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Editorial

Is Evangelicalism Eroding?

Evangelical introspection has been the burden of many recent books. And now in yet another (*Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, by James Davidson Hunter) we find a prophecy that evangelicalism is softening. Hunter, who is a sociologist predicts that in spite of its remarkable growth and influence in the past, the chances of maintaining the growth and self-renewal of evangelicalism in the near future are slim.

Hunter is of course speaking primarily of American evangelicalism. He bases his findings on a survey conducted with evangelical leaders in sixteen seminaries in the USA during 1982–85—and we should remember it is academicians who eventually set the trend of the coming generation. He infers that there has been a dilution in ‘four dimensions of the evangelical cultural system’: In *theology* he sees a move away from the doctrines of the inerrancy of the Bible, original sin, the wrath of God, and hell. In the area of *work, morality and self*, the change is from self-mortification to self-fulfillment. In the area of *family and politics*, he observes that evangelicals are divided, to say the least. All in all, the evangelical pilgrim ‘is now travelling with less conviction, less confidence about his path, and is perhaps more vulnerable to the worldly distractions encountered by Bunyan’s pilgrim’.

All modern sociological prophecies must be taken with a pinch of salt; sociology is still a controversial science. And many reviewers of the book do take issue with him; but such an analysis as his prods us towards both self-examination and house-cleaning. For there are instances where the difference in outlook between evangelicalism and liberalism has been merely a matter of a time-gap. With the threat of ‘future shock’ upon us, we must resist the temptation to ideologize evangelicalism.

The well-known systematic theologian of yesteryear, Augustus Hopkin Strong, held that a total allegiance to Jesus Christ is an adequate criterion for evangelicalism. There can be flexibility in any area save this. And although there is no one theme for the articles in this issue, grace, truth, power and creativity are the undercurrents. Beyond an adherence to the supremacy of the Bible for faith and conduct, and the proclamation of the gospel leading to conversion, evangelicalism can be defined as loyalty to Jesus Christ, inevitably including the Church, his body. To put it in the words of John: ‘grace p. 100 and truth came through Jesus Christ’, and as long as these basics are held on to, there is no danger of a ‘softening’. For, after all, it is he who builds his Church.

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Do Miracles Authenticate the Messiah?

James R. Brady

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This article assesses the role of miracle-working in the authentication of Jesus as ‘the Son of God’. In well-documented analyses of the first century expectation of the Messiah, and the

understanding of shalom among the Jews, the author convincingly argues for the power of the 'Son of God' to do miracles as an authentication of his Messiahship. In our age of supernatural healing, with its increase in occult experiment, the relevance of the article is apparent.

Editor

When the Scriptures talk of Jesus as the Messiah, probably *the* most significant title they use is 'Son of God'. In passages such as [Matthew 16:16](#) and [26:63](#) it is clear that these two titles—Messiah and 'Son of God'—stand in apposition. The title 'Son of God' undoubtedly stems from OT texts such as [2 Sam. 7:14](#) and [Psalm 2:7](#), in its association with the Davidic king.

But when we come to the miracle-working aspect of Jesus' ministry, there is great difficulty in establishing a clear connection with the OT anticipation of the coming Messiah. But it can be shown that this facet of the Lord's ministry was indeed in line with OT expectations of God's 'Son'.

THE WORKING OF MIRACLES IN JESUS' MINISTRY

Robert Fortna reflects the sentiments of many when he says, 'There is surprisingly little direct evidence that the Jewish Messiah was expected to be a worker of miracles.'¹ But the working of miracles was considered by Jesus to mark his work as Messiah. When imprisoned, John the Baptist sent to ask if Jesus was indeed the 'Coming One'. Jesus answered with a declaration of his miracles ([Matt. 11:1-6](#) par.)². Jesus' [P. 102](#) preaching of the 'gospel of the kingdom' is tied directly to his working of miracles ([Matt. 9:35](#) par.). When Jesus sent out his disciples to 'proclaim the kingdom', he gave them power to perform miracles ([Lk. 9:1-6](#) par.). Thus Jesus' Messiahship, the kingdom, and the working of miracles seem to be inexorably linked.

An explanation for this, as it relates to exorcism, is offered by Howard Kee. He says,

The clue to the significance of the title Son of God in the exorcism narratives is offered in [Mark 2:23-27](#). The images are mixed: a kingdom is divided, a dynasty is ruined by internal conflict.... As the demons' words disclose, Jesus is the agent of God empowered to bring about their defeat and to wrest control of the world from the hand of Satan and subject it to the rule of God. This is not traditional messianic language, according to strict Jewish traditions, but it is Mark's way of understanding the one ordained to be God's viceregent.³

At this point, Jeremias' insight into the concept of 'kingdom' is helpful:

One thing is certain: the word *malkūtā* did not have for the oriental the significance that the word 'kingdom' does for the westerner. Only in quite isolated instances in the Old Testament does *malkūt* denote a realm in the spatial sense, a territory; almost always it stands for the government, the authority, the power of the king ... *malkūt* is always in

¹ Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs*, p. 230.

² Jesus' words in v. [6](#), 'and blessed is he who refrains from stumbling over me', is probably a reference to the doubt of John and others who may not have seen Jesus' ministry as perfectly fulfilling that of the anticipated Messiah. The greatest stumbling block, that of the cross, was yet to come.

³ Kee, *Community of the New Age*, pp. 123-24.

process of being achieved. Thus the reign of God is neither a spatial nor a static concept; it is a *dynamic concept* [ital. his].⁴

Consequently, Jesus' Messiahship and Sonship in His first advent entailed something other than a physical throne and domination over Israel's political enemies. As Kingsbury points out, Jesus' miracles (and exorcism in particular) show him to be the Son of God engaged in eschatological conflict with Satan and his forces.⁵

THE FIRST CENTURY EXPECTATION OF MESSIAH

The term 'Messiah' had come to be something of a *terminus technicus* by the first century BC for the Anointed One who would be God's deliverer in the days of eschatological consummation.⁶ Referring to Ps. Sol. chapters [17-18](#) and 1QS 9:11, Longenecker says, 'What seems to have captured the people's fancy was that the Messiah would **P. 103** be a political and nationalistic ruler—even a military leader.'⁷ But parallel with this ran the belief that the Messiah would be one who would bring good news and well-being for the people according to [Isaiah 52:7](#).⁸ So, although the people would not have expected a purely political Messiah, yet in light of texts such as [Mk. 10:37](#) there was the expectation of political power with respect to the kingdom.

William Wrede postulated that the 'Messianic secret' was evident because Mark needed to insert a rationale in his Gospel for Jesus' life passing without Messianic fulfillment.⁹ It seems more feasible to see the apparent 'secret' of Jesus' Messiahship not in a lack of fulfillment, but in the lack of understanding by the people. As is evident from several passages, they were so eager for the arrival of their anticipated Messiah that they wanted to make him king 'by force' (e.g. [Jn. 6:15](#)). Thus Jesus exhorted most of those whom he healed to be silent about his Messiahship, including demons (cf. [Mk. 1:25, 34](#)). Realizing the mania that could spread among the people, Jesus admonished the cleansed leper to show himself to the priest 'for a testimony to them' ([Mk. 1:44](#)). The word 'them' is probably a reference to the Jewish leaders. These were the ones primarily responsible for recognizing the Messiah and designating him as such. Only then could the people be unified in their recognition of and submission to him.

'THE SON OF DAVID'

But the common people did see Jesus in the role of Messiah. Just how they saw him as such in the light of the working of miracles may lie in his function as 'Son of David'. In many references, this title is associated with healing and exorcism (cf. [Matt. 9:27](#); [12:22](#); [15:22](#); etc.).

⁴ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 98.

⁵ Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*, p. 77.

⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, pp. 64-66.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11', *JBL* 86 (1967): 40.

⁹ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans, J. C. G. Grieg, *passim*, esp. 211-30.

Kingsbury shows that the title 'Messiah' in the Gospels is equivalent to 'Son of God', 'King of Israel', and 'Son of David'.¹⁰ In the Old Testament, aside from one reference to Absalom ([2 Sam. 13:1](#)), the only person designated 'son of David' was Solomon ([1 Chr. 29:22](#); [2 Chr. 1:1](#); [Prov. 1:1](#); [Eccl. 1:1](#)). In each of these contexts, Solomon is not only called 'son of David', but reference is also made to his being the king of Israel. p. 104

Not only is Solomon the definitive 'son of David' in the OT, but he may be the only person in the OT designated as God's 'son'. This is evident when the 'sonship' texts are examined. The reference in [2 Sam. 7:14](#) (par. [1 Chr. 17:13](#)) is obviously to David's son, later identified as Solomon ([1 Chr. 22:9](#)). [Psalm 89](#) is not a Davidic psalm, but is attributed to Ethan who refers back to the Lord's promises to David in 2 Sam. chapter 7.¹¹ [Psalm 2](#) is anonymous, and for this reason Delitzsch says it cannot be considered Davidic.¹² The only sonship passage that remains is [1 Chr. 22:10](#). Here a clear reference is made to Solomon as God's 'son'. Thus the only certain referent with respect to sonship is Solomon.¹³

It is also noteworthy that Yahweh himself gives Solomon his name even before he is born. The name thus seems to be connected with the concept of sonship, for they both proceed from the Lord in the same context. Yahweh gives a brief explanation for the name, saying he shall be Solomon because God will give him peace (*shalom*) during his reign.

The word 'peace' (*shalom*) means more than the absence of strife. The Old Testament employs the word to mean 'completeness, soundness, wholeness, health, prosperity'¹⁴. Von Rad says, 'At root it means "well-being".'¹⁵ Such was the ideal for the ruler in the ancient world. Wolfgang Roth says,

Behind the notion that the king brings and guarantees peace is the so-called ancient Near East royal ideology. There peace is understood not so much as the opposite of war as ... justice and harmony.... Through his rule the king upholds this order.¹⁶ p. 105

This was true because, as Henri Frankfort explains,

The ancient Near East considered kingship the very basis of civilization ... Security, peace and justice could not prevail without a ruler to champion them.... Whatever was significant was imbedded in the life of the cosmos, and it was precisely the king's function to maintain the harmony of that integration.¹⁷

¹⁰ Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*, p. 55.

¹¹ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell, pp. 590–91.

¹² Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton, 1:89. In [Acts 4:25](#) Peter attributes [Psalm 2](#) to David. However this ascription may be similar to Matthew's attributing the words of Zechariah to Jeremiah in [Matt. 27:9](#). Matthew does this because Jeremiah was first in the group of prophetic books. Gundry calls this a 'Jewish practice [of] composite quotations' (Matthew. A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art, p. 557). Peter may have linked the Psalm to David since he was the most prominent author of the Psalms (Weiser, pp. 94–95).

¹³ Note also how both 'his kingdom', i.e. Solomon's, and 'your kingdom', i.e. David's, are used interchangeably in these passages. Thus, although David may seem to have some part in the concept of sonship, this is only because it is his offspring who is called God's 'son'. David's throne, therefore, becomes the throne of God's 'son'.

¹⁴ BDB, s.v. 'shalom', pp. 1022–23.

¹⁵ *TDNT*, s.v. 'eirēnē', by Gerhard von Rad, 2 (1969): 402.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Roth, 'The Language of Peace: Shalom and Eirene', *Explor.* 3 (1977): 71.

¹⁷ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p. 3.

But even more important for the present study, J. Maxwell Miller points out that the monarch in the ancient Orient had the above-mentioned responsibility because he was the 'image' of God. Just as God at creation had bestowed upon man (who was his image) the responsibility to care for the creation, so he held the king (who is his image) responsible for the care of the people.¹⁸

Thus Israel's king was to provide well-being for God's people. This was because as Israel's 'father', God had promised to care for the nation as a father cares for his son (cf. [Deut. 1:31](#)). A. R. Johnson observes, '[That] the king held office as Yahweh's agent or viceregent is shown quite clearly in the rite of anointing which marked him out as a sacral person endowed with such special responsibility for the well-being of his people.'¹⁹

Well-being for Israel was indeed maintained during Solomon's reign. Of this period Bright says, 'Israel enjoyed a security and material plenty such as she had never dreamed of before and was never to know again.'²⁰ But as the biblical account shows, that harmony lasted only as long as Solomon's heartbeat. In the wake of his death, the strife that followed began at the throne itself ([1 Kings 12:1-20](#), par.). No king thereafter was ever referred to as God's 'son'. Instead, as in [Ps. 89](#), they looked back to Yahweh's promise to David.

Loren Fischer thinks that during the time of Jesus, at the popular level, the title 'Son of David' referred to Solomon.²¹ Thus, there may have been something conveyed by the 'son' titles as applied to Jesus which looked back to the figure of Solomon.²² p. 106

There is evidence to substantiate such a claim. Donahue says that in the Gospels, 'exorcism distinguishes a person as possessor of royal power in David's line'.²³ Klaus Berger goes further and proposes that the Jewish tradition concerning Solomon's power over demons stands behind the understanding of the title 'Son of David' in the New Testament.²⁴ Vermes shows that in intertestamental Judaism and that current with early Christianity, Solomon was viewed as an exorcist and that exorcisms were performed in his name.²⁵ In a passage from *Antiquities* Josephus says of Solomon,

And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return.²⁶

When and how this tradition about Solomon began can only be speculated. But Fischer claims that Solomon's fame as a great wonder-worker spread into many forms of Near

¹⁸ J. Maxwell Miller, 'In the "Image" and "Likeness" of God', *JBL* 91 (1972): 294-96.

¹⁹ A. R. Johnson, 'Hebrew Conceptions of Kingship', in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, pp. 207-208.

²⁰ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 212.

²¹ Loren Fischer, ' "Can This Be the Son of David?" ', in *Jesus and the Historian*, p. 90.

²² That the title 'Son of David' had more meaning for Jews than non-Jews may be reflected by its nine occurrences in Matthew, three in Mark, and two in Luke's Gospel; but is not to be found in the rest of the New Testament.

²³ John R. Donahue, 'Temple, Trial, and Royal Christology', in *The Passion in Mark*, p. 75.

²⁴ Klaus Berger, 'Die Königlichen Messiastraditionen des Neuen Testaments', *NTS* 20 (1973): 3-9, 13-15.

²⁵ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, pp. 62-65.

²⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.45.

Eastern literature.²⁷ That this was recognized during Jesus' time might be seen in [Matt. 12:38–42](#). In response to the Pharisees' demand for a miraculous sign Jesus replies, 'One greater than Solomon is here.'

Vermes theorizes that the exorcism tradition associated with Solomon may stand behind the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees in [Matt. 12:22–29](#). Here they accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Probably, says Vermes, this is because Jesus does not invoke any human source, such as that most commonly used: Solomon.²⁸ Thus in v. [27](#) Jesus retorts, 'By whom do your sons cast them out?'

Jesus continues in this Matthean pericope to declare that exorcism demonstrates that 'the kingdom of God has come' (v. [28](#)). In correspondence with the Old Testament, then, the Son of David and his work are tied to the kingdom. [p. 107](#)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF *SHALOM*

But Jesus' activity as 'Son of David' is more than exorcistic, it is 'therapeutic'.²⁹ Obviously demon possession was viewed as a plague of evil in Palestine,³⁰ but the influence of evil from Satan was seen to go even further. As Vermes says,

In the world of Jesus, the devil was believed to be at the basis of sickness as well as sin. The idea [existed] that demons were responsible for all moral and physical evil.³¹

Loader sees Jesus functioning as Messiah and Son of David to purge Israel of evil and the reign of Satan.³²

The kingdom of which Jesus speaks and which he manifests encompasses more than a following of people and the changing of lives. It is a cataclysmic restructuring of the fallen created order. Jesus was seen as the 'Son of David' because he was bringing about the anticipated *shalom* which even Solomon—the first king of peace and son of David—did not. As Messiah ('Son of David' and 'Son of God'), he healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead ([Jn. 11:27ff.](#)), and calmed the storm ([Matt. 14:22–33](#)). Of this last account Otto Betz says, 'Jesus' walking on the water proclaims his victory over the powers of chaos.'³³ Jesus brought order out of chaos, he brought about soundness, health, and well-being. In short, he brought peace. As we have already seen, the provision of peace was the responsibility of the king in the ancient world. In Nolan's words,

The royal ideology of the Old Testament is certainly tributary to early oriental ideas of the king as mediator of the cosmic order, as guarantor of Maat or *sedeq*. By his righteousness

²⁷ Fischer, p. 85.

²⁸ Vermes, pp. 63–64.

²⁹ Dennis Duling, 'The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic', *NTS* 24 (1977–78): 409.

³⁰ Otto Betz, p. 70.

³¹ Vermes, p. 61.

³² W. R. G. Loader, 'Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew', *CBQ* 44 (1982): 570–85.

³³ Otto Betz, p. 69, n. 52. Betz (*ibid.*) also mentions the chaos Jesus overcame by his being with the 'wild beasts' ([Mk. 1:13](#)). Hans-Günter Leder, 'Sudenfällerzählung und Versuchungsgeschichte,' *ZNW* 54 (1963): 205–206, 211, referring to Old Testament texts such as [Isa. 11:6–8](#) and [Hos. 2:18](#), sees Jesus' presence in the wilderness with the wild beasts as an allusion to the eschatological age of salvation when men and beasts will dwell together in peace.

((s)f *daqah*) he triumphs over enemies and ensures the Shalom of his people. He is ... the son of God.³⁴ p. 108

Jesus' righteousness and provision of peace was that about which not even Solomon could boast.³⁵ And only in the person and work of the king did the ancient Near East see the possibility of security and peace for the people.³⁶ No wonder the Jews longed for the appearing of their Messiah. Some intertestamental literature summed up the blessings of the Messianic period with the word *shalom*.³⁷

But Jesus' ministry *did* involve the changing of lives. As we see foreshadowed in the examples of David and Solomon, the Messiahson was to be more than a political king; he was to be a prophet and priest. Of Jesus' words in [Matt. 12:42](#) ('a greater one than Solomon is here'), Schniewind says,

Now what kings possessed and what prophets longed for is fulfilled. Here is a summons to repentance greater than the summons of the prophets, and a joyous word greater than the word of the first son of David. Here is God's Messiah who is both king and prophet.³⁸

As prophet, Jesus' ministry is religious. But this does not conflict with some uses of *shalom* in the Old Testament. As Roth points out, in Joshua through 2 Kings the word *shalom* has religious as well as political overtones.³⁹ Von Rad says, '[When] used in its full compass, *shalom* is a religious term.'⁴⁰ We see Jesus using this term to proclaim, 'Go in peace (*eirēnē*), your faith has saved (root *sōzō*) you' ([Mk. 5:34](#) par.; [Lk. 7:50](#)). The connection of *shalom* with salvation is apparent in much Old Testament usage. Citing several passages in the prophets including [Jer. 31:6](#), Beasley-Murray says that, for the Jew, peace extended to one's existence in relation to God and others, for peace is an all-encompassing synonym for salvation.⁴¹

Peace was something for which the Jew longed. Van Rad says, 'Expectation of a final state of eternal peace is an element in OT eschatology which finds constant expression in the prophets and other writings.'⁴² As the Jews longed for this peace, so Jesus' ministry was characterized by peace. It was prophesied of him by Isaiah ('Price of Peace,' 9:6), announced at his birth ([Lk. 2:14](#)), prophesied by Zacharias to define his ministry ([Lk. 1:79](#)), an essential part of the p. 109 disciples' ministry as a reflection of his ([Matt. 10:13](#) par.), proclaimed by the people in association with him at the Triumphal Entry ([Lk. 19:38](#)), that which was rejected by Israel when they rejected him ([Lk. 19:42](#)), and that which Jesus left for those who believe in him ([Jn. 14:27](#); [16:33](#); [20:19](#), [21-22](#), [26](#)).⁴³

³⁴ Brian Nolan, *The Royal Son of God*, pp. 225–26. Cf. W. Malcolm Clark, 'The Righteousness of Noah', *VT* 21 (1971): 277–79 for a similar discussion.

³⁵ Thus Jesus says, 'A greater one than Solomon is here' ([Matt. 12:42](#) par).

³⁶ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p. 3.

³⁷ *TDNT*, s.v. 'eirēnē', by Werner Foerster 2 (1964): 409.

³⁸ Julius Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 163.

³⁹ Wolfgang Roth, p. 71.

⁴⁰ *TDNT*, s.v. 'eirēnē', by Gerhard von Rd, 2 (1965): 403.

⁴¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, p. 20.

⁴² von Rad, 'eirēnē', 2:405.

⁴³ Notice Jesus' blessing on the 'peacemakers' who shall be called 'sons of God' ([Matt. 5:9](#)).

Thus Jesus announced the kingdom over which neither Solomon—the ‘king of peace’—nor any other israelite king had reigned. Jesus showed himself to be God’s anointed, God’s representative, and God’s Son in his conquest of the forces of evil which had prevailed over the cosmos.⁴⁴ Betz says Jesus’ miracles are essentially ‘victories over death and the devil’.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament clearly stands behind Jesus’ working of miracles. Jesus was the Messiah who was bringing the longed-for peace to God’s creation. In so doing he was the unique Son of God. But the leaders, whom Jesus would have had recognize his Sonship ([Mk. 1:44](#)), were unwilling to accept him. The kingdom was thus taken from them to be given to another generation and time ([Matt. 21:43](#)).

These concepts of peace, sonship, and king flow together in Isaiah’s prophecy. He says the ‘son’, the ‘prince of peace’ is the one who will be born to sit on David’s throne, whose kingdom of peace will be without end, and who will be called ‘the Mighty God’ ([Isa. 9:6–7](#)).

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Varieties of Pluralism

Paul Schrottenboer

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With the emergence of Christian theologies of inter-religious dialogue and the increasing militancy of non-Christian religions, the concept of pluralism is in the forefront in contemporary theological agenda. The need to avoid the danger of syncretism, while maintaining the unique and absolute claims of Jesus, calls for a creative approach to other faiths. Paul Schrottenboer is former General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council and a long-standing member of the WEF Theological Commission. Here he discusses four aspects of pluralism from a broader perspective: cultural, religious, political and ecclesiastical—and returns the reader to the basic issues in order to develop the valid theology of pluralism which is needed in our time.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

⁴⁴ Jesus said Satan was the ‘ruler of the cosmos’ ([Jn. 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16–11](#)).

⁴⁵ Otto Betz, p. 69.

Without variety life would be monotonous, uninteresting, poor. Variety gives richness, potentiality and flavour to life. It is, we say, the spice of life. Dr. Abraham Kuyper referred to this aspect of our experience when in 1869 he declared that 'uniformity is the curse of modern life'. Among the many ideas he advocated was that of pluriformity. He applied it both to church and to state.

Life's variety not only gives pleasure but also produces tensions and conflicts, for with many differences we do not know how to cope in a calm and peaceful way. All too often they lead to open strife and permanent alienation.

A word much in use today to express differences is 'pluralism', a term that itself has a variety of contexts and connotations. The term 'pluralism' is often used imprecisely, without reference to the context in which it is used. When this happens the reader does not always know what the writer had in mind.

Another closely related term is 'plurality'. The difference between [p. 111](#) plurality and pluralism is that the latter is too much of a good thing. What this means should become apparent in what follows.

Another term closely related to pluralism is 'toleration'. The two terms differ, in that toleration describes an *attitude* which allows for differences, and pluralism refers to a *settled argument* where toleration and equality prevail.

The fact that we can speak of the many kinds of pluralism, and that it affects so many life zones, indicates that our society as a whole is pluralist. The sameness that once characterized our societies has largely disappeared.

Pluralism is seen by some as an evil to be eradicated where it exists and a plague to be avoided where it has not yet put in an appearance. Others see pluralism as the most just arrangement that society can hope for and believe it must exist not only in society but also in the church if harmony is to prevail.

It is the aim of this essay to demonstrate the need to distinguish clearly between areas or life zones of human existence in order to evaluate how pluralism functions in each. Pluralism in politics is quite different from pluralism in the church and our evaluation will differ accordingly. Moreover neither cultural or religious pluralism (both of which cover the entire spectrum of human existence); can be subsumed under either 'politics' or 'church'. In this essay we shall limit our comments to culture, religion, politics and the church.

CULTURAL PLURALISM

Christianity from its inception has been a multi-cultural religion. As such it differs from its predecessor Judaism which was tied to the Hebrew culture. Not exclusively, for the Old Testament writings were translated in about the year 200 BC into Greek in what came to be called the Septuagint, the first translation of the Bible into a vernacular language.

At Pentecost the gospel was proclaimed in all sixteen languages which were represented by the people gathered at the feast in Jerusalem. This was not the result of a grand scheme of the disciples of Jesus; it occurred by fiat of the Holy Spirit who gave the gift of tongues to the followers of Jesus. Pentecost was the decisive breakthrough of the mono-cultural religion of the followers of Abraham whom God had singled out, separated for centuries from the other peoples of the world, preserved through many dynasties and finally used as the vehicle to bring forth the Christ who would become the Saviour and Judge of all nations, not just one. [p. 112](#)

Not only would the message of Jesus and the resurrection be proclaimed in all the languages of the then world, but people of every tongue would be accepted into the Christian church on an equal footing. This was the lesson Peter had to learn in his

encounter with Cornelius at Joppa ([Acts 10](#)) and the entire church was led to accept (when it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them) that Jew and Gentile should be accorded equal status in the new fellowship of people who were saved by grace, not by performing works prescribed by law ([Acts 15](#)).

Again, this was not a discovery of the leaders of the early church. It was rather a conviction forced upon them by the Spirit of God in special revelation, much against their will. At Joppa Peter was finally convinced that when God made all foods clean his truth was marching on beyond the earlier particularism (for Jews only) to take into his saving arms people of every nation. Only then was Peter ready to baptize Gentile believers. How could he argue against the coming of the Spirit upon the band of followers of the way in Cornelius' house?

What the church experienced already at Pentecost it has continued to put into practice. Nowhere, perhaps, does this appear more clearly than in the way in which the oral reports of the life and sayings of Jesus and of the early expansion of the church were recorded. Jesus had spoken in Aramaic, the everyday language of the Jews after the Exile, but when his disciples wrote the Gospels and the Apostles sent their letters to the young churches, they wrote them all in Greek. At that very early age it became apparent that the new movement that was based on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth would not be limited to the Hebrew and Aramaic languages which only a small percentage of the people in the Roman Empire spoke. The vehicle of transmission for the Good News was the world language, namely *koine* Greek.

That Greek would be the language of the church for only a short while, and that even at that time only partially, was already decided at Pentecost when the gospel was heard by the people, everyone in his or her own language. The church took its cue from Pentecost and, following the Holy Spirit's example, has continued to proclaim the gospel in the vernacular languages. Even the hold of Latin upon the Roman Catholic Church has in recent times been broken.

This stress on using every language as a vehicle of transmitting the gospel has characterized the church until this day and has been most prominent in those circles which stress transcultural evangelism. The need to translate the Scriptures into the many languages was even [p.113](#) elevated to a part of the church's confession in the Westminster Confession of Faith (I, viii).

Prof. Lamim Sanneh makes the point in 'Pluralism and Christian Commitment' (*Theology Today*, April 1988) that Christian commitment is compatible with genuine pluralism. He observes that the translation work of the Christian missionary movement has led to the Scriptures being presented in more than 1,800 languages. The *missio Dei* is not in conflict with but consistent with the maintaining of cultural integrity. 'In centring on the primacy of God's word, Christian translators invested the vernacular with consecrated power, lifting obscure tribes to the level of scriptural heritage and into the stream of universal world history' (p. 27). Says he, 'If the argument is pressed that mission was wrong because it interfered with the cultures of others, then the evidence on the ground that mission in fact bolstered indigenous cultures should be sufficient to answer it' (p. 29).

It must be granted that for many decades the Protestant mission was reluctant to use the entire culture of the receptor people and in fact often imposed elements of the culture of the missionary, but of recent time it has become apparent that God uses every culture as an instrument not only to transmit but to live the Gospel. Today the principle that there is no absolute culture that is normative for all others is working through to relativize Western culture which has been the garb that has clothed most of the trans-cultural

mission work done in the past few centuries. Few still claim that people in the Third World need to be westernized when they declare themselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

With its stance of a multi-cultural transmission of the Christian message, of relativizing the Hebrew, Greek and Western cultures, the Christian religion stands in contrast to both modern Judaism and Islam. Orthodox Jews still insist on the priority of Hebrew; Muslims on Arabic. In the Synagogue and in the Mosque only the sacred languages are legitimate. No Christians are allowed to visit the Islamic holy city Mecca.

The Christian religion stands out among the other world religions as one that holds that Christian commitment to God, the faith of Jesus Christ, involves commitment to cultural forms in their essentially plural relativism. Christian commitment, as Sanneh says, is thus rewarded with a cultural pluralism of the most lively and diverse kind (p. 32).

The importance of recognizing cultural pluralism in the transmission of the gospel may be seen in the fact that culture (which is the product of human communal work that gives form to the way we live) shapes p. 114 both the tongue that tells and the ear that hears the gospel. It is the indispensable vehicle of communicating the Good News. It is that whole social environment in which and through which we seek to obey the truth of the gospel.

When the gospel comes to a people and they respond to it, the Good News impacts on the culture in two ways: it judges it by purging it of unacceptable elements and it transforms it, making it a fit instrument for the Master's use. The gospel, as it were, takes possession of the culture.

Because of the dual impact of judgement and transformation, there can be no identification of the gospel with one or other culture (for here the medium is not the message), nor can the culture of the receptor people be by-passed in bringing the gospel.

Space does not permit us to go into greater detail on how gospel and culture interact.¹ But it should be clear that pluralism in culture is not an obstacle to be deplored, but an opportunity to be grasped.

PLURALISM IN RELIGION

The word religion usually refers to institutions and acts of worship. Sometimes it is used as a synonym for the church. As such it is one of several areas of life. At times it is understood as one of two fundamental life-dimensions, called the 'sacred'. It is then contrasted with 'nature', the secular area. Neither of these meanings is what we have in mind.

Religion as we now speak of it is that broad-as-life directedness of human existence that forces human beings to deal with God and his revelation and to serve him, or whatever or whoever takes his place.

This comprehensive meaning of religion was understood by the monastics who joined together in religious orders which controlled every aspect of their lives. But over time this comprehensive usage fell into disuse and religion was reduced to a part of human experience and later was reduced even more to one institution among many.

Religion as we speak of it is service, response. Man himself is not a substance, that is, something which, as Descartes said, needs nothing outside of himself to exist, but a

¹ The contextualization of the gospel is dealt with in the *RES Theological Forum*, 'Contextualizing the Gospel', November 1987, Vol. XV, No. 4. The papers given at the RES 1988 Theology Conference in Harare (in the volume *Christ's Rule: A Light for Every Corner*) dealt with the same theme. Both are available from the REC Secretariat.

response being, totally and [p. 115](#) permanently dependent upon the God who made him, continues to uphold him and will one day call him to give account.

The Scriptures speak of man as the image of God. And whatever else this word conveys, it means that man is not self-existent but the reflection and representative of his Maker. It is instructive to note that the Genesis story tells us both that God made Adam and Eve in his image and that Adam had a son in his image, Seth ([Genesis 5:3](#)). Thus just as Adam could take his son in his arms and see that he looked like his father, so God could observe Adam as he was busy in the garden and see in him a reflection of himself.

Religion in this full, authentic sense means the total commitment and service of man. It is not one kind of activity along side of others, nor is it one area of life in the midst of other areas; in its God-directedness it is a way of life. Life is religion, *Gottesdienst*.

Plurality in religion means that there is in humanity a variety of total commitments: e.g. the Christian, the Hindu, the Islamic, the Buddhist, the humanist, African traditional religions and others.

Religious plurality has been a fact of life since humankind was early differentiated between the 'children of God' and the 'sons of man' ([Genesis 6:1, 2](#)). From the beginning man has had the tendency to turn from God to idols. From the worship of idols God called Abraham; from the worship of them God continued to call his people: 'You shall have no other gods before me' ([Exodus 20:3](#); [Deut 5:7](#)).

Religious pluralism (which as we shall note is not the same as plurality of religions) has become a topic for much discussion in recent time for a number of reasons. One of these is the recent mixing of people. Time was when people lived and remained in areas where nearly all the inhabitants held the same religious commitment. Thus the Hindus lived in India, the Muslims in the Islamic lands and the adherents of African traditional religion in their own part of Africa. For centuries in Europe after the Reformation Catholics tended to live in areas with a Catholic government and Protestants in Protestant lands. The one exception was the Jews who were scattered around the world in the diaspora; but even they tended to congregate in their own neighbourhoods. Today, thanks in large part to Western colonialism, the Christian mission and modern transportation, adherents of opposing religions exist side by side not only in the universities of all Western lands but in society as a whole. This movement of people goes far to explain why religious pluralism has become so prominent as an issue today.

In the West the prevailing attitude is: live and let live. Each religious community has equal right to the benefits of society along with other [p. 116](#) communities. It was not always so, nor is it true in every country today. In the time of the early church Caesar claimed that he was God and required of all his subjects to recognize that claim. At that time the Christians advanced the counter claim that Jesus is Lord and many paid the supreme sacrifice for that confession (cf. [Acts 17:7](#) for a direct reference to the conflict).

When in the beginning of the Constantine era (4th. century) Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire, the roles were reversed. Now the adherents of the non-Christian religions were given second rate status. They were tolerated but not considered equal.

Later, after the 16th. century Reformation, the idea prevailed for a century or so that every land should have its own religion (e.g. Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed). Accordingly, people who did not share the religion required by the rulers could either convert, or leave, or stay and suffer the consequences.

Today there is not only a mixing of religious communities in the West, but also a resurgence of non-Christian religions. At the turn of this century the other religions were seen to be in retreat and the widely held expectation was that eventually they would lose their vitality and strength, and all the while the Christian religion would advance.

That idea gets little support today. The power of the Islamic states, in which religion and politics are coextensive, is enough to convince one that Islam is undergoing a resurgence, with the help of petro-dollars. Likewise, Buddhism and Hinduism enjoy new life and engage in counter mission. Today on all sides the Christian religion is under attack—from atheistic governments, from secularists, from other religions.

We shall not at this time enter further into the practice by the state to determine or influence religion. That comes up for discussion under the section on pluralism in politics. What we should note, however, is the idea that now enjoys great strength in Western society, namely that the various world religions are all equally valid. No claim to truth can be considered absolute. This is what is usually meant by the term religious pluralism. It raises the issue whether there are many roads that lead to the Kingdom of God.

Some years ago a book appeared in the USA under the title: *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*.² It considers the question, How can p. 117 Christianity, which claims universality for its vision of God and confesses Christ's lordship over the world, live as one religious community among others which possess their own particular faith and truth claims? To this question answers are given by sixteen contributors of various theological orientations.

One answer to the question of religious pluralism comes in the form of syncretism, a position that would advance the mixing of religions, advocating in its most developed form the formation of one great world religion by incorporating into it elements of all the existing world religions.

The classic example of syncretism is the Pantheon in Rome. In this temple there is room for all the gods, but only if they all renounce the claim of exclusive access to ultimate deity and final truth.

This idea has been given more recent form in the Baha'i religion which originated in Persia and has erected its great nine-sided temple in Wilmette, Illinois, each side representing one of the great world religions. It will come as no surprise that the Baha'is have been persecuted in the Middle East by the Islamic state of Iran.

It is becoming popular to say that passages in the Bible (such as that Jesus is the only Way, that his is the only Name, that he is the one Mediator, the only Foundation and that his sacrifice of himself was once and for all time) are true for those who espouse the Christian faith. These affirmations must be understood, so it is said, as the 'language of love'. Thus, a young man may say to his bride 'You are the most beautiful woman in the World', and he means it. So too, the claim that Jesus is the one and only way to God is valid and true for Christians; but the adherent of another religion can make equal claims for the founder of that faith too.

In similar vein the Roman Catholic theologian Paul Knitter claims that since the New Testament writings were written in the expectation of the early return of Jesus Christ, all expressions about the finality of Christ were 'culturally limited'. Gregory Baum, also Roman Catholic, describes the exclusive claims as 'survival dogma', the language of power and domination. It is strange that the efforts to escape the force of the New Testament message of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ can diverge so greatly as to call them in one instance the language of love and in another the language of domination.

We shall resist the inclination to consider at this time the question of whether the loss of people who do not confess Christ as Saviour and Lord is compatible with the Bible's emphasis on the love of God. Suffice it to say that the Bible itself does not make a problem of what to many seems to be a contradiction. p. 118

² *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*. G. H. Anderson and F. Stransky, editors. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981.

Space does not permit us either to consider further the question of the conflict of various truth claims. Nor can we comment on the influence of the idea of truth as relational in a subjectivist sense; and on whether such a view that a *priori* claims one religion to be true, and all others utterly false, has full biblical support.

We would observe that if the idea of religious pluralism takes hold, it will spell the demise of the Christian mission. Religious pluralism, we may conclude, is one kind that we would be most reluctant to accept.

In review, we may observe that religious *plurality* refers to the fact that there are many fundamentally different answers to the questions of human existence. A question we should consider in the section on political pluralism is how the different religious communities can live in civil peaceful coexistence.

Proponents of religious *pluralism* hold that these fundamental differences do not as *truth claims* mutually exclude one another. Those who oppose religious pluralism but recognize religious plurality hold that there can be no peaceful coexistence among conflicting claims of truth. They hold that the particularity of the Christian revelation is an essential aspect of the *skandalon* of the gospel.

POLITICAL PLURALISM

The state is one of the public sectors in which the affairs of life in society are to be regulated by justice and are enforced by penalty and the sword. The state enjoys the right of coercion. The regulation of civil affairs is called politics or statecraft.

There is a similarity between religion and the state, namely that both are inescapable. We have observed earlier that, as the image of God, human beings cannot but respond to God in one way or other. Likewise, as inhabitants in a legal jurisdiction or state, one can choose to go from one state to another, but not from a state to a stateless condition.

This involuntary character of our involvement in the state (we are willy hilly a part of one civil jurisdiction or other) means that if there is to be true freedom and justice for all, then there must be a plurality of political options³, including the exercise of religion. The Muslim, the Jew, the Christian, the Humanist, the Buddhist and the atheist should all be accorded equal rights before the law.

This is not to say that all the opposing religious claims are as such equally valid; but it *is* to say that in a just society there must be the freedom to exercise all religions, provided that such exercise does not infringe upon the civil rights of others. A just state with a monoreligious stance is a contradiction in terms. Social justice also means that no one religion may enjoy preference over another.

The view that most adequately expresses the way in which equality of rights and opportunity may be protected for all religious groups and individuals is appropriately called 'principled pluralism'.

The society regulated by principled pluralism differs from the Islamic (sacral) state which wipes out the distinction between state and church. It must also be distinguished from the modern secular state which in the name of 'separation of church and state' seeks to abolish all influence and even the symbols of religion (the Cross, the Star of David, the Minaret) from public life. As a reaction against the infringement of the church upon the affairs of the state, adherents of the secular state seek to grant equality to all by putting the public sector out of bounds to all religions.

³ A symposium by Reformed persons of position papers and responses on Christian responsibility in government will be published in the spring of 1989 by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company; it will be entitled *God and Politics; four views on reformation of civil government* (Gary Scott Smith, editor).

This view has the advantage that it grants to no religious body preference over another. It allows for no establishment of religion. In the secular society there will be no religious wars.

The flaw in this view is that, having identified religion in effect with church and cultic activities, it does not permit any expression of religion in public life. The result is a 'naked public square'.

The shortcomings of 'principled pluralism' are truly serious, for by seeking to restrict all manifestations of religion to the private sectors of church and home (and school if the parents are willing—and able—to pay double) the proponents are advocating what may be called the 'religion of secular humanism'.

As we noted earlier, man's response to God (or that which functions in his place—an idol) irresistibly functions in every sector of life, including the public sector, whether we are willing to recognize it or not. The idea of the secular state is one such response.

A prime *tenet of faith* of secular humanism is that in the really important area of life, where men and women make a living and decide the issues of society, people manage much better if they leave all their ideas of God at home. No less than the recognized religions, the unrecognized religion of secular humanism seeks to give answers to the fundamental questions of human existence. The basic conviction that man can manage best by keeping God out of public life [p. 120](#) functions as a control belief, determining what people may and may not do.

The idea of principled pluralism in politics accepts neither the idea of the sacral state, nor the halfway house that, while tolerating all, grants to one religion or denomination preference over others. It stands for full equality in civil affairs for adherents of all religions, without exception.

Nor does this kind of pluralism in statecraft opt for a secular state, which is a greater threat in the West today than the kind of politics that identifies church and state. It advocates a pluralism that is based on the principle of justice for all, in all life zones.

The basic principle is that people should exercise their religiously directed civil responsibilities in such a way that the free exercise of religion is not denied or restricted. The alternative to having to go either the way of the sacral state or the secular state is to give each and every faith community equal right and opportunity as well in public as in private. The mosque, the synagogue, the temple, and the church should all enjoy equal rights before the law. Muslims, Jews, Christians and Humanists should all share equally in tax money for education. Institutions for meeting social needs should all receive equal public protection and support, whether they are of one or other religious conviction or claim to have no faith at all. Where the policies of principled pluralism are put into effect a truly pluralist and just society can exist.

PLURALISM IN THE CHURCH

We have observed that the Christian religion is multi-cultural. This means that neither culture nor language, nor race, nor social status are legitimate reasons to discriminate in the church against people. That which all believers have in common, and gives to all full equality, is their faith in Jesus Christ. And that one common possession is also the most basic. The church is a communion of saints. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him ([Romans 10:12](#)).

It will be apparent that when we speak of pluralism in the church we are dealing with an unusually important issue. This becomes clear when we reflect that the oneness of the church is an article of faith ('I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church'). This

oneness, moreover, is not to be thought of exclusively or primarily in terms of structure (important as that is) but in terms of agreement in faith and [p. 121](#) confession. Nowhere does this oneness appear more clearly than in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians where he deplors the existing divisions and admonishes them to 'be perfectly united in mind and thought' ([1 Cor. 1:10](#)).

The question now arises whether we can in any way apply the pluralist model to the church and, if so, in what way and to what extent. Some may ask: if it works well in society, why not in the church? In what sense can we speak of a legitimate plurality of faith?

We are confronted in the New Testament with the great variety of gifts that God has given his people ([Rom. 12](#), [1 Cor. 12](#), [Eph. 4](#), [1 Pet. 4](#)). This variety is in each case seen as an enrichment of the One Body, the people of God. There should be no question that in terms of gifts that are used to enhance the life and witness of the church and manifest more clearly its oneness, a plurality is much to be desired. But then it should be clear that these differences are for the common good and that they build the church ([1 Cor. 12:7; 14:4](#)).

However, uniformity, a oneness of form, is not an option for the thriving church. Uniformity would have a deadening influence upon the life of God's people.

Variety in the church, including the full range of cultural plurality, must serve the unity. The use of all the many different gifts should be, as Paul says, 'for the common good'. As Peter states, it should lead to the praise of God ([1 Pet. 4:11](#)).

When we turn from the picture that the New Testament presents of the one body and its many members to the fractured christendom all around us, the question arises: Is there any way to justify the many denominations on the ground that a pluriformity of churches, like the interaction of the members of the body, enhances the greatness of the *Una Sancta*? Can it be said that in the great number of church communions the multiform wisdom of God ([Eph. 3:10](#)) is manifested? Or is it clouded over? If the church appears as a broken vase, does it make sense to speak of a pluriform vase?

Abraham Kuyper propounded the idea of the pluriformity of the church as a means to justify the existence of many denominations. He found a basis for this idea in the great differentiation there is in creation.

Kuyper, as well as Herman Bavinck, saw the 16th. century as the age of the pluriformity of the church. At the time, Kuyper claimed, the early Reformers were not aware of the transition then transpiring from a uniform to a multiform church because they had an unshakeable conviction that their confession 'bore an absolute and exclusive character'. The thought prevailed then that the truth, which is [p. 122](#) absolute, must result in a oneness of form and content. The time was not ripe for the idea of a pluriformity of churches. People still dreamed that the oneness of the church could be restored.

The events of history shook the church out of its dream. In the face of many church communions, not in fellowship with one another, the idea of a pluriformity of churches along the line of denominational structures evolved. Kuyper said it in this way: 'It is our firm conviction that pluriformity is a phase of development to which the church had to come visibly into view' (*Gemene Gratie*, Vol. III, p. 231).⁴

Kuyper found additional support for his idea of pluriformity in the inadequacy of our apprehension of the truth. Since all our subjective responses in appropriating the truth are incomplete, pluriformity in the church is the result. G. C. Berkouwer's observation is

⁴ In fairness to Kuyper it should be noted that he immediately added these words: 'But pluriformity [in the church] has come into existence historically in a way that affronts the sense of unity. If sin had not corrupted everything, then pluriformity would have developed without the loss of the unity, even if that unity could not federally be found.'

that the idea had its source, not in a study of the oneness of the church, but in the 'organic' (a term dear to Kuyper's heart) development of history (*De Kerk I, Dogmatische Studien*, p. 69).

We should note that the church, unlike the state, is a voluntary association. No one is forced to become or remain a member. Proselytism, seen as a form of coercion (monetary or otherwise) to join a church is generally (and rightly) seen as illegitimate. A voluntary association has the right to set standards of membership without discriminating against those who choose not to agree, but the standards that are set should be derived from the nature of the church.

The church in its nature is a confessing community. This Jesus made abundantly clear when, after Peter had made his confession 'You are the Christ the Son of the Living God', Jesus replied, 'Upon this rock I will build my church' ([Matt. 16:18](#)). Apart from his confession Peter cannot be called the rock.

The voices that speak of pluriformity as a justification of the multitude of denominations, most of which do not recognize the others,⁵ are not numerous today. The brokenness of christendom cannot be minimized to a difference in form. It can be said without fear of contradiction that the force of the Bible's teaching on the [p. 123](#) essential oneness of the church and the need to manifest this oneness has been stressed in our age more than ever before.

Pluralism is a problem as well for denominations and local congregations as for the ecumenical movement. It is on the local level where differences in faith become most painful. In looking at the idea of pluralism in the church, we face the issue whether, and if so to what extent, conflicting views regarding the content and expression of the faith can be tolerated or approved.

The trend toward plurality (I do not say pluralism)⁶ is manifest in churches far and near. Denominations generally are much more diverse today than they used to be. Differences cut across denominational boundaries, making them less distinct than they once were. Even in small churches of less than 50,000 members, deep differences have surfaced and groups of 'concerned persons' have arisen.

It makes good sense to distinguish between differences that do not affect the unity in the true faith and those that touch the heart of the gospel. But does this mean that only those articles of faith that 'touch the heart of the gospel' allow no difference of opinion? If so this means a change from the traditional view.

In Reformed thinking the church's confessional standards have been understood as forms of unity, and it has been held that these standards in their entirety mark the limits of permissible differences in teaching and preaching. Reformed churches have therefore felt obliged to call a halt to the spreading of ideas that are out of harmony with any part of the standards that office bearers are asked to uphold.

It should be observed that, once the standards as a whole no longer set the limits, there is no clear line of demarcation between permissible and impermissible differences. Moreover, there is an observable tendency that leads from the one to the other, from the acceptable to the unacceptable.

This means that the churches will do well if they do not simply acquiesce in the *status quo* in which conflicting differences exist, even if such differences do not call in question central gospel truths. The churches will do better to try to resolve such differences as

⁵ The *Christian World Encyclopedia* lists 6,111 denominations in the world, of which 3,840 are unrelated to any world conciliar body (p. 794).

⁶ When we speak of a plurality in this connection we *recognize* the existing difference: when we used the word pluralism in this context we refer to the *approval* of the differences.

cause conflict in order to clear the way for straightforward testimony and more effective service, both of which can easily be hindered where [p. 124](#) they experience internal conflict. Rather than turn the distress into a virtue, the distress should be the stimulus to reach the common mind that the Apostle set as a goal.

In answer to the question, Where should we draw the line? it will be necessary to keep in mind that the churches' confessions are subordinate standards, under and not alongside of Scripture. It should also be kept in mind that the church should be on the move, as its people, led by the Spirit, are led in community to reformulate its views, including those expressed in the confessions.

Here we touch on a crucial point. The church is a communion of believing saints and therefore its scholars, no less than the others, should be a community of faith-ful academics who lead the church so that as a whole they come to new insights. In such a common search, as in the normative model of the New Testament ([Rom. 12](#), [1 Cor. 12](#)) the diversity of viewpoint should serve the common good. This can happen only if it is clear at every step that the views that are propounded came from a sincere desire to understand and apply the gospel truth, the things 'most assuredly believed' by God's people.

The church is very much like a fragile vase that can so easily be shattered. It would appear that only God can put together again the shattered fragments of the world church today. This should not, however, cause us to turn away from the task of preserving the basic oneness, but should rather spur us on to 'maintain the unity' ([Eph. 4:3](#)) and to grow together into the full maturity of faith ([Eph. 4:16](#)).

CONCLUSION

In our discussion of pluralism we have considered it under only four headings: culture, religion, politics and church. Pluralism has become in recent years, and may be expected to become in greater measure in the coming decades, an issue of great importance. There should be as little plurality as possible in our evaluation of pluralism.

Other areas in which a plurality is present, which we have not discussed, also need to be looked at closely. They too affect the life and witness of the church. We would therefore do well at another time to direct our thoughts and our pens to consider: 1) plurality in Scripture, 2) plurality in life style (with special reference to family and personal ethics) and 3) the presence of co-existing world views which deeply affect how we respond to the many kinds of pluralism in human society today.

Paul G. Schrotenboer is former General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council. [p. 125](#)

Charismatics, Grace and Works

Bryan D. Gilling

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Dealing with a vital contemporary issue, this article uses the classical categories of Calvinism and Arminianism to analyse the basic question of human free will and God's sovereignty—in the charismatic movement in particular, but evangelicalism in general. The appeal of the author is that we should move from the danger of a Pelagian understanding of the gospel to a 'healthy synergism' concerning the theology of grace. We would be glad to receive and publish responses to this article by those who hold rather different views.

Editor

There have been lakes of ink and forests of wood expended in discussing the pros and cons of the charismatic movement's claims regarding spiritual gifts. Very little, however, has been said about other theological trends within the movement. This article seeks to point up some common tendencies which go beyond what may be regarded as a more or less healthy synergism towards a Pelagian understanding of faith.¹ We also observe some of their causes, while noting that these problems are not peculiar to charismatics but extend potentially to all groups not rigidly Reformed in outlook.

Part of the absence of comment on this area may be due to the widespread openness of many observers to a similarly Pelagian general position, although without the specifically charismatic applications. Another reason may be the difficulty of defining the theology of the charismatic movement as a whole. Charismatics are generally seen as those who, while remaining within the 'mainline' denominations, espouse, to some extent, Pentecostal teachings, especially regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit and the 'sign' gifts of [1 Corinthians 12](#), particularly speaking in tongues. They may, therefore, be virtually indistinguishable in most of their theory and practice from any other [p. 126](#) members of their denomination, or alternatively may develop ideas and meetings identical with traditional Pentecostalism.

SOME PROBLEM AREAS

The pivotal issue is the priority (or otherwise) ascribed to the human will over God's grace in the initial work of salvation. What is the nature of faith and how is it exercised? If one accepts that rigid and therefore double predestination is too far to one extreme, there must be some association of divine grace and human freewill. Along a continuum of human freedom to will and to act, where does the charismatic movement stand? To assess charismatic views regarding the actions of God and man, we shall examine several related issues: healing, confession, baptism in the Spirit and justification by faith.

To simplify matters, and at the risk of attacking 'straw men' since it will sometimes overstate the case, much of our illustration will be from sources closer to the Pentecostal end of the spectrum. Many, particularly in Britain, would agree only with milder formulations.

How does healing come about for a Christian? Kenneth Hagin, an American Baptist, explains that there are two aspects to it: the degree of 'healing virtue' ministered and the degree of the individual's faith which gives action to that virtue. Both are necessary. Man may thus control both the administration and the reception of this healing virtue and if

¹ We shall regard Pelagianism as a position holding that human beings can of their own free will turn towards God, and that God will then grant them the grace to assist in that decision to continue in new life; but that people are still free at any time, before or after conversion, to resist and reject that grace.

the recipient has no faith then even what virtue is ministered is rendered useless.² This faith is made operative only by a lengthy process:

If I were you: I would come expecting a miracle. I would believe that it is God's will for me to be healed. I would build up my faith by attending both afternoon and evening services and listening to the Word of God preached. I would use a point of contact [*seedfaith principle; see below*] to release my faith. And I would let my faith go to God and accept my healing from him.³

This expression of faith in God's grace seems to involve at least six human works.

It is difficult, also, to avoid the impression that what effects healing is an impersonal power, analogous to electric current, and likewise brought into action by the operation of the right switch. [p. 127](#)

We need to realize that this [healing] power is passive and inactive until faith is exercised. It will not operate on its own.⁴

We, rather than God, appear to be the operators of this switch. He, it seems, always wills our healing so that 'Healing does not fail because of the will of God, but because of the unbelief of his children'.⁵ This claim, in turn, seems based largely on a controversial exegesis of [Mark 6:5f.](#) (taken out of context and disregarding [Matt. 13:58](#)) and of [1 Peter 2:24b](#) (also taken out of its context), and puts the responsibility for healing on the potential recipient. But note, for example, [Mark 2:5](#), where it is the friends' faith which is efficacious and such passages as [Acts 3:1-10](#) where faith is not mentioned at all.

The required faith seems to be brought into existence by another human act, audible expression.

There is no faith without confession. Confession is faith's way of expressing itself.... Now faith is of the spirit and there is not [*sic*] faith without confession. *Faith then grows with your confession.*⁶

That faith might be received as a free gift of God's grace, so that no-one might boast, seems to be overlooked; and again God's power is curtailed by human action. 'There is no action on the part of God without our confession [i.e. 'thinking faith thoughts and speaking faith words']'.⁷

Human words assume a semi-magical power. On the one hand they may work in a negative, faith-destroying way, so that

Every time you confess your doubts and fears, you confess your faith in Satan and deny the ability and grace of God. When you confess your weakness and your disease, you are openly confessing that the Word of God is not true and that God has failed to make it

² *Healing Belongs to Us* (n.p.: Faith Library, 1980) 23.

³ R. F. DeWeese, Oral Roberts' associate, quoted in D. E. Harrell, *All Things are Possible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) 92.

⁴ K. Hagin, *Healing*, 25.

⁵ Quoted in J. I. Packer, 'Theological Reflections on the Charismatic Movement', *Churchman* 94 (1980) 25, n. 41. 'Healing is primarily a faith proposition on the part of the individual who receives': K. Hagin, *The Key to Scriptural Healing* (n.p.: Faith Library, 1978) 13.

⁶ K. Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose* (n.p.: Faith Library, 1978) 22.

⁷ E. W. Kenyon, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne* (n.p.: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1969) 157.

good... The believer who is always confessing his sins and his weakness is building weakness, failure, and sin into his consciousness.⁸ p. 128

This would, though, be difficult to square with such biblical examples as Christ in Gethsemane or Paul's boasting in weakness in Corinthians [12:9f](#). Surely a person who refuses to relinquish all pretence of self-sufficiency is not one on whom the Christian gospel of a God-provided Saviour can have much impact.

On the other hand, words may work positively.

The Word in your lips becomes a living thing, just as the Word in Jesus' lips could rule the sea, the wind and the waves.... That is your confession, that his Word now has become the healer in your lips ... the pulpit of Jesus Christ.⁹

Either way, once more God is bound to observe human channelling of his action.

Perhaps the basic belief of the charismatic movement, which it has in common with Pentecostalism, is that the experience of the 120 at Pentecost should be normative for all Christians and, associated with that 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', an evidential sign of this second baptism is speaking in a language unknown to the speaker. This baptism is a crisis experience occurring at any time after conversion (and therefore usually after water-baptism). There are some, particularly in Britain, who instead of positing two stages now see the distinct second stage as not ideal so much as 'God's provision for a regrettable situation', making up for inadequate teaching and expectation at conversion and therefore for an impoverished experience. However, most still hold to two stages, conversion initiation and baptism in the Spirit; while at times some Pentecostal groups have added still more, such as sanctification and obedience to apostles.

How then is the second stage attained? Our concern here is not with whether or not tongues and other miraculous gifts are 'for today'. Thankfully God is not bound to any one way, always, forever; and to no-one is it given to know exactly how the Spirit will graciously act in any specific individual's life. We shall restrict ourselves to assessing the human part in the event as portrayed by some of a more strongly Pentecostal persuasion.

We find that:

Some have had the superficial conception that the Lord gives his Spirit as a reward for making matters right. But this is not so. The heart must be made clean. When all conscious sin has been taken away, then we really are in a place where it becomes easy to trust him.¹⁰
p. 129

This attitude poses several problems. First, it makes a distinction between the Lord and His Spirit which fails to do justice to the New Testament passages which suggest, in fact, a very close identity (phrases such as 'the Lord is the Spirit' [[2 Cor. 3:17](#)] and 'the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit' [[1 Cor. 15:45](#)]). It seems to insist that one can 'have' the Lord without also receiving the Spirit at the time of conversion, which is when justification, 'this work of making matters right', takes place. This contradicts the New Testament testimony that in fact from the moment of our adoption as sons of God, i.e. justification, we also have the Spirit of his Son in our hearts bearing witness to the fact by crying, 'Abba! Father!' (e.g. [Romans 8](#), especially [4ff.](#), [9ff.](#), [15ff.](#), [23](#), [26f.](#); also [Gal. 3:13f.](#); [4:6f.](#), etc.). This is summarised in [Rom. 8:9b](#): 'Any one who does not have the Spirit of

⁸ E. W. Kenyon, quoted in D. W. Clark, 'An Implicit Theory of Personality, Illness and Cure Found in the Writings of Neo Pentecostal Faith Teachers', *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12 (1984) 282.

⁹ E. W. Kenyon, quoted in Clark, 'Theory' 283.

¹⁰ Quoted in F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970) 249.

Christ does not belong to him'. Without having received the Spirit one cannot be a Christian of any sort. Nor can one receive the Spirit only in part, for 'it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit' ([John 3:34](#)).

Furthermore, this attitude declares, 'As sinners we accept Christ; as saints we accept the Holy Spirit.'¹¹ Somehow, 'the heart must be made clean' in order to receive the Spirit, yet since he has not been received sinners must achieve this on their own—no mean feat and certainly not one the writer of [Romans 7](#) could attain to!. It also cuts straight across Jesus' teaching in [Luke 18:9–12](#) where the man conscious of no sin is not forgiven whereas the one almost frantic under conviction of sin *is* justified.

The New Testament knows of no saints who do not already possess the fulness of the Spirit of God. There are none more 'highly qualified' as Christians than others, or who deserve God's blessings more than others. The Pentecostal blessing came upon all the disciples, not only those who had 'tarried' sufficiently. All who were baptized into Christ's death are now slaves of righteousness (cf. [Rom. 6:1–10](#); [Col. 2:11–15](#); [3:1–4](#)). To those who attempt now to earn God's gift of the Spirit, given when we became sons, we may ask, with Paul, 'Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit are you now ending with the flesh?' ([Gal. 3:2f.](#)). With regard to the teaching of a separate Spirit-baptism accompanied by signs, Pinnock asks, 'Why is not the promise of our Saviour and the witness of the Spirit in our hearts crying 'Abba!' sufficient for us? Can it be wrong to walk by faith and not by sight?'¹²

p. 130

The process of sanctification seems thus to be turned into one whereby one becomes a saint *before* one receives the 'full' gospel. 'Utter and complete baptism in the Holy Spirit ... is reached only where there is a perfect yielding of the entire being to Him...'¹³ But this is impossible legalism. How is it ever possible to know if one believes perfectly? What mortal can achieve the absolute? In our present life 'between the times' we can at best only confess, 'I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin' ([Rom. 7:25](#)). 'Perfect yielding of the entire being' is out of the question until the Parousia.

Yet this counsel of despair continues to be demanded:

No person can receive or retain the Pentecostal experience without complete and unconditional obedience to all the revealed will of God. *The Bible gives no shortcuts or easy routes*. It is only when the person is entirely consecrated and fully obedient that the Spirit will come in.¹⁴

This 'victorious-life' teaching ignores the biblical evidence that it is *only* sinners who receive the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit and sin *do* dwell in the same heart (e.g. [Romans 5–8](#), especially [7:13–25](#)), and the whole point of Colossians that when we have Christ, i.e. at conversion, we have everything; there is no distinction between Christ *for* us (conversion) and Christ *in* us (Spirit-baptism) (e.g. [Col. 2:2f.](#), [9–15](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [3:25ff.](#)). To continue to insist otherwise is to reverse the biblical sequence of grace, then obedience.

¹¹ Quoted in Bruner, *Theology* 233.

¹² 'The New Pentecostalism: Reflection of an Evangelical Observer' in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (ed. R. P. Spittler; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 191.

¹³ R. M. Riggs, quoted in J. R. Williams, *The Pentecostal Reality* (Plainfield: Logos, 1972) 74.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bruner, *Theology* 253, n. 41.

The extreme consequence of this teaching assumes that one is sanctified before receiving the Spirit and that afterwards one is maintained in a sinless state. This is exemplified in a statement from the Pentecostal Latter Rain Movement,

The mystery of the new covenant is that these laws are now written in our hearts.... We now no longer steal or curse or kill, not because the law forbids it, but because grace has given us a life that *cannot* steal or curse or kill.¹⁵

To say this it is necessary to take verses such as [1 John 3:6, 9; 5:18](#) but ignore others such as [1 John 1:8](#), and to dismiss the whole of the New Testament's ethical teaching which, though written to Christians, p.131 becomes redundant for those who have achieved real spirituality (or perhaps *gnosis*?). Interestingly, it is precisely the *pneumatikoi* of Corinth whom Paul has to upbraid as 'still of the flesh' ([1 Cor. 3:3](#)), who wrong and defraud other Christians ([1 Cor. 6:8](#)), who are arrogant and undiscerning ([1 Cor. 5:2](#)) and who boast as though they have already acquired, through their own effort, every conceivable spiritual blessing ([1 Cor. 4:7f.](#)).

What of faith itself? How is it viewed? One illustration is that of the 'seedfaith' principle developed by Oral Roberts. By planting some sort of 'seed' a Christian is assisted to 'release' faith and God then responds to meet the need. A common expression of this is in seedfaith moneyboxes, which, operating on this principle, induce God to bestow prosperity on the believer. Paul Yonggi Cho advocates a process of incubation or imagisation which involves four steps: having a scripturally appropriate goal, visualizing its end results, praying for God's assurance, and audibly confessing the outcome.

Kenneth Hagin has a separate four, following Abraham's experience: he had God's Word; he believed it; he did not consider contradictory circumstances; he praised God.

Follow these four steps, and you'll always get through to God. They are four steps to certain deliverance, healing, prayer, or whatever it is you are seeking.¹⁶

In the same book a chapter title is 'Faith is an act'. Elsewhere, he claims that faith alone is inadequate.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that if you just believe in your heart you'll get an answer. It teaches that if you believe with your heart and say it with your mouth, whatever you want shall come to pass.¹⁷

This emphasis on human initiation seems very widespread.

Is it true that the man must always make the first move when co-operating with God, to bring about a miracle? Answer: Yes. If we go through the miracles of the Bible we will find that the man always did something which constituted a step of faith.¹⁸

The lunatic fringe extends to Rev. Ike's message, 'You can't lose with the stuff I use'.¹⁹ p. 132

Amongst the many like examples Bruner amasses, he selects one for special analysis.

¹⁵ Quoted in W. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (trans. R. A. Wilson; London: SCM, 1972) 327.

¹⁶ *What Faith Is* (n.p.: Faith Library, 1980) 27.

¹⁷ *How to Turn Your Faith Loose* 12.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bruner, *Theology* 249, n. 35.

¹⁹ Quoted in Harrell, *All Things* 235.

He is offered [not given] to us freely without money and without price [except faith]. We simply [including tongues] extend our hand of faith [whose hand is extended?], lay hold on him [a work], appropriate him [another work], and receive him as our own.²⁰

When K. Hutten attacked similar attempts to empty the doctrine of justification of faith of any meaning, the response came.

Hutten's basic error is that he speaks of grace without conditions, and the Bible knows of no such thing. The doctrine of grace without conditions is a master stroke of Satan, with which he has already deceived millions of people and led them to damnation.²¹

This extraordinary statement does contain some truth; there *are* conditions to having a full, proper relationship with God. But the gospel is that Christ has fulfilled these conditions. Galatians and Hebrews, particularly, are at pains to explain precisely this point. 'He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' ([Heb. 9:26](#)); therefore, 'a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because by works of the law shall no one be justified' ([Gal. 2:16](#)). Humankind is unable to work in any way which can make us acceptable to God. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, estranged and hostile, doing evil deeds until God acted in Christ to reconcile us to himself (cf. [2 Cor. 5:17-21](#); [Eph. 2:1-10](#); [Col. 1:19-23](#)). Throughout the Bible the whole pattern is that God acts first in gracious love to reconcile rebellious, self-centred human beings who, every time they exalt themselves, run the risk of exchanging the truth about God for a lie and worshipping the creature instead of the Creator—the primaevial sin and the Pelagian error.

However, the Pelagian standpoint is steadfastly maintained, that 'salvation is open to all by an act of 'free will', which must be continually reaffirmed by a godly life'.²² The stress on one's individual work in order to become and remain a Christian is relentless.

Any sin not confessed to God can bring man to the point where he falls outside the forgiveness of God.²³ p. 133

When only a certain type of piety is acceptable as genuinely Christian, the activity of the Holy Spirit is thus also channelled and those who have not 'believed for the blessing', been 'Spirit-filled' or experienced the 'Super Nine all the time' are at best second-rate Christians or (at worst) not spiritually alive at all.

The picture is of a God who lays all his blessings on a table, cries out, 'Come and get it ... if you can!', and leaves us to work our way through the maze of right and wrong approaches with which it is all hedged around.²⁴

To this it is only possible to reply, again with Paul, that in Christ 'the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him' ([Col. 2:9f](#); [1:19](#)).

To be fair, many in the charismatic movement would reject as extreme the statements on which we have been commenting. Besides, many evangelicals (particularly those in

²⁰ Quoted and annotated in Bruner, *Theology* 248.

²¹ Quoted in Hollenweger, *Pentecostals* 319.

²² R. Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 32, n. 5.

²³ Quoted in Hollenweger, *Pentecostals* 319.

²⁴ T. Small, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980) 155. He also observes that, 'it is a delusion of the rally mentality that God has a limited three or four things he can do in people's lives, and it depends on the decision people can be induced to make whether he can do them or not.' *Father* 156.

groups with a revivalistic tradition) hold decidedly Arminian views. Tom Smail quotes Billy Graham's appeal for a 'decision for Christ':

When you come to the moment of decision, your father can't help you, your mother can't help you, your best friend can't help you and—I say it with all reverence—*God himself* can't help you.²⁵

Smail himself, especially in *Reflected Glory*,²⁶ advocates separation of Arminian theology from Pentecostal experience. The two do not have to go together if one regards the experience as a making up for what was not received at conversion due to the inadequate preaching of Christ as bestower of the Spirit. Since faith comes, not by exhortation, nor by 'working-up', but by hearing the preaching of Christ ([Rom. 10:17](#)), the answer is 'to declare the full Christ'. The human response is then created by the message and is thus itself part of the gift. He would also argue that faith is not the ground but the means of reception of God's blessing, since it takes its value solely from the object on which it is set, not from its quality or quantity as worked up in the believer. He sees, still, a use for the word 'appropriation': [p. 134](#)

Faith is a trusting which has become a taking, it is a believing which does not inertly wait for the blessing to be delivered, but so trusts the reality of the promise made by God, that it stretches out its hand to accept what it sees him offering.²⁷

His ideal, however, seems so seldom met in practice that now he largely agrees with Bruner that 'there is more danger than I used to realise that the Pentecostal baby will be totally immersed in the Arminian bathwater and lost without trace.'²⁸

SOME ROOT PROBLEMS

During our discussion we have come across several problems which seem to lie at the heart of the whole attitude. The first is hermeneutical rather than theological: it is the assumption that the New Testament in general, and Acts in particular, is a paradigm of what God *will* do rather than of what he *can* or *may* do. Conscious imitation of the early Church has been the foundation of virtually every Christian reform or renewal group since at least the time of Wyclif and Hus, but for each group in its own unique set of circumstances the question must be asked: to what extent *does* God desire us to be exact replicas of first-century Mediterranean Christians? Specifically, are all the New Testament manifestations of the Spirit available and intended for all Christians everywhere, for all time? Does the New Testament and particularly Acts claim to provide an exact pattern for all to expect to follow? If some paradigm is contained in the seemingly random experiences portrayed, how may we in the twentieth century come by that same experience?

Whatever our answers to those questions surely it cannot be maintained that our experience can be generated by our own 'tarrying', 'seeking', 'confessing', or other acts of self-purification; any more than the New Testament Christians attained a sufficient level of merit to warrant their supernatural experiences. If the acts recorded are anyone's they

²⁵ Quoted in Smail, *Father* 154.

²⁶ *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

²⁷ *Reflected Glory* 151.

²⁸ Smail, *Father* 155.

are those of the Holy Spirit, not of the apostles. And if the book of Acts shows us anything it is the great flexibility and variety in the way he works, and that he always works as he alone wills.

Another key problem has (strangely) been that of an inadequate view of the Holy Spirit. Seldom has he been seen as a person, particularly one with his own inscrutable purposes hidden from mortals, but rather as a supernatural power source which can be p. 135 varied by a person exercising faith; as if faith were a tap regulating a flow of 'living water', or an accelerator pedal controlling the 'revving' of our spiritual power plant. This misses 'the fact that he works primarily by generating awareness and communion and that whatever power and wisdom he gives derives from that'.²⁹ The evidence for the Spirit is not tongues but faith expressed in the prayer, 'Abba! Father!' ([Gal. 4:6](#); [Rom. 8:16f.](#)) or in the confession, 'Lord Jesus' ([1 Cor. 12:3](#); [1 John 4:1ff.](#)), and in the indispensable qualities of Christian character ([Gal. 5:22](#); cf. [Matt. 7:16ff.](#)). As C. F. D. Moule observes, no mortal can perceive the precise moment of visitation by the Spirit of God. At best, only different focal points of a protracted reality may be distinguished with any clarity, as in his example of an ongoing loving relationship with focal points such as holding hands, kissing and the wedding ceremony.³⁰

What we must *not* do is to think and speak of the Holy Spirit as a magical power which God gives us to make us 'successful' Christians. This was the error of Simon Magus, and it continues to be the error of some revivalist and pentecostalist preaching.³¹

A blatant example of precisely this abuse comes at the end of some advertising literature requesting financial gifts:

God bless you and now we command Holy Ghost fire to come upon each one that reads this book, in Jesus' Name. Look up and shout Hallelujah! And you will feel the garment of power begin to wrap around you by the Holy Ghost.³²

To do this sort of thing is virtually an attempt to suborn the Spirit of God to one's own ends. It hardly keeps him as another Counsellor of the same kind as Christ, but reduces him to no more than a convenient genie activated by human rubbing of the bottle in the right way, or to another paranormal force in a semi-animistic world view.

These tendencies, it would seem, stem from what amounts almost to a blasphemous desire to recreate God in human image—the full Pelagian error—as perceptions of and relations with God are defined and determined by *my* ideas and *my* experience. A man-centred, not God-centred, theology develops.

As one moves nearer the extremes of Pentecostalism this may perhaps be linked ever more directly to the variety of social deprivation theories applied by sociologists to the origins of the p. 136 movement. If this were so one could see the anthropocentrism of the charismatic theology linked in some way to a desire to replace one's inability to manipulate society, becoming socially successful, with a more profitable ability to manipulate God himself. Though that would, I think, be pure speculation at the present time, the theology may well be seen as another re-emergence of mankind's primaeval desire to usurp God's place, to be like God. Only Christ has not counted equality with God

²⁹ J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London: SCM, 1972) 200.

³⁰ *The Holy Spirit* (London: Mowbrays, 1978).

³¹ Taylor, *Go-Between God* 202.

³² Quoted in Harrell, *All Things* 104.

a thing to be grasped; we children of Adam need to be constantly on our guard against our desires to control our own destinies independent of all else. Again, perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that the rise of the charismatic movement has paralleled the flourishing of the 'Me' decades and the 'Now' generation.

CONCLUSION

We have considered a number of key areas in Christian life and teaching to examine the charismatic understanding of how these come about. In every case they have been seen to be shot through with a strongly anthropocentric, Pelagian emphasis and there seems little doubt that the nearer the charismatic movement veers towards full-blown Pentecostalism, the stronger that emphasis becomes. Yet we have also seen examples of charismatic insistence on more historic Protestant tenets. The bulk of current evangelicalism, too, seems tarred with the Arminian brush. It has been instructive that only Bloesch, Bruner, Packer and Smal have even begun any criticism on these grounds.

Throughout this essay I have criticized the movement's tendency to have mere mortals attempt their own salvation and earn its blessings. We should end by noting that that has largely eventuated through a desire to revitalize a complacent 'once saved, always saved' outlook, and a Christianity which has often seemed to deny the Spirit any real power at all. One must agree thankfully with Packer's enthusiasm:

With radical theology inviting the church into the barren wastes of neo-Unitarianism, it is (dare I say) just like God—the God who uses the weak to confound the mighty—to have raised up, not a new Calvin or John Owen or Abraham Kuyper, but a scratch movement, cheerfully improvising, which proclaims the divine personhood and power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit not by great theological eloquence, originality, or accuracy, but by the power of renewed lives creating a new, simplified, unconventional and uncomfortably challenging lifestyle. *O sancta simplicitas!*³³

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Creation, Covenant and Work

William J. Dumbrell

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The central thesis of this exegetical study is that man basically relates himself to his fellow human beings, and the world around, by work. It is through his work that he becomes aware of God's plan of new creation, and of his own role in it as the agent responsible for bringing harmony into a world full of evil. It makes an excellent alternative to the Marxist anthropology, that man is the product of his producing activity, as it supplies the missing

³³ *Keep in Step* 230–1.

links: the personal blessing of God. It is a necessary reading for those studying the 'integrity of Creation'.

Editor

COVENANT

First, let us examine the detail we have about covenant in the Creation narrative of [Genesis 1–11](#). This examination will lead us back naturally to Creation and the detail of [Genesis 1–3](#). That, in its turn, will speak to us of man's role and purpose in our world.

Since we see man most naturally as the worker, we shall need to note carefully the bearing of the Fall upon this most natural role for mankind. Finally, we shall conclude with brief attention to the question of rest as associated for man with toil, turning our attention at that point to [Genesis 2:1–3](#), in order to ascertain what is the total biblical perspective that the themes of covenant and creation lay before us.

Since biblical eschatology will be progressively associated with a doctrine of a 'New Covenant' it will be important for us to note, summarily at least, the developing features of the Old Testament covenants. The immediate context of [Genesis 6:17–18](#) is the impending flood; but the notion of covenant is before us for the first time biblically. For the first time, we meet the Hebrew word *bef rit* ('covenant') in its some 290 occurrences in the Old Testament. Addressed at [Genesis 6:17–18](#) is Noah, a member of the godly line of Seth, son of Adam, and the context of [Genesis 6:17–18](#) is a promise uttered by God in the very shadow of the impending flood. In the 'but I will establish my covenant with you' of [Genesis 6:18](#) several questions [p. 138](#) are posed for us. What is the precise meaning of the word 'establish' here and why is the verb in the future tense? What is the exact meaning of the term 'covenant'; why is it used here seemingly without introduction and why further is it 'my' covenant? Is the covenant concluded with Noah personally or representatively?

First, the term 'covenant'. Most naturally the English term 'covenant' contains a notion of mutuality. Though some human/human covenants in the Old Testament bear the features of mutuality about them, in the case of Old Testament divine/human covenants there is no element of mutuality. Divine covenants are imposed upon the recipients, as the 'my' of my covenant here suggests. Thus the actual meaning of *bef rit* must be determined from within the context in which it is operating, within the general sense of the background of the word which appears in its basic sense to reflect the notion of 'bond', 'fetter'.

Second, the absence of any direct background for the word *bef rit* in [Genesis 6:18](#) needs to be illuminated from the use of the word within comparable contexts of the period. Instructive here is the use of *bef rit* in the three secular instances of [Genesis 21:22–32](#), [Genesis 26:26–33](#), [Genesis 31:43–54](#) concerning Isaac and Jacob in relationship to others. The point in each case of these three covenants is that the covenant in each incident does not initiate the relationship which is already in each case in existence. What the covenant does is to give to the relationship a quasi-legal backing and guarantee its continuance. The point is an important one for [Genesis 6:17–18](#) since it signifies that we must look elsewhere for the origin of the relationship which is referred to by the term 'covenant'.

Third, the normal term for covenant initiation where the relationship is to be secured in this way is the Hebrew verb *karat*, 'cut'. In every other case of covenant initiation in the Old Testament the covenant is technically begun by having been 'cut'. Undoubtedly the idiom 'to cut a covenant' goes back to some type of pre-biblical curse ritual enacted by covenant making which confirmed existing relationships but that is not important for our

purpose here. Since [Genesis 6:17–18](#) (and the dependent passage in [Genesis 9:9–13](#)) is the one Old Testament context where the verb ‘cut’ is absent, the presumption is that we do not have at [Genesis 6:17–18](#) the actual initiation of the covenant with Noah. But is [Genesis 6:17–18](#) merely an anticipation of the more fundamental context in which the same issues are aired, but more widely, [Genesis 9:9–13](#)? [Genesis 9:9](#) widens the concept of [Genesis 6:18](#) by including Noah’s descendants, making it thus clear that the covenant with Noah was with Noah as representative humanity. [Genesis 9:10](#) takes us further to include the animal species threatened [p. 139](#) by the flood (i.e. every living creature—birds, cattle and beasts of the earth). This seems to make it clear that the stress in the Noachian covenant is upon man, but as guarantor of the created order. It becomes apparent that by [Genesis 9:13](#) the parameters of covenant are even more widely drawn to include everything that was threatened by the Flood, namely the earth as well and to this covenant with Noah is added in [Genesis 9:12](#) the sign of the rainbow to remind the Creator of his undertaken obligation to man and his world.

In summary, [Genesis 9:9–13](#) appears to presuppose the context of [6:17–18](#) but to widen it. [Genesis 9:9–13](#) is not the covenant to which [6:17–18](#) looks forward but [9:9–13](#) refers to the covenant of [6:17–18](#). Noah is provided with an assurance in the shape of a covenant before the onset of the flood in [6:17–18](#) and then at the conclusion of the flood, [9:9–13](#) the covenant is confirmed and its implications extended. It seems, then, that we must look for the relationship to which [6:17–18](#) gives confirmatory point in some act prior to [Genesis 6](#). Here the precise language of [6:18](#) helps for the covenant is not ‘made’ with Noah, but ‘established’. In all other Old Testament contexts in which the phrase ‘establish a covenant’, *heqîm be’f rîit*, occurs ([Gen. 17:7](#), [19](#), [21](#); [Exod. 6:4](#); [Lev. 26:19](#); [Deut. 8:18](#); [2 Kgs. 23:3](#); [Jer. 34:18](#) as well as [Gen. 9:9](#), [11](#), [17](#)), the initial institution of a covenant is not referred to, but its perpetuation and we may thus surmise that the phrase ‘cause my covenant to stand’, i.e. ‘establish my covenant’ of [Genesis 6:18](#) also refers to the perpetuation of some covenant and not to its initiation.

The pledge of divine obligation to creation, as affected by the flood which is the substance of the covenant with Noah ([Gen. 6:18](#), [9:9–13](#)) seems therefore to refer to a basic commitment to maintain the structure of creation, given implicitly by the fact of creation itself. It is important to note that the mandate given to humanity in [Genesis 1:26–28](#) to ‘be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it’ is virtually repeated to Noah in [Genesis 9:1ff.](#), while the further details of the covenant advanced in [9:9–13](#) makes it clear that what is being ‘maintained/established’ is some basic arrangement with the world whereby man, the animal world and the earth itself are assured of continuance. Since, moreover, the detail of [Genesis 1:26–28](#) (to which the promise given to Noah in [9:1–7](#) refers) has in mind a divine purpose to be accomplished by man and his world, it would seem to suggest that the covenant with Noah has not merely the fallen world and man in it in view, but also the purpose of [Genesis 1:1–2:3](#) which will finally be brought into effect. It is in this latter sense that the covenant with Noah can be called eschatological. The latter association [p. 140](#) of the New Covenant with a concept of the New Creation draws together the two notions of creation and redemption and thus by redemption of first man and then his world, by the restitution of all things ([Col. 1:20](#)). As covenant and creation are associated at the beginning of human experience, so they will be at the end.

CREATION

Our review of the use of the term covenant at [Genesis 6:18](#), etc. has led us back to creation itself. For our purposes, what is important for us here will be the definition of man’s role

in our world and man's reaction to creation as presented in [Genesis 2:4–3:24](#). We may present the broad outline of Creation in [Genesis 1–2](#) as follows.

Genesis 1:1–2:3: Creation in Six Days

Within the parallels of introduction (vv. [1–2](#) and conclusion [2:1, 2:3](#)) which 'frame' detail relating to the seventh day) a regular pattern relating to eight acts on six days occurs. The six stages are marked by a conclusion formula ([5b, 8b, 13, 19, 23, 31](#)) and the pattern (with some exceptions) is command, execution of command, act of creation and then valuation. The first three stages have to do with progressive separations (light from darkness, water above from waters below, waters from dry land). The next three stages 'fill' creation with essential life and there is a general parallelism of form to content in days 1 to 4, 2 to 5, 3 to 6. The narrative proceeds as a series of 'begettings' (Hebrew *tôledôt* 'generations' [2:4a](#)) and is told in report form. The setting could be the cult (cf. the interest in sabbath [2:2–3](#)) or the royal court (since man in [Gen. 1:26–27](#) is depicted in 'royal' terms). The intention is to stress that the origin of all things depended upon God. The use of Hebrew *bara*, 'create', in [Genesis 1:1](#) stresses this also.

The structure appears to separate [1:3–31](#) from [1:1–2](#) and then to mark off the sabbath in [2:1–3](#) as important, indeed critical. In these circumstances it seems best to take [1:1](#) as adverbially dependent upon [1:2](#) with [1:2](#) referring in three circumstantial clauses to the primaevial unfitness of the earth for human occupation as a first stage of creation (since it was desolate and dark, but even as such completely controlled by the Spirit). [Genesis 1:3–31](#) then deals with the outfitting of creation for human habitation, climaxing in the creation of mankind, while [2:1–3](#) points to the goal of creation. [Genesis 1:2](#) needs careful attention. The reference to primaevial waters covering the earth and the darkness which covered that seems, in view of [p. 141](#) creation conflict accounts in the later Old Testament, etc. (cf. [Ps. 74:12–14](#); [Isa. 51:9–11](#); [Ps. 93](#); [Isa. 27:1](#)) to point to the threat of disorder. But the Spirit of God which hovers over the waters provides reassurance of divine control. Chapter [1](#) thus may suggest a knowledge of such ancient Near Eastern creation myths but forms a polemic against them!

The Days of Genesis—There are Three Main Views:

1. They refer to a literal six days. This seems to founder on the scientific evidence available and seems also not to take account of the difficulty that [Genesis 2:5](#) raises.

2. The days are eras. Apart from the scientific difficulties (sun, moon created only on the fourth day) which are present for chronology on this view, the eras would have to be unequal, at least then weakening the symmetry of six days plus one.

3. The arrangement is logical rather than chronological and the order is an order of interest. This seems to be preferable. The first section in [1:3–13](#) is of three days, four creative words with a double movement at the climax. The movement is from heavens, to waters to earth. The second part, [1:14–31](#), essentially follows the same scheme: heavens, waters, earth. The eighth action on the sixth day brings us to the creation of man.

Man as the Image

We need first to take up the question of man as the image and relate that to the concept of dominion. The creation account in [Genesis 1](#) indeed climaxes in the account of the creation of man in [1:26–28](#). True, this is not the climax of the account itself; that comes in the material concerning the Sabbath rest in [2:1–3](#).

Basic to the account of the creation of man is the nature of the relationship which is conjured up under the term 'image'. The notion is an important one for the purposes of

our discussion of man's role in his world although the phrase 'image of God' occurs only twice in Scripture ([Gen. 1:26, 9:6](#)). This phrase has been variously handled in the history of Christian thought and we note that Karl Barth (1960) has shown how each age has filled [Genesis 1:26](#) with the philosophical content of its age (i.e. as 'soul', etc.).

Selem, 'image', is an ambiguous word with the possible meanings of 'copy' or 'representation', always with reference to what is externally presented. Only 'representation' fits the theological context of [p. 142 Genesis 1:26](#); and to weaken further the sense of vagueness imported by 'image', *df mût*, 'likeness' is added to indicate that man is only an image, only a representation of the deity and nothing more. Indeed, the context goes on to underscore the point since unlike God but like the other creatures man is endowed in [v. 27b](#) with sexual differentiation. This further distinction anticipates [1:28](#) but does not directly refer to man as the 'image' (Bird, 1981). In regard to the content of the image, we may therefore dismiss earlier Christian internalizations of the term such as rationality, self-consciousness, etc. Of course, Hebrew thought conceived of man as a psycho-somatic whole and thus not merely externality is on view in image, but that emphasis is predominant.

In the Semitic cognate languages this note of visible representation is plain. So Akkadian *salmu*, 'image', refers to a visible symbol, usually representation of the deity set up in a temple as a sign of the authority of the city state deity to whom the image referred. Moreover in Akkadian, when used of the king, 'image' referred to the god-like power of the king in his function as ruler. Consistent with this ancient Near Eastern presentation are Egyptian texts where 'image' language is found frequently. As the image, Pharaoh was the visible representation of the deity, the god incarnate on earth.

Perhaps the Mesopotamian analogies to which we have appealed throw light also upon the royal connotations which are present in the relationship of man to the deity which [Genesis 1](#) offers. In Mesopotamian royal theology, the king was conceived as a servant of the gods; and 'image' language, used of the king in that context, thus decried the king in some relationship to the gods. But the image was clearly conceived of in Mesopotamian thought as being different in character and substance from the god who stood behind it. The designation of the king as the image of the god in Mesopotamia referred to his royal function as having a mandate from the god to rule and thus as one possessing divine power. There is a duality, however, in the [Genesis 1–3](#) account for we are introduced to man in royal terms as the image, consistent with the general ancient Near Eastern picture, and yet in creature terms as part of the animate and inanimate creation over which he bears rule.

The nature of this rule now requires attention. The precise word associated with man's rule in [Genesis 1:26–28](#) is Hebrew *radah*. What is signified by the very *radah* is the exercise of authority by a superior over a positionally inferior. This is not necessarily arbitrary or despotic rule, for where this is indicated in the Old Testament, a further predicate is often supplied (cf. [Lev. 25:43](#) 'with rigour', and [vv. 46, p. 143 53](#); [Ezek. 34:4](#) 'with force and with rigour', [Isa. 14:6](#) 'in anger'). The verb is thus appropriately used of the rule of kings ([1 Kgs. 5:4](#); [Ezek. 34:4](#); [Ps. 72:8, 110:2](#)) and of the rule over fellow Israelites in a way that resembles foreign domination ([Lev. 25:43, 46, 53](#)). It is thus a peremptory word and by it a state of circumstances normally translated by 'subdue', 'bring into subjugation' is intended. As has been noted, the use here in [Genesis 1](#) refers to Adam's place and role *vis-à-vis* the created world (Bird, 1981). There is however no note within the verb itself of the precise details or type of control or management which dominion in [Genesis 1:26](#) was to assume, but its use is consistent with the extra-biblical royal nuances to which we have referred. They constitute important comments upon

[Genesis 1](#), let alone the further act that [Psalm 8:5](#) in an exposition of man's place in creation adds that he is 'crowned' with glory and honour.

Kabas, 'subdue' ([Gen. 1:28](#)), which is often taken to be a further predicate of 'dominion', relates more narrowly to man's relationship with the ground, and thus to the content of v. [28](#) and blessing (Westermann, 1974).

We may thus sum up our discussion of man's role in [Genesis 1](#) by saying that as the image, man is installed as God's vice-regent over all 'creation with power to control and regulate it, to harness its clear potential, a tremendous concentration of power in the hands of puny man! What authority he thus possesses to regulate the course of nature, to be a bane or a blessing to his world!

Behold, It was Very Good (Gen. 1:31). Was Creation Perfect?

With man created to exert dominion over the world the account of [Genesis 1](#) comes to a close. We need, however, now to relate more precisely to the world over which man was set in control. God expresses himself in [1:31](#) as pronouncing the creation which he beheld 'very good'. The phrase *kî tôb* appears six times in [Genesis 1](#) with reference to various specifics of creation; light (v. [4](#)) on the first day, sea and dry land on the second day, plant life on the third day, celestial bodies, sun, moon and stars on the fourth day, sea creatures and birds on the fifth day, living creatures and beasts on the sixth day climaxing in *kî tôb me' od* on the sixth day as a final evaluation of the total work.

Each time *kî tôb* is used in [Genesis 1](#), God is the speaker and the form refers to divine approval of some specific act of creation. Traditionally, many different views have been offered as to the meaning of the phrase. Those who interpret the phrase in terms of [p. 144](#) 'perfection' understand the term to mean the complete harmony of creation in its integration with all details. On such views both the parts and the whole of creation emerged perfect from God's hand (Cassuto, 1944). However, we do not see such perfection obtaining in our world today. Pain, suffering, natural calamities, and the inevitability of decay mark the world we know. Such a picture of a perfect creation is also at variance with the biological competition within nature which we know to be clearly our present case.

Hebrew *tôb* has a broad range of meanings: pleasant, pleasing, favourable, useful, suitable, proper, right, beautiful, well-shaped, friendly, cheerful, plentiful, Valuable, excellent of its kind, prosperous, benevolent, upright, brave, genuine. Thus the translation of *tôb* will be conditioned by its immediate context. The adjective certainly can mean aesthetic good or ethical good and need not be understood of perfection. Of course to convey absolute perfection the construction which we do have in [Genesis 1:31](#) would serve. Such a concept, however, would be without parallel in the Old Testament, and we agree with Kohler and Baumgartner (1953) that *tôb* in this context is best taken as 'efficient'. We would therefore see creation as good in its correspondence to divine intention, suitable to fulfil that purpose for which it had been brought into being. We would suggest that the further appeal to ethical nuances in regard to the 'good' in [Genesis 1](#) rests upon the general tenor of Scripture as a whole rather than upon the context itself and rests also upon the presuppositions which we generally bring to [Genesis 1](#), namely that a concept of absolute perfection is in view in this narrative.

The Garden—The Ideal World and the Dominion Role of Man Reviewed

We need now to return to the role of man in our world. [Genesis 2](#) treats man in more detail. It is not, as is frequently suggested, a second account of creation. The purpose of the account is to make clear from the perspective of man what was meant to be the relationship of man as exercising dominion to his world under God. The narrative of

[Genesis 2](#) indicates that man was created outside of the garden ([2:8](#)). This seems confirmed by the progressive movement of the action in [Genesis 2–3](#) from outside of the garden, into the garden, to the centre of the garden and then again finally outside of the garden once more. The garden seems a reserve which has been specially set apart from its world and seems to be completely different from it. The noun *gan* occurs 41 times in the Old Testament and the feminine noun *gannah* [p. 145](#) 16 times. It is derived from *ganan* ('cover', 'surround', 'defend'), which occurs 8 times in the Old Testament. The verb is only used with Jerusalem or the people of Yahweh as its object. Yahweh is always the subject ([Isa. 31:5](#), [37:35](#), [38:6](#); [2 Kgs. 20:6](#), [19:34](#); [Zech. 9:15](#), [12:8](#)—see Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1972). The use of these nouns indicates that a garden is a plot of ground protected by a wall or a hedge, a concept which the basic meaning of the verb *ganan* with its notes of 'protect, defend' would support (*TWOT*, 1980). Walls around royal gardens are specifically mentioned in the Old Testament ([2 Kgs. 25:4](#); [Jer. 39:4](#), [52:7](#); [Neh. 3:15](#)). Vineyards also were surrounded by walls (cf. [Prov. 24:30–31](#); [Isa. 5:5](#)) to protect them from ravage by animals, and we are not surprised that the same precautions would be taken generally concerning gardens (cf. [Amos 4:9](#) where 'gardens' and 'vineyards' are parallel).

All of this makes understandable the note of a garden as a special place which is spatially separate and different from its world. It is a valued, fertile, well-watered place which is constantly cared for. These notes are reinforced in the case of [Genesis 2](#) by the Septuagint translation of Hebrew *gan* by *paradeisos*, from Hebrew *pardes*, itself a loan word from Persian. *Pardes* has the basic sense of 'what is walled, what is hedged about' and thus 'a pleasure garden surrounded by a stone or earthen wall' (Keil & Delitzsch, 1975). The Vulgate translates the phrase 'garden of Eden' by *paradisus voluptatis*, 'a delightful paradise' (Westermann, 1974).

In the Old Testament, we find that the garden of Eden becomes a symbol for a particularly luxuriant land. In this connection, the proper name Eden is derived from the Hebrew root *ʿdn* (Jacobs-Hornig, 1978 & 1962), 'to delight'. So, in [Genesis 13:10](#), the well-watered Jordan valley appeared to Lot 'like the garden of the Lord'. Later the fertility of the garden of Eden can be contrasted with the desolation which comes upon Judah as a result of the 586 BC fall of Jerusalem. Isaiah and Ezekiel can thus predict that Judah, though it is desolate, would become like Eden, the garden of the Lord ([Isa. 51:3](#); [Ezek. 36:5](#); cf. [Joel 2:3](#)). The existence of gardens and parks as special places in the ancient Near East outside of Israel is abundantly clear from Mesopotamian literature. Kings planted and boasted of extravagant gardens. Sumerian mythology also reveals a paradise myth which speaks of an extremely fertile land, Dilmun, where beasts do not prey upon each other and where sickness and ageing are unknown. The Gilgamesh epic also speaks of an island garden with trees bearing precious stones. Egyptian literature and art also describe beautiful gardens as places of love and happiness (Jacobs-Hornig, 1969). [p. 146](#)

In the light of all this, the garden of Eden in [Genesis 2](#) is best viewed as a special sanctuary quite unlike the rest of the world. [Genesis 2:5–25](#) describes the position of man before the Fall, existing in that openness in the divine presence which the presentation of the extended seventh day of [2:4a](#) suggests. Some picture of the nature of man's dominion over nature is thus provided as well. Paradoxically, man exercises dominion over his world by service and worship in the divine presence. His service in the garden is denoted by the very *ʿabad* (used 290 times in the Old Testament with the basic meaning of 'work' or 'serve'). In the context of [Genesis 2:15](#) the clear meaning of the verb is 'till' or 'cultivate', but the use of the verb in the later Old Testament as the customary verb for 'worship' imports into the [Genesis 2](#) context the further nature of man's response in what is clearly a sanctuary presence. That the garden of [Genesis 2](#) is a shrine, comes out not only from

Chapter 2, but markedly from the manner in which [Ezekiel 28:11–19](#) describes Eden, the cosmic focus of the—world in the alternate terms of garden/holy mountain of God (cf. vv. [13, 14](#)). Since after man’s expulsion from the garden, he is described in relationship to the earth by the same verb *‘abad* ([3:23](#)), we may take it that by this verb the very fundamental character of man’s dominion over the earth is being described. Service which is divine service is thus his role; a dominion which shows itself first in submission to the Creator is what is required; and we may refer to [Mark 10:45](#) for a Christian analogy. The note emphasized for man’s role in the garden by Hebrew *‘abad* is reinforced by the use of Hebrew *samar* in the same verse (v. [15](#)). This verb has the general meaning of ‘take care of’, ‘to have charge of’. The use of this verb then indicates the nature of the attention devoted to the garden, within the consciousness of the presence of the Creator from whom the mandate has been given. Perhaps also there is latent in the notion of the verb the watchfulness that needs to be exercised over against the serpent who will appear in [Genesis 3](#).

But we may sum up this section by suggesting that the garden episode displays, as a paradigm, admittedly under ideal circumstances, the harmony of created orders that the dominion role was to secure in the world at large. At the same time [Genesis 2](#) indicates what dominion as such is and how it was to be exercised. Dominion is the service which takes its motivation from the intimate relationship with the Lord God on behalf of whom dominion is exercised. The possibility exists, even within the garden, for man to exercise his God-given authority independently ([Gen. 2:16–17](#)). We know this will happen in [Genesis 3](#) and expect that it will have disastrous effects for [p. 147](#) man’s mandate and role. The Fall will deny to man the further possibility that the garden also holds out to him, that immortal by relationship to God, he might develop and deepen that relationship by which alone life in God’s presence would be retained. We now turn to the Fall account itself.

THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL

The harmony of created orders under man, for which [Genesis 2](#) speaks, is fractured by the Fall, by which the order of [Genesis 2](#) is reversed in Chapter 3. Man’s acquisition by the Fall of the knowledge of good and evil is to be understood in terms of the legal background of the ancient Near East which underlies the phrase ‘good and evil’ as W. M. Clark (1969) has made clear. This phrase is not simply a merism for total knowledge. It is legal language denoting the authority to decide an issue (cf. [1 Kings 3:4–28](#), especially vv. [9, 28](#)). In [Genesis 3](#) by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man claims for himself the moral autonomy and the right to decide for himself apart from God (to whom these decisions properly belong) what is good or non-good.

The consequences which ensue from all this are recorded in [3:14ff](#). Of primary interest for us in all of this is the curse which is placed upon the ground in v. [17](#) and the description which then follows. What, however, is meant by the fact that in the post-Fall situation, the ground is cursed? In what sense is it cursed, and how are we to understand the prepositional phrase ‘because of you’, ‘on account of you’? What has changed in all this, the ground or man? Or have both undergone a change as a result of the Fall? Has creation been brought into bondage (cf. [Rom. 8:20](#)) by man’s Fall, and if so, in what sense are we to understand [Romans 8:18–23](#) which speaks of creation’s bondage and the prospect of its deliverance?

The verb ‘curse’ in [3:17](#) is Hebrew *‘arar*. The passive particle *Qal* which is used here accounts for 40 of the 63 Old Testament occurrences of the verb. Most curse sayings in the Old Testament are found in declarations of punishment, threat utterances, or accompanying legal proclamations (as in the extended treatment of covenant curses,

[Deut. 27–28](#)). In each case, they come as a response to the violation of one's relationship with God (*TWOT*, 1980). The verb *'arar* is an antonym of the Hebrew *barak*, 'bless.' It is used in opposition to *barak* 12 times (cf. Gert. 9:25–26, 12:3, [27:29](#)). To 'bless' means to endow with potential for life, to give the power to succeed, prosper, reproduce. It is always the gift of God, even where a human mediator [p. 148](#) intervenes. As opposed to 'bless', to 'curse' is to alienate, to remove from a benign sphere, to subject to deprivation (cf. the Akkadian cognate *araru*, 'snare', 'bind' [Hamilton, *TWOT*]). Thus Joshua's curse upon the Gibeonites means their deprivation of freedom ([Josh. 9:23](#)). Contrariwise, when the ground is blessed, it yields an abundance ([Gen. 27:27–28](#); [Deut. 28:11](#)); while when cursed, the ground ceases to yield its natural fruit ([Deut. 11:17](#), [28:23–24](#); [Jer. 23:10](#)).

The curse of [Genesis 3:17](#) breaks the former natural relationship between man and the earth. What will be involved in man's future relationship with his world is conveyed in v. [17](#) by the noun *'issabôn*, 'hardship', 'pain', 'distress'. It is derived from the Hebrew root *'sb*, 'to find fault with, to hurt, to trouble'. The root signifies both physical and emotional suffering, i.e. pain and sorrow, and these two concepts are reflected in the six nouns derived from the root (*TWOT*, 1980). Prior to his sin, Adam was to work; now he must 'toil'. The same noun is used of Eve's travail in childbirth (v. [16](#)) and Lamech's statement where rest from toil over the ground is hoped for ([Gen. 5:29](#)). We must see in this the element of pain, sorrow and agonizing effort. This is emphasized in vv. [18–19](#) by the reference to thorns and thistles which will be reaped when edible plants are desired, and by the note of the sweat on Adam's face as effort is expended. In the garden, however, before the Fall, man's work was evidently free of grief or pain whether physical or psychological.

After the Fall, man will find that his effort to cultivate the ground, and generally to relate to it, will be painful and disappointing. But what has changed here? Has the change occurred in man or in the environment, or in both? It is often suggested or implied that the change has occurred both in man and his environment. The Fall, it is suggested, had caused the ground to become recalcitrant in a way which had not previously been the case. From this point onwards, pain, suffering and struggle penetrated the natural order as well as the human order. The lion began to prey on the lamb and the pestiferous entered the human sphere! Yet scientific opinion indicates that the qualities of suffering and struggle were part of the natural process from the very beginning. Nowhere in the Fall account is it implied that the animal world as well as the ground was cursed. Certainly death now comes upon man as he is identified with the ground from which he came. But death comes explicitly because of man's sin and the expulsion from the garden ([Gen. 3:22–24](#)) seems intended as an act of grace. God will not let man live forever (with access in the garden still, it would seem, to the tree of life!) in a fallen state.

It seems therefore preferable to suggest that what is impaired as a [p. 149](#) result of the fall is man's *control* of the ground. In this connection, Hebrew *ba'abûrf ka* ([Gen. 3:17](#), 'for your sake') is ambiguous. 'For the sake of', the basic meaning of this preposition has the built-in ambiguity of either 'on account of' and 'for the benefit of'. The sense most suited to this [Genesis 3:17](#) context is 'because of', i.e. the ground yields a curse because of man's inappropriate use in future of the ground. We may cite here [Genesis 8:21](#) where 'for the sake of' seems best rendered as 'on account of' since what follows in the post-flood world is the preserved stability of nature, in spite of the fact that 'the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'.

We take therefore the meaning of the preposition in [Genesis 3:17](#) to signify that man's use of the ground had become impaired as a result of the Fall. The problem then, after the Fall, and our problem, is man's inability to use natural resources. The Fall has left him 'like God', i.e. he has the power to make decisions by which the course of his own life and his

world are controlled. He has not the ability, however, to be sure that the decisions taken are right in themselves, nor the assurance that such decisions once taken will promote the desired consequences. That is to say, man lives in his world unable to exercise proper dominion over nature. So far from man's dominion over the world producing the ecological problems of our world, *the very opposite is the case*. It has been the *failure* by man to exercise dominion, in the sense in which this concept is understood by [Genesis 1–3](#), which has caused the problem. It has been man's failure to serve his environment, his failure to exercise dominion in this way by proper management, his failure as a worker to understand the nature of his relationship to creation, which has furnished our world with its present spate of problems. Man lives out of harmony with nature and himself. In a world after the Fall in which testing difficulties abound, man therefore is found continually deficient and humbled. Unable to administer his charge, his mismanagement and neglect and exploitation only served to accentuate, to increase and to sharpen the inbuilt problems of the natural world, on which it seems that he was charged to expend his energies as steward of creation. Created to rule, man has found that the crown has fallen from his brow.

WORK

In view of our exegesis of [Genesis 3:17](#), how does the issue of work in our world relate to all this? Is work simply the monotonous, routine, daily expenditure of energy whose final result is that nothing remains after a lifetime of toil? Is the writer to Ecclesiastes correct and life must **P. 150** be 'hated because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me: for all is vanity and a striving after wind' ([Eccl. 2:17](#))? Should toil and labour, as an accursed thing, commanding the sweat of our brow, be left as Athenians left it to slaves and manual workers, as they claimed that the intellectual and the philosopher must give himself to something better, to the *Bios Theoretikos* and not degrade himself by working? Is work therefore beneath the dignity of a gentleman as the Greeks believed?

It is true that the Old Testament generally presupposes the fact of work and the New Testament parables and teachings of Jesus assume that secular labour of all sorts and kinds belong to the lot of man and must be undertaken by him. On the other hand, there is the plain fact that Jesus never called anyone to a particular occupation. Even if Jesus were a carpenter ([Mark 6:3](#)), there is not evidence that he continued with his craft after his call to ministry. True again, St. Paul was a tent maker, to take another New Testament example. He worked with Aquila in Corinth at this trade, but this does not provide the type of legitimization for work generally that we need; for Paul was above all a minister of the gospel who happened to be a tent maker and who, for the strategic reasons of his own mission, preferred to keep himself (cf. [2 Thess. 3:18](#); [1 Cor. 4:12](#), [9:4](#); [2 Cor. 11:7](#)). He tells us that it was his practice to work so as not to be a burden on others and so that his ministry might not be blamed. At several places, he urges Christians to do the same ([1 Thess. 4:11](#); [2 Thess. 3:10ff.](#); [Eph. 4:28](#)) but such instructions are peripheral to the thrust of his message. This type of instruction, moreover, is not vigorously pursued by him and it is obvious that while he is concerned with social harmony between classes and the preservation of the *status quo* after Christian conversion, and urges a doctrine of submission to authority ([Rom. 13](#)), Paul himself has no positive interest in work. We search in vain for the evidence in the Bible generally to support the vigorous way in which the mandate to subdue the earth has been applied since the Reformation with all the vigour of the Protestant work ethic: behind it (Brunner, 1957).

While presumably under Greek influence, the monastic movement, which thought it reckoned with work as an able means of self discipline and necessary to support human

existence as such, strongly propounded the excellence of the contemplative life as the chief end of man. All this was combated vigorously at the Protestant Reformation particularly by Martin Luther who attempted to undergird the labours of field and worship, the home and the nursery, with the dignity of worship. Luther was therefore a prime mover in generating the [p. 151](#) Protestant work ethic. Civilization and thus work was recognized as God's will for man. Encounter with the world and not withdrawal from it was henceforth in Protestant circles to mark the Christian man. The Reformation emphasized the truth that it had been the command to subdue the world which had preceded the Fall as man in [Genesis 2](#) had been charged with the care and oversight of the garden with the mandate to till it and to keep it. Man was to control creation and to use it wisely. As Wolff points out, it is important to note that man's charge to till the ground in [Genesis 2:5](#) is the only definition of the way in which man is to relate himself in the world, and the only measure of man's significance (Wolff, 1974). Man as created was removed from the general world outside and given this role in the garden. All the gifts of creation are then made over to man and his duty is now to exercise the innate capacity for toil that God had given him. As the writer continues with his account of the early period, it is of maximum importance to him as the genealogy of Cain is presented to indicate how quickly in the world the ingenuity of man devoted itself to the task of specialization of labour, the tiller of the soil joined by the breeder of the herds, the tent dweller and the musician, the technicians and workers in bronze and iron (Wolff, 1974) came into existence. Man is met by the challenge of his world and by the time we get to [Genesis 11](#), we find that even the construction of a tower whose top may reach to heaven is now not beyond the range of man who has begun at that stage to commit himself to the task of investigation of worlds beyond his own.

In our world, it is the will of God for us that we receive nothing which does not come as a shared blessing. Jesus taught us to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Daily bread is the gift of God to us through the service of others. The dignity of labour does not consist in what is done, but in the spirit in which it is done; and to this degree Luther was right at the Reformation. But it is in this matter of mutual relationships, in the world of organized labour, that the curse of the Fall manifests itself in broken relationships, rivalries, jealousies, sordid self seeking, cut throat economic rivalries, and fratricidal quarrelling. So far from being the happy workplace where regard is had brother for brother in mutual service, the happy workshop of the commonwealth of man is disarranged as a result of man's rebellion (Richardson, 1958). We continue to be fired with the technological illusion that through the ingenuity of man, we can build a better world, the dream which has inspired humanistic thinking since the Fall.

The Bible itself, however, commends industry and conscientiousness in work. The book of Proverbs understands work as an axiomatic [p. 152](#) claim on man's time and sees success as resulting from application and industry. 'A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of a diligent man makes rich' ([Prov. 10:4](#)). Riches are not seen as part of man's heritage but something which comes to him by the application of ingenuity and diligence. One has only to note the personal experience of the wisdom writer as he relates real life incidents in [Proverbs 24:30-34](#). Laziness is condemned by the book and poverty is one of its expected rewards (cf. [Prov. 13:4](#), and on the general theme cf. [Prov. 6:6-11](#)). And yet, for all this, Proverbs sees that there is no automatic connection between industry and success, for the hidden factor in personal blessing is the intervention of God (cf. [Prov. 10:22](#)). The blessing of Yahweh alone makes rich and man's own toil adds nothing to it. Yahweh also intervenes to arbitrate between man's desires and the reality which results so 'the plans of the will belong to man, but the answer from the tongue is from Yahweh'

(cf. [Prov. 16:1](#)). Riches and success remain ambiguities and thus 'Better is a little with the fear of Yahweh than great treasure and trouble with it' (cf. [Prov. 15:16](#) [Wolff, 1974]).

The Bible thus sees man as one who goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening ([Ps. 104:19-23](#)). Labour is the common lot of man which should be accepted cheerfully. Work is part of the divine ordering for man in this world.

There is nothing to support the Greek or Stoic view, then, according to which the higher class person has to have the leisure to fashion himself physically, intellectually and aesthetically into a harmonious being (Brunner, 1957) with the real working classes existing to provide for the gentleman who is occupied with his own concerns and thus with real living. So the writer of Ecclesiastes, who accepts this under Greek influence, asserted that manual labour and the study of the law were fundamentally incompatible. But the Rabbis of the New Testament period did not accept this view; for it was their rule that no Rabbi should accept payment for his teaching or other professional activities. Each must acquire a trade and support himself with honest toil. Happy is thus the man whose labour is blessed by the Lord ([Ps. 128:2](#)) and how wretched are those whose toil is not blessed and whose labour is in vain ([Isa. 62:8](#)).

For all this, however, there is no biblical indication that work is a *vocational* call. There is no biblical example of any man being called to a particular trade. Paul thus was *called* to be an apostle and *supported* himself by tent making. The Bible is seemingly uninterested in the various trades and livelihoods and professions in which humans engage. We cannot speak with assurance about God calling a person [p. 153](#) to be a medical practitioner, a lawyer or a plumber. God calls lawyers and doctors and plumbers to be evangelists, if we are to speak of a biblical calling. First Corinthians is not advice to remain within the secular occupation in which one was engaged prior to conversion; rather it means to be faithful to the spiritual call by which the life-changing experience was had. The biblical terms *klesis*, *ekklektoi*, *ekklesia* have nothing at all to do with description of secular occupations. God calls upon us to work honestly in whatever calling we choose and to give good value for our labour (cf. the advice that John the Baptist gave to tax gatherers and soldiers in [Luke 3:13ff.](#)). Christians, of course, should be concerned on the score of what occupation is chosen. But work is not an end in itself but the means to an end which is our wider participation in the activities of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, God is at work. God is at work promoting among the lives of individuals, at this point in time, the nature and significance of the Kingdom of God. Particularly in John's Gospel we see God at work in salvation and grace, and Jesus may sum up his ministry in terms of the works that God had given him to do. At the conclusion of his ministry, Jesus could say in [John 17:4](#): 'I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do', as prospectively he prayed in the shadow of the cross. He prays there for his disciples whom he had sent into the world as God had sent him into the world. This is above all the work that God has committed to us, that of labouring in his field which is the world, or in his vineyard which is the church. No other task is so urgent as the spreading of the gospel on earth.

We turn now to a new and final area for work as part of the divinely ordered structure of the world, the only command relating to our topic in the decalogue and not one related to an admonition to work or a warning against idleness, but one which endorses the need to set aside one day in seven. Though work is presupposed by the Sabbath commandment, what is important for the worker is that the Sabbath be observed and that its nature be understood.

SABBATH

Genesis 2:1–3—The Sabbath

Structure: Verse 1 is introductory and concludes the creation account while verses 2–3 combine creation with the seven-day scheme. God had completed his work and then rested. This rest is the rest of [p. 154](#) completion, not of exhaustion. The creation sabbath (the verb, however, and not the noun for ‘sabbath’ occurs) is meant to provide the context within which man is to operate. After the fall, the idea of sabbath as ‘completion’ is modelled upon God’s action of entering into his rest on the Sabbath day. [Genesis 2:1–3](#) provide the pattern of seven lines which rise to a crescendo in [3a](#), with [3b](#) emphasizing as a close, the matter of [2b](#). Verse [2:4a](#) begins what follows. Verse [1](#) is attached to [2a](#) by a common verb; [2b](#) is attached to [2a](#) because of similar conclusions; [3b](#) provides the reason for [3a](#) but is connected with [2b](#). No morning or evening is provided for the seventh day, which is thus unending. No light is able to be shed on the origins of the day from extra-biblical sources. Akkadian has the word *shabattu* which perhaps refers to a festival day, but this is uncertain. There is some evidence for the link between the day and the day of the full moon, and some biblical support for this; but a regular seventh day cannot be obtained from the lunar month. Some suggest that, in the ancient world, there were regularly-occurring market days; but there is no evidence for this in the Old Testament. Others conceive that the day derived from the Kenites who were smiths, since firemaking was prohibited on the seventh day. But these and other proposals are too tenuous to be helpful.

The verb *shabat* means ‘stop’ or ‘cease’. Sometimes it is translated ‘keep sabbath’ but this is a later derived use. The Hebrew root occurs 73 times in various themes in the Old Testament and is generally used of persons, habits, customs, coming to an end (*Qal*) or being brought to an end (*Niphal* and *Hiphil*). In none of these basic usages is the notion of ‘rest’, or desisting from work, given prominence. The seventh day is that which causes the week to stop and thus completes it. The note of ‘completion’ or ‘perfection’ is thus implicitly there, particularly by the sequence of [Genesis 2:2–3](#), and this idea of a creation rest for the creating deity is found in all creation texts of the ancient world.

The seventh day is the goal of creation in [Genesis 1–2](#), and is that for which creation exists. Such a goal cannot be gained by toil or trial but is given. Man’s fellowship with God is to be conducted on this ‘day’. There is no question of a rest from a work already done in [Genesis 2](#). The seventh day merely provides the context in which the ongoing relationship is to take place. Man is thus invited to ‘rest’ from his works and enter God’s rest! The Sabbath in Chapter [2](#) is God’s acceptance of his creation and indicates his desire for fellowship with man.

‘Sabbath’ and ‘rest’ are first brought together as concepts in [p. 155](#) [Exodus 20:8–11](#) (especially verse [11](#)) in connection with creation. Israel’s condition as resident in the promised land is in mind (cf. verse [10](#)). It is important here to note the meaning of the Hebrew *nuah* (‘to rest’) as joined with ‘sabbath’. No notion of rest from labour is implied by this verb (cf. [Gen. 49:15](#)). Rather, the verb implies movement from an unsettled condition to a fixed or settled condition. There are some few occurrences in the Old Testament meaning of relief from weariness or pain ([Prov. 29:17](#); [Isa. 28:12](#)) but these seem to be secondary extensions of the verbal idea.

It is important to note that in the early period, the ideas of sabbath and ‘rest’ are quickly brought into close connection with the sanctuary. We note that the promised land, viewed as a sanctuary, is the goal of the Exodus in the old hymnic/credal statement of [Exodus 15:17](#) and that the sabbath and the sanctuary/tabernacle are brought into close connection in [Exodus 31:12–17](#) and [35:1–3](#). Indeed, Tabernacle and sabbath are two sides of one reality. The logic seems to be that the building of the sanctuary gives expression to the principle of the Sabbath. Note also that the promised land, rest and sanctuary are

brought into connection (cf. [Deut. 12](#)). The gift of rest makes the building of the sanctuary possible and this, in its turn, documents the promised land as a *promised* land.

So a 'rest' of God ([Gen. 2:1-3](#)) indicates that creation is now settled and fixed. We note also that in the ancient world, the creation of the world is connected with the building of a temple/sanctuary and that thus man in [Genesis 2](#) is depicted as a king/priest (cf. [Ezek. 28:11-14](#)) offering worship in the sanctuary garden, the centre of the world, which is Eden.

The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath! Man, created to enter in and to enjoy divine rest, still has not enjoyed divine rest! There still remains a rest for the people of God ([Heb. 4:4-11](#), where [Ps. 95](#), which speaks of Israel's failure to enter that rest, and [Gen. 2:2](#) are brought together). Israel in the Old Testament never possessed its possessions! God's cessation from his work has now become the ceaseless endeavour of Jesus ([John 5:19](#)) in providing salvation which brings rest (cf. [Matt. 11:28](#)). As a consequence of all this, the shape of the Christian Sunday is given. It is, above all, a time when we reflect upon the blessing of creation and remind ourselves that God's work to bring in the New Creation is unceasing. We further reflect, also, that whatever may be the nature of our secular occupation, God has called us in whatever we do to be faithful to the new light which has shone in our hearts. p. 156

CONCLUSION

The [Genesis 6:18](#) notion of covenant drives us back upon creation and calls upon us to understand the purpose of God for man in [Genesis 1-2](#). Man, as we noted, created to bring harmony into a world which had to be subdued, forfeited his responsibility. As a result, he was expelled from the garden and his basic relationship with God, his fellow creatures and with the soil was broken and has remained so. Yet, for all this, man is aware that there is a dignity still about his relationship with his world and his fellows. Basically, he relates himself to his fellows and to his world by 'work'. The working week culminates in his use of the seventh day to recall to himself the purpose for which the world was created. In this way, he becomes aware of God's intention through ceaseless endeavour to bring in the new creation to which the misuse of the blessings of this present evil age points.

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Contextualizing Roman Catholicism

Jerry L. Sandidge

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions last year at Philadelphia College of Bible. Though some may not agree with all the insights of the paper, it makes a good supplement to the Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism produced by the Task Force of the WEF Theological Commission and published in these pages in an earlier issue.

Editor

John said to him, ‘Master, we saw a man driving out devils in your name, and as he was not one of us, we tried to stop him.’ Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; no one who does a work of divine power in my name will be able the next moment to speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is on our side. I tell you this: if anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you are followers of the Messiah, that man assuredly will not go unrewarded’ ([Mark 9:38–41](#), NEB).¹

The history of Pentecostal and Evangelical mission work in predominantly Roman Catholic countries has been in the tradition of Joshua ([Num. 11:29](#)) and John ([Mk. 9:38](#)). Joshua wanted to silence Eldad and Medad. They were a part of the Seventy but were not with Moses in the tabernacle at the time the Spirit was conferred upon them. Nonetheless, the Lord moved upon Eldad and Medad ‘in the camp’ even though they were not with the others ‘round the tent’. One commentary from an Evangelical publisher calls Joshua’s jealousy for [p. 158](#) Moses’ authority and leadership a ‘sanctuary clericalism’.² John tries to stop a man from casting out devils because ‘he was not one of us ...’ John wanted to defend his Lord by denying someone outside the circle of the Twelve the right to do the works of God.

¹ There is a similar passage in the Old Testament. In [Numbers 11:16–30](#) is the account of God directing Moses to call 70 elders to the ‘Tent of the Presence’. God said: ‘I will take back part of that same spirit which has been conferred on you and confer it on them...’ The account goes on to say that ‘as the spirit alighted on them, they fell into a prophetic ecstasy...’ But two men, Eldad and Medad, continued to be in ecstasy (or to prophesy). Joshua, upon hearing them, went to Moses and pleaded: ‘My lord Moses, stop them!’ Moses refused, saying: ‘I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would confer his spirit on them all!’

² Philip J. Budd, *Word Biblical Commentary*. Numbers, Vol. 5 (Waco: Word Books, 1984), p. 130.

Both Joshua and John approached the situation with sincerity, but from the wrong perspective. Each assumed too much and was over zealous in his defence of the lord (Joshua) and Lord (John).

Dummelow's one-volume commentary has an interesting comment on both events. 'The fact that Eldad and Medad also received the spirit shows that the spirit of God is not limited to certain places or individuals, and that he is no respecter of persons.' The meaning of the Mark (and [Luke 9:49, 50](#)) passage is: 'The man, though without your apostolic commission, was doing, and doing successfully, the very same benevolent work that you were doing. You ought, therefore, to have esteemed him a friend and a helper, not an enemy. A jealous and exclusive spirit is unworthy of the ministers of Christ.'³

From my observation, it seems that the missiological approach used within Pentecostal/Evangelical churches working in a Roman Catholic context has differed little (if any) from strategies used among animists, atheists, Muslims, Hindus, and other non-(or un-) Christian peoples of the world. For the most part, we have placed the Roman Catholic Church outside 'the Tent of Presence' and the circle of Jesus' disciples.⁴ This missiological position is being challenged today. The caricature of Rome as 'the whore of Babylon' or as the 'scarlet woman' of Revelation, the pope as 'the antichrist' and Catholicism as 'the apostate church' must be dropped. The question can be simply asked: 'Is the Roman Catholic Church, in any way, a valid expression of Christian faith? Does the 'Body of Christ' include the Roman Catholic Church in the same sense that it might include the Nazarene Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Free Methodist Church, or the Assemblies of God?'

The Pentecostal/Evangelical mission boards of the twentieth century seem to have answered 'No!' to these questions. It is the thesis of this paper to challenge that tradition and urge that we reconsider such a [p. 159](#) position. This is not to deny the many questions we have about Roman Catholic theology and practice. This is not to imply that evangelization within Roman Catholic countries must cease. Rather, it is a plea for an updated contextualization of the Latin Church in the final decade of this century. There are several reasons why I believe it is past time to take a more healthy and irenic look at the Church of Rome.

First, there is the impact of *Vatican II*. My experience as a missionary for over ten years in a Roman Catholic country was that Pentecostal and Evangelical pastors and leaders did not consider anything that happened at the Vatican Council as of any consequence. The attitude has been expressed that the Roman Catholic Church is *semper eadem* ('always the same'); that its position was *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* ('Rome has spoken, the case is closed').

The recent statement by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship on 'An Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism' shows an awareness of and appreciation for the documents of Vatican II, amid some basic concerns for the purity of the Gospel.⁵ Such a document must be read and used as a basis for contextualizing Roman Catholicism from a Pentecostal or Evangelical perspective.

³ J. R. Dummelow (ed.), *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 106, 729.

⁴ The same comment could perhaps be applied to the various Orthodox churches of the East, the other non-Roman Catholic churches, and some forms of Reformation Protestantism.

⁵ 'An Evangelical Perspective of Roman Catholicism', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 104 (October 1986), pp. 342-364; 11, 1 (January 1987), pp. 78-94.

Second, the Council opened the doors for Roman Catholic scholars to begin *dialogue* with those in the Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Pentecostal, and Evangelical churches. Non-Roman Christians are considered ‘separate brethren’, among whom, as the Latin text implies, each stands apart from the others. It is not simply a one-sided separation. Since 1972 there has been an international dialogue between the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and certain leaders from the Pentecostal movement worldwide.⁶ Between 1977–1984 there were three dialogue sessions held at the international level, between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, on the topic of mission in the world.⁷ These are hopeful signs, not of a merger of these churches into Roman Catholicism, but of a reaching out to one another in mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance.

Third, the birth in 1967 of the *charismatic renewal* among Roman Catholics is a positive signal of their desire for greater spiritual reality p. 160 within their Church. Conservative estimates are that there are over 20 million Catholic charismatics in the world. (Some estimates are as high as 50 million!) Bishop Gabriel Gonsuam Ganaka, President of the Nigerian Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops, recently described the charismatic renewal to his fellow bishops at the Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome:

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is an essentially lay ‘movement’ (for want of a better word) under the influence of the Holy Spirit, with its emphasis on total self surrender to Jesus through discipleship—which means following Jesus, knowing Jesus, loving Jesus, serving Jesus and neighbours for the sake of Jesus. The great emphasis on daily Bible reading and on weekly Bible study applied to life; the great devotion to the Holy Spirit with the moment to moment dependence on him for his gifts and direction for the building up of the Church, and on a deep sacramental life:—these and many other peculiarities of this postconciliar renewal have helped transform nominal, Sunday to Sunday Catholics into men and women who have become knowledgeable, vibrant, committed and dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ. They have made the important transition from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus—and that he is alive and active in the lives of believers. The weekly testimonies during prayer meetings have helped to transform men and women involved in the renewal into persons of unshakeable faith.⁸

Fourth, there is renewed emphasis upon *evangelization* by Roman Catholics. There are many signs that Catholic leaders are expressing a new impetus to evangelize their own people as well as unbelievers. Over a decade ago a Jesuit theologian wrote that his Church was inadequately proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ: ‘There is a multitude of baptized Christians but only a limited number of Christians who really live their commitment to Christ’.⁹ Surely this will get an ‘amen’ from the Pentecostal and Evangelical corners of Christianity. Fr. Tom Forrest, a leader in the charismatic renewal, has opened offices in Rome and is beginning to organize for ‘Evangelization 2000’, a programme (funded with a billion dollars!) designed to motivate Roman Catholics around the world to support and

⁶ Jerry L. Sandidge, ‘Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue: A Contribution to Christian Unity’, *Pneuma*, 7, 1 (Spring 1985), 41–60.

⁷ ‘Evangelical and Roman Catholics Dialogue on Mission’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 10, 1 (January 1986) pp. 1–21.

⁸ ‘Bishop Ganaka’s Intervention’, *International Newsletter*, 15, 1 (January–February 1988), pp. 5–6. This ‘intervention’ was made by Bishop Ganaka at the Synod of Bishops (250 of them!) convened in Rome in October 1987 to study the ‘Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council’.

⁹ Johannes Hofinger, *Evangelization and Catechesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 7.

participate in a decade of evangelization so that by the year 2000 the [p. 161](#) world will be more Christian. (See the news article on this ambitious plan in *Christianity Today* [February 6, 1988], p. 36.)

Fifth, in spite of certain negative forces within Roman Catholicism, there is enough positive movement to say that there now are some *common interests* which should bring Roman Catholics and Pentecostals/Evangelicals closer together. A common desire for world evangelization has already been mentioned. There is also a common desire to see the Scriptures distributed among all Christians in their native tongue. We would, for the most part, stand beside Roman Catholics on certain moral and social issues such as opposition to abortion and euthanasia, nondiscrimination among races or sexes, the rejection of homosexuality as an acceptable life-style, the use of drugs, opposition to corrupt political systems, and hatred of war and poverty. There should be a common concern to provide, in the name of Christ, jobs for the poor, education for the illiterate, health care for the sick, provisions for widows and orphans, and other such examples of Jesus' compassion for humanity.

There are some small but certain steps we can take now to convey a message that we regard the Roman Catholic faith as a legitimate part of the Family of God and members, as ourselves, of the Body of Christ. (1) We can revise our vocabulary, removing the pejorative language, and replace it with a more gentle form of discussion. (2) It is now possible to share a common Bible (recognizing, of course, the additional deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament as a point of difference) in English, French, Dutch, Malagasy, and no doubt, other languages. If we can use a common biblical text, then we have a better basis upon which to discuss our differences and share our similarities. (3) We should begin to engage in dialogue on the national and regional levels, taking into account the experiences shared and documents produced at the international level. It is time to talk *with* each other rather than talking *at* or *about* each other. (4) Creative ways could be discovered to share our trinitarian faith in common and to share in a witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ before a sceptical and unbelieving world. (5) There should be occasions when together, in prayer and humility, we experience the words of Jesus: 'May they all be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me' ([Jn. 17:21](#)).

Perhaps a better way to emphasize the necessity of seeing Roman Catholicism in a new context is to relate a personal experience. The following event took place in August 1987 at a session of the Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue convening in Venice. This description is adapted (with permission) from the text of a sermon by my friend and [p. 162](#) colleague on the Pentecostal side, Dr. Cecil 'Mel' Robeck, Jr., an Assemblies of God minister, Assistant Dean for Academic Programs and Associate Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary. As a participant in the same events, I found my impressions very similar to his.¹⁰

'It was a bright and clear Sunday morning in Venice, Italy. About 35 of us gathered together for breakfast, then briskly made our way through the winding sidewalks, past opening stores, and across ancient bridges toward San Marcos Square. There we were confronted by the massive cathedral, looking more eastern than western with its four bronze horses—its beautiful mosaic and its many domes. It stood guard, as it has now for nearly a thousand years, over the square where the Doges and their mistresses, the men

¹⁰ This sermon was delivered by Dr. Robeck on Sunday, August 28, 1987 at Bethany Church (Assemblies of God), Alhambria, CA. The full 14-page manuscript is available upon request to Dr. Robeck at Fuller Theological Seminary. (I have used only those portions that also truly reflect what I was experiencing at the mass in Venice.)

of means and influence, and those in the social registers of the city had long ago gathered to conduct their business and make their social contacts.

'Our little group was different, as we stood amid tourists, pigeons, and the local faithful. All of us were entering the Cathedral of San Marcos to celebrate High Mass. We were ushered up a side aisle and across the front of the cathedral to a special section of reserved seating, just to the left of where the priest would deliver the sermon. We were Pentecostal preachers and church leaders as well as Roman Catholic priests. We were theologians, historians, and exegetes. We included lay persons, pastors' wives, Catholic nuns and monks. Among us were Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, and Cappuchins. There were represented the Foursquare Gospel Church, Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Church of God, Church of God of Prophecy, the Pentecostal Brotherhood of Holland and the Assemblies of God (USA). We gathered there to worship our Lord together.

'As my eyes grew accustomed to the relatively dimly lit surroundings, I looked at the order of worship. It was recognizable, though it was largely in Italian and Latin. There were the opening welcome, readings from Scripture, hymns, prayers, the recitation of the Creed, the sermon or homily, and the celebration of the eucharist. To accommodate the hundreds of tourists, the welcome and the Scripture readings would be given in German, French, English and Italian. In some ways it was to be a Pentecost-like event. p.163

'The service began promptly at 10:00 a.m., with a welcome in which attention was drawn to our little group in the front of this historic cathedral at the gateway between East and West. The people were informed that we were special visitors to the city. Our task was one of dialogue, in an enterprise hosted by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity from the Vatican, and engaged in an activity intended to bring about better understanding between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals around the world. The congregation was asked to pray and to remember us throughout the week, lifting us up to the Lord, that our work might bear good fruit. We sang. We prayed. We worshipped. And we affirmed our common faith by repeating the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed together.

'The sermon was centred upon Jesus. The text, [Matthew 14:13-21](#), depicted Jesus, exhausted from Ministry, attempting to withdraw into a place of privacy away from the press of the crowds. But he had been followed. Crowds of needy people found him, and he was forced to reach into his inner resources, to draw upon his strength reserves; and in the compassion so typical of our Lord, he did. He continued to heal the sick, and when it was observed that the people were hungry and there was no place nearby to buy food, he multiplied the five loaves and two small fish to meet their needs.

'While the text was important, the priest was a dynamic speaker who was exhorting his congregation to live out their lives in compassionate imitation of Jesus. The fact that he preached in Italian, of which I am able to understand little, left my mind somewhat free to wander. And it did, as I sensed the presence of God among us.

'With one ear I listened, but I found myself studying the familiar stories from Genesis to Revelation, marvellously preserved in the magnificent mosaics, carved wood furnishings, etched stonework, and oil paintings which covered the walls, the ceiling, and even the floors. I thanked God for those who had come before me in the faith, those who cared enough to communicate the gospel in the day when illiteracy was the norm, and when personal copies of the Scriptures were virtually non-existent. I thanked God for the years they had invested in the works which stood before me, and for the sacrificial giving which ensured that the message of the Gospel would not be lost, but preserved in these great art treasures.

'I found myself thanking God for the vision these people had held, of their infinitesimal role in the whole life of the Church. It was, indeed, bigger than they were. It went beyond their boundaries, their times, and their understanding. It made me intensely aware of the reality of what the Creed calls the "communion of the saints"—which included [p. 164](#) those faithful of the 11th century who constructed the building in which I found myself, and all those who both preceded and followed them. And I was thankful for the brothers and sisters who were asked to pray for us that morning, and all those who sat with me in this little group. But I found myself praying that we, too, might catch a vision of what it means not to look for quick solutions and easy answers, but to rest content in the slow but methodical leading of the Lord whose purpose includes both beginning and end with everything in between.

'The priest ended his sermon and prepared to celebrate the mass. He was now moving from the familiar in which we could all participate together, into a portion of the service where I was now not invited. I was a stranger. It was the event toward which every Roman Catholic worship service is focused, participation in the Lord's Supper. The priest sanctified the altar through prayer, then he circled it, swinging his pot of burning incense. Away from the crowd, far to the front of the cathedral, I watched, as he circled the altar, swinging his pot, while shafts of bright sunlight pierced the smoke. It brought to mind a number of Old Testament images of Aaron, of incense, of an altar, and of sacrifices on behalf of the people of God.

'I knew somehow, and beyond all question, that God was in our midst. Yet the reconciliation which he longs for was shattered. God waited at the table, but we were unable to get along, and so we could not all meet together there. Sin was present, power struggles, and church division. And I was grieved in my heart, as I am each time I attend a communion service and I am not allowed, because of my church affiliation, to share the cup and bread with other Christians.

'I was reminded of Jesus' prayer for unity among his disciples, so that the world might believe ([John 17](#)). I was reminded of those who do not believe; in particular, of the Ayatollah and all those who are swayed by the Muslim faith. Later that week we would be reminded and my conscience would be pricked as we read from their scriptures, the *Koran*, a passage in which Mohammed declared that Christian divisions were the curse of Allah for their sinfulness, highlighting the fact for me that our divisions serve to validate the Islamic claim even as our unity, visible before the world, could serve to validate the unique message of Jesus Christ as the One who has come from the Father.¹¹ [p. 165](#) And I was reminded of the disciples who sought to silence another because he was not, in John's words, "with them".

'Then it struck me. We want people to be "with us" more than we want them to be "for him". Many, perhaps most, of us are just like John and the other disciples. We do not trust doctrines which we have not ourselves developed. We do not trust methods which are different from our own. We do not trust the motives of people we do not fully understand. And I had to ask myself, "What is it, really, that keeps us apart? What are the real reasons we cannot accept each other and have full communion together? Why do we consistently insist that 'they' must change, must be 'with us' before we can recognize him or her as a brother or a sister? Is it pride? Is it fear? Is it power? Is it insecurity? Or, is it merely a lack of spiritual discernment?" '

¹¹ Sûrah V, 'The Table Spread', verse [14](#), says: 'And with those who say: "Lo! we are Christians," We made a covenant, but they forgot a part of that whereof they were admonished. Therefore, we have stirred up enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Resurrection, when Allah will inform them of their handiwork.'

It is interesting to note the larger context in which John's declaration of forbidding the stranger, and Jesus' words, 'Forbid not', appear. It is in a context in which there has been an argument among the disciples over greatness and power. Jesus had placed a child in their midst and said, 'Whoever receives this child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me receives the One who sent me' ([Lk. 9:48](#)). That is where true greatness comes in.

It does not come through self proclaimed declarations of 'I am great' with its obvious corollary, 'therefore, you are not'. It comes in accepting the other: the child, the stranger, the Roman Catholic, the mainline Protestant, the Evangelical. It comes in discerning where Jesus is at work in the other. We are called to be separate from the world. But we are called upon to make space, to provide room, to encourage access, and to affirm *Jesus* in those who claim to serve the same Lord as we do.

The Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue is but one of many places where we have an opportunity to share, proclaiming Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we have learned of him and experienced him. It is made the more exciting when we stop to realize that much which has enabled Pentecostals to dialogue with Roman Catholics has taken place since Vatican II (1962–1965). We have yet to reap the full harvest of this Council, with its encouragement of personal Bible Study and the pursuit of holiness, its openness to all forms of renewal from liturgical to charismatic, and its willingness to dialogue with its separated sisters and brothers.

And if we are ahead of them in any way, and if we have something to teach them, then we must accept them and love them and be patient with them and encourage them when we see them doing something right. We do not have the option to forbid them lest we find ourselves [p. 166](#) forbidden. We cannot afford to stand against those who stand 'for us'. We cannot be caught bearing false witness against them before others.

We need to be patient with them on another account as well. The Roman Catholic Church is organized quite differently from Pentecostal and Evangelical denominations. It works from the top down, rather than from the congregation up. Thus not all doctrines and policies have been fully implemented at all levels. And they will not be for years to come.

One outstanding result of our dialogue has been that Pentecostals have now been moved from the category of *sect* (by which they probably meant 'cult') to that of *church* (or, perhaps better, legitimate spiritual movement within Christianity). There are calls being made to the priests of Latin America who have at times violently persecuted Pentecostals to do it no longer. Implementations of this new edict will take time and education because feelings run deep and our past histories and hurts are real.¹² We are their biggest competitors in some parts of the world.

We have also seen evidence that they recognize the problem that their people have been 'sacramentalized', so to speak, but not necessarily evangelized, and we have been told that our concern for evangelization should include churched Catholics in those areas. But we have been asked not to take newly evangelized Catholics into our churches but to leave them as salt and light and leaven in their own. This can only be successful if we recognize them as being 'for him' even though they are not 'with us'. Here is a great area for dialogue; we must be willing to hear and listen as well as to speak to this issue.

¹² 'Sects or New Religious Movements: Pastoral Challenge', *Information Service*, No. 61 (1986/III), 144–154. This document, we were told specifically by Msgr. Basil Meeking of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, is *not* directed at Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Rather, it is aimed at the pastoral problem of the increased activity by various religious cult groups and new religious movements.

The church world of today is not the same as it was in the 1940s when the WCC and National Councils of Churches were formed. Nor is it the same as it was in the mid-60s when Vatican II took place and the renewal of the Holy Spirit began. We, as the disciples of Jesus, may not have changed much, and we need to hear afresh near the close of this century a word to be discerned in others through reliance upon God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The Church's Mission and Ministry in India

Sunand Sumithra

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The following article is a revised version of a paper presented at a conference on The Mission and Ministry of the Church in India at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India last November. The conference met as a preliminary to the coming World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Texas, USA, later this year, to be held under the auspice of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, and sought cooperation and dialogue among the various groups and persuasions. It discussed church's mission and ministry from an Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and 'ecumenical', as well as evangelical, point of view; this paper represented the evangelical position.

Editor

Change and pluralism mark the contemporary Indian scene, including the Indian Church. The global processes of secularization, modernization and liberation affect us all. The tensions these revolutions have generated are only strengthened by the stubborn fact of Indian pluralism, making harmony for survival the urgent need in the land. Religious pluralism, the nerve centre, has thus been the subject of scores of debates in the last decade. If the Church has no substantial solution to offer here, she must at least keep her house as clean as possible from such pollutions. This is the relevance of our theme: we dialogue about the Church's mission and ministry both and largely for the sake of her unity as well as for showing her usefulness in contemporary world. My modest aim here is to raise some relevant questions about the Indian Church's mission and evangelism and give some guidelines by way of answering them. p. 168

MISSION AND MINISTRY

Ours is an age striving not so much *to understand* what the world is as *how to change* it.² For the last half century or so, ‘-isms’ have been replaced by ‘-izations’—humanism by humanization, evangelism by evangelization, secularism by secularization, theology by theologization, freedom by liberation, reflection by action. In such an atmosphere, it is natural to look at the Church also ideologically rather than theologically—that is, in our inquiries concerning the Church, questions about her *function* dominate rather than her *nature*. This is valid to some extent, for, as Jesus said, the Church is the salt and light of the new world,³ giving it meaning, hope and revelation. As is now universally accepted, the Church’s mission does not take place in a vacuum, be it social or spiritual, but in the concrete world of men. This means that the church is a church for others. The CRESR Consultation also acknowledged that all Christians are called to both witness and service.⁴ The missiologist Herbert Kane rightly comments that ‘the church is the only institution in the world that exists for the sake of others. Its supreme mission is to meet the world’s greatest need’.⁵

One’s definition of the greatest need of man depends upon one’s belief. If one accepts universalism, then all are already saved in Christ and are ‘on their way to heaven’, so their greatest need turns out to be improvement of their lot here and now. This is what the Hong Kong Declaration denies: [p. 169](#)

But we repudiate the idea that the gospel begins and ends with the improvement of man’s physical conditions. Until men are brought to put their trust in Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour, God’s good news has not come home to them in any biblical and meaningful sense. We must bring men under the challenge of the gospel so that their lives may be transformed by the power of God and they may be built up in their fellowship of God’s church. In giving priority to evangelism we emphasize the transcendence of God.⁶

On the other hand, if one believes that man is immortal, created in God’s image and for God but is fallen out of his fellowship, then man’s fellowship with his creator becomes his greatest need, for time and eternity.

Following the latter option, John Stott defines the word ‘mission’ as

... not a word for everything the church does. ‘The church is mission’ sounds fine, but it’s an overstatement. For the church is a worshipping as well as a serving community, and

² ‘“Philosophers,” wrote Karl Marx, ‘have only interpreted the world differently; the point is, however, to change it.’ However unlike they are in fundamental affirmations, the Christian gospel and communism are at this point in agreement. But the agreement goes little further. Distinctively, the Church proclaims the changed world as the consequence of changed men. Reflective man produces new philosophies; it is only regenerate man who holds the clue to a society that is really new’—Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Fleming H. Revell (Old Tappan: 1982), p. 1.

³ Stott’s interpretation of the Church as the salt and light of the world is handy here: he concludes that Jesus, by using these terms, expressed several aspects of the life of the Church—‘first, Christians are fundamentally different from non-Christians ... Secondly, they must permeate non-Christian society, rather than existing for themselves; thirdly, they can influence non-Christian society, and finally, they must retain their Christian identity’—John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Marshalls (Basingstoke: 1984), pp. 64–67.

⁴ *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Tom Sine, MARC, California: 1983, p. 479. (Now republished by Regnum Books in a new edition, ed. V. Samuel and C. Sugden.)

⁵ *The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow*, Herbert Kane, Baker Book House (Grand Rapids: 1981), p. 152. The statement originated with Archbishop William Temple.

⁶ *The Hong Kong 1973 Declaration*, in *Voice of the Church in Asia*, ed. Bong Rin Ro, Asia Theological Association (Hong Kong: 1975), p. 167.

although worship and service belong together they are not to be confused. Nor ... does 'mission' cover everything God does in the world.... 'Mission' describes rather everything the church is sent into the world to do.⁷

Thus, while the mission of the church reveals the meaning of her existence, her ministries reveal her relevance, her usefulness.

To put it in another way, the church's mission is *to be* a worshipping fellowship (*leitourgia* and *koinonia*) and *to do* service and proclamation/witness (*diakonia* and *kerygma/marturia*). The 'Wheaton '83' Declaration on the Nature and Mission of the Church states:

The mission of the church is inseparable from that of Christ who bought the church with his own blood. Thus in repentance and faith we enter his kingdom and pledge him our allegiance; in baptism we confess his lordship; in the eucharist we proclaim his death until he comes; in becoming his disciples we enter into a life of submission and denial, of identification and crucifixion—where we participate in his suffering—and of obedience where we follow him where he leads; in worship and service we demonstrate his rule over our lives for the good of the world.⁸ p. 170

In an excellent study of New Testament ecclesiology, Edmund Clowney shows that the Church can be best grasped in its trinitarian aspect—as *the people of God*—an assembly of people, chosen by him to worship him and to be his new nation, a city set on the hill; *as the disciples of Christ*—the gathering church of Christ, as his body; and *as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*—worshipping, nurturing and witnessing in the Spirit.⁹ The same emphasis is noted also in the Grand Rapids meeting of CRESR in 1982:

God created and redeemed the world in order to reveal his infinite majesty and his eternal love. Therefore the primary sin is to refuse to honour him as God or to give him thanks ([Rom. 1:21](#)), while the supreme duty of his redeemed people is to *worship* him in humble praise and obedience ... Only if rooted in a vertical relationship to God in *worship* can the church's two ministries of *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) be held in proper balance and tension.¹⁰

Evangelicals have complained about the lack of this dimension of worship in many an understanding of mission. The question of *the role of the Church in the world* is therefore essentially linked with the more basic question of *what the Church is*.

Once this understanding of the church's mission is recognized as valid, her ministries also fall into focus.¹¹ Kane observes,

⁷ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Falcon (London: 1975), p. 30. Cf. also p. 82: 'Mission denotes what God sends his people into the world to do, and of primary importance within this mission of sacrificial service is 'evangelism', the sharing with others of God's good news about Jesus.'

⁸ *New Frontiers in Mission*, ed. Patrick Sookhdeo, Paternoster (Exeter) and Baker (Grand Rapids: 1987), p. 176.

⁹ 'The Biblical Theology of the Church', by Edmund P. Clowney, in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. Donald A. Carson, Paternoster (Exeter) and Baker (Grand Rapids: 1987), pp. 15–87.

¹⁰ Tom Sine, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 445.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue*, SPCK (London: 1987), p. 121f.: 'But it is nonetheless significant that there are so few controversial issues on the matter of the ministry of all Christians. There can be an agreement because thought and practice has not yet moved beyond first principles. No one really knows yet what "the ministry of the whole people of God" amounts to.'

The church has several functions, which include worship, teaching, fellowship, service, and witness; but the prime function of the church will have all eternity to worship and serve and praise. Witness is the one activity that is restricted to her life here on the earth.¹²
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the Church's mission includes all these ministries. Since ministries show the Church's usefulness in the contemporary context, they need to be updated constantly according to the needs of the time. Also, when there is more than one ministry, the obvious important question is: which one has priority over which?

Here we need to take seriously W. R. Hogg's concept of challenging relevance, to maintain the cutting edge of the gospel message and at the same time to exercise a ministry of prophetic criticism of the situation. However, the gospel was not given particularly for Bangalorean, Indian, Asian or even global contexts—or for that matter, for the first, 15th. or 20th. century contexts. It was meant for the 'human' context, irrespective of the time-place matrix. By 'human context' I mean man *qua* man, not as an Indian or African or American. Though principles can be evolved from the Bible to be applied to our modern situations, the Bible does not give any ready-made solution to all of them. What we are saying here is that though the principle of relevance is essential in any application of the gospel of Jesus Christ to contemporary situations, it must be kept in balance with 'the whole counsel of God', maintaining also the universal relevance of the gospel for the basic 'human' situation. Though the Church is *in* the world, she has the mandate not to be *of* the world. The world expects the church to be different. In exercising her prophetic ministry to the world, the Church needs to evaluate the self-understanding of the situations in the light of the biblical revelation.

EVANGELISM

It is very heartening indeed to note that the coming together of 'Evangelicals' and 'Ecumenicals' to discuss evangelism has been increasing in the last couple of years, which is a good sign—particularly under the WCC leadership of the 'evangelist' Emilio Castro. Fortunately (or unfortunately!) in the 20th. century evangelism and evangelicalism have been increasingly interpreted as being identical. While the definition of evangelism remains in dispute, there is a general concern to distinguish it from the more inclusive 'mission' or 'witness' of the Church, and to give it its proper place among the various ministries of the Church for the fulfilment of her mandate.

Article 4 of the Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism thus:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is p. 172 indispensable to evangelism. And so is the kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship ... Jesus still calls all

'What is so astonishing is the complete absence from its pages of a distinction between "priest" and "laity", of the thought that some Christians may or must needs exercise a priesthood which is not the prerogative of others. The New Testament stands as an exceptional testimony to a different understanding of the way in which God's people may approach him, and one which marks it off both from the Old Testament and from what was subsequently to become the pattern of catholic christianity.'

¹² Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church, and responsible service in the world.¹³

Evangelism, then, as John Stott admirably epitomizes, is sharing good news with others. The good news is Jesus. And the good news about Jesus which we announce is that he died for our sins and was resurrected, and that in consequence he reigns as Lord at God's right hand, and has authority both to command repentance and faith, and to bestow forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit on all those who repent and believe. This is what is meant by 'proclaiming the Kingdom of God'.¹⁴

Since the Church has several ministries, their order of priority is of great significance in carrying out her tasks. The WEF/LCWE Conference on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) gives a three-fold relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, portraying social action as the *consequence*, *bridge* and *partner* to evangelism, though evangelism has a twofold priority over the former:

The very fact of Christian social responsibility presupposed socially responsible Christians, and it can only be by evangelism and discipling that they have become such. Secondly, evangelism relates to people's eternal destiny, and in bringing them Good News of salvation, Christians are doing what nobody else can do. Seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls ... Nevertheless, if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and that therefore a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well-being.¹⁵

This means that everything the Church does is not evangelism. Evangelism is an identifiable, unique activity, the presentation of Jesus Christ and the response of faith. Liturgy, education, social ministry, and the like, may have evangelistic elements but they are not evangelism, however necessary they may be. We seem to have lost confidence in the power of the Gospel message to stand on its own. The Great Commission derives its meaning and power wholly and exclusively from the Pentecost event. It does so in terms of a deeply organic relationship. The proclamation of the gospel is therefore not one activity among many in which the Church of the New Testament engages; but it is her basic, her essential activity. It is for this reason that the preaching office is the central office in the Church.¹⁶ As such, evangelism takes precedence over other ministries of the Church—the healing, teaching, prophetic or reconciliatory ministries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. It is significant that though the concept of a responsible society has been discussed at international level for the last fifty years, yet the Church has not been considered a model

¹³ C. Rene Padilla (ed.), *The New Face of Evangelicalism*, Hodder and Stoughton (London: 1976), p. 67.

¹⁴ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, pp. 54, 55.

¹⁵ Tom Sine, *op. cit.*, p. 452–456.

¹⁶ Cf. Sookhdeo: 'Evangelism, including the verbal proclamation of Jesus Christ and the planting and perfecting of churches, has a priority since it is concerned with the eternal condition of men and women. In addition, Christian social responsibility presupposes the existence of socially responsible Christians, who can only become such as a result of evangelism and discipling. Thus the church has one mission but many ministries'—*op. cit.*, p. 178.

for it, thus revealing her inner inadequacy and hence her weak voice in the secular world—also indicating that the Church belongs more to the ‘not yet’ than the ‘already’. In a recent Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship in Singapore in 1986, the truth was brought home in no unmistakable terms that unless the Church is renewed it is possible neither for the Church to reach the world nor for the world to listen to the Church. It is essential therefore that the Church recovers its basics. In scores of discussions on mission and ministry of the Church in the last few decades, several distinctions of the Church have been lost and need to be recovered—such as the distinction between the Church and the world, between the saved and the lost, between witness and service, and between the sacred and the secular. This is why we said earlier that it is only partly valid to use the principle of relevance, for the Church’s vertical dimension needs to be kept intact in order for us to grasp her tasks—a theological understanding of the nature of the Church is thus a prior necessity to understanding her mission and ministry. **P. 174**

2. This means that our primary task is the renewal of the pastors of the local congregations, as the enablers of the Church’s leadership, as well as the renewal of the laity, those who carry out the Church’s task of mission in the world. Though mission is primarily an enterprise of the Church, this does not mean that the missionary task is solely the task of the local congregation.

3. A survey made of Indian Christians some years ago revealed that they embraced Christian faith not because of the *shanti* or peace it gives them, but rather primarily because of the offer of brotherhood in the Church. Once the Church sets her own house in order, at least to some extent (by way of taking the beam out of her eyes!), she has something to offer to the world, and can fruitfully minister to the world. A local congregation is equipped with the gifts necessary for the common good, and by being an earthly model of the Kingdom to come she manifests her saltiness and light. The Church ought to be the hope of the nation by offering such a much-needed model. Thus Church renewal strengthens any social reform.

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Covenant, Fulfilment and Judaism in Hebrews

John Fischer

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Coming from the pen of one who is involved in mission to Jews, the article makes a fascinating reading in its creative approach to the book of Hebrews, which is traditionally thought to express the setting aside of the Old Testament on account of Jesus’ fulfilment of it. The author demonstrates rather that the book of Hebrews is actually stressing the identification of Jesus as the true centre and intent of Judaism.

Editor

Hebrews has long been viewed as a dynamic treatise demonstrating how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament and Judaism. Judaism and the Old Testament are then often viewed as beautiful pictures of his character and functions, but as having been set aside with the advent of Jesus. The argument goes something like this. 'Judaism pointed to Jesus the Messiah. When he came, died and rose, he fulfilled the Jewish system. Therefore, it is no longer relevant, having been set aside because it fulfilled its function of pointing to the Messiah. So, using Jewish elements of faith or worship means going back to 'the old life'. It involves placing one's self 'under the law', going back to a system opposed to God's gracious operations through Jesus. This contradicts its fulfilment in him.'¹

But should Hebrews be so understood? In order to interpret Hebrews correctly, we need to understand its background and setting, namely the nature of fulfilment in Scripture, and the nature of the people and beliefs being addressed by the epistle. Proper treatment of the crucial passages in Hebrews necessitates such preliminary study.

We will start with a 'second look' at the New Covenant. The prophets also refer to it as the everlasting covenant or covenant of peace (cf. [Jer. 32:40](#); [Ezk. 16:60](#), [Isa. 54:10](#); [55:3](#); *et al.*). p. 176

But does this interplay account completely for [Jeremiah 31](#)? It seems quite possible that Jeremiah intended the New Covenant to be viewed as a *renewed* covenant.² A number of the associated passages ([Ezk. 16:60ff.](#); [Isa. 55:3](#); [Mic. 7:18–20](#); and especially [Jer. 33:14–22](#)) appear to indicate that this covenant is a ratification of the previous covenants with Abraham, Moses and David.³ In this sense alone, the New Covenant can be viewed as a renewal. A number of writers have seen this, e.g. Calvin and Hengstenberg.⁴

Further, as Kaiser points out,⁵ the Hebrew and Greek terms for 'new' used with this covenant frequently mean 'renew' or 'restore', as can be seen in the phrases 'new moon', 'new heart', and 'new heavens and earth'.

Many scholars have noted that there is very little 'new' in this covenant; many of its specifics have been mentioned under earlier covenants, e.g.

1. God's law;
2. 'I will be their God and they will be my people' (cf. [Gen. 17:7](#); [Ex. 6:7](#));
3. 'They will know the Lord' (cf. [Ex. 6:7](#), *et al.*);
4. Complete forgiveness of sin (cf. [Ex. 34:6–7](#); [Psa. 103:12](#); [Mic. 7:18f.](#));
5. Even possibly the creation of a new heart (cf. [Psa. 51:12](#)).

¹ E.g. William Currie, 'The Traditional Approach to Witnessing to Jews'; Leland Crofts, 'Response to The Messianic Jewish Approach'; papers read at the Consultation on the Variations of Life and Expression of Jewish Believers, at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois, Nov. 18–19, 1977.

² Cf. Walter Kaiser, 'The Old Promise and the New Covenant', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XV (1972), pp. 11–23.

³ Cf. George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1 (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 322.

⁴ Cf. Marten Woustra, 'The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59–63', *Calvin Theological Journal* VI (1971), pp. 22–48, and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 429–445, reprinted in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter Kaiser (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 240.

⁵ Kaiser, pp. 16–17.

Each of the items adduced is but a repetition of some familiar aspect of salvation already known in the Old Testament.⁶

Can the New Covenant, then, in any sense claim to be new? Jeremiah may be using 'new' in an ironical way, much as he uses irony elsewhere in his prophecy.⁷ Israel should have been experiencing these 'new' realities, but they weren't. To shock them out of complacency Jeremiah suggests that God will establish a new covenant as if these realities were foreign to them. Their experience of these realities would be as radical as a new covenant. Jeremiah intended this treatment to lead the complacent person to realize that p. 177 he was not experiencing the realities of a relationship with God. Wallis finds confirmation of this in the same use of irony in the New Testament with respect to the New Covenant.

Probably the most transparent of these New Testament cases is found in [Galatians 4:21ff](#). Already the note of irony is heard in Paul's words, 'Tell me, you who desire to be under law ...' Verse [24](#) brings the apparently straightforward statement, 'these women are two covenants'. However, in the subsequent development and contrast of the two covenants, Paul's irony becomes apparent. The one covenant corresponding to Sarah and leading on to the mention of liberty, and climaxed by the quotation from [Isaiah 54](#), is clearly the covenant of salvation by grace. By contrast, the mention of the other covenant with its accompaniments of slavery, and most pointedly the slavery of the 'present Jerusalem', makes it plain that Paul is equating this other covenant with the Christ-rejecting Judaism of his day. Now to call this late situation a 'covenant' is surely ironical for Paul. Paul certainly intends an emphatic rejection of it by his hearers. In the parabolic words 'cast out the slave and her son ...' Paul means to say that the specious appeal of legalism to Moses is not a real covenant, but is the very antithesis of it—a broken covenant, as Jeremiah phrased it.

The theme of two covenants emerges in [2 Corinthians 3:14-15](#). 'But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds....' Paul apparently does not mean by 'old covenant' the volume of 24 books, *simpliciter*. He clearly means that Christ is in the Old Testament. In [Romans 10:6-10](#), quoting [Deuteronomy 30:12-13](#), Paul is careful to say that Moses' message is his message—'the word of faith which we preach'. It is Moses as read with hardened mind and veiled heart which is called the 'old covenant'. 'Old covenant' is a way to express what happens when unbelief reads the book. Clearly we are hearing Jeremiah's note of irony: the 'old covenant' implied in Jeremiah's promise of a 'new covenant' is Moses read with eyes which do not see Christ: the 'new covenant' is not 'new'; it is only a true exegesis of Moses. The newness of the covenant is subjective and psychological: in Jeremiah's terms, it is the writing of the law on the heart. When the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is removed and the glories of salvation by grace shine on every page. Believers, beholding with unveiled face and heart, see the glory of Christ.⁸ p. 178

In wrestling with the same problems, Hengstenberg takes a different tack, stressing the internal and the deeper as the newness; great depth, stability and internality appear as key elements of it. In fact, after reviewing the different items in the New Covenant and showing that they were in place under the 'old covenant', he concludes: 'We have thus

⁶ Wilber Wallis, 'Irony in Jeremiah's Prophecy of a New Covenant', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XII (1969), p. 107.

⁷ See Wallis, p. 109.

⁸ Wallis, p. 109.

before us merely a difference in degree.⁹ The degree, extent and depth of the experience of God are much richer and fuller. As [Hebrews 10](#) adds, worshippers now have a 'cleansed conscience' because of the finality and completeness of Jesus' sacrifice. Comparing Jesus' statements in [John 14:16-17](#) with the New Covenant promise of [Ezekiel 36:25-27](#), the *permanency* of the Spirit's indwelling appears as new also, enabling us to partake of God's nature, making his Torah an internal motivating principle of our natures and enabling us to carry out its instructions ([Rom. 8:4](#)).

The repeated violations of his covenant make this statement stand ever more beautifully as an expression of God's grace. Despite the broken covenant, he renews the terms and grants even greater blessing. He then takes it all one step further, extending the scope of the covenant. *All* people ([Jer. 31:34](#)) will participate in its provisions—perhaps another element of its newness.

A resolution to the problem of newness apparently lies in a combination of Wallis' and Hengstenberg's insights. However, one other perspective needs to be added to complete the picture, the implications of the Near Eastern covenant renewal procedure. When covenants were renewed, new documents were prepared which *brought up to date* the stipulations of the earlier documents. Deuteronomy illustrates this process ([Dt. 5:6-21; 15:5ff.](#); cf. [Ex. 12:7, 46](#)). It provides evidence for the fact that this was a renewal of the earlier covenant at the time when the leadership was transferred to Joshua. It *includes* the stipulations and sanctions of the original covenant. It is, in fact, the text of the treaty reproduced, as was common in the ancient Near East, for the dynastic succession of Joshua.¹⁰ Joshua followed the same procedure when he took leave of the people ([Josh. 24:25ff.](#)). So it served not only as a renewal of the covenant, but also as the testament of the will of Moses making Joshua his successor. This correlates directly with the statements of [Hebrew 9:16-17](#), emphasizing the necessity for the death of the testator to

p. 179 effect the covenant, as Kline shows in his *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (1972). He goes on to point out that Jesus dies as the representative of God, putting the testament into effect. He then rises as the heir, succeeding to the throne. Jesus' reticence to proclaim himself the Messianic king may reflect this perspective.

In addition to the perspectives of irony, internality, enabling, extent and renewal as they relate to the New Covenant, the principle of [Galatians 3:17](#) applies to any covenant discussion. One covenant does not set aside another. One does not invalidate another so as to nullify its stipulations. Rather, it renews, expands, adapts, updates.

THE NATURE OF FULFILMENT IN THE BIBLE

The fulfilment theme in Hebrews maintains the divine origin and establishment of the Jewish system. Rather than manifesting an attitude of disparagement or annulment, Hebrews hallows, reveres and makes prominent. So Judaism foreshadows Jesus as it is fulfilled in and highlights him. He takes it up in himself, and crowns, fills out and gives meaning to the Jewish system. This cannot be adequately seen if the Jewish system, the 'highlighter', is removed from the picture. It is not set aside but serves as a good contemporary teacher pointing to Jesus. Set the system aside, and you remove the pointer.

The objection usually comes at this point. 'The argument of Hebrews demonstrates that the new is better than the old; so the old is set aside.' But Hebrews applies the same

⁹ Hengstenberg, p. 250.

¹⁰ Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 9-14, 122.

argument to angels as to the old covenant. If the old is set aside and void, by the same argument the angels must be as well!

Jesus' teachings in [Matthew 5:17–19](#) shed further light on the meaning of fulfilment. He uses 'abolish' and 'fulfil' as opposites here. The Greek term used, *kataluo*, conveys the idea of 'do away with', 'annul', 'make invalid', or 'repeal'.¹¹ Jesus did not come to do this to the Jewish system. In fact, he mentions 'not abolish' twice to emphasize his point. The Greek construction connecting 'not abolish' and 'fulfil' (*ouk ... alla*) indicates a strong contrast. It reinforces the Opposite nature of the two ideas, implying that one contradicts the other. They are thus shown as mutually exclusive. [p. 180](#)

The word 'fulfil' (*plēroō*) carries a variety of nuances: (a) make full, fill full, fill out fully; (b) make complete, confirm; (c) show forth in its true meaning, bring to full expression. The prominent idea here is 'bring to full expression', 'show forth in its true meaning'. And, as the context brings out (vv. [20ff.](#)), the idea of 'fill out fully' also plays a significant role.

Further as Beecher reminds us, the Bible presents fulfilment as cumulative, not disjunctive.¹² The passage conveys the image of a crown. A crown shows something off in its full radiance. The whole Jewish system foreshadows Jesus and highlights him, emphasizing his brilliance and glory. He, in turn, takes it up in himself and crowns it; he fills it out and gives it meaning. He shows it off in its full radiance and significance.

We can conclude, then, that Jesus came as the fullest expression of the Jewish system, thoroughly consistent with it in its pure form, as the central, integral, and essential part of it. He showed us its true meaning and lifted it to new heights (cf. its previous heights in [Psa. 19, 119](#)). He crammed it full to the brim.

THE NATURE OF THE PEOPLE & BELIEFS ADDRESSED BY HEBREWS

Scholars have frequently argued about the kind of people addressed by the author of Hebrews. Some have made a case for a Gentile audience, while others have argued for a Jewish one. Both positions have their problems.

The main problem in identifying the nature of the addressees has been the very strange combination of beliefs which the readers are urged not to return to, or exhorted to move away from. What Jewish group would have held to a theology that combined the veneration of angels, Mosaic prophetology, the exaltation of Melchizedek, the portrayal of the cultus in terms of the wilderness tabernacle, and the vital importance of the sacrifice system ...¹³

This combination does not fit the Pharisees or Sadducees, for example. The priesthood and cultus as concepts of importance would be alien to Pharisees, as angels and the tabernacle would be to the Sadducees. However, Melchizedek as a main theme is perhaps the most [p. 181](#) problematic to assign to a Jewish group. He plays a very prominent role in Hebrews (especially chapters [5–7](#)), but has little or no significance for the commonly known Jewish sects. The Dead Sea community at Qumran (probably Essenes) stands as the one exception. Melchizedek figured prominently in their thinking. He had a heavenly position and played an active role as an eschatological saviour. Identified with the Messiah in some way, he was expected to come to proclaim release to the captives and atonement

¹¹ See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1967), p. 415.

¹² William Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1963), pp. 365–386.

¹³ Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 160.

for their sins. Anointed by the Spirit, he would punish the wicked in the last days.¹⁴ A closer examination of the beliefs addressed in Hebrews and a comparison with the Qumran teachings demonstrates their close relationship and argues for an Essene-type audience for Hebrews.

The following analysis depends on the work of Yigael Yadin.¹⁵

As deduced from the argument of Hebrews, its readers believed that angels would play an important role in the last days. They would operate under the direct order of God and not as servants to a Messianic agent (1:6–7, 14). In the world to come they would possess certain controlling powers and dominion (1:13; 2:1 ff.). Their status would be such that they would possess some sort of qualities of sonship in relation to God (1:5ff.). In comparison, the Essenes believed that the angel of light, Michael, would assist the ‘children of righteousness’. His authority would be magnified, and he would have dominion over the ‘children of light’ (1QM 13.9–10; 1QS 3.20; 24–25). Angels, in general, would have controlling powers, and God would operate through them directly (1QH 10.8, 1QH Fragment 2, 1.3). The scrolls also speak of angels as sons of heaven or sons of God (1QH Fragment 2, 1.3; 1QH 3.1–22; 1QS 11.7–8).

The readers of Hebrews expected a Messianic priest figure or a priestly Messiah, specifically from the tribe of Aaron (5:1f.). He would rival or be superior to Messiah the king (7:18). He would oversee a restored and purified sacrificial system, which would be primary in importance, as well as efficacious (10:1ff.; 9:25–26). Similarly, those at Qumran recognized a Messiah ‘from Aaron’ as well as one ‘from Israel,’ a priestly Messiah and a kingly one (CDC 12:22; 13.1; 14.19; p. 182 20.1; 1QS 11.11). The priestly Messiah would assume a leading role over the kingly one in the conduct of the war against the enemy, and both would serve under Michael (1QM). The scrolls call this priestly Messiah ‘the chief priest’ and ‘prince of the whole congregation’ (1QM 5.1; CDC 7.18–21; 1QSb 3.20–21). The full ritual of the sacrifices would be resumed in prominence in the last days under the direction of the chief priest and would provide atonement for the congregation (1QM 2.1–6).

In the last days the readers of Hebrews looked for a prophet, separate from the Messiah, to appear with a new revelation (1:1–2; cf. the stress on Jesus as the *final* revelation and on his superiority to the *prophets*). This probably reflects the widespread belief in the eschatological role of the ‘prophet like Moses’. (Dt. 18:18ff., cf. Mt. 16:14; Jn. 6:14). This Mosaic prophet apparently had some connection with the New Covenant (9:15ff.). The Dead Sea community believed in the coming of a prophet separate from the two Messiahs: ‘... until the coming of a prophet and of the Messiahs from Aaron and Israel,’ (1QS 9.11). They apparently considered him a ‘second Moses’, and as such perhaps expected him to serve as the mediator of the New Covenant between God and Israel (cf. the beginning of *Assumption of Moses*).

Hebrews frequently refers to biblical passages about the tabernacle—which was quite distinct from the Temple system—and the wilderness wanderings (chs. 3–4, 9–10, etc.). The repeated references to the wilderness tabernacle are quite striking because the readers lived in Temple days over a thousand years after the wilderness tabernacle. Apparently, the author tries to prove his points by using concepts close to the readers’ outlook and understood by them. So, he shows that Jesus fulfils important aspects of the

¹⁴ Yigael Yadin, ‘A Note on Melchizedek and Qumran’, *Israeli Exploration Journal* XV (1965) pp. 152–154; G. W. Buchanan *To the Hebrews*, Anchor gibe series (Doubleday: Garden City NY, 1972) pp. 99–100 Cf. also Longenecker p 161.; cf. the Melchizedek Scroll, 11Q Mel.

¹⁵ Yigael Yadin, ‘The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 36–55.

tabernacle (ch. 9ff.). Significantly, the Qumran community organized themselves as a replica of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness. (Cf. 1QM, 1QS, and CDC on the entire following discussion.) They called their leaders by the same titles as those in Exodus, and their age requirements for service in the congregation and in war correspond to those in Numbers. They referred to themselves as ‘exiles in the wilderness’ and believed they would enter a new land of promise. While they awaited this, they imitated Israel’s pattern of life in the wilderness. They were, therefore, quite familiar with the tabernacle and partial to it. They used the same measurements for their weapons as those given for the tabernacle furniture. Because they felt the existing Temple and its services were defiled by the corruption and present order of the priesthood, they viewed the tabernacle system as purer. [p. 183](#)

A couple of other things should be added about the nature of those addressed by Hebrews. The strong emphasis on the New Covenant (chs. 8–10) may also reflect a background of Essene beliefs. The Essenes felt that they were members of the New Covenant (CDC 6.19; 8.21; 20.12).¹⁶ In fact, yearly they celebrated the renewing of this covenant on Shavuot (Pentecost).¹⁷ The Essenes also would have felt right at home with the stress on the end of days (cf. 1QM) found right at the outset of Hebrews ([1:2](#)). Finally, if Hebrews was written in the tense period before the revolt against Rome, the Messianic Jews were facing a difficult choice and test of loyalty either to their nation or their Messiah. The author warns them not to revert to a Judaism without the Messiah.¹⁸

Now that we have examined the nature of covenant renewal in the Near East, the nature of fulfilment in the Bible, and the nature of the people and beliefs addressed by Hebrews, we are better prepared to analyze the crucial passages in the book of Hebrews.

THE CRUCIAL PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

Although not usually so interpreted, some have used [Hebrews 6:1–2](#) as an attack on Judaism and Jewish identity.

But is this so evident? Westcott,¹⁹ for example, equates the elementary teaching with the first teaching of the apostles (cf. [Acts 2:38](#); [4:2](#), [33](#); [8:16f.](#)). The context ([5:11f.](#)) reinforces Westcott’s understanding and militates against the former interpretation. The context equates ‘elementary teaching’ with milk, those first principles which fed the young believers. These are necessary for early growth but are inadequate to fuel further development. As a person grows properly, he grows beyond the ABC’s and moves on to that which assists his maturity. As Bruce²⁰ restyles the author’s point: you have remained immature long enough; I am going to give you something which will take you out of your immaturity. The ‘milk’ and the ABC’s do not pertain solely to Jewish teachings but apply more broadly to [p. 184](#) basic teachings given to new believers in general, as the context indicates. [Hebrews 6](#) challenges us to build on these, not abandon them.

¹⁶ Buchanan, p. 137.

¹⁷ Frank M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Duckworth: London, 1958), p. 164.

¹⁸ Longenecker, p. 162; cf. Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. lxxv–lxxvi. On the dating of Hebrews see John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 200–220.

¹⁹ B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 143.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 111.

[Hebrews 8](#) poses a more difficult problem. The passage speaks of a better covenant and better promises (vv. [6](#), [13](#)). Apparently this sets aside the old, doing away with the Jewish system, as some would assert. Note first though, the passage speaks of a ‘better covenant’ and ‘better promises’ not a better Torah. God’s Torah could not be improved, as [Galatians 3:21](#) implies. Besides, how could you improve on something God describes as ‘holy, just and good,’ and as ‘spiritual’ ([Rom. 7:12, 14](#))? Further, Jesus clearly stated that he fulfilled, not set aside, the Torah. Hebrews would not contradict this clear teaching.

To what, then, do the better promises and better covenant refer? Clearly the reference involves a *covenant* and *promises*. From the context they refer to the *New Covenant promise* of the Torah on the heart (v. [10](#)). This is the new dimension of the covenant—internality and enabling. However, it is based on the same Torah; it has just been internalized, not set aside. It is no longer simply an objective criterion outside the believer. It invades him as his very essence, driving force and motivating impulse from within. This fits the conclusions of our survey on Near Eastern covenant procedure. Jeremiah spoke in ironical terms about the ‘new’ covenant whereby the people would experience the kind of intimate relationship with God he intended for them under the previous covenants. So it was really a renewed covenant, ratifying the past covenants and enabling its participants to experience the intended benefits. As in the Near East with the renewal of covenants, here also the relationship and obligations continued but were brought up-to-date (as for example, the Sermon on the Mount, which explains, adapts and expands the Torah). The dimension of enabling and internality remains as the striking ‘newness’ of the covenant.

Verse [7](#) goes on to state that the first covenant was not faultless. But as the context demonstrates (vv. [8–9](#)), the problem resides not with the covenant, promises or Torah, but with man. He ‘finds fault with [blames] them’ (v. [8](#)) because ‘they did not continue in my covenant’ (v. [9](#)). Or, as Jeremiah put it ([31:32](#)), ‘which covenant they broke’. To this, [Romans 8:3](#) adds that it was ‘weak because of the flesh’. The passages emphasize man’s inability to keep the covenant. This perspective is emphasized by the terms in verses [7](#) and [8](#). ‘Faultless’—referring to the covenant—and ‘blaming’—referring to man—come from the same root, making the point that the covenant was not blameless because the Jewish people could not keep it.²¹ p. 185

Verse [13](#) adds the phrases ‘obsolete’, ‘growing old’ and ‘ready to disappear’. Once again these refer to the covenant, not the Torah, and do so because of the new dimension. Further, the term ‘obsolete’ means ‘outdated’ or ‘antiquated’, not ‘annulled’. The new dimension makes the former covenant antiquated. The believer, by the Spirit of God, can now accomplish what before he was commanded but was not able to carry out. Thus, there is now a better way to accomplish the same old objectives. ([Romans 8:4](#) proclaims the same message.)

Notice, too, that verse [13](#) says ‘growing old’ and ‘ready to disappear’, not ‘old’ and ‘having disappeared’. The former still has a present use. This reflects the ‘already and not yet’ tension expressed by Jocz and the interplay of old and new noticed by Cullmann, as cited earlier. The ultimate fulfilment of the ‘new’ awaits the Messianic age when ‘everyone shall know God’ (v. [11](#)) and ‘the Torah will go forth from Zion’ ([Isa. 2:3](#)).²²

[Hebrews 9:3–10](#) poses still another problem for continuance of Jewish practice and identity, particularly verse [10](#) which seems to indicate an end for the ‘regulations of food and drink and various washings’. Clearly the context (vv. [7](#), [9](#), [12–13](#), [19](#)) refers to the

²¹ Buchanan, pp. 137–138.

²² Cf. W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age or the Age to Come* (Society of Biblical Research: Philadelphia, 1952).

sacrificial system that existed in both tabernacle and Temple. The main point of the passage occurs in verse [8](#): ‘the way into the holy place had not yet been disclosed’. In other words, the people had no direct, unhindered, free access to God within that structure. ‘The people were separated from the object of their devotion.’²³ So, the author contrasts the free access to God with the symbolic limited access permitted by the tabernacle and Temple.²⁴ Verse [9](#) explains verse [8](#) and then verse [10](#) modifies verse [9](#), thus continuing the expansion of verse [8](#). Therefore, the regulations of food, drink and washings in verse [10](#) refer to those associated with the sacrifice system and not to the food laws, other washings, *et al.*, ‘... the accompaniments of the sacrifice, the personal requirements with which they were connected ...’²⁵ These regulations relating to the sacrifices were temporary as was the sacrificial system. However, as the text notes (v. [9](#)), even this was a picture or lesson for ‘the present time’ (‘then’ is not in the Greek text); it served a present function. [p. 186](#)

The text concludes by stating that the regulations were imposed until a time of ‘reformation’ or ‘new order’. The term ‘reformation’ used here implies reconstruction,²⁶ renewal as opposed to building a new structure. It means ‘making straight’, the idea of making stable,²⁷ reminiscent of Kimchi’s statement cited earlier: ‘It will not be the newness of the covenant, but its stability.’ Qumran, too, eagerly anticipated this time of the *renewal* of creation after final judgement.²⁸ This verse refers to the time initiated by Jesus, with his one *permanent* sacrifice replacing the many *temporary* ones (as chapters [9](#) and [10](#) go on to develop).

[Hebrews 13:10–14](#) stands as the last major, crucial passage relating to Jewish continuity. Verse [13](#) expressed the key to the paragraph, ‘bearing his reproach’. It states the only command in the section, ‘go to him outside the camp’. ‘Bearing his reproach’ then modifies the command, explaining its meaning. The command emphasizes identifying with Jesus ‘go to *him* ...’ So, the author stresses, not leaving behind, but identifying with Jesus even if it means reproach and persecution. The Dead Sea community, and those influenced by it, would have understood reproach because of the stand they had taken in separating themselves. To them, Hebrews says: ‘Now suffer reproach for a worthier cause, the Messiah himself.’ Remember, if Hebrews was written just prior to the revolt against Rome, this would have been a time of real pressure for greater harmony and unanimity, to stick with the system as is, to ‘not make waves’. Differences could easily have resulted in great ‘reproach’.

Does the phrase ‘outside the camp’ then imply leaving the Jewish system? Westcott makes an interesting observation but does not follow through on the implications.

Moses did originally set up the tent or meeting ‘outside the camp’ ([Ex. 33:7](#)) and spoke with God there, making it the earliest and ‘purest’ form of established worship—from Essene eyes. The sacrifices originally took place here (cf. [Heb. 13:11–12](#)), making it the true centre of the religious system, the place of communicating with God. Even later, it was the place for the cleansing ashes of the red heifer ([Num. 19:9](#)). The Yom Kippur

²³ Westcott, p. 252.

²⁴ Bruce, p. 195.

²⁵ Westcott, p. 254.

²⁶ Bruce, p. 197.

²⁷ Westcott, p. 254.

²⁸ Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Thomas Nelson and Sons: New York, 1961), p. 171.

sacrifice, 'a sacrifice from which no one can eat' (cf. [Heb. 13:10](#)), was brought here to be consumed [p. 187](#) ([Lev. 16:27](#)). Jesus died here, 'outside the camp', the original place of worship and communication with God, in fulfilment of the sacrifice system and as the true centre of Judaism.

The further references to 'outside the gate' would have struck another responsive chord among the Essenes. It would have coincided with their emphasis on the purity of the tabernacle and the impurity of the Temple, 'outside the gate' indicating separateness from the 'corrupted'—for the Essenes—Temple practices. So this command does *not* refer to withdrawing from the Jewish traditions and practices. Rather, it stands as a readily understood challenge—in terms the Essenes would appreciate—to return to God and identify with true Judaism ('outside the camp and the gate') centred in Jesus, apart from whom the whole thing is bereft of its ultimate meaning, life and reality.

The Essenes would also have responded favourably to Hebrews' emphasis on 'the city to come' and not having a present 'lasting city' (v. [14](#)). They had gone outside the gate', having left the city because of their objections to the corruptness of the priesthood and its operations, e.g. impurity of the practices, wrong calendar, and so on. Therefore they believed the Temple and city had to be cleansed before true worship could take place.²⁹ They viewed themselves as 'exiles in the wilderness', awaiting entrance into a 'new—and cleansed—promised land'. So they had no present city; they looked for one to come. This would occur when Messiah ruled from Jerusalem. Verse [14](#) then repeats and reinforces the challenge of verse [13](#), using concepts and terminology familiar to the readers.

The background of the Near Eastern covenant procedures and the historical context of the Dead Sea community must affect our understanding of Hebrews. A biblical understanding of fulfilment must also shape our approach to the book. Finally, we must not push passages in Hebrews to contradict other Scriptures such as [Matthew 5:17–20](#), [Romans 7:12ff.](#), and the testimony of Acts to continued Jewish practice and identity. As these principles are kept in mind, the critical passages fall into place and the message of Hebrews becomes clear. Hebrews stresses identifying with Jesus as the true centre and intent of Judaism; it does *not* set aside Jewish identity and practice.

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Book Reviews

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORLD RELIGIONS

by Ajith Fernando

(first published by Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, 1987; subsequently by Gospel Literature Service, Bombay, India, 1987 as paperback; pp. 192)

Reviewed by Rev. C. V. Matthew (Assistant Professor of Religions at the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India). Printed with permission.

²⁹ Buchanan, p. 235.

The Age of Missions, contrary to what many want to believe, and profess, is not yet over. Interestingly enough we have the rare privilege of witnessing an era which is more missionary than ever before. The present century may be rightly called the century of World Missions—not merely of one religion or two but of most of the major religions of the world; not merely of mission from the West to the East but also from East to the West. In the historical context of post-Christian liberalism in the West, and the post-colonial struggle of the Church in the Third World countries, many Christians have addressed themselves to the crucial issue of inter-religious attitudes and relationships. Much has already been written on this theme. It may not be wrong to observe that most of these writings are from (and please excuse the unpleasantness of the labels) the ‘liberal’ Christians and not from those of the ‘evangelical’ persuasion. It seems that the evangelicals have been less vocal on this topic. This is especially true of Third World evangelicals.

In this setting, it is quite pleasing to note that Ajith Fernando, as an evangelical Christian and thinker, addresses himself to this theme in his book *The Christian’s Attitude Toward World Religions*. Here Ajith attempts to outline a Christian, that is a biblical, perspective on non-Christian religions. The aim of the book, which has thirteen chapters in two parts, is ‘to expound the biblical attitude to other faiths’ (p. 24). Basically it is an exposition of Paul’s ministry in Athens ([Acts 17:16–34](#)). From this study, principles regarding attitudes toward other religions and guidelines for ministry among other religionists are drawn. Then, in the second part, the book deals with issues related to these principles and guidelines.

The author says that he has written ‘a nontechnical book for a nonspecialist audience’ (p. 12). He goes on to say that this book is the fulfilment of a long desire to write a book on the topic of Christianity [p. 189](#) and other faiths, and the film *Gandhi* inspired him to write a talk entitled ‘Evangelism under Fire’. And this ‘talk was gradually expanded over the next three years into this book’, reminisces the author. He expects that this book will have a threefold effect on its readers: it will help them think biblically about non-Christians and their beliefs, increase their joy and appreciation of the supremacy of Christ and his gospel, and motivate them to witness to non-Christians effectively.

In the first chapter the writer briefly surveys some of the new and popular attitudes to other religions prevalent in the Church, new approaches to evangelism, and some of the major objections raised to traditional evangelism. The excellent exegetical study of the text ([Acts 17:16–34](#)) is indeed the strength of the book. It is clear and faithful to the text and context as well. Inspired by Apostle Paul, Ajith Fernando pleads for a ‘combination of a strong conviction about truth and respect for the individual’ in formulating a Christian attitude to other faiths.

In chapter two the author highlights the place and significance of dialogue in evangelism. Persuasively he calls for a return to the biblical understanding of dialogue as exemplified in Paul’s ministry. It is true that the ‘dialogue’ which Fernando talks about is different, in meaning and purpose, from the dialogue that is quite popular in many circles today. Nevertheless he has the merit of being faithful to the text. For him dialogue is part of proclamation. It is an honest and respectful confrontational dialogue with a genuine and loving desire for the conversion of non-Christians to Jesus Christ. Further, he argues that contextualization is a necessity while syncretism is to be avoided. In chapter three he describes a good Christian witness as ‘a student of both the Word and the world’ (p. 46).

Chapter four deals with the absolute necessity of setting things right with regard to the fact of God in any evangelistic task, especially in a pluralistic context. Against the reigning spirit of relativism in our modern period, Fernando, like Paul, is not afraid to hold that ‘all non-Christian systems are untrue at their heart’ (p. 52). He also draws our

attention to the fact that creation and redemption are not synonymous, a point where many students of religion are confused.

Chapter seven features a discussion of such questions as whether or not to quote non-Christian authors, the needed sympathetic and respectful attitude to non-Christian religions, the possible pitfalls one may encounter in developing such an attitude, and the ways to avoid these pitfalls. In chapter eight issues such as God's revelation (both general and special), and non-Christian systems in the light of these modes of revelation are dealt with. Chapter nine deals with 'the crucial [p. 190](#) question of the destiny of those who do not receive Christ's lordship, especially of those who have not heard his gospel' (p. 119).

The next chapter discusses various supposed exceptions to the principle that belief in Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation. Perhaps this may be the only 'problematic' chapter for a number of evangelical Christians. The author argues persuasively. However the present reviewer tends to feel that on certain details one may differ from the author's position, and on certain other issues one may be less sure than the author, and yet remain a committed evangelical. This scope for divergence is possible also in relation to what he has not explicitly stated. For instance, Fernando looks at non-Christian religions as 'man's religion' (p. 104), with no obvious role for Satan in the origin of untruth (cf. 'all non-Christian systems are untrue at their heart', p. 52). The only reference to Satan in this book (p. 114) has to do with him as one who misuses that which is best in other faiths. However Christians may hold the view that Satan, as the 'father of all lies', is the very author of untruth which is at the heart of other religions. Perhaps this observation with regard to the possibility of right and legitimate views different from the author's assumes special significance especially in the light of the definite article in the title of the book, '*The Christian's ...*'. Guidelines which the writer proposes in the following chapter ('But if there is no clear teaching in the Scriptures about something, we must not claim biblical authority for it', p. 156; 'We do not need to be afraid to say that we don't know the answers to these questions', p. 157) may well be scrutinized carefully in this regard too.

The last three chapters discuss the paired themes of persuasion and intolerance, uniqueness and arrogance, and conversion and proselytism, in the context of evangelism.

One of the points where the author becomes vulnerable to criticism is in his reference to gaining 'an airstrip' in the alien territory in the evangelistic task (p. 40). This idea has come to be associated, rightly or wrongly, with the much criticized 'commando type evangelism'. Even if the given text ([Acts 17:16-34](#)) does not provide much scope, the writer would have done well had he discussed what is generally called 'incarnational evangelism'.

The author, Ajith Fernando, National Director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, writes from the crucible of everyday ministerial encounter with the people of other religions in his pluralistic society of Sri Lanka. This is a book straight from the 'field'. The living experiences of the author as a minister of Jesus Christ in a real world of religions make his book quite refreshing, challenging and realistic. His arguments and [p. 191](#) personal examples, as seen in this book, show that an evangelist can persuade without becoming intolerant; can firmly believe in the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ without becoming arrogant; and can engage in conversion without turning to proselytism.

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