

foundations

Issue No.13
Autumn 1984

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Martin Luther and National Life,

Theological Journals, 1983-84

Apostles today?

Book Reviews

Eternal Punishment

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Foundations is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in November and May; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, Biblical theology, church history and apologetics — and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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"This is the fruit that is to follow from this one-ness, namely that Christ's word is to break forth more and more and be accepted in the world as God's word, in which an almighty, unconquerable power and the treasure of all grace and blessedness reside."

Martin Luther on John 17:21

Editorial

An early notice about *Foundations* appearing in an evangelical magazine expressed the hope that the BEC would soon improve the format to make it worthy of the contents. It has taken us six years! Whilst deeply grateful for those who made it possible for the journal to appear at all in those initial years we are pleased that the first fully type-set issue is now in your hands. It will not go unnoticed by readers concerned to exercise responsible stewardship of limited financial resources that this improvement has been possible with **no increase in price** even for the next six issues.

A word of explanation is needed about the number of articles in this issue from one pen! The Editor, Dr. Eryl Davies, had already planned to include another of his reviews of Theological Journals (so valuable to busy men!) together with the article on "Eternal Punishment", a subject increasingly questioned among professed evangelicals today. It was then that we received several requests from men who had attended the 1983 Luther Memorial Conference in London to publish his address on "Luther and National Life". Although responding with appropriate modesty, the Editor has yielded to our pressure and readers will judge for themselves the wisdom of that decision.

The "Apostles Today?" article (Rev. Hywel Jones) is included this time because of contemporary pastoral problems in our churches. The view which maintains that the apostolic office is valid for our generation is subjected to exegetical examination in a stimulating way. Giving priority to this article has meant deferring until a future issue the planned item on "Holy Spirit, Holy Bible, Holy Church".

Mr. Jones has also contributed a major review of an important book on the relevance of the Old Testament for social ethics (Living as the People of God, C. Wright). The crucial need for an evangelical consensus in the church's approach to burning social problems today highlights the importance of clear thinking on this subject.

It has been a feature of *Foundations* from the outset that we have included reviews of new books to indicate their theological standpoint and practical value. Stephen Dray supplies as further selection on Old Testament commentaries.

Martin Luther and National Life

Eryl Davies

The substance of an address given at the BEC annual conference in Westminster Chapel, London, on 9 November 1983.

“Had I desired to ferment trouble,” wrote Luther, “I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany. Yea, I could have started such a little game at Worms that the Emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug’s game. I left it to the Word.”¹ Such restraint in the face of enormous social, political and religious problems has led some to think of the reformer as a heartless man, lacking in social conscience. Advocates of liberation theology, for example, would probably have deemed it their ‘Christian’ duty to help the exploited German peasants in the 1525 uprising and with a World Council of Churches grant to have supplied the peasants with weapons! But Luther belonged to a different breed altogether. He was essentially “a man of the Word, a preacher and professor of biblical theology with strict views about the need for parsons to mind their own business.”²

Clearly there is a wide divergence of opinion today within Christendom and amongst Evangelicals as to how believers and churches ought to respond in society to pressing practical issues such as war, nuclear weapons, injustice, corruption, immorality, pornography, racism, unemployment, euthanasia and abortion, etc. Many questions are being asked today concerning the role of the Christian in society and whether it is biblical for churches to do anything more than its distinctively spiritual ministry in order to curb the expressions of sin in society. In this article, therefore, I want to pinpoint then apply some of the more important biblical principles which Martin Luther both recognised and used as determinative in his own response to a contemporary situation which included problems of violence, the maintenance of law and order, corruption, social unrest, political opportunism, charismatic extremism as well as the problem of a persecuted Christian community.

Preliminary Observations

Before I isolate these major principles in Luther’s writings, I want to make two preliminary observations:

A. As we should expect, there are inconsistencies as well as development in the writings of the reformer so that I do not want to rubber-stamp all

that Luther wrote or practised. My aim here is to ask, what were the big principles which influenced Luther's social ethics?

B. I believe Luther would be unhappy today with the way in which many professing Christians approach social issues. We tend to concentrate on the question, what can **we** do as individuals or churches to restrain sin? How can **we** obtain a more just society? Is there anything more **we** can do to influence the Government for good? If we are to discharge our God-given responsibilities and also face up to the awful realities of our contemporary situation, then, of course, we must ask such questions. Nevertheless, there is the subtle danger of a Pelagian, man-centred approach to social ethics on our part when we stress human activity and responsibility without an adequate biblical perspective. At this point, Luther reminds us that prayer is the most potent weapon we have but prayer must be used extensively, believingly and perseveringly even in our approach to social ethics. Again, rather than ask, what believers or churches can do to restrain sin or promote justice, Martin Luther begins with God. The reformer continually emphasises what God is already doing in society in confronting the devil, in restraining wicked people and in thwarting and over-ruling their evil deeds and designs. The duty of believers then, according to Luther, is to '**Co-operate**' (an important and technical word for Luther) with God in what He is already doing in society rather than looking around for something novel and eye-catching to do. I intend to follow this Lutheran and biblical approach to social ethics by asking, **What is God Doing in Society?**

Providence

Before we can answer this question, we need to remind ourselves of Luther's profound doctrine of Providence.

The God of the Bible and of Luther is the living God who rules over His creation, who is abundantly kind to all creatures and who directs human affairs. "His will cannot be resisted, changed or hindered,"³ insists Luther and history is the outworking of the divine decrees. But we must also think in terms of the living devil. There are only two alternatives for man, he argues, either subjection to God or subjection to the devil. "Between the two," he adds, "man stands like an animal to be ridden. If God be the rider, the creature goes where God wills ... If Satan be the rider, he goes where Satan directs. Man cannot freely choose to leap to the side of one or the other of these riders or to seek one out. It is the riders themselves who contend to win and possess man."⁴ Now it is against the devil, depraved sinners and all forms of sin that God uses two different but related forms of government, namely, the **Earthly** and the **Heavenly** or **Spiritual** in order to restrain wickedness, promote righteousness, love and external peace. The kingdom of God's "right hand" is that of the spiritual which makes sinners into Christians

whereas the kingdom of His “left hand”, the earthly, restrains the wicked so that “they have to keep the peace outwardly and be silent against their will.” These two kingdoms oppose sin in different ways.

Three Orders

We reach the heart of Luther’s social ethic when we observe that in his later writings he speaks of **Three Orders** (‘offices’ or ‘hierarchies’) running through and expressing the earthly kingdom of God in society, namely, the home, the state and the church. Here again Satan fights God fiercely over these offices for while they are God-appointed, the people who fill these offices can belong to God or the devil. In his exposition of Psalm 101 in 1534-5, Luther states that “those who occupy and practice them are usually of the devil” and this affects the way in which the duties of these offices are fulfilled. According to Luther there can even be a Satanic transformation of these earthly offices yet, on the other hand, God can and frequently does renew and transform the offices in His common and saving grace. For these reasons the three orders never stand still and must not be approached in merely political or social terms.

This teaching concerning the activity of the devil in society is far more relevant to social ethics than is usually acknowledged today. For example, one writer has recently provided impressive evidence that Karl Marx was a Satanist who sold himself to the devil and whose aim was the destruction of Christianity rather than concern for the proletariat. One third of the world’s population is now ruled by Marxist governments. Again, in Britain there are reliable reports of witches’ covens and Satanist groups which are seeking to destroy Christian marriages, undermine Christian families and churches. “Christians,” declares Luther, “know there are two kingdoms in the world, engaged in fierce mutual combat. One of these Satan rules ... in the other, which always opposes and battles with Satan’s kingdom, Christ rules.”⁵ Do we recognise this conflict (cf. Ephesians 6:12)? Let us now look in more detail at Luther’s teaching concerning the three offices which express God’s earthly kingdom in society.

The Home

The foundational order, Luther insists, is the domestic one, namely, marriage, parenthood and the family unit.

Luther claims that marriage transforms and also supports the other orders and ought itself to be supported and encouraged by the ‘orders’ of the state and the church. He describes family life as a “school for character” for it is in the family where the child learns to respect authority and people, where he learns wisdom and how to make

decisions as well as appreciating the value of mercy. Luther rightly concludes that all these qualities and benefits reinforce the proper exercise of government and promote social harmony and justice. Our concern is that this basic office is being undermined in our contemporary society. A soaring divorce rate, the widespread practice of adultery and co-habitation with a staggering nine hundred thousand single-parent families recorded in Britain for 1981, large numbers of battered wives and children compel us to ask whether there is anything else we can do to influence or change this situation.

The State

The second office acknowledged by Luther is the State, including the magistrates, government, Queen or President.

“Earthly government,” he writes, “is a glorious ordinance of God and a splendid gift of God,”⁶ the Creator. The implications of this principle are far-reaching and we will now pinpoint them briefly:-

(a) This splendid office of secular rule should be accepted reverently, not reluctantly, the reformer argues, thankfully not complainingly for it is an office appointed by God.

(b) It is the duty of all citizens to obey the authorities and in this context Luther frequently refers to Romans chapter 13. “Obedience,” he affirms, “is the crown and honour of all virtue.” Filtering into Germany at this time were mercenaries from the cities of Italy who — alongside the selfish ruling princes, the preaching of extremists like Thomas Muntzer and the excitement aroused by astrological predictions which even attracted a theologian of the calibre of Melancthon — incited an already exploited peasant population to rise in rebellion in 1525. Luther was adamant. Man’s duty, whatever the grievance, is to be subject to the “higher powers” (Romans 13:1). As he had refused to spearhead national, political resistance to Rome in the early 1520’s so now again he refused to encourage or support the peasants in their rebellion. He then wrote his famous **“Against Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants”** condemning the uprising in no uncertain way. On biblical grounds, Luther was convinced that rebellion against the civil rulers was sinful and also counter-productive in that it resulted in far greater evils. He concedes, however, that there are occasions when rulers exceed their authority and when it is necessary to obey God rather than men. In his treatise, **“Of Earthly Authority”**, for example, Luther remonstrates with the Roman Catholic rulers who forbade citizens to read Luther’s Bible and demanded that such Bibles be surrendered and burnt: “You are a tyrant and over-reach yourself and command where you have neither the right nor the power.” Nevertheless these are rare exceptions to the rule and citizens must obey the civil rule wherever this is possible.

(c) In common grace, unbelievers have sufficient integrity, wisdom and

sense of justice to rule a country competently. "It is not necessary for the emperor to be a Christian to rule," Luther boldly declares, "it is sufficient for the emperor to possess reason."⁸ He goes further by claiming that pagans are often far more skilled than believers in secular rule. This claim is at variance with the modern tendency amongst evangelicals to vote for an MP or President only because he professes to be a born-again believer. What Luther does allow, however, is that the believer should be the most socially conscious of all for love is in his heart and he is thus most free to serve. Furthermore, if God provides a nation with rulers who are both wise and Christian then this is for Luther an unusual but signal favour of God to that people.

(d) We have the important duty as citizens of guarding the office of secular rule. I want to elaborate this crucial point for I discern in Luther's writings at least six ways in which the office of secular rule can be safeguarded. It is protected, **first of all**, through precept and example in the family. **Secondly**, by safeguarding the distinction between the spiritual and earthly realms. "The secular authorities," complains Luther, "always seek in the name of the devil to teach and instruct Christ how He should conduct His church and His spiritual rule. Similarly, the false priests and sectaries, not in the name of God, always seek to teach and instruct people how they should conduct secular rule. Thus the devil is unrestrained on either side and has much to do ..." The vigorous preaching and teaching of the Word was regarded by Luther as the most effective way of avoiding confusion between these two realms. **Thirdly**, we guard the office of secular rule by appreciating its necessity for the well-being of people in society. The purpose of this office is the restraining of sin, the promotion of external peace and justice. If evil is not resisted by secular rule, remarks Luther, then three disastrous results will ensue, namely, social anarchy, freedom for the devil to work unhindered and, finally, the overthrow of God's earthly kingdom. Enforcing the message of Romans 13, the reformer insists that the use of force in restraining sin and wickedness can never be removed because society cannot be christianised. We also guard this office, **fourthly**, by being prepared to suffer injustice. If believers attack their rulers, Luther adds, they must surrender the name of Christian. Fearing that some of the extremist peasant leaders were misinterpreting Israel's release from captivity in Egypt under Moses, Luther argues that this was neither a revolt nor a pattern for rebellion. In his **Admonition to Peace (1525)** he assures the peasants that when conditions appear impossible to bear, God is still at work and will raise up a man to restore justice and peace. In the meantime, "the gospel teaches that Christians ought to endure and suffer wrong, and pray to God in all their necessities" but, Luther warns, "you are not willing to suffer and, like the heathen, force the rulers to conform to your impatient will."⁹ Such an attitude is often regarded

today as political conservatism and a hangover from medieval philosophy concerning the sanctity of the social order. However, we must say in reply that Luther was not opposed to change and, in fact, agreed with many of the grievances felt by the peasants. He even urged the Princes to make radical changes to benefit the peasants but, for Luther, the change must come about in God's way and time, not through lawlessness.

Fifthly, prayer is another means by which we can safeguard the office of secular rule. The only useful thing the exploited peasants could do, in Luther's opinion, was to pray to God that He should support the order He instituted on earth and establish greater justice in society. He challenges the peasants: "You adduce the children of Israel as an example, saying that God heard their cry and delivered them. Why then do you not follow the example ...? Call upon God yourselves and wait until He sends a Moses."¹⁰ Do we take seriously the apostolic injunction in 1 Timothy 2:1-2? **Sixthly**, there is for Luther another way in which we can safeguard the office of secular rule. "Since a true Christian lives not for himself but for his neighbour and ... the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world to preserve peace ... to punish sin and prevent evil ... he serves, helps and does all he can to further the government ... he considers what is for the profit of others."¹¹ Instead of complaining about, and criticising, the inadequacies and corruption of local or national governments, individual believers should, as part of their vocation, serve and influence these rulers in positive ways. "Therefore," continues Luther, "if there is a lack of hangmen, soldiers, judges, rulers, etc. and you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the job so that necessary government may by no means be despised and become inefficient or perish."¹² In relation then to this office of secular rule, God's people have solemn responsibilities to fulfil.

The Church

We turn briefly to the **Third Office** of which Luther speaks. **It is one of the distinctive features of Luther's ecclesiology that he regards the church as the third order within the earthly kingdom thus complementing the offices of Home and State.**

I do not intend to develop his ecclesiology here except to note that in reaction to the Roman Catholic domination of the state and the indifference of some sects to the state as well as his own distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church, the reformer over-reacted by making the church almost subject to the state and territorial as well as spiritual in character.

Two Major Principles

My concern here is to ask, how, in Luther's view, were believers expected

to express their faith in society? I have already suggested and detailed some Lutheran answers to this question but in conclusion I want to draw attention to **Two Major Principles** which characterised the holy living of Luther and his people in the world.

The first major principle is that of **Co-operation**.

An unbeliever who fulfils his vocation faithfully is a co-worker with God even though he may be unaware of the fact. The believer, on the other hand, is free to serve God in love and in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Describing the inseparable relationship between faith and love, Luther maintains, “just as faith brings you blessedness and eternal life, so it also brings with it good works and is irresistible.”¹³ Faith “is the moral living force” of love, it is “something living, busy, active and powerful and it is impossible that it should not unceasingly bring about good” and this good involves co-operation with God.

But what is the nature of this co-operation? How do believers co-operate with God? Luther’s answer is that we co-operate with God by fulfilling our callings responsibly in personal, domestic, social and church contexts. Luther’s social ethic then majors around these callings and offices for “such work is wellpleasing to God and brings forth true Christian fruits in temporal and bodily matters, as ruling a land or people, bringing up children, serving and working ... whether as a farmer, tailor, servant, soldier or carpenter ...”¹⁴ etc.

Yet the question remains, is there something additional we should be doing? What happens, for example, when the ‘offices’ are corrupted by evil men and even by Satan? Here again we must ‘co-operate’ with God. For example, we should inform, encourage and support rulers as they endeavour to maintain and apply the laws of the realm. Believers should also pray more for unbelievers that they will be able to use their offices more consistently to restrain sin. Again, the ‘works’ of the believer are used by God to enter daily into earthly situations in order to influence and change them as He pleases. But what happens when all this fails to effect a change? Should we pick up our banners (or ETs or Sword and Trowels) and start demonstrating or withholding our taxes? Certainly not, replies Luther. We should expect God to deal with the corruption more directly and radically by ordaining temporal judgments such as drought, rebellion or even war as divine punishments. To the princes at the time of the peasants’ rebellion, Luther wrote, “it is not the peasants merely who have set themselves against you but God Himself ...”¹⁵

Another aspect of co-operation is love for one’s neighbour. Several Lutheran scholars like Bainton, Ebeling, Rupp and Wingren emphasise the centrality of the neighbour in Luther’s ethics for the law, the offices, the vocations and the gospel are all directed beneficially and downwards

towards the neighbour. We see the centrality of this principle in the reformer's description of a Christian — the person who receives the gospel in his heart and is surprised to find he then has love for his neighbour. According to Luther, this love finds joy in people and in meeting the desperate material needs of our neighbours. Love also involves obedience to the law of God, truthfulness, fairness, kindness, etc. Another description he gives of the Christian is of someone who receives from above and then gives out below so that the Christian "becomes as it were a vessel or tube through which the stream of divine goodness flows unceasingly into others ..." ¹⁶ Denying that our works have any meritorious value before God, Luther stresses that we must love our neighbour for the neighbour's sake just as a road leads to an insignificant little house and goes no further. But Luther warns of a carnality which makes even believers "pick and choose not only the persons it loves, but even the qualities it loves in them and thus it only loves its neighbour ... because he is learned, rich, merry, attractive and it dislikes or despises whatever is commended under another label, the unlearned, the fools and the sinners ..." ¹⁷ Is the wide rift between the church and sections of society such as the working class due in some measure to a selective loving and concern on our part? Another example of co-operation with God for Luther is applicatory preaching. Preaching in Wittenberg on the parable of the king who cancelled his servant's debt (8 November 1528), Luther says in conclusion, "you want to be Christians while still practising usury, robbing and stealing. How do people who are so sunk in sins expect to receive forgiveness ... but my sermon is for crushed hearts who feel their sins and have no peace." ¹⁸

The second major principle which governed Luther's social ethic was **Prayer.**

He insists, first of all, that there must be regular praying and rebukes Christians for rushing to their earthly tasks and vocation without first praying to God. The result of such prayerlessness is that God is "barred" from their labour. He believed that God alone sustains, renews and transforms the 'offices' He appointed in society and He alone can make them effective against sin and Satan. Prayer is the door through which God the creator and lord enters creatively into the home, the factory, the community, the school or the government etc. so prayerlessness means there will be little blessing upon vocations and little, if any, improvement in society. "Through prayer," he adds, "we commend everything that is in good order, bring into order what is in disorder, bear what cannot be bettered, triumph over misfortune and hold fast to what is good." However, there are times and situations when, according to Luther, all human ways are 'blocked' and no help or relief is found by ordinary prayer and daily obedience. In such a time of need and necessity,

believers have no choice but to resort to more earnest and importunate prayer. Here Luther had in mind situations such as apostasy, war, gross injustice and persecution. Through prayer, God revolutionises the home, society and the church. He distinguished between God working through creaturely means and “God’s arm”²⁰ working directly and powerfully in situations when man is utterly helpless. “Faith”, Luther insists, “is always constrained to prayer. It must walk in desperation and in many groanings, saying, Lord, Thou wilt do that which is good.”²¹ In his exposition of Jonah,²² the reformer is convinced that God will answer the prayers of the helpless: “Look up to God ... to the Lord ... He will not leave you unanswered.”

Here then are the responsibilities of believers in the world. We must ‘co-operate’ with God in what He is doing in society and pray fervently for the Lord’s gracious intervention in the life of our nation and church. The need of the hour is not for marches or demonstrations or strikes or even despair but for believers and churches who know and honour God and who will use prayerfully the spiritual weapons entrusted to us by the living God.

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Review of Theological Journals 1983-4

The Editor

“Evangelicals at the Cross-roads” was the rather startling headline to the editorial in **Theological News** (vol.15, No.2). “During the past two decades,” the editorial continues, “there has been an enormous increase in involvement in evangelism and in relief and in social services. Evangelicals are in need of a doctrine of the Church to integrate these two streams and to define priorities” (p.2). We heartily agree and so does Professor Klaas Runia in a fascinating article in the **Evangelical Review of Theology** (vol.8, No.1) entitled, ‘Evangelicals and the doctrine of the Church in European Church History’. He suggests three reasons why it is necessary for evangelicals to give thought to the doctrine of the Church. One reason is that the main churches of Europe are “at present passing through one of the most serious crises in history”. Secondly, ecumenical, sociological or political solutions are “neither hopeful nor helpful”. But, thirdly, evangelicals cannot afford to be smug at this point for the Church is “one of the most neglected parts of our doctrine” (p.41). Professor Runia recognises realistically that the way forward is far from easy. “Are evangelicals not hopelessly divided, not only as to their doctrine of the Church, but also as to their actual place within the Church? Some belong to established or national churches. Others belong to Free Churches. Others again belong to assemblies of Brethren or charismatic groups. How can we ever find a common doctrine of the Church in such a situation?” He suggests some pointers from a European-historical perspective. For example, “there often was (and is) a one-sided emphasis on the spiritual nature of the Church. I do not deny, of course, that the deepest secret of the Church is that it is the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit ... But ... we have often overstressed the distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the Church ... and used this distinction as a means of escaping from the troubles in our local church or denomination ...” (p.51). Also, “there was (and still is) a one-sided emphasis on the spiritual unity of the believers” without its visible expression (cf. John 17:21,23). Runia’s final pointers are that we need to give urgent attention to the question of separation and, at the same time, make a study of church discipline (p.54).

The guest editorial by Dr. David M. Howard in the recent issue of **Theological News** (vol.16, No.3) reminds us that “the problem of

hermeneutics is one of the most vital issues with which the Church must struggle today” (p.2). In this respect the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship has study units doing some original work in the area of hermeneutics and the Church, ethics and society, mission and evangelism (issues concerning the integration of converts from Islam into the Church) and pastoral ministries (questions such as polygamy and the Church in Africa) while another study unit is focusing attention on the Church and China, working out biblical principles and strategy concerning Church and State in totalitarian situations.

Volume 7, No.1 of the **Evangelical Review of Theology** was, in the reviewer’s judgment, both an important and stimulating issue for it included the papers given at the Third World Theologians’ Consultation Seoul, Korea in 1982. These papers mark “an historic moment in the development of third world theological reflection. The degree of unity achieved in the midst of incredible diversity and tensions of cultures, mission and ecclesiological heritages, economic and political systems is remarkable. It reflects a common determination to uphold the primacy and authority of Scripture and devotion and obedience to one Saviour and Lord. We may find fault with the wording of the Seoul Declaration, but its central thrust is clear and augurs well for the theological undergirding of the churches which will embrace three-fifths of the world’s Christians by the 21st century” (p.7). Once again these papers raise the crucial question of hermeneutics.

The first paper by Ismael E. Amaya is a Latin American critique of Western theology. He is unhappy with the systematising approach of Western theology which has often been “dogmatic ... philosophical and traditional rather than biblical” (p.13). Dr. Amaya argues that most of the weaknesses of Western theology are related to ideology and technology resulting in a failure to deal adequately with the issues of riches (“do the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:24 have any meaning for a rich society?” p.22), abundance and waste, overeating and obesity, ecology, social problems such as divorce, drugs, corruption, civil rights, etc. This article is inadequate and unbalanced as a critique of Western theology and the relationship between systematics and the scriptures needs to be expounded more carefully but there is ample food for thought there.

This is followed by a brief African critique of Western theology by Billy Simbo dealing with the roots and results of Western theology and an Asian critique of Western theology by Han Chul-Ha. Principal Simbo sees the Hebraic thought pattern of Third World cultures with its striking resemblances to the Old Testament world view and cultures as the distinctive feature distinguishing Western theology from Third World theology (p.32). Twelve more chapters follow in which Third World theologians indulge in self-criticism and seek to construct a more biblical

theology within the framework of their own cultures. All this makes good reading and these brethren need our prayers and practical support. Congratulations to **The Evangelical Quarterly** for some valuable articles particularly in 1983. I am referring to the April and July issues '83. Allow me some space just to whet your appetite! The April issue was superb despite the fact that I did not agree with some of the conclusions of various writers. This issue took as its theme 'Calvin and Calvinism' and in the light of recent controversy concerning the agreement of Calvin's theology with later Calvinism here is an issue not to be missed. Paul Helm wrote on Calvin and the Covenant, Unity and Continuity while James Torrance dealt with The Incarnation and Limited Atonement. Tony Lane then provided a well-documented essay on The Quest for the Historical Calvin in which he contrasted and compared various attempts to find out what Calvin actually said on various controversial issues. Some of this discussion is open-ended but fair and his main conclusion which many will want to question is that "Calvin did not give way to a controlling principle in his theology, whether that be the Calvinist doctrine of the eternal decrees or of Barthian 'Christomonism'. Calvin was prepared to recognise both God's universal love for all mankind and his desire for all to repent and his purpose that some only should be saved" (p.113). The final article is by Charles Bell on Calvin and the Extent of the Atonement in which he attempts a critical appraisal of contributions by Helm, Lane and Kendall, and suggests no-one should be dogmatic in their evaluation of Calvin's teaching!

Similarly the July '83 issue was provocative and relevant with its major articles on Inerrancy. The first one was entitled Inerrant the Wind: The Troubled House of North American Evangelicals which was a critical survey by Robert Price of current approaches to the question of the inerrancy of the Bible and another one, Short Study: Inerrancy, Dictation and the Free Will Defence — briefly questions ways of describing the manner in which God's inerrant word was communicated through the means of human authors.

A more thorough and reliable treatment of inerrancy is found in the **Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society** (vol.25, No.4, which is the silver anniversary issue of the journal). This is an outstandingly useful and competent discussion of subjects such as Biblical Inerrancy: The Last Twenty Five Years, Raking up the Past, The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, The Bible and the Conscience of our Age, Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today, From Tatian to Swanson, from Calvin to Bendauid: The Harmonisation of Biblical History, John Calvin and Inerrancy, The Doctrine of Inspiration Since the Reformation, The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy: The Hermeneutics of Charles Spurgeon, Jacques Ellul's View of Scripture, Let's Put 2 Tim. 3:16 Back in the Bible, The Love Poetry Genre in the Old Testament and the

Ancient Near East: Another Look at Inspiration and, finally, Re-Examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy. If you want to keep abreast of the inerrancy debate and want a good, historical perspective on the subject then read this issue in its entirety.

Then in **Vox Evangelica XIV** (biblical and historical essays from London Bible College), Dr. Tidball writes on 'A Work so Rich in Promise: The 1901 Simultaneous Mission and the Failure of Co-operative Evangelism' (pp.85-103). "During its brief heyday," writes the author, "the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches initiated, in 1901, a united mission to the nation in an attempt to stem the growing tide of secularism and bring the masses back to church. The nineteenth century had seen a growing proliferation of home mission agencies both of a denominational and independent kind but this was to be evangelism conducted on an unprecedented scale and would attempt, for the first time, to secure the national co-operation of the Free Churches. The 1901 Simultaneous Mission is significant in that it established a pattern of co-operative evangelism which has subsequently been repeatedly adopted with approximately the same results being achieved. It is surprising, therefore, that it has been so neglected by historians and ... churchmen" (p.85). In the opening section we are given the background to the mission before being given a glimpse of the quality of co-operation. Six denominations were represented on the central committee and the Free Churches greeted the proposals for the mission with enthusiasm. Because of the threat of Romanism and sacerdotalism, only a few Anglicans participated in the mission but the most serious threat to the unity of the mission came from the Evangelical Alliance who were concerned about unorthodoxy of one missionary, Charles Akeed but the Alliance was eventually pacified even though Akeed was unsound in a number of doctrines. Several missionaries like Gypsy Smith, John McNeill and F.B. Meyer conducted meetings in London before reaching out to the provinces. In evaluating the effectiveness of this mission, Dr. Tidball writes of the excitement and approval in the religious press as well as statistics detailing the number of converts in the various centres. "And yet, underneath the triumphalist image projected, all was not well. All agreed that the Simultaneous Mission had been a failure in reaching those outside the church" (p.96) and an examination of the growth rate of six main nonconformist denominations reveals that the effect of the mission on overall church growth was marginal. The mission "continued the pattern, already established, that more and more evangelistic effort produced less and less result as the nineteenth century progressed ... Sadly," concludes the writer, "eight decades later, the same methods and style of evangelism are still being adopted, in the mistaken belief that it is a means of reaching the nation. If it was a work 'so rich in promise'

it has to be said that the promise has never been realised" (p.100). Relevant? Incidentally, in the previous number there is another historical essay by David Bebbington on *The Gospel in the Nineteenth Century*, that is, as it was understood in England among evangelicals. "The nineteenth century," we are told, "as much as the eighteenth, shaped evangelicalism for the twentieth. If today we wish to stand in this evangelical tradition, we need, like nineteenth century evangelicals, to be conversionist, activist, biblicist and crucicentric ... The centrality of Christ crucified is the legacy of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, and to the twenty-first" (p.27).

Before I complete this review, I want to refer to the fifth bi-annual conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) which was held in West Germany from 13—17 August 1984. About seventy members attended from most of the Western European countries, including members from East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and news of church life and theological study in many of these countries was encouraging. The conference theme was the place of experience in Christian theology and life which, in our existentialist age bereft of absolutes and dependent to a large extent on emotion and experience, is a relevant subject. One session dealt with the place of experience in theologies as diverse as those of Schleiermacher and Barth while in another session the contributions of contemporary theologians are evaluated. The final paper on the biblical theology of experience was given by the FEET chairman, Professor Klaas Runia of Kampen, Netherlands. "The conference," writes Professor Howard Marshall, "achieved a useful purpose in enabling the participants to engage in honest self-examination, to widen their understanding of other evangelical traditions and to recognise afresh the reality of the gifts of the Spirit with which God continues to enrich His Church."

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Are There Apostles Today?

Hywel Jones

It is a widely known fact that the term “apostle” is not used exclusively of “the Twelve” in the New Testament (Romans 16:7). That is not to be wondered at for the term represents a common enough reality and concept in the first century, meaning “to be sent from another as his representative”. However, it is to be realised and remembered that not all “apostles” are “sent ones” in the same sense, nor are they all of a single kind. It is important to ask and to note in each case who did the sending and how or in what circumstances people were sent. Attention should also be paid as to why or on what mission they were sent. When this is done, we see that the Lord Jesus was sent personally by His Father; “the Twelve” were sent personally by the Lord (and there are obvious differences between the Lord and “the Twelve”, together with their respective tasks); Barnabas and Epaphroditus were sent by the churches of Antioch and Philippi respectively, as were others by other churches, for example, the messengers of the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 8:23), and there are yet others who are termed “sent ones”, though who sent them, how and why they were sent is not specified in the New Testament. In studying the subject of apostleship, and doing so particularly in the present climate of deep disagreement, it is so important to make these distinctions. Otherwise, confusion will become worse confounded. An example of the importance of this procedure is in 1 Thessalonians 2:6, where Paul, Silas and Timothy are described as “apostles of Christ”. There are differences to be noted here between the three mentioned in terms of their being sent.

However, even when this kind of discrimination characterises our study of the New Testament, not only is the disagreement over “apostles today” not resolved, but conflict continues and even intensifies. This is chiefly because the real crux of the debate is not focussed on with precision, let alone examined. For example, it is possible for someone who studies the New Testament on this matter to arrive at the following framework for the uses of the term apostle in those sacred writings, namely, the Lord Himself, “the Twelve”, and a group of church-commissioned evangelists, missionaries or inter-church messengers. Now, such an outline has no obvious point of contact with that emphasis on apostles and apostolic ministry which is so characteristic of the contemporary Charismatic movement broadly considered. This is because the crux of the conflict is not touched on. Where does it lie? It is to be found in two matters which, though they are capable of being distinguished for the purposes of teaching and study, become closely inter-related in the case which is presented in favour of “apostles today”. These are:

The nature of Paul's apostleship

The kind of apostles referred to in Ephesians 4:11.

It has been said that “the onus clearly rests on those who assert that apostles were only intended to be a temporary institution, to prove it from the Scripture”. This is the aim in this article and its achievement will be attempted by examining each of these two points in turn.

The Nature of Paul's Apostleship

One contemporary charismatic leader, namely Mr. Arthur Wallis, has written as follows in **Restoration** magazine:

“In considering the question ‘apostles today’, it is crucial to see that Paul belonged to a third distinct class of apostle.”

The two other classes implied in this quotation are the Lord and “the Twelve”. This statement is most helpful, both in its clarity and also in its emphatic nature. The first step in the case presented for “apostles today” is to dissociate Paul from “the Twelve” (with whom it is claimed he cannot be properly bracketed anyway) and to associate with Paul all the others who are termed apostles in the New Testament. So, the framework that results is the Lord, “the Twelve” and then Paul and the rest. In this way a different kind of apostolic succession becomes possible and, of course, in the event, actual.

This framework will be examined, of course, by necessary implication when the narrower issue, namely Paul's apostleship is focussed on. So, a question is framed. “Did Paul belong to ‘the Twelve’ in the sense of sharing a common apostleship with them or not?” To the answering of this question we now turn, aware and grateful that Paul himself addresses this question and answers it. His reply was that he was one with

“the Twelve”.

Paul's repeated claim that “in nothing was he behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5 and 12:11, KJV) is most probably to be understood as a sarcastic reference to those who were presenting themselves to the church as apostles and troubling it. A similar situation is referred to at Ephesus in Revelation 2:2. However, the older interpretation of the statement which referred it to Peter, James and John, the inner circle of “the Twelve” is perhaps not wholly out of place. If that interpretation were to be admitted, it would, of course, settle the matter under consideration with clarity and finality. But such a use will not be made of that text.

Paul's own substantiation of his link with “the Twelve” is presented in those letters where his status as an apostle of Jesus Christ needed to be introduced or even asserted because it was in some way being challenged or even denied, that is Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. It is in the light of what he has to say in these epistles about his apostleship that expressions like “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1), or the other variants of this theme (1 Tim. 1:1; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Titus 1:1) are to be understood. In what sense Paul was an apostle he makes particularly clear in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians.

The obvious problem which Paul's apostleship raises is connected with time and its passing nature. In choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, in accordance with Holy Scripture, Peter said, “It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us — beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these should become a witness with us of his resurrection.” (Acts 1:21,22, NASB)

Now those terms could neither have described Saul of Tarsus nor even, and this is more important, Paul, the believer in Jesus Christ. He could never (or so it surely seemed) qualify for apostleship under those terms. And this not only because he was an unbeliever, which was the least of it, even though he was **such** an unbeliever, but, and this was the insuperable obstacle, because an era of revelation had passed by irrevocably. Jesus Christ would not only not be baptised again and minister on earth, but He had been raised from the dead and gone to heaven, having appeared to “the Twelve” over a period of forty days. Those elements so necessary to apostleship surely could never recur. Only from those present in the Upper Room, before the day of Pentecost came, could an apostle of Jesus Christ arise. Therefore, by lots, for the choice of an apostle was directly the Lord's and this needed to be preserved as much as possible, Matthias “was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

Paul was acutely aware of this theological situation for he knew the dif-

ference that Pentecost had made (Galatians 4:1-7). Yet he never saw this as constituting a problem which stood in the way of his being an apostle of Jesus Christ like “the Twelve”. He saw it as part of the amazing, incredible wonder that Christ Jesus had made him an apostle. Everything was against it: his previous life, his devastation of the church, his blasphemy, his unbelief and the passing of time, but Christ made all of these as nothing (1 Cor. 15:9,10; Galatians 1:13-16; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:13-15). It was Paul’s boast and claim — all glory to the grace of God in Christ Jesus — that his apostleship, when viewed in relation to that of “the Twelve” only differed from theirs in that he was “as one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8). His was an apostleship which fully harmonized with the norm, but it was given in an abnormal, theological-chronological situation. What “the Twelve” were given before and on the day of Pentecost, Paul was given after.

In Paul’s presentation of his apostolic credentials in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, or the magnification of his office (Romans 11:13), he concentrates on the very two matters which distinguished “the Twelve” as they are described in Acts 1:23,24 and 10:39-42. These were that apostles of Jesus Christ had to be able to be witnesses of His resurrection and had to be recipients of revelation from Him. Paul was convinced that he passed on both counts with flying colours, and it is what he had to say on both these matters which supplies the basis for associating him with “the Twelve”. Let us consider what he had to say on each count.

The Apostle of Jesus Christ — A Directly-Commissioned Witness of His Resurrection from the Dead

The apostle of Jesus Christ is one who not only proclaims that Christ rose again, but one who declares that he has seen Jesus Christ who had died and had been buried, physically alive. On this point, could anything be clearer than Paul’s challenge, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). In the list of resurrection appearances which he records in 1 Cor. 15, he includes himself, saying, “And last of all, He was seen of me also” (verse 8).

It is important to realise and stress that what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus was not in the nature of a vision, that is, something which is made present only to the inward sight and having no objective reality in time and space. Though Acts 26:19 speaks of a vision, it refers to the kind of sight which results from an “appearing” (Acts 26:16), that is an event of actual self-disclosure. It was, therefore, an incident of the same kind as those recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7) (the same verb is used) when the resurrected Lord made Himself visible and tangible. He was as physically present on the road to Damascus as He had been on the road to Emmaus. Paul was physically blinded by the One whom he physically saw — the Lord Jesus Christ, raised from the dead physically.

As a result, Paul could preach that Christ had been raised from the dead as emphatically as Peter could and in the same sense (Acts 25:19).

The apostle of Jesus Christ, however, was more than a witness of the resurrected Christ. He received a commission directly from Him. Others saw Him alive again without being sent by Him as His representatives to the world and to His future church, for example, Mary Magdalene in John 20:17 and the five hundred referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:6. The Lord appeared to some in order to commission them as His apostles (Acts 1:2-8; 10:41,42). He did this with Paul (Acts 26:16-18). Paul was commissioned as an apostle by the resurrected Christ Himself (Galatians 1:15-17).

Now, Paul does not only lay claim to this event-experience but says that it occurred “last of all” (1 Cor. 15:8). This means that Paul was the last, and was to be the last to whom the resurrected Christ physically appeared. No other person like him, therefore, could be added to the band of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Only one was to be added “out of due time” to “the Twelve”. The reference to the twelve apostles of the Lamb in Revelation 22:14 is, therefore, a figurative one, representing completeness and is not to be taken literally.

The Apostle of Jesus Christ — A Chosen Recipient of Revelation from Him

To the eleven disciples in the Upper Room before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ promised the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Among the several benefits which He would give to them for their work of witness-bearing (John 14:27) was the revelation of truth — truth previously declared which the disciples had not understood (John 14:16) and truth not yet disclosed because the disciples could not then receive it (John 16:12). So, as from Christ, the Spirit “would bring to remembrance” what Christ had said and “lead into all the truth: and show what was to come”. This is how apostles were able to preach the gospel in the world and found churches in the truth. They were to teach disciples from all nations “to observe all that Christ commanded them”. They were made, therefore, infallible in all their actual teaching, whether in oral or written form (2 Thess. 2:15) because they were recipients of revelation from Jesus Christ Himself, the Truth Incarnate. (The case of Peter in Galatians 2 does not contradict this claim because there we have an example of fallibility of **conduct**. It was what Peter did (Gal. 2:12) which was not in accord with the gospel and not anything he said. Paul dealt with him on the basis of the gospel which they both believed.)

How does Paul fit into this situation? He does so without any difficulty at all. He insists that just as no human being had appointed him to be an apostle (Galatians 1:1), so no human being had taught him the gospel

(Galatians 1:11 and 12a). “For I would have you know brethren that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it.” It was Paul’s claim that he received his gospel “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12b). Not only was the gospel divine, but he received it in a divine manner. This claim he supports by three arguments in Galatians 1 and 2. They are as follows:-

- (i) Before his conversion, he could not have been taught by the apostles because he was a persecutor and his conversion was without human instrumentality. While after his conversion, he had no extensive contact with the disciples (Galatians 1:13-24).
- (ii) When he did eventually confer with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, it was not to learn the truth from them and they recognised that he already had the gospel and so they had nothing to add to him (Galatians 2:1-10).
- (iii) So independent was he of the other apostles that he openly rebuked one of them, Peter, when his conduct undermined the gospel of divine grace common to them both (Galatians 2:11-21).

It was, however, not only God’s way of salvation, so to speak, which was revealed to Paul. It was by revelation from Christ through the Spirit that he learned that Gentiles were to be included with Jews in the one church of Christ, without their having to embrace Judaism as well (Ephesians 3:3-5). That was also the case with regard to problems concerning marriage. Paul’s expressions “not I but the Lord” and “I not the Lord” refer to the distinction between teaching which the Lord gave while He was on earth (1 Cor. 7:10 cf. Matt. 19:6) and teaching revealed by Him to Paul through the Spirit after His ascension (1 Cor. 7:12,25 and 40). The latter revelation relates to cases not covered by the former. Though there is a difference of opinion about it, the same can be said of Paul’s account of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23 and following). The prepositions used which are prefixed to the two verbs “received” and “delivered” are not only used in connection with the transmission of information from one human being to another in the New Testament. After all, did not the Lord tell him that He would appear to him in the future as well? (Acts 26:16).

So, Paul qualified for “the Twelve”, so to speak, on the same grounds as did they — he too was a directly commissioned witness to Christ in His resurrection **and** a divinely chosen recipient of revelation from Him for the nations and the church. Now, it was as a result of this that he (and this would apply to the others of “the Twelve” as well) was “a wise master builder” (1 Cor. 3:10), laying a foundation by his doctrine for the church for all time and in every place.

Under this heading of Paul's claim to be, in effect, ranked with "the Twelve", two other elements need to be mentioned. The first concerns the acceptance of that claim and his reception as an apostle by James, Peter and John, the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church. Though Titus, a Gentile convert, and Barnabas, a colleague, accompanied him (and, therefore, Barnabas was given the right hand of fellowship as well as Paul), yet Paul is distinguished from them both in Galatians chapter 2. It was recognised that Paul "had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter with the gospel to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7,9). Not only was Paul certain that theologically he belonged to "the Twelve", but Peter and John, two of "the Twelve", were so convinced as well. The second element concerns the divine confirmation given by signs and wonders that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:2; Hebrews 2:4; Galatians 2:8).

Paul, therefore, is not to be dissociated from "the Twelve". 1 Corinthians 15:5 and 8 in which it is alleged that he so differentiates himself is no more than a desire on his part to be historically and chronologically accurate — a concern which is so essential to the meaning and force of this great passage. 1 Corinthians 15:5 is a reference to the eleven disciples, the survivors of those who had come to be known as "the Twelve". Paul was not among them physically when the Lord revealed Himself physically to them (John 20:19 and Luke 24:36 and following). 1 Corinthians 15:8 is, as we have seen, a reference to the grounds on which Paul claimed to be associated with them.

It is true that Paul did also have another kind of apostleship. But this he shared with Barnabas because they were apostles of the church at Antioch (Acts 14:4 and 13:1 and following). In this, they were not commissioned directly by Christ, that is, without human instrumentality, but mediately via the church. That is the third kind of apostleship presented in the New Testament — men sent to preach the gospel, plant churches and those women who helped them (Philippians 4:3), and having planted them, to cause them to prosper. This apostleship is not characterised by directly given revelation and infallibility in communication. Epaphroditus was another example of this kind of apostleship (Philippians 2:25).

However, Paul was primarily an apostle of Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself did the choosing, the sending, the showing of Himself alive and the disclosing of His truth to him. This is what Paul was, first and foremost — or to quote him, "the last and the least" (1 Cor. 15:8,9). Paul is not a different class of apostle, distinct from "the Twelve".

The Apostleship of Ephesians 4:11

We turn now to the second point presented in favour of "apostles

today". It concerns the identity or type of apostles referred to in Ephesians 4:11. Though this is a separate matter, it becomes joined with the point already considered in the case presented by Mr. Wallis for "apostles today". He writes:-

"This third category of apostles referred to in Ephesians 4:11 are, according to Paul, the gifts of the ascended Christ (Eph. 4:7-11). They are thus to be distinguished from "the Twelve" who were appointed and commissioned by Christ in the days of His flesh. In a word, the appointment of "the Twelve" was pre-Pentecostal, that of Ephesians 4 apostles was post-Pentecostal. Paul was, of course, the outstanding apostle of the Ephesians 4 order and he loved to recount his personal meeting and commissioning by the ascended Christ."

Clearly, what has to be considered is the intimate connection between the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and His giving of these apostles to the church. We shall face up to this by once again setting ourselves a question to answer. It is this. What is meant in Ephesians 4:8-10 by the expression "He ascended"?

It has been a mistake, often repeated in the course of the church's history, to regard the expressions "He descended" and "He descended into the lower parts of the earth" **too literalistically**. Doing that has given rise to strange notions about what our Lord allegedly did between His death and resurrection. Those quoted expressions are theologically figurative for the immeasurable condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ and His humiliation. By the same token, to regard the corresponding expressions "He ascended" and "He ascended up far above all heavens" as referring exclusively or even primarily to the **event** of our Lord's ascension is to make the same sort of mistake. "He ascended" is theologically figurative for the infinite exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, corresponding to and consequent upon, His humiliation, which is represented by the expression "He descended".

Psalms 68 as a whole is in Paul's mind in this passage, that is, Ephesians 4:1-16, and from it he quotes with interpretation in verse 8. This Psalm struck two notes, namely Jehovah's victories over the foes of His people and His dwelling among them as Lord, distributing the blessings of His reign. Some commentators say that the occasion of this Psalm was the ark's return to Jerusalem. However, the theme is conquest and co-dwelling. The "ascending on high" referred to in Psalm 68:18 has the hill of the earthly Zion in view where the Lord's reigning presence and activity was symbolically presented to the people, but in reality, to those with faith. The Lord Jesus Christ's "ascent" in Ephesians 4 is His exaltation to reign among and for His people, following and because of His death.

Now, of course, it is not being suggested that our Lord's ascension does not figure in His exaltation. His exaltation would be incomplete without it, if such a possibility may even be theoretically considered. But what is being stated, not suggested, is that our Lord's exaltation did not **begin** with His ascension. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ began with His resurrection from the dead. "He ascended" in Ephesians 4 includes the resurrection. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1:20 where he speaks of God's power being manifested in Christ "when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all".

When the resurrection is included in our thinking about Ephesians 4:8-11, the picture alters significantly about the identity of those apostles mentioned there. No longer are "the Twelve" necessarily excluded because it is not the ascended Christ that is in view, but the exalted Christ, that is, raised, reigning and to ascend, who gives them to His church. John 20:19-23 records such a giving or commissioning when, after showing the **disciples** His hands and side, Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, even so send I you." He then gave them an assurance of the Holy Spirit's bestowal to equip them for the task as He had been. Luke 24:36 and following records the same truths as does Matthew 28:18-20. Acts 1:2 calls them apostles and 1:13 lists their names. Acts 2:1 records their actual empowering.

So, Ephesians 4:11 should not be regarded as of necessity teaching post-ascension apostles because of the expression "He ascended". These are post-exaltation apostles and they are "the Twelve" with Paul included. In Ephesians 4, the major perspective is that of a theological standpoint whereas in 1 Corinthians 15 it is an historical or chronological one. Paul never "recounted his personal meeting and commissioning by the **ascended** Christ". To suggest that he did is quite inaccurate. Paul referred to what happened on the road to Damascus as a meeting with the resurrected Christ. We have seen this from 1 Cor. 15:8. Galatians 1:1 is quite explicit on this matter, namely, "Paul an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead". On the road to Damascus, the fact that Jesus Christ had ascended was immaterial; what was important and shattering was that He was no longer in the grave. He had triumphed and was Lord. As raised, He reigned among and for His people in converting Saul and calling him to be an apostle.

One other point is mentioned in the case argued for "apostles today". It is based on the preposition "until" in Ephesians 4:13. In effect, it is a case built on the continuing need of churches to be brought up to "the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ". This is termed an experiential foundation in distinction from that

historical foundation laid by “the Twelve”. Such a foundation, it is argued, can only be supplied by present day apostles and these are the master builders (1 Cor. 3:10).

We have seen that the twelve and Paul constitute one group theologically on the basis of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, and that Ephesians 4:11 can refer to this group. On this showing, what sense can be made of the preposition “until”? Though these apostles are no longer on earth, their teaching remains, preserved by the head of the church who gave it to them, for churches in every age and place. The church or churches today do, therefore, have apostolic ministry — Paul, Peter, John and Matthew — and by them, Christ speaks by His Spirit to the churches.

The fault for the condition of the churches is not, therefore, to be attributed to their lack of apostles, but to the failure of and want of pastors, teachers and elders and the mutual encouraging of one another. All these are to edify, that is, build up others in the faith and in grace and the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The need for edification is not the proof for the need of apostles.

There are, therefore, no apostles today in the sense being argued for in the current charismatic scene. The twelve and Paul were Christ’s master-builders. All others seek to work according to their pattern, given by the Lord and recorded by His Spirit. However, there are other “apostles”, that is church-appointed men and women who devote themselves to the work of the gospel. These can be better described as pastors, teachers, preachers, evangelists, or missionaries.

In this category, from time to time, there have been those whose labours have been so significantly owned of God in raising churches from ruins, rubble, dust and nothing that their contemporaries or successors justly regard them as having something apostolic about them, for example, the Reformers, “the apostle of the North”, “the apostle of the Peak”, “the apostle of Pembrokeshire”. Their work has demanded the figurative use of this term because of its undisputed colossal nature. May many more of their calibre be raised up!

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Review Article

Living as the People of God

C.J.H. Wright

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The relevance of Old Testament ethics

Mr. Wright declares his aim in writing this book as attempting "to provide a comprehensive framework within which Old Testament ethics can be organised and understood." (p.9). In the Prologue he demonstrates how necessary such an overview is by a reconstruction of a discussion — a Shaftesbury Project meeting, perhaps — in which various approaches to Old Testament moral and social legislation are expressed. In the book he proceeds to unfold his own. This is, therefore, not only a book about Old Testament ethics but about Old Testament interpretation.

The work falls into two parts. Part 1 (pp.19-64) is general in nature and is entitled "The Framework of Old Testament Ethics". Part 2 is devoted to a consideration of particular areas of that field (pp.67-212). Mr. Wright focusses attention on social rather than individual ethics, apart from the very last chapter of the book, because Israel was a community. A general bibliography and extensive bibliographical references for each chapter (and subject)

together with biblical and subject indexes complete this important, enlightening and thought-provoking book.

The author describes his proposed framework in terms of an "ethical triangle". This he represents diagrammatically with God at its apex and with Israel and the land forming the corners of its base. He writes:-

"Old Testament ethics are built upon Israel's understanding of who and what they were as a people, of their relationship to God, and of their physical environment — their land. These were the primary factors of their theology and ethics ... in a triangle of relationships, each of which affected the others." (pp.19-20)

Though it may be felt that too much is made of "Israel's understanding" in this statement rather than God's revelation being referred to, the content of the book is not a psychological study of Israel's self-consciousness, but an examination of the data found in the Old Testament. (After all, understanding is a necessary precondition of ethical behaviour.) The content of the Old Testament is presented in relation to the big theological

themes namely Creation, Fall, Redemption, Eschatology and the inter-relationship between the two Testaments. These supply the grid on which the Old Testament is interpreted.

Part 1 unfolds the significance of this "ethical triangle" by a survey of Old Testament ethical teaching viewed from its theological, social and economic angles. (The first of these is primary and conditions the other two while they in turn either reflect the actualisation of the first in the life of the nation, or its absence.) In this part of the book historical and prophetic material is included as well as the legislative sections of the Old Testament. Mr. Wright succeeds in demonstrating how harmonious Old Testament literature is and that it is God's covenantal relationship with Israel which supplies its integrating factor. Many points which are most relevant to an Old Testament theology are to be found in these chapters. Of particular importance for the major thesis of this book as indicated in its sub-title is the section with the heading "Israel as God's Paradigm" (pp.40-45). In this, Israel is regarded in terms of the totality of her character and existence as intended to display God's **paradigm** (pattern) for living to the nations. The section on the land is most helpful. Mr. Wright sees "land-theology" as providing "a measure or gauge of the effectiveness of the other two

angles" i.e. Israel's spiritual relationship with God and her "social shape" as God's people. In this part attention is given to Old Testament material and references to the New Testament are rare.

Part 2 applies the framework of Part 1 to particular matters. These are "Economics and the land; Politics and the world of nations; Righteousness and justice; Law and the legal system; Society and culture and the Way of the Individual." Each of these chapters is a mine of information about the Old Testament and will repay careful study in conjunction with an open Bible. They will also make what Israel ought to have been come alive. There are studies here on the land, the Tower of Babel, the value of life, the monarchy, differing responses to heathen nations and culture, the Decalogue, punishment, capital offences, family law, and slavery. The discussion about the "wise man" in Proverbs in the light of what is said elsewhere in the Old Testament about the character of God is most striking and fruitful. The continuance and treatment of many of these themes in the New Testament is dealt with and the eschatological dimension of the material is also highlighted i.e. a perfected community in the heavenly land.

The most distinctive feature of this book, however, and certainly the most thought-provoking is

the claim that Israel as a society within as given territory was intended by God to convey a pattern of social ethics for other nations (heathen ones) in their own lands and that it is the responsibility of Christians, especially those in the various professions to translate the principles behind Israel's format into different cultural settings. Mr. Wright bases this on the belief that "Israel's existence and character as a society were to be a witness to God, a model or paradigm of his holiness expressed in the social life of a redeemed community." (p.43). By a paradigm he means "something used as a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged, though details differ." (p.43). This means that Israel's social ethics should become *mutatis mutandis* India's social ethics.

The significance of this as a hermeneutical principle can be seen by comparing it with typology with which at first sight it may appear to bear close similarities in that typology too exhibits a continuity of principle with differences of detail. But they are by no means identical. In fact they are widely apart.

Typological interpretation enables Mr. Wright to say that Israel's social life in its divinely given form and land is a type of the church's life of fellowship in Christ begun on earth and con-

summated in heaven. This is sound. In this hermeneutical method there is an identity of principle or reality, in this case fellowship with God, but with that progression from a lower and provisional plane (the land) to a higher and permanent plane (Christ). Such correspondence and progression is of the essence of Typology.

By contrast, Paradigmatic interpretation refers to a continuity of principle with different details **but on the same plane of reality** that is between Israel as a nation in its land and other nations in their territories (see the treatment of the land and the Jubilee pp.88ff). Mr. Wright regards the Jubilee as referring typologically to Christ's ministry and message, eschatologically to the consummation and paradigmatically to those "situations where land tenure and land reform are pressing issues of social and political dispute." (p.101).

In evaluating paradigmatic interpretation it is important to bear in mind that both typological and eschatological interpretation have points of anchorage in the New Testament. Paradigmatic interpretation is, however, based exclusively on the Old Testament and New Testament corroboration for it is wanting. This raises a serious question against its validity for while the Old Testament is not to be devalued as Holy Scripture, it is not to stand alone without the New

Testament's endorsement and perspective.

On what Old Testament basis does Mr. Wright rest his case for regarding Israel as a social paradigm for other nations? There are two main grounds at least. On the one hand, Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6) and "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). As priests taught the word to the people, so "if Israel as a nation were to be a priesthood, the implication is that they would represent God to the peoples of mankind in an analogous way. God's way would be manifest in their life as a nation." (p.41). As it was Israel's mission which the Servant of the Lord took on, Israel having failed, so what was said of the Servant can be said of Israel namely that she was to be "a light to the nations". Mr. Wright therefore says, "If Israel was meant to be a light to the nations then that light must be allowed to illuminate." (pp.43-44).

Accepting that "for me" is a supportable rendering of the Hebrew in Exodus 19:6 instead of the more usual "to me", (though the latter accords better with the emphasis on Israel as God's special treasure, dearer than the whole earth, of which expression it is partly explanatory) and accepting that as a priest Israel was to teach others in her time as her priests taught her, the big question to be faced is "What was Israel to teach? What was the

word she had to bring?" Was it "God's way in her life?" (Would this not by analogy make *the Church*, the Church's message?) Was her message not identical with her light i.e. God's word of judgment and salvation in relation to a Coming One — The Messiah? He was her light and it was His coming which brought brightness to her (Isaiah 60:1ff) and so to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32).

On the other hand Israel is believed to be a paradigm because the features of her constitution as a society Mr. Wright sees as being the reiteration and amplification of creation principles which centre in stewardship, e.g. shared resources, work, growth and shared produce. To these could be added marriage, the family and the Sabbath. These are re-emphasised and given visible form in Israel in the context of redemption and against the deleterious effects of the Fall. This is a very useful way of integrating Creation and Theocracy. While, however, it can be continued very fruitfully into the context of the church it cannot be extended to include nations which have no knowledge of grace and redemption. Just as the Passover and the Exodus preceded the Theocracy so it is the gospel alone which can renovate a society.

Your reviewer, therefore, has serious doubts not only about the

validity of paradigmatic interpretation but also about the value of Christian social ethics as a discipline and pursuit because the subject is fraught with such difficulty and danger.

On the one hand the difficulty is two-fold. First, Mr. Wright is alert to the error as well as the impossibility of a simplistic transference of Israel's features to a contemporary society. We are told that it is the principles behind the various laws etc. that are to be applied to differing cultures by Christian economists, sociologists, lawyers etc. Is this not a pipe-dream? Given the difficulty, which is great, of agreeing on what those principles are what likelihood is there of getting economists, educationists etc. etc. to agree on how they should be applied in a complex and fallen society? Secondly, by Christian social ethics he does not mean the Christian's own ethics in society but the ethics of the redeemed applied to society which is fallen. Is not that difficulty almost insuperable? Will such an attempt not smack of legalism and pride and breed hypocrites?

Further, there is an inherent danger in this enterprise. It is that it could prove detrimental to true evangelism and even ultimately become a substitute for it. One had the feeling at times in reading this book that in spite of her faults being recognised, Israel was being spoken of too highly, almost as an Old Testament

saviour. One place would be on page 41 where we read "there is indeed something 'incarnational' about the role of Israel in the Old Testament". The figure of the Servant of the Lord is pointed to as an example of this for in Isaiah the Servant is sometimes Israel and sometimes the Messiah. While that is a fact, a better adjective would "representative" rather than "incarnational". (Is the church 'incarnational' too? Or is this a typical Non-conformist comment on the work of an Anglican?!)

Further to this and when speaking of the Servant and his work Mr. Wright declares that it was "to exemplify and generate all the **social** blessings that should have been displayed in the nation" (emphasis original) that he came. As the passages quoted with reference to this statement speak of justice and righteousness which deal first and foremost with God's relation to man and not with one man and another, let alone one nation and another, the adjective "spiritual" would be better. This is the great danger that is inherent in social ethics — it may become another social gospel.

However, this is an excellent book — plenty of nails for one's knowledge and goads for one's thought (Eccles. 12:11). We look forward to Mr. Wright's next work "God's People in God's Land" which a footnote in this work tells us is forthcoming.

Hywel R. Jones

New Books on the Old Testament

Old Testament commentaries remain in full spate as this article confirms.

The **Daily Study Bible** has been mentioned in these review columns before (See *'Foundations'* 10). Since then, the series has moved on apace and thirteen volumes have now been produced. Almost uniformly they offer sound, generally conservative exposition with an emphasis upon the final canonical form of the text and upon the application to the individual reader. They are semi-popular in format and presentation.

Perhaps the least satisfactory of the volumes under review here is that entitled **'Genesis II'** by J.C.L. Gibson.¹ The author views the Patriarchal narratives as mythological history and is willing to subject the theology of Genesis to criticism. He criticises, for example, the nationalism he claims is implicit in Genesis 14. In view of the fact that there are so many good commentaries on Genesis most readers of this article will regard the purchase of this volume as an unnecessary extravagance.

The same could not be said for the **'Exodus'** volume by the late H.L. Ellison² which provides sound, thorough exposition with perceptive pastoral applications. Ellison's views on miracles will

not necessarily commend themselves but should not unduly prejudice the reader in the use of this helpful over-view of the Book of Exodus.

Walter Riggans' contribution on **'Numbers'**³ is less conservative than that of Ellison although the author's more liberal views do not markedly mar this excellent little book. Riggans uses a Christological hermeneutic with great profit in seeking to apply the scarcely handled passages in Numbers to the present believer through Christ. He thus furnishes much valuable material for preachers.

The book by David Payne on **'Samuel'** (i.e. 1 and 2 Samuel) is very similar to that of Ellison.⁴ A double concern is evident: first, to unfold the theology of the two books (a much needed task) and then, secondly, to show, especially at the level of Christian leadership, the relevance of the theology to today.

With reference to these four volumes as a whole (and with the exception of Gibson's book) expositors of each of these Bible books will want to use and will value the practical help provided by these volumes in the proclamation of God's Word. These volumes show that these books can be preached.

All that G.A.F. Knight produces is worthy reading — a fact which is true of his double-volume commentary on the **Psalms** in the same series.⁵ His style and

technique is lively. He seeks to uncover the original situation of the Psalm (often in a dramatic way) and then to provide a paraphrase which encompasses contemporary application. This method sometimes exposes his liberal tendencies (as for example in Psalm 110, where the Psalm is only regarded as 'Messianic' in a limited sense and where the NT use is regarded as 'rabbinic' and not normative for the Christian Church today). Nevertheless, for lively devotional reading and for providing comment which gets to the heart of the relevance of each Psalm, these books are invaluable.

Robert Davidson's book entitled '**Jeremiah 1**'⁶ covers the first 20 chapters of the prophecy. Typical of most modern scholarship, Davidson does not credit all the content of Book of Jeremiah to the prophet. Nonetheless, this little volume is to be recommended as providing a useful survey of the Book by means of a sort of 'expanded paraphrase'. Thus, it will be of value to the student or preacher seeking to work out the overarching message and structure of the Book while wrestling, at the same time, with the more detailed commentaries. Davidson is thin on application although the relevance of the prophet's message lies only just beneath the surface of his comments.

The volume on '**Ezekiel**' by Peter Craigie⁷ is an excellent outline of

the prophet's message by an unimpeachably orthodox evangelical scholar. It is almost identical in format to that of Davidson.

Mention of Ezekiel leads to the necessary reference to two other commentaries that have recently appeared on the Book. We are in debt to John Job for his superb study guide entitled, '**Watchman in Babylon**'.⁸ He provides the essential background data necessary and then gives a survey outline of each passage, a Christian interpretation/application together with questions for further study. Here is a volume to get us into and appreciating this mysterious Book. It is highly recommended.

Few Bible students who have consulted the Hermenia series of Commentaries will be unaware of the massive (in every sense of the word) contribution they make to Biblical exposition. Fewer still who have consulted, for example, H.W. Wolff's volumes on 'Hosea' and 'Joel and Amos' will be unaware of their value to the serious Bible Student. Thus, a further volume in the series, W. Zimmerli's life's-work on '**Ezekiel**' (volume 2, covering chapters 27 and onwards) is most welcome.⁹ As to be expected, the volume includes detailed textual analysis, form and history of religions criticism from a liberal perspective and exposition together with a highly useful statement of the teaching of the

passage set against the entire book. This last feature is highly stimulating and suggestive. Doubtless, this work will be the standard critical commentary on Ezekiel for a long time and, used with discernment, should enrich all study and proclamation of the Book for the more scholarly preacher.

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| 1. | J.C.L. Gibson: | Genesis II |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 322pp. £2.95 | |
| 2. | H.L. Ellison: | Exodus |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 204pp. £2.95 | |
| 3. | W. Riggans: | Numbers |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 252pp. £2.95 | |
| 4. | D.F. Payne: | Samuel |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 281pp. £2.95 | |
| 5. | G.A.F. Knight: | Psalms 1 & 11 |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | I, 337pp., II, 369pp. £2.95 each | |
| 6. | R. Davidson: | Jeremiah I |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 166pp. £2.95 | |
| 7. | P.C. Craigie: | Ezekiel |
| | St. Andrews Press | |
| | 322pp. £2.95 | |
| 8. | J. Job: | Watchman in Babylon |
| | Paternoster Press | |
| | 101pp. £2.20 | |
| 9. | W. Zimmerli: | Ezekiel 2 |
| | Fortress Press | |
| | 606pp. £19.50 | |

Readers of this journal will also be interested to know that Baker Book House have recently issued a new edition of R.B. Girdlestone's '**Synonyms of the Old Testament**'. Originally published in 1871 this volume was always superior to that of Trench on the New Testament and although dated is still valuable. Coded to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and with an attractive type-face this edition is commended.

The Grace Baptist Assembly has begun a series of **recommended reading lists**. Two are currently available on the Old Testament. These include Old Testament Introduction and Commentaries on the Pentateuch. Others on Church History, Scripture, New Testament Introduction and God and Man are also available. Details may be obtained from: Mr. John Cooke, 5 Swiss Avenue, Watford, Herts. WD1 7LL.

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Focus

This article is the first in an important series entitled 'Focus' in which we intend to draw attention to major biblical doctrines. The purpose of the series, first of all, will be to uphold and elucidate foundational scriptural truths then, secondly, to report and comment on the way in which these doctrines are regarded in our contemporary situation. Prompted by a rationalist/existentialist philosophy and encouraged by a 'new mood of Christian humility' involving a 'flexible', open attitude towards the truth, many church leaders and theologians in our generation have seriously modified or rejected all the foundational orthodox doctrines of Scripture. Sadly, an increasing number of evangelicals, too, are abandoning an orthodox position on a number of important doctrines. In Focus, therefore, we intend to provide an over-all view of these developments and alert readers to the wind of change blowing strongly at present through the churches.

Thirdly, we want to challenge Christians to think more biblically and theologically in relation to these doctrines. For example, do we understand and appreciate the teaching and implications of these truths ourselves? Our final purpose in this series will be to encourage and help preachers teach and contend for these truths in their churches.

This present article focuses on the much neglected and disputed doctrine of Eternal Punishment and in our next issue the Rev. Hywel Jones, an associate editor, will focus on the Doctrine of Scripture.

Focus : 1 Eternal Punishment

Eryl Davies

The member churches of the BEC assent to the biblical truth that unbelievers will be condemned by God to hell where they will be punished eternally for their sins under the righteous judgement of God.¹ Although, in the words of J.W. Wenham,² this is "the ultimate horror of God's universe" yet the church today, observes Peter Hamilton with a degree of satisfaction, "seldom mentions hell".³ One reason for this silence, of course, is that Christendom in general rejects the notion of a literal and eternal hell. Throughout the twentieth century a growing number of theologians and church ministers have rejected and ridiculed this

doctrine. Barth's universalism, Tillich's existentialism and William Barclay's liberalism are all too familiar to us. "The doctrine of an absolutely opposite eternal destiny of individuals," wrote Paul Tillich, "cannot be defended",⁴ whereas D.M. Baillie could confidently write in 1936 that hell is "open to serious objection ... it can hardly be held adequate to the truth of Christianity."⁵ Writing in 1980, Hendrikus Berkhof (not to be confused with Louis Berkhof!) is representative of contemporary theologians in his candid rejection of the orthodox doctrine of hell. "The ease," he writes, "with which many orthodox Christians used to and still designate at least 95% of the human race as lost betrays much thoughtlessness and harshness. Fortunately, secularism and the intense contact with non-Christian worlds compel us to a deeper and more careful consideration of this matter."⁶ Possibly the most pernicious and popular condemnation of the doctrine of hell recently is by Robert Short (the author of **The Gospel According to Peanuts**, a book, incidentally, which is read by many Christian students in the colleges) in a book published in 1983 with the title, **The Gospel From Outer Space**. Written against the background of the film **ET** and with the effective employment of cartoons, the author devotes at least one chapter to denouncing the orthodox doctrine of hell, claiming that "the threat of eternal damnation prevents a proper understanding of the goodness of 'the good news' of Christ ..."⁷

Objections

Such examples could be multiplied but it will be more useful to notice, briefly, some of the reasons given by these people for rejecting this biblical doctrine. The major reasons can be classified in a fourfold way, namely — philosophical, theological, hermeneutical and ethical.

In addition to the total depravity of human nature blinding the mind and making it averse to God and His self-revelation, **philosophical** reasons and presuppositions are also basic in determining the theological and hermeneutical approach to the subject of hell. I do not intend to refer to the more technical arguments of philosophers which are frequently expressed by means of analytical philosophy. It will be adequate for our purpose here to confine ourselves briefly by way of illustration to two contemporary philosophers. The first is John Hick, a trained philosopher who is now the H.G. Wood Professor of Theology in the University of Birmingham. His books, especially **EVIL AND THE GOD OF LOVE**⁸ and also **DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE** include numerous arguments against the doctrine of eternal punishment. He writes, for example, of the "evident incongruity, if not self-contradiction, in the very notion of perpetual torment."⁹ In an orderly manner he also marshals all the objections and arguments against this orthodox position: "for a conscious creature to undergo physical and mental

torture through unending time (if this is indeed conceivable) is horrible and disturbing beyond words; and the thought of such torment being deliberately inflicted by divine decree is totally incompatible with the idea of God as infinite love; the absolute contrast of heaven and hell, entered immediately after death, does not correspond to the innumerable gradations of human good and evil; justice could never demand for finite human sins the infinite penalty of eternal pain; such unending torment could never serve any positive or reformatory purpose precisely because it never ends; and it renders any coherent Christian theodicy impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgment within God's creation."¹⁰

A second example is Brian Hebblethwaite who argues "metaphysically ... that the final state of created being will be good without qualification, and the existence of hell would undoubtedly introduce a major permanent qualification."¹¹ Hebblethwaite then concludes that "religious agnosticism about God's eternal plans for the created universe is an inevitable stance for the reflective theist."¹² These writers do not make any appeal to the Bible as their supreme authority but rather human reasoning is the criterion for deciding what is 'true' or acceptable.

The **theological** objection centres around the-alleged incompatibility of the divine wrath and love. "Guided by the universal scope of divine love," remarks Peter C. Hodgson, "Christian hope will rebel against every doctrinal restriction which sets limits to the vision of hope." Another theologian suggests that the reason why the church today seldom mentions hell is "because we have at last learned the truth that God is love and that the divine love predominates over the divine justice. I do not myself see how one can possibly combine God's love with the idea of eternal punishment ..."¹⁴ Critics refuse to accept the harmony of the biblical approach that the divine love is also a holy, righteous love exercised consistently by God. Modern theology has created its own perverted image of God.

Hermeneutically, the doctrine of eternal punishment is more often dismissed as mythological and figurative or symbolic. The late John Robinson, for example, wrote: "... life can be hell ... for that is really what hell is about — the dark side, the shadow side, of life ..."¹⁵ He then describes three kinds of experiences which can be described as 'hell': "1. Experiences of suffering, frightfulness and torture — physical or mental ... 2. Experiences of madness — when reality, or the loss of reality, becomes unendurable. Many representations of hell have in fact been psychotic — descriptions of a nightmare world. 3. Experiences of alienation — of being up against it in a relationship from which one cannot get away ..."¹⁶ Along similar lines Robert Short affirms: "when we see through the outward, parabolic form in which the New Testament

mentions 'hell', we can see that it's talking about the reality of a 'judgment' that occurs in the present, in **this** lifetime, **inside** our hearts ... Even if the wicked never end up in hell, that doesn't mean that in the meantime hell won't be in them."¹⁷ Hebblethwaite also supports the view "that hell and eternal punishment are also figurative and symbolic notions, and do not literally describe permanent aspects of reality in the final consummation of the divine purpose."¹⁸ Paul Tillich sees 'heaven' and 'hell' as "symbols of ultimate meaning and unconditional significance. But no such threat or promise is made about other than human life."¹⁹ Tillich goes on to describe heaven and hell as "symbols and not descriptions of localities" which "point to the objective basis of blessedness and despair, i.e. the amount of fulfilment or non-fulfilment which goes into the individual's essentialization. The symbols must be taken seriously ... and can be used as metaphors for the polar ultimates in the experience of the divine."²⁰ This hermeneutical approach is governed by a strongly existentialist philosophy which is hostile to the revealed truth of scripture.

The **ethical** objection to the orthodox doctrine of hell is more well-known. "If God sends sinners to hell," people claim, "then He is cruel and immoral." A writer, representative of many contemporary scholars, insists that "morally speaking, the idea of eternal punishment has to be rejected by the sensitive moral conscience quite independently of religion."²¹

We need to note all these contemporary objections carefully and counter them in our churches if we are to communicate the whole counsel of God in a relevant and meaningful way. A great deal of work still needs to be done in this area if we are to teach the truth effectively today.²²

Universalism

What then are the popular alternatives today to the doctrine of eternal punishment? An increasingly popular alternative is universalism and it is now probable that Hebblethwaite's description of universalism as a "minority view" is no longer accurate.²³ Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King also report that in the past "a minority of theologians have taught a doctrine of universal salvation ... The majority of churches and theologians have resisted the teaching of universal salvation. Why? It seems," he replies, "that Christians have done what comes naturally — to hope chiefly for themselves, their own family and friends, and let the rest go to hell."²⁴ Professor Hick describes the belief in universal salvation as "a small underground stream"²⁵ since the time of Origen which, I suggest, has now surfaced as a fast-moving river. Certainly universalism has a wide general appeal today, both within and outside Christendom. According to this theory all people will be saved,

eventually if not immediately. This theory is obviously unbiblical but we need to note some of the biblical texts which universalists are misusing to support their position, such as 1 Corinthians 15:51, Philippians 2:10 and 1 Timothy 2:4. Universalism must be rejected as an unbiblical teaching for it requires us, in the words of Bruce Milne, “not only to revise our view of judgement but also change our view of the Judge.”²⁶

Annihilation

What about those contemporary theologians who do not accept the doctrine of universal salvation or the doctrine of eternal punishment? John Hick is correct in observing that “they usually speak of the finally lost as passing out of existence”²⁷ (annihilation). What is disturbing, however, is the growing number of evangelical writers and preachers who espouse the theory of annihilation (conditional immortality). One such example is Stephen Travis in a book which is widely read in churches and popular in Christian Unions.²⁸ “In the last hundred years,” he writes, “considerable ground has been gained by an alternative view to eternal punishment, known as ‘conditional immortality’ or ‘annihilationism’ ... In my view the New Testament does not express itself clearly for one or the other of these options ... If pressed, I must myself opt for the latter (annihilationism).”²⁹ John W. Wenham sympathises with Travis when he declares: “we shall consider ourselves under no obligation to defend the notion of unending torment until the arguments of the conditionalists have been refuted.”³⁰ Reviewing Murray Harris’s recent book **RAISED IMMORTAL**,³¹ John Wenham observes that “the searing question of the immortality of the damned — do they continue for ever in opposition to God or are they literally destroyed after suffering their just punishment?” is not dealt with by Dr. Harris at the depth it deserves.³² It is almost unbelievable that Dr. Skevington Wood in his review of Travis’ book should make no reference at all to his support of annihilation.³³ This may be due partly at least to the fact that in England now a significant number of UCCF students and speakers, Evangelical Anglicans and others generally accept and even advocate the theory of conditional immortality. Donald Guthrie in his valuable **NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY**³⁴ leaves the question open-ended as does the **LION HANDBOOK OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF**.³⁵

It is refreshing to find other evangelical writers who declare themselves uncompromisingly in support of the orthodox position. William Hendriksen, for example, maintains that “the passages in which this doctrine of everlasting punishment for both body and soul is taught are so numerous that one actually stands aghast that in spite of all this there are people today who affirm that they accept Scripture and who, nevertheless, reject the idea of never-ending torment ... One hears the objection, ‘But does not Scripture teach **the destruction** of the wicked?’

Yes, indeed, but this destruction is not an instantaneous annihilation, so that there would be nothing left of the wicked; so that, in other words, they would cease to exist. The **destruction** of which Scripture speaks is an **everlasting destruction** (2 Thessalonians 1:9) ...”³⁶ Another American, Millard J. Erickson, comes out clearly in his first volume in favour of eternal punishment but we will have to await his fuller treatment until the projected third volume appears.³⁷

Let us now look at ourselves and ascertain the way in which we should approach this important and frightening doctrine. We must consider three basic aspects of this doctrine, namely, the definition of hell, the nature of hell and the duration of hell.

Hell: Its definition

The fact that there are four words translated ‘hell’ in the Authorised Version of the Bible and also the insistence of Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses that we have misunderstood the correct significance of these words makes it essential for us to define these words carefully and correctly.

Tartarus is a Greek name for the underworld, especially for the abode of the damned and the only appearance of the word in the New Testament is in 2 Peter 2:4. This word clearly refers to hell but the real controversy centres around the other three words — *SHE’OL*, *Hades* and *Gehenna*. *SHE’OL* is a common Hebrew word describing the location of the dead, meaning ‘the depths’ or ‘the unseen state’ and occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. *SHE’OL* can have the restricted meaning of ‘the grave’ (e.g. Job 7:9, Genesis 37:35) or the state of death into which believers and unbelievers are brought (e.g. 1 Samuel 2:6, Job 14:13-14, Psalm 89:48) and sometimes as in Psalm 9:17 and Deuteronomy 32:22 ‘hell’ is clearly in view. *Hades* appears ten times in the New Testament and like *SHE’OL* is used in more than one sense, a fact which is crucial to a correct understanding of the words. *Hades*, too, sometimes means the state of death (e.g. Acts 2:27, Revelation 6:8) and in six out of the ten references in the New Testament it refers to hell (e.g. Luke 16:23). Louis Berkhof surveys the meaning and use of the words *SHE’OL* and *Hades* in a most helpful way: “In the Old Testament the word *SHE’OL* is used more often for ‘grave’ and less often for ‘hell’, while in the corresponding use of *Hades* in the New Testament the contrary holds.”³⁸ *Gehenna* is used twelve times in the New Testament and refers to ‘hell’ but the use of the word also includes the idea of the punishment of body and soul which will occur immediately after the final judgement (e.g. Matthew 10:28, Mark 9:43-47) and this is unique to the word *Gehenna*.

Hell: its nature

Concerning the nature of hell, the biblical descriptions of hell can be

classified under the headings of separation and punishment. Passages like 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Matthew 7:23 and 25:41 underline the fact that separation from Christ is an essential feature of hell. In Matthew 25:46 our Lord speaks of hell also as “everlasting punishment”. The Greek word *kolasis*, translated ‘punishment’ is important, for Jehovah’s Witnesses translate this Greek word as ‘cutting-off’ in order to support their doctrine of annihilation. A quick look at the way in which the word is used in its verbal form in Acts 4:21 and 2 Peter 2:9 will show the absurdity of the Watchtower translation. There is need for more careful thought as to what constitutes the punishment of hell (e.g. Matthew 10:28, Mark 9:43-45, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Jude 7, Revelation 14:11, 19:3, 20:10, etc.). How literal, for example, is the fire of hell? John Owen³⁹ and Jonathan Edwards emphasised that God Himself is a consuming fire to the ungodly but while figurative language may or may not be used, the warning of Hendriksen concerning the phrase “in flaming fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7) is a salutary one: “To speak about a ‘mere’ symbol in such a connection is never right. The reality which answers to the symbol is always far more terrible (or far more glorious) than the symbol itself. Human language is stretched almost to breaking-point in order to convey the terrible character of the coming of the Lord in relation to the wicked.”⁴⁰

Hell: its duration

A great deal of controversy at present focuses on the eternity of hell’s punishment. In this context the meaning of the Greek word *aiōnios* in the phrase “**everlasting punishment**” (Matthew 25:46) is important. The word and its cognates are used seventy-one times in the New Testament. While it sometimes denotes an ‘age’ or an indefinite period of time, it is used in the majority of cases in the New Testament in the sense of ‘everlasting’. For example, the word expresses the eternity of God (Romans 16:26, 1 Timothy 1:17), the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), the endless reign of Christ (Revelation 1:18) and, on fifty-one occasions, it describes the unending bliss of the redeemed in heaven. It is well known that this same word is used twice in Matthew 25:46 both to describe the duration of ‘everlasting life’ and to describe the duration of hell so that one cannot escape the conclusion that when descriptive of hell it has the sense of ‘everlasting’.

In reply, the advocates of conditional immortality argue that eternal punishment is eternal in its effects but not in its suffering. They appeal to 1 Timothy 6:16 to try and deny the immortality of the soul (Hendriksen⁴¹ has an excellent exposition here and answer to the annihilationists) and argue that descriptive terms like ‘death’, ‘destruction’, ‘perishing’ and ‘fire’ suggest an end. Here another important Greek word to watch in the New Testament is the verb *apollumi*, translated ‘destroy’ in Matthew

10:28. The word occurs eighty-five times in the New Testament and is variously translated as 'lose', 'perish' or 'destroy' in the AV but nowhere does it mean annihilation. To translate the word as 'annihilate' in 2 Peter 3:6 and Hebrews 1:11-12 or Luke 19:10, for example, would make nonsense of those verses. Furthermore, the Bible speaks of suffering and loss rather than annihilation for unbelievers, then the fact that there are degrees of punishment in hell (e.g. Matthew 10:14, 11:22-24; Luke 12:47-48) is also incompatible with the theory of annihilation.⁴² While being extremely unhappy with the biblical doctrine of eternal punishment, Hendrikus Berkhof is honest enough to acknowledge that "a few biblical passages state" the doctrine clearly and that there has been "a reluctance to engage in a deeper probing of this frightening conviction." He then expresses his unease with the notion of annihilation for several reasons. First, he feels it "does not do justice to man's decision and is a defeat of God's love although hidden by an act of force" and exegetically he is persuaded that biblical terms like 'perdition', 'lost', 'destroy', 'death' used to support annihilation actually "presuppose a continuing existence."⁴³ He goes on to describe the idea of a second chance as a "pious fantasy" although he acknowledges it to be "psychologically appealing".

I greatly appreciate the warning issued by John Wenham to all those attracted by the now popular theory of annihilation. "Beware," he warns, "of the immense natural appeal of any way out that evades the idea of everlasting sin and suffering. The temptation to twist what may be quite plain statements of Scripture is intense." Secondly, he reminds us that "the modern world and the modern church have little use for a disciplined submission of the mind to the revelation of God ..." He also reminds us that the modern revival of conditionalism was pioneered mainly by Socinians and Arians (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians, etc.) who rejected other fundamental doctrines of the Bible. Wenham warns us to "be wary of such bed-fellows."⁴⁴ This is a useful point to make for it really "is a dangerous thing to meddle with the theology of the Bible; because all its doctrines ... are yet so wonderfully coherent that to touch one is to imperil the rest," adds E.M. Goulbourn.⁴⁵ Wenham also points out that the adoption of conditionalism does not solve all the difficulties but can be positively harmful in weakening our zeal for the gospel.

Preaching

A final word to those of us responsible for preaching the Word. There is a pressing need for us to undertake a careful and fresh study of the doctrine of eternal punishment. Are we convinced ourselves that this doctrine is biblical? Do we grapple with the biblical data and teach it adequately? Preachers, do not neglect your study!

Although we may give assent to the orthodox doctrine of hell, we must ask ourselves whether we preach it and do so regularly. "The hearers are led to deny the truth which the preacher leaves out of his sermon," was the sober warning of John Elias, to which he added, "Omitting any truth intentionally in a sermon leads to the denial of it."⁴⁶ We need to examine our preaching in the light of this warning for we may believe the right things about hell and yet fail to preach it as an integral part of the gospel message. The late Professor John Murray underlines Elias' warning: "A conspicuous defect ... is the absence of warning and of condemnation in evangelistic effort. The naturalistic temper of our age, united with its callousness, makes the doctrine of hell peculiarly uncongenial ... But hell is an unspeakable reality and, if evangelism is to march on its way, it must by God's grace produce that sense of condemnation complexed by the apprehension of perdition as the due reward of sin."⁴⁷ Do we proclaim faithfully this divinely given message?

But then **how** do we preach this doctrine of eternal punishment? Simplicity and directness are important. Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon, for example, made a telling use of illustrations to warn and enforce the doctrine with a sustained application at a level and in a language the people understood. This doctrine must also be preached with compassion. There can be no excuse for indifference or cold professionalism on the part of preachers. Our hearts must throb with the love of God if we are to be the faithful messengers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, too, that we care for souls "as they that must give account" (Hebrews 13:17). Such is our responsibility that David Dickson described the ministry as "the most dangerous of all charges, because the account of lost souls within the church shall be craved at their hands, whether they have done all that which became them to do."⁴⁸ Let us then contend for this doctrine of eternal punishment and preach it to our people fearlessly and compassionately.

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