

31. Styles op.cit. p.99,100,104,111-120
32. Styles op.cit. p.108-109
33. Styles op.cit. p.105
34. Styles op.cit. p.124-125
35. Gill 'Commentary' Vol V p.861 cf. Styles comment on why children should be taught to pray p.125
36. Gill 'Commentary' Vol VI p.310
37. Styles op.cit. p.167
38. Styles op.cit. p.101
39. Styles op.cit. p.131-133,195
40. Styles op.cit. p.186-208
41. Styles op.cit. p.168
42. Styles op.cit. p.167,132,133
43. Styles op.cit. p.86

Editor's Note. The writer has agreed to write a critical assessment of the 'Hyper' position in our next issue.

INTERPRETING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURE

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From the 9th to 11th March, thirty-five representatives from the constituent member churches of the BEC met in NORTHAMPTON to consider five papers dealing with issues related to the interpretation and application of scripture. The papers were distributed to conference members in advance, with a view to the maximum benefit being obtained from these days of corporate study.

Most of those attending were pastors of local churches. It may well

be asked what benefit to the churches could result from a group of pastors spending hours of their limited time considering such reputedly abstruse subjects as 'the New Hermeneutic'. The writer would respond in Pauline fashion, "Much in every way!" In summarising the content of the papers, the outcome of the discussions, and my impressions of this, the first such study-conference I have attended, I hope to show why this is so.

In the first paper, Rev Dr Eryl Davies dealt with FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION against the background of the New Hermeneutic. Traditionally, hermeneutics has to do with the application of proper principles in order to interpret a passage of scripture and with a view to properly applying the message of that passage in the present - the very theme of this study-conference. In the context of the New Hermeneutic however, the term has acquired the sense of an account of the way in which the Word of God moves from the ancient text to a meaningful proclamation in the present. Central to this is the so-called language-event or word-event through which God's Word becomes an event time and time again in the realm of our human language.

Dr Davies first gave reasons why the study of this subject is so important. These included the fact that a "lively debate" on hermeneutics is taking place in contemporary theology, centering around this approach, highlighting the fact that hermeneutics has been much neglected in English Theology. Evangelicals must be concerned with how the Bible's message 'speaks' to modern man.

The leading exponents of the New Hermeneutics are Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. Dr Davies described the influences which form the background to their thought. These include fundamentally, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and, more directly, the theory of language advocated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and the historical-critical approach to the interpretation of the New Testament of Rudolph Bultmann, who were themselves greatly influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In line with Kant, Heidegger taught that it is impossible to go outside the area of our own 'historic' existence, and "Heidegger's category of 'world-hood' is basic to Fuch's description of hermeneutics."

The paper then highlighted features of the New Hermeneutic. Basic to it is the concept that the problem of hermeneutics extends

beyond the text to the interpreter because of the temporal and cultural distance between them. Perhaps of special value was the way in which the paper isolated four stages in the approach of theologians of this school to the New Testament in order to ascertain the present challenge of a text.

First of all, historical-critical analysis of the text is necessary. This performs a basically negative function, ie. the removal of all the conceivable possibilities of the interpreter deceiving himself as to the aim of the Biblical text. Secondly, 'common ground' is to be obtained between the interpreter and the text. According to Fuchs, the success of our Lord's parables related to the fact that he created and entered a world which he shared with his hearers. In this respect, we were introduced to the hermeneutical circle in the sense of a continuous interaction between the interpreter and the text involving movement and progress in understanding. The interpreter puts questions to the text which reflect his own pre-conditioning. He is changed by the text's answers, leading to him asking a new set of questions and receiving different answers etc.etc. Consequently, amongst other things, interpretation is an on-going open-ended process, existentially oriented. Thirdly, the interpreter is to exhibit openness to the text, waiting in receptive silence for Being to come to speech. Finally, a 'merging of horizons' occurs between the text and the interpreter, otherwise known as a 'language event' or 'word event'. A deep interaction occurs affecting the interpreter in a challenging manner.

Dr Davies then highlighted some of the weaknesses inherent in this approach. It undermines the objective authority of the Bible as divinely inspired and inerrant. Having done this, it is guilty of a subjectivism which disparages the role of the mind, denies that the significance of a text flows out of its meaning, and reduces the meaning and challenge of a text to that which comes through to the particular interpreter. Furthermore, the New Hermeneutic manifests an almost magical view of the nature of language, failing to do justice to the range of functions it has within revelation, and identifying language with 'Being'. Lastly this approach exaggerates the difference between the original writers and the interpreter.

In the final section of this paper, the challenge of the New

Hermeneutic was faced. This includes the pastoral concern which underlies and motivates it. In interpreting God's Word we need to be mindful of the complex contemporary problems which our people face, for example, in the realm of social and medical ethics. Other aspects of this challenge include the importance of applying the text and the necessity to be mindful that there are 'existential' factors which affect our interpretation of scripture. However, the main contribution of the New Hermeneutic concerns their approach to our Lord's parables, which highlights, for example, our tendency to identify with the publican in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, whereas Jesus' original hearers would have identified with the Pharisee and would hence have been deeply disturbed and shocked by his climactical utterance (Luke 18:14).

The present writer heartily concurred with Dr Davies' statement that "our own hermeneutics have been atrocious at times", and his final comment, "The greatest challenge, possibly, from the New Hermeneutic is that we should improve our own hermeneutics".

The conference now moved from the general to the particular and from how hermeneutics should not be done to how it should. An Old Testament example of this was given in the second paper, AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF LEVITICUS 17, by Rev Principal John Waite.

After stressing the importance of this chapter as it bears upon the doctrine of the atonement, Rev Waite first of all considered its place in the overall structure of Leviticus. He suggested that chapter 17 is a transitional chapter, though belonging to the second part of the book (chs.17-27). However, having as its main theme "the sanctity of blood", it is also complementary to the preceding chapter on the Day of Atonement, which pre-eminently indicates the significance of sacrifice in the life of Israel and, consequently, the unique sacredness of the blood.

He then analysed the chapter into its constituent points, noting that, after a significant introduction, it clearly falls into four well-defined sections which all reflect the close-knit unity of the chapter. Each section was then carefully exegeted.

Vv 3-7 deal with the prohibition of slaughtering domestic animals away from the Tabernacle. (N.B. The Hebrew verb *sha'chat*, translated

'sacrifices' in the NIV, actually has the more general sense of 'to kill' or 'to slaughter'). Any Israelite who killed an animal which belonged to the sacrificial category either outside the camp, or within the camp but not at the Tabernacle was held to have 'shed blood'. He was thus exposed to the ultimate penalty, "that man shall be cut off from among his people" (AV).

Whereas these verses were concerned with 'peace' or 'fellowship' offerings, with which sacrificial meals were associated, vv 8,9 deal with the burnt offering (ʕlah), which belonged to God in its entirety. Rev Waite indicated that "the thrust of this section is to make illegal the offering of sacrifices to God in any other place whatsoever save at the sanctuary which had been set up at God's command and according to Divine specifications". Animal sacrifice must not be misused, and thus the peculiar significance of sacrificial blood, and its unique sanctity, must not be denied.

The key section of this chapter is vv 10-12 which deal with the prohibition of the eating of blood. Of central importance is verse 11. In this verse, the two-fold ground upon which the eating of "any manner of blood" is forbidden, is given. The first aspect is expressed thus: "The life of the flesh is in the blood". The meaning of this may be clarified by comparison with verse 14, Genesis 9:4 and Deuteronomy 12:23. It should be translated "the life of the flesh is the blood". Blood is the visible symbol of the life (nepheg) which is itself invisible. The second aspect, resting upon the first, is expressed in the rest of the verse. Mr Waite preferred the last statement of the verse to be rendered "for the blood makes atonement by the life".

In this connection, he carefully examined the meaning of the Hebrew verb 'kipper' translated "to make atonement", together with the cognate noun 'kopher'. Avoiding uncertain etymological considerations, he concentrated on the non-cultic use of this verb. The passage in Exodus 30:11-16, concerning atonement money, is especially relevant. Mr Waite also considered other passages, such as Numbers 35:30-34. From these passages, he concluded: "It would appear then that kipper involves the idea of the payment of a ransom - a kopher ... To make atonement thus means to pay a ransom for one's life".

It was now possible to argue that sacrificial blood was the

evidence of a life that had been taken. This was the ransom-price that enabled the person on whose behalf the sacrifice was offered to escape the death that his sin deserved. Animal blood had a unique sanctity "because God had appointed it to make propitiation for the sins of His Covenant people upon the altar".

Finally, by way of exegesis, vv 13-16 (closely related to vv 10-12) deal with the prohibition of the eating of the blood of animals caught in hunting, and the eating of clean animals found dead.

The paper now dealt with reasons for maintaining that the prohibition concerning the eating of animal blood is not binding upon Christians. Although Jesus Christ fulfilled and abolished the types and shadows of the Mosaic law, this prohibition antedated the Law (Genesis 9:4) and was enjoined on Gentile believers (Acts 15:20,29) Dealing first with the latter factor, Mr Waite argued that this decree of the Jerusalem Council was a temporary expedient in view of the continued horror of Jewish Christians concerning eating blood. Its non-permanency is clear from 1 Cor.10:25 and Romans 14:14. Secondly, having argued for the Divine institution of sacrifice from the beginning, and that the Noahic prohibition was because of the sanctity of blood through God's appointment of it in sacrifice, Mr Waite reasoned that this prohibition too had been abrogated by the great anti-typical sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last part of the paper Mr Waite dealt with the abiding significance of sacrificial blood. He was particularly concerned with the view that the blood represents life released as an offering to God - life which has become available for another end. In line with his exegesis, he argued cogently that the significance of blood in sacrifice is that of a life forfeited in place of the life of the sinner who offers the sacrifice. It speaks of the death of a substitute under the judgement of God. It symbolises life violently ended, being given or taken in death. All this is indicative of the true nature of the death of Jesus Christ.

This helpful paper was followed by a thorough treatment of 1 Corinthians 7, as a New Testament example of how to interpret and apply Scriptures. This paper was prepared and presented by Rev Professor A.C.Boyd. The concern, as with the Leviticus paper, was the permanent-passing 'complex'.

Mr Boyd pointed out that the chapter is almost exclusively

concerned with marriage. However, Paul is not writing a treatise on marriage, but answering questions put to him. Again, Paul is dealing specifically with the Corinthian situation, but this must not be so stressed as to obscure the abiding and universal significance of his message. After answering those who pit Paul's (apparent) imminent expectation of the Parousia against the contemporary relevance of much that he wrote in this chapter, Rev Boyd referred to the phrase "dia tēn enestōsan anankēn" (because of the present necessity) in verse 26. Some take it to refer to a temporary crisis affecting Corinth, some as a reference to "the great tribulation", and others as a reference to the affliction that characterises the whole of the time between the two advents of Jesus Christ. He considered that the best approach "is the one that accepts that when Paul came to address those in mind in v26 (or 25 and 26) he saw that it was particularly relevant in their case to make mention of the 'present necessity'".

Mr Boyd then looked at the text of the chapter in some detail. He considered it in terms of four main sections.

In vv 1-17, Paul answers questions concerning marriage, raised by the Corinthians in a letter, in a straightforward but non-simplistic way. Paul does not contradict those at Corinth who were saying "It is good for a man not to touch (marry) a woman" But he cannot share their philosophies or preconceived ideas. Paul seems to regard marriage as the normal, regular, perfectly proper, practice, and the directions of vv 3-5 make it plain that it is to be a real marriage. However, for those who, like Paul, have the gift, to whom immorality is not a significant danger, "there is a life ... to live that Paul wished them to have".

In vv 10-11, Paul addresses the married in the light of what has been said in vv 1-7, especially vv 2-5. Paul is here giving a commandment in a matter on which the Lord Himself had clearly spoken. They were not to separate. Adultery is not under consideration here but rather, whether or not it was a "good" thing per se for Christian couples to separate. In vv 12-16 Paul addresses the partners in mixed marriages who were in a situation not under consideration in the commands of the Lord. There were those in Corinth, converted after they were married, who felt that they should put away or leave their pagan partners. However we translate 'aphiēmi' (divorce NIV), Paul is envisaging the breaking up of the

marriage and he categorically forbids the Christian partner to take the initiative in this. Concerning the encouragement Paul gives to obey this command in verse 14, Mr Boyd noted that the sanctification of the unbelieving partner is spoken about as an accomplished reality, already true while he or she is still an unbeliever (apistos). "He cannot therefore, be speaking about any regenerating or renewing work of the Holy Spirit". Mr Boyd also stressed that the "desertion" envisaged in verse 15 is not on the basis of such grounds as incompatibility. "It is the clash of unbelief with faith that is in view here". The statement "is not bound" is interpreted in various ways and may provide grounds for a believer to be free to remarry in such circumstances. However, the emphasis is that the believing party is not at liberty to divorce or depart. In conclusion, verse 17 states the general principle that the circumstances in which a Christian finds himself are those in which he is to live out his Christian life.

In the second section, vv 18-24, Paul applies what he has said in verse 17 to the realm of religious and social distinctions. The paper indicated however, that these verses must be understood in their relationship to the whole chapter, with its theme of marriage. Paul is emphasising a particular point in this connection.

Mr Boyd took vv 25-38 as a unit, containing advice concerning 'parthenoi' (virgins). On the basis of grammatical and exegetical considerations he also took the view that the 'parthenoi' are unmarried girls, perhaps betrothed, whom Paul does not address directly because they were not in a position to take the initiative in the matter of marriage. He further regarded those addressed in the whole passage as the fiances, rather than the fathers (or guardians), of betrothed maidens. In any case, the burden of Paul's advice is in line with what he said in verse 8 concerning other unmarrieds. The distinction Paul makes between 'gnōmē' (v25 advice) and 'epitagē' (command) is to be noted. In this section Paul is giving advice concerning the betrothed, whether it is wise to continue an engagement, or whether sin is involved in breaking it. Mr Boyd argued that in the first part of verse 27, Paul is not addressing a married man but an engaged man. The word 'gunē' (translated 'wife' in AV and NIV) can be used of a betrothed girl. Paul's advice is that, in certain circumstances ("the present necessity" v26) it is good for a man to remain engaged rather than

get married, or to remain unengaged if an engagement has been broken. However, because he is giving 'gnōmē' and not 'epitagē', failure to conform to it is not sin.

In verse 36, Paul qualifies his advice for those who feel they have good reason not to accept it. But in vv 37 and 38 he makes it clear that the man who has reasoned things out and, not being pressurised by the will of others, follows Paul's advice, takes the preferable course. The observations of vv 29-35 are very germane to all this. Whether we take vv 29b-31 as imperatival or a statement of what will be, it indicates that the attitude of the Christian towards the things of the world is to be one of "engagement yet disengagement". It is essential to get priorities right. In this respect, there are some circumstances in which it is easier than others for the believer to live out what these verses command or imply. This is the tone of vv 32-35. Paul is not suggesting that the striving of the married Christian to serve the interests of his or her partner is wrong. But Paul's point is that there are legitimate claims on the married man or woman that come in the way of undivided service to the Lord. This is intensified in a time of affliction ("the present necessity" v26).

The final section, vv 39-40, deals of course with the remarriage of widows.

In conclusion, some considerations of permanent relevance and contemporary application were highlighted. In particular the place of celibacy and the single life were stressed. The single life holds out countless opportunities for service and, "there can be a form of exaltation of marriage that is as much a perversion of Scripture teaching as is the Roman Catholic exaltation of celibacy"

The conference no moved specifically into the realm of the practical. The final two papers considered how Scripture's permanent authority and relevance may be applied to actual situations in a multi-faith environment. In this connection, the paper by Rev Maurice Wheatley dealt with CHURCH PLANTING AND GROWTH. In introducing this subject, he highlighted the nature and importance of church planting and indicated that such missionary activity always takes place in a given "culture". This raises such issues as how absolute and relative are to be distinguished and on what basis aspects of cultural practice should be excluded. The paper then

followed this matter through in four sections.

In the first section, Mr Wheatley considered the significance and power of culture as illustrated by the overall church situation in Africa. The vast complex of culturally orientated religious forms and structures that have arisen in the African churches was seen as a reaction to Western missionary activities of the past. Western missionaries saw little of value in African tribal customs and, frequently, Western values were assumed to be above question. For example, polygamy was often integral to tribal coherency and security. Western eyes saw a plurality of wives as reprehensible although not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. Demands made of newly converted men to conform to a monogamous pattern undermined the security of women and led to various evils. The paper made reference to other actions which "struck at the roots of traditional well-being., identity and security". The translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular provided an independent standard of reference and was "a major causative factor" of the spread of churches independent of those founded through missionary activity. In the long run cultural factors will not be ignored.

In the second section, the Church Growth Movement was considered. The father of this movement is Donald Anderson McGavran (born 1897) and the basic text book is his 'Understanding Church Growth' (published 1970). The home of the movement is North America (inevitably!). The theology of the movement is basically evangelical and the motivating desire is to mobilise the church to reach the vast numbers of people who have never heard the gospel.

Mr Wheatley then considered the major emphases of the Church Growth Movement. Numerical growth should be a primary concern of the church. The church should be making disciples. The church should concentrate on the responsive areas and segments of society. The church should use every possible aid to understanding its situation and fulfilling its task. The church must plan adequately and mobilise its whole membership. In enlarging on these emphases, reference was made to several key aspects of McGavran's thought. To give examples: his D1 category of "discipleship", in which a non-christian society turns to Christ for the first time evidencing this say by a sociological change; his concept of "winnable people", as those who for circumstantial reasons are more open to the gospel; his highlighting of non-theological factors which

prevent people becoming Christians, such as the fear of Hindus of being separated from their people.

In a brief assessment of the movement, Mr Wheatley referred to its success-orientated outlook, its pragmatism, and the tendency of its literature to suggest that growth is "achievable if only we master the technique". He then indicated the challenge to us of this movement, for example, in the matter of the non-theological factors related to the success of the gospel. Must we always expect God to overcome cultural barriers in bringing people to himself? "The theological ones are big enough".

The third section of the paper dealt specifically with McGavran's concept of People Movements and Homogenous Church Units. Western Christianity has an individualistic character incongruous to many areas of the world where the individual sees himself as part of a corporate entity such as a tribe, in which social practice, common religious belief, and power structures, are closely intertwined. This suggests the need for a change in a number of people together to enable them to alter their life out of allegiance to Jesus Christ and at the same time to retain the identity of their tribe or clan. These are known as "people movements". The people of such a group move forward together, the group taking its decisive step in its own time. McGavran regards such movements as the only way to plant churches in any significant number. In close connection with this, McGavran uses the term "homogenous unit" to describe the various sociological groups which have an identity of their own, sharing a lifestyle, language and assumptions. McGavran urges that there should be a deliberate strategy of church-planting amongst such groups as groups, allowing them, for example, to create their own indigenous music for worship. A broader manifestation of brotherhood is seen as a pattern for long-term existence, not a strategy for planting churches. In these ways "bridge-building" takes place using "the natural web of kinship and friendship in families, tribes, clans and castes".

In the last section, a few guidelines were suggested for the use of Scripture in a church-planting situation. The legitimacy of culture was stressed, indicating that there should be as little cultural separation as possible. In this respect a true "crux decision" must be looked for in a convert. This might be baptism, or a cultural factor which is truly significant such as the

abandoning of the turban. We were exhorted to exercise caution in applying deducted principles. Our opposition to polygamy is not based on express biblical statements but on deduction from scriptural principles. In such cases, there would appear to be a place for an "interim adjustment" taking a long-term view of the effect of the gospel on practices of this nature. We were also exhorted to distinguish between form and function. The example was given of the observation of the Lord's Supper by the Uhunduni tribe, using sweet potatoes and red juice from wild raspberries!

In similar vein, Rev George Hemming presented his paper on EVANGELISM AND MISSION. This took the form of a case study. It was based on the experience of a group of missionaries working amongst Muslims in Bangladesh, and had relevance to the whole subject of our evangelistic approach to Muslims.

The paper first pointed up the problems. Muslims in the Indian sub-continent associate the gospel with Hinduism, firmly believing that Christians worship three gods. The Muslim is convinced that the Christian Bible is a corrupt version of the Koran and finds the personal habits of Christians, who he sees as consuming both pork and wine, strongly offensive. He also has the impression that many people become Christians for the financial well-being associated with Western culture. Above all there is the problem of the converted Muslim, turning to the Western missionary for help in a time of persecution, henceforth being removed from his own environment with the consequent loss of his witness to his own people.

In view of all this, the missionary team have adopted a new strategy. This includes: the avoidance of the westernisation of the gospel; the ordering of their approach so that no financial dependence of converts upon missionaries is ever encouraged; the aim of obtaining group, rather than isolated, conversions. However, total loyalty to the Scripture is emphasised above all.

Mr Hemming next dealt with the need to avoid unnecessary offences. The missionaries adopt as simple a lifestyle as possible so that Muslims invited into their homes do not feel out of place. They normally adopt the dress of a Muslim teacher in order to be accepted as a religious teacher. The term 'Christian' is avoided, as this "conjures up a picture of a pig-eating, liquor-drinking, three-god worshipper". Other examples, for discussion, were given.

Furthermore, operations are based in a central town from where people in surrounding villages are reached. Those interested come to the central teaching location. Thus, when a group of men in a particular village become seriously interested, there is no western presence in their midst to confirm the view of their peers that Christianity is a Western religion.

The paper then turned to the complex matter of attitude to customs. We must remember that matters which seem trivial to us can give agony to missionaries in the real situation. First, customs which are unprofitable but nonetheless harmless were considered. These can be submitted to. However, Rev Hemming found problems in the matter of the wearing of prayer hats by men, since he regards it as obligatory for women to have their heads covered during times of public worship. Secondly, customs which are profitable in essence but questionable in form were dealt with. These include, praying five times a day towards Mecca and the observation of Ramazan. It was noted that the devout Muslim neither eats, nor drinks, nor even swallows his saliva, during the daylight hours of Ramazan. Fasting is an excellent practice for Christians. Should they thus outwardly conform to this Muslim feast, or demonstrate their new-found liberty in Christ? Is it, in any case, as simple as that?

In the final part of the paper, Rev Hemming turned his attention to baptism. He was concerned with "the fierce practical problems of establishing the Christian church in a Muslim community". He saw baptism as presenting insuperable problems since it leads to the rejection of a Muslim from his society, giving no hope of establishing true churches in Muslim cultural situations. This is because religion, culture and nationhood are bound together in the Muslim mind, in a way that is "impossible for any Westerner to grasp". He thus sought a reappraisal of the whole question of baptism. Making reference to Paul's apparent undervaluation of baptism in 1 Cor.1, and our Lord's command to "wash one another's feet" which we interpret spiritually, he asked whether we could emphasise the spiritual meaning of baptism" which need not necessarily be represented by a public application of water".

Lively discussion followed the presentation of this case study. Much of the discussion focussed on whether or not the Christian in a Muslim culture should outwardly conform to the requirements

of Ramazan. (Interestingly, the previous paper regarded this matter as involving a "crux decision"). By such means, the chairman skillfully avoided the subject of baptism! Avoiding the temptation to comment on this last matter myself, I can state that these final two papers challenged several of my presuppositions about missionary strategy.

The final morning was devoted to discussion and several observations were made by way of summation. These included reference to the need for a truly Biblical theology, the importance of taking account of the mode of the passage of scripture we are studying (whether it is narrative, poetry, etc.), the equal importance of an awareness of twentieth century man, and the need for a continual reexamination of our doctrines in the light of scripture. Ultimately, as the New Hermeneutic reminds us, we must realise that the purpose of scripture is to speak to people in order to renew a people for God.

There is space only to comment on two outstanding features of the conference, as far as I was concerned. First, the mutual acceptance of, and fellowship between, brethren from various evangelical 'traditions'. Secondly, the excellent chairmanship of Rev Hywel Jones.

BOOK REVIEWS

MAN AND WOMAN IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE James B. Hurley
Published by IVP 288pp. £5.50

Dr Hurley is to be most warmly thanked for this work of worthy evangelical scholarship and the IVP is to be loudly praised for its courage in publishing it. The relationship between and the respective roles of the sexes is a most vexatious issue at the present time. It not only divides the Christian from the non-Christian world but it also is a cause of disagreement between Christians and within Churches.

In all this the teaching of the Bible is given less than its proper place. Dr Hurley's aim is to determine what Scripture in its various parts has to say on this subject. He thinks in terms of