the doctrine set out so emphatically in Romans 5:12-21). God's mercy is a difficult doctrine. Is Jonah any different from the disciples who wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56)? A hard doctrine must sometimes be learned the hard way, which explains why surprising events or miracles occurred. Jonah needed to drown – almost – and experience salvation (Jonah 2), and he needed the parable of the plant and the worm.

Allen's position concerning the genre and non-historicity of Jonah is not sustained. The narrative's length, its historical indicators, its cluster of miracles, how it fits the wider context, and New Testament reference to it, *all* point to its historicity. Douglas Stuart rejects the idea that it is parable. 'Jonah is prophetic narrative... As sensational, didactic, prophetic narrative the book shares features

with those genres of literature known as parable and allegory, but it is not correct to identify it with either of these.’<sup>37</sup> Joyce Baldwin rejects Allen’s conclusion and holds that Jonah is historical.<sup>38</sup>

Reading Jonah as history is not possible unless one believes in God and miracles. McCartney and Clayton observe:

Many Christians believe that the book of Jonah belongs not to the history genre but to the parable genre. This is not a question of whether Jonah is true; it is a question of *how* it is true – a question about what the book of Jonah is saying. If it is not intended as a historical narrative, interpreting it as such would be an error.... The issues in this example are confused, however, because those who claim that Jonah is not historical often do so because they do not believe in its miraculous elements. But this is to use a modern, anti-biblical assumption to prejudice the genre issue. Miracle also characterizes the book of Acts, which the author clearly claims is historical. If Jonah is parable, rather than history, there should be clues in the text itself to indicate that it is a parable. According to T.D. Alexander, Jonah does not bear the linguistic markers of a parable. And B.S. Childs points out that Jonah bears certain features that are not at all characteristic of parables. We cannot relegate a text to a nonhistorical genre simply because we have trouble believing that something it narrates could have happened.<sup>39</sup>

Allen’s ‘*improbable*’, surely does just that. But it is *in the very nature of a miracle* to be *impossible* (not just *improbable*) and yet also *historical*. If Jonah’s story is improbable, what is the Exodus narrative, with its plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, or the Elijah and Elisha narratives, or the Gospels? They are full of miracles. That is why liberals must ‘un-god’ them (to use Davis’ expression).

The message of the book of Jonah (the Lord’s mercy) holds true whether history or parable. Its historicity however adds something: God’s mercy is a *fact, a reality*, not just a *concept*. God really does act to show grace towards Gentiles, as he did with Rahab and Ruth and perhaps even Naaman and Nebuchadnezzar. It is a real anticipation of the gospel to the nations from Pentecost onwards.

## **b. What is Daniel 1-6?**

‘The time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire...’ (Heb. 11:32-34a). Stopped the mouths of lions? Quenched the violence of fire? Daniel and the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and their exploits in Daniel 1-6! Clearly this writer thinks that these were historical people and events. So did Ezekiel.<sup>40</sup>

Ernest C. Lucas questions the genre. History? He admits that genre recognition here faces two difficulties: first, the lack of a consensus over genre definition and, second, the shortage of similar texts from the same cultural setting. Even so, he proceeds as follows:

1. He groups together the Book of Esther (which he admits is the ‘only real candidate’ for the group), the Joseph narratives of Genesis 37-50, and, from outside the Hebrew Bible, Ahiqar (from Mesopotamia) and Sinuhe (from Egypt), with Daniel 1-6.
2. He labels the group ‘court tales’.
3. He says that court tales in the Ancient Near East were written for three principal reasons: to entertain, to edify and to encourage.
4. He concludes that they are unhistorical.

Consider this:

‘First, they were written for entertainment, intended to be enjoyed by the readers or hearers. This suggests that they are better treated as stories rather than historical

reports... In fact some of the characters and other features in the stories have something of a cartoon-like nature. Clearly, we have here the art of the storyteller rather than the concerns of the scholarly historian.<sup>41</sup>

This is not the language of certainty. Only 'suggests' and not 'proves'? Only 'better' and not 'correct'? How sure is this? Is Lucas being modestly cautious? Is he saying that these are stories and not historical reports? What weight can we place on his analysis and conclusions?

1. Grouping these texts together is not at all straightforward. They differ in form and purpose and come from different times and places. *ANET* assigns Sinuhe and Ahiqar to 'Egyptian Heroic Tales' and 'Didactic and Wisdom Literature' respectively. Ahiqar is unlike Daniel 1-6 in that the greater part of it contains wise sayings.<sup>42</sup> We may further ask in what royal courts these tales were told. This is a particular difficulty for the biblical narratives in question. We cannot regard the genre as established or correctly assigned.
2. Were they written for entertainment rather than as historical accounts? To assert is not to demonstrate. The Joseph narrative is everywhere treated as historical.<sup>43</sup> Certainly the Book of Esther is used at Purim, which is entertaining, but is it unhistorical? How is that established? About Sinuhe, set in Egypt and Asia c.1960 BC, we read: 'the central narrative is a credible account, which fits the period as we know it. If this was fiction, it was based on realities'.<sup>44</sup> The story of Ahiqar, set in the court of Sennacherib (704-681 BC) and Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), names persons known to be historical and fits the historical context. It is clearly didactic rather than entertaining.
3. Even if these accounts are entertaining, it implies nothing about historicity. Such narrative is typically selective and crafted with skill.
4. If the deliverances from the furnace and the lions' den, and the writing on the wall, were fiction, how would it encourage suffering men of faith?

These considerations all point in one direction: the narratives of Daniel 1-6 are not fictitious tales without historical substance.

## 2. Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Inspiration of the Old Testament

During the past two centuries, archaeologists have unearthed numerous ancient texts. For example, between 1848 and 1876, thousands of clay tablets were discovered in the library of Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) in Nineveh's remains.<sup>45</sup> These included *Enuma Elish*, usually described as a creation myth, and *The Gilgamesh Epic*, commonly thought of as a Babylonian account of the Flood.<sup>46</sup> In 1901, the *Laws of Hammurabi*, king of Babylon 1792-1750 BC, were found.<sup>47</sup> So it has continued. In March 1928, a farmer stumbled across Ras Shamra, with many texts in a new Semitic language, Ugaritic.<sup>48</sup> Twenty years later, the Qumran caves were discovered, containing the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (1946-1956).<sup>49</sup> There have been many other remarkable finds. Actually, only a fraction of archaeological sites have been excavated. The texts we have come from a wide range of times and places and thus offer an uneven representation of that age and culture. Even so, they have added much to our knowledge and the impact on Old Testament studies has been considerable.<sup>50</sup>

Reviewing such discoveries, Peter Enns says: 'It is not an overstatement to say that how people viewed the Bible would never be the same again.'<sup>51</sup> It is this that we shall now examine.

### a. Peter Enns' case

Our interest is in Enns' call for a revision of the evangelical doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. His argument rests on three planks. First, he asserts a close relationship between the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern literature. In his opinion, it is so close that it challenges the Bible's

uniqueness. The Bible must be seen as a product of the culture. Second, he believes that there is theological diversity in the Old Testament, a result of its human authorship. Third, he draws support from his opinions about the New Testament's use of the Old. It is not my purpose to examine his entire case but to focus on the first of these three points.

It is quite simple. He judges that the similarities between sections of Genesis-Exodus and Babylonian sources are so close as to establish a relationship of influence and dependence, the Old Testament being shaped by the Ancient Near Eastern framework of ideas and perhaps even its documents.

Comparing *Enuma Elish* with Genesis 1-2, Enns writes:

However different the two stories may be, they unquestionably share a common way of speaking about the beginning of the world; both Genesis and *Enuma Elish* 'breathe the same air.' Whether or not the author of Genesis was familiar with the text known to us as *Enuma Elish*, he was certainly working within a similar conceptual world.<sup>52</sup>

He observes similarities between *Gilgamesh* (and *Atrahasis*) and Genesis 6-8, the biblical account of the Flood.<sup>53</sup> It is not a matter of textual dependence (direct borrowing). Rather, however the accounts vary in particular details, he believes that they share the same mythological, pre-scientific categories: there is a conceptual dependence of the Old Testament on the Babylonian material.<sup>54</sup>

With reference to the Law Code of Hammurabi (18<sup>th</sup> century BC, so older than Exodus), he writes:

Many of the similarities concern the topics discussed: stealing, property laws, kidnapping, marriage and divorce... Some laws have very similar wording to biblical laws. For example, laws 195-214 of the *Code of Hammurabi* deal with personal injuries and find many specific parallels in a portion of Exodus known as the 'Book of the Covenant' (Exod. 21-23).<sup>55</sup>

He believes that these similarities present a problem for the evangelical who wants to maintain the uniqueness of the Bible and its divine inspiration.

The problem... is that showing how at home the Bible is in the ancient world makes it look less special in some respects – less unique. What can we say about the uniqueness of the Bible when in so many areas it bears striking similarities to the beliefs and practices of the other nations? This is precisely where the tension lies: the true faith of Israel and the false faith of her neighbors look similar.<sup>56</sup>

If Moses depended on the ancient Near Eastern sources or culture for his basic ideas of creation, flood, and law, more of the biblical material is attributable to men and less to God.<sup>57</sup> Hence, the Scriptures must be accounted for in terms of an analogy with the Incarnation. As Christ was both divine and human, so is Scripture. An adjustment is now needed to give more weight to the human nature of the Bible.

## **b. Evaluation**

It is not possible, and indeed it is unnecessary, to include here a comprehensive and detailed comparison of the texts in question. Such work has been done and can be consulted by anyone who is interested to follow it up. A few observations can be made.

1. Clearly there *are* similarities between *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1-2,<sup>58</sup> between *Gilgamesh* and Genesis 6-8, and between *Hammurabi's Law Code* and Moses' Law.<sup>59</sup> This is simply a matter of fact and we do not need to be afraid to acknowledge it. One example will suffice. The *Gilgamesh Epic* contains an account of the Flood on Tablet XI lines 1-155.<sup>60</sup> Here is an extract:



<sup>145</sup> When the seventh day arrived, <sup>146</sup> I sent forth a dove and let (her) go. <sup>147</sup> The dove went away and came back to me; <sup>148</sup> There was no resting-place, and so she returned. <sup>149</sup> Then I sent forth a swallow and let (her) go, <sup>150</sup> The swallow went away and came back to me; <sup>151</sup> there was no resting-place, and so she returned. <sup>152</sup> (Then) I sent forth a raven and let (her) go. <sup>153</sup> The raven went away, and when she saw that the waters had abated, <sup>154</sup> She ate, she flew about, she cawed, (and) did not return. <sup>155</sup> (Then) I sent forth (everything) to the four winds and offered a sacrifice.

Compare Genesis 8:6-20. There are some remarkable similarities of detail (dove, raven, sacrifice) but some complete differences (seventh day, swallow).

2. Nevertheless, the differences are vast. Strictly speaking, *Enuma Elish* is *not* a creation account but a theogony, an account of the birth of the gods, designed to establish Marduk's supremacy – a form of propaganda? Similarly, *The Gilgamesh Epic* is *not* a Flood narrative but an epic myth of Gilgamesh's adventures and search for immortality, which brings him eventually to meet Utnapishtim (the counterpart of Noah). There are numerous basic differences:
  - a. Monotheism versus polytheism, and the whole idea of what constitutes divine character. Babylonian 'gods' are male and female, reproduce, fight, lose their tempers, conceive of wicked ideas, are foolish. Tiamat and Marduk have four eyes; Marduk also has two horns and a tail (a dragon?).
  - b. *Creatio ex nihilo* is unknown in *Enuma Elish*; in the Babylonian myth matter was eternal.
  - c. The Babylonian account does not know of the Fall of man.

Heidel summarizes thus:

Our examination of the various points of comparison between *Enuma Elish* and Gen. 1:1-2:3 shows quite plainly that the similarities are really not so striking as we might expect, considering how closely the Hebrews and the Babylonians were related. In fact the divergences are much more far-reaching and significant than the resemblances, most of which are not any closer than what we should expect to find in any two more or less complete creation versions (since both would have to account for the same phenomena and since human minds think along the same lines) which might come from entirely different parts of the world and which might be entirely unrelated to each other.<sup>61</sup>

As for the *Laws of Hammurabi*, the preamble is polytheistic, the laws are entirely case law (*shumma awilum...* / 'if a man...'), and the closing section echoes the preamble's pantheon and pronounces curses. Most of the laws are different from the Mosaic. Some sound similar, especially the 'eye for an eye' section.

Peter Enns has overstated the closeness between biblical and Babylonian texts. His judgment is not borne out by the texts themselves nor is it supported by a specialist in the field.

Resemblances are to be expected. The Creation, Flood, and Law, were universal. It would be strange indeed if there were no similarities. Since Noah did send out a dove and a raven, we are not surprised to find the same birds mentioned in *Gilgamesh*. As time elapsed, it is not difficult to understand that alterations and embellishments (for example, the swallow) were made. The development of religion in the world took the direction of corruption of truth (Rom. 1:21-23). The creature rather than the Creator became the object of worship; truth was suppressed and imagination took control. In the sphere of law, Genesis shows that moral and ceremonial laws were in existence before Sinai (*lex talionis*, clean and unclean creatures, Gen. 7:2; 9:6, 7; 18:19). Besides that, there is also an internal witness in the human heart and conscience; and sin is universal. Since all this is so, it should come as no surprise that ancient law codes dealt with the same crimes and

offences and sometimes laid down the same or similar punishments. Such similarities do not undermine the Bible's uniqueness or its inspiration. Heidel affirms the doctrine of inspiration:

The late Professor Franz Pieper, of Concordia Theological Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri), one of the most conservative Protestant Institutions in the world, has solved the problem involved in this connection as follows: 'As the Holy Ghost employed the style which He *found* in the individual writers, thus He also utilized the historical knowledge which the writers already possessed, either through their own experience or through their own investigations.... The example of the first Pentecost brings this out very clearly. Of the resurrection of Christ the apostles had knowledge through their own experience before Pentecost. Yet on the first Pentecost they spoke... of the resurrection of Christ "as the Spirit gave them utterance."' <sup>62</sup>

Clearly there is no demand for a new doctrine of inspiration coming from Heidel or Pieper.

The analogy with the Incarnation is employed to argue that more weight should be given to the human authorship of the Bible. <sup>63</sup> The Son of God came in flesh; the Word of God was written by men. For some, human authorship entails fallibility. There must be errors: men make mistakes. <sup>64</sup> Hans Kung wrote that the Bible is 'unequivocally man's word... Hence it is not without shortcomings and mistakes, concealment and confusion, limitations and errors.' <sup>65</sup> Gordon Lewis rejects this. Just as Christ in human nature was without sin, so human authorship is compatible with inerrancy, because of the Holy Spirit's work.

### 3. Remarks and conclusions

#### a. Biblical Interpretation

*Genre identification* is important for interpretation. Often a text will give clear signals. Just as 'Once upon a time' indicates that it is *fairy tale* and 'On 11 September 2001' tells us that it is *history*, so in Scripture 'There was a certain man' typically introduces a *parable* whereas 'Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai' announces that it is *history*. Some commentators will allow for the opinion that the book of Jonah is a parable, even though the evidence is against it, because such a view does not prevent us from learning its message. In the case of Daniel 1-6, it is much more difficult to make room for Lucas' treatment of the genre because in this case it would undermine the text's purpose and pastoral effectiveness: to supply encouragement to those under stress for their faith. It also runs counter to the evidence.

As noted earlier, genre identification is a particularly sensitive (and contentious) matter *at this one point*: whether certain narratives are historical or fictional (myth, epic, legend, tale, parable). What we have seen in the case of Jonah and of Daniel we find also in Genesis. How often we are told that Genesis is myth and not history: it is not a *scientific* account. <sup>66</sup> Of course Moses knew nothing of Isaac Newton or Albert Einstein! Of course he did not have the benefit of telescope and microscope. It is worthwhile pausing over this however. What might a 'scientific' account of creation look like? There are two possibilities. It might be a completely blank piece of paper: since science is in the business of observing repeatable phenomena (and creation is neither observable nor repeatable). Alternatively it might comprise hundreds of thousands of pages filled with detailed charts of the universe, orbits measured, diagrams of dissected creatures, chemical analysis, DNA maps of all life, etc. Evidently Genesis presents matters at a much higher level: it presents the first cause, the principle method, the order and the broad classifications of the universe. It says nothing about the circulation of the blood (which was left to Adam and his posterity to discover), but it does present

the one essential fact about human identity – that we are created in the image and likeness of God. That needed to be revealed since it could not be discovered by observation. In fact, the information provided by Genesis is indispensable to any scientific account. Any account that leaves out these elements must ultimately be most *unscientific*. How unsatisfactory to omit the principal cause of everything! If the method of creation was God's speaking, how deficient would be any account that concentrated on secondary means and failed to inform us about the principal means. It is common to state that the 'worldview' implicit in Genesis 1-2 is the ancient Near Eastern cosmology of a flat earth standing on pillars (Enns includes a diagram of this in his book). But it must be asked, Where do we find that in Genesis 1-2? Even the reference to the firmament (*rāquā*) does not take us there. Young writes:

Genesis 1 is monumental in character... We are not to regard the chapter as the reworking by the Priestly School of a myth that was common to ancient tradition. Rather, the chapter is sober history. Although Genesis 1 does not purport to be a textbook of science, nevertheless, when it touches upon scientific subjects, it is accurate. Science has never discovered any facts which are in conflict with the statements of Genesis 1.<sup>67</sup>

The rest of the Bible confirms its historicity.<sup>68</sup> Liberals call it myth, claiming to respect the literary form of the text but not believing the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Genesis 1 intends to present an account in the space of 31 verses of an historical act of God that took six days to complete. It intends to furnish us with an understanding of the broad lines of demarcation of the reality in which we exist. Genesis 1-5 intend us to understand that Adam and Eve were real people who had children and grandchildren, who sinned against God, and whose actions had a radical effect on all of us. Adam is compared with Jesus Christ (Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15).

The Bible is *fundamentally historical*.<sup>69</sup> This is not to say that all must be interpreted literally. Psalms are not history (although Psalms 105-107 are historical). Laws are not history. There are parables which are not history. But the point is that the Bible presents a continuous (selective) history from Genesis to Acts, from Creation to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and forward to the return of Christ. It is a *coherent* history. It does not simply report events but it traces a course from inauguration, through development of God's covenant, to fulfilment. Portions that are not narrative history find their context in the covenantal-historical framework. When a *narrative* is portrayed as historical, and has a place within that continuum, we need very strong reasons for reinterpreting it as a parable, tale, myth, legend or epic. In the case of Jonah and Daniel, attempts to establish them as non-historical have failed. The same conclusion must be reached with respect to Genesis and the Gospels. History! *Theological* history, yes – the selection and composition is purposeful, conveying a message or doctrine – but history all the same.

The Bible is *essentially supernatural, spiritual and miraculous*. Strange as it may seem at first, the record of a miracle or supernatural event, instead of undermining the historicity of a narrative, actually supports it, since the biblical history is full of miraculous events while parables deal in the ordinary, the commonplace. Enoch was translated, the sun stood still, Balaam's ass spoke, Christ walked on the sea and raised Lazarus from the dead. These are mere details consistent with the big picture of creation *ex nihilo*, of Incarnation and Resurrection, of the miracle of the new birth. The Lord reigns! A king's sleepless night, two female bears attacking forty-two youths, a maid taken captive by the Syrian commander, an arrow shot at random hitting its target, a coin in a fish's mouth... are all his work.

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and

immutable counsel of his will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.<sup>70</sup>

### ***b. Biblical uniqueness***

Comparative study of ancient Near Eastern Literature finds some similarities but emphasises the differences. These in no way undermine the uniqueness of the biblical revelation. We must take great care not to allow extra-biblical literature to *control our hermeneutic*. For example, the Hittite suzerainty treaties are now fairly well-known and biblical covenants have sometimes been interpreted in terms of Hittite forms, with implications for the formulation of covenant theology.<sup>71</sup>

### ***c. Inspiration of the Bible***

The evangelical, or Reformed, doctrine of the Inspiration of the Bible involves a synthesis of divine and human authorship which preserves infallibility or inerrancy. Sound theology often holds in synthesis two factors that appear to be paradoxical: divine sovereignty and human responsibility; the Trinity, one God, three persons in one; Christ, divine yet human; omniscient and growing and learning.<sup>72</sup>

Two accusations have been levelled against evangelicals who hold to divine inspiration and biblical inerrancy. They are accused of docetism (the ancient Christological heresy) and they are accused of being defensive.<sup>73</sup> On the evidence of the confessions and Reformed authors such as Young and Davis, the first charge cannot be maintained. The form of the Word has been thoroughly investigated and respected by such Reformed advocates. They have not followed Rivetus.<sup>74</sup> On the second charge, the reason why they have defended the doctrine is precisely because it has been misrepresented and attacked. It is necessary to heed the warnings issued by Machen, Young and others.

Peter Enns says, 'my aim is to allow the collective evidence to affect not just how we understand a biblical passage... [but] to affect how we think about what Scripture as a whole is'.<sup>75</sup> He does not simply want a new doctrine of inspiration. He advocates 'a more open and curious posture' and it is evident in the end that it has far reaching implications.

Whatever words Christians employ to speak of the Bible (inerrant, infallible, authoritative, revelational, inspired), either today or in the past, must be seen as attempts to describe what can never be fully understood.... This should lead us to a more willing recognition that the expression of our confidence of the Bible as God's word has a provisional quality to it.

Notice his terms: 'whatever words Christians employ' is comprehensive. Every formulation of the doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture 'can never be fully understood' and must be seen as 'provisional'. In other words, we cannot hold to a Reformed confession of faith with certainty. It has never been a requirement of such a confession that the truth be *fully* understood! Confessions are not like that. One important task they perform is to mark the limits of truth, to put a 'no entry' sign over the paths of error. The evangelical doctrine of Scripture says that if we believe and teach that the Bible contains errors, we have gone astray. How can our present doctrine of Scripture be provisional? We do not live in the fear that the next turn of the archaeologist's spade might produce a death blow to the Bible. When the next clay tablet is dusted off, we are sure that its evidence, to the extent that it bears on the Bible at all, will only serve to confirm what we already know and believe. Enns' openness is dangerous. Long ago, in 1957, E. J. Young wrote:

In face of this constant demand for a new doctrine of inspiration, what attitude is the Christian man to adopt?... There are some who are all too willing to give up the time-

honoured Biblical doctrine and substitute in its place the shibboleths of some of the forms of modern theology. Shall we join them? Must the battle at this particular point be given up? For our part, we believe that these questions should be answered with a resolute negative... We do not believe that the 'facts' which the modern 'scientific' study of the Bible has brought to light compel us to change or modify or abandon the historic doctrine of inspiration which finds such a classic expression, for example, in the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>76</sup>

#### **d. Pastoral Application**

I am happy to bear the stigma of being naive! I am ready to be counted a fool for Christ. I will preach the inspiration of Scripture and I will study the form of the text, rejoicing each time I see more of its nuances. I am happy to close my copy of *Enuma Elish*, never to read it again, whilst returning to Genesis year after year to be fed and to feed those who hear me. There is no comparison!

If I preach that Genesis is myth, that Jonah is parable, that Daniel is fiction, that the Bible is so similar to Babylonian myths (remember, they are not strictly speaking creation and flood accounts) that we must be open to the idea of its being a truly human (and erroneous) document, then you can be sure that those who listen will begin to doubt the Old Testament. Did God create all things? Did Adam really sin and all mankind in him? They will not know what to believe. Did God part the Red Sea or was it a fluke combination of natural forces? If I say that only naive simpletons imagine that Jonah was actually inside a big fish for three days, or that there was really a den of lions for Daniel – if I turn history to fiction – I will undermine the faith of the hearers. Since the Bible is full of miraculous, supernatural events from cover to cover, once they start to doubt, they will not know where to stop. This is exactly what has happened in liberal pulpits in this country for the past two centuries. Perhaps, when our Lord received the five loaves and two fish, the generosity of the little boy so inspired or shamed the crowd that they all started to pass around their dinner! Not a miracle at all. Not God's witness to his Son but a lesson in kindness. The assured results of liberal criticism have been a loss of confidence in the Bible, a decline of gospel preaching, an inability to stand against the spirit of the age, unsaved souls, empty pews and closed churches.

## Appendix 1: confessional statements on Scripture

### 1. The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647.

#### *Chapter 1, Of the Holy Scripture*

I. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, which are these: Of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Of the New Testament: The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians I, Corinthians II, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians I, Thessalonians II, To Timothy I, To Timothy II, To Titus, To Philemon, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The Epistle of James, The first and second Epistles of Peter, The first, second, and third Epistles of John, The Epistle of Jude, The Revelation of John. All which are given by **inspiration** of God to be the rule of faith and life.

III. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.

IV. The **authority** of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the **author** thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the **infallible truth** and divine **authority** thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

VI. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.[http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/l\\_fn.html-fn11](http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/l_fn.html-fn11) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances

concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

VII. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: 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 use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), **being immediately inspired by God**, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,[http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I\\_fn.html - fn19](http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I_fn.html - fn19) that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner;[http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I\\_fn.html - fn20](http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I_fn.html - fn20) and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.[http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I\\_fn.html - fn21](http://www.epcew.org.uk/wcf/I_fn.html - fn21)

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

X. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but **the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture**.

## 2. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978<sup>77</sup>

### *Preface*

The *authority* of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the *total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture* is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its *authority*.

The following Statement affirms this *inerrancy of Scripture* afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of *current lapses from the truth of inerrancy* among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition\*. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to *the inerrancy of Scripture* and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the

limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who *deny the inerrancy of Scripture* do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

\* The Exposition is not printed here but can be obtained by writing us at the Oakland office: ICBI / P.O. Box 13261 / Oakland, CA 94661 / (415)-339-1064.

### ***A Short Statement***

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has *inspired* Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, *written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches*: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. *Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.*

5. The *authority* of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine *inerrancy* is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

### ***Articles of Affirmation and Denial***

#### **Article I**

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.



**Article II**

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

**Article III**

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

**Article IV**

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

**Article V**

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

**Article VI**

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

**Article VII**

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

**Article VIII**

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

**Article IX**

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

**Article X**

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We

further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

#### **Article XI**

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

#### **Article XII**

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

#### **Article XIII**

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

#### **Article XIV**

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

#### **Article XV**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

#### **Article XVI**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

#### **Article XVII**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

**Article XVIII**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

**Article XIX**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church.

## Appendix 2

### Parables of the New Testament

listed by Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: IVP, 1990).<sup>78</sup>

The Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32  
The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, Luke 15:4-10; Matt. 18:12-14  
The Two Debtors, Luke 7:41-43  
The Two Sons, Matt. 21:28-32  
Faithful and Unfaithful Servants, Luke 12:42-48; Matt. 24:45-51  
The Ten Virgins, Matt. 25:1-13  
The Wheat and the Tares, Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43  
The Dragnet, Matt. 13:47-50  
The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31  
The Children in the Marketplace, Matt. 11:16-19; Luke 7:31-35  
The Talents, Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27  
The Labourers in the Vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16  
The Sower, Mark 4:3-9, 13-20.  
The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37  
The Great Supper, Luke 14:15-24; Matt. 22:1-14  
The Unforgiving Servant, Matt. 18:23-35  
The Unjust Steward, Luke 16:1-13  
The Wicked Tenants, Mark 12:1-12  
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18:9-14  
The Two Builders, Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49  
The Unprofitable Servant, Luke 17:7-10  
The Seed Growing Secretly, Mark 4:26-29  
The Rich Fool, Luke 12:16-21  
The Barren Fig Tree, Luke 13:6-9  
The Unjust Judge, Luke 18:1-8  
The Friend at Midnight, Luke 11:5-8  
The Householder and the Thief, Matt. 24:43,44; Luke 12:39,40  
The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price, Matt. 13:44-46  
The Tower Builder and the Warring King, Luke 14:28-33  
The Mustard Seed and Leaven, Luke 13:18-21

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) 175-181

<sup>2</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 20* (Nottingham: IVP, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Enūma Eliš, The Babylonian Epic of Creation, The Cuneiform Text* established by W. G. Lambert and copied out by Simon B. Parker, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, reprinted 1974). E. A. Speiser (trans.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 60ff, 501ff (*subsequently ANET*). Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Speiser (trans.), *ANET*, pp.72ff. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

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<sup>5</sup> Theophile J. Meek (trans.), *ANET*, pp.163ff. G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, (trans. & eds.), *The Babylonian Laws*, volume 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation. Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005, originally 1963) 3. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is clear that the rejection of biblical supernaturalism observed by Blamires was but a step towards irrationalism and the acceptance of another type of supernaturalism: Melanie Phillips, *The World Turned Upside Down. The Global Battle over God, Truth, and Power* (New York and London: Encounter Books, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word became Fresh. How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2006) I and II.

<sup>9</sup> David L. Baker, 'Which Hebrew Bible? Review of Biblia Hebraica Quinta, Hebrew University Bible, Oxford Hebrew Bible, and Other Modern Editions,' *Tyndale Bulletin* (2010) pp.209-236. Baker writes, 'The third edition was published from 1929 to 1937, with three major innovations... Third, there was a much more substantial critical apparatus, with many proposals for emending the text where it was deemed corrupt.'

<sup>10</sup> Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton write that 'modern history interprets the data according to a modern presuppositional framework, which assumes that God does not directly intervene in the course of human events. The history writing of the Bible, however, does not conform to either the goal or the limitation of modern history writing. Biblical writers constantly refer to the supernatural causes, particularly God's plans and activities... However, biblical history and modern history do have two things in common. First, they both recount real space-time events... Second, both biblical and modern history put forth viewpoints on the meaning of events. The major difference is, of course, that the biblical writers relate events from a transcendent position... They write from the standpoint of God. This is why much of the Bible reads like a novel... It is not because the biblical writers made up the events, but because that reporting style was more closely related to the story genre than is modern history.' Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand. A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2002) 224

<sup>11</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923) 52-53

<sup>12</sup> E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 13-14

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>14</sup> Enns, 15. Note here, Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism. Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible* (Leicester: IVP, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Machen, 78.

<sup>16</sup> The issues came into sharper relief after the time of the Westminster Assembly. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993) 51ff.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson, 'Approaching the Bible' *New Bible Commentary 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition* (ed. D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, G.J. Wenham, Leicester: IVP, 1994) 3

<sup>18</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, 'The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture,' *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman L. Geisler, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Davis, 3

<sup>20</sup> E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1960) 18

<sup>21</sup> Lucas, 23

<sup>22</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *The Old Testament, Its Claims and Its Critics* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1972). Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978). Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, and commentaries on *Joshua* to *2 Kings*. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard

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Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993). Dan McCartney, Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*.

<sup>23</sup> Or epic, legend, tale etc.

<sup>24</sup> The identification of Jonah with the prophet in 2 Kgs. 14:25 was denied by O. Eissfeldt and others. R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1970) 905. E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1960) 261-3.

<sup>25</sup> Harrison, *Introduction*, 905-914 surveys the field. He dismisses the allegorical and leaves open a choice between history and parable.

<sup>26</sup> Allen, 175-181

<sup>27</sup> Allen, 176

<sup>28</sup> Licht, 124

<sup>29</sup> Davis, 14-16. Peter J. Naylor, 'Numbers', *New Bible Commentary*, 21<sup>st</sup> century edition (Leicester: IVP, 1994) 161f.

<sup>30</sup> Allis, 143ff.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart, 435

<sup>32</sup> Allen, 179

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>34</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: IVP, 1990). Ronald S. Wallace, *The Gospel Miracles* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960)

<sup>35</sup> Compare Isa. 11:10; 19:18-25; 49:5-7; 65:1; Amos 9:11,12; Zech. 8:20-23.

<sup>36</sup> Deut. 18:22

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah* (Waco: Word Books, 1987) 435-7

<sup>38</sup> Joyce Baldwin, 'Jonah,' *An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 547

<sup>39</sup> McCartney and Clayton, 155f.

<sup>40</sup> Ezekiel 14:14, 20; 28:3. Cf. Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14

<sup>41</sup> Lucas, 26-27

<sup>42</sup> *ANET*, 427-430

<sup>43</sup> Ps. 105:17; Acts 7:9-18; Heb. 11:22

<sup>44</sup> *ANET*, 18-22

<sup>45</sup> Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (ed. H. W. F. Saggs, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, orig. 1849)

<sup>46</sup> *ANET* 60ff, 72ff, 501ff. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis and The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*

<sup>47</sup> Driver and Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*

<sup>48</sup> A. S. Kapelrud, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965). Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). Cyrus H. Gordon prepared the first Ugaritic Grammar, published in 1940, just 71 years ago.

<sup>49</sup> For example, John C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, volumes 1 and 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973 and 1975)

<sup>50</sup> Kapelrud writes, 'From the outset it was clear that the Ras Shamra texts were of considerable interest for Old Testament scholarship', p.13.

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Enns, p.23, surveys *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis*, *Gilgamesh*, the Nuzi texts, *the Law code of Hammurabi*, Hittite suzerainty treaties, the *Tel Dan Inscription*, the *Siloam Tunnel Inscription*, the *Mesha Stele*, and the *Instruction of Amenemope*.

<sup>52</sup> Enns, 26-27

<sup>53</sup> Enns, 27-29

<sup>54</sup> Enns, 49-56

<sup>55</sup> Enns, 31

<sup>56</sup> Enns, 32

<sup>57</sup> Enns, 56-59

<sup>58</sup> Note for the sake of completeness here: (a) Both accounts involve starting with watery chaos. Akkadian *Tiamat* and Hebrew *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* are cognate, but the ideas are different. Darkness comes before light, and light before the sun and moon and stars. (b) The Marduk-Tiamat conflict may find echoes in Isa. 51:9-10, Ps. 89:9-12, Job 9:13-14, 26:12,13, and Isa. 27:1 but this has no direct bearing on Genesis. (c) The creation of man is very different but both Genesis and *Enuma Elish* put man as the final and highest point of creation.

<sup>59</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) 54-59

<sup>60</sup> Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, 80-86

<sup>61</sup> Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 130

<sup>62</sup> Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 136-7

<sup>63</sup> In 'The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture', Gordon Lewis sets out the arguments. *Inerrancy*, pp.228-264 (see footnote 18, page 4). The incarnational analogy is not original to Peter Enns; Lewis wrote 25 years earlier.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis mentions Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich, but gives brief attention to Harry Boer (Reformed), Charles Davis, Leslie Dewart and Hans Kung (Roman Catholic) and finally a more thorough discussion of G.C. Berkouwer.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis, 234, quoting Kung, *On Being a Christian*.

<sup>66</sup> Enns, 49-56. James Barr, *Escaping From Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1984) 132ff.

<sup>67</sup> Young, *Introduction*, 49

<sup>68</sup> Exod. 20:11; 31:17; Lev. 19:19 (the kinds of Genesis 1 are reflected in the law against attempting to breed animals of different kinds); Luke 3: 38; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; Jude 14.

<sup>69</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961, 1955) 50-58

<sup>70</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1647, chapter 5, section 1

<sup>71</sup> C. Van der Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel* (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1990) 19-23

<sup>72</sup> Luke 2:52

<sup>73</sup> Enns, 14, 18

<sup>74</sup> See above, p.3

<sup>75</sup> Enns, 15

<sup>76</sup> Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, 16-17

<sup>77</sup> [www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/icbi.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/icbi.html)

<sup>78</sup> I am aware that other lists exist that differ slightly but this is sufficient for the present purpose.

# **The Right Doctrine, Wrong Texts: Can we follow the Apostles' Doctrine but not their Hermeneutics?**

Greg Beale, Westminster Theological Seminary, PA.

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## **Introduction**

In 1989, I published an article titled 'Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of the Apostles' Exegetical Method.'<sup>1</sup> This was an article that surveyed the recent history of the use of the Old Testament in the New, with focus on the works of Richard Longenecker. Longenecker had argued that the trend of the New Testament was to use the Old Testament in non-contextual ways, which we today would consider illegitimate and which we certainly should not imitate in the way we interpret the Old Testament. I will summarize the essence of that article here and also integrate into it briefly the developments within especially evangelical scholarship on this issue since my 1989 article. Then I will take a single case study of a notoriously difficult text to see how one might approach other thorny uses of the Old Testament by the New.

First, a summary of my 1989 article with a few updates, the concerns of which continue up to today.

The degree of continuity and discontinuity in both theology and interpretative method between Christianity and its Jewish environment has been a point of much debate in NT studies. This has especially been the case with the issue of the use of the OT in Judaism and in the NT.

One widely held position is that Jesus and the writers of the New Testament used non-contextual and atomistic hermeneutical methods such as were used by their Jewish contemporaries. We today would regard such methods as illegitimate. But, we are assured, they were guided in their interpretation by the example of Christ and by the Spirit, and so, although we cannot and should not imitate their methods today, we can trust their conclusions and believe their doctrine.<sup>2</sup> A recent development of this view goes further and contends that the New Testament writers used what we would consider today to be wrong methods of interpreting the Old Testament and that we should follow these wrong methods!<sup>3</sup> My 1989 *Themelios* article was intended to raise questions about these kind of approaches and to offer a possible alternative, which I now summarize, along with a response to a few subsequent developments, which I believe is just as applicable to the present debate as it was then.

## **The Issue of Non-Contextual Exegesis in Post-biblical Judaism and Its Relation to the NT Methodology**

Our starting point is to observe that it is not at all clear that non-contextual midrashic exegesis was as central to earlier Pharisaic and Qumran exegesis as is suggested by scholars favouring the approach we have described. First, it may not be appropriate to speak of a non-contextual *rabbinic* method in the pre-70 AD setting, since most examples come from after 70 AD and those which can be dated with probability before that do not appear to reflect such an atomistic approach.<sup>4</sup> Second, concern for contextual exegesis is found not uncharacteristically both in Qumran and in Jewish apocalyptic.<sup>5</sup> This analysis has far-reaching implications for the argument of those who believe that early Christian exegetes were influenced by a prevalent atomistic Jewish hermeneutic.



But even this assumption of influence may be questioned. It sounds *a priori* plausible that the exegetical procedures of the NT would resemble those of contemporary Judaism. And yet, since early Christianity had a unique perspective in comparison with early Judaism, one should not assume that Jewish and Christian hermeneutical approaches will necessarily have been identical in every way.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to look at the NT itself, without prejudice about methodological continuity or discontinuity, in order to assess the issue.

It is often claimed that an inductive study of the NT reveals a predominantly non-contextual exegetical method. But, in fact, of all the many OT citations and allusions found in the NT, only a very few plausible examples of non-contextual usage have been noted by critics. These include<sup>7</sup>:

1. *ad hominem* argumentation: the role of angels revealing the law in Gal. 3:19; the Exodus 'veil' theme in 2 Cor. 3:13-18.
2. non-contextual midrashic treatments: the understanding of baptism and the 'following rock' in 1 Cor. 10: 1-4; Deut. 30:12-14 in Rom. 10:6-8; Gen. 12:7ff. in Gal. 3:16; Ps. 68:18 in Eph. 4:8.
3. allegorical interpretations: Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor. 9:9; the use of the OT in Gal. 4:24; Gen. 14 in Hebrews 7.
4. atomistic interpretation: Isa. 40:6-8 in 1 Pet. 1:24ff.

Two things need to be said about such examples. First, it is by no means certain that even these examples are actually non-contextual. A number of scholars have offered viable and even persuasive explanations of how they could well be cases of contextual exegesis.<sup>8</sup> But, second, even if it is granted that they are convincing examples of non-contextual hermeneutics, it does not necessarily follow that they are truly representative of a wider hermeneutical pattern in the NT.<sup>9</sup> They may be exceptional rather than typical.<sup>10</sup>

## The Christocentric Debate

In addition to attributing uncontrolled exegesis to the influence of contemporary Jewish interpretation, scholars offer other reasons as well. Some have believed that many of the New Testament authors were so caught up in defending Christ as Messiah that they twisted Old Testament passages to support their viewpoint about the truth of the gospel.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, others have argued, especially more recently, that the apostolic writers were so christocentric in their understanding of the Old Testament that they 'read' Christ into passages that had nothing to do with the coming Messiah. In so doing, they distorted the meaning of the Old Testament writer by reading in their presupposition that all of Old Testament scripture pointed to Christ.<sup>12</sup>

I believe that one can have a christocentric perspective on the Old Testament without reading in distorted meanings into it. I will address the reason for this in the last segment of this introductory section. But before doing so, there is one more recent trend of interpretation that needs addressing.

## The Rhetorical Debate

Still others affirm that writers like Paul were not primarily concerned to use the Old Testament to convey its contextual import but rhetorically to persuade readers to obey their exhortations. Thus, only the wording of the Old Testament is appealed to without consideration for its sense in order to enhance the New Testament writer's apostolic authority in trying to make a 'power move' to make the readers submit.<sup>13</sup> Some would contend that New Testament writers would not care about what an Old Testament verse meant in its context, since the majority of the readers/hearers in churches

would have been Gentiles, who would not have had the educational background to read the Old Testament and appreciate its significance. Furthermore, such a view likely entails that even if many had possessed such an educational preparation to read the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament, since they were recently converted pagans, they would not have had any exposure to the Old Testament. Consequently, in either case, they would not understand Paul's contextual use of the Old Testament.

According to some scholars, such considerations make it unlikely that New Testament writers would have expected the majority of their readers to understand the Old Testament contextual ideas of the verses that they cited in their writings. Therefore, according to this perspective the upshot of the preceding considerations makes it unlikely that these writers referred to the Old Testament with its contextual sense in mind.

While there is not space here to respond sufficiently to this, suffice it to say that the following makes the rhetorical approach less likely: (1) Gentiles did not need a high level of education to understand the Old Testament references in apostolic writings, since these would have been read to the churches and the hearers did not have to read the letters themselves; (2) furthermore, there would likely have been more than only one reading of a letter to a church, but repeated subsequent readings, which would help the hearers understand them better and the Old Testament references therein; (3) letter carriers probably explained some of the contents of the letters, including the Old Testament references; (4) discipleship in the churches would have been carried on by those who knew the Old Testament and could explain its use in apostolic letters to newly converted Gentiles.

But perhaps the best evidence against a mere rhetorical force of Old Testament references is that the rhetorical impact is heightened when the broader contextual meaning of the Old Testament passage is taken into consideration. Naturally, such a conclusion about this heightening is an exegetical decision, which needs substantial analysis in a case-by-case basis and may be more persuasive in some cases than others.

There are other reasons that scholars do not see continuity between Old Testament references in the New,<sup>14</sup> but I have covered the primary ones in the preceding. In the next section, I respond further to why the above objections to a contextual reading of the Old Testament by New Testament writers are not ultimately persuasive.

### **The Contribution of C.H. Dodd**

A substantial and too-often neglected argument against the view that the NT uses the OT atomistically is C.H. Dodd's classic work *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952). Dodd was responding to the so-called 'Testimony Book Hypothesis,' which contended that the New Testament writers took their Old Testament quotations from a so-called 'testimony book,' which contained various kinds of proof texts that were commonly used for apologetic reasons. If this were the case, then the New Testament authors would not have been using these Old Testament references with the literary context of the Old Testament in view.

In brief, Dodd responded by observing that throughout the NT there are numerous and scattered quotes that derive from the same few OT contexts. He asks the question why, given that the same segment of the OT is in view, there are so few identical quotations of the same verse and, secondly, why it is that different verses are cited from the same segments of the OT. He concludes that this phenomenon indicates that NT authors were aware of broad OT contexts and did not focus merely on single verses independent of the segment from which they were drawn. Single verses and phrases are merely signposts to the overall OT context from which they were cited. Furthermore, he

concludes that this was a *unique hermeneutical phenomenon* of the day. He goes on to assert that since this hermeneutical phenomenon can be found in the very earliest strata of the NT traditions, and since such innovations are not characteristic of ecclesiastical committees, then Christ was the most likely source of this original, creative hermeneutic and it was from him that the NT writers learned their method.<sup>15</sup>

Some disagree with Dodd, and indeed, many scholars in this field generally affirm that the NT writers often employ a non-contextual exegetical method.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, others have confirmed Dodd's thesis about the NT's unique and consistent respect for the OT context.<sup>17</sup> In particular, some have recently tried to resurrect the testimony book theory by arguing that there was not one testimony book, as argued earlier, but there were many circulating excerpts of scripture texts on various topics to which New Testament writers could have appealed. But even if this were so, it is evident that New Testament authors would have had access to more data than this, such as large tracts of the Old Testament put to memory and to Old Testament scrolls themselves.<sup>18</sup>

It must be taken into consideration, however, that NT authors display varying degrees of awareness of literary context, as well as perhaps historical context, although the former is predominant. Those texts with a low degree of correspondence with the OT literary context can be referred to as semi-contextual, since they seem to fall between the poles of what we ordinarily call 'contextual' and 'non-contextual' usages.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, there are instances where NT writers handle OT texts in a diametrically opposite manner to that in which they appear to function in their original contexts. Often, upon closer examination such uses reveal an ironic or polemical intention.<sup>20</sup> In such examples it would be wrong to conclude that an OT reference has been interpreted non-contextually. Indeed, awareness of context must be presupposed in making such interpretations of OT texts. On the other hand, non-contextual uses of the OT may be expected to occur where there is unintentional or unconscious allusion. Caution should be exercised in labeling OT usages merely either as contextual or non-contextual, since other more precisely descriptive interpretive categories may be better.

### **The Distinctive Presuppositions of the Apostles' Exegetical Method**

But neither Dodd nor his followers have inquired deeply enough into the more fundamental issue concerning the reason why the NT is different from Judaism in its contextual approach (assuming for the sake of argument that a non-contextual method was an inherent trait of Jewish exegesis, a position we have tentatively questioned). Therefore, what were the presuppositions which inspired what Dodd and others believe to be a unique, consistent contextual approach to the OT?

The answer which makes most sense of the data is that Jesus and the apostles had an unparalleled redemptive-historical perspective on the OT in relation to their own situation (there are some parallels with Qumran but there is not space to discuss the reasons for its methodological differences with the NT, except to note the following assumptions of the NT writers). This perspective involved a framework of five hermeneutical and theological presuppositions:

1. the assumption of *corporate solidarity or representation* ;
2. that Christ is viewed as representing the *true Israel* of the OT and true Israel, the church, in the NT;
3. that *history is unified* by a wise and sovereign plan so that the earlier parts are designed to correspond and point to the latter parts (cf. Matt. 11:13f);
4. that the age of *eschatological fulfilment* has come in Christ;
5. as a consequence of (4), it may be deduced that the latter parts of biblical history function as the broader context to interpret earlier parts because they all have the same, ultimate divine author who inspires the various human authors, and one deduction from this premise

is that Christ as the centre of history is the *key to interpreting the earlier portions of the OT and its promises*.

It is only in the light of this fifth presupposition that we may legitimately speak of a *sensus plenior* of scripture, although it is probably best not to use this phrase since it is not often understood in this precise manner (*sensus plenior* is typically defined as the full meaning of scripture of which an author was likely not cognizant, although there is a wealth of literature discussing the legitimacy of seeing such meanings).<sup>21</sup> On this view it is quite possible that the OT authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning, implications and possible applications of all that they wrote.

Subsequently, NT scripture interprets the OT scripture by expanding its meaning, seeing new implications in it and giving it new applications.<sup>22</sup> I believe, however, that it can be demonstrated that this expansion does not contravene the integrity of the earlier texts but rather develops them in a way which is consistent with the OT author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people – which is the unifying factor between the Testaments. Therefore, the canon interprets the canon; latter parts of the canon draw out and explain more clearly the earlier parts.<sup>23</sup> LaSor has explained well the fifth presupposition of canonical contextual interpretation:

'In one sense, it [the *sensus plenior* or fuller meaning] lies outside and beyond the historical situation of the prophet, and therefore it cannot be derived by grammatico-historical exegesis. But in another sense, it is part of the history of redemption, and therefore it can be controlled by the study of Scripture taken in its entirety.

Perhaps an illustration will make [this] clear... An ordinary seed contains in itself everything that will develop in the plant or tree to which it is organically related: every branch, every leaf, every flower. Yet no amount of examination by available scientific methods will disclose to us what is in that seed. However, once the seed has developed to its fullness, we can see how the seed has been fulfilled... [and] we have sufficient revelation in the Scriptures to keep our interpretations of *sensus plenior* from becoming totally subjective.'<sup>24</sup>

The biblical basis for each of these presuppositions needs more elaboration than the limits of this essay allows.<sup>25</sup> It is also important to realize that these presuppositions were not newly created by Jesus and the church but can be found in the Old Testament itself, though there is not space here to demonstrate that. It is within the framework of these five presuppositions that we are to understand why the early church believed that through identification with Christ it was the continuation of true Israel, living in the inauguration of the latter days. As such it was beginning to fulfil the OT prophecies and promises about eschatological Israel.

It is within this framework too that the whole OT was perceived as pointing to this eschatological age, both via direct prophecy and the indirect prophetic adumbration of Israel's history. This latter point is especially significant; OT history was understood as containing historical patterns which foreshadowed the period of the eschaton. Consequently, the nation Israel, its kings, prophets, priests and its significant redemptive episodes composed the essential ingredients of this sacred history. This is what scholars sometimes call 'typology,' which is often defined as the study of correspondences between earlier and later events, persons, institutions, etc., within the historical framework of biblical revelation, and which from a retrospective viewpoint are perceived to have a prophetic function. Ideal or even enigmatic depictions in the OT became 'ideal' candidates to select for descriptions of features in the eschatological period which had finally arrived. These came to be considered as typical or ideal prophetic portraits.

I would argue that this broad redemptive-historical perspective was the dominant framework within which Jesus and the NT writers thought, serving as an ever-present heuristic guide to the OT. In fact, it is this framework which should be seen as the wider literary context within which the NT authors interpreted OT passages. Consideration of the immediate literary context of OT verses, which is what most exegetes affirm as an essential part of the historical-grammatical method, should therefore be supplemented with the canonical literary context.

But when these five presuppositions are related closely to the NT's exegetical method, they provide the best explanation for Dodd's observations and conclusions, especially why the NT does not focus on verses independent of their contexts. Their selection of OT texts was determined by this wider, overriding perspective, which viewed redemptive history as unified by an omnipotent and wise design. Throughout this plan are expressed the unchanging principles of faith in God, God's faithfulness in fulfilling promises, the rebellion of the unbelieving, God's judgment of them and his glory. Therefore, there was an emphatic concern for more overarching historical patterns or for significant persons (e.g. prophets, priests and kings), institutions and events which were essential constituents of such patterns. Such an emphasis was probably facilitated by the belief that Christ and the church now represented true Israel so that it would have been attractive to see various segments and patterns of Israel's history from the OT as recapitulated in the NT. This then was a holistic perspective, guiding them away from concentrating on exegetically or theologically insignificant minutiae in passages and quoting individual references as signposts to the broad redemptive-historical theme(s) from the immediate and larger OT context of which they were a part. Is not this the most likely explanation for the phenomena in the NT of so few identical quotations but different citations from the same segments of the OT?

In the light of our overall discussion, the proposal of many that the NT's exegetical approach to the OT is characteristically non-contextual is a substantial overstatement. It would take more space than allowed in this article to discuss all the relevant cases where the OT is used in the NT, but the present aim has been to focus on methodological and presuppositional issues which often influence the exegetical task itself. I remain convinced that once the hermeneutical and theological presuppositions of the NT writers are considered, there are no clear examples where they have developed a meaning from the OT which is inconsistent or contradictory to some aspect of the original OT intention.<sup>26</sup> However, there will probably always remain some enigmatic passages that are hard to understand under any reading.

In the light of the validity of the above argument and presuppositions, I concluded the 1989 *Themelios* article by saying that we should imitate the interpretative approach of the New Testament writers when interpreting parts of the Old Testament not addressed by them.

*NOTE: We are unable to publish the case study that Professor Beale used to end his paper but the substance of what he delivered (on another occasion) is available in both audio and video format for free download at this address: <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/lectures/gheens/a-classic-proposed-example-of-the-misuse-of-the-old-testament-in-the-new-testament-hosea-111-in-matthew-215/>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Themelios* 14, 89-96.

<sup>2</sup> For a lucid and sympathetic presentation of this sort of view see, for example, the writings of Richard Longenecker, including his article "Who is the Prophet talking About?" Some Reflections on the New Testament's Use of the Old,' *Themelios* 13 (1987), 4-8.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 113-166, and idem., 'Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond the Modern Impasse.' *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 263-287.

<sup>4</sup> On this latter point David Instone Brewer has identified all the exegetical examples representing this early period (approx. 100) of purported pre-70 AD proto-rabbinic exegesis. He has attempted to demonstrate that every example shows that, while these Jewish exegetes may not have always succeeded, they attempted to interpret the OT according to its context, and they never supplanted the primary meaning by a secondary or allegorical one. Even if his conclusions are judged to be overstated, they nevertheless reveal an early concern for context to varying significant degrees which previously has not been sufficiently acknowledged (see his *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 C.E.* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 30; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992).

<sup>5</sup> In Qumran e.g. 1QM1; 1QS A 1; in Jewish apocalyptic, e.g. Enoch 36-72; 4 Ezra; 2 Baruch; The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. See my own *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press, 1984); L. Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., as Longenecker surprisingly assumes ('NT's Use of the Old,' 7), since he points out the same kind of presuppositional fallacy on the part of others (*Ibid.*, 1).

<sup>7</sup> Here I am using Longenecker's examples from his 'Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament?' *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970), 3-38, and *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> On 1 Corinthians 10 and Galatians 3-4 see E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 51-54, 66-73; R. M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University, 1981), 193-297 and D. A. Hagner, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament' in *Interpreting the Word of God*, FS in honour of S. Barabas, ed. S. J. Schultz and M. A. Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 101-102, who sees a broad, contextual and typological approach in these texts.

On 2 Corinthians 3 see W. J. Dumbrell, *The Beginning of the End* (Homebrush West, Australia: Lancer, 1985), 107-113, 121-128, and S. Hafemann, Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel (WUNT 81; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995).

On 1 Cor. 9:9 cf. A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1974), 161-166; S. L. Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 39-51; D. J. Moo, 'The Problem of Sensus Plenior' in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 179-211.

On Romans 10, cf. M. A. Seifrid, 'Paul's Approach to the Old Testament in Romans 10:6-8,' *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985), 3-37, who sees a contextual and typological use.

<sup>9</sup> But Longenecker has most recently contended that among NT writers there can be found only 'some literalist, straightforward exegesis of biblical texts,' that the pesher method (which he defines as an atomistic approach and which includes typology) 'dominates' Matthew, John and the early chapters of Acts and 1 Peter, and that midrashic interpretation (which he also views as a non-contextual method) 'characterizes' Paul and Hebrews ('NT's Use of the Old', 6-8; cf. his *Biblical Exegesis*, 218-219). He does qualify this by saying that NT authors employed a 'controlled atomistic exegesis' (*Ibid.*, 7) but this is unclear and he never explains what he means by this.

<sup>10</sup> See G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 85-122, for an updated response to the notion that the New Testament's interpretation of the Old is dominantly influenced by the surrounding non-contextual Jewish approach.

<sup>11</sup> Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London: SCM, 1961).

<sup>12</sup> Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 113-166, and idem., 'Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond the Modern Impasse,' who prefers to call this approach a 'christotelic' perspective, i.e., that the Old Testament was viewed by the New Testament writers as designed to point toward Christ. Enns would say that the New Testament writers'

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hermeneutic would be viewed as a distortion of the Old Testament meaning from the vantage point of our modern standards of what is a correct exegetical method. According to the first century standards of acceptable Jewish exegesis, their approach should be viewed as legitimate.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing with Paul: the Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York/London: T & T Clark International, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Some postmodern-minded interpreters believe that it is virtually impossible to understand what an ancient writer meant because no person can escape from interpreting any oral or written communication, including ancient letters, without reading in their own presuppositions and thus distorting the meaning of the speaker or writer. Accordingly, New Testament writers would have distorted the meanings of Old Testament writers.

<sup>15</sup> Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 110, 126-127.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM, 1961); S. V. McCasland, 'Matthew Twists the Scripture,' *JBL* 80 (1961), 143-148; S. L. Edgar, 'Respect for Context in Quotations from the Old Testament,' *NTS* 9 (1962-1963), 56-59; A. T. Hanson, *The Living Utterances of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), 184-190; M. D. Hooker, 'Beyond the Things That are Written? St. Paul's Use of Scripture,' *NTS* 27 (1981-1982), 295-309; B. Lindars, 'The Place of the Old Testament in the Formation of New Testament Theology,' *NTS* 23 (1977), 59-66; for other references in this respect consult Longenecker's bibliography in *Biblical Exegesis*, 223-230.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the sources cited above in this regard, see also, among many others, e. g., S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Van Soest, 1961); R. Rendell, 'Quotation in Scripture as an Index of Wider Reference,' *EQ* 36 (1964), 214-221; Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971); *idem.*, 'The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication,' *NTS* 27 (1980-1981), 233-251; D. Secombe, 'Luke and Isaiah,' *NTS* 27 (1980-1981), 252-259; Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New*; Moo, *The OT in the Passion Narratives*; W. C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985); Moo, 'The Problem of Sensus Plenior,' Beale, *The Influence of Daniel Upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse*, *JETS* 27 (1984), 413-423; *idem.*, 'The Use of the OT in Revelation' in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, FS for B. Lindars, ed. D. A. Carson and H. Williamson (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), 318-336; *idem.*, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1,' *NTS* (1989), approx. 25pp.

<sup>18</sup> See David Lincicum, 'Paul and the Testimonia: Quo Vademus?' *JETS* 51 (2008), 297-308, for a good discussion of the issue with similar conclusions.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. G. K. Beale, 'OT in Revelation.'

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. K. Beale, 'OT in Revelation,' 330-332.

<sup>21</sup> For a survey of significant literature discussing *sensus plenior* see G. Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century* (London: SCM, 1986), 37-47.

<sup>22</sup> For a partial exegetical demonstration of this see the representative literature in favour of a contextual interpretation of the OT in the NT cited throughout the present article.

<sup>23</sup> So also Moo, 'The Problem of Sensus Plenior,' 204-211; V. S. Poythress, 'Divine Meaning of Scripture,' *WTJ* 48 (1986), 241-279; W. S. LaSor, 'Prophecy, Inspiration, and Sensus Plenior,' *TynBull* 29 (1978), 54-60; *idem.*, 'The 'Sensus Plenior' and Biblical Interpretation,' *Scripture, Tradition and Interpretation*, FS for E. F. Harrison, ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 272-276; D. A. Carson, *Matthew in The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 92-93; J. I. Packer, 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,' *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids' Zondervan, 1983), 350; see Moo and LaSor for examples of how this method can be applied.

<sup>24</sup> 'Prophecy, Inspiration and Sensus Plenior,' 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> A beginning biblical basis for each presupposition is found in my 1989 Themelios article.

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<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is corroborated by the articles of Moo, 'The Problem of Sensus Plenior,' R. Nicole, 'The New Testament Use of the Old Testament' in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. C. F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 135-151 and *idem.*, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament' in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* I, ed. F. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 617-628.



# The Use of the Bible in the Church

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## Introduction

The year in which the conference at which this paper is to be presented marks the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Who can begin to estimate the influence and effect which that version has had upon the English language and upon the peoples of the English speaking world over the past centuries? Already there have been programmes on the BBC where the continuing influence of that version of the Bible has been celebrated. My concern in this paper, however, is less with the influence of the Bible in the world, than with its use in the church; not with one particular translation or version, however influential that may have been, but with God's Word itself.

The Bible can be a very dangerous book: its authority has been cited to support beliefs and practices which range from the quaint to the bizarre and dangerous. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that certain Old Testament material which prohibits the drinking of animal blood forbids blood transfusions for human beings. This is a sobering reminder that lives may be lost through the misunderstanding of Scripture. Peter warns us that even greater damage may result from improper use of the sacred writings: the distorting of Paul's letters, as of the other Scriptures, by ignorant and unstable people leads to their destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). The fact that Satan quoted from Scripture to give point to one of his temptations of the Lord Jesus Christ underlines that this is no merely academic matter: there are spiritual issues and forces involved, as well as a spiritual battle in which we are engaged.

If we are to appreciate aright how the Bible is to be used in the Church, we need first of all to have very clear convictions concerning the nature of the Bible, to be clear as to what it *is* and what it is *for*: that is, what is its *nature* and what is its *purpose*. Only then shall we be in a position to consider precisely *how* the Bible is to be used in the Church. I turn, first of all, therefore, to a consideration of the nature of Scripture<sup>1</sup>.

## The Nature of the Bible

Given that the conference at which this paper is presented has been organised under the auspices of a body which, in its doctrinal statement, is committed to the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, and authority of the sixty six books of the Bible as the Word of God, I shall not adduce the evidence to support the belief that the Bible is God's Word; rather, I shall seek to consider some of the implications of this fact.

First, the Bible is, as Calvin expressed it, 'the utterance of the speaking God'<sup>2</sup>. Although, as the opening of Hebrews informs us, 'God *spoke*' to people (Heb. 1:1) in the past, the same New Testament letter advises us of the fact that God is still speaking through that same Word which he gave once for all time. Thus, in Hebrews 2:12-13, quotations from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8 are introduced with the words, 'He says' or, 'And again he says', the 'he' being a reference to Jesus. In 3:7 the quotation from Psalm 95 is prefaced with the words, 'So, as the Holy Spirit says'. Later, in 4:3 part of the same quotation from Psalm 95 is introduced with the words, 'just as God has said'. These introductory formulae provide ample justification for the epigram which states that God still speaks through what he has once spoken; or to express the same thought slightly differently, the Bible is

the living word of the living God. Whenever the Bible is read, God is addressing us as really as he addressed our first parents in Eden after their fall into sin; he addresses us as truly as he addressed Abram when the thick and dreadful darkness came over him (Gen. 15:12-16); his voice sounds in the pages of Holy Scripture as clearly as it sounded over the Sea of Galilee when Jesus addressed the multitudes. *All* of Scripture is God speaking. I shall consider the implications of this observation for the use of the Bible in the Church a little later.

Unless we believe that God cannot make himself understood, one important corollary of the divine authorship of the Bible is that it is *perspicuous*. This was something for which the Reformers had to contend in their day, as over against the arrogant claims of the Roman Catholic Church that the Magisterium of that Church was necessary to interpret the Bible. The Roman Catholic claim leads to the preposterous idea that what God said through his prophets and apostles was not clear but rather opaque, whereas what he says through their self-styled successors is perfectly clear. The logic of that claim leads surely to an infinite regress because it might be argued that the pronouncements of the Magisterium also need interpretation, and so does the interpretation of the interpretation, and so on. The importance of all this resides in the fact that the doctrine of Scripture's perspicuity is under attack today from a very different quarter: instead of an ecclesiastical magisterium being placed between the Christian and God's Word, some have been led to the belief that it is impossible for them to understand the Bible unless they listen to the scholarly magisterium of the academy. The flood of books and articles which has poured from the presses since Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was first published in 1977 has left some feeling that unless they become expert in the intricacies of Second Temple Judaism, they cannot possibly understand what the New Testament is getting at when it refers to justification. This can have frightening consequences for the use of the Bible in the Church, whether one is considering the Church's evangelistic mission or its pastoral work<sup>3</sup>. Something similar might be said about some studies of the biblical teaching concerning the role of women<sup>4</sup>. At least one problem with this heavily academic approach to the Bible is that scholarly unanimity is as elusive as the so called unanimity of the early Church Fathers.

Secondly, however, although the Bible is God's voice, God speaking, it is also the case that God spoke through men. He used human language, or, more precisely, human languages. Moreover, he not only used human languages but human thought forms and human literary categories or genres to express his Word. The 'various ways' through which God spoke through the prophets to the forefathers (Heb. 1:1) probably refers, primarily, to different *modes* of communicating His revelation (see Num. 12:6-8); it may also, however, have reference to the different genres through which God spoke. Whatever be the precise import of these words in Hebrews 1:1, it is clearly the case that although the Bible is one book, with one divine author, it is made up of very different books by very different human authors. God's Word came through specific people in specific cultural contexts. If this point is not grasped, there is the very real danger of churches not using the Bible but, rather, abusing it and, in turn, abusing the very people who need to be fed by it. This is such an important point, which needs to be held in creative tension with the doctrine of Scripture's perspicuity, that I shall seek to work out its implications a little later.

## The purpose of Scripture

In John Stott's *Christ the Controversialist*<sup>5</sup> there is a chapter with the title, *Scripture: End or Means?* It is an important question and one which Stott answers with his customary clarity. Having, in a previous chapter, answered the question, *Authority: Tradition or Scripture?* with a clear affirmation of the authority of Scripture, Stott goes on to consider the danger of bibliolatry, of making the Bible an end in itself. He likens such a wrong approach to Scripture to a family who have a picnic at a signpost to a well known beauty spot instead of at the beauty spot itself<sup>6</sup>. This, of course, is sheer

folly and the result of failure to appreciate the true purpose of the signpost: it is not an end in itself but a pointer to something else. Yet this is precisely what some of Jesus' contemporaries were doing with Scripture<sup>7</sup>: they were turning the study of it into an end in itself. This is always a very real danger, especially for those with a high view of the nature of Scripture as God's Word (and perhaps particularly so for those who are attending a theological study conference about the Bible!). As Jesus goes on to say in vv. 39-40, the Scriptures testify about him, yet his contemporaries refused to come to him. Scripture, therefore, has a soteriological purpose: it witnesses to Christ, it points to Christ, so that people may come to him. We may say that there is something profoundly experiential about Scripture: it was given that we might come to know Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal (Jn. 17:3).

Salvation is a huge category and the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ will entail many things. We are not only to know the truth but to do it (Jn. 13:17; Jas. 1:22). We are to remain in the truth and in so doing will be liberated by it (Jn. 8:32), a liberation which, as is made clear by vv. 33-36, is from sin and is effected by Jesus himself. It is not, therefore, that the teaching of Jesus or the Word of God have some magical power to effect change; rather, the Scripture points to Christ and it is by looking to him, trusting him and obeying him that liberty is experienced. The same truth is expressed in our Lord's great prayer in John 17. In v. 17 he asks that his disciples may be sanctified by the truth, the truth which is God's Word. Although the Word is the *instrument* or the *means* by which the disciples will be sanctified, the fact that Jesus petitions his Father to bring this about means that sanctification is, ultimately, a work of God. The term 'means of grace' perfectly expresses this point: the Word of God is one of the means of grace which God employs for the sanctification of his people. Perhaps nobody has put this as eloquently as the late A.W. Tozer. What he says of Bible exposition applies equally to the study of the Bible itself:

Sound Bible exposition is an imperative must in the Church of the Living God.

Without it no church can be a New Testament church in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but the means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.<sup>8</sup>

While the proper use of the Bible in the Church will achieve many things, we must say that its ultimate purpose is that people may come to know the Living God, who has been revealed supremely in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and then grow in their knowledge of him and their likeness and conformity to him: in Paul's memorable words, that everyone may be presented mature in Christ (Col. 1:28).

Having considered the nature of Scripture and the reason why God gave it, we are now in a position to address the issue of the use of the Bible in the Church.

### **The Use of the Bible in the Church: the public reading of Scripture**

The first and most obvious thing about the Bible is that it is a book; and books are intended to be read. Certainly the public reading of God's Word is something which has always had high priority amongst the people of God. One thinks of the blessings and cursings which were pronounced at the end of Deuteronomy (27:9-28:68) and of the renewal of the covenant (Deut. 29). The assembling of the people to hear the reading of the law every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles must have

been an impressive event (Deut. 31:9-13). Certainly it appears that there is a relationship between the reading of the Law by Ezra in Nehemiah 8 and the confession of sin and worship which is recorded in the following chapter. The practice of reading the Scriptures publicly was carried over into the synagogue, and it is surely instructive that even the Son of God, the very Word incarnate who had been anointed by the Holy Spirit, read from the Scriptures which were then available to declare the things concerning himself (Luke 4:16-21). It is in connection with how people should behave in God's household, his church, (1Tim. 3:14-15) and in connection with Timothy's public ministry that Paul issues the command that Timothy is to devote himself to reading (1Tim. 4:13). Indeed, during the New Testament period, although it was possible to have one's own copy of at least part of the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 8:28), it would appear that the knowledge of those letters which were written to different churches was first acquired by hearing them read publicly in the gatherings of God's people (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). In an age when most people in the developed world have a reasonable standard of literacy and have access to the Bible online, we do well to remember that in the New Testament churches, as well as in many parts of the world throughout history, many people's knowledge of the Bible came through *hearing it read publicly*. While it is cause for huge gratitude that we have our own copies of the Bible, whether as a printed book or in some more technologically advanced format, we need to recapture the importance of the Bible being the book for the church, as well as for the individual Christian. In an age of rampant individualism we need to appreciate the importance of the public reading and hearing of the Word of God.

The public reading of Scripture is an event of tremendous importance. It is as though the LORD addresses his assembled people from his throne. As Stuart Olyott has said, 'Preaching, even at its best, has error in it. But, unless it is done inaccurately, or from a faulty translation, the moment when Scripture is read is unique. No error is present'.<sup>9</sup> It is not to be done hurriedly or in a perfunctory manner. The very words of God are being read. They should be read, therefore, thoughtfully, clearly, intelligently and in a manner appropriate to the matter which is being read. As Stuart Olyott points out, if the person reading keeps his head down and his eyes glued to the page, those who are not following the reading in their own Bible or a church Bible, or, we may add, on a screen on which the reading is projected, may well feel that this has nothing to do with them. It is important, therefore, for whoever reads to do so in such a way that eye contact is made with those who are not themselves reading. This will help them to realise that this is something which is for them.

The Scriptures should not be read in a pompous manner or with false solemnity, but neither should they be read in a casual or jaunty way. One may be natural, reverent, and joyful at the same time. Those passages which have an awesome solemnity about them must surely be read differently from those passages which are joyful or lyrical, and these are to be read differently from those where there are clearly elements of humour present. Reported speech and conversations should surely not be read in a monotone. The Scripture should be read in such a way as to arouse interest and even to whet the appetite of the people to want to read it for themselves. Admittedly this is much easier to do if one is reading a dramatic incident, such as Joseph revealing his identity to his brothers, than it is when one is reading a genealogical list at the beginning of 1 Chronicles! What this means is that the public reading of Scripture requires a spiritual attitude, as well as clear diction, intelligence and spiritual and aesthetic sensitivity. Alas! The reading of Scripture in some churches becomes the occasion for a display of the democratic spirit and principle, which insists that all should be given opportunity to read the Scripture. That everyone has a spiritual gift is not in dispute, but this is very different from saying that all are equally able to read the Scriptures in an edifying way. In fact, some might argue that a case might be made out for saying that in 1 Tim. 4:13 Paul links the reading with the preaching and teaching in such a way that the person who preaches should, generally speaking, be the one who reads the Scripture in the gatherings of God's people when preaching takes place.

If the person reading must do so in the right way, then it is certainly important that those who listen should do so in the right way. Our Lord's injunction that we consider carefully how we listen (Luke 8:18) is surely pertinent at this point. Church 'cultures' differ and there are, no doubt, generational factors which can affect the culture of a church. Generally speaking an older generation was more formal in many areas of life than are young people today. The 'culture' of a church consisting of mainly elderly people will probably be quite different from that of a church made up of predominantly younger people, while a church with a good spread across the age range may well have its own distinctive culture. Families with very young children in a gathering of God's people have their own challenges. These observations notwithstanding, it is surely incumbent upon those in spiritual leadership to impress upon God's people that the public reading of Scripture is not a time for people to 'switch off' and to let their eyes wander all over the building or, even worse, to have a tête à tête with the person next to them. God is speaking: let the whole congregation be silent!

### **The use of the Bible in the Church: praying and singing**

A church is not a place where there is a performer or where there are a number of performers and an audience of spectators. It is a household, a body where everyone has a part to play (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:12-26). There will be spiritual gifts which may be exercised in the gatherings of God's people and there may be gifts which are employed 'behind the scenes'. It is not with these that I am now concerned but, rather, with the corporate or communal praise and prayer of the people of God.

Corporate prayer was clearly important in the New Testament church (Acts 1:14; 4:23-30; 1 Tim. 2:1). I do not propose to go into the arguments for and against some kind of liturgy, for set prayers or spontaneous prayers, or for a blend of both. What I want to emphasise is that we can learn much from the prayers that are prayed in Scripture and the patterns that are set us. There are great promises to plead and these should be heard often in the prayers that are prayed when we meet together. One has sometimes sat in some gatherings for prayer where the scriptural content and reasoning of the prayers has been noticeable by its absence. How much we need for our prayers, while coming from our hearts and prompted by the Holy Spirit, to be saturated with the truth of Scripture, the promises and the pleas of Scripture! Nothing helps new Christians to grow in their praying as much as hearing great role models praying. In our prayer meetings and in leading in prayer in corporate meetings of God's people, we need to be setting an example in this realm.

What we sing matters as well. Those who are committed to exclusive psalmody do not have to face the problem of singing material which is not informed by Scripture. Those who sing 'uninspired compositions' need to face the question as to the *place* which singing receives and as to the *content* of what is sung. It is cause for concern that some Christians, especially young Christians, may assess a church not in terms of the holiness of its members or the measure of its prayerfulness or the content and quality of its preaching and teaching but, rather, on the basis of its singing and, not infrequently, on the type of music and instruments that are played. When one considers the relative paucity of material relating to these matters in the New Testament, one can only conclude that some believers have fallen for a kind of massive spiritual confidence trick.

This is not to argue for singing only staid old hymns set to dull music; it is to say that what matters supremely is the content of what is sung and the spiritual attitude of those who sing. There needs to be a harmony or congruence between the belief and preaching of a church and the content of what is sung in the church. If some of the material in the New Testament was originally hymn material (this is a moot point: one thinks of parts of Phil. 2, Col. 1, and 1 Tim. 3), then it is clear that there was substantial content to it. This is certainly the thrust of Paul's words to the Colossian Christians: the word of Christ was to dwell among them richly, as they taught and admonished each other in the

singing of their psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col. 3:15-16)<sup>10</sup>. It is surely not without significance that both Luther's hymns and the hymns of Charles Wesley helped to encapsulate and to spread the message of the gospel recovered at the times of the Reformation and the Methodist Revival respectively.

## **The use of the Bible in the Church: preaching**

Although it is a wise saying and a blessed reality that even when there is chaff in the pulpit there is always grain at the lectern (the saying comes out of Anglicanism), the biblical ideal is that the grain should form the basis of a nourishing meal with which the preacher is to feed the people. Jesus did not simply read or recite the Old Testament material concerning himself to the two disciples on the Emmaus Road: '...he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). Paul told Timothy not only to devote himself to reading; he also told him to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). It is clear from what he has already said in this letter, in 3:15-17, that the Word is comprised of all Scripture and that all of it is profitable. Similarly, he told the Ephesian elders that he had held back nothing that was profitable for them (Acts 20:20). Since all Scripture is profitable, this explains why Paul also said that he had not hesitated to proclaim the whole will of God (Acts 20:27). Authentic biblical preaching will involve more than the exposition and application of the scriptural text and the scriptural message to the living congregation: there is also the dimension of the work of the Holy Spirit to be considered, the work which, as Charles Hodge points out, is not only *in* the Word, *by* the Word, and *through* the Word, but also *with* the Word<sup>11</sup>. (Since the relationship of the Word and the Spirit in preaching is the subject of the final paper in this conference, I shall say no more about it.)

While true preaching involves more than the exposition and application of the biblical text and the biblical message, it cannot involve less. Since the Bible is 'God speaking', expounding and applying the biblical text is truly an awesome responsibility and a demanding work. It is for good reason that Paul speaks of those who 'labour' in the teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Just what is the place and use of the Bible in true preaching? A number of elements need to be considered. Some of these apply not only to preaching, understood in the narrow sense of proclaiming the biblical message, but also to a broader category of teaching the Bible, whether that be the leading of a monological Bible study or Bible class or a dialogical or interactive study. In what follows, therefore, I am not confining my observations to what is involved in public preaching but am also including broader aspects of the Church's ministry of Bible teaching.

### **1. Choosing the text**

Whether one is preaching on the Lord's Day or mid week or leading a Bible study, the very first question to address is surely, *which* passage? Many factors come into play at this point, but the one to which I want to draw attention concerns the spiritual condition and capacity of the people. The schoolteacher who, in reply to the question, 'What do you teach?' answered, 'Children,' was making a very serious point: *the people to be taught* are as important as what is to be taught. Although, as we have seen, all Scripture is profitable and although the whole counsel of God is to be made known, this has to be balanced with other strands of biblical teaching which emphasise that assessments have to be made of the general and spiritual capacity of the people of God. Although Jesus was about to die and had much more to say to his disciples than he had said in his upper room discourse, they were not then able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). Paul had only been able to give milk to the Corinthians, because they had not been ready to take solid food (1 Cor. 3:1-4). If the faithful servant of the master gives food to his fellow servants at the proper time (Matt. 24:45), it is no less the case that he must give the proper food at the proper time. In this connection, two issues need to be

addressed: first, the use of the Bible with children and young people and, secondly, helping people to be able to feed themselves from God's Word. I shall deal with the second issue later in this paper but shall make a few comments at this stage on the first one.

Children love stories and the Bible has lots of stories. But herein lies a pitfall for the unwary. It is always harder to 'unlearn' something than to learn something that is totally new. The danger is that children may be taught certain stories from the Bible with certain parts necessarily left out. The child comes to faith at some later stage and grows up thinking that he or she knows the story quite well. But in actual fact the way that the child has heard the story may be such that an essential element has been filtered out and the child may go on in its Christian life continuing to filter out something that really is quite integral to the story. I shall illustrate this from my own experience.

As a young child I was told and taught the story of Joseph and have always loved that story. Although I read it to my own children many times, they too always loved to hear it, even though they knew how it ended. There is, of course, early on in the story the account of Judah and Tamar: that had not been read to me as a child nor did I read it to my own children. Yet preaching some years ago through the life of Joseph, I came to realise that this account is integral to the story of Joseph and has a tremendously important function in the overall narrative. It was Judah who had hatched the plot to sell Joseph (Gen. 37:26-27); it was Judah who wronged his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Gen. 38:1-11); the turning point in his life appears to be his acknowledgement that Tamar was more righteous than he (Gen. 38:26). This then paves the way for the remarkable speech which Judah makes in Genesis 44, the longest speech in the book of Genesis, and one of the greatest speeches in the whole of the Old Testament and, indeed, in the whole of great literature<sup>12</sup>. This is the same Judah who had hatched the plot to sell his brother and who wronged his daughter-in-law and, had she not outwitted him, would have had her burned to death together with the children in her womb. The significance of Judah is already hinted at in v. 14 : 'Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in'; but Judah was, of course, one of the brothers, so we are being prepared for something of importance. What we are being prepared for has never been better expressed than it has been by Sternberg:

That the sons of the hated wife should have come to terms with the father's attachment to Rachel ('my wife') and her children is enough to promise an end to hostilities and a fresh start. That the second of these children should enjoy his brothers' affection is amazing. But that Judah should adduce the father's favouritism as the ground for self-sacrifice is such an irresistible proof of filial devotion that it breaks down Joseph's last defences.<sup>13</sup>

And in Jacob's Testament, it is Judah, of course, through whom the promised ruler will come (Gen. 49:8-10).

The point which I wish to emphasise is that if the story of Joseph is told without reference being made to the part of Judah in it all, including the more unpleasant aspects of his character, then, in a very real sense, the story will have been skewed in the telling of it: the wonderful grace of God in transforming Judah will be missed, as will the larger redemptive purpose of God that it would be from the line of Judah that the ruler would come. There is also the fact that Judah's failure in the sexual realm in chapter 38 serves as a counterpoint to Joseph's triumphant resistance to serious sexual temptation in chapter 39; and there are, of course, much larger issues here, since although it is Joseph's resistance to temptation that, ultimately, leads to him being in the right place at the right time and thus be able to be the saviour of the people of God (as well as of others) from famine, it is nevertheless the case that God overrules Judah's failure, since it is from his incestuous union with a woman whom he considers a prostitute (though she is, in reality, his daughter-in-law) that David will be born and, ultimately, of that line the promised Messiah will come. And this, of course, is all of a

piece with the great lesson that what Joseph's brothers meant for evil, God meant for good. In New Testament language, where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

How does one communicate all this to children? Of course, it may be replied that just as a child may eat a smaller portion of a meal than an adult, so one does not have to tell children *everything* in the story of Joseph for them to benefit from it. This point may be readily granted; but I am wanting to make a deeper point, and it is this: the story of Joseph, *to be truly understood*, requires that one grasp the part played by Judah in it. Without this, although one may enjoy the story and benefit from it, one will, in the strict sense, miss one of the *major* elements in the story, part of the divine author's (not to mention the human author's) intention in giving us this narrative. It would be like being told King Lear without hearing of his daughters, Othello without hearing of Desdemona, or Hamlet without hearing of Horatio.

This does *not* mean, of course, that one should disturb the minds and hearts of children with things which they do not yet have the capacity to understand; what it does mean is that thought needs to be given in the telling and teaching of the story, so that children grow up knowing that Judah is pretty important in this narrative and that some of what goes on they will have to wait until they are older before they can appreciate and understand. Otherwise we may be training up people who misread their Bibles and who think they know what a story is all about when, in reality, their understanding is seriously deficient. In other words, we must not naively assume that *all* Bible stories are equally suitable for children or that all are as easily understood. It may be that some of the best known and best loved stories will be the ones which will require particular attention in the way that they are related.

## 2. Understanding the text

Before the preacher can bring the message of any part of God's Word to the people, he must, first of all, understand it himself. Jesus evidently placed a very high value and premium upon the understanding of God's Word: he taught that failure in the area of understanding gives Satan the opportunity to snatch the message away from the hearer and prevent entrance into the kingdom (Matt. 13:19). He rebuked his disciples for their failure to understand his teaching (Matt. 15:15-20) and opened their minds so that they could understand the Old Testament Scriptures and how he fulfilled them (Luke 24:45-47). Given that it is God's Word that is to be expounded, the preacher should spare himself no efforts or pains to get at the meaning of whatever passage of God's Word he is to expound, for if he fails in his understanding, he may well inflict damage upon the people of God. Right understanding of the biblical text will involve a number of things.

First, since the Bible is 'God speaking', the primary prerequisite for a proper understanding is that of a humble, reverent, and submissive attitude to God and his Word, and a truly spiritual mind and outlook. This will be expressed in an attitude of dependence upon God and prayerfulness for light and understanding: 'Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law' (Ps. 119:18). Knowledge of God's will comes through spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9). A proper use of God's Word, in terms of obeying it as well as knowing it (Jas. 1:22-25), is essential to gaining further understanding of the truth of God; the principle here is that to him who has, more will be given, but that from him who has not, even what he had will be taken away (Matt. 13:12). This, no doubt, is *one* of the reasons why the New Testament is insistent that those who lead God's people and who teach his Word must satisfy certain moral and spiritual criteria (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9). The need for a spiritual attitude is one which is explored in considerable depth by the great Puritan John Owen in a work in which he adduces biblical passages and advances biblical arguments to support the position that the possession of certain spiritual graces is a *sine qua non* of understanding the *spiritual* message of God's Word<sup>14</sup>. While Owen certainly did not undervalue the importance of hard



mental labour in getting to grips with the biblical text in its original languages (his own work input and output in this realm was truly prodigious), he nevertheless stresses that no amount of learning and what we might call 'technical skill' will be of any value without the right spiritual attitude. This is how he expresses it:

Yea, I must say, that for a man to undertake the interpretation of any part or portion of Scripture in a solemn manner, without invocation of God to be taught and instructed by his Spirit, is a high provocation of him; nor shall I expect the discovery of truth from any one who so proudly and ignorantly engageth in a work so much above his ability to manage.<sup>15</sup> (original emphasis)

The inability of the people to understand Jesus' teaching in John 10:1-5 (see v.6) was not, it would seem, because of failure in exegetical skills; the response of his hearers to his interpretation of the imagery which he had been using led some to respond to his words by saying that he was demon possessed and raving mad (v.19). Their problem was that they were spiritually blind, self confident and self sufficient in their attitude, and it is this which made them guilty of sin (9:41). This is a far graver matter than lacking certain exegetical skills.

Possession of the right attitude and spirit, while being necessary prerequisites to a proper understanding of Scripture, are not, however, sufficient in themselves. Having humbled oneself before the Lord and having sought divine illumination, the preacher has to address a number of questions before he is in a position to understand a passage of Scripture.

First, *what* does the text say? This raises text critical questions as well as issues of translation. The importance of getting this right is illustrated by Luther's discovery that *metanoia* did not mean 'penance' but 'repentance'. Huge issues may hang on getting the translation right. This underlines the importance of an understanding of the biblical languages and, at the very least, of using good exegetical commentaries, especially if one's facility in the biblical languages is not very great. Where someone with no knowledge at all of the biblical languages is going to preach or lead a study, then he needs to have access to good exegetical commentaries which will ensure that he is not left to the mercy of whichever translation(s) he happens to use. In churches where different members may take Bible studies, it is essential that those in spiritual leadership ensure that they are resourced with such commentaries.

*Who* said it? The point here is that while there is only one divine author of Scripture, there are multiple human authors; one writer may use a particular word in a different way from another writer. If one is truly to know what the divine author is saying, one must be clear as to what the human author is saying. Does Matthew always use the word 'righteousness' and its cognates in the same way that Paul does? What of James's use of the terminology of justification? Does the word 'fulfil' always refer to the same thing? Might it be that on some occasions it carries the idea of correspondence to something that has been predicted, while on other occasions it refers to recurring patterns or 'types' finding their fullest expression? Might it be the case that sometimes the same writer may use the same term in one way and on another occasion use it in a different way?

Knowing what the text *says* is not, however, the same as understanding what the text *means*; and to get at the meaning of the text, it will be necessary to know something of its particular cultural and historical context. There are, of course, two extreme positions to avoid. On the one hand there is the danger of believing that unless one is expert in the history, culture, and customs of the Ancient Near East, and of the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world of the first century, then one cannot understand the Bible. But to say this is necessarily to be committed to one of two presuppositions. The first is one which sees the Bible as essentially no more than a human book or, rather, a collection of human books and writings. The second is that, when God gave his Word he did not intend it to be

understood by all his people in later times: for if understanding of his Word requires a considerable background knowledge of ancient culture and customs, then this would mean that those who would lack the necessary abilities and resources (not to mention the leisure!) to gain such knowledge and who would not be privileged to be within reach of Bible teachers who would have such knowledge would inevitably be unable to understand his Word. This is to abandon the historic Reformed view of Scripture's perspicuity. Chapter I, paragraph 7 of the Westminster Confession gives eloquent expression to the meaning of the phrase 'perspicuity of Scripture':

... 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 use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

The opposite danger is to minimise the value and importance of such background knowledge as an aid to understanding God's Word. Those who hold to an extreme version of this position might even argue that it is, in principle, wrong to bring extra-biblical material to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture, for, it might be argued, Scripture is its own interpreter. But this approach is the result of a number of fallacies and misconceptions. First, there is no such thing as a 'culture free' reading of the biblical text. If we assume that we do not need to read the Scripture through the lens of ANE culture or that of the first century Jewish and Graeco-Roman world, we shall simply end up reading it through the cultural lens of *our* twenty first century world.

A striking example of this mistake can be seen in debates concerning the so called 'Pauline privilege' of 1 Corinthians 7:15. Is Paul here allowing a believer to divorce an unbelieving spouse who deserts the believer or is he saying something different? The question assumes a whole approach to marriage and divorce which is fundamentally different from that of Roman law, where desertion would usually constitute an act of divorce by the deserting spouse<sup>16</sup>. If one says that it is wrong, in principle, to bring the Roman law background to bear upon the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15, then one must say that it is equally wrong to bring the legal background of any other culture, including our own, to bear upon the interpretation of this verse. But this will mean, in effect, that it then becomes impossible to interpret the verse because it is impossible to move to some Archimedian point, outside of human culture, where one can have a culture free reading of the text.

Most of us are sufficiently practical and realistic to realise that knowledge of culture *does* affect our understanding. Why will it probably be the case that at the conference at which this paper is presented delegates and others in attendance will not be washing each other's feet? Why will it almost certainly be the case that Anglo-Saxons and their brothers in Christ from the USA at the conference will not greet one another with a holy kiss? Both of these practices are commanded in the New Testament; but we realise that these practices were the expression, in a specific cultural context, of certain enduring obligations upon the people of God. When that cultural context changes, the obligations remain but the cultural mode of fulfilling those obligations may well take different forms. Once this principle is accepted, one has accepted the legitimacy of bringing the cultural background to bear upon the interpretation of a text. It is tragically possible for churches of Jesus Christ to condemn behaviour which Scripture does not condemn or to insist on behaviour which Scripture does not command because of failure to distinguish biblical mandates from the cultural packaging in which those mandates are expressed.

Another reason why the idea that extra biblical knowledge should never be brought to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture is fundamentally mistaken flows from the fact that the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, with a small portion having been written in Aramaic. The moment one reads the Bible in any modern language, one is, in effect, relying on extra-biblical knowledge, that is, the knowledge which the translators have of the biblical languages. But that knowledge was not

gained from Scripture itself. And if one reads the Bible in the original languages, one is bringing one's personal knowledge of those languages to bear in one's reading of God's truth. But how were those languages learned? Not from the Bible!

Taking account of the historical and cultural background of Scripture does not offend against the principle of the perspicuity of God's Word. Chapter I, paragraph 7 of the Westminster Confession, which has already been quoted, begins with the words, 'All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all...' Furthermore, the paragraph speaks of the 'due use of the ordinary means' as being involved in coming to an understanding of God's Word. It is true that paragraph 9 goes on to state, 'The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself...', and it might be thought that the Westminster divines were here committing themselves to the position that extra-biblical knowledge was not to be employed in the interpretation of Scripture. But, for a number of reasons, this would be to misunderstand the paragraph. First, the paragraph states that the *infallible* rule of Scripture is the Scripture itself; this does not mean that extra-biblical material may not be of help. The real benefit of such material is that it may the better help one to use the infallible rule and to compare Scripture with Scripture. Secondly, a reading of the sermons of some of the Westminster divines soon demonstrates that they used every help to get at the meaning of the text, not least the meaning of the original languages.

It will be clear from what has just been said that, in common with the evangelical community throughout history, I believe that there is a *meaning* to the biblical text: that meaning is *not* to be identified with how the original hearers or readers understood it, for it is clear that they sometimes misunderstood what the speaker or writer was communicating (Matt. 16:5-12; 1 Cor. 5:9-11); rather, misunderstanding meant that they failed to grasp the speaker or author's *intention*. Meaning is tied very closely to authorial intent. In recent years deconstructionists have challenged this whole approach and have argued that meaning, like beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. This has been part of a wider movement of thought which, denying the subject/object distinction which lay at the heart of western Enlightenment thinking, has come to regard the world as a 'text' which may be read by different people in different ways. This leads on to the idea that claims to possess the 'true' or 'real' meaning of a text, whether that text be of a literary nature or otherwise, are, in reality, exercises or abuses of power. Detailed consideration of this issue would take us beyond the subject and title of this paper and reference should, therefore, be made to those works which have effectively, even decisively, criticised this whole approach to truth and to interpretation<sup>17</sup>. However, since it is all too easy for the interpretation of Scripture to become an exercise in power and manipulation, and since it is not uncommon for sincere believers sometimes naively to think that the Bible may mean different things to different people, a few observations on this whole matter are necessary. These observations will be found in Appendix 2 to this paper.

Understanding the meaning of a text will also require sensitivity to the literary category or genre of the literary unit in which it is found. This is an essential element in getting to grips with the *purpose* of the passage. An example may illustrate this point. Did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter? Two preachers whom I highly esteem have maintained (one in a large Christian family conference, the other in a meeting for gospel ministers) that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter because he surely could not have sacrificed her. Why not? Because it would be unthinkable for a godly man, one of Israel's deliverers, no less, to have behaved in such a way. Since the preacher at the Christian conference was drawing lessons by way of example from the incident, he maintained that Jephthah dedicated his daughter to perpetual virginity and this was why she spent two months mourning: she would never marry. One of the great lessons which the preacher drew was her submissive spirit: "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised."

The interpretation that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter is, of course, not new. Possibly the most thorough and persuasive argument ever mounted for this interpretation was that which was advanced by the great Jonathan Edwards<sup>18</sup>. I shall not go into the detailed exegetical issues which must be addressed in order to assess the relative merits of the arguments for and against the interpretation that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter; nor am I expecting or inviting you simply to agree with those who believe that he did sacrifice her. Rather, I wish to raise for consideration the whole issue of the *kind* of book that Judges is and how this might affect our understanding of the whole episode of Jephthah and his daughter. To do so it will be necessary to spend some time in a consideration of other material in the book; the benefit of doing this is that it may enable us to look at the Jephthah incident with fresh eyes and how it fits into the overall theme and message of the book of Judges.

Although the children of Israel had entered the Promised Land, it is clear that there was a lack of cohesion within the nation and that, in some respects, they were functioning as disparate tribes. There is clear conflict amongst the tribes. Furthermore, it is clear early on that things are not all that they should be: there are cycles of disobedience, chastening, repentance, the raising up of a deliverer who delivers the people from their enemies, only for the people of God to slide backwards again and for the whole cycle to be repeated. While the deliverers may rescue the people from the hands of their enemies, they are unable to rescue them from themselves. This, of course, is the real problem: not the enemy without, the Philistines, but the enemy within. Thus, the book ends with the highly significant words, 'In those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit.' The salvation of the people is bound up with having a king, and this prepares the ground for the book of Ruth, where we learn that God's long term plan was being fulfilled in the days of the judges not so much by the Gideons, Samsons, and Jephthahs of that time, but through a Moabite woman named Ruth, who marries a man from whose line will be born David. This then prepares the ground for the books of Samuel, where we read of the beginning of the Davidic dynasty. That, in turn, proves to be less than what was hoped for, but it becomes clearer and clearer in the Old Testament that great David will have a greater son, and he will be *the* deliverer.

It is in this overall context and against this background that we must understand the narratives concerning the judges, or deliverers, whom God raised up. Terrible things are happening in the book of Judges. Samson is, no doubt, a great deliverer, but he is hardly the best of role models or the man whom you might want your sister or daughter to marry! There is a sense in which moral values have degenerated into chaos in the events and people we meet in this book. The incident of the Levite and his concubine, recorded in chapter 19, makes for some of the grimmest reading in the entire Old Testament, not to mention in ancient literature in general. The people of Gibeah in Benjamin – and these are numbered amongst God's people – are no better than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 15, 22). The owner of the house, who is giving hospitality to the Levite and his concubine, behaves worse than Lot does in the similar situation recorded in Genesis 19. Rather than put his guests at the mercy of the men of Sodom (which would have been a terrible breach of the hospitality code), Lot does something which to our ears passes comprehension: he is willing, as if throwing animals to wolves, to offer his two virgin daughters to the men (Gen. 19:6-8).

But the man in Judges 19 sinks even lower: he not only offers the men his virgin daughter, but also the concubine for whom, together with the Levite, he should have provided protection (vv. 23-24). His *words* are insufficient to deal with the situation, but the Levite's *action* is: he took his concubine and sent her out to them (v. 25: what was a *Levite*, of all people, doing in having a concubine? This is another indicator that things were in a pretty parlous condition amongst the people of God). Interestingly, as events unfold, it appears that the man's daughter is not thrown out and subjected to the horrific abuse suffered by the Levite's concubine. The callous attitude with which the Levite greets his concubine the following morning (v. 28) is matched only by his macabre mutilation of her

corpse and the sending of her body parts to the twelve tribes of Israel. If this is the behaviour of a Levite, what is this telling us about the condition of the people of God?

The answer to this question is provided by the aftermath which is recorded in chapters 20-21. A kind of civil war breaks out and all but six hundred Benjamite men are slaughtered (20:46-47). The rest of the children of Israel take an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to Benjamite men (21:1). They had also taken an oath that any who failed to assemble before the LORD (at the assembly at which the oath had been taken not to give their daughters to the Benjamites) would be put to death (21:5). This is the background to the way they plan to resolve the heart-breaking dilemma that the tribe of Benjamin will not endure as a result of the Israelites' oath not to give any of their daughters in marriage to them. The Israelites discover that the people of Jabesh Gilead had not assembled with the rest of Israel before the LORD. They wipe out all the men of Jabesh Gilead and those women who were not virgins, because they had failed to assemble. This left four hundred virgins who *could* marry the Benjamites, since the people of Jabesh Gilead had not been party to the oath not to give their daughters in marriage to the Benjamites. This, however, still left two hundred men who would be without wives. The Israelites then hit upon the ingenious idea of telling the Benjamites without wives effectively to seize or kidnap women who would be dancing at the annual festival of Shiloh, and that is what happened (vv. 18-23). Here, then, is a people who should have been a light to the surrounding nations but who have sunk to such a low level that they think nothing of virtually ethnically cleansing the land of one of the tribes of God's people, nothing of arranging for women to be kidnapped that they might be married, but who are punctilious about any promise which they make.

In this overall context it makes perfect sense to see that Jephthah *did* sacrifice his daughter. As a leader he should have known that he could not just sacrifice anything to the LORD (what if an unclean animal had met him?) and that a monetary equivalent should have been given in place of his daughter (Lev. 27). But that is the whole point: things are so bad that he flagrantly violates the law of the LORD in order not to break his vow. Moral values are in chaos amongst God's people. And his daughter's supine acquiescence to his grotesque plan and behaviour is not to be seen as the rightful submission of a godly daughter to the instruction of a godly father but, rather, as the tragic consequences which flow from failure to live by the law of the LORD. Instead of using the passage to look for examples for us to follow today, this passage tells us how even the best people (the nation that has God's law) can sink into indescribable depths of depravity. Here are lessons concerning original sin writ large upon the sacred page and lessons concerning what happens when people, even God's people, depart from the law of the LORD.

If the lessons of a book such as Judges had been proclaimed instead of the milk and water diet of liberal theology that was served up in so many churches in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, then the First World War would not have come as such a shock to the people of the churches in this land nor led to the general disillusionment with 'Christianity' which followed it. Those who have grasped the message of the book of Judges will have no difficulty with understanding how some of the most cultured people<sup>19</sup> of one of Europe's most cultured nations could have been responsible for the decision to gas six million of their fellow human beings. If we use God's Word in order always to find a message of immediate, personal relevance, we may be guilty of seriously distorting the text, of failing to hear what God intends us to hear, and of not having the necessary 'world view' which we may well need in testing days.

In addition to ascertaining the literary genre of a book or passage and the purpose for which it was written, consideration needs also to be given to the question as to why different Bible writers may refer to similar incidents in quite different ways. One thinks here, for example, of the differences amongst the four Gospels and the different purposes for which they were written (Luke 1:1-4; cf. Jn.

20:30-31). The concern of the author of the books of Chronicles is clearly quite different from that of the author of the books of Samuel and Kings. Although it is all God's Word and there is, therefore, an underlying unity to the Bible's message, since God has seen fit to give his message in these diverse ways, it is an essential part of the teaching 'programme' of any church to ensure that people pick up this diversity and do not treat the different parts of Scripture in a 'flat' kind of way.

### 3. Applying the text

God's truth, to do any good, needs to be applied to us. Like a life saving medicine, it needs to be applied to us, to be assimilated into our spiritual bloodstream. This is such a huge area that I shall have to confine myself to a few brief observations before focusing on one specific area of application, namely, the use of the Bible in teaching ethics.

John Stott has helpfully likened the task of preaching to that of bridge-building<sup>20</sup>: preaching needs to relate the ancient text to the living people in the contemporary world. If the Bible is to be truly used in the Church, then it is essential that people realise that God is still speaking to them in their situations, with their joys and sorrows, temptations and trials, sins and sanctification, through that same Word which he has spoken once for all time. While the preacher must move back into the world of the ancient text in order to understand what it *said*, it is no less important for him to live in the contemporary world so that he might be clear as to what it *says* to people today. There is a sense in which true preaching will stimulate and inspire people to want to go back to the Bible themselves, to read it for themselves, once they realise just how relevant it is and how it speaks, as nothing else can speak, to their deepest needs<sup>21</sup>. There is a sense in which what has been called the problem of historical relativity should be dealt with not only by scholarly responses<sup>22</sup> but by preaching which *demonstrates* the relevance of the Bible to us today. As Spurgeon expressed it, in his own characteristic and inimitable way, 'Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion. Let it loose!'<sup>23</sup>.

I wish to turn now, however, to one particular area of the application of biblical teaching, and that is to the whole subject of difficult ethical issues.

### The Use of the Bible in Ethical Instruction

Ours is a complex world, and it frequently throws up a bewildering array of complex ethical questions and dilemmas. There are questions thrown up by the increasingly sophisticated use to which medical technology may be put, both at the very earliest stages of life as well as at the close of life. There are issues which arise for Christians in certain walks of life as a result of equality legislation, as well as age-old problems which have received fresh impetus and have become increasingly urgent as a result of terrorist activity. The United Kingdom is, possibly, characterised by greater cultural diversity today than at any point in its history. This may mean that newly converted people may bring practices or patterns of behaviour with them into the church which, in the past, were so much at odds with the *cultural* ethos of the churches that it was assumed that these things would need to be discarded as part of the baggage of the non-Christian world. But times have changed and some fine Christians wish to retain some of these practices because, they believe, there is nothing in God's Word which forbids them. One example I have come across is that of having the body tattooed. How is a church to respond to such a challenge?

What are some of the ethical issues which have to be faced today? I shall give a number of random examples. Here is a couple who cannot have children. Should they undergo fertility treatment? What if this will lead to the creation of spare embryos? Is this biblically permissible? A couple may well

consult the pastor of their church for help in this area. He may refer them to some big tome or, alternatively, to a pamphlet which deals with the issues in a fairly superficial way. But people in distress may have neither the time nor the heart to cope with a big tome nor feel that they are really helped by a pamphlet which may be more slick than scriptural in its approach. What is the pastor to say to them? What if they disagree with his understanding of Scripture? Change the presenting issue to that of remarriage after divorce. There is considerable disagreement amongst the people of God over this issue. Is a believer to be governed by the view of his pastor? What if his pastor and church leadership believe that it is not permissible but a church member comes to the view that he can remarry? Is this a subject for church discipline? Given that many godly people would agree with the church member, is it possible for the believer to be remarried without any discipline taking place, even though the leadership believes that the member has sinned? Must a believer be governed by the views of the leadership? If so, how does this differ from the Roman Catholic position on the need to bow to its authority? But if a believer is not thus to be bound, what does this mean for the whole concept of authority in a church? What is the relationship of the authority of the church to the authority of Scripture? What if the church leadership changes its mind some time later? Will biblical ethics then become similar to what one wit had said of equity and justice in the Chancery Court of the eighteenth century: 'justice varies according to the length of the Chancellor's foot!'? What light does the Bible give on these kinds of questions?

Is it ever right for a Christian to torture someone? What if the Christian works for the intelligence services of the USA? Is rendition permissible? Might he subject a terrorist suspect to such severe torture that the suspect is permanently disabled physically or loses all sanity? What if the suspect dies? Will it make any difference if the suspect is a child? Should it make any difference? And what if the believer comes to the view that extreme torture is justified (because many lives might thereby be saved) but, after the torture takes place, the agent learns that he was mistaken in his belief that the suspect was a terrorist; in fact, the suspect was perfectly innocent and this was a case of mistaken identity? Will this change the moral quality of the action that the agent has taken?

What does a Christian registrar do if two people of the same sex want a civil partnership ceremony? What does the Christian owner of a guest house do if two people of the same sex wish to share a bed for the night? Does it make any difference if it is not a guest house but a five star hotel of which the Christian is the receptionist? If there is a difference, does this feed relevant information back into the answer to the Christian registrar's dilemma?

These are *not* merely theoretical questions, the sorts of things that candidates must answer in the ethics paper of a philosophy finals examination. They are questions which have burning practical relevance to many believers and are likely to become increasingly so. Given that the Scripture is *sufficient* (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it follows that those in pastoral oversight should not only be able to give counsel on these issues but also to teach on them and, perhaps more importantly, to help God's people to see *how* the Bible addresses ethical issues. This requires more than a proof texting approach to things. It necessitates deep, hard and long reflection on the *whole* of biblical teaching.

A good example of the need to consider all the biblical teaching on an ethical issue is to be found in the case of male headship within marriage. Male headship is, it seems to me, quite clearly taught in Scripture: the so called complementarian, as opposed to what is called the egalitarian understanding is more faithful to the biblical material. But certain biblical data demand that this position be held in a nuanced way. Abram is told to listen to his wife when she tells him to get rid of Hagar (Gen. 21:8-13; Zipporah saves Moses from being killed by the LORD when she takes the initiative to circumcise their child (Exod. 4:24-26); Abigail takes initiative and even goes behind her husband's back, and thereby saves her life and prevents David from bringing about carnage which would always have tainted him when he came to the throne (1 Sam. 25); the virtuous wife considers a field and buys it

out of her earnings (Prov. 31:16); and in the area of the sexual side of marriage Paul's emphasis is on mutuality rather than headship (1 Cor. 7:1-5). God's people need to hear these nuances, else they will become unbalanced in their discipleship.

While it is a basic principle of the understanding of Scripture that we must distinguish between a *descriptive* passage and a *prescriptive* passage, some *descriptive* passages may well invite us to reflect upon the ethical issues involved. While the Bible was not given by God simply 'to be read as literature', it is undoubtedly the case that some of it is truly great literature. And much great literature surely addresses issues of profound ethical importance and invites reflection upon these issues. Indeed, in some respects literature may force one to think upon such issues more deeply than would an abstract treatise upon ethics<sup>24</sup>. In this respect, therefore, the distinction between prescriptive parts of God's Word and descriptive parts must not be employed and applied naively to mean that no ethical instruction may be gleaned from descriptive portions of Scripture. 'All Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The point of the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages is that *the way* Scripture teaches will be different for a descriptive than for a prescriptive passage.

Reference has already been made in this paper to the sexual encounter between Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. To our modern, western eyes it may well appear that neither of the characters comes out very well from the account that is given. Nevertheless, Judah's exclamation that Tamar was more righteous than he (v. 26) indicates that in this incident she is 'in the right' rather than he.<sup>25</sup> The narrative, therefore, invites us to reflect upon the whole incident and on the behaviour of the two characters. While there is nothing to commend in Judah until he makes this exclamation, what is righteous about Tamar's behaviour? Like Jacob before her, she has disguised and concealed herself to obtain what she wants; she receives payment for sexual services rendered, rendered to one who is no other than her father-in-law.

Nevertheless, she takes seriously the need for the line of her dead husband to be continued, something which was of enormous importance in Old Testament religion and about which Judah, it seems, had no concern. In a patriarchal world, here is a woman who is concerned for things that the people of God should be concerned about, even though she sets about getting them in a less than creditable way; it is a woman who ensures that the line of Judah will continue. Life may often be like this: a mixture of noble motives but ignoble means. While this passage may well constitute a warning of things to avoid (especially when set in contrast to the next chapter, where Joseph resists the advances of Potiphar's wife), what we have here are not so much examples to follow or avoid but an account of what the world – and the church! – can sometimes be like.

### **Helping God's people to feed themselves**

Each week consists of seven days of twenty four hours. Most people are only in church for a limited period of time on a Sunday and meet with God's people again once in the week. This is a very short period of time. If folk are to get maximum benefit from their Bible, then they clearly need to be reading it at other times. But how well are people able to do this? I know of not a few churches where there are believers who have long sat under very good Bible ministry but who seem utterly incapable of reading a passage and getting the main lessons from the passage. Sometimes these are highly intelligent people. Sometimes they have a good doctrinal understanding. But they seem incapable of understanding fairly straightforward passages of Scripture. Why might this be so? Or perhaps a better question is, How might this state of affairs be remedied? What practical steps can we take in our churches to help people to be able to feed themselves from Scripture, not as a



substitute for the public preaching, but as a supplement to it? Should we ensure that new Christians meet with mature believers who are able to help them get the most out of their Bible reading? Should pastoral visiting encompass this whole area? Should there be a series of meetings run each year in which church leaders give help and instruction in this area? These are questions, rather than answers. But they are questions which we must surely be asking and be thinking about: asking the right questions is necessary to getting the right answers!

## **Conclusions**

The use of the Bible in the church is a vast subject and there are many areas which I have necessarily had to neglect. One of the most important has been that of the relationship of the use of the Bible in furthering theological understanding within the church. That would justify a paper in its own right. There have been other matters which I have only been able briefly to touch upon. The conviction which has lain at the heart of this paper is that, as an army marches on its stomach so the people of God can only march into battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil as they are fed with the finest of the wheat. God has provided the wheat in his Word. It is the solemn duty of those in spiritual oversight to ensure that God's people are fed, week by week, with nourishing meals provided from that Word and given every help to feed themselves day by day with the selfsame Word. 'Who is sufficient for these things? ... But our sufficiency is of God.'

## Appendix 1: The Relationship of the Church to the Bible, with specific reference to the questions of canon and authority

I began to write this paper in December of 2010, the year in which the Pope purported to ‘beatify’ Cardinal John Henry Newman and thus begin the process whereby the late cardinal might become a ‘saint’. Newman had earlier professed an evangelical conversion and faith but, not unlike a number of prominent nineteenth century figures, then abandoned that faith for something else. In Newman’s case his new found faith was the ‘Anglo-Catholicism’ of the ‘Oxford Movement’ but he was led inexorably onwards (or should I say backwards?) in his journey and ended his days in the Church of Rome. The first step of that journey began, however, with a remark made to him by Richard Whately, later to become Archbishop of Dublin, to the effect that the Bible did not establish doctrine but proved doctrine: the Church taught the doctrine to be believed and merely used the Bible to prove that doctrine. In other words, authority was located in the Church rather than the Bible.

This remark lodged like a seed in Newman’s mind and, as it germinated, it grew in such a way that Newman moved from the evangelicalism of his youth into the Church of Rome, via the Oxford Movement as a kind of halfway staging-post. What Whately’s remark did was to disturb in Newman’s mind his understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Bible and the Church. Similarly, the defection of other erstwhile evangelicals to the Roman Catholic Church or to Eastern Orthodoxy has sometimes been due to failure properly to understand the nature of this relationship<sup>26</sup>. Since this is something which is essential for a proper understanding of the use of the Bible in the Church, I shall outline the main features of the relationship between God’s Word and God’s people. This is foundational to the substance of what has been said in this paper concerning *how* the Bible is to be used in the Church and *why* it is to be so used.

It was by God’s Word, by God speaking, that the universe came into being, and it was by God speaking, by the divine *fiat*, that the dark and formless deep became ordered and structured (Genesis 1). What God has created he also sustains by his powerful word (Heb. 1:3). Similarly, God’s people come into being through the instrumentality of his word in their lives: the spiritual life that is called into being, or to be more precise, that is called into *expression* by the instrumentality of the Word of God is likewise maintained, nurtured and developed through God’s Word. Although this is such a dominant and pervasive theme in Scripture, constraints of time and space are such that I shall have to be severely selective in the biblical material which I shall adduce to demonstrate and elucidate this point.

The great tragedy of the catastrophic fall into sin of our first parents was met by God with the first announcement of salvation and deliverance (Gen. 3:15). Adam’s second naming of his wife, with the name ‘Eve’, was surely an act of faith in the promise found in v. 15 and in the promise which is implied in the judgment pronounced in v. 16. ‘The community of faith’ was very small in Noah’s time, consisting of only eight people. Those eight people were saved as a result of Noah building an ark in obedience to God’s Word. In the case of Abram, it was the LORD’s call to him which led him to leave his homeland and to become the father of many nations. By the time of the book of Exodus it is clear that the children of Israel had lost sight of the promises of God to Abraham. The LORD raised up Moses and through him revealed the significance of the divine name and gave to his people the ‘charter’ of their salvation and of their corporate life as the people of God. In all of these situations the Word of God logically (and theologically), as well as chronologically preceded the coming into being of the people of God. When the priests, whose task it was to teach the people, departed from the faith, thereby leading the people astray (‘like priest, like people’), the LORD raised up prophets to call the people back to himself and to the old paths which he had laid down through Moses. The

covenant community was not only called into being through the instrumentality of the Word of God; its life was also to be ordered, corrected and checked, and maintained and sustained through that Word.

The same pattern can be seen in the New Testament. Whether it is Jesus calling his first disciples or then teaching them, or whether it is the great ingathering of the 'firstfruits' of the 3000 on the Day of Pentecost, the missionary activities of Paul, or the charge to men like Timothy to preach God's Word to his imperilled people, the principle discernible in the Old Testament is as visible in the New: the faith of the people of God is called into exercise by the Word of God and that life is then nurtured through ongoing exposure to God's Word.

In terms of the relationship between the Word of God and the people of God this means that the Word *precedes* the Church, both logically and chronologically: the Word of God is not the Word of God because the Church *confers* authority upon it, for the Church would not exist, in the first place, if God had not first called her into being by his Spirit and through his Word. This, surely, is the thrust of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7. It was through the gospel that the church at Corinth was brought into being. Although Paul is at pains to stress that what he preached was the gospel which the other apostles preached and was part of what might be called the 'apostolic tradition'<sup>27</sup>, his anathema in Galatians 1:8-9 surely entails the proposition that if the 'Church' or any representative of the Church preach any gospel other than the authentic gospel, the gospel that God had revealed and which Paul had preached, that 'gospel' is to be rejected. The gospel stands over the church because, as Paul so movingly writes in Galatians, the gospel was revealed by Jesus Christ (1:11-24). Though he were an apostle, the Bereans still checked Paul's teaching against the Old Testament Scriptures and, in this, they are regarded as being more noble than the Thessalonians (Acts 17:11).

The gospel, of course, is of foundational and primary importance in the New Testament revelation: the 'therefores' which ground so many of the New Testament ethical imperatives in the gospel indicatives demonstrate that much New Testament revelation which might not be regarded as 'the gospel', if one understands that term in a narrow sense, is, nevertheless, organically related to the gospel and is part of the larger 'gospel revelation'. By the time of the book of Revelation most of the seven churches which are addressed by the risen, reigning Lord are in a condition of some measure of spiritual decline. That decline can only be arrested as the churches respond to the revelation given to them by the risen Lord through his exiled servant. Authority, therefore, resides in God's Word and that Word, like the saving work to which it testifies, is a completed and final revelation; it is 'the faith once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3). The Church must live under that Word and be corrected by it. When the Church falls into parlous spiritual decline, the only way for it to be recovered and restored is by hearing and heeding the timeless message of God's Word.

This means that the biblical and evangelical statement of the nature of the relationship of the Bible to the Church is fundamentally different from that of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic position is that the Magisterium of the Church lays down what is to be believed and it is to be believed *because* the Church teaches it. Thus the Church teaches that certain books are to be received as God's Word. In effect and in practice this means that it is the Church which *confers* authority on the Bible. It also lays down that certain traditions upon which it will pronounce are also to be received as true and authoritatively binding. By contrast, the evangelical position is that inspired Scripture is, *because it is inspired Scripture*, God's holy Word and is true and authoritative. The Church *recognised* the fact that certain books were inspired Scripture whereas other books, even though useful in their own way, were not part of the canon of Scripture. The former position puts the Church above the Bible; the latter puts the Church beneath the Bible<sup>28</sup>. Augustine's memorable statement that he would not have believed the gospel had he not been moved thereto by the authority of the Catholic Church needs to be understood in the context in which that remark

was made: Augustine was not saying that the Church had the authority to determine what was or was not God's Word; rather, as a matter of *historical fact and historical enquiry*, what the Church said about the nature of the Bible was a vital piece of evidence for Augustine<sup>29</sup>.

The upshot of what has been said thus far is that the Church can never be, and must not therefore attempt to be in 'control' of the Bible or in any way to domesticate it for its own purposes and ends; rather, the Bible is always to be in control of the Church and is constantly to be renewing and transforming it into the image of Christ. In this connection we need to be very careful in our understanding of what Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:15: 'the church... is the pillar and ground of the truth'. J.N.D. Kelly's comments on the verse deserve careful consideration: 'We should note (a) that *buttress* is probably a more accurate rendering of the Greek *hedraioma* (nowhere else found) than "foundation" or "ground" (AV), and (b) that the local church is described as a *pillar*, etc., not "the pillar, etc.", because there are many local churches throughout the world performing this role'<sup>30</sup>. It is, therefore, the task of each church, just as it was of Timothy, to 'guard the good deposit that is entrusted' to it and to hold it forth to a needy world. This is what the images of buttress and pillar denote.

## **Appendix 2: Do meaning and authorial intention exist?**

First, as has frequently been pointed out, deconstructionism is self-defeating: those writers who espouse deconstructionism expect their readers to understand what they are writing and are at pains to deal with misunderstanding of their writings. But this assumes that there is an understanding which corresponds to a meaning and the meaning is what the author was intending to convey. In effect, deconstructionism is the ultimate use of power to grant one a privileged position, since deconstructionist writers are, in effect, saying that there is no authorial intention *except in their writings*. In other words, the emperor has no clothes<sup>31</sup>! Secondly, commitment to authorial intent does not mean that meaning is 'flat'; meaning may be richly textured, and one may discover different aspects of that meaning on different occasions. The all-important word here, however, is 'discover'; the meaning is already in the text, and the reader discovers that meaning and different facets of it rather than uses the text as a springboard or base from which effectively to invent meaning.

In the third place, rejection of a deconstructionist approach does not mean that one must necessarily be committed to a naive subject/object dichotomy, where one assumes that one reads the text as a neutral observer. Thiselton's work, in which he refers to the horizon of the text and that of the reader and of the need to 'fuse' the two horizons, is surely important at this point<sup>32</sup>. We *do* come to texts with various life experiences behind us which may well mean that we read the text through a particular lens; the reading of the text has an effect upon us, so that when we come the next time to the text, the lens through which we read it has been modified somewhat. Indeed, the effects of sin in our lives may well mean that, at times, we fail to hear some things aright but as we grow in holiness we may then see and hear things to which, hitherto, we had been blind and deaf.

In this connection, some people who may well lack the exegetical skills which are essential to anyone who teaches God's Word may, by virtue of their life experiences, have far greater insight into the meaning of some passages of Scripture than those who have those exegetical skills but whose experience is more limited. An illiterate Christian suffering in a Nazi concentration camp might well have had greater insight into what was Job's problem and dilemma than an Old Testament scholar sitting in the comfort of his study and oblivious to the misery and suffering which others were experiencing. An infertile woman might have an understanding of the anguish of Hannah and of Rachel, in their desire for children, far greater than that a pastor and wife with a large family. What

all of this means is that to get at the meaning of a text one must both *distance* oneself from the text, in order to ascertain what it meant in its original context, *and* read the text with sympathy and enter into it.

The nature of authorial intention is, of course, more complex when we consider the Bible than when we read any other book, because there is both the divine author and the human author. *Whose* intention is being sought by the interpreter: God's or the human author's? Putting the question in this way implies that the two intentions may not be entirely congruent. This surely follows from the fact that God is omniscient, whereas even inspired human authors are not. Thus, when God announced that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head, he knew exactly who the seed of the woman would be, how the serpent's head would be crushed, and how the heel of the serpent's destroyer would be bruised. But it does not follow that Moses knew all this when he wrote it down. Indeed, Romans 16:25-26 indicates that, although the revelation of the mystery which had been hidden for long ages was in the prophetic writings, it is only *now* – that is, the eschatological 'now' brought about by the coming of Christ – that what was in the prophetic writings is made known. Life and immortality are certainly in the Old Testament but it was only with the resurrection of Christ that they were 'brought to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10).

Revelation is, therefore, progressive. Just as someone who reads a 'whodunit' may miss some of the clues on a first reading but, on having it all explained and disclosed in the final chapter, will then pick up the clues on a second reading, so, as those upon whom the end of the ages has come, we shall inevitably see more, and see more clearly, things in the Old Testament than were seen by the Old Testament saints. This is not to deny that they were justified by faith, just as we are (Rom. 4), nor that they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah (Jn. 8:56; 12:41), nor that the life of faith is, in principle, the same in all generations (Heb. 11); it is to say, however, that with the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the coming of Christ, things are now seen with greater clarity. When preaching on Old Testament materials, the preacher needs *both* to ground his exposition in the historical context and place in redemptive history in which the passage is located *and*, since it is God's Word which is being expounded, to bring out the divine intention which lies behind the words. In other words, although the preacher must engage in the hard work of grammatico-historical, biblical exegesis and biblical theology, he is to bring God's message to the living people before him in the contemporary world, people who are *not* located in the world of the Old Testament and in that particular place in redemptive history, but who are people upon whom the end of the ages has come and who live the other side of the climactic fulfilment of the law and the prophets in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, vital also to consider the nature of the Church and the relationship of the Bible to the Church. Misunderstanding of the relationship between the two has led, over the years, to a steady stream of evangelicals converting to Rome. Since this issue does not receive the attention today which it once received

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in evangelical polemics, (polemical theology being decidedly out of fashion!) and because it touches matters of fundamental importance, I have devoted an appendix to this paper, in which I seek to set out the reasons for insisting on the logical and theological, as well as chronological priority of the Word of God to the Church of God, and for maintaining that God's authority is exercised *primarily* through his Word, which stands over his church, rather than the Roman Catholic belief that authority resides in the Church, which then confers authority on Holy Scripture and sacred Tradition. The importance of the issue is such that it could not be neglected in this paper, but to deal with it in the body of the paper would have been a distraction from the main issues which need to be addressed.

<sup>2</sup> I first came across these words about twenty five years ago and quote them here from memory. I have been unable to track down and locate the source.

<sup>3</sup> It is a shrewd observation of John Stott, in his *Bible Speaks Today Commentary on Romans*, when he says that for all the erudition displayed by Sanders, Stott feels that perhaps Sanders knows more about Second Temple Judaism than he does of the human heart.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Perriman and my critique of it in *Foundations*.

<sup>5</sup> Stott 1970

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>7</sup> Jn. 5:39-40. The first verb in v.39, variously translated as 'diligently study', 'search' could be indicative or imperative. As Carson indicates, the context demands the indicative: Carson, 1991, 263

<sup>8</sup> Tozer

<sup>9</sup> Olyott, 5

<sup>10</sup> The arguments for the position that these verses refer to singing that took place in the gatherings of the church at Colosse are helpfully set out by Moo, 285-290

<sup>11</sup> See Hodge, 470-485

<sup>12</sup> S.R. Driver called it 'a speech of singular pathos and beauty' and J. Skinner describes it as 'the finest specimen of dignified and persuasive eloquence in the OT'. Both are quoted by Wenham, 425.

<sup>13</sup> Sternberg, 308

<sup>14</sup> Owen

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205

<sup>16</sup> Such an act of desertion was known as *repudium*. Reference should be made to *repudium* in the standard works on Roman law and the Roman law of marriage. In particular, see Buckland; Corbett; Nicholas.

<sup>17</sup> See Beale, 2008, 223-260; Carson, 1996; Clark, 133-164, 353-418; Vanhoozer.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, 734-737

<sup>19</sup> Reinhard Heydrich, Himmler's deputy, is described by Rees as 'both a man of culture and a mass murderer': Rees, third photograph, next to plate facing 144

<sup>20</sup> Stott, 1982, 135-178

<sup>21</sup> D.M. Lloyd-Jones maintained very strongly that one of the great purposes of preaching was to 'inspire', that this was more important than imparting information: see Lloyd-Jones 1978, 6. This was also the position of one of his great spiritual mentors, Jonathan Edwards: see Lloyd-Jones 1987, 360, 369; Edwards, 391, 394

<sup>22</sup> One very fine scholarly response is that of Hughes, 173-194

<sup>23</sup> I am quoting here from memory, and have been unable to locate the original source.

<sup>24</sup> The Greek tragedies and Shakespeare's tragedies are monumental examples of this. On the whole area of literature and ethics, see Nussbaum

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<sup>25</sup> As Wenham points out, 'Her prosecutor acknowledges that he is the guilty party, not she... Judah declares her innocence and admits his own guilt.' Wenham, 369.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Vanauken, 225-226

<sup>27</sup> The Greek term translated, 'I passed on to you' (*paredoka*) 'is a technical term in Judaism for the oral transmission of religious instruction' (Fee, 499, note 29) and carries the idea of passing on what had become established teaching or authentic tradition.

<sup>28</sup> On the Roman Catholic view of the canon of Scripture and the normative character of tradition, see the *Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures in Trent, Tridentine* para II, *Vatican II*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> See Warfield, 442-445

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, 88

<sup>31</sup> For a brilliant expose of the vacuity of post modern ways of thinking, see Bricmont

<sup>32</sup> Thiselton



# Preaching the Word in the Power of the Holy Spirit

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The main purpose of this essay is to focus attention on 'the Power of the Holy Spirit' but to do so without selling short what is properly involved in 'Preaching the Word'. We will therefore consider our subject by way of biblical, historical and theological reflections before thinking about it pastorally. No one who stands in the Reformed tradition should be able to think about a way forward for the church on any matter without first going 'back to the Bible' with regard to it but then also examining the inheritance transmitted in the church on the subject. That is what has been attempted in this paper. Each step in the argument presented is followed by a conclusion, printed in italics and numbered for ease of reference in subsequent discussion.

## Back to the Bible

Three truths that are laid down in the opening chapters of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians provide us with parameters for our study. They are echoed elsewhere in both Testaments, and in various ways. Hopefully, they still find general acceptance among us. They are,

- (i) the divinely given assignment to preach the gospel-word is essential not peripheral to its effectiveness (1Cor. 1:18; 2:1-3) and
- (ii) the preaching of that Word will not achieve its divinely intended result without the fertilizing, edifying ministry of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 3:6-8) and
- (iii) the intended result is the building of the church, a garden-shrine for God (1 Cor. 3:9-15).

Summarizing the argument of that letter, Calvin writes,

[Paul] shows in what estimation the ministers of the gospel ought to be held – that the honour given to them does not in any degree detract from the glory that is due to God – ... as all are his servants; all are mere instruments; he alone imparts efficacy and from him proceeds the entire result. He shows them at the same time what they ought to have as their aim – to build up the church.<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul gives special attention to the Christian Ministry in what has been described as a parenthesis in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (see 2:12-7:4). In that section there is a passage which contains more detailed perspectives for our subject and it is set out below for convenience. The expressions in it that are material for our study have been bolded.

Therefore having **this ministry** by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's word, but by **the open statement of the truth** we would commend ourselves **to everyone's conscience in the sight of God**. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing **the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God**. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' has shone in our hearts to give the **light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that **the surpassing power** belongs to God and not to us (2 Cor. 4:1-7, ESV).

Four matters can be identified which provide a specific foundation for our task namely:

## **1. 'This ministry'**

Although the apostle Paul does not use the word 'covenant' in the section quoted, that is what he has in mind by the use of the demonstrative adjective. He has just referred to two covenants and their respective ministries; one made with Israel at Sinai and the other being the new covenant. He has done so largely by way of stark contrast. He regards his ministry as that of 'the new covenant' or 'of the Spirit' which gives life (see 3:6) and not that of 'the old [covenant]' (see 3:14) which brings death because it is 'of the letter' (of the law).

The sharp distinction made by such negative language should not however be regarded as a complete description of the old covenant or as a denial of any harmony between it and the new covenant. Paul used such diametrically opposed expressions because of the situation in the church of Corinth to which he was writing.<sup>2</sup> It was the seemingly ever-present Jewish pressure to comply with the prescriptions of the old covenant over against, or in addition to, the gospel, as essential for obtaining acceptance with God that required an unambiguous declaration to be made that the old covenant would be a means of death and condemnation if it were regarded as *only* a covenant of law promising life for perfect obedience. Of course the old covenant was not only that (and the apostle will make that clear shortly) but its ability to give the life it promised was something that had to be denied in order that the terms of gospel righteousness might be clearly maintained.

### **Conclusion 1**

*There is need today for such an unambiguous differentiation between law and gospel and not only between Protestants on the one hand and Roman Catholics and Orthodox on the other, but also among those that are Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist.<sup>3</sup> Such discriminating and definitive handling of the law and the gospel is the necessary basis and distinctive character of preaching the word in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

## **2. The light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ**

The new covenant, however, does have its old covenant precursors. These are not merely ideas that are common to both – for example creation, covenant (law and promise), mercy and judgment – which could be regarded as just picture language, but actual Old Testament texts are mentioned in one way or another by the apostle. This is proved by Genesis 1:3 being quoted in 4:6, Moses being referred to in 3:12, allusions to Jeremiah 31: 31-34 and to Ezekiel 37 being necessarily made by means of the term 'covenant' and Psalm 116 being cited a little later in 4:13. Such references point to the fact that the 'old covenant' era was not destitute of redemptive truth and of authentic spiritual experience. What is more, it indicates that the new covenant whose ministry we are considering is every bit a divine arrangement or relationship with human beings as is the old. But Jesus Christ is the image of God, and so is the 'light' and 'glory' of the new covenant. The term 'image' refers to a representation that corresponds exactly to its counterpart. Light and glory refer to disclosure and, consequently, to knowledge. 'Glory' characterizes both covenants but the new has a 'greater glory' than that of the old. The term 'glory' is related to revelation.<sup>4</sup> A working definition of it would be 'someone revealed by something' and an examination of any verse in which it occurs would show who is being disclosed and by what. It is used of man as well as God; for example,

wealth or grey hair reveal something about man, just as the universe or the cross different things about God.

Wherever and however the term 'glory' is used of God in Scripture a basic harmony exists across the board because God is one. This means that the same God is revealed in each covenant but he reveals more of himself in the new than the old. Both concern righteousness, but the old records the kind of righteousness that each Israelite should furnish (but only the true Israelite could undertake) and the new reveals the righteousness that is found 'in the face [person] of Jesus [the] Christ' who is 'the image of God'. This good news brings 'light' and liberty from condemnation and increasing likeness to God for all who cannot keep the law but turn to 'the Lord who is the Spirit'. Having this 'greater glory' the new covenant is 'better' than the old.<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion 2**

*The written word of God that is to be preached is therefore any portion of either the Old or the New Testaments in its proper relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate and redemptive word, to whom the Spirit always bears witness. This requires the use of a redemptive-historical hermeneutic but that is not sufficient to qualify preaching as truly Christian. Jesus of Nazareth must be presented and proclaimed as the Christ of God and not just pointed out as the terminus ad quem of the sermon text.*

## **3. The open statement of the truth... to the conscience**

The spirit of truly Christian preaching is 'confidence' (3:4) and 'hope [expectation]' (3:12) that the gospel message will enliven and enlighten. This inevitably impacts proclamation, producing 'plainness of speech' (3:12) or boldness. This is in striking contrast to the ministry of Moses who, after seeing and being affected by the glory of Sinai, concealed that brightness from the Israelites because they drew back in fear, and so they did not have the benefit of seeing that the glory was fading (that is, it was temporary).

By contrast the Christian preacher not only 'tells [the truth] as it is' but also as it always will be – even though the greatness of this new covenant relationship is not perceived by many. Far from indicating that there is any failure in the new covenant, such a reaction is due to a human aversion that is the result of Satan's opposition. What is more, he addresses that truth to the hearer's conscience *coram deo*. The preacher stands before God and so speaks that he brings his hearers there too. He does so knowing that the truth will, to some degree, register its authenticity in every hearer – whatever the result will be. To speak for God does require careful and accurate handling of texts but also the consciousness of being God's spokesman (see 2 Cor. 2:17, 5:20).

## **Conclusion 3**

*The Greek word that is translated 'boldness' or 'plainness of speech' is a term that sums up the spirit of the New Covenant. It is used of address to human beings by way of witnessing/preaching (see Acts 4:13) and access to God in prayer and praise (see Eph. 3:12) and even appearing before him in eternity (see 1 Jn. 2:29).*

## **4. The surpassing power [of] God**

No preacher is left without divine assistance in the privilege and responsibility of speaking for God in Christ. The all-surpassing glory of the new covenant (3: 9-10) includes a similar plenitude of power

for its ministry (4:7). The apostle Paul frequently used superlative terms to describe the greatness of Jesus Christ and the resources that are available to the Christian and hence to the preacher. And he did this most notably when he wrote from prison, where glory and grace did not diminish but rather the reverse! In this realm hyperbole is reality! There is always something more, something beyond what has been received from the Lord, to enable further service for his praise. It is not possible for humans to measure the riches and the power of God. What applies to the length, breadth, depth and height of God's love in Christ is also true of his power.

#### **Conclusion 4**

*The power in preaching the covenant of grace and glory, sealed by Christ in his death, is therefore not due to human reason or rhetoric. It is manifested in someone and in something unimpressive from the world's standards and so easily dismissed. But clay pots contain heavenly treasure and exhibit divine power.*

#### **The Here and Now**

In recent decades the ministry of preaching has thankfully been regaining its proper place in many churches after a long period when it was marginalized and even forfeited by the combined forces of liberal theology and secular communication theory.<sup>6</sup> As part of this recovery of preaching, much has been written about the importance of a hermeneutic that is appropriate to the character of Holy Scripture and also of a homiletic adapted to the preacher's audience.<sup>7</sup> This distinction between hermeneutics and homiletics is often not appreciated by (would-be) preachers and that failure results in preaching that is too didactic and not at all prophetic. But correct interpretation and contemporary proclamation are two essential components of authentic preaching.<sup>8</sup> They correspond to John Stott's description of preaching as a bridge that connects the two banks of a river namely the worlds of Scripture and of contemporary hearers.<sup>9</sup>

Fuelling this renewal has been the recovery of a true biblical theology which looks at a text in its time-space slot in redemptive history and revelation. This is not the Biblical Theology movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, associated with the names of G.E. Wright or John Bright, that saw revelation as event but not word, in keeping with the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Instead it harks back to the work of Geerhardus Vos around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also extends to include the whole of the canonical text and not only the parts of it that record a divine encounter.<sup>10</sup> The late Ed Clowney had a profound influence at the two Westminster in this very area.<sup>11</sup> As a result, preaching classes have been given more prominence in the curriculum of seminaries and workshops in conferences have become popular. There is a new eagerness to 'preach the [whole] word' by the time-honoured method of *lectio continua* and a confidence as to how to do so in a way that does not amount to Spurgeon's mischievous witticism: 'ten thousand, thousand are their texts but all their sermons one'.

But in all this there has been what we will call a striking oversight, namely that not much explicit and concentrated attention has been given to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in such literature, and *certainly not to his power*. Numerous biographical studies of individual preachers have been published which have done so in connection with 'seasons of refreshing' but these do not carry as much weight as they should (one suspects) with those who are driven by the importance of exegetical accuracy and contemporary relevance. In this long-overdue attention that is being given to Holy Scripture, has the Holy Spirit been forgotten?

Sinclair Ferguson makes a remarkable comment on this matter in his preface to his book on the Holy Spirit. Recalling student days, he records that whenever an address or lecture was to be given on the Holy Spirit it would usually begin with the remark that ‘the Holy Spirit was, until recently, the “forgotten” person of the Godhead’. But no longer! Such days were past and gone because of the rise and growth of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement. But he then went further and claimed that the adjective ‘forgotten’ was not adequate as a description of the relation between the 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian/the church and the Holy Spirit. Instead he regarded the adjective ‘unknown’ as more accurate than ‘forgotten’ because the ‘new’ familiarity with the work of the Spirit did not extend to knowledge of him *as a Person*. Ferguson says that ‘the Spirit *himself* remains to many Christians an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being’.<sup>12</sup> If he is right (and he usually is!) then the situation is worse than is implied by the word ‘forgotten’.

Two recently-published collections of essays by a number of international preachers and teachers provide examples of what we are calling (somewhat euphemistically) an ‘oversight’. 1986 saw the publication of a number of most useful essays on *Preaching* edited by Samuel T. Logan Jr.<sup>13</sup> to which he contributed an essay on what makes preaching truly ‘an event’. It is entitled ‘*The Phenomenology of Preaching*’ but there is no essay specifically on preaching and pneumatology.<sup>14</sup> Logan does make a one-sentence acknowledgment in his essay that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is needed, but there is nothing more, nothing that refers to ‘*the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*’ (see 1 Cor. 2:4). In 1995 another collection appeared with the title ‘*When God’s Voice is heard*’.<sup>15</sup> It opens with two essays which deal with the sufficiency of Scripture and preaching the whole Bible and the authors, both Australians, make no reference at all to the Holy Spirit. A want of reference and absence of treatment is found in other similar books on both sides of the Atlantic. In so many of them another chapter needs to be written.

By contrast, Spurgeon has a chapter on ‘The Ministry of the Holy Spirit’ in his *Lectures To My Students* – and he did not ignore the practicalities of the task in that well-known work! Going further back to the very beginning of Puritan preaching (‘plain speaking and close dealing’) William Perkins defines the act of preaching as ‘the hiding of human wisdom and the demonstration or the manifestation of the Spirit’.<sup>16</sup> (Why did Perkins describe preaching as ‘prophesying’?) John Stott concludes his study of preaching which originally bore the title *I Believe in Preaching* with a section on ‘The Power of the Holy Spirit’. Lloyd-Jones majored on the subject in his lectures at Westminster, Philadelphia and there is a chapter in *Preaching and Preachers*<sup>17</sup> with the title ‘Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power’. More recently Al Mohler has sounded the same note and done so in relation to our postmodern culture.<sup>18</sup>

The question can therefore be raised as to whether, in the campaign to restore the whole Bible as the ‘word’ for preaching, there has been a tendency to take the ministry of the Holy Spirit for granted. If that is so, how should that assumption be regarded? Can anything be said for it? Yes. We think that something can and should be said and it will be in a moment. But *something else* should also be said, and the concern that this might be forgotten instead of being restored to prominence in all appropriate ways and places is what animates this paper. There is not much of an emphasis at all on praying for the Holy Spirit’s power to descend on the ministry of the word and on the preacher and hearer alike. This is a tell-tale sign. Is this superfluous now that we have the whole Bible and the skills to interpret any passage in it? Or is it doctrinally unacceptable? These are uncomfortable questions but they have to be faced by those who uphold written Scripture as the Word of God: Is the Holy Spirit ‘forgotten’ or ‘unknown?’ Is his presence and activity taken for granted and so is it being minimised?

Interestingly, Jay Adams has recently written a little book entitled 'Preaching According to the Holy Spirit'.<sup>19</sup> Its origin is similar to T. David Gordon's book *Why Johnny Can't Preach*<sup>20</sup> namely a concern on account of poor, boring preaching, but Adams expresses dissatisfaction with books on homiletics as well! Using Matthew 10:19-20 and its synoptic parallels (a text only for likely martyrs?), Adams highlights 'the what, the how and the when' of preaching as the concerns of the Holy Spirit and he backs up his argument with reference to the material in the Acts of the Apostles. All that this little book needs to be complete is the recognition that there are degrees of power to be associated with the Holy Spirit's activity on preacher and hearer alike.

## Light from the Past

There are five points of reference for our subject that we ought to bear in mind. The first two are wholly positive; the next two are of indirect benefit in that they provoke at least strong reservations. The last is a bit like the proverbial curate's egg. It is therefore arguable whether our age is the best or the worst of times for considering our subject but that is a theoretical matter compared with 'the need of the times'.

In favour of its being 'the best of times' are the following two facts:

### a) The Corpus of Holy Scripture has been determined

The sixty six books of the bible were firmly recognized as the written word of God in the Christian Church in the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The thirty nine books of the Old Testament were endorsed at the Council of Jamnia after 70 A.D. and the rabbis excluded the Apocryphal books from that list. In a similar way, that is by the testimony of the Spirit validating certain books in the consciousness of churches, the twenty seven books of our New Testament were endorsed as the Word of God at the Council of Carthage in 397 B.C. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Lutheran and Anglican churches recognised Apocryphal books as being acceptable for 'example of life and instruction of manners' but Genevan churches did not. No reformed tradition therefore recognised them as part of the church's rule of faith.

## Conclusion 5

*Extra-canonical books may be of interest and use to biblical scholars but they should **not** be regarded as part of 'the Word' to be preached from, and certainly not be given any decisive weight in relation to any Christian doctrine or the relationship between Scripture and the Spirit.*

### b) The Divine Personhood of the Holy Spirit has been confessed

The personhood of the Holy Spirit was expressed in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in 381 A.D along with that of the Father and of the Son in the Godhead. The relevant words are 'the Lord and Giver of Life who, together with the Father and the Son, is to be worshipped and glorified'. The full 'membership' of the Spirit in the Holy Trinity therefore does not need to be established as a point of doctrine today but it does need to be understood (in so far as possible) and strongly maintained in both worship and preaching.<sup>21</sup>

God is a tri-unity of persons. Each person of the Godhead acts in coherence with the other two (*circumincessio*) or the unity of the Godhead would be destroyed. There cannot be any competitiveness between them. God is a God of *shalom*. No person therefore acts (or could act) in an idiosyncratic way. But each person acts freely and sovereignly, that is when, where and how he

wills and this freedom entails acting with varying degrees of power to effect a purpose that is also shared equally by the others. Although a specific task is predicated of each person in creation and redemption the other two are neither uninterested nor inactive in those same acts.<sup>22</sup>

In the Creed just mentioned the Spirit is also designated as the one 'who spoke by the prophets'. This early formal connection between the Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Spirit via the prophets pointed to the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament era. This was perhaps due to the church's wish to reject a Marcionite excision from the New Testament of anything to do with the Old, a fear of sects – for example Montanism – or more probably to its desire to veto Arian or Semi-Arian exegesis of the Old Testament.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion 6**

*The Spirit and the Word are therefore not on the same plane of reality. The former is God; the latter is not, seeing as it is the product of the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This means that the Spirit is as free and sovereign in his activity as is both the Father and the Son, and that the Word that is his product is also his instrument. He remains the agent.*<sup>24</sup>

In favour of its being '*the worst of times*' is the unavoidable fact that the elements of the heritage just referred to have been progressively and largely squandered in the last three hundred years or so. Although they were never without a challenge of some sort, for example the recognition of extra-biblical tradition in the Eastern and Roman Catholic churches, whether written or oral, and the growing detachment of Spirit from Word in Quakerism and Romanticism, revisionist movements have arisen with regard to them in churches that owe their existence to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. These movements have had considerable influence and so the Protestant world has been considerably altered in its belief, character and internal alignments. These movements are:

#### **a) With regard to Holy Scripture**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Enlightenment built on Kant's denial of any one-to-one connection between the meaning of Scripture's texts and the supernatural realm. The books of the bible became human (rather than divine-human) products and so their trustworthiness was made subject to human verification and their value dependent on human approval. The result, as is well known, was that the *sola scriptura* principle became threatened and was progressively abandoned. Attempts that were made to stem the tide in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the Continent by Hengstenberg, Krummacher, Keil & Delitzsch and Oehler met with little success, whereas Warfield and Machen and others were more successful in the States.

In the decades after the Second World War a neo-evangelical movement arose which restricted the infallibility of the Bible to matters of faith and conduct, centred on Fuller Theological Seminary. By way of reaction to this an International Council of Biblical Inerrancy was founded in 1978 in which the term 'inerrancy' was used so that the full scope of the term 'infallibility' might be maintained. In arguing this case great emphasis (understandably) was placed on the Holy Spirit's work in verbal inspiration that resulted in the inner harmony of the contents of Scripture, and addresses that were given at its congresses were published during the ten years or so of its existence. It was terminated in 1986 because of the realisation that the debate was not only over the text but with interpretative methods of it. The Chicago Statement marked the conclusion of this necessary enterprise. However plans are currently being made for its resurgence – due to the same sort of reasons that brought it into being in the first place!

## b) With regard to the Holy Spirit

Two 20<sup>th</sup> century movements need to be brought into the picture here, namely the Ecumenical Movement and the Charismatic Movement. The former had a 19<sup>th</sup> century precursor in the World Student Christian Federation and the latter was an outgrowth of older Pentecostal denominations. Both gained significance in the years following the Second World War.

The Ecumenical Movement may be said to have begun in 1910 with a concern about the great hindrance posed to the church's mission by her dividedness. In the years before 1939 it added a social dimension to its missionary vision but each of these retained its distinctiveness until 1970. Since then a larger multi-religious and socio-economic preoccupation has replaced the pursuit of a worldwide ecclesiastical union between the churches based on the settlement of doctrinal differences. In this movement the Spirit's ministry has been effectively disconnected from the production of Holy Scripture and from bearing unique testimony to the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ. Instead the Spirit is linked with a zeitgeist composed of an all-embracing ecclesiastical tradition, a pursuit of social justice and the religious awareness of non-Christian religions.<sup>25</sup>

The Charismatic Movement originated in the mid-1960s. Although it was distinct from the Pentecostal denominations, it had elements in common with them – for example, a two-stage understanding of the work of the Spirit being necessary for every Christian, evidenced by *glossolalia*. From a psychological and sociological perspective, this movement may be considered as a result of the break-up of the structures of family, community and ecclesiastical life due to the Second World War. Elevating the importance of the individual, it caught on and soon swamped those earlier forms of Pentecostalism and the Christian Brethren. It even infiltrated the Ecumenical Movement, producing renewal movements in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions. It has now morphed into a kaleidoscope of opinion and activity which has challenged profoundly the theologies and worship practices of many church traditions, but its main feature is its emphasis on the experience(s) of the individual Christian.

J.I. Packer addressed this charismatic phenomenon in his volume on the Spirit.<sup>26</sup> He makes the same basic emphasis as Ferguson does, namely that the Spirit is knowable but not as well known as he should be. Speaking somewhat imprecisely, the aim of this book was to bring an orthodox pneumatology to bear on charismatic pneumatology by way of biblical exegesis and theological evaluation. There is an immense amount of soundest sense in these pages but not that much on the preaching task. His views on that are, of course, well known and are found elsewhere.

Gerald Bray points out that a focus on the Spirit's work to the neglect of that of the Father and the Son in certain forms of the charismatic movement makes it,

difficult to tell what connection these [experiences] have with the gospel message of sin, righteousness and judgment. If nothing outside the self really matters, if it is what I feel and experience that gives me the assurance that I am on the right track, then no objective criteria will be allowed to interfere with my judgment. This attitude is common in certain charismatic circles, and it is the result of ignoring the Trinitarian context of the Spirit's promises and work. Its inadequacy can be seen in its fundamental self-centeredness and its tendency to reduce the knowledge of God to a series of unusual human experiences that have no obvious purpose beyond themselves.<sup>27</sup>



Something of relevance to our subject ought to be learned from these movements because they have forfeited the uniqueness of Holy Scripture and of the Holy Spirit, and also the proper relationship between them. How many times did one hear in theological faculties 'The Bible is a book like any other book'? How often has the Spirit been connected with the stirrings of the human spirit and neither with the text of the Bible or with its central focus, the Christ of God? A morass of intellectualism and mysticism, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism and, of late, environmentalism has broken the connection between the Spirit of Truth and the text of Scripture and the Spirit of Christ and that of Man. Mercifully, Holy Scripture exists and the Holy Spirit is still active. The former is definable in the sense that it consists of specific texts but alarmingly the work of the Holy Spirit is not as easily discernible to many Christians. The question as to how to differentiate between the Spirit and the 'spirits' would not occur to many people, let alone the answer to it – and that in spite of the New Testament's description of the Spirit as being 'true' and 'holy'!

### **Conclusion 7**

*Preaching lost its supreme place in the church because the church lost the Bible. Consequently the church forfeited the power of the Spirit and lost her influence in the world. The pulpit, the pew and the pavement are never as far apart as they may be spatially. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, will never marginalise the Bible and exalt the Church, nor will he minimise the Lord Jesus Christ by drawing attention to himself. Nor will he deny the universal fallenness of human beings.*

### **c) With regard to the Holy Spirit in relation to Holy Scripture**

There is one other matter from the past that must not be overlooked. It is the position established as a result of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation which correlated Word and Spirit in such a decisive and definitive way that B. B. Warfield could say of Calvin that he was 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit'<sup>28</sup> and the late John Murray could write that 'The Word and the Spirit was the keynote of the Reformation. This was the legacy of Protestantism.'<sup>29</sup> The written Word was the product of the living Spirit who still spoke by means of it. The Scriptures were therefore the Spirit's voice, as is demonstrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews by the use of the present tense 'says' instead of the usual past tense of the verb 'written'. The Bible was (is) alive.

We have had the temerity to describe this legacy as being something of a mixed blessing because there was not complete agreement in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on how the Spirit was to be related to the Word. Continuing with the quotation just made Murray says,

But on the relationship between the Word and the Spirit a great deal of discussion had still to be conducted. It is a persistently recurring question whether the Holy Spirit works in the believer only in, by or through the Scripture or whether the Spirit works sometimes independently of the Scripture. Is the Spirit tied to Scripture?

Murray's use of the word 'still' in the above quotation indicates that the precise nature of this relationship, which is indeed a contemporary question, ran all the way back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century disagreement between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. This is a very important matter for our subject that is generally not recognised. The possibility exists that those who regard themselves as Reformed may, in reality, be Lutheran on this matter.

We will therefore hear three voices on this. Two are 19<sup>th</sup> century men; one (Dutch) Reformed and the other Presbyterian, namely Herman Bavinck and Charles Hodge. The third is a contemporary voice; a Sydney Diocese Episcopalian, namely John Woodhouse.

## Herman Bavinck

Surveying the field, Bavinck raised the question as to ‘whether the Holy Spirit always works in the human heart directly and immediately without the Word (Anabaptists), or only by the Word (Lutherans), or exclusively by the sacrament (Rome), or *as a rule in connection with the Word*.’ (emphasis mine). He declares,

there is often disagreement over the power and efficacy of the Word, as well as the relationship between Word and Spirit. Nomism (Judaism, pelagianism, rationalism, Romanism) considers the special supernatural power of the Holy Spirit superfluous, while antinomianism (Anabaptism, mysticism) expects everything from the inner light of the Holy Spirit and finds in the Word only a sign and a shadow. By contrast both Lutherans and reformed, against nomism and antinomianism alike, taught that though the Holy Spirit can work apart from the Word, ordinarily Word and Spirit go together. Lutherans, however, prefer to speak of the Spirit working *per verbum* (through the Word) while the reformed prefer *cum verbo* (with the word).<sup>30</sup>

Bavinck’s concern is to maintain such a close connection between Word and Spirit that the Word – and by that he does not only intend to refer to Holy Scripture but also to its effects in the family, school, society and of course in the church – becomes a means of grace. Even so, he is anxious to say that the Spirit *may* act apart from the Word, for example in the case of children dying in infancy. But ordinarily the Spirit works in conjunction with the Word, or rather conjoins himself to the Word, and so it is not enough to speak of the Word as if it were also the Spirit. For example in relation to regeneration he writes,

We must never forget that the word of God... always comes with power. At the same time, it does not always produce the same effect, and the regenerating, renewing effect cannot be understood without acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit as a distinct work.<sup>31</sup>

## Charles Hodge

Hodge considers the Word as the primary means of grace and contrasts the Reformed and Lutheran positions in the same terms as Bavinck.<sup>32</sup> He asserts that the Spirit may work apart from means but normally in association with them. He sees the Lutheran position as having something in common with both Rationalists and Remonstrants in that it locates ‘the efficiency of the Word of God in the work of sanctification [in] *the inherent power of the truth*’ (emphasis mine). He does however record that Lutherans speak of this power as divine and not just moral or human as the Rationalists did.<sup>33</sup> But even if this power in the Word is ‘inherent, divine and constant’ as Lutherans maintain, how then are its differing results to be understood? Here Reformed and Lutherans differ for the latter say that those results are related ‘to the subjective state of those on whom it acts’ and not ‘to the Spirit accompanying it at some times and not at others... [nor] to the Word’s having more power at one time than at another; [nor] to its being attended with a greater or less degree of the Spirit’s influence but to the different ways in which it is received’.<sup>34</sup> He regards Luther (‘glorious and lovely’ as he says he was) as having over-reacted against the Anabaptists and says,

In opposition to their pretensions he took the ground that the Spirit never operated on the minds of men except through the Word and sacraments; and as he held the conversion of sinners to be the greatest of all miracles, he was constrained to attribute divine power to the Word.<sup>35</sup> [i.e. not to the Spirit]

Continuing, he sets out the alternative,

He was not content to take the ground which the Church in general has taken, that while the Word and the sacraments are the ordinary channels of the Spirit's influence, He has left himself free to act with or without these or any other means.

And so he throws down the gauntlet to Lutherans (and to any others as well):

What, according to the Lutheran theory, is meant by being full of the Holy Ghost? Or, by the indwelling of the Spirit? Or, by the testimony of the Spirit? Or, by the demonstration of the Spirit? Or, by the unction of the Holy One who teaches all things? Or, by the outpouring of the Spirit? In short, the whole Bible, and especially the evangelical history and the epistles of the New Testament, represents the Holy Spirit not as a power imprisoned in the truth, but as a personal, voluntary agent acting with the truth or without it, as He please. As such He has ever been regarded by the Church, and has ever exhibited himself in his dealings with the children of God.

A letter from Hodge to Rev. Dr Robert Watts of the Presbyterian College of Belfast on the subject of 'The Witness of the Spirit' is found in A.A. Hodge's biography of his father.<sup>36</sup> It is a succinct and erudite statement that deserves not to be forgotten.

### **John Woodhouse**

Formerly an Old Testament Professor at Moore Theological College in Sydney, John Woodhouse contributed an essay entitled *The Preacher and the Living Word* to a Festschrift for Dick Lucas.<sup>37</sup> The material was originally given at an EMA conference in 1989 and was subsequently written up. After listing references to several writings on Spirit and Word in the context of the debate over inerrancy, he claims that 'None of these studies develops the intimate relationship between Word and Spirit that is on view in this [i.e. his] paper.'<sup>38</sup> That is factually correct and so what he has written is valuable, although it is brief. It is also important because of the growing influence of Matthias Ministries etc. in the UK and USA.

He aims to present 'a proper understanding of the relationship between the Word of God and the Spirit of God' because in his estimate 'Christian thought about the work of the Spirit has too often been separated from the Word of God.' To judge from his frequent and varied references to the Charismatic Movement, that is what he seems to have particularly in mind. For him, the notion which (at least) separates the Spirit from the Word and more often than not regards the Spirit as the necessary and vivifying supplement to it, is to be repudiated.

Instead he asserts that there is such an inter-relationship between the Word and the Spirit of God that the Word is alive. He shows this by citing specific verses that refer to the creation of the world, the formation of Israel and of the international church as a result of the power of the Word of God. He claims that in so many places in the New Testament the terms 'Spirit' and 'Word' are 'virtually interchangeable'. Underlying this association and giving it validity is the fact that,

English lacks a word which has the range of meaning of the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*. Both these words can mean 'wind' and 'breath' as well as 'spirit'. In many biblical texts the expression 'the Spirit of God' could well be translated 'the breath of God'. We will see then, that in biblical thought the Spirit of God is as closely connected to the Word of God as breath is connected to speech.<sup>39</sup>

This inter-connection between Spirit and Word is therefore well made. But it is over-made because Woodhouse repeatedly collapses the Spirit's work into the meaning of the Word. Luther's well known statement 'I did nothing: the Word did it all' was typical of him and it should not be considered as if it were a doctrinal definition.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, and with more accuracy to the whole of Scripture's teaching, Calvin says,

The work of the Spirit, then, is joined to the word of God. But a distinction is made that we may know that the external word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of the Spirit... All power of action, then, resides in the Spirit himself and thus all power ought to be entirely referred to God alone.<sup>41</sup>

This is the kind of distinction that Woodhouse does not make. His comments on 1 Thessalonians 1: 4-6 and 2:13 show this. He claims that they make 'exactly the same point' in that they describe 'one experience, what they experienced when 'our gospel came'. But that is not the case, although they are related (see below). His treatment has the effect of conflating Spirit and Word instead of connecting them. He does exactly the same in what he says about Romans 8:16 and treats it in a way that is without any parallel in commentaries on Romans (I believe).<sup>42</sup> He does not relate it to verse 15 and so can write,

*How does the Spirit testify to me? The answer is surely by the gospel, by the Word of God. Are there two experiences, the word of God telling me that I am a child of God and the Spirit testifying with my spirit that I am a child of God? No, God's Word comes with the power of God's Spirit. God himself breathes his word to me. Receiving the *breath* of God and the *words* of God are not distinguishable experiences here. (italics original)*

It is because he does not consider how verses 15 and 16 correlate he deprives the Spirit of any independent testifying activity to the believer in relation to the matter of assurance. It is noteworthy that Woodhouse never speaks of 'faith *in Christ*' in this essay. Instead it is always 'faith in God'. This is because the gospel word is God's word and so faith must be 'faith in God'. But does not the New Testament refer specifically to Christ as the object of saving faith?

## Summary Conclusion

From all that has been advanced so far two doctrinal propositions can be deduced, namely,

### 1. The Word is conjoined to the Holy Spirit and must never be disconnected

The Holy Scriptures are God's inerrant and sufficient word and wherever and whenever any part of them is properly explained, God speaks by it. This means that the Scriptures do not become the Word of God. That is what they already are and what they will never cease to be – whatever other books will be written about them may say and however many copies of them may be sold! The Bible may one day cease to be the world's bestseller. (Perhaps it has already).

But any and every text from it may be truly prefaced with the words 'Thus saith (says) the LORD'. By 'the power of the Holy Spirit' is not meant something that brings God's silence or absence to an end. He is near whenever the book is opened and he speaks and acts. Nor may his power be sought as if he were not present in and with the Word. The powerful voice of God in the word of God has some self-evidencing quality in every conscience – whether men will believe or not. And there is also a 'word' (*sensus divinitatis*) that testifies to God's existence, wisdom, power and justice in the moral constitution of every human being (Rom. 1:18-2:16)

## 2. The Holy Spirit is 'greater' than the Word and must not be imprisoned in it

As a Divine Person the Holy Spirit is an agent and the Holy Scriptures are his chief instrument. His are the arms and hands that make the sword of the Word 'two-edged, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow' and his are the eyes that 'discern[ing] the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb. 4:12). He uses the Scriptures as sovereign but in accord with the purpose of the Father and of the Son. He therefore works where he wills and as he wills, but in differing degrees of might as it pleases him. This is nothing but the principle which underlies the *modus operandi* in relation to the distribution of the *charismata* referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. And it is also present and active in degrees of grace given to believers – and held out to them as part of growth in holiness. The Spirit has been given, but he has more – much more – of the fullness of Christ to give.

### Need for the Future

If Theology is the queen of the sciences then Pastoral Theology is (arguably) the king of the disciplines – provided of course that it is theology applied! By contrast, the expression 'philosophy of ministry' is one that I often heard used approvingly in the States – but not, I hasten to add, in Westminster Seminary, California. Instead a *theology of ministry* is what is appropriate, and in connection with our subject it must be one that recognises the importance of 'the word of truth *and* the power of God' (2 Cor. 6:4)

As our subject is the preaching of the Word, we focus attention on men who are set apart to the Christian Ministry. Limiting our field in this way does not mean that we are forgetting or denying that the making known of the word of God is not restricted to pastor-teachers in the New Testament. Stott refers to what he calls the 'one another-ing' passages in the New Testament where all believers, female as well as male, are exhorted to mutual edification and witness-bearing. This is described as 'preaching' in Acts 6:4. Even so, it is the ministry of pastor-teachers in particular who exercise a shaping and forming influence on those who are in the church in their multi-form service for the Lord, both individually and corporately (Eph. 4:11-16).<sup>43</sup>

We have been saying that a suitable portion from somewhere in the verbally-inspired Scriptures must be *to the fore* in the preaching of the Word but also that *something more needs to be said* about the Spirit who attends it. We will now think about that 'something more' and do so in relation to the preacher himself, but also to his preaching.

The two texts from 1 Thessalonians to which reference has already been made are of help in enabling us to describe what is involved in 'preaching the word with power.' While they refer to the same 'event', namely the preaching of the gospel which brought the church into being, they describe it from its two sides: that of the preacher(s) and that of the hearer(s). The verb 'come' in 1:5 was a standard in which first-century rhetors introduced themselves to their audiences (see 1 Cor. 2:1 and also 1Thess. 2:1).<sup>44</sup> The verbs 'received and heard' in 2:12 are self-explanatory. John Stott comments on these verses,

We must never divorce what God has married, namely his Word and his Spirit. The Word of God is the Spirit's sword. The Spirit without the Word is weaponless; the Word without the Spirit is powerless... The truth of the Word, the conviction with which we speak it, and the power of its impact on others all come from the Holy Spirit. It is he who illumines our minds,

so that we formulate our message with integrity and clarity. It is he whose inward witness assures us of its truth, so that we preach it with conviction. And it is he who carries it home with power, so that the hearers respond to it in penitence, faith and obedience.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Preacher – The Spirit and the Word**

Preaching cannot be considered properly without attention being given to the preacher because the soul of his sermons is the outflow of his own spirit. No one who is in pastoral ministry has any grounds for thinking that his congregation will rise any higher than himself. That may happen but it is only because God is gracious to his people. Whenever and wherever it does it should be regarded as the exception rather than the rule.

This means that the beams of the glory of the new covenant must have shone in the preacher's heart, namely the grace of God in the gospel of Christ and the life of the Spirit as these are displayed in the Holy Scriptures (see 2 Cor. 4:4-6). This 'light' is the seed-bed in which the internal call to the work germinates and out of which it blossoms – both to the individual's own consciousness and for the church's endorsement. It is essential and irreplaceable. It conveys what no church or seminary can give. It underlies Romans 10:15 – a text that is overlooked.

Sadly, things are going wrong at this precise point and they have consequences for authentic preaching. The internal call is not only being ignored but denied. The trade wind here blows from Australia, from the Sydney Diocese. The message of *The Trellis and the Vine*, a book from Matthias Ministries, is much needed wherever there is an over-emphasis on the ordained ministry (not only in Anglican churches but also in Reformed and Presbyterian churches too). But it denies this call.<sup>46</sup> Several pieces in *The Briefing* say the same thing and Proclamation Trust seems to be echoing the message. Christopher Ash's helpful study of preaching emphasises the task and the character of the preacher does not mention the internal call.<sup>47</sup> David Jackman writes on 'Preparing the Preacher' in the *Lucas Festschrift* and does not mention it either. Philip H. Eveson's most timely article entitled '*Moore Theology*': A Friendly Critique is a must-read.<sup>48</sup>

The internal call is often reduced to a matter of 'feeling' called – by both sides in this debate. It should not be, because while 'feeling' is involved, 'thinking' is most definitely required. While it is the activity of the Spirit who impresses this constraint on a man's conscience (to whatever degree it pleases him) he also endows the man with a varied measure of giftedness requisite for the work. 1 Timothy 3:1 is either ignored or not adequately considered. It is not just a human wish. It has two strong verbs, one of which is used for the constraining desire the Lord knew as he contemplated the work that the Father had given him to do (Lk. 22:15). This desire is also borne out in the 'qualifications' that follow. Luther's words 'The ministry of the Word belongs to all' are quoted but Calvin is not and he spoke of 'that secret call of which each minister is conscious before God, and which does not have the church for its witness'.<sup>49</sup> The Reformed tradition is therefore of an inward call which is inseparably associated with a measure of giftedness that can be greatly enlarged and then tested in the courts of the church. That God raises up men and gives them to his church in time of need is no longer part of our thinking and praying.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a discussion took place in the PCUSA over whether able young men should, as a matter of duty, consider becoming ministers. Breckinridge and Thornwell argued that there was no such obligation. For them it was impossible that the duty could exist prior to the call. Thornwell's discussion of this subject is incredibly moving and so is his lengthy excerpt from Breckinridge.<sup>50</sup>

Dabney also contributed to the discussion and while there are differences between him and them they all work within the necessity of the inward call.<sup>51</sup>

In my view Mike Plant's helpful article on the views of this triumvirate regarding the call overplays the difference between Thornwell and Dabney.<sup>52</sup> They do not 'inhabit a completely different thought world'. But there is a difference, and it may be no more than a matter of a word – the word 'duty'. Dabney's call to young men to give serious thought to the ministry can be seen as no more than any Christian man voicing the question 'What wilt thou have me to do?' – a question that is surely appropriate for every believer to ask. This is in the nature of an investigation and not a conclusion. To make known to office-bearers that one is contemplating the ministry is helpful as a first step – as is also to make known in the church that that is what ought to be done! After all, this is a specific need that the church ought to be praying about – and publicly (see Lk. 10:38). The strength and clarity of 'the call' will vary from person to person. Some will need encouragement to admit to themselves what they are contemplating; others will need to be tested by a delay.<sup>53</sup> This is a matter where wisdom is called for on the parts of all involved. But no one should seek the encouragement of the local church to begin a course of theological study without some degree of inner constraint and encouragement from church office-bearers.<sup>54</sup>

But the requirement of an internal call should not be jettisoned. It makes a man conscious of the 'unknown Spirit' in his mind and conscience, heart and life and it encourages him to give himself up to the Holy Spirit's control whenever he is preaching and not only when he is preparing. This is what is meant by unction in the preacher. Pierre Marcel describes it wonderfully. He writes,

When in preaching a man abandons himself to the freedom of the Spirit, he discovers that his faculties are developed above normal: freedom is given not only to the soul but also to the tongue, his mental perception is deeper; his ability to picture things in his mind is greater; truth works a greater power in his soul; his faith is more intense; he feels himself involved in a living and compact reality. His feelings are much more sensitive and spontaneously permeate his heart. He comes to think the thoughts of Christ, to experience the feelings and emotions of Christ... The Spirit endows his word, his expression with a natural freshness and vitality which gives the word a new and original appearance and which belongs only to the spoken style.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Preaching – The Spirit and the Word**

The mention of 'the spoken style' in the above quotation should not be overlooked. Although a sermon is a connected, pointed address<sup>56</sup> it is neither to be fashioned nor presented as a literary product. It is not cool communication but white-hot speech – no manuscript or auto-cue for the preacher and no hand-out or overhead projector for the congregant!!! We should so speak that people see and feel as well as hear – to make an impression as well as provide instruction.

In *The Archer and the Arrow*, a companion volume to *The Trellis and the Vine* (although it is not by the same author) Phillip Jensen works with an orthodox trinitarianism that is both ontological and economic. He connects the triune God both with the word (and words) of Scripture and the work of salvation in the heart and life of the sinner. But in relation to the preacher and preaching he only relates the activity of the Spirit to ascertaining the proper meaning of the text, communicating it intelligibly and its effect of the message on the hearer.<sup>57</sup> Praying for the help of the Spirit *is limited to these matters*. This amounts to a significantly diminished doctrine of the Spirit as Person and also the dimension of power. Using the title of the book the book there is much that is useful with regard

to the 'arrow' and the 'archer' but precious little 'about drawing the bow at a venture' (see 1 Kings 22:34).

What then is 'the power' of the Holy Spirit? This question has to be asked because we have been acknowledging that the Word is never without the Spirit and yet have been arguing that there is a greater degree of the Spirit's power. What does this greater degree look like? All that is meant in this paper by the powerful activity of the Spirit is that he pursues his standard, regular work as the Spirit of truth and holiness *with far more intensity and extensiveness than at other times*.

This matter relates to 'boldness', 'plainness of speech' or 'a door of utterance' (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 1Cor. 16:8, 9; 2 Cor. 2:12, 3:12; Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:3). They are synonymous expressions and are the concomitants of the new covenant. They do not merely refer to opportunity to speak, much less to the existence of human need, but to the kind of speech that is in keeping with the character of the gospel of the glory of Christ. That was something that had to be prayed for – even by apostles. Paul knew the content of the gospel and what was to be said but he knew that he was dependent on the aid of the Spirit to say it as it should be said, so that people might receive it as it ought to be received (see 1 Cor. 2:1-4). He prayed for that and he asked the churches to do so as well. This, and its effects, are the divinely given extra – and it has degrees; to quote John Elias, 'fire cannot be carried in paper'.

This work is promised *and described* by the Lord Jesus Christ toward the conclusion of his Upper Room Discourse. In John 16:8-15 Jesus speaks of the coming of the Spirit and his ministry in the world (vv.8-11) and in the church (vv.12-15). While his words have a special sense for the 11 disciples who are to become apostles, they do not have exclusive reference to them.<sup>58</sup> Jesus is speaking of his disciples who are to be his witnesses but also to all who believe on him. The Spirit will endorse their testimony to unbelievers, convincing them of their unbelief, of their inadequate righteousness and of their liability to judgment. He will also disclose the Saviour to them as being God's exclusive and replete Mediator.<sup>59</sup>

The Book of the Acts describes such preaching and believing both by those who preach and those who come to believe. A comparison between the Gospels and the Book of Acts on both those counts almost reveals a different world. There is no more failing to understand, forsaking and fleeing on the part of the disciples and there is fearing on the part of the unbelieving Jewish and Gentile world. People turn to God from idols to serve him and wait for his Son from heaven. Others as well as they spread the message and it travels faster than human instruments can take it. In such a setting the Spirit is active beyond the regular witnessing ministry of the church; for example, Rahab had 'heard' but not from the Israelites, just as Macedonians had heard but not from Paul or the Thessalonians. He may even stir minds and consciences directly (by dreams!) and bring them to the truth or bring the truth to them (see Job 33:14-30). But this activity, that is apart from Scripture, is never in contradiction of the truth of the Word of God but in harmony with it. Such a change is evidence of the 'greater things' Jesus predicted the Holy Spirit would do as a result of his glorification (John 7:38). Time and again something like Pentecost happened and knowledge, joy, peace and power flooded the churches and flowed over their environment.

## Conclusion

The matters presented are seen as both *supports* for 'the preaching of the word' and as *signposts* as to how to think of 'the power of the Holy Spirit'.



Our conclusion is one of immense thankfulness that there is not 'a famine of the word of God' and that the Spirit has been attending the making known of its truth. It is not the worst of times – not really.

But it is not the best of times either. There are many for whom the gospel has not even come in 'words only', others for whom it has can no longer even remember those words. Others are familiar with some of the language but they are serving idols and have not turned to the living God (1 Thess. 1) It is not the worst of times but it could be a better time (Psalm 119:126) – a much better time. Is there not therefore urgent need in our time and place for God's people to pray that he might arise, scatter his enemies, gladden his people and bring the equivalent of the Ark of the Covenant – no, what is superior to it – to Zion, his holy temple (Psalm 68). In his Bible Annotations Matthew Poole wrote of this Psalm that, as David knew that

...both the ark and himself were types of Christ and that the church and people of Israel were types of the catholic church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, and that the legal administrations and actions were types of those of the gospel, he therefore, by the Spirit of prophecy, looked through and beyond the present actions and types unto the great mysteries of Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, and of the special privileges of the Christian church and of the conversion of the Gentiles unto God.

What we have been considering is what the Puritan, John Owen, desired and described as follows: When God shall be pleased to give unto the people who are called by his name, in a more abundant manner, 'pastors after his own heart, to feed them with knowledge and understanding', when he shall revive and increase a holy, humble, zealous, self-denying, powerful ministry, by a more plentiful effusion of his Spirit from above: then, and not until then, may we hope to see the pristine glory and beauty of our church restored unto its primitive state and condition.<sup>60</sup>

Since 1676 when those words were written something of that order has happened at many places and in many times. The like needs to happen again – and it can!

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on 1 Corinthians

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Paul does not choose to use the term 'covenant' when there are not situational factors that require him to do so, such as a Jewish tendency or threat, as in 2 Corinthians, or when he is quoting the words of Jesus (see 1 Cor. 11:25). Being 'in Christ' is the way in which he prefers to describe new covenant reality. Of course the Epistle to the Hebrews is excluded from this comment as being non-Pauline.

<sup>3</sup> The literature here is extensive. It relates to the New Perspective on Paul and to Federal Vision. See *Covenant, Justification and Pastoral Ministry* (ed. R. Scott Clark; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> For a study of 'glory' in the New Testament see A.M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, 1949)

<sup>5</sup> Although the distinctions between the old and the new covenants are only relative, they are not distinctions without a difference. They are the consequence of the greater revelation and its appropriate effects. The new covenant is to be distinguished from the Sinaitic covenant (and also the Abrahamic) by a much greater clarity and by finality.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Henry documented this in *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books 6 vols, 1976). David Wells did the same in his *No Place For Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) as did the French sociologist Jacques

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Ellul in his *Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Ellul wrote 'Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the Word' (quoted in Wells, 187)

<sup>7</sup> See the writings of Sidney Greidanus, Haddon Robinson and Brian Chappell.

<sup>8</sup> There is a third component which is the theme of this essay.

<sup>9</sup> *Between Two Worlds. The Challenge of Preaching Today*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 137ff. Klaas Runia also uses this image in his Moore College Lectures of 1980 entitled *The Sermon Under Attack* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983)

<sup>10</sup> Compare Vos' *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) with Goldsworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000)

<sup>11</sup> *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (London: Tyndale Press, 1961) and *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003)

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Spirit. Contours of Christian Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1996) 12

<sup>13</sup> *Preaching* (ed. Samuel T Logan Jr.; Phillipsburg: P&R, 1986) and by EP under licence.

<sup>14</sup> Other contributors do emphasise this.

<sup>15</sup> *When God's voice is heard* (eds. Green and Jackman; Leicester: IVP, 1995)

<sup>16</sup> *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996) 71-72

<sup>17</sup> D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971) 304-325

<sup>18</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Preaching According to the Holy Spirit. Timeless Texts* (Woodruff, 2000)

<sup>20</sup> *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009). The promised sequel *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture rewrote the Hymnal* appeared from the same publisher in 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity. In Scripture, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004)

<sup>22</sup> *Opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the use of Proverbs 8 in favour of the view that the Son was a creature or first of the creatures.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis E Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> For further information and evaluation see the author's *Gospel and Church* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 1979) and also *Only One Way* (Nottingham: Day One, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999)

<sup>27</sup> Gerald Bray, Evangelicals Losing Their Way: The Doctrine of the Trinity, in *The Compromised Church* (ed. John H. Armstrong; Wheaton: Crossway, 1998)

<sup>28</sup> B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931) 21

<sup>29</sup> Review of The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience by G.F. Nuttall, in *Collected Writings Vol. 3* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth) 325

<sup>30</sup> The Spirit's Means Of Grace: Proclamation in *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation. Vol. 4, Reformed Dogmatics* (ed. John Bolt; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008) 441-460

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 442

<sup>32</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 466-485

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- <sup>33</sup> See quotes from several Lutheran theologians in these pages.
- <sup>34</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 481
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 484-5
- <sup>36</sup> A.A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust) 524-52
- <sup>37</sup> *When God's voice is heard* (eds. Green and Jackman; Leicester: IVP, 1995). See also articles in *The Briefing*, 10-12
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 61
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 55. There is however another word for 'breath' in Hebrew beside *ruach* (see Gen. 2:7)
- <sup>40</sup> See Stuart Olyott's article *Where Luther Got It Wrong and why we need to know about it* (Banner Magazine December 2009)
- <sup>41</sup> Commenting on Ezekiel 2:2
- <sup>42</sup> See John Murray on these two verses.
- <sup>43</sup> Even if we argue that the comma in the KJV rendering of Ephesians 4:12 should not be there, the work of teacher-pastors is necessary in order to the maturing of the body of Christ and, by extension, her witness in the world.
- <sup>44</sup> See Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) esp. 111-254
- <sup>45</sup> John Stott makes the requisite distinction and association in commenting on these verses in *The Message of Thessalonians* (Bible Speaks Today. IVP, 1991)
- <sup>46</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009) 129-134
- <sup>47</sup> *The Priority of Preaching* (PT Media and Christian Focus, 2009)
- <sup>48</sup> *Foundations*, Autumn 2006. It would be useful if a friendly reply were to be made on all points raised.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Trellis and The Vine*, 58 and *Institutes*, Book 3, iv.13
- <sup>50</sup> See Ecclesiastical, *The Collected Writings of J.H. Thornwell, Vol. 4* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 15-42. Also John H. Leith, The Recruitment of Students, in *The Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville: WJK Press, 1997) 97-109
- <sup>51</sup> See What is a call to the Ministry? in *Discussions, Evangelical and Theological, Vol. 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust) 26-46
- <sup>52</sup> The Call to the Ministry, *Foundations*, Spring 2008
- <sup>53</sup> Issue 16 of Affinity's *Table Talk* lays out the difficulties associated with this whole process from the standpoint of those who are considering the ministry or have just entered into the work. It describes this whole area as a 'growing crisis'.
- <sup>54</sup> Lloyd-Jones had never preached in a church service before he went to Sandfields for the first time. When his wife asked him whether he was sure that he could preach his answer was, 'I can preach to myself'.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Relevance of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 20
- <sup>56</sup> See Dabney's *Evangelical Eloquence* published by Banner of Truth and much used by T.David Gordon in his book. It would have been better if the original title of this book, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, had been retained by Banner's editor of the time!

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<sup>57</sup> I do not intend to demean by the use of the word 'only' but to draw attention to something else that is important (pp.72 & 78).

<sup>58</sup> See Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and His Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) esp. 142-153

<sup>59</sup> See D.A. Carson, The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979); 547-566

<sup>60</sup> Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel. *Works VII* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust) 195