

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 13

Volume 13 • Number 2 • July 1989

Evangelical Review of Theology



WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission [p. 195](#)

Editorial

Sin and Society

Do I sin every time I eat a slice of bread or meat, or drink a cup of coffee or juice? Yes, many Christians would answer: in a modern society, with all its multi-national and other dehumanizing structures around, every consumable good is contaminated with exploitation of the poor, on whom injustice is heaped upon injustice; one cannot participate in the benefits offered by such oppressive systems without being a party to the evil they represent and perpetuate. As Martin Luther King said, passive inaction against evil is the same as an active support for it. No doubt every sin is basically God-oriented—that is, King David sinned against God in committing adultery with Bathsheba, not because he robbed Uriah of her or killed him or seduced her, but because in every case he broke God's commandment. Thus any so-called 'structural sin' is not against man but primarily against God. At some stage it exposes its true character—a breach of God's law.

When all the trimmings are gone and only essentials left behind, both global mission conferences this year will be seen to deal primarily with this problem of sin. San Antonio, the southernmost city in the USA with the greatest hispanic settlement, is deliberately chosen as the venue of the WCC'S World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, to remind its participants of North-South economic injustices. And Lausanne II in Manila, in the Philippines, the most Christianized nation of Asia, will for its part amply stress the need for personal trust rather than any structural affinity to Christendom. In one case, sin is seen predominantly as lack of justice to one's fellow man; in another it is lack of belief in Jesus Christ.

The articles in this issue also deal with these questions, in some cases quite originally. Though there is no immediate proposal to bring together the two basically different approaches to sin in the two global Conferences, I believe that to the discerning eye there is a hidden current in these pages which seems to push beyond the conventional wisdom, while at the same time keeping true to the biblical insights: namely, that somehow structural sins could be incorporated as part of personal sin, not as *acts* of sin, but as part of sin as an *attitude* or state. More courageous souls than I must take up the challenge to clear the dust and bring out with greater precision the biblical concept of sin all the more relevantly for our times. [p. 196](#)

Inter-faith Dialogue in the New Testament

I. Howard Marshall

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This article, originally written for the theological consultation of FEET (Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians) last year at Woelmersen, West Germany, was subsequently revised for ERT. Developing a systematic exegesis of both the term and the

concept of 'dialogue' in the NT, Marshall concludes that though the early church did speak in terms that would be intelligible to its hearers and addressed them in different situations, yet dialogue was not the primary means of presenting the gospel, and suggests a model which takes away the simple antithesis between proclamation and dialogue, 'but the unchanging essence of the gospel is proclaimed in forms adapted to the needs of its hearers'.

Editor

The place of dialogue with non-Christians in relation to the evangelistic task of the church has received renewed attention recently in the pages of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.¹ It is clear that some Christians regard dialogue as an important form of witness, and think that the church's evangelistic task should be carried on by means of dialogue as well as by proclamation.²

We may roughly contrast the two possible approaches as follows. In proclamation the evangelist (X) has a message (G—the gospel) which he communicates to his hearer (Y) as something which is to be accepted or rejected; the evangelist himself has received this unchanging message, and he communicates it virtually without change. In dialogue, however, the message is not something which the evangelist already possesses in normative form. Rather he must enter into discussion with his hearer, both participants contributing to the dialogue and thus together reaching an understanding of the gospel.

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The question which is posed by juxtaposing these two types of approach is whether the Christian message is something 'given' to the evangelist which is passed on unchanged to the potential convert, or whether the truth of the gospel is something that emerges in the course of dialogue. Obviously the issues are not as sharp as this in practice. Any evangelist must shape his proclamation to the situation and character of the hearer; it is no use speaking in German to somebody who understands only Tamil, and illustrations and concepts must be chosen which will be intelligible to the hearer. Similarly, even in a situation of dialogue the evangelist will have some understanding of the gospel, even if his understanding of it may undergo radical alteration in the course of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask whether the *essential* content of the gospel is something 'given' to the evangelist or can undergo radical alteration in a common search for truth along with a non-Christian.

It is surely essential that in discussing this matter we have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'dialogue' in the New Testament and determine whether it was practised as a means of evangelism. We shall look first at the meaning of the Greek verbs which suggest the idea of dialogue, and this will involve us in a study of the church's evangelism as portrayed in Acts. From there we shall turn back to the synoptic Gospels to see whether the dialogue form can be found there, and then we shall move forward to see whether Paul's letters reflect the use of dialogue, and finally we shall consider the Gospel of John as a source for dialogue. The essay will close with some brief conclusions.

1. THE WORD-USAGE IN ACTS

¹ P. Schrotenboer 'Inter-Religious Dialogue', *ERT* 12:3, July 1988, 208–225. Reprinted from *Reformed Church Synod Missions Bulletin*, March 1986.

² The problem was considered at the conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians in 1978, and the following paper is based upon a lecture given on that occasion.

The Greek verb which is roughly equivalent to the English verb 'to discuss' is *dialegomai*, which occurs 13 times in the NT.³ It can be used of a debate in which two or more people argue with one another, as in [Mk. 9:34](#) where we read of an argument among the disciples of Jesus, and in [Jude 9](#), where the archangel Michael and the devil dispute about the body of Moses. But the verb can also be used in contexts where the idea of mutual discussion appears to be absent. Thus in [Heb. 12:5](#) the writer asks the readers, 'Have you forgotten [P. 198](#) the exhortation which addresses you as sons?' and goes on to quote from Proverbs; the Revised Version translates the verb as 'to reason with'. Here there is no question of dialogue or discussion, and this corresponds with the usage of the word in Jewish Greek, where, according to G. Schrenk, it 'is used not merely for "conversation" or "negotiation" but quite frequently for "speech" in the sense of an "address"'.⁴

This range in meaning must be borne in mind when we come to the [10](#) occurrences of the word in Acts with reference to the missionary activity of Paul. It is used to describe his teaching in the synagogues ([Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8](#)), in the school of Tyrannus ([Acts 19:9](#)) and in Christian assemblies ([Acts 20:7, 9](#)). It also describes his disputes in the temple ([Acts 24:12](#)) and his conversation with Felix about justice, self-control and judgment to come ([Acts 24:25](#)). Arndt and Gingrich suggest that in [Acts 18:4](#) and other passages the word may simply mean to speak or preach,⁵ and G. Schrenk makes the same point more forcibly: "There is here no reference to "disputation" but to the "delivering of religious lectures or sermons" ... What is at issue is the address which any qualified member of the synagogue might give."⁶ This interpretation is justified to the extent that there is certainly no mention of what Paul's hearers may have said to him; all the stress falls on Paul's activity as a speaker, and he discusses the gospel with them, rather than they with him. It would be helpful to know how far discussion and debate took place in the synagogues. So far as I can tell, the synagogue service included a sermon by any person present who was competent to deliver one, but there does not appear to have been religious discussion. Nevertheless, there are one or two places which indicate that the preaching of Paul led to vocal opposition during the actual synagogue service. This was the case in [Acts 13:45](#) and also in [Acts 18:6](#), and we might also cite the cases where Jesus' activity in the synagogue led to protests and arguments on the spot, and sometimes to expressions of wonder and approval ([Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:22; 13:14; Jn. 6:41, 52](#)). There could also be discussion outside the synagogue. The picture which Luke gives of the Jews at Berea who examined the Scriptures daily for themselves to see if what Paul said was correct ([Acts 17:11](#)) certainly suggests that discussion was taking place. Furthermore, the use of the verb *synēteō* [p. 199](#) describe how the Jews disputed with Stephen ([Acts 6:9](#)) and how Paul argued with the Hellenists ([Acts 9:29](#); cf. [Acts 17:18](#)) indicates that debate or dialogue certainly took place. Similarly, Apollos engaged in debate with the Jews and refuted them ([Acts 18:28](#)).⁷

There is, therefore, sufficient evidence to show that the preaching of the early Christians could lead to debate and discussion with the hearers. But it is clear that the emphasis falls upon the preaching of the gospel, a fact that would certainly be borne out

³ See G. Schrenk, *TDNT* II, 93–5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵ *BAGD* s.v.

⁶ *TDNT* II, 94f.

⁷ Empty disputes, however, are not recommended in the Pastoral Epistles ([1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4f.; 2 Tim. 2:23; Tit. 3:9](#)).

by a detailed study of the vocabulary used to describe the evangelism of the early church. In short, the evidence of the vocabulary used in the NT to describe evangelistic activity can scarcely be said to give a large place to dialogue as a means of communicating the gospel; dialogue or debate arises rather as a result of the initial proclamation. There is certainly no indication whatever in the material from Acts that the evangelist needed to enter into dialogue with his hearers in order that he himself might gain a fuller and better knowledge of the gospel. The objective is always to correct misunderstandings of the gospel, not to reformulate the gospel.

2. DIALOGUE AND PARABLES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

When we move back from the study of Acts, to which we are guided by our linguistic investigations, and turn to the synoptic Gospels for evidence of the activity of Jesus, we find that the category of dialogue is a common one. Two types of unit demand our attention.

A. The Apophthegmata

The first of these is the *Apophthegmata*, sometimes and more helpfully known in English as 'pronouncement stories'.⁸ R. Bultmann has subdivided these into the two categories of 'controversial and academic discussions' and 'biographical apophthegmata'. It is the former of these groups which interests us, and I shall continue to follow Bultmann in his classification of the material in this category and his further subdivision into four groups. He distinguishes: 1. Controversies occasioned by a healing performed by Jesus. 2. Controversies occasioned p. 200 in some other way by the conduct of Jesus or the disciples. 3. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by the disciples or other people with friendly intent. 4. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by his opponents.⁹

According to Bultmann all these stories originated in the early church. In every case, therefore, they must be regarded as 'ideal' scenes, in the sense that they are constructions which express an idea pictorially in a concrete setting. While they may depict the kind of happenings that may have taken place in the ministry of Jesus, none of them certainly represents an actual individual, historical episode. Nevertheless, the stories developed relatively early in the history of the tradition, since the closest parallels to the types of discussion described are to be found in Palestinian Judaism.

The stories, then, are to be regarded as frameworks created to incorporate sayings ascribed to Jesus. Often they are concerned with the behaviour of the disciples rather than of Jesus himself, and this indicates their community origin. The labelling of the opponents of Jesus as Pharisees and Sadducees is stereotyped, and this again betrays a lack of historicity.

Even the sayings of Jesus incorporated in them are not necessarily authentic in the eyes of Bultmann. They often contain the sort of counterquestions or appeals to Scripture

⁸ V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, London 1933, 30.

⁹ The passages in question are: 1. [Mk. 2:1-12](#); [3:1-6](#); [3:22-30](#) (also in Q); 2. [Mk. 2:15-17](#), [18-22](#), [23-28](#); [7:1-23](#); [11:27-33](#); [Lk. 7:36-50](#); 3. [Mk. 9:38-40](#); [10:17-31](#), [35-45](#); [11:20-25](#); [12:28-34](#); [13:1-5](#); [Mt. 11:2-19](#)/[Lk. 7:18-35](#); [Lk. 9:51-56](#); [12-13f.](#); [13:10-17](#); [14:1-6](#); [17:20f.](#) 4. [Mk. 10:2-12](#); [12:13-17](#), [18-27](#).

which are found in Judaism, and in particular the use of Scripture is typical of the early church.¹⁰

The merits of this discussion are that Bultmann has drawn attention to the existence of a dialogue form in a couple of dozen synoptic narratives. This form suggests that the early church retained the memory that Jesus' ministry was often carried on by means of controversial discussions, but above all, for Bultmann, the form testifies to the church's own controversies with the Jews over its beliefs and activity.

Before we can build anything on this analysis, however, we need to ask whether it is soundly based, and it is not difficult to show that in many respects it must be pronounced to be totally unconvincing. p. 201

1. While Bultmann argues that the *Sitz im Leben* of many of the controversies is the church's attempt to justify its own practices over against Jewish criticisms, J. Roloff has demonstrated that the main thrust in many of the stories is more accurately designated as christological; the stories are designed primarily to show why it was that Jesus was ultimately crucified.¹¹ Although, therefore, the stories still have their *Sitz im Leben* in the early church, the basic reason for narrating them lay in their testimony to what Jesus said and did on his way to the cross; in other words, the church showed a historical interest in Jesus. If this is the case, then the argument that the church created these scenes as a reflection of its own controversies about its way of life falls to the ground, even though the stories may have had a secondary value in helping to justify the church's conduct.

2. Bultmann's particular criticisms of the content of the stories are not cogent. It is not at all clear why the type of use of Scripture found in these stories should be denied to Jesus. On the contrary, R. T. France's examination of the use of Scripture in the sayings ascribed to Jesus does much to support the general authenticity of the material as a coherent product of a single mind.¹² Nor is it strange if the types of answer favoured by Jesus should resemble those found in rabbinic discussions, unless it be denied that Jesus in any way resembled a rabbinic teacher.

3. The argument that the questions about the disciples' conduct betray their origin in the early church has been effectually countered by D. Daube's demonstration that a master was held responsible for the actions of his pupils and that consequently the Gospels can be regarded as showing how Jesus is called to answer for the habits which he had taught his disciples.¹³

4. There is at least some doubt whether the radical attitude towards the Jewish scribal interpretation of the law which is found in the controversy stories was typical of the early church. The disputes involving Paul strongly suggest that the Palestinian church was somewhat less radical than Jesus in its attitude to the law.

5. Bultmann's claim that the controversy stories contain 'ideal' p. 202 scenes appears, so far as I can see, to be pure assertion without any real evidence to back it up. The fact that the stories were 'created' in the early church does not mean that they must be devoid of historical basis. On the contrary, the assumption that the early church had some historical basis for its stories about Jesus is much more credible. We may not be able to

¹⁰ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, Göttingen, 1958⁴, 9–26, 39–56. See further M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, Tübingen, 1971⁶, 34–66; M. Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche*, Berlin, 1921; A. J. Hultgren, *Jesus and his Adversaries*, Minneapolis, 1979.

¹¹ J. Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus*, Göttingen, 1970. Roloff's investigation is concerned with the sabbath controversies, but its results can be extended more generally.

¹² R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, London, 1971 (reprinted, Grand Rapids, 1982).

¹³ D. Daube, 'Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels', *NTS* 19, 1972–3, 1–15.

prove that each individual instance is historical, but in each case we may reasonably suggest that stories should be regarded as having a historical kernel unless positive answers to the contrary are produced. Bultmann's assumption that stories produced in the early church do not have a historical basis is in no sense a compelling argument.

The result of this examination of Bultmann's analysis is to suggest in broad terms that the controversy stories should be seen primarily as testimonies to dialogue situations in the ministry of Jesus, and that these dialogues are genuine and not artificial creations.

The value of Bultmann's classification of the dialogues in terms of the kind of occasion that led up to Jesus' reply is not especially helpful for our present purpose. What does emerge from the analysis is that, so far as Mark is concerned, discussions arising out of a healing or other action performed by Jesus or his disciples occur predominantly in the first half of the Gospel, while discussions arising out of questions formulated by the disciples, interested enquirers or opponents of Jesus occur predominantly in the second half. This is historically plausible. In the early days it is more likely that the unusual actions of Jesus would lead to reaction in the form of enquiry about their significance. Only later do we find that questions are addressed to Jesus as an established teacher or with a view to acquiring evidence against him from his own mouth.

It is more useful to look at the kind of issues which arise in the dialogues. They can be roughly classified as: 1. Questions about Jesus' attitude to the law, especially the sabbath law, clean and unclean foods, fasting and divorce; 2. questions about Jesus' attitude to sinners, which again raised the issue of his attitude to the law; 3. a question about the chief commandment; 4. the question about entry to the kingdom, which again relates to law; 5. questions about Jesus' authority to teach, to exorcise and heal and to forgive. These questions nearly all have some reference to the law and might, therefore, be regarded as dealing merely with ethical issues. But the concern is not merely ethical. It is about the law as the way of life appointed by God and with the authority of Jesus to pronounce concerning God's will. In a Jewish environment, therefore, the dialogue is very much concerned with the way of life associated with the gospel. p. 203

But this means that something precedes the dialogue. Its ultimate basis lies in the action and proclamation of Jesus which calls out for elucidation and finally for critical examination. The dialogues, therefore, are only to a limited extent concerned with the proclamation of the rule of God and the call to discipleship, although these figure prominently in at least two significant episodes. The basic question that keeps on recurring is: 'How do the teaching and activity of Jesus square with the existing Jewish understanding of the will of God for people?' We may legitimately draw the conclusion that the dialogues do not constitute a primary form of *presenting* the gospel. They serve to elucidate aspects of a message that has already been proclaimed in word and deed.

We may ask next about the effect of the dialogues. Do they constitute a 'dialectical' means of progress in understanding, so that the participants on both sides come to a new awareness? Clearly the people who question Jesus receive answers to their questions in the form of instruction, correction and challenge. Having been drawn into the possibility of a new awareness by some action or teaching on the part of Jesus, they now respond by seeking a fuller explanation, and they receive it. Whether they respond positively or negatively is another matter. As for Jesus, there is no indication whatever that he appears as the enquirer or that his understanding is deepened by the encounters. The whole point of the pronouncement story is that its theme is the definitive and authoritative statement or pronouncement made by Jesus himself. He never appears as the questioner, anxious to find out things that he himself does not know. When he asks questions, these are intended to make his opponents think, or to stir up his disciples to a deeper awareness. Jesus

appears as the teacher who knows the answers.¹⁴ There is no indication that the dialogues bring together two people in a common search for truth.

This general conclusion is confirmed by the actual form of the dialogues. As we have them, they are generally very simple in character. Only in two or three cases does the actual conversation go beyond a simple question and answer form. The questioners do not take up what Jesus says, except when he specifically asks them a question; at most there are expressions of approval or disapproval of what Jesus says. p. 204

B. The parables

The second type of unit which may be relevant to our enquiry is the parables. J. Dupont has argued that the parables of Jesus are intended to be understood as instruments of dialogue.¹⁵ Their purpose is to answer the questions posed by people who listened to Jesus, and to propound fresh questions in their minds with the object of persuading them to make their response to Jesus. Hence many of the parables begin in question-form with the aim of involving the hearers in the topic discussed. They are to be regarded as means of persuasion rather than as weapons for conflict. The paradigm example of this understanding of the parables is to be seen in [Lk. 7:36–50](#) where the parable of the two debtors deals with a question in the mind of Simon the Pharisee and is meant to lead him to reflection and understanding about his own attitude to Jesus.

This is a helpful and useful approach to the parables, but again it must be stressed that there is no suggestion that the views of Jesus are to be changed in the course of the discussion. On the contrary, the aim is to convert the hearer. What is significant, however, is the use of a method which will lead the hearer to think in a new way and to be drawn into a discussion which can change his outlook. He is not so much confronted by an authoritative presentation of a set of facts or propositions which he must accept or reject; rather he is brought into a situation where he is led into seeing things from a new angle and is forced to ask his own questions and reformulate his own attitudes.

It might be argued that in neither of these cases, controversy stories and parables, is there 'dialogue' in the proper sense, in that there is no real interplay between the two sides, leading to deeper understanding on the part of both. But our concern is not with what 'dialogue' *ought* to be, but with the actual phenomena in the Gospels, and it must be emphasized that the synoptic Gospels give us no basis for supposing that the task of evangelism consists in a dialogue in which Jesus and his partners embark on a common search for a truth which neither of them fully possesses.

3. PAUL AS AN EVANGELIST

From Jesus we turn to Paul. Here we at once come up against the p. 205 difficulty created by the sources. Paul's letters are directed to Christian communities and are not evangelistic tracts. It is, therefore, a matter of some difficulty to reconstruct the probable contents of Paul's missionary message, and even more difficult to reconstruct the forms in which his message was presented. We can of course supplement the material in the letter with the evidence from Acts, but our earlier investigation of the vocabulary of

¹⁴ This applies, of course, to the role of questions in the controversy stories. It is not denied that Jesus on occasion lacked information and asked for it, or that he grew in self-understanding. See J. R. Michaels, *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel*, Atlanta, 1981.

¹⁵ J. Dupont, *Pourquoi des paraboles? La méthode parabolique de Jésus*, Paris 1977.

dialogue showed that little concrete information was forthcoming from that area. So we are compelled to adopt a more indirect approach.

A. Diatribe style

Although the writings of Paul are letters, they were no doubt meant to be read aloud in church, and we may presume that to some extent at least they were formulated for this purpose. In one or two places Paul adopts the style of the 'Diatribe', a type of philosophical address which was well-known in the Hellenistic world.¹⁶ The diatribe was characterized by its use of artificial dialogue in which the speaker himself expressed objections to his argument and questions which might be posed by imaginary interlocutors and then proceeded to answer them. We have a good example of the style in James, especially in chs. [2](#) and [3](#) where we may note the posing of questions by an imaginary interlocutor in [2:14](#) and [18](#).¹⁷ Paul uses the style in Romans, where the use of questions and objections put into the mouth of imaginary opponents serves to provide him with hooks on to which to hang his own replies and so to move his argument forward.¹⁸ Sanday and Headlam comment: 'No doubt this is a way of presenting the dialectical process in his own mind. But at the same time it is a way which would seem to have been suggested by actual experience of controversy with Jews and the narrower Jewish Christians. We are told expressly that the charge of saying "Let us do evil that good may come" was brought as a matter of fact against the Apostle (ver. [8](#)). And vi. [1](#), [15](#) restate this charge in Pauline language. The Apostle as it were takes it up and gives it out again as if it came in the logic of [p. 206](#) his own thought.'¹⁹ If this comment indicates that we cannot proceed directly from the artificial style of the diatribe to actual controversies in which Paul was engaged, at the very least we can say that the use of this style probably indicates that he was conscious of real questions which arose in dialogue with other people, and that the actual questions which arose in such dialogue have contributed to the way in which he expounds his thought in his letters.

The use of imaginary questions by interlocutors is most prominent in Romans. It is not clear whether the limited use of questions in Galatians ([3:19](#), [21](#)) is anything more than a literary method for forwarding the argument. In both cases we have to do with objections to the Pauline gospel from the side of Jewish Christians or Jewish opponents of Paul. Certainly the questions could be regarded as points which caused Paul to deepen his understanding of the gospel. If Paul alleged that all could be saved through faith in Jesus Christ without observing the law of Moses, it was only natural to object: Why, then, did God give the law ([Gal. 3:19](#))? Is the law contrary to the promises of God about salvation by faith ([Gal. 3:21](#))? What is the point of being a Jew or submitting to circumcision if faith is all that matters ([Rom. 3:1](#))? And so on. But these are such obvious questions that it would be difficult to state categorically whether they first arose in the mind of Paul or in the minds of his opponents. While, therefore, it is very probable that Paul is dealing with real questions raised by Jews and Jewish Christians, it is not at all clear whether these

¹⁶ R. Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe*, Göttingen, 1910. There has been some discussion as to whether Paul's style is really that of the diatribe. See S. K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Chico, 1981, for a careful evaluation of the position.

¹⁷ M. Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, Göttingen, 1957⁹, 36.

¹⁸ See especially [Rom. 3:1](#), [3](#), [5](#), [27](#), [29](#), [31](#); [4:1](#), [9](#); [6:1](#), [15](#); [7:7](#); [9:14](#), [19](#).

¹⁹ W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh, 1902⁵, 69f.

questions actually led to any development in his thinking. But we must return to this point later.

B. Questions from the churches

In [1 Corinthians 7:1](#) Paul begins the discussion of a fresh topic with the words: 'Now concerning the matters about which you wrote'. The same formula appears in an abbreviated form in the introductions to later topics in the letter ([1 Cor. 8:1](#); [12:1](#); [16:1, 12](#)), and it may also be present in 1 Thessalonians ([5:1](#); cf. [4:9, 13](#)). It appears that the structure of these letters is partly determined by a series of questions or topics which had been presented to Paul for his answers and opinions, so that here we have evidence of a genuine correspondence between Paul and the churches, with Paul replying to specific [p. 207](#) questions in the minds of his friends and conveyed to him either by letter (as in [1 Cor. 7:1](#)) or by word of mouth. In both cases the questions are raised within the congregations, and therefore they afford no direct evidence for Paul's relations with non-Christians.

However, it is possible that indirectly some light may be shed on the way in which Paul's thinking could have developed in the context of dialogue. J. C. Hurd has drawn attention to the existence of an earlier letter of Paul to Corinth (cf. [1 Cor. 5:9-11](#)) and proceeded to reconstruct the stages of Paul's thinking on various problems dealt with in his correspondence. He traces Paul's opinions as expressed in his original preaching at Corinth, in his so-called 'previous' letter to the church, and in his canonical first letter to the church, and he attempts to show how Paul's thinking changed and developed between these three stages. On Hurd's view Paul's thinking was affected by the promulgation of the apostolic decree ([Acts 15](#)) and by the Corinthian letter sent in reply to his 'previous' letter.²⁰ If this hypothesis is sound, we would have some indication that Paul's views changed and developed in the context of controversy. However, Hurd's theory has failed to convince the most recent English-speaking commentators on 1 Corinthians; there is no clear evidence that Paul was affected by the apostolic decree, and the alleged changes of mind which he is said to have undergone are improbable in the comparatively short period of time covered by the correspondence.²¹

In any case, the issues which Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians are concerned with matters of Christian belief and behaviour within the church. They cover such questions as sexual morality, attitudes to idolatrous feasts, the conduct of Christian meetings, the resurrection of the dead, and the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. There is little here that is directly associated with the proclamation of the gospel to non-Christians, except for the questions of the resurrection of believers which Paul regarded as being a direct implication of the primitive affirmation of the kerygma about the resurrection of Jesus.

C. Responses to opponents

In a brief summary of Paul's theology I once wrote that 'Paul's basic [p. 208](#) theology rested firmly on that of the primitive church; he frequently is indebted to it for theological and ethical material. Throughout his career he was beset by opponents who were envious of his success or anxious to upset his work. His theology is thus very much shaped by polemics, and it owed its individual development to the exigencies of debate.'²² When

²⁰ J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, London, 1965.

²¹ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1968, 6-8; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, London, 1971, 24, 58; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 13.

²² J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1974, 757.

writing this statement I had very much in mind the way in which Paul's theology was hammered out in controversial writings dealing with the perversions of the primitive faith by Judaizers and by gnosticizing Christians. This suggestion leads us to consider at a slightly deeper level whether we can see in Paul's theology the effects of controversy. Such effects might be of two kinds.

First, there is the suggestion, already hinted at, that Paul may have been led to develop particular themes in the light of objections made to his viewpoint. Thus it is arguable that Paul's stress on the close relation between the Spirit and justification arose out of the need to defend his doctrine of justification by faith against the charge of antinomianism. Similarly, his stress on the supremacy of Jesus Christ in Colossians could be a reiteration of a point which was called in question by gnosticizing Christians. In such cases heresy acted as a catalyst to the development of Christian doctrine which in fact drew nothing from the heresy itself.

One interesting thesis along these lines has been developed by an evangelical scholar. J. W. Drane has noticed how Paul appears to be something of a libertine in Galatians, whereas he is something of a legalist in 1 Corinthians. He argues that these apparently contradictory stances taken up by Paul are dictated by the nature of the opposition which he was facing. In Galatians he was confronted by Judaizing legalists, and therefore it was natural for him to stress the immediate guidance of the Spirit and to play down the importance of human traditions in the Christian faith. Then Drane argues that some of the Corinthian Christians proceeded to develop Paul's view well beyond their limits as a kind of reply to the apostolic decree of [Acts 15:20](#) which required that Christians should observe the Jewish law in whole or in part. On this view the 'Gnosticism' in Corinth was in part due to a one-sided development of Paul's own teachings. In 1 Corinthians we have Paul's reaction to this movement, and he reacts in terms of a legalistic approach, appealing to various traditions and rules which must be observed in the church. A middle ground between these two p. 209 Pauline extremes is found in 2 Corinthians and Romans where Paul is 'anti-libertine without being legalistic'.²³

It seems to me that Dr. Drane has probably overplayed his hand.²⁴ I do not find that Paul has swung so violently in his opinions as this brief summary of the thesis might seem to imply. Nevertheless, in broad terms it is psychologically plausible that a person will emphasize now one aspect and now another of his theology in dealing with opponents from different angles. While I hope, for example, that my understanding of Christian baptism is reasonably consistent, there is more than a trace of original sin in me (not washed away by baptism), which makes me want to supply a paedobaptist corrective to the views of advocates of believers' baptism when I am in their company, and to put the case for believers' baptism when I am confronted by paedobaptists. Certainly one may learn and develop in thinking through facing advocates of different positions, even if such growth is within a reasonably stable understanding of Christian doctrine. In broader terms we may claim that the development of doctrine has often been determined by apparently fortuitous circumstances.²⁵

The preceding remarks have dealt with the possibility of development by way of reaction to opposition. There is also the possibility that contact with other opinions may

²³ J. W. Drane, *Paul, Libertine or Legalist?*, London, 1975.

²⁴ See my review in *EQ* 48, 1976, 60–62.

²⁵ C. F. D. Moule, 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Christological Terms', *JTS* ns 10, 1959, 247–63; 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Eschatological Terms', *JTS* ns 15, 1964, 1–15. Both essays are reprinted in the author's *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, Cambridge, 1982, 165–183, 184–199.

lead a thinker to a creative assimilation of certain motifs from them, even although he may be fundamentally opposed to them. Something of this kind has been asserted with reference to Paul's contacts with gnosticizing Christians. For example, it has been claimed that some of the theological terms which Paul uses may have been drawn from gnosticizing use, or at least the fact that they were used by gnosticizing thinkers may have brought them to Paul's attention and encouraged him to use them. Thus H. Schlier has commented on the use of the term 'head' in Colossians: 'Here we see both the ideas and terminology of the Gnostic myth'.²⁶ In the same way, Paul's use of the term 'body' in the captivity epistles is often thought to owe something to Gnosticism.²⁷ indeed, it has been argued that such a passage as [Col. 1:15-20](#) is a [p. 210](#) Christian adaptation of an originally Gnostic text.²⁸ If these views are correct, then the suggestion is that certain words and concepts came into Christianity from alien sources, and, to use a well-known comment by H. Chadwick, were 'disinfected' for Christian use.²⁹

While the correctness of this thesis in detail must rest on careful exegetical consideration of the relevant texts, there need be no objection in principle to the possibility of this kind of development in Christian thought; at best it will have been marginal and has not substantially affected the central content of the faith. There are, of course, more far-reaching claims that Pauline theology (and also Johannine theology) can be shown to have a very broad base in the gnosticizing outlook of certain early Christian groups,³⁰ but in my view such proposals are highly speculative and unconvincing, and we do not need to consider them here.³¹

4. DIALOGUE SITUATIONS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

We come, fourthly, to a consideration of the Gospel of John. Of all the documents which we are considering this one is the best source for dialogue. It is well known that it contains not only extensive monologues by Jesus but also lengthy scenes in which Jesus talks with several interlocutors. The story of the woman of Samaria, for example, is essentially a dialogue in which both participants engage in a comparatively lengthy conversation. Or one might cite [John 9](#) in which a whole variety of actors take part in conversations among themselves and with Jesus. Other scenes may begin as conversations, although they drift into monologues by Jesus, rather like the way in which Paul lets his conversation with Peter in [Gal. 2:11-14](#) slide over into a theological disquisition directed to the readers of the letter. So too Nicodemus quietly disappears from the scene in [Jn. 3](#) as Jesus continues to speak. It is, however, no exaggeration to say that the Gospel of John is characterized by dialogue, and that for the most part the dialogue is between Jesus and outsiders or opponents, rather than between Jesus and his disciples. [P. 211](#)

One may, therefore, examine the Johannine dialogues more or less as they stand, in order to learn from them how Jesus was envisaged as speaking to people. The story of the

²⁶ H. Schlier, *TDNT* III, 681; see 676-8, 680f.

²⁷ E. Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi*, Tübingen, 1933.

²⁸ E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, London, 1964, 149-68.

²⁹ H. Chadwick, 'All things to all men', *NTS* 1, 1954-5, 272.

³⁰ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London, 1952, 1953; W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, Nashville, 1971.

³¹ See R. M. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament*, Oxford, 1968; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, London, 1973.

woman of Samaria has been seen as a paradigm for the Christian evangelist, exemplifying the way in which a person may be brought to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.³² But it is doubtful how far we can trace this exemplary motif, since much of the dialogue is of a kind that the church could not take over. Christians obviously could not speak in the same way as Jesus had spoken in his own person. They could, to be sure, adapt what he had said for use in their own conversations with non-believers.

To many scholars the Johannine dialogues have appeared to be somewhat unreal. It is argued that often the conversation proceeds by way of deliberate ambiguities on the part of Jesus and by inept misunderstandings on the part of the other participants. The dialogues, in other words, are literary rather than reports of the *ipsissima verba* of the participants. We may, therefore, be justified in regarding the scenes in John as dramatic rather than as precise reports of actual conversations. John presents the conversations in the manner of a dramatist who has a certain freedom in how he reports what took place. Just as the speeches in Acts may be Thucydidean, in the sense that Luke has 'kept as closely as possible to the general gist of what was really said', so too the Johannine dialogues may have the same quality. Indeed, this is what we would expect, since it is unlikely that the precise wording of what at the time appeared to be a casual conversation would be exactly remembered and recounted by any of the participants. We cannot, therefore, even on this level accept them as necessarily being protocol reports of what took place.

However, allowance for this dramatic element in the presentation does not mean that we cannot observe them to note the kind of issues which are raised and the answers which are given. It is immediately obvious that, as elsewhere in the NT, Jesus is the one who gives the answers or poses counter-questions to make his hearers think; there is no sense in which he is presented as learning from the dialogues or modifying his ideas in the light of what others say; the picture is entirely consistent with the synoptic one in this respect. The subjects of conversation are varied, but in general they are more christological than in the synoptic Gospels. The person of Jesus, his authority and functions as Saviour are of central importance. The first part of the p. 212 Gospel is taken up with the claims of Jesus, and the problems discussed are those of Jews who are puzzled by him.

From a historical point of view there is much here that can belong to the historical ministry of Jesus. It is not difficult to compile a lengthy list of Johannine sayings which have parallels in the synoptic Gospels and which can be plausibly assigned to a life-setting in the ministry of Jesus. Nevertheless, two further factors justify us in cautiously broadening the scope of John's interest. On the one hand, there is the fact that in this Gospel, much more than in the others, Jesus speaks in the character of the risen Lord. There is a unique merging of the earthly and the risen Jesus. On the other hand, there is also a case that the situation of the disciples and the Jews often reflects the situation of the early church in a Jewish environment. The questions that arise are those faced by the early church.

An attempt to do justice to these factors has been made by J. L. Martyn who posits that John operates on two levels of reality, and that the dialogues can be seen as testifying to the historical events of the life of Jesus and as reflections of debates in which the early church had to engage with the Jews. John has, as it were, written a Gospel which attempts to deal with the problems: 'What would Jesus have said if he had been alive now in our particular situation?'³³ The important point that emerges for our purpose from the theory is that Martyn holds that the early church was in contact with Jews and discussions did

³² W. Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, London, 1945, 65–68.

³³ J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York, 1968.

take place between Christians and Jews; to be sure, such relationships could be broken as the synagogue excommunicated Christians and refused to have dealings with them, but the Gospel testifies to a period in which discussions did take place and the Christians attempted to defend and commend their faith. Such discussions may originally have taken place in a synagogue setting before Christians were excommunicated. Afterwards, they must have taken place in more private settings. But the point is that the evidence of John implies that one setting for evangelism was discussion and debate. We should not ignore the fact that the Gospel can also be cited as evidence for the presentation of the gospel by means of the sermon; it has been argued that features typical of Jewish synagogue sermons can be seen in some of the discourses in John.³⁴ But alongside such sermons there were also discussions.

If this general hypothesis is correct, however much we may want to question some of the details, then it would seem that here in John we p. 213 have some of the strongest NT evidence for the activity of dialogue in the early church. Thus the dialogue form which characterizes John at a surface level reflects the situation of the church which was engaged in dialogue with the Jews, and the Gospel is both a reflection of such discussion and also, one may presume, a guide to Christians faced by the kind of questions which arose in such contexts.

Martyn suggests that one of the themes of such dialogue was the person of Jesus. He identifies a Jewish hope in the coming of a prophet like Moses who would be a messianic figure. Christians had to take a stance over against such Jewish expectations, and they did so by affirming that Jesus was the expected prophet. Yet this presentation was an inadequate one, and the church went on to affirm its belief in Jesus as the Son of man. If this is correct, it would show how the church responded to its environment by taking up the Jewish messianology and developing it positively. If, however, we prefer to believe that the ultimate basis of the teaching in John goes back to Jesus, then we can again say that Jesus responds to the views of his contemporaries and yet goes beyond their inadequate ideas about the Messiah. In both cases it remains true that there is a Christian response to ideas genuinely held in the environment of Jesus and the early Church. Christian theology develops in response to these ideas, and yet is not controlled by them; it makes use of them so far as they can serve its purpose, and especially because they can provide a point of contact with the people it addresses. But there is still no evidence that the thinking of the early church or of Jesus was significantly developed or changed by dialogue.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It emerges that the total amount of NT material that would contribute to a theology of dialogue is small in quantity, although there is more than might be realized at first sight. The lesson is surely that dialogue was not the primary means of presentation of the gospel in the early church. Certainly the church took notice of the ideas of its audiences and made use of them as starting points for its own proclamation of the gospel; one cannot communicate without using ideas that are comprehensible to one's audience. But we have found very little evidence indeed to suggest that the church's own thinking was significantly influenced by dialogue with non-Christians, or indeed that dialogue within the church played a significant part in the development of doctrine. The traditional picture of a church communicating and proclaiming the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints is a well-founded one. There is not the slightest suggestion that P. 214 the church and the

³⁴ P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Leiden, 1981².

world conversed as equal partners in the search for truth. There is more room for the view that the early church progressed in its understanding of the way of God by discussion internally; we may think of the discussions recorded in [Acts 11](#); [15](#) and [Galatians 2](#) which were concerned with the place of Gentiles in the church. It has been suggested that 1 John depicts a church which is not clear where the lines between orthodoxy and heresy are to be drawn, and which is engaged in dialogue to seek the answer, but this picture is not convincing to my mind.³⁵

Positively, we may claim that the church did speak in terms that would be intelligible to its hearers and addressed them in their different situations. We have only to think, for example, of the way in which the presentation of the gospel in Acts to Gentiles differs in form from the presentation to Jews and proselytes who already believed in Yahweh. The church has a duty to understand its hearers and their needs and to frame the presentation of its message accordingly.

It follows that our simple antithesis between proclamation and dialogue at the outset of this essay is over-simple. We must think rather of a model in which the unchanging essence of the gospel is proclaimed in forms adapted to the needs of its hearers.

C. PROCLAMATION THAT TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION
G --- → X ---- → Y

(Here the broken arrow indicates that the 'shape' of the message is varied to make it intelligible and relevant to the hearer.)

Put otherwise, the problem of transmitting the message is a problem of *communication* or translation, in which the message must be put in such a way as to be intelligible and applicable to the receptor. It is not a problem of *discovery* in which the evangelist hopes that the 'receptor' will help him by means of dialogue to discover what the gospel is.

If we conclude that the New Testament knows nothing of a form of dialogue from which the evangelist may learn what the essential content of the gospel is, it still remains true that Christians must practise dialogue with non-Christians. On the one hand, only by means of dialogue can they come to an understanding of the situations of non-Christians and how the gospel answers their needs. On the other hand, as the examples in the Gospels show, Jesus responded to the questions raised by the people whom he met, and above all he [p. 215](#) sought to involve them in a personal encounter with the claims of God on their lives by bringing them into a situation of dialogue in which they were invited to respond to his message.

Michael Green has written:

...in days like our own ... Christians tend to be rather shy about the uniqueness of their religion. 'Dialogue' replaces 'mission' in the vocabulary, and 'conversion' is an unacceptable concept. Recently Professor J. G. Davies has launched an assault on both the word and the idea of conversion. He criticizes the Church for attempting to extend its own numbers by proselytism and individual conversion. The true aim of Christians, he thinks, should be to enter into dialogue with the world, not subject it to monologue; to send men into the world with God's reconciling message in their lives, rather than to try by lip to exert an influence on the social and economic life of their generation. That is to say, Dr. Davies is coming down firmly on one side of the old divide, social gospel or spiritual gospel. But the New Testament firmly rejects the dichotomy. The early preachers did not enter into dialogue with the world, except to understand it and to present their life-changing message in terms comprehensible to their contemporaries. They believed they had got

³⁵ K. Weiss, 'Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im I. Johannesbrief', *ZNW* 58, 1967, 247-255.

good news for their friends, and they knew that good news was embodied in Jesus Christ. Him they proclaimed.³⁶

I suggest that Michael Green's thesis is confirmed by our examination of the evidence.³⁷

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Sin in John's Gospel

David Tuesday Adamo

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Basically an exegetical inquiry, this article deals with the question of sin as bondage, with Satan as its originator. Interacting with many modern scholars, particularly Bultmann, the author attempts to bring out the concept as one of the main subjects of the Gospel of John.

Editor

Despite the various points of view of many scholars, it appears there are only two basic methods of approaches to Johannine theology. Some scholars consider all the writings of John as one unit.¹ Others make an exception of the Gospel, and try to deal with it as Jesus' theology rather than John's.² If a person sets out in his New Testament theology to lay emphasis on Jesus' teaching as the very 'vocal point from which other apostolic teaching

³⁶ E. M. B. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, London, 1970, 147f.

³⁷ T. F. Torrance, 'Questioning in Christ', in *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, 117-127, has suggested that what Jesus did was to raise questions of fundamental importance in the minds of those who heard him and then to force them by his counterquestions to think even more deeply. 'In the last resort it is we who are questioned by the Truth, and it is only as we allow ourselves to be questioned by it that it stands forth before us for our recognition and acknowledgement.' This type of approach operates at a theological level and draws out the fuller significance of the fact that people ask questions of Jesus, and find that in the process they themselves come under questioning. It is not altogether a new approach, for it has often been recognized that in a sense the trial scenes in which Jesus appears as the one on trial are really occasions on which the judges themselves stand under judgment. But where Torrance goes further in theological discussion is when he claims that Jesus identifies himself with people in their questionings: on the cross he calls out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and thus voices on behalf of mankind the most insistent question of all; at the same time it is Jesus who gives the true and final answer to God: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' This cry was answered, and this prayer was ratified by God when he raised from the dead.

On this view the dialogue is not one in which Jesus comes to deeper understanding, but rather one in which the world does so. And yet in a paradoxical fashion Jesus takes mankind's questions upon himself as part of the burden which he has to bear. But, Torrance insists, the questions which Jesus asks are the right questions, questions which are capable of fruitful answers, whereas our human questions are the wrong questions and need to be refined and purified through encounter with Jesus.

¹ C. C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959) p. 302.

² G. B. Stevens, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) p. 175.

emanates and evolves', the method of excepting the Gospel, and dealing with it as coming from Jesus himself, can be justified. On the other hand, if the individuality of Johannine thought, style, terminology and method of conceiving the Christian truth is to be emphasized, the method of seeing the whole as a unit is indeed 'natural, useful and preferable'.

Whichever method one follows, it is crystal clear that the author of the Fourth Gospel aims at two broad themes: *God* and *salvation*. Under these two broad headings come other various connected themes: christology, ecclesiology, sacramentalism, eschatology and others. The specific importance that the Fourth Gospel gives to salvation reveals that the author's major concern is the salvation of the world. For this reason, according to the Fourth Gospel, God sends his only begotten Son ([Jn. 3:16](#)). The logos became flesh ([Jn. 1:14](#)). He gave life, suffered, died and rose again from the dead. John exhorts the world to believe in him in order to have salvation.

It seems to me that the author of the Fourth Gospel knows that any soteriological discussion without a description of sin will be incomplete. It will be incomplete because salvation is free from sin and its consequences—death. The Fourth Gospel therefore gives John's [p. 217](#) various concepts of sin. Various principal words for sin are used: *hamartia* ([Jn. 1:29](#), [8:21](#), [24](#)) which has the meaning of hitting the wrong mark; *poneros* ([Jn. 3:19](#), [17:15](#)) with its original meaning of worthlessness; and *adikia* ([Jn. 7:18](#)) which has the original meaning of 'unrighteousness'.³ The Fourth Gospel sees sin as being in total deep darkness. It is a universal phenomenon. The term 'world' is used to mean sinful men ([Jn. 10](#)). Sin, according to John, is synonymous to being in bondage ([Jn. 8:33](#)). Demoniacal possession is sin ([Jn. 7:20](#)). The source of sin is the devil or Satan.

VARIOUS TERMS USED FOR SIN

A. 'Darkness'

The Fourth Gospel uses the word 'darkness' as a definition of sin. In the Fourth Gospel the word 'darkness' is used about eight times and, 'light' about 23 times. In the prologue of John, there is a personification of darkness and light and the two are in constant opposition to one another. While light is synonymous with the Logos, darkness is synonymous with the sinful world or the men for whom the Logos dies. Light is a symbol of goodness, love and spiritual life, but darkness symbolizes all kinds of evil: hate and moral death.⁴ Darkness is also the characteristic and the condition of the sinful world. Darkness is indeed a symbol of the world's isolation from the source of its life. In several places, this symbol is used in the phrases 'walk in darkness' ([8:12](#); [8:35](#)) and 'abide in darkness' ([12:46](#)). To the author of the Fourth Gospel, the real essence of the Gospel is 'God is light', the fact that in him there is nothing like darkness ([Jn. 1:5](#)). It has a practical purpose of showing us that the moral conduct of men proves whether they are having fellowship with him or not ([Jn. 1:6-7](#)).

The above dualistic concept in the Fourth Gospel is an important one. The nature of this Johannine dualism is worth some special attention. Is the nature of this dualism of light and darkness physical, inherent in the human nature consisting of spirit and matter? If not, is it metaphysical, inherent in the essence of the universe? Or is it ethical? If we agree that light is synonymous with the Logos, and darkness sin, or the sinful world for whom the Logos came, then the [p. 218](#) phrase, 'And the light shines in darkness; and the

³ C. C. Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

⁴ G. B. Stevens, *Johannine Theology* (Chicago: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) p. 128.

darkness comprehended it not' ([Jn. 1:5](#)), is a figurative way of saying that Jesus came to his own and his own rejected him ([Jn. 1:11](#)). This is a deliberate rejection of Jesus. It represents a free personal action on the part of men. The nature of this dualism must therefore be ethical rather than metaphysical or physical.

It is important to point out the problems involved and the divergent opinions among scholars concerning the proper translation of the word *katelaben* in [John 1:5](#).⁵ R. E. Brown has discussed at great length various translations by various scholars.⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, the Latin tradition, Lagrange, Macregor and Braun are examples of scholars and translators who translate it 'to grasp, to comprehend'. Dupont, Bultmann and some others translate it 'to welcome, to receive, accept, appreciate'. Some Greek Fathers, Schlatter, Westcott, Boismard and Brown prefer 'to overtake, overcome'.⁷ Moffatt translates it 'to master', in his attempt to reconcile 'understanding' and 'overcoming' with one another.

I think that the translation 'comprehend, grasp, master', in an intellectual sense is inappropriate. The words *ginosko* and *oida* would have been used instead if an intellectual sense were involved. Moreover, such translations exclude the sense of rejection and the deep struggle between the darkness and the light. Looking at the literal meaning of the word *katelaben*, and the world's attitude toward Christ (they rejected him, they thought that they had overcome him by killing him), it seems to me that 'to overcome', or 'to welcome, receive, accept, appreciate', would be more appropriate than 'comprehend' or 'master'.

That the Johannine dualism of light and darkness is ethical is further supported by the ways it is used in the Synoptic Gospels ([Mt. 4:16](#); [10:27](#); [3:19-27](#)).⁸ The contrast is always employed throughout the [p. 219](#) Gospels. The conflict involved morally good actions against morally evil actions:

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God ([Jn. 3:19-21](#)).

The [1 John 3:4](#) description of sin as 'lawlessness' supports the ethical use of this dualism.

What is the source of this Johannine dualism of light and darkness? Various suggestions have been given by many scholars. Bultmann and Bauer are among the scholars who have suggested that the source of Johannine dualism is Gnosticism. Bultmann went as far as saying that the evangelist was an ex-Gnostic.⁹ In reconstructed Gnosticism, especially in the *Odes of Solomon* and the Mandaean writings, there is a dualism of light and darkness; and this is what led Bultmann and other scholars to this conclusion. Dodd, Braun and E. A. Abbott see the source of this dualism in Hellenistic thinking. E. A.

⁵ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City: Doubleday Comp. 1966).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ It is interesting to see that the Johannine dualism of light and darkness is not foreign to African societies. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, light (*imola*) is a symbol of goodness and truth, while darkness (*okunkun*) represents all evil and all kinds of wickedness. Among the Yoruba there is a cult called *Egbe Okunkun* (Society of darkness). To this group all kind of evil and wickedness are attributed. If there is any suspicion of any evil act in a particular city or tribe, the elders of the city will first of all go to this group to enquire. See G. B. Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 132.

⁹ R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. LIV.

Abbott emphasized that the author of the Fourth Gospel borrowed from schools of Greek philosophical thought, mainly from Platonism or Stoicism.¹⁰ Dodd maintained that one of our most direct sources for the background of Johannine thought is Philo of Alexandria along with Rabbinic Judaism and the *Hermetica*.¹¹ Westcott, Glasson, R. H. Smith and Schlatter are among the prominent scholars who lean toward Palestinian Judaism as the source of Johannine dualism. These Palestinian Judaistic sources include the Old Testament and the ideas of Qumran. G. B. Stevens rejects the modern idea that the origin of the concept of light and darkness in the Johannine writings comes from Gnostic or Hellenistic dualism.¹²

Looking at the parallel in the Fourth Gospel to Gnostic and Hellenistic thought concerning the dualism of light and darkness, I am convinced that one should not dogmatically dismiss the notion that there are some influences on the author of the Fourth Gospel. However, it will probably be more appropriate to conclude that even p.220 though the Fourth Gospel's author might have been aware of Gnostic Hellenistic thought, the principal background for Johannine thought was Palestinian Judaism. This is so because of the overwhelming parallels in the Old Testament writings, the Qumran literature and the Fourth Gospel. Brown has this to say after concluding that both Qumran and the Fourth Gospel have their roots in the Old Testament.

What can be said is that for some features of Johannine thought and vocabulary, the Qumran literature offers a closer parallel than any other contemporary or earlier non-Christian literature, either in Judaism or in the Hellenistic world. And, in fact, for such features Qumran offers a better parallel than even the late post-Johannine Mandaean or Hermetic writings.¹³

'COSMOS'

The Fourth Gospel uses the term 'cosmos' to mean sinful men as opposed to the men of truth, righteousness and Jesus. The word *kosmos* is used 14 times in the Synoptics, 78 times in the Fourth Gospel and 24 times in the Johannine Epistles. It is used three times in the book of Revelation. The total of New Testament usages of the term *kosmos* is 185. Out of these, 105 are Johannine (see Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, p. 508).

I must also point out that there are three shades of meaning in the Johannine use of the term *kosmos*. It is used to mean the whole created universe apart from its moral qualities. This is the physical universe as created by God. This universe is described in the Old Testament as *samayim* and *eretz* (heaven and earth). But it is in the late Hebrew that the word *otam* comes to mean 'age' and 'world' and therefore becomes the equivalent of the Greek word *kosmos*.¹⁴ The Fourth Gospel is therefore indebted to the Old Testament thought in its use of the term *kosmos* to mean the physical world as created by God. Thus we have in the Fourth Gospel the expressions 'before the foundation of the world' ([17:24](#)), 'before the world was' ([17:5](#)), 'he was in the world and the world was made by him' ([1:10](#)).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. LVII.

¹¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953) p. 133.

¹² G. B. Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 132.

¹³ R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. LXII-LXIV.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

The term *kosmos* is also used by the Fourth Gospel to mean the free and intelligent action of all rational and moral beings.¹⁵ It means mankind, or society as a whole. If the Old Testament in [Genesis 1:26](#) p. 221 describes man as the very culmination of God's creation, and [Genesis 2](#) places the 'animate creation' at man's service, I think that the Fourth Gospel is right in using the term 'world' this way. When we read that light came to men or to the world, and that men loved darkness more than light ([3:19](#)), the phrase 'the world' refers to both the evil doers and the righteous ones. It refers to the entire human race as created by God in his own image, both male and female.

The third meaning of the term *kosmos* as used by the Fourth Gospel refers to sinful men and their sins. This meaning of 'the world' is the one that is most prevalent in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles. This is the meaning we are most concerned with here. These sinful men did not only reject Jesus Christ, but opposed and killed him. These men were under the leadership of Satan. Jesus therefore attached a very strong note of hostility to the use of the term *kosmos* in this sense. When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, he said, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he' ([8:23-24](#)). He further told them, 'My kingdom is not of this world' ([18:36](#)). We read in the Fourth Gospel that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it neither sees him nor knows him ([14:17](#); [17:25](#)). The world hates the disciples, Jesus and God ([15:18-19](#)) because of their wickedness. That is the reason for the condemnation of the world. The Spirit is sent to the world to 'convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment' ([16:8-11](#)). Assuming that the Epistles of John are written by the same author as the Fourth Gospel, we find a clarification of the meaning of the term *kosmos* there. The sons of darkness inhabit the world ([1 Jn. 2:9-10](#)). One is advised not to love the world or the things in it. The very love of the world is the hatred of the Father ([1 Jn. 2:15-17](#)). The world is also in the power of the evil one.

One cannot deny the fact that there is no clear-cut distinction in this use of 'the world' by the Fourth Gospel. In other words, the world as 'physical universe', the world as 'the entire human race' and the world as 'the sinful men' are interwoven. [John 1:10](#) is an example. He was in the world (*mankind*), and the world was made through him (*universe*), yet the world (*sinful men*) knew him not.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN

The Johannine description of sin as a power or principle implies that he regards sin as a universal phenomenon. Bultmann sees clearly the Johannine concept of universal sin when he says: [P. 222](#)

The universality of sin, i.e. the determination of men by unreality, is therefore not attributed to a mythical cause but simply shows itself to be a fact—a fact by virtue of the light coming. ... Not only because men (by and large) refuse to believe does the universality of sin show itself to be a fact but equally by the circumstance that there are those who came to faith ('But as many as received him' 1:12KJ; 3:12). For faith, as we have seen, is the admission that one has hitherto languished in blindness, has been enmeshed in the 'works' of the devil and has now come over from death into life.¹⁶

¹⁵ G. B. Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 133.

¹⁶ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. II, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

The emphasis the Fourth Gospel lays on the world's need of salvation shows that all men are sinful. Christ comes to take away the sin of the world ([Jn. 1:29](#)). According to the Fourth Gospel, the Spirit comes 'to convict the world of sin' ([Jn. 16:8-9](#)). 'For God so loves the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' ([Jn. 3:16](#)). The entire world is in moral darkness and death, and God's wrath without redemption ([Jn. 1:5; 2:46; 3:14; 1:16](#)).¹⁷

Is the Fourth Gospel referring to the fall of Adam and Eve? Does it contain any idea that inherited sin was transmitted to the whole world before the darkness came ([Rom. 5:12](#))? Or is it the act of sin that an individual commits?

The doctrine of sin inherited from Adam has been a controversial one since ages. Let us examine some of the different opinions of various people. Athanasius' view of original sin is clear. To him, Adam plunged all human race to corruption, sinfulness and death.¹⁸ The Cappadocians and Antiochenes follow a similar line of thought as Athanasius. They strongly denied any idea that children are free from sin. Pelagius strongly affirmed the position that Adam's sin is not transmitted to children. He regarded newly born children as a completely fresh creation of God and therefore perfect.¹⁹ Tertullian, one of the African theologians of the time, accepted the Pelagian line of thought. He regarded the baptism of children as a very dangerous act.²⁰ Cyprian differed from his master Tertullian. He never delayed the baptism of newly-born children for he thought that children [p. 223](#) contacted sin from their birth. Augustine of Hippo, in old Roman North Africa, derives his idea of inherited sin in the entire human race from [Psalm 51:5](#) and [Romans 5:12](#). He therefore anathematized Pelagius for his teaching against the existence of an inherited sinfulness from the fall. Origen of Alexandria did not hold back the idea that it was through one man that sin entered the world, even Adam, in whom all have sinned.

In the views of modern scholars, there is some rejection of this idea of original sin. Professor John S. Pobee opposes the doctrine vehemently.²¹ He argues that the doctrine of inherited sin is based on a mistranslation of the word *eph o* in [Romans 5:12](#). He maintains that the word *eph o* should be translated 'because' instead of 'through'. The words of the Apocalypse of Baruch put it right, according to Dr. Pobee: 'Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each one of us has been the Adam of his own soul' (LIV:19).

That other New Testament passages unanimously agree with the Johannine universal concept of sin is unquestionable. Jews and Gentiles, religious people and non-religious people, Christians and non-Christians have sinned and have missed the mark (see [Rom. 3:23; 3:9-10](#)).²² For any one to claim sinlessness is to be blind to the truth ([1 Jn. 1-8](#)), for sin is indeed an undeniable fact of existence.

¹⁷ G. B. Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 138.

¹⁸ H. Cunliffe-Jones, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh) p. 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²¹ J. S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), pp. 113-14.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 112. The doctrine of universality of sin is not only taught by the Fourth Gospel and supported by the other biblical passages; African traditional theology supported it too. The Yoruba tribe of Nigeria and Gas of Ghana are exceptional in affirming the universality of sin. The Yoruba people usually say that *enia ko feni re're*. It literally means that no one wants good for another person. This is a very deep expression of human wickedness because of the recognizable inbuilt wicked nature in man. The Gas of Ghana usually say *Ghomo adesa, Ghomo adesa ni*: 'Oh man! The deeds of man'. This is an affirmation of the Ghanaian people

Concerning the idea of original sin, it seems as if Johannine theology of sin implies it, though it is not directly stated. 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it' ([Jn. 1:5](#)). This means that the darkness was already in the world, and all men were already in that darkness before the coming of the light to shine in it. Rudolf Bultmann puts it in a better way when he discusses Johannine theology of universality of sin: 'It is clear: before the light's coming all were blind. "The blind" are such as knew of their blindness or know [p. 224](#) of it now that the light encounters them'. In short: before the light's coming the whole world is in darkness, in death. But by the light's coming the question is put to man whether he chooses to remain in darkness, in death.²³ At the same time, we must remember that the Fourth Gospel clearly recognizes the sin as an individual act and an individual is also responsible for the consequences of his own sin. It is a deliberate act of rejecting Christ who came for the sole purpose of saving the world. The word *hamartia* in [John 9:2-3](#) means an act of sin. The phrase 'to commit sin' ([8:34](#)) refers to an act of sin. This Johannine universal sin fits into the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' own disciples who followed him, who were under Jesus' protection, whom we would have probably regarded as good men, were told to pray for the forgiveness of their sins and deliverance from evil ([Lk. 11:4](#); [Mt. 6:12-15](#)). However, we should not derive any dogmatic doctrine of 'original sin' and universalism of sin from the Gospel of John even though it is implied there.

SATAN AS THE SOURCE OF SIN

The Fourth Gospel connects sin with certain demoniacal agencies. While the Synoptic Gospels mentioned demoniacal possession in relation to physical and mental trouble, the Fourth Gospel mentioned the possession of a demon only in connection with the multitude's charges against Jesus ([7:20](#); [10:20](#); [8:48](#)). After Jesus had opened the eyes of the man born blind, the Pharisees accused him of sinfulness and falsehood. They called him a sinner and a demon. Looking at this, it seems as if the Fourth Gospel is saying that to be demon possessed is to be a sinner, a wicked man and a mad man.²⁴ Jesus is regarded as someone not from God by the Jews because he has a demon.

The Fourth Gospel does not describe a sinner simply as someone who has a demon; the *source* of sin is given. The devil or Satan is the originator. He is the person behind all sinful and wicked acts. Special reference must be made to Judas Iscariot. The wicked act of betraying one's master is regarded as an act of the devil. Jesus, speaking concerning Judas the betrayer, said, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' ([Jn. 6:70](#)). According to the Fourth Gospel, to sin is to be a devil (*diabolos*). There are several passages where human sinfulness is directly ascribed to Satan or the devil. [Jn. 13:2](#) [p. 225](#) says that the act of betraying one's master is put into Judas' heart by the devil. When the Jews opposed Jesus, accused him of falsehood, tried to kill him, and yet claim Abraham and God as their father, Jesus bluntly denounced them. He said:

This is not what Abraham did ... if God were your Father you would love me ... you are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When

that the human being is unreliable by definition, and by nature is expected to cause harm to society and others. This phrase is always uttered whenever any one causes trouble or harm to another person.

²³ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

²⁴ Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 139.

he lies, he speaks according to his own nature for he is a liar and the father of lies ([Jn. 8:40, 42, 44](#)).

This idea of being sons of the devil, which appears only in this passage in the entire Gospel, also appears in the First Epistle. 'He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.... By this it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil' (*ta tekna tou diabolou*).

The passage in [Jn. 8:44](#) demands particular attention. Scholars have various interpretations of this passage. The ideas of the devil being a murderer and a liar from the beginning have not been agreed upon generally. J. Ramon Diaz²⁵ holds that the notion of the devil as a murderer from the beginning is a reference to the murder of Abel by Cain in Genesis. He argues strongly that in the Palestinian Targum of [Genesis 5:3](#) Cain was not mentioned specifically as the son of Abraham, but of Eve: 'Eve had borne Cain who was not like him [Adam]'. Diaz therefore concluded that Jesus was right in saying that Abraham was not the father of the Jews because they belonged to Cain, the son of the devil. Stevens rejects the idea that the statement 'a murderer and liar' is a reference to Cain, because there was no mention of the instigation of Satan in the story of the murder of Abel by Cain. Stevens thinks that [Genesis 3](#) is more probable because Satan is represented under the figure of a serpent.²⁶ The phrase *ap arches* will therefore mean 'from the beginning of the human race'. Reuss interprets *ap arches* to mean that Satan is eternal.²⁷ I personally think that the origin of Satan cannot be determined here.

Brown admits the possibility of an allusion to both Cain and the fall of Adam and Eve. In a brilliant analysis he sees a possibility of referring to a wider spectrum of Old Testament passages. It is attractive that his [p. 226](#) position allows flexibility, and settles many controversies. Below are his exact words:

In emphasizing the essential nature of the devil as a sinner, a murderer, and a liar, Jesus is speaking in the tradition of the O.T. period which traces all sin and death to the devil's work described in the early chapters of Genesis. Wisdom ii.24 says: 'By the envy of the devil death entered the world'; Sir xxv.24 says: 'Sin began with a woman [Eve], and because of her we all die'.... the specific charge of lying is to be connected with Satan's deception of Eve, and the charge of murder to the story of Cain. It is possible that in the latter instance the charge is even wider, and that as in the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach the penalty of death brought by the first sin is meant.²⁸

Bultmann sees this Johannine dualism 'of God' and 'of the devil' as of Gnostic origin. He says: 'The language of his dualism is that of Gnosticism. In particular the division of mankind into two groups—those who are of God or 'of the devil', 'of the truth' or 'of the world', from above or below.²⁹

Brown sees a similar dualism 'at Qumran where the spirit of truth is opposed to the spirit of perversion'.³⁰

²⁵ J. R. Diaz, *Novum Testamentum*, 1963, pp. 79–80.

²⁶ Stevens, *Johannine Theology*, p. 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁸ R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

²⁹ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁰ R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

SIN AS A STATE OF BONDAGE

The Fourth Gospel describes sin as a state of bondage ([Jn. 8:33–36](#)). Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in this conception of sin and promised them freedom because he sees them as being in bondage. Unfortunately, the Pharisees did not understand him. They answered Jesus ignorantly that as children of Abraham they were not in bondage. But Jesus continues, ‘Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’ ([Jn. 8:34](#)). That is, sin by its very nature is slavery. It makes one lose his citizenship, freedom and divine destiny. To be in darkness is to be in bondage. To be in bondage is to be a sinner and a devil. Bondage to sin is bondage to the devil. The truth is the one that brings freedom from the bondage of sin and darkness. The truth (Logos) brings freedom from the world.

Bultmann sees again this Johannine dualism of freedom and bondage as having its source in Gnostic thought. He says: ‘John’s concepts, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, freedom and bondage, life [p. 227](#) and death, come from Gnostic dualism, but they take on their specific Johannine meaning only in their relation to the idea of creation’.³¹

In Johannine theology, it seems as if the Fourth Gospel recognizes one type of sin as the most grievous sin and unforgivable ([Jn. 1:10, 11; 3:16–19](#)). This particular sin is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. This is the type of sin that was called *hamartia pros thanatos* in [1 John 5:16–17](#). The emphasis that the Fourth Gospel gives to this sin, and to the condemnation of those who are guilty of it, is great. It is as if the Fourth Gospel is saying, if you reject Christ you are a liar; you belong to the devil; you are guilty of all sins of which there is no remedy and no other way. Can this sin of rejecting Christ be the same as the one referred to in the Synoptic Gospels ([Mt. 12:31; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 12:10](#)) as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? I find it difficult to conceive of any other sin that is unforgivable apart from the one to which the Fourth Gospel is referring. This is probably the sin to be retained by the disciples in [Jn. 20:23](#) because it has been retained in heaven. There is no other saviour, there is no other sacrifice for such sin ([Heb. 10:26](#)).

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Original Sin: A Fresh Approach

David Parker

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In present theological debates, particularly with the conciliar movement, the nature of sin has been figuring prominently—by way of human predicament, social sin, structural sin, which are closely related to the classical expression of ‘original sin’, thus making the fresh approach to the latter in this article most relevant for our time. Tracing the doctrine to its historical roots in both Reformed and Arminian theologies and considering some current

³¹ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 17.

attempts at precision (Donald G. Bloesch, Millard Erickson, Charles W. Carter), Parker gives us here a very worthwhile and interesting theological work, which argues that the term is not the happiest: 'To discard the terminology would be no loss for it is not biblical in any case'.

Editor

The doctrine of original sin which refers to the 'morally vitiated condition in which we find ourselves at birth as members of a sinful race'¹ is commonly regarded as one of the most difficult parts of Christian theology. With talk of such matters as imputing Adam's sin to the race and our real incorporation in Adam, the doctrine seems to many to be a good example of some of the worst features of scholastic speculation. Some theologians would go further and regard it as 'offensive' or 'a perversion of the Biblical doctrine of sin' and quite 'untenable in its traditional forms'. However, they would also generally concede that it does witness to a vital element in Christian truth, viz., that sin is 'a dominant force, and the fact that all men are connected in the solidarity of sin'.²

This makes it crucial for evangelicals who usually uphold it in a straightforward way because they believe it conserves a basic biblical teaching in a particularly emphatic manner. Thus, in an essay in 'The Fundamentals', Thomas Whitelaw lists a number of key Scriptural passages in support of the doctrine, and then concludes: [p. 229](#)

If these passages do not show that the Bible teaches the doctrine of original, or transmitted and inherited, sin, it is difficult to see in what clearer or more emphatic language the doctrine could have been taught. The truth of the doctrine may be challenged by those who repudiate the authority of Scripture; that it is a doctrine of Scripture can hardly be denied.³

But the importance of the doctrine for evangelicals lies not only in its specifically biblical content, but also because it is integrally related with other doctrines which are of primary theological and practical importance. These include the ideas of grace and salvation, the atonement, the nature of mankind, the function of baptism and evangelism. It also has implications for sanctification and ethics, and moreover, the methodology used to derive the doctrine is dependent upon vital hermeneutical decisions and philosophical presuppositions.

HISTORY

The doctrine is not stated in its traditional form in the Bible. It is generally agreed that Augustine upon the work of some of his Western predecessors) was the first to formulate it in the context of his controversy with Pelagius whose views provoked a turning point in the historical discussion of the subject.⁴ Pelagius taught that individuals are born with the same nature as Adam before the fall and that their subsequent sinning was a

¹ E. L. Mascall, 'Sin', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 20 (1968), 556.

² Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Sin', M. Halverson and A. Cohen (eds.) *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (London: Fontana, 1960) 352; E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952) 103; H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 203.

³ *The Fundamentals* vol. 11 p. 15. His article is 'The Biblical conception of sin' (pp. 7–22). See also vol. 7, pp. 49–63 Charles B. Williams, 'Paul's testimony to the doctrine of sin'. The more recently published *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* and *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* do not contain separate articles on original sin.

⁴ G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 430.

consequence only of their imitation of the sins of Adam. Hence Pelagius did not hold to a doctrine of original sin, largely because he felt that it had no scriptural basis and because he believed that the strongly deterministic emphasis of Augustine's teaching undercut a Christian's sense of moral responsibility.

In reaction, Augustine refined his teaching and spoke of the idea of generic sin by which 'human nature, existing in its totality in Adam, was corrupted in the first act of transgression, and as such is transmitted to his descendants', the instrument of which is 'the sexual appetite'.⁵ Basing his views on Romans 5.12 where the Vulgate p. 230 translation of the Greek *eph ho is in quo* (in whom) which, according to Augustine can only refer to Adam, he wrote,

Nothing remains but to conclude that in the first man all are understood to have sinned, because all were in him when he sinned; whereby sin is brought in with birth and not removed save by the new birth.... It is manifest that in Adam all sin, so to speak, *en masse*. Hence, by that sin we become a corrupt mass—*massa perditionis*.⁶

Although Pelagianism was officially condemned at Carthage in A.D. 418 and at later councils, it reappeared in the modified form of semi-Pelagianism, which taught that the first steps towards salvation could be taken by man although divine grace was needed for salvation. Both views were found during subsequent centuries with semi-Pelagianism often in the ascendancy.

The Augustinian view was revived by the Protestant reformers, with Calvin, for example, defining original sin as

an hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' ([Ga 5:19](#)) ... since we through his [Adam's] transgression have become entangled in the curse, he is said to have made us guilty.⁷

With the development of biblical criticism, the historicity of the Genesis record was discredited, and with it the idea of a literal period of innocence in the Garden followed by a fall through sin. Accordingly, the basis for the traditional doctrine was undermined. Contemporary philosophical and social developments produced a range of views about original sin, most of which tended strongly to contradict the traditional view by appealing to such notions as justice and personal responsibility.

Even amongst contemporary evangelicals there is a wide variety of views. At one end of the scale, there is a popular level statement such as the one from 'The Fundamentals' quoted above and this from Paul Little:

Because Adam's original sin is charged to us, we inherit a corrupt nature ... From Adam we received sin and guilt ... sin is our corrupt nature.⁸ p. 231

Yet, despite these clear affirmations, Donald G. Bloesch has suggested that the evangelical practice of revivalism may be guilty of a *de facto* denial of the doctrine through

⁵ G. P. Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896) 185. Augustine's position is not always entirely clear (Fisher, 186; Berkouwer, 434).

⁶ Fisher, 186. See also p. 190, '*Persona corrumpit naturam; natura corrumpit personam*; so the doctrine was summarily stated.'

⁷ *The Institutes* II i.8.

⁸ Paul Little, *Know What You Believe* (Homebush West: Anzea Books, 1973) 59f. See also Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 174.

too great an optimism about man's freedom to 'decide for salvation on his own' without the aid of divine grace.⁹ There may well be considerable validity to such a claim, but as most will admit, human experience and the Bible point to a serious problem of sin, so the doctrine can hardly be dropped altogether despite its problems. Accordingly, at the other end of the scale there are lengthy treatments, such as those by Orton Wiley, Charles Hodge and G. C. Berkouwer, which develop complex statements on questions of imputation, divine justice and the impact of the doctrine on the scheme of theology. All of this suggests that there is a good deal of truth in Berkouwer's point that it is easier to spot and condemn the error of Pelagius than to provide a satisfactory positive alternative.¹⁰

Such a confusing state of affairs might be tolerable in the case of a peripheral doctrine or for systems of theology that do not lay claim to an absolute authority. But it clearly raises serious questions for evangelical theology which not only affirms the crucial importance of this doctrine in its own right and in relation to other doctrines, but which also bases itself on a belief in the authority, clarity and sufficiency of Scripture for all matters of faith and practice.

ISSUES INVOLVED

Because the form and the terminology of the traditional doctrine are not to be found as such in Scripture, it is desirable to identify some of the major general issues before considering particular doctrinal expressions. To begin with, it must be noted that the term 'original sin' itself is somewhat 'misleading', as E. L. Mascall concedes, since it does not refer primarily to the original sin of Adam, or to the first sin of an individual, but only to the state in which we find ourselves at birth as members of the race.¹¹ Hence, to avoid misunderstanding, the terms 'birth sin', 'innate sin', 'inherited sin' or 'race sin' are sometimes preferred. But as Hendrikus Berkhof points out, it would appear that to the extent to which it is something which is 'original' **P. 232** or innate, it can hardly be described as 'sin', if sin is connected with personal responsibility for rejection of God's will.¹²

There is little dispute over the fact that the human race exists in a vitiated state; while this is certainly 'asserted, assumed, and proved' in Scripture¹³ experience alone is necessary to demonstrate it, and even those who reject the traditional form of the doctrine readily agree that this is the case. This corrupt state involves a bias or proneness to sin which leads inevitably, but not necessarily, to actual sinning in the case of each individual. Therefore the simplest way of thinking of this doctrine is to regard it as the theoretical explanation (of whatever cogency) for the patently obvious phenomenon of the universality of sin amongst humans. Thus E. J. Bicknell states that original sin is 'at bottom the attempt to express the fact that all men fall into sin'.¹⁴ From a biblical point of view, the universality of sin cannot be attributed to some external or physical

⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 113.

¹⁰ Berkouwer, 433, 435.

¹¹ Mascall, 556.

¹² Hendrikus Berkhof, 204.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: James Clarke, 1960) 231.

¹⁴ E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty Nine Articles* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955) 177. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 159. See also John Stacey, *Groundwork of Theology* (London: Epworth, 1977) 257, 'The fall tells us the way things are'.

characteristic (as some beliefs of gnostic or Manichean origin have it) for this would deny the doctrine of the creation of mankind in the divine image by suggesting that mankind is evil or defective *per se*. Rather, the fault must be a moral one, involving personal responsibility whereby each individual willingly consents to the inborn corruption and bias to sin and thereby actually sins.

The traditional formulation of the doctrine of original sin is intended to preserve this idea of personal involvement, for as Berkouwer notes, the church has always agreed that it 'may not function and cannot function as a means of excusing ourselves or hiding behind another man's guilt'.¹⁵ Therefore, even in its simplest form, it differs from the Pelagian view, yet in so doing it becomes little more than an alternative term for the state of depravity.¹⁶ However, because of ethical and metaphysical uncertainties surrounding the notion of an inborn tendency to sin and the links between this tendency and actual sins, it may be doubted if this way of understanding the doctrine has p. 233 even succeeded in satisfactorily protecting the idea of sin. Yet it is not certain that support for a stronger view can be found in Scripture. Apart from a few notoriously controversial texts (*viz.* [Ps. 51](#), [Rom. 5](#), [Eph. 2:3](#)), all passages usually cited speak simply of the universality and inevitability of actual sins as a phenomenon, without offering any further metaphysical or theological explanation.

Nevertheless, formulating the doctrine of original sin as merely an explanation for the universality of sin does not satisfy a number of theologians because it does not seem to provide a strong enough explanation for the occurrence of sins. To overcome this weakness, some theologians go further and speak of original sin and also of original guilt. The latter is defined as our judicial involvement with Adam's sin.¹⁷ This is a stricter view for it refers to the inherited corruption of the human race as sin for which people are culpable and not merely as a vitiated state and a tendency to commit actual sins. This way of looking at original sin certainly succeeds in guarding against Pelagianism. However, to sustain such a view, it is necessary to show how it is feasible to think of mankind as a whole existing in a state which may be called 'sinful' in any biblical sense, and also how individuals can be associated with each other and with Adam in such a way as to be genuinely responsible for Adam's sin.¹⁸ It is in dealing with these issues that more problematic or even speculative elements make their appearance in the doctrinal formulations.

Thus to account for the universality of sin or 'race-sin', reference is made to the concept of generic human nature. Then sin itself is defined as not only an act of rebellion or rejection of God's will, but as a 'disposition or state' which 'lacks conformity to the moral will of God'.¹⁹ Finally, various mechanisms are proposed to account for the link between Adam and mankind in regard to sin. The most common of these are the *physical* by which Adam's descendants are born in a corrupt state by the laws of generation and consequently sin; the *organic* by which Adam p. descendants are regarded as literally

¹⁵ Berkouwer, 435.

¹⁶ See especially Arminians such as H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* vol. II (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1952) 125 and Ernest S. Williams, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2 (Springfield: Gospel Pub. House, 1953) 136.

¹⁷ Hodge 227; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962-3) vol. II, 285.

¹⁸ Buswell, *op. cit.*, II, 286.

¹⁹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907) 549, 577; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1939) 246. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1952) vol. II.

(seminally) within him an undifferentiated or unindividualized state; and the *judicial* by which Adam is regarded as the representative of p. 234 all mankind in a legal sense so that he acts on their behalf in a covenantal (federal) relationship with God and they suffer the consequences of his fall, which includes death, depravity and guilt.

Some systems of theology make the process of imputing or reckoning sin and guilt to an individual (whether his own or Adam's) the entire problematic of original sin.²⁰ But this tends to distort the focus of the discussion by highlighting theories of imputation and ethical questions associated with guilt and the justice of God rather than seeing original sin as a call to the confession of our personal guilt and the grasping of the greater grace of God.²¹ Such a distortion exacerbates the apparently scholastic nature of the doctrine, but at least it does serve to emphasize the racial or generic aspects of the doctrine and so distinguish it clearly from the separate ideas of depravity and actual sin.²² Therefore if the doctrine is to be retained at all, it needs to be stated in terms which deal with these more advanced issues. A review of some major evangelical schools of interpretation now follows.

REFORMED THEOLOGY

Reformed theology with its Augustinian roots is the most rigorous in its approach to original sin. A number of different examples may be found in readily accessible publications. They are similar but by no means identical in every detail.²³

The view that sin is not only an act but also a state which is out of the will of God is usually found as a basic tenet of the conservative tradition of Reformed theology, as is the belief that the Genesis record of Adam is historically reliable. Reformed theologians usually reach similar conclusions about the nature of Adam's sin and its immediate impact upon him. More significantly for the present topic, they also see Adam's sin affecting mankind as the cause or origin of sinfulness and the ground for a judicial sentence of guilt which is levelled against all people.²⁴ However, Reformed theologians differ among themselves over the modes of transmission of sin or the theories of imputation because of differing hermeneutical and theological schemes. p. 235 Thus L. Berkhof, J. O. Buswell and C. Hodge adopt the representative or federal mode, while A. H. Strong follows the organic or Augustinian mode. Strong also effectively restricts the idea of original sin to imputation although he defines his terms carefully assigning imputation to the divine treatment of sin and original sin itself to the abnormal human condition.²⁵ Therefore, although there may be significant differences in theories of imputation between these theologians, the net effect is similar in that they all affirm a concept of race-sin derived from and dependent upon Adam. Furthermore, the theories of imputation are all constructed so that the link with Adam still leaves all people personally responsible for sin even if not individually involved.

²⁰ Strong, 593f.

²¹ Berkouwer, 466.

²² Hodge, 227.

²³ The four popular theologies examined here are those of L. Berkhof, J. O. Buswell, Charles Hodge and A. H. Strong.

²⁴ Hodge, 227.

²⁵ Strong, 594.

In their treatment of the 'abnormal human condition' they are more consistent. The starting point is the universality of sin as an empirical reality, the most obvious aspect of which is the 'conscious violation of law' or actual sin. There is no difficulty in proving this notion by referring to scripture and experience. However, it is a different situation when Reformed theology wishes to progress beyond this level and so distinguish itself from Pelagianism by proving that there is a link with Adam and also that sin is more than personal acts of sin. This is where it is necessary to call upon the notion of a corrupted human nature, which is the basis for a doctrine of original sin.

The clear statements of Scripture are not sufficient here, for as Buswell concedes, 'The imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity is not explicitly developed in the Old Testament'.²⁶ As far as the New Testament is concerned, he can only appeal to Romans chapter 5 for an unequivocal statement on the topic. But even this is far from convincing when it is realized that interpreters from rather different schools of thought find the same passage supportive of their positions also! To demonstrate their case, Reformed theologians typically resort to a process of deduction that proposes a general law or common human nature to account for the universality of actual sins amongst human beings. Thus Strong writes,

Reason seeks an underlying principle which will reduce these multitudinous phenomena to unity.... we are compelled to refer these common moral phenomena to a common moral nature, and to find in it the cause of this universal, spontaneous, and all-controlling opposition to God and his law. The only possible solution of the problem is this, that the common nature of mankind is corrupt ... This unconscious and fundamental p. 236 direction of the will, as the source of actual sin, must itself be sin; and of this sin all mankind are partakers.²⁷

According to Reformed theology, then, it is this common human nature now tainted by corruption which the Bible means when it speaks of 'the flesh' and the 'carnal mind'.

Buswell is one of the few to acknowledge in any detail the philosophical presuppositions involved in this process,²⁸ but even then he does not allow this concession to affect his certainty about the racial dimension of sin. But this is a serious weakness because it is clear that only a doctrinal system presupposing the real existence of universals like 'human nature' could include the notion of 'race sin' or a generic human nature liable to be corrupted by the fall of its founder and head. If belief in the existence of universals is not part of one's theological or philosophical system, then the fact that all people do in fact sin may be accepted as an undoubted empirical and historical fact but one which requires no further explanation as to its cause or origin. In this case, there can be no doctrine of original sin and guilt except in the most elementary manner. The latter is a more popular philosophical position in the contemporary world, at least at the popular level.

The Augustinian or realist theory of imputation seems best suited to the idea of a corrupted human nature, but it is notable that only Strong adopts it. The others reject this theory because it seems to be *too* materialistic, thus tending to obscure the personal or moral element in original sin. But it is impossible to avoid such a position if the idea of a generic human nature is to be held. It is this factor in Augustine's original presentation that ensured the church would retain infant baptism as the sacramental remedy for

²⁶ Buswell, 286.

²⁷ Strong, 580.

²⁸ Buswell, 300. See also Fisher, 185, on Augustine.

original sin. It also led in time to the idea of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a safeguard for the Virgin Birth in order to prevent Christ and Mary from being affected by original sin. Similarly, in Reformed theology, the realist theory accounts for the belief that original sin is still present in the regenerate believer although not imputed.²⁹ This has a practical effect by its impact on the doctrine of sanctification by ruling out the possibility of entire sanctification until original sin is removed at the glorification of the believer at death. The notion of a common human nature which is tainted or corrupted by the fall also leads Reformed p. 237 theology to assert a strict doctrine of original guilt, whereby Adam's descendants are judicially involved with his sin. They are therefore justly liable to its consequences in terms of both blameworthiness (*reatus culpae*) and liability to punishment (*reatus poenae*). But according to the Reformed doctrine of sin, this corruption or depravity is itself sinful because it is a state which is contrary to God's will and wholly inclined to evil. As Hodge puts it, original sin or the corruption of nature derived from Adam is 'truly and properly of the nature of sin, involving both guilt and pollution.'³⁰ However, it must be observed that this is a special interpretation of the idea of sin, as Buswell implies when he refers to 'sin, *in the form of corruption*' as dwelling in our nature.³¹

This idea of original guilt is closely associated with the doctrine of total depravity which leaves mankind without hope of salvation apart from divine election. In its purest form, this is a harsh doctrine. Strong relieves it somewhat by stating that 'actual sin, in which the personal agent reaffirms the underlying determination of his will, is more guilty than original sin alone' and that 'no human being is finally condemned solely on account of original sin; but that all who, like infants, do not commit personal transgressions, are saved through the application of Christ's atonement'.³² But even this does not seriously negate the idea of original sin, for Strong writes:

There is a race-sin, therefore as well as a personal sin; and that race-sin was committed by the first father of the race, when he comprised the whole race in himself. All mankind since that time have been born in the state into which he fell—a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation.³³

According to the Reformed theologians, nothing less than this can account for facts of life and the teaching of Scripture; but Arminian theology has a different view.

ARMINIAN THEOLOGY

Some contemporary theologies in the broader Arminian tradition reject the traditional doctrine of original sin as having no explicit biblical warrant and as creating insoluble

²⁹ Hodge, 230; Griffith Thomas, 171f.

³⁰ Hodge, 230.

³¹ Buswell, 286.

³² Strong, 596.

³³ Strong, 596.

problems over the idea of **P. 238** original guilt.³⁴ But there are other, more conservative examples which assert the doctrine in no uncertain terms. Thus W. T. Purkiser writes,

That there is a profound and permanent perversity in the heart of man is the fundamental, uncompromising assertion of Christianity about human nature. To this perversity Christian theology has given the name 'original sin'. The doctrine of original sin is not a mere appendage to Christian thought, but is one of the foundation stones of the building. For only in the light of man's enslavement to sin does the plan of redemption become intelligible. If man can solve his problems without divine assistance, then the incarnation of God in Christ is largely meaningless.³⁵

Classical versions of Arminian theology (especially of the Wesleyan tradition), therefore, like Reformed theology, accept the reliability of the Genesis account and see sin as rebellion against God, the consequences of which include the penalty of death. Furthermore, Arminian theology accepts a moderate expression of the natural and federal headship of Adam so that all mankind become involved in the results of his sin. Thus Arminian theology, in contrast with Pelagianism, does support a doctrine of original sin which it has defined as 'the transmission of hereditary guilt and depravity to all the natural progeny of the first sinning pair'.³⁶ It is in discussion of these two elements of original sin that the distinctive elements of the Arminian position begin to emerge.

First of all, depravity, which is defined as the morally tainted nature inherited from Adam,³⁷ is not an evil infused by God as a judgment upon man but the result of the loss by Adam of original righteousness or God's life-giving presence and power with the consequent state of spiritual death or depravity. Adam as head of the race passed on to his posterity that state or condition. That is to say, it is a case of 'depravation' arising from 'deprivation'.³⁸ Arminianism affirms that mankind's morally depraved condition is the consistent teaching of Scripture and is assumed by it throughout. Such a view of depravity calls for a particular view of inherited or original guilt. Arminian **p. 239** theology places great emphasis upon the distinction between guilt as personal blameworthiness and guilt as liability to penalty.³⁹ Both are true for actual sin and in the case of Adam's sin, but only the liability to penalty (*reatus poenae*) applies to race-sin, since it is argued that on any moral principle, the posterity of Adam could not be personally responsible for his sin.

For biblical support, Field and Wiley both note the importance of a particular interpretation of the phrase, 'whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam' in [Romans 5:14](#).⁴⁰ Here a distinction is made between Adam's sin and that of his posterity in that he sinned personally (incurring both kinds of guilt) but his posterity did not sin personally. Yet by empirical evidence, his posterity suffered death which is stated to be the penal consequence of Adam's sin in his role as representative head of the race. This

³⁴ E.g., John Stacey, *Groundwork of Theology* (London: Epworth, 1977); H. Maldwyn Hughes, *Christian Foundations* (London: Epworth, 1927); Gordon S. Dicker, *Faith with Understanding* (Sydney: Unichurch Pub., 1981).

³⁵ W. T. Purkiser (ed.), *Exploring our Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1960) 237.

³⁶ Benjamin Field, *The Student's Handbook of Christian Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883) 122, quoting Hannah.

³⁷ This is similar to Reformed theology. Wiley, II, 119.

³⁸ Wiley, II, 123; Field, 126.

³⁹ I. e. *reatus culpae* and *reatus poenae*. Wiley, II, 126; Field 124.

⁴⁰ Field, 125; Wiley, II, 97.

means that the posterity were dealt with as sinners because of their connection with Adam and not because of personal sins. Such an arrangement is defended as being in harmony with God's justice for it is not unnatural for one to suffer the results of another's actions, although in such a case one is not blamed for them. Thus all mankind is born in a state of separation from God as a result of Adam's fall and therefore under the curse of the law and in need of restoration through Christ, as [Galatians 3:14](#) and [Ephesians 2:3](#) make plain. Accordingly, 'hereditary depravity (or original sin), then, is not only the law of natural hereditary, but that law operating under the penal consequences of Adam's sin'.⁴¹ So, for Arminianism (in contrast to Reformed theology) 'original sin [is] a depravity that results from deprivation ... a loss of original righteousness and involves guilt only in the sense of culpable liability to punishment'.⁴²

To understand fully this apparently weaker view of Original Guilt, it is necessary to see the link with other theological themes, especially the fine balance in [Romans 5](#) between Adam and the Fall on the one hand and Christ and righteousness on the other. This leads on to what Wiley calls the 'distinctive doctrine' of Arminianism, *viz.* the free gift of righteousness, or the unconditional diffusion of grace to all men, as a first benefit of the universal atonement made by Jesus Christ.⁴³ It p. 240 is by this gift of prevenient grace 'that the condemnation that rested on the race through Adam's sin is removed' and that accordingly 'no child of Adam is condemned eternally, either from the original offence, or its consequences' or for the 'depravity of his own nature'.⁴⁴ So there is no need for a concept of election and reprobation as in Calvinism, or for the weaker view of Pelagianism which denies the penal consequences of Adam's sin altogether. There is also no role for sacramental infant baptism.

The Arminian view of Christ's atonement and prevenient grace which mitigates the 'culpability of original sin'⁴⁵ is a much neater and stronger solution than others that have been offered, yet one that does not deny the 'exceeding sinfulness of sin'. It is also more positive because it leads on to the assurance of being able to deal with depravity in the life of the believer by the power of the gospel. Accordingly, Arminian theology teaches the 'eradication' or purification of inherited corruption by the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ Traditional Arminianism may offer a neater solution, but whether it has done so by merely re-defining terms is another matter. Some of its own advocates have their reservations, especially in regard to the meaning of the biblical texts and the ethical problems of the imputation of Adam's guilt.⁴⁷ This continuing difference illustrates the notorious 'difficulty' of this doctrine, at least in its classical formulations. It is not surprising then

⁴¹ Wiley, II, 125.

⁴² Charles W. Carter (ed.), *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) vol. 1, 263.

⁴³ Wiley, II, 130.

⁴⁴ Wiley, II, 135.

⁴⁵ Wiley, II, 136.

⁴⁶ *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 268.

⁴⁷ *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 268; Richard S. Taylor, *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 19) 378.

that some contemporary theologians have attempted to find a more radical path to resolving it.⁴⁸

CONTEMPORARY SOLUTIONS

Donald Bloesch, who has attempted to ‘resolve past conflicts’ by use of a radical biblical approach in his *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*,⁴⁹ recognizes the vital role of hermeneutics in dealing with P. 241 the biblical material. He agrees with the view of Niebuhr that the Genesis record must be taken seriously if not literally. This can be done easily, he argues, if it is regarded as ‘symbolic or mythopoetic rather than univocal’.⁵⁰ Using this principle, he concludes there was a real fall, but not necessarily an historical one, by which is evidently meant not one that can be confined to our present historical continuum but one that is pre-historical and universal.⁵¹ The first man and the first all are not only historical but also universal and representative. Thus, by taking a wider view of Scripture, Bloesch is able to argue for a racial concept of sin. However, he is obliged to concede that no rational explanation can be offered for the relationship between primal sin and individual sin—it is, as Brunner noted, ‘*sui generis*’. Hence Bloesch can only conclude, ‘original sin is not a biological taint but a spiritual contagion which is nevertheless, *in some inexplicable way*, passed on through biological generation’, and accordingly, it is ‘not a natural necessity but a historical inevitability’.⁵² Yet despite this, Bloesch, in common with others, effectively denies a concept of Original Guilt (*reatus culpae*) when he states that original sin ‘does not become rooted in man until he assents to it and allows it to dominate his whole being’.⁵³

A similar position is taken in one of the most recently published evangelical statements—*Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson. After having reviewed the various issues and options, Erickson finds the starting point for his distinctive position by recognizing that a loose interpretation of the balance between Adam and Christ found in Romans chapter 5 may permit belief in an ‘unconscious faith’ on the part of unbelievers. However, because such a concept is not sanctioned anywhere else in Scripture, he concludes that this must be a false interpretation of the passage. But this line of thinking also rules out the possibility of the related idea of unconscious sin on the part of mankind. There is some basis for accepting that ‘we all were involved in Adam’s sin and thus receive both the corrupted nature that was his after the fall, and the guilt and condemnation that attach to his sin’. However, when it comes to the question of inherited guilt, p. 242 the situation is different because there can be no ‘unconscious faith’. Therefore, ‘there must

⁴⁸ Not all contemporary theologians adopt a radical approach. See, e.g., Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 6 (Waco Word, 1983) 248 who takes a traditional Augustinian position. The works of G. C. Berkouwer and Hendrikus Berkhof could also be consulted.

⁴⁹ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (2 vols) (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) Vol. 1, ch 5, ‘Total Depravity’.

⁵⁰ Bloesch, 104. This is a view which Henry condemns when he finds it expressed by Dale Moody. (Henry, 248).

⁵¹ Bloesch, 106f.

⁵² Bloesch, 106, 107 (emphasis added). Compare Bloesch’s wording in his article in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (p. 1013) where he says that this ‘spiritual infection’ is ‘in some mysterious way transmitted through reproduction’.

⁵³ Bloesch, 107.

be some conscious and voluntary decision on our part. Until this is the case, there is only a conditional imputation of guilt'.⁵⁴ This 'conditional imputation' becomes 'actual', Erickson concludes, whenever we accept or approve of our corrupt nature. Thus Erickson overcomes the problem by retaining the notion of depravity but by modifying the idea of Original Guilt to the point where the idea of 'guilt' becomes virtually meaningless.⁵⁵

While both these theologians who work from a broadly Reformed perspective are grappling seriously with the central issues in an attempt to overcome the traditional difficulties, it cannot be said that they arrive at a fully persuasive solution.⁵⁶

Similarly, another recently published systematic theology, this time from the Wesleyan perspective,⁵⁷ can only concede the complexity of the issue and the lack of consistency amongst Arminians. In the end, its author, Charles W. Carter, rejects the Augustinian/Calvinist position for two major reasons. The first on account of the ethical problem that the idea of original guilt contradicts the idea of guilt as 'a culpable act traceable to the unethical conduct of a morally responsible person'. The second reason for rejection is because of 'the Augustinian tendency to identify sin with physical being [which] leads to a materialistic understanding that attributes a sort of tangibility or "thingness" to it'.⁵⁸ Such a tendency subtly transforms the concept of sin. According to Carter, Arminianism can be defended because it avoids this problem by maintaining the view that biblical terms such as 'flesh' and 'the old man' should not be interpreted literally but as 'symbols or metaphors to communicate nontangible realities'. Consequently sin is not 'an independent metaphysical entity' but as 'moral reality that exists only in the distorted relationships between God and fallen humanity'.⁵⁹ In this way, the dynamic concept of sin and grace is maintained which tends strongly to preserve the sense of personal responsibility on the part of man. Although such a position seems quite p. 243 distinct from Augustinianism with its strong reifying process, Carter believes that a better understanding of the structure of Arminian and Calvinist theological systems, especially in regard to the definition of sin, would reduce the differences in line with Wesley's opinion that there was 'but a hair's breadth' between them.⁶⁰

CONCLUSIONS

But the substantial differences of opinion which do remain indicate that stronger measures yet are necessary to overcome the difficulties in formulating this doctrine. As a first step in achieving this, the structure of the traditional evangelical approach needs to be clearly recognized. The common aim is to produce a systematic statement of the biblical teaching about the universality of sin and to correlate this with the data of human

⁵⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 639.

⁵⁵ A. H. Strong (p. 596) speaks of a similar qualification.

⁵⁶ The authors themselves show a certain tentativeness about their own positions. E.g. Erickson (639) refers to 'the current form of my understanding ...'

⁵⁷ Charles W. Carter (ed.), *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic and Practical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), ch. 7, 'Harmartiology'. The editor is the author of this chapter. This work is useful as a sample of Wesleyan thinking, but it is neither full nor conclusive and suffers from a lack of clarity of aims and methods.

⁵⁸ *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 261, 267.

⁵⁹ *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 261.

⁶⁰ *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 272.

experience and with other areas of theology. The fact of the universality of sin is clearly found in Scripture, but there is much less support for specific teaching about a concept of race-sin, its nature or cause, and its link with Adam's sin, assuming that the history of the Genesis record is to be accepted, at least in a general sense.

But the desire to provide an explanation for the universality of sin and thus to provide a substantial basis for soteriology leads many theologians to notions of a generic human nature corrupted by the fall of Adam and to theories of imputation to account for the transmission of this corruption and guilt. But it is only possible to hold to such ideas on the basis of particular philosophic presuppositions which do not necessarily find unambiguous support in Scripture. Consequently, from a biblical point of view, it is possible to adopt other philosophical principles which do not postulate such explanations, but are content simply to speak of the way all mankind does sin and is therefore in need of salvation. The biblical data do not seem to require anything more than this if they are taken quite naturally and within their proper context. Yet at the same time, they exclude the Pelagian error which proposes the avoidability of sin and hence the possibility of salvation apart from grace. Biblical passages referring to Adam are interpreted as either symbolical statements of the existential condition of man, or more conservatively, as showing how man has sinned ever since the beginning. [p. 244](#)

Therefore it can be concluded that one major problem with the traditional formulation of the doctrine of original sin is the desire to go beyond Scripture by seeking rational explanations for the causes and mechanisms of sin. One result of this is to distort the biblical witness by placing heavy dependence on extra-biblical philosophical doctrines, rather than putting the emphasis where the Bible does, *viz.* upon moral relationships which speak of the 'confession of our sin' or 'the guilt character of all sin'.⁶¹ Once this is recognized, the major exegetical difficulties fall away⁶² leaving the passages dealing with sin to be interpreted in their original pastoral context. There is therefore no inclination to add anything to the doctrine of sin to sharpen its impact, and no need to hedge soteriology around with any protective doctrinal affirmations. This means that there is no need for elaborate theories of imputation and furthermore, there is no pressure to develop a doctrine of sacramental infant baptism or to move in the direction of the Catholic Marian dogmas of the immaculate conception or of the bodily assumption. It also frees up the idea of the Virgin Birth and enables it to make a more dynamic contribution to Christology. As well as dealing with the racial aspects of man's existence, this doctrine also deals with the 'morality vitiated condition in which we find ourselves at birth'.⁶³ The inclusion of the term 'sin' in the description of this condition is another major problem facing the doctrine. This is because the word 'sin' in theology is usually associated with a strong sense of personal responsibility. But it is used in a special sense in the doctrine of original sin to refer to our moral condition at birth. It is ethically difficult to assign responsibility for a state or condition of existence and one over which the individual has no personal control. Yet biblical teaching and human experience will not allow the simple Pelagian solution of denying that mankind exists in a morally vitiated condition.

The use of the term 'depravity' as an equivalent or alternative to original sin as found in some Arminian theology offers a promising lead for resolving the difficulty. The terms 'depravity' or 'innate moral corruption' may be used to refer to the fact that, due to the absence of God's gracious presence and power resulting from the fall, man exists in a

⁶¹ Berkouwer, 466ff.; Henrikus Berkhof, 192.

⁶² See, e.g., Strong, 553 (d), (e) where there is an over-exegesis in regard to the personification of sin.

⁶³ Mascal, 556.

morally deprived condition. He is therefore unable to please [p. 245](#) God or to prevent himself from falling into sin. By virtue of this condition, he is therefore under the displeasure of God and 'by nature a child of wrath' ([Eph. 2:3](#)). To refer to this as 'sin' (as the traditional formulations do) may be correct if the definition of sin is broadened to include the idea of 'moral corruption', but it is certainly misleading, and could well be avoided by the use of other terminology which differentiates between sin and the morally vitiated state of mankind.

To speak of 'innate moral corruption' instead of 'birth sin' not only resolves the ethical problem relating to 'sin' and the idea of 'inherited guilt', but also has a clarifying effect on the corresponding view of salvation. The new terminology stresses inability, lostness and separation from God and his life-giving presence. The motifs of salvation which correspond to these are reconciliation, redemption and liberation. These are prominent in biblical teaching and also common enough in evangelistic practice. However, they are not always associated with theological statements relating to man's need of salvation arising out of original sin, but are instead often overshadowed by the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. This exclusive dependence upon only one of the biblical models of the atonement (which is distinctive of the entire system of evangelical soteriology) can be corrected by the new approach to the doctrine of original sin. The universality of Sin and its penal consequences requires penal substitution while 'innate moral corruption' calls for reconciliation, redemption and liberation.

Thus it can be concluded that the biblical data as they stand speak of the universality of sin and mankind's needy moral condition, both of which need the intervention of divine grace for salvation. The term 'original sin', as Griffith Thomas suggests, is 'not the most accurate phrase to employ'.⁶⁴ Happily, it may be set on one side without any fear of either compromising biblical teaching about sin or undermining soteriology. To make the change would be in accord with a more satisfactory methodology for evangelical theology and would result in a simpler and therefore stronger doctrine by eliminating the causes of most speculation, misunderstanding and controversy. To discard the terminology would be no loss for it is not biblical in any case, and what we have to do is maintain the 'anti-Pelagian motif', not its 'formulation in a doctrine of Original Sin' as such.⁶⁵

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Evangelicals and the Social Sciences

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen

Printed with permission from Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith, Vol. 40 No. 4, December, 1988

⁶⁴ Griffith Thomas, 158.

⁶⁵ Brunner, 103.

The author expertly traces the encounter of the social sciences with evangelical thought during the last two hundred years. In conclusion, she pleads with evangelicals to take seriously the 'value-critical' approach to the social sciences. In her opinion, 'time is ripe for evangelical social scientists both to stop accepting false guilt for having a world view that "weakens" their scientific objectivity, and to give up the rigid compartmentalization of their religious from their scientific activities'.

Editor

As a critical overview of the relationship of evangelicals to the social sciences, this paper focuses mainly on positions reflected in two interdisciplinary journals which began thirty to forty years ago and continue to this day. These are: *The Christian Scholars Review*, which began in 1955 as *The Gordon Review* and changed to its present name in 1970, and *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* which recently changed its name to *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. I will, however, begin with some remarks about the eighty years or so prior to the beginning of these publications.¹ In addition, because North American thought has been influenced not a little by British evangelicalism in the last four decades, I will give credit to the latter tradition where due.

After a consideration of the pre-1947 period, the paper will develop three observations concerning the ambiguous relationship of evangelicalism to the social sciences. The first concerns the relationship of the social sciences (both Christian and secular) to the *natural* sciences, and the consequences which followed the majority decision to organize Anglo-American social science around a natural sciences paradigmatic ideal. Secondly, I will trace the debate, which has gained momentum in the last two decades, between Christians who p.247 believe that the social sciences should be 'hermeneutic' or 'interpretive' disciplines (instead of, or in addition to, being 'scientific'), and those who believe just as sincerely that good, God-honouring social science can be done only if, like the natural sciences, it limits its attention to causal, deterministic relationships which are empirically testable. Finally, I suggest that the social sciences *should* and will become more hermeneutic in their approach (without jettisoning all that they have acquired of value from the natural sciences paradigm) and that evangelical Christians can both lead and profit from such developments.²

EVANGELICALISM AND THE 19TH CENTURY RISE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The climate in which the social sciences emerged was both similar to and different from that which prevailed when the natural sciences began to be formalized three centuries earlier. Many historians see the natural sciences as resulting in part from the anti-scholastic, anti-authoritarian mindset of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Many also see in the emergence of natural science the beginnings of secularization in European society. But others are willing to grant that the Reformational mindset, which saw Earth

¹ For a more detailed treatment of the 19th century, see George Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), Part I, and also his *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

² A more detailed development of these points as regards the case of psychology is in Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, 'Psychology's Two Cultures: A Christian Analysis', *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (June 1988), pp. 406–24. A detailed philosophical analysis can be found in C. Stephen Evans, *Psychology as a Human Science: Prospects for a Christian Approach* (Grand Rapids: Baker, in preparation). A 40-year overview of evangelical scholarship in general can be found in George Marsden's 'The State of Evangelical Christian Scholarship', *Reformed Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 9 (Sept. 1987), pp. 12–16 (reprinted in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 157–159).

as the orderly creation of a faithful God—a creation human beings were mandated to explore with respect and gratitude—could be a catalyst to the development of natural science without always sliding into unbelief.

The social sciences, by contrast, emerged as separate disciplines only in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this case there was also a revolt against authority, but now of a much more profound nature. Prior to about 1870, there seemed to be a kind of Christian ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ among academics to the effect that the naturalism of the natural sciences would go only so far. It was considered quite compatible with good creation theology to see God’s providential hand in the mechanics of day-to-day physical and biological laws. But two areas of inquiry were implicitly ‘off-limits’ to naturalistic explanation—namely, the origins of life and the individual and social behaviour of human beings. In American colleges (including such now-secularized institutions as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale) these topics were exegeted not by natural or social scientists (the latter did not have any institutional existence as yet) but by a ‘moral’ or ‘moral philosopher’, frequently the college president, who was as often as not also a clergyman. The standard, year-long moral philosophy course for seniors was, in historian Mark Noll’s words,

a course with vast horizons, including everything having to do with human beings and their social relationships (the subjects studied under this rubric would later become the separate disciplines of psychology, philosophy, religion, political science, sociology, anthropology, economics and jurisprudence). The course almost always included an investigation of epistemology in general and the epistemological foundations of Christianity in particular.... It represented an effort to perceive all bits of knowledge as parts of a comprehensive whole, and to do so within a Christian framework. It was, in modern jargon, a course seeking to integrate faith and learning. [It] provided college seniors with a respectable defence of God’s existence and the moral law. It offered comprehensive exhortations to live morally in society, to support religion, to put public good above selfish interests, and to work for the coming of God’s kingdom in America.³

In its intention to combat atheistic scepticism, promote democratic ideals and encourage social morality, moral philosophy represented a laudable programme. But the methods for achieving its ends were ill-equipped to withstand the rise of evolutionary biology, old-earth geology, hypothetico-inductive experimentalism, and the so-called value-neutral, naturalistically inclined social sciences. Noll points out that its epistemology was reductionistic: it assumed that intuition was an adequate basis for the defence of morality, that science was the supreme route to truth (its methods equally applicable to Scripture and the natural world), and that logical argument alone could prove the existence of God. Moreover, its ethics were individualistic: moral philosophers were unable to see that sin could be a property of institutions as well as of individuals, a myopia which probably helped lead to their being upstaged by the new, secular discipline of sociology.

The moral philosophers were also committed to Baconian inductivism—to the notion that unchanging ‘facts’ (whether in nature or Scripture) could be perceived by unbiased minds and organized without controversy into generalizable propositions or laws. Thus, they were reluctant to concede that the construction of scientific laws might require disciplined imagination and hypothetical thought, or that such laws (not to mention their own handling of Scripture) might be open to revision. As a result, there was a too-simplistic triumphalism about evangelical moral philosophy: its adherents assumed

³ Mark A. Noll, ‘Christian Thinking and the Rise of the American University’, *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (1979), pp. 3–16, (quotation from p. 6).

a priori that the enterprise of science would always confirm their particular doctrines about God, creation, and human beings.

In light of all this, most evangelicals were ill-prepared to weather the onslaughts of biological and social Darwinism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Their response was to retreat from contact with mainstream higher education almost completely after the demoralizing outcome of the Scopes trial in 1925. Instead, they concentrated on setting up Bible colleges, or, at the few remaining evangelical liberal arts colleges, in clinging to the nineteenth-century moral-philosophical approach to learning, thereby creating a wider and wider chasm between themselves and mainstream natural and social science. This ‘fortress mentality’ continued unabated until what historian George Marsden sees as the watershed year of 1947, when Carl Henry published his famous critique, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.⁵ That was also the year of the founding of Fuller Seminary; consequently, the period of serious American evangelical dialogue with the social sciences is no longer than those intervening forty years.

THE BEGINNINGS OF RAPPROCHEMENT

In January 1949, the first mimeographed issue of *The American Scientific Affiliation Bulletin* (soon to become *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*) was produced. The majority in its seven-year-old parent organization were natural scientists, dedicated to the task of overcoming the schizophrenia many had lived with as culturally defensive fundamentalists on the one hand, and trained **P. 250** scientists on the other.⁶ But from its inception, the journal welcomed contributions of a social-scientific nature as well, although the majority of such papers appearing in early issues were in fact written by theologians, philosophers, and pastoral counsellors—something which may indicate both a residual attachment to the ‘moral philosophical’ approach among evangelicals, as well as the paucity of evangelical scholars actually trained in the social sciences.

Consequently, the early articles in the *J.A.S.A.* have a decidedly ‘in-house’ flavour, reflecting more concern to make science relevant to the contemporary pastoral and theological agenda than to show the relevance—or even the compatibility—of a Christian world view to the conduct of science. In light of the stand-off between fundamentalist and mainstream scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century, this was perhaps the most that could be expected—or risked without being branded heretical. Thus, the first five or six volumes of the *J.A.S.A.* included articles with titles like: ‘Science and Salvation’, ‘Geriatrics and the Book of Ecclesiastes’, ‘Probability in Biblical Prophecy’, ‘The Biblical Psychology of Conviction’, ‘Reflections on Sociology and Evangelism’, and ‘Genetic Evidence as to the Colour of Adam and Eve’.

But the year 1954 saw another watershed publication, a book that was considered so significant that the *J.A.S.A.* published no fewer than three reviews of it in the December

⁴ For an account of little-known exceptions in both Britain and America, see David N. Livingstone *Darwin’s Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987).

⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947). See also Marsden, ‘The State of Evangelical Christian Scholarship’.

⁶ Marsden points out that, in 1947, the transdenominational movement was known either as fundamentalism or evangelicalism (usually the former), but that it was fundamentalist in character. The theological distinctions between the two have developed since then.

1955 issue, by an anthropologist, a theologian, and a biologist.⁷ Twenty-five years later, in 1979, a special *Festschrift* issue of the journal honoured the book's author and commemorated its publication, at which time the volume itself was still selling briskly through the Affiliation's book service. The book in question was philosopher/theologian Bernard Ramm's *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, which ranged over the fields of astronomy, geology, biology, physical anthropology, and the philosophy of science.⁸ There is little doubt that, for better or worse, its conclusions have shaped faith/science dialogue within an entire generation of evangelicals in the natural and social sciences. p. 251

The cover commentary on Ramm's book is rather misleading, for it reads:

Acutely aware of the imperative necessity for a harmony of science with Scripture, [the author] calls for the return of evangelicalism to the tradition of late nineteenth-century conservative scholars, who learned the facts of science and Scripture with patience, care and integrity, and showed with great competence that these two can never conflict. [The result is] a scholarly, comprehensive and masterly contribution to the complex problem of finding a true harmony between modern science and Holy Scripture.

Ramm's approach, however, was anything but a return to the nineteenth-century moral-philosophical approach, although his strong creation theology certainly convinced him that there need be no conflict between 'God's word in Scripture' and 'God's work in nature'. Both, he affirmed in the tradition of Reformed theology, are the ongoing products of God's purpose and sovereignty; therefore, evangelicals need not be defensive about the results of natural science when carefully done and cautiously theorized without accompanying metaphysical pronouncements. In other words, science short of reductionistic *scientism* was a legitimate aspect of the human mandate to subdue the earth.

But Ramm differed from the moral philosophers in several crucial respects. First of all, he affirmed a division of labour between science and theology: science was to explore the structure and functioning of the universe, while theology was to explain its ultimate meaning and purpose in light of revealed truth. Secondly, the Bible was not to be treated as a scientific textbook (as many fundamentalists had tried to do in wake of the moral-philosophical tradition). It was to be understood as God's progressive message embodied in the phenomenal language of the cultures to which it was revealed, and not as a coded storehouse of scientific theory which could be deciphered by means of a certain exegetical calculus available to a privileged few. Finally, because science and Scripture were two different, yet complementary, ways of understanding the universe, each was to be given sovereignty to operate in its own sphere. Theologians should not presume to be scientists, and scientists *qua* scientists should not dabble in metaphysics. If these rules were observed, Ramm thought, the way would be open for a mutually respectful dialogue between evangelicals and the sciences.⁹ p. 252

It should be pointed out that neither Ramm's integrative approach nor his hermeneutics were strictly new, as he himself was careful to acknowledge. The fact/value

⁷ All three reviewers were from Wheaton College, which was very much the intellectual flagship of the American fundamentalist/evangelical movement.

⁸ Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

⁹ Ramm is careful to note that his approach is not unique: some form of it has been typical of both Catholic and Reformed theology throughout the centuries, and American evangelical thought could have continued in this tradition but for the cultural retreat and defensiveness of fundamentalism. See also Livingstone, *op. cit.*

division between science and religion goes back at least to Kant, and evangelical biblical scholars had been applying a hermeneutic similar to Ramm's for over a quarter of a century. Indeed, in Britain, where their conclusions were better diffused among non-scholars. Ramm's book was so enthusiastically received that a British edition was released within a year of the American one. The virtue of Ramm's semi-popular work was that it 'brought the [American] fundamentalist reading public up to date' with the conclusions of its best biblical scholars.¹⁰ Many of those readers apparently did not like what they read in Ramm's volume,¹¹ but for many evangelical scientists (as the later *Festschrift* reminiscences make clear), Ramm's book was like a breath of fresh air which enabled them to survive with integrity as scientist-Christians.

RAMM'S PERSPECTIVALISM AND EVANGELICAL SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

The most prominent social scientist to develop Ramm's 'division of labour' approach (although he may have arrived at it through independent British influences) was undoubtedly Donald MacKay of Keele University in England.¹² Trained as a physicist, but with an acquired P.253 interest in human thinking from a cybernetic perspective, MacKay was the creator and head of an interdisciplinary department of neuroscience until his death in 1987. MacKay, who became a role model for many evangelical academic psychologists, was famous for his promotion of three ideas in service of the religion/social science rapprochement.

First, MacKay held that it was possible to examine the same phenomenon from a number of logically separate but complementary 'perspectives', each of which could be theoretically exhaustive on its own level but still not sufficient to do justice to that phenomenon. Thus, for example, an electrically wired 'NO EXIT' sign may be described exhaustively by an electrician in terms of resistances, wattage and voltage; by a fire-marshall in terms of efficient traffic flow in case of emergency; by a linguist in terms of the Latin and Anglo-Saxon roots of the words involved; or by a literary critic in terms of Sartrean existentialism. So too with the study of human behaviour; one could study human beings as mechanisms without necessarily denying that other 'perspectives' or 'levels of explanation' (such as the religious) were needed for a complete account.

As a related point, MacKay was a sharp critic of all reductionisms—that is, of attempts (especially by behaviourists) to reduce all of human functioning to 'nothing but' what they

¹⁰ Robert D. Culver, 'An Evaluation of *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* from the Standpoint of Christian Theology', *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec. 1955), pp. 7–10, (quotation on p. 7).

¹¹ Witness the following comment from Ramm's letter to the *J.A.S.A.* in conjunction with the latter's positive evaluation of the book: 'With some of the very mean criticisms I have been receiving, it is a comfort to get some Amens from solidly evangelical men'. See Vol. 7, No. 4 (Dec. 1955), p. 7. But in an interview in the *Festschrift* volume, Ramm estimated that over 25 years, positive letters about the book outnumbered negative ones by about twenty to one. See, 'An Interview with Bernard Ramm and Alta Ramm', *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Dec. 1979), pp. 179–86, and also Ann H. Hunt's summary of press reactions to the book on pp. 189–90 of the same volume.

¹² Donald MacKay, *The Clockwork Image* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1974); *Human Science and Human Dignity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979); *Brains, Machines and Persons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). For critical analyses of MacKay's position, see for example, Clifton J. Orlebeke, 'Donald MacKay's Philosophy of Science', *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (1977), pp. 51–63; and William Hasker's 'MacKay on Being a Responsible Mechanism: Freedom in a Clockwork Universe', *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (1978), pp. 130–40; MacKay's response to same (pp. 141–48 of the same volume); and Hasker's response to MacKay's response (pp. 149–52 of the same volume).

observed from their own research perspective. Thus, he had nothing against B. F. Skinner's programme to examine human functioning *only* in terms of respondent and operant conditioning (that was his privilege as a specialized scientist) provided he didn't turn metaphysician and announce that there was nothing more to be explained (as he surely did, for example, on the religious level).

Finally—and most importantly for this paper—MacKay was a strong unity-of-science adherent in the philosophical tradition of Karl Popper. This meant, first of all, affirming the position that there was only one method which characterized all true sciences (including social sciences), a method which consisted of giving causal, deterministic explanations which were empirically testable. So although he was anything but scientific (in the sense of according science both complete and ultimate explanatory power of all phenomena), he did adhere to the idea that sciences and non-sciences are characterized by different methods, and so explain the same phenomena in very different ways. Thus, when talking about the study of human beings, MacKay often used the metaphor of the 'O-Story' and the 'I-Story'. The 'O-Story', (the 'outside' or 'objective' story) was the account given by social or natural sciences in causal, deterministic categories. Such an account, no matter how complete on its own level, did not preclude [p. 254](#) *other*, non-scientific disciplines (such as history, literature, theology, etc.) from analysing human beings from an empathetic 'I-Story', or 'insider's' perspective. But it did mean, in MacKay's view, that the social sciences should be organized around a natural-sciences ideal, leaving the interpretive or hermeneutical approach—with its stress on human meaning, values, freedom, and responsibility—to the humanities.

Closely allied to this was MacKay's insistence on the in-principle objectivity of the scientific method. Although human bias and prejudice was constantly in danger of creeping in, MacKay was certain that the checks and balances of the scientific method (e.g. its norms of replicability and empirical testability) made it possible for scientists corporately and progressively to 'see what was really there'. Moreover, he suggested, from specifically *Christian* scientists God expected no less. In a 1984 letter to the *J.A.S.A.*, criticizing a colleague who espoused a more Kuhnian, post-empiricist philosophy of science, MacKay wrote:

If we publish the results of our investigations, we must strive to 'tell it like it is', knowing that the Author is at our elbow, a silent judge of the accuracy with which we claim to describe the world He has created.... If our limitations, both intellectual and moral, predictably limit our achievement of this goal, this is something not to be gloried in, but to be acknowledged in a spirit of repentance. Any idea that it could justify a dismissal of the idea of value-free knowledge as a 'myth' would be as irrational—and as irreligious—as to dismiss the ideal of *righteousness* as a 'myth' on the grounds that we can never perfectly attain that.... [Christians must not] forget that, whatever their difficulties in gaining objective knowledge, they are supposed to be in the loving service of the One to whom Truth is sacred, and carelessness or deliberate bias in stating it is an affront.¹³

However, in expressing the issue in the way he did, MacKay may have confused some of the very levels of explanation he was so anxious to keep independent. For it is one thing to say that evangelicals should unambiguously confess that God is the author of truth and sovereign Lord of the universe. It is quite another thing to imply that such an acknowledgement can lead to only one, properly Christian philosophy of science—namely, one which claims, Kantian fashion, that facts and values can be neatly separated

¹³ Donald M. MacKay, 'Objectivity in Christian Perspective', *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec. 1984), p. 235.

and *will be* so separated p.255 in the best exemplars of science.¹⁴ To this point I will return presently, but before doing so I wish to comment on what it was about MacKay's perspectivalism that attracted so many Christian social scientists.¹⁵

There is no doubt that the perspectivalist resolution *was* (and still is) attractive to many evangelicals, especially those in the academic, as opposed to the applied, social sciences. In a sense, it allowed them to get the best of both worlds: by affirming that no one perspective on human behaviour was complete by itself, they avoided charges of naturalistic reductionism from fellow-Christians; at the same time, by affirming the hegemony of the scientific approach in their own particular disciplines, they maintained professional respectability with their secular colleagues. Thus, in a 1972 collection of essays, *Christ and the Modern Mind*, economist Thomas Van Dahm wrote:

Economics, in brief, being a science, is ethically neutral, its principles suitable for use for the loftiest as well as the most depraved ends.... Will the fact that the student approaches economics from the standpoint of a Christian world and life view cause any problems for him in cases where the professor or authors of the course materials hold other views? No, provided that neither the student nor the professor and authors allows their views on religious questions to interfere with their perception of data, and provided that they can keep separate any cases of disagreement arising solely from differences in their underlying premises concerning the nature of God, man, and the physical world and their interrelationships. Such disagreements simply are not economic, but philosophical; therefore they have no bearing on one's understanding of economics *per se*.¹⁶

And sociologist John Scanzoni wrote in the same volume that

a 'Christian sociology' does not exist any more than a 'Christian psychology' p. 256 or a 'Christian biology'. Sociology ... represents an attempt to apply scientific methodology to the study of relationships between individuals and between groups. Any science is a set of generalizations induced from observations about empirical phenomena. Christianity, on the other hand, is a set of deductive propositions, many of which are simply beyond the ken of empirical verification.¹⁷

¹⁴ The quotation cited in not an isolated example of MacKay's conviction that a pre-Kuhnian, Popperian philosophy of science was the only proper one for Christians. In another article, 'Value-Free Knowledge: Myth or Norm?' (*Faith and Thought*, Vol. 107, 1980, p. 202), he voiced concern over younger Christian colleagues being 'seduced' into rejecting the norm of value-free knowledge, and saw such post-positivistic leanings as 'symptomatic of the practical atheism of our day'. The author also recalls his personal visit to the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship in 1981, at which time the Center fellows (who were studying the relationship of Christianity to the behavioural sciences) were urged to 'let the Kuhns and the Habermas' go their own pagan way, and stand instead on the unshakable Word of God.'

¹⁵ Perspectivalism as a philosophy of integration has been a strong theme in the pages of the *J.A.S.A.* since its original, basically positive endorsement of Ramm's book.

¹⁶ Thomas Van Dahm, 'Economics'. In Robert W. Smith (ed.), *Christ and the Modern Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), pp. 215–23, (quotation from pp. 216–17).

¹⁷ John Scanzoni, 'Sociology'. In Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–33, (quotation from pp. 123–24). Note that despite his implicit separation of methods for science and theology, Scanzoni's epistemology for both is very much in the tradition of the 19th-century moral philosophers, who were not only Baconian inductivists (assuming that observed 'facts' could be organized into generalizations without dispute), but also 'propositionalists' with regard to the nature of Scripture (assuming that, regardless of genre differences, all parts of the Bible could be reduced to an interlocking set of logical propositions). Both mainstream pre-Kuhnian scientists and mainstream evangelical biblical scholars would be startled by Scanzoni's simplistic epistemology masquerading as sophisticated philosophy of science and theology.

The upshot of this way of resolving the tensions between faith and social science was usually the conclusion that one's scientific work had scant bearing on one's confessional life, and that one's confessional life had little bearing on social scientific theorizing. Thus, when asked by students what makes a Christian psychologist (or economist, sociologist, anthropologist, etc.) adherents of the perspectivalist resolution could often be heard to say that 'A Christian psychologist (etc.) is simply a *good* psychologist'. What this was meant to imply was that one's faith might affect one's *personal* conduct as a social scientist—hopefully making one more honest, more careful in data-collection and analysis, and more courteous towards research subjects, clients, etc. A Christian service mentality might also be a motivator behind the kinds of applications one sought for one's research results. But the actual *conduct* of hypothesis testing—the actual 'logic' of the scientific method—was seen, at least in principle, to be rightly immune to world view considerations.¹⁸

PROBLEMS OF PERSPECTIVALISM AND THE POST-POSITIVIST RESPONSE

There was, however, a price to be paid for this neat compartmentalization of one's social scientific paradigm—putatively value-free, **P. 257** deterministic and naturalistic—from one's Christian confession regarding the supreme importance of certain values, the relationship of human freedom to moral responsibility, and the existence of a nonmaterial reality. The most obvious problem was that by embracing only natural-scientific models of humanness, evangelicals in the social sciences, while moving closer to their secular *academic* colleagues, created an ever-widening gulf with their colleagues in the *applied* social sciences, particularly those in counselling and clinical activities. It is true that there have been some attempts to 'scientize' clinical psychology—the medical model of mental illness and doctrinaire behaviour modification are the most obvious examples—but for the most part clinicians and counsellors (Christian *and* secular) have assumed a model of humanness which stresses the very things which the methodological determinism of academic psychology ignores: the irreducible existence of meaning, values, freedom, and moral responsibility in the lives of their clients.¹⁹

A second problem has to do with the fallout of Ramm's insistence that the Bible not be seen as a sourcebook of scientific theories. One can understand why Ramm hammered so insistently on this point, and why evangelical natural scientists agreed with him: the

¹⁸ The distinction between the 'context of discovery' of hypotheses (in which *any* source of inspiration is allowable) and the 'context of justification', or testing of those hypotheses (in which only the so-called 'logic of the scientific method' is said to operate) is a distinction made famous (and for a long time normative) by Karl Popper. See Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

¹⁹ For a further critical analysis of these tensions, see Evans, *Psychology as a Human Science*; Stanton L. Jones (ed.), *Psychology and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), especially chapters 1, 3, 7–9; and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *The Person in Psychology: A Contemporary Christian Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). There are a number of historical reasons for the decision of clinical/counselling psychologists to work primarily from a non-scientized model of humanness. But in addition there is a pragmatic factor which also weighs heavily: academic psychologists have traditionally been able to summon research subjects on command (from undergraduate classes especially); consequently, they have not had to worry much about any offence given to these subjects by their reductionistic and often deceptive manipulations. (The same is true of clinicians using a medical or behavioural model with severely disturbed patients who have temporarily lost their civil rights and freedom of choice and movement.) By contrast, counselling psychologists have to work in an open market: condescending and dehumanizing behaviour towards clients results, in the long run, in having none.

biblical drama of creation, fall, redemption, and future hope is not natural or social history so much as it is ‘metahistory’, or salvation history. Its trustworthiness is not dependent on its various genres being reducible to a rigid chronology of temporal events, a set of logical propositions, or a set of detailed scientific theories (all of which earlier fundamentalists claimed). But the *social* sciences are concerned with human beings, not for the most part with subhuman entities as are the natural [p. 258](#) sciences, and human beings are central players in the biblical drama. Systematic theologians have long seen the importance of articulating a biblical anthropology in the form of the doctrine of man; by contrast, evangelical social scientists have tended to deny that the Bible reveals *anything* about human nature that could help them construct and adjudicate theories.

This denial is accomplished by focusing on what theologians have called the *relational* image of God in persons to the exclusion of the *substantial* image; that is, on the claim that the way persons ‘image’ God is strictly through his covenant relationship to them, and conversely, through their potential to respond to God and to their neighbours rather than because of anything essentially different about human beings *per se*.²⁰ Again, adherents of this position seem to get the best of both worlds: they acknowledge the importance of covenant theology (thereby maintaining an evangelical identity), but at the same time assert that discovering what (if anything) makes humans unique is a strictly empirical question (thereby sparing themselves the embarrassment of seeming like religious fanatics in the eyes of their secular colleagues). But Christian social scientists need an understanding of *both* the substantial and the relational image to do justice to the scriptural picture of humanness.²¹ In particular, they need to grasp and apply what Scripture says about human freedom, creativity, sociability, sexuality, and the impulse to worship and attribute meaning. Moreover, they need to understand how each of these is qualified by successive acts of the biblical drama. This is no easy task for social scientists, who want to avoid the naive biblicism that characterized their nineteenth-century forebears with regard to the natural sciences. But to overreact by denying that the Bible contains *anything* of [p. 259](#) relevance to social science theorizing is simply to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.²²

A final problem resulting from rigid adherence to the unity-of-science ideal has been a progressively outdated conception, on the part of both Christian and secular social scientists, as to how the natural sciences actually *do* operate. Contemporary philosophers of sciences, beginning with Thomas Kuhn in the 1960s, have become acutely aware that the actual, historical practice of sophisticated science departs substantially from Popper’s notions of falsification and rigid, hypothetico-deductive logic— notions that are still taken

²⁰ See for example MacKay, *Human Science and Human Dignity*; David Myers, *The Human Puzzle: Psychological Research and Christian Belief* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); E. Mansell Pattison, ‘Psychology’, in Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 185–203; G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); and Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (New York: Friendship Press, 1986). For an opposing treatment, see Sidney Greidanus, ‘The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship’, *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (1982), pp. 138–47.

²¹ For an excellent development of this point, see C. Stephen Evans, ‘Healing Old Wounds and Recovering Old Insights: Towards a Christian View of the Person for Today’, in Mark Noll and David Wells (eds.), *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 68–86. Evans points out, among other things, that if it were only the relational, and not the substantial image of God that mattered, Jesus Christ could just have easily been incarnated in the form of a tomato, rather than as a person.

²² For an elaboration of this criticism, see especially Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

for granted in academic psychology particularly.²³ The business of science is basically that of theory-adjudication; that is, deciding which of many possible theories best explains a certain phenomenon. In making such decisions, scientists use a number of non-logical criteria which philosophers of science term 'epistemic values'. These include such things as the simplicity of the theory under consideration, its internal coherence, its breadth of scope (i.e. the number of other theories it can subsume), its empirical testability, its susceptibility to numerical expression, its fruitfulness (i.e., the number of research programmes it generates), and the success with which it can be modelled through the use of meaningful metaphors.

However, scientists by no means apply such epistemic values in universally agreed-upon ways. For one thing, it is almost impossible to maximize all of these values at once when judging a theory, and scientists differ in the way they rank-order their importance. This does not mean that 'anything goes' when it comes to judging theories; as with the criticism of literary texts, there are limits on the range of theories one can realistically apply to the materials. But it does mean that a personal, value-laden, hermeneutic dimension—not reducible to technique—is not only inescapable in science, but probably essential to it.²⁴ How does one scientist settle on the model of the p. 260 double helix to describe the DNA molecule, or another on the metaphor of the snake swallowing its tail to represent the benzene ring? An adequate apprenticeship, a deep sometimes even inarticulate knowledge of the field, the capacity to think divergently, a hunch as to what one is looking for even before logical and empirical details support it—such 'tacit knowledge' is no less essential in natural science than it is in textual criticism or counselling psychology.

In addition, it is now well understood that there are no strictly neutral 'facts'. Not only are theories under-determined by facts (witness the number and diversity of epistemic values that come into play), but the reportage of 'just the facts' is in fact highly value-laden. What scientists choose to look at, how they conceptualize it, how they determine the validity of those concepts, how they decide on the range of applicability of their findings—all of these operations involve value-judgments, many of which are bound not just to epistemic values, but to the scholar's prescientific faith-commitment to a certain world view. Consequently, the distinction between the so-called 'value-neutrality' of science and the 'value-ladenness' of religion simply doesn't hold up.²⁵

An important question, then, is not why some evangelical social scientists have begun to *reject* the traditional empiricist notions of objectivity and value-neutrality, but rather why so many others continue to cling to them. The work of Robert Wuthnow, an evangelical sociologist at Princeton, suggests that it has to do with the greater insecurity of *all* social scientists regarding the legitimacy of their disciplines, given the institutional recency of their existence and especially the lower level of theoretical consensus that

²³ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962 & 1971). See also Frederick Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); and Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Aberdeen: Cambridge University Press, 1970). For a good summary of the state of philosophy of science from a Christian perspective, see Del Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

²⁴ For an elaboration, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, rev. ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1962).

²⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Evans, 'Psychology as a Human Science', and also David Lyon, 'Valuing in Social Science: Post-Empiricism and Christian Responses', *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (1983), pp. 324–38.

exists in the social as opposed to the natural sciences.²⁶ Lower levels of religiosity tend to be associated with higher levels of education in *all* academic fields; contrary to the accepted secularization hypothesis concerning the inevitable conflict of science with religion, it is *not* true that irreligiosity is highest among academics in the most successful natural sciences. In fact, study after study has shown that it is *natural* scientists who perceive the *least* conflict between science and religion, and who p.261 display the highest levels of religious commitment.²⁷ Wuthnow argues that the latter, being more secure in their accomplishments, have less need to develop 'boundary posturing mechanisms' by which they set themselves apart from the social norms and epistemology of everyday life in order to feel more secure as an academic guild. 'People in the social sciences and humanities reject religion not so much because of what they dislike about religion specifically [Wuthnow notes that they differ from the ordinary population on political and lifestyle issues too] but because of the ill-codified reality they need to protect within their own discipline.'²⁸

Furthermore, it turns out that this boundary-posturing activity is greater among self-confessed *religious* people in the social sciences (few though they may be) than it is among their religious colleagues in the natural sciences. A 1973 study revealed that social scientists who believed in God were *much more* likely to assert that they had to keep their religious convictions and their research separate than believers working in the natural sciences, who generally said they felt no need to keep science and religion separate!²⁹ This suggests that many evangelical social scientists feel doubly defensive. Not only are their disciplines, which aspire to be scientific, dubiously successful in achieving this end (at least by unity-of-science standards), but in addition they themselves fear being labelled 'subjective' or 'intellectually lightweight' because of their Christian commitment. Thus those who do not decrease their defensiveness by renouncing religion entirely take pains to keep their religious and disciplinary epistemologies in mutually exclusive compartments. p.262

It should be clear by now that a legitimate alternative to this strategy would be to accept at least a weak form of the sociology of scientific knowledge, acknowledging that the pursuit of truth in science (and especially social science) is not a value-neutral endeavour at any point, and that the theory-adjudicating activities of scientists are not as different from those of non-scientists (or as free of social and metaphysical influence) as their popular image has led people to believe. Philosophers of science increasingly agree

²⁶ Robert Wuthnow, 'Science and the Sacred', in: Phillip E. Hammond (ed.), *The Sacred in a Secular Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 187–203.

²⁷ See Wuthnow's bibliography for a list of such studies, but note in particular *The Connecticut Mutual Life Report on American Values in the '80s: The Impact of Belief* (New York: Research and Forecasts, Inc., 1981); Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot: Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); and Fred Thalheimer, 'Religiosity and Secularization in the Academic Professions', *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 46 (1973), pp. 183–202. It should be noted that the findings of these studies are supported by some uniquely evangelical data: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in North America reports that its volunteer faculty advisors to student groups on secular campuses come overwhelmingly from the natural sciences, with only a small percentage from the humanities and almost none from the social sciences. It is also clear that this reflects not differential rates of volunteerism, but the much greater percentage of Christian faculty among natural scientists in comparison with social scientists and humanities scholars (personal communication with James Sire and Michael Maudlin, June 1987).

²⁸ Wuthnow, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–98.

²⁹ Fred Thalheimer, 'Religiosity and Secularization in the Academic Professions', *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 46 (1973), pp. 183–202.

that world view considerations affect *all* scientific theory-adjudication, whether this is consciously acknowledged or not. Consequently, the time is ripe for evangelical social scientists both to stop accepting false guilt for having a world view that ‘weakens’ their scientific objectivity, and to give up the rigid compartmentalization of their religious from their scientific activities. They need to realize that it can be an advantage to have a world view which is overt rather than covert, under constant scholarly discussion, open to refinement, and capable of supplying certain ‘non-negotiables’ about the basic nature of individual and social life, both as these were creationally intended and as they have been affected by the Fall.

Such an admission should, in turn, leave evangelical social scientists free to explore the possibility of alternative paradigms to the methodological determinism demanded by adherence to the unity of a science ideal. I agree with Stephen Evans that this does not imply the eclipse of empirical research, with its search for regularities of behaviour. It does mean, however, that such regularities are only the beginning, not the end, of social explanation. It means that social scientists have to look for explanations of human behaviour (both regular *and* irregular) as much in the realm of *reasons, intentions, and purposes* as in the realm of laws of the natural-scientific sort. It means that like their colleagues in counselling, history, and literature, they must begin to see human beings as ‘narratives in progress’ or ‘living texts’, as much or more than as passive materials in an experiment. This suggests that human behaviour is to be regarded as quasi-linguistic: fully understandable only if one has learned the grammar and syntax of the rule-following community to which a respondent or client belongs. This is what Evans calls the ‘interpretive’ side of social science, which is fully as important as its empirical side (and, indeed, essential to it).³⁰ p. 263

The development of a more interpretive methodology in academic psychology would obviously do much to unify it with the concerns and methods of Christian clinicians and counsellors, not to mention those of overseas and home missionaries—whose successful work depends on their ability to become empathic ‘participant-observers’ in the cultures to which they are assigned. Nor does such an approach have to imply value-relativity, for as Evans points out, even as we seek to understand the rules by which others operate, covert judgments of value are inescapable. The very fact that even the self-professed value relativist distinguishes between acceptable *reasons* for a given behaviour and *rationalizations* (which are seen as ‘bad’ or ‘inadequate’ reasons—note the value-judgement!) testifies to this.

It is increasingly recognized that all social-scientific work whether consciously admitted or not, includes an interpretive face and a judgmental (or ‘value-critical’) face, in addition to its better-understood empirical face.³¹ For evangelical social scientists to focus consciously only on the last of these, to the neglect of the other two, is to produce social science theory which is at best incomplete, and at worst sub-Christian. Increasing

³⁰ Evans, *Psychology as a Human Science*. See also David Braybrooke, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987).

³¹ Recent articles in the *Christian Scholars Review* which attest to the recognition and validity of these three faces include: Arthur J. Moen, ‘Paradigms, Language Games, and Religious Belief’, (Vol. IX, No. 1, 1979, pp. 17–29); Ronald J. Burwell, ‘Sleeping With an Elephant: The Uneasy Alliance Between Christian Faith and Sociology’, (Vol. 10, No. 3, 1981, pp. 195–208, with responses); Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, ‘The Unfulfilled Apprenticeship of North American Psychology’, (Vol. XI, No. 4, 1982, pp. 291–315, with responses); James J. Olthuis, ‘On Worldviews’, (Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1985, pp. 153–64); and Richard Perkins, ‘Values, Alienation, and Christian Sociology’, (Vol. XV, No. 1, 1985, pp. 8–27, with a response by Stephen Evans in Vol. XV, No. 3).

numbers of mainstream social scientists recognize the need to do justice to all three.³² Consequently, given both the textual-interpretive traditions and the value-concerns Christians have to draw on, it would be both sad and ironic if evangelicals failed to offer leadership at this time of paradigm questioning in the social sciences.

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Evangelicals and Human Action Systems

Charles Corwin

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This article, written by someone with vast experience in Asian societies, attempts to answer the question, 'How should the evangelical church in non-Christian societies relate to those human action systems?' and is a complement to the preceding article. The answer given is very clear: namely, that the Asian church will grow to the extent she first disciples her members in all four kinds of human action—adaptive, social, cultural, goal-attaining. By doing this, she both supplies a model for the secular society and also trains her own members for fruitful ministry in society.

Editor

Peer out from the window of an Asian church sanctuary any morning of the week. You will observe Asian society in microcosm. Walking slowly in modest sari, tugging a preschooler with her right hand while balancing a basket of bananas on her head with the left, a young mother makes her way to the weekly bazaar. 'Ah! That spot is ideal. Many passers-by. Sell all the bananas by noon and you will have time to return home for another load.' One basketful sold will bring in enough rupees to exchange for today's needed food. A second basketful sold will mean she can help her aging parents. A third sold will add to tuition savings for the child commencing primary school next year. But the police officer waves her on. That spot is government property. She moves to a shady spot under a banyan tree by the road, rearranges the bananas temptingly in the basket, looks pleadingly to passers-by. This will be a good day if she can somehow meet her family's expectations.

Why is the above a microcosm of Asian society? According to the human action systems model of sociologist Talcott Parsons, this woman was performing four functions necessary for survival in any society. First, she was attempting to *adapt* to the environment by (a) producing and selling bananas, (b) doing this as efficiently as possible:

³² Examples from psychology include: Kenneth J. Gergen, *Towards Transformation in Social Knowledge* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1982); Rom Harre, David Clarke & Nicola De Carlo, *Motives and Mechanisms: An Introduction to the Psychology of Action* (New York: Methuen, 1985); Donald Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press); Peter Reason and John Rowan (eds.), *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research* (New York: Wiley, 1981).

walking to the nearest bazaar, sitting in the shade. Second, she was *maintaining the cultural pattern* of her society by (a) dressing in modest sari, (b) accommodating to the festive occasion of the weekly bazaar. p.265 Third, she was *integrated* into her society by (a) fulfilling the role expectations of her family as mother and provider, (b) obeying the police officer, (c) satisfying the physiological needs of her family in a lawful manner—selling bananas. Fourth, her personality was striving toward the *attainment of goals*—helping her parents and saving for her child’s education.

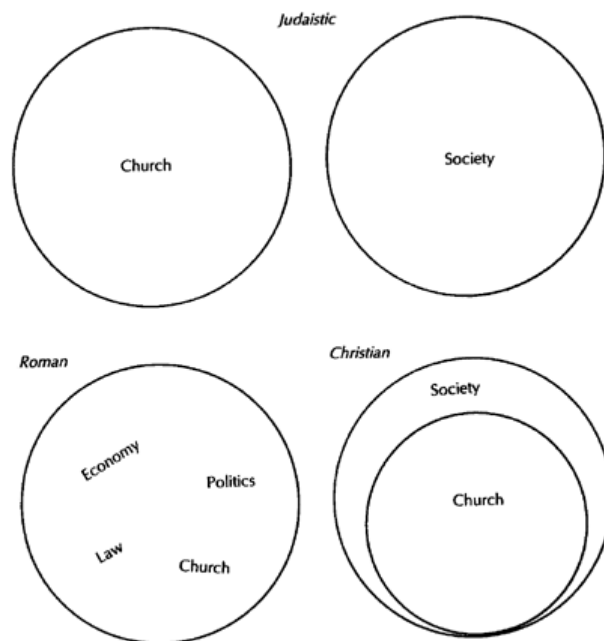
When groups of individuals like the woman above live together within geographical proximity and in such a way as to extend their relationships beyond the life of one generation, you have a *society*. To distinguish one society from another, we use adjectives to describe its critical features, such as ‘industrial society’ or ‘agrarian society’. But societies don’t do anything. It’s the people in them who do. When actions of groups of people become similar in nature to the actions of that one woman, in a more formally predictable manner, they are called the *subsystems* of a society. To sustain itself, the group must somehow relate to the environment in an *adaptive* sense. This involves not only sustaining the behavioural organisms of the group but also adapting to the ‘ultimate reality’ environment—discovering some kind of logical model by which the mind of the group can cope with life’s contradictions. To achieve pattern-maintenance and stimulate pattern change, the *cultural subsystems* must work. To integrate the different parts of a society into a coordinated whole, the *social subsystem* must operate. To achieve goals which gratify the members of a society, the *personalities* of the group must devise plans for action leading toward those goals without violating the social norms or cultural values.

The question I am raising in this article is, ‘How should the evangelical church in non-Christian societies relate to those human action systems?’ What about the church in Asia at this hour? While Asian societies are in ferment and turmoil during the modernization process, is the church to remain ensconced in her cultural and religious sphere? Does the church’s task of bringing the woman and her child into the Kingdom of God preclude involvement in the economic, political and societal subsystems of society? The pendulum of thinking within evangelical circles has swung from social aloofness during the later nineteenth century to social concern of the early p.266 twentieth century, back to social aloofness in the fifties,¹ then back to social concern during the restless sixties, and now with the strong stress upon church growth, back to social aloofness. But if it can be demonstrated that a sanctified balance in carrying out the cultural mandate while fulfilling the evangelistic mandate will in fact ensure the most solid kind of church growth, the goal of this study will be reached. Sociologists like Max Weber and Talcott Parsons concluded that there is something about Christianity which makes it uniquely suited for assisting societies during the modernization process, especially in the sector we would least expect—enhancing the adaptive capacities of developing societies. As long as the church remained distinct from secular society while developing her own socio-cultural components, she became a great innovative force upon the society in which she found herself. Let’s look closer at this ‘distinct yet innovative’ concept suggested by Parsons and how this tension or ‘balance’ (in that sense i am using the word) was kept by the early church and is presently being kept by Khasi Christians of North East India, whom I visited early in 1978.

¹ The U.S. government, for example, bolstered adaptive subsystems around the world after World War II. So the U.S. evangelical church rightfully concentrated on its cultural sphere—evangelism. Today that situation no longer prevails. The U.S. government is devoting to adaptive subsystems of developing societies a small percentage of the aid she was giving after World War II.

THE HISTORIC CHURCH AND SECULAR SOCIETY

When the Apostle Paul wrote to communities of Christians living throughout the Roman Empire, he clearly distinguished their spheres of existence. These communities were simultaneously in Christ and in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Philippi. By doing this Paul acknowledged what the early Christians already knew and were experiencing. They were in the world but not of it. They were a social system within a society, a kingdom within a kingdom, a sub-culture within a larger culture. With this emphasis Paul broke with two extreme positions. The first was the ‘people of God’ concept within Judaism. This concept said that an individual could only be a Jew as a total social personality. Jews had no dealings as a people with the Samaritans, the Romans or the Greeks. The other extreme position was that implicitly taught within the Roman Empire—the civil religion concept. This concept held that one’s religion or religious activity was part of the over-all cultural subsystem, forming values and articulating norms for society. These values and norms enabled the state to function smoothly. They provided the motivational orientations for individuals as citizens of the state. The civil religion concept rendered *all things* to Caesar, including one’s religious devotion. The Christian church, however, became an ‘associational religious group, independent of any ascriptive community, either ethnic or territorial. Its focus was specifically religious, **P.267** the salvation of the individual soul ... but one could be both a Christian and an Athenian or Roman on the level of societal participation, a member of both the Church and an ethnic-territorial community’.² A diagram of the three positions—the Judaistic, the Roman and the Christian would appear something like this:



p. 268

From the different metaphors employed by Jesus to describe the Christian’s relation to the world (e.g. salt, light, investor, builder), from the teaching of Paul, from the many accounts of the early church’s stance before civil authorities, we learn that the church, though a subculture within a plurality of sub-cultures in society, nevertheless has a responsibility to the society in which it finds itself. The first responsibility is redemptive and reconciliatory. After a brief time of prayer for receiving the divine enablement, a little

² Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1971) pp. 30–31.

band of Christians moves out from the church sanctuary to conduct open air meetings during the weekly bazaar. Let's assume the Christians will be able to buy several bananas from the woman under the banyan tree. They will intersect her world at the *adaptive* or economic level. But as they sing songs and testify, they will intersect her *cultural* world, describing in new symbols and style how she can become cognitively re-oriented to ultimate reality in a way that will be more satisfying and fulfilling than she has hitherto experienced. If they become her advocates, asking the traffic officer not to enforce the antiquated law, they will intersect her world at the *social* level. And finally, if one of the band is a teacher at the local primary school, that Christian will intersect the woman's world at the *goal-attainment* level. *The thesis of this article is that the Christian church in Asia can grow best in Asian society if she first disciplines her members so that they excel in all four kinds of human action—adaptive, social, cultural, goal-attainment. By doing this she will provide a model for secular society by her corporate life while equipping and sending forth her members with capabilities to improve the quality of life of that society.*

The church has never been a society in the strictest sense, in that her members have continued in the world as artisans, workers, professionals to meet their adaptive needs. Neither has the church maintained a law-enforcement system to sustain its norms. But she has been a sub-culture, with her own system of beliefs, system of expressive symbols (such as her liturgy), and system of values. But as the individual Christian is shaped by these cultural components, as he internalizes the church's system of beliefs and values, he becomes a change-agent in society, a transformer of culture. This is not an option. The church must always assume a prophet's role in culture, transcending it every minute of time while contending with it to precipitate a crisis of culture. This is what Parsons meant: to the degree the church maintained a consistent differentiation from the social systems with which she was inter-dependent, she became an effective innovative force in the development of the total socio-economic system. As Tillich remarked, secular society, like Pilate, is continually asking the [p. 269](#) question, 'What is truth?' but incapable of accepting the church's answer. For if it did it would cease being a secular society. But the church must be equipped and ready to answer that question in every generation. Part of that equipping involves training its members for interaction with all four of those components of societal action. To the extent she has done this, the church has grown and society has been enriched.

For example, in order to *adapt* to his environment, the Apostle Paul maintained his companions and himself by making tents. In his adaptation to that part of his environment called 'ultimate reality' Paul had to restructure his thinking after encountering Christ. History, Judaism, his own inner struggles had to make sense. This they did after he developed his own Pauline theology as articulated in Romans and Galatians. Second, as much as he conscientiously could, Paul tried to uphold the *cultural values* of the Jewish community to which he belonged. Though charged with flouting Jewish custom, he carefully avoided doing this ([Acts 24:11, 12; 25:8](#)). In fact, he took the stance in court that he was merely maintaining the pattern subscribed to by all good Jews—believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and the Prophets ([Acts 24:14](#)). Third, Paul was integrated into Roman society by observing Roman law. During the series of trials in Acts, he asserted that he had not acted contrary to Roman law ([Acts 25:8](#)), that he was a Roman citizen in full standing. Regarding *goal-attainment*, we see Paul's personality developing plans for evangelizing the then known world, out in concentric circles from Jerusalem to Illyricum on the west coast of Greece.

When Paul and the early Christians impinged on society, they were considered threats to society along those four components of societal action. First they affected *adaptive processes* or economies of those societies as the fortune-tellers and silversmiths attested

([Acts 16:19; 19:25](#)). In the area of *culture* Paul was seen as a threat by both secular and religious leaders. Wherever he went there arose ‘no small disturbances concerning the Way’ ([Acts 19:23](#)). They were, in the eyes of their accusers, ‘upsetting the whole world’. Certain of these charges were true: ‘gods made with hands are no gods at all’ is the message society was getting from Paul. So Paul’s accusers attacked him in the cultural sphere. However, to get a conviction they had to press their attack in the *social* sphere, laying charges against him before civil magistrates. The civil magistrates were at a loss to try Paul’s case, for cultural matters were beyond their pale. However, as Gallio, Festus and Agrippa testified, Paul was not upsetting Roman laws or norms. Paul believed he was fully integrated into Roman society and consistently [p. 270](#) preferred to be tried in civil courts rather than religious. But because of their *overall goals*—securing the good favour of Nero in their provincial governorships—the procurators were desirous of doing the Jews a favour, so held Paul in custody ([Acts 24:27](#)). Hence we see Paul’s evangelistic activities affecting all four components of secular societal action.

Moving into the modern period, we notice that to the degree the church kept herself in tension between being in the world and not of it, she became an innovative force in the total socio-economic systems of modern societies. Parsons makes this telling point in discussing the pre-modern foundations of modern societies. He says:

Christian culture—including its secular components—was able to maintain clearer and more consistent differentiation from the social systems with which it was interdependent than either of its forebears (Hebrew and Greek cultures) had been. Because of such differentiation from society, Christian culture came to serve as a more effective innovative force in the development of the total sociocultural system than had any other cultural complex that had yet evolved.³

For example, in the *integrative process* the church became a model for societies by integrating people into her fellowship regardless of ethnic or territorial background. This egalitarian tendency of the church in non-egalitarian societies has on occasion caught the attention of social reformers seeking for indigenous models. Let me cite one case. Japanese Minyusha historians of the Meiji era (1868–1911) began fulminating against diehard oligarchs in power trying their best to suppress democratic pressures mounting from below. One such historian, Takekoshi Yosaburo, writing in the 1890s, discovered in the fledgling Japanese church just the model needed for Japanese society:

The society which Takekoshi saw beginning to emerge out of the destruction of the old order was the ‘popular society’ ... It was basically an egalitarian society, where no one enjoyed special privileges, where all enjoyed the same rights, and where membership in society was open to all on an equal basis. The old Japan had been divided into ‘artificial classes’, based on exclusiveness, heredity, and tradition, but all this had been overthrown by the Restoration and the post-Restoration reforms. The new Japan was becoming a pluralistic society made up of voluntary associations, in which leaders were chosen on the basis of talent and ability, in which all members enjoyed the same rights and obligations, and in which all members cooperated because they joined as a matter of free [p. 271](#) choice. (*Takekoshi even went so far as to suggest that the basic social paradigm was a church organization.*) [italics mine]⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ Peter Duus, ‘Whig History, Japanese Style: The Minyusha Historians and the Meiji Restoration’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, May 1974, p. 428.

In the *adaptive-upgrading* process the church also served as a model, for a person could be both a medical doctor or seller of purple while functioning as a lay-evangelist or deaconess in the church. Within the church itself there was a process of *value-generalization*, so that all the detailed laws of Judaism could be subsumed under the general law of love. Thus *pattern-maintenance* became easier; what mattered was not an external rite but a new life-style. Secular states influenced by the Protestant church within them began to generalize their norms, narrowing them down to the prohibition to exploit others as a mental set, not detailed laws. England led the world in this process when she gave full citizen's rights to her religious dissenters.

Much of what Parsons is saying about the relation of the Christian church to the development of modern societies came dramatically alive for me when I visited a so-called 'people's movement to Christ' among the Khasi tribal peoples of northeast India during January 1978. Welsh Presbyterian missionaries arrived in this area in 1840. While preaching the gospel to these primitive people they also directed their activities along all four components of human action—adaptive, cultural, social, goal-attainment. Churches were built, hospitals erected, schools established, the language reduced to writing. The Rev. Thomas Jones is called 'the father of Khasi Literature' and is credited with 'laying down the basis for modern Khasi literature'.⁵ Today over half of the million Khasi people of Meghalaya State are professing Christians. In the capital, Shillong, large Presbyterian churches can be seen everywhere. Adjacent these churches are their own church-staffed primary, secondary and tertiary schools. A large number of the top government posts, including those of the two members of the Parliament in Delhi, are filled by Khasi Christians. The agrarian Khasi are not a wealthy people, but there are no beggars. The literacy rate is higher than that of much of India. Thus the momentum of this people's movement has been sustained.

The Khasi scholar Dr. Hamlet Bareh, in his doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Gauhati, Assam, in 1967, included a poem written by an unnamed Khasi. It reveals how the Rev. John p. 272 Roberts (d. 1908) demonstrated Parson's 'distinct yet innovative' balance.

In Memoriam

Teacher revered, I come to strew
Thy mouldered grave with broken flowers
Which once were gathered neath thy bowers
In days serene of long ago.

Oh soul profound, of mould divine
With sage-like mien in every breath
How could thy voice be choked in death
And we left orphaned to repine?

For this our land, the ancient home
Of Ignorance and sin and shame,
Unknown in records past of fame,
Was graced and honoured by thy tomb.

Nor could thy life and toil severe
For Khasi's weal be spent in vain;

⁵ Hamlet Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* (doctoral dissertation published privately; Naba Mudran Private Ltd., 1967) p. 398.

For they in God's own presence reign
His call to sacrifice who hear.

Nay stilled for once in death's embrace
Thy voice yet lives in pious hearts,
'Midst torches bright of science and arts
Our much-loved Khasi which emblaze.

The model-preacher in our land,
Whose words did burn with Gospel's fire;
Prepared to quench the devil's pyre,
The founder of the Prophets' Band.

Oh father, who can fill thy place—
For, like some tall proud cedar's fall
Thy death—a shocking, sudden call
Had left a vacant, empty space.

And yet, thou art alive—e'en now
Thy spirit still pervades our land
Where people met in holy band
God's wondrous ways and love to know.

Wherever men are held spelt-bound
By Khasi youth who, at thy feet
Had found the Gospel manna sweet
Thy echoes there do still resound. p. 273

Roberts:—Still rings that grand dear name
Which once had cheered us in our way,
Nor can oblivion's baleful sway
While Khasi last, eclipse the fame.

Bareh says, 'In admiration and affection of John Roberts, the verses reflect the deep sense of gratitude of a Khasi man to the missionaries for the part they played in furthering education and for undertaking a selfless job for the dissemination of learning and more for harbingering the Light of the World to shine in the dark.'⁶

We cannot over-simplify the main task of the church into 'church-growth'. The Acts model and the historic church demonstrate that Christian involvement with the secular world reveals the relevance of the Gospel and becomes preparatory for the evangelistic thrust.

Charles Corwin is a former Associate Professor of Missions at the Talbot Theological Seminary. p. 274

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 439–440.

Book Reviews

David F. Wells

[*God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith*](#)

Review by John Chapman

David L. Edwards

[*Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical dialogue*](#)

Review by O. R. Barclay

John R. W. Stott

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Book Reviews

GOD THE EVANGELIST: HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS TO BRING MEN AND WOMEN TO FAITH

by David F. Wells

(Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1987, 144pp., £4.95)

Reviewed by John Chapman in World Evangelization, July–August, 1988; reprinted by permission

The last twenty five years, in churches all over the world, has been marked by a new awareness of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He fascinates everyone, but whether he is taken seriously or not is another matter altogether. This is the note sounded by J. I. Packer in the Introduction of this book. There is no doubt that David Wells takes the Holy Spirit seriously, and he invites us to do the same.

The Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization held a Consultation on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Evangelization in Oslo, Norway in May 1985. As a result David Wells, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, was asked 'to write an account of this subject that would utilize the papers as sources, put the material in as orderly a form as possible, and include the benefits of the discussions and exchanges wherever he judged these to be appropriate'.

The book consists of six brief chapters written by Dr. Wells and five case studies which have been provided by different contributors.

In Chapter One, 'Spirit of the Living God', we are reminded of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments. This is done in the context of his relationship to the other persons of the Trinity, and is particularly helpful.

Chapter Two, 'The World and Its Religions', deals with idolatry in both Western and non-Western culture. Here the author concludes, 'Because they are idolatrous, non-

Christian religions, as well as materialistic philosophies (such as Marxism) and materialistic orientation (such as the affluence of the West), do not represent paths to God' (p. 21). However, he invites us to note 'that the Holy Spirit will judge and condemn all elements of religious culture that are contrary to the nature of God and his Law (p. 25) and that he will 'transform and renew all that is good, beautiful and true in religion and culture' (p. 25). There is a strong plea in this chapter for those involved in evangelism to enter into dialogue so we can understand other's positions and engage in vigorous apologetic work so that the 'presupposition p.276 of unbelief' can be exposed. The author sees this as a necessary preparation for the preaching of the gospel.

Chapter Three, 'The Gospel made Effective' is excellent and the book is worth buying for this chapter alone. In it, the author describes the relationship between the work of Christ and his death and resurrection and the Spirit's work in applying it to the individual's life. There is a very helpful summary of how the Spirit's work has been understood differently through the history of the Church and especially at the time of the Reformation.

Chapter Four is 'God's message and God's People'. I found it to be the least satisfactory of the book. It was not clear to me what relationship this chapter has to the work of the Spirit. Although I agreed with much in this chapter, I often did so for reasons other than those stated. The chapter begins with a clear, biblical defence of the fact that every Christian should be an active member in a local Christian Church. The author goes on to an excellent argument that the Church is the product of the gospel and not the reverse. From there, he shows that '... the Gospel that created the Church should also be modelled by the Church'. 'Such modelling is silent proclamation' (p. 54). I was personally unable to support this idea from the Bible. The Church 'witnesses' to the 'principalities and powers in the heavenly places' ([Eph 3:10](#)), but that is not what the author is speaking about. He draws our attention to three areas of the local church where this 'silent witness' occurs: Unity, Holiness, and Worship. Wells rightly shows that Christ has broken down the barriers between people and makes one new 'man' ([Eph 2:15-16](#)). He also rightly condemns exclusive church membership and notes that some 'evangelicals are apprehensive about using the "homogeneous unit principle" as a tool when it comes to church planting'. However, I don't believe that the homogeneous unit principle does exclude people. (Appendix II, 'The Spirit and People Groups', shows only too clearly that the homogeneous unit principle is of great value in evangelism, as the author of that section comes to a different conclusion.)

The second area of 'silent witness' described is the holiness of the Church. I agree that we should be individually and corporately holy. However, I noticed that all of Wells' examples involved individual rather than corporate witness.

The third area of 'silent witness' described is that of worship. This is described as 'a gathering of his people for nothing less or other than' showing forth God's worth (p. 60). It was interesting to note that no Bible reference was given for this. Does the Bible say we gather for this? I think not! The author tells us that preaching is an essential p.277 feature of worship because in God's Word, there is a self-disclosure of God's character, will, and way, and only as we know him can we worship by acknowledging him for who he is and what he has done. I believe that preaching is essential to worship because the purpose of our meeting is to gather around Christ to hear him speak to us just as Israel did at Mt. Sinai ([Exodus 19-20](#); [Acts 7:37](#); [Deut. 18:15](#); [Heb. 12:25](#)). Preaching is not to enable us to worship; it is the essence of worship. The gathering will and must be evangelistic, not as the uncritical description of Celebration Evangelism (p. 60) implies, but as we hear him speak and obey him ([1 Cor. 14:24-25](#)). I rejoiced in the clear call to see the importance of preaching but I think it is ever more important than this chapter recognizes.

Chapter Five, 'Spiritual Power Encounters', traces the work of the Spirit in convincing the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. This section shows how we can be liberated from the flesh, the world, and the devil. It includes a very helpful discussion on 'signs and wonders'. Wells concludes this section 'in the most basic of all power encounters, he [the Spirit] brings life and light to fallen sinners whose rebellion has produced only death and darkness' (p. 91). In the current debate, this chapter provides an important contribution which is often overlooked.

In the final chapter, 'Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh On Us', we are reminded of the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth and holiness. I was both stirred and humbled as I read this chapter. I was convinced of my own need to call on the Spirit to rekindle his presence in me and those around me so that we will fulfil our evangelistic calling.

The book concludes with five brief case studies of some very exciting evangelism. While these were fascinating, I was not altogether happy with conclusions drawn from them. I couldn't help but wonder, in each case, if the person describing the event had really been in a position to analyse what was significant and what was incidental. Fascinating as these were, I don't think they helped with our understanding of the main theme of this book.

This book should be read by all those engaged in evangelism; and that should be every Christian. Nothing is more important in evangelism than knowing our role and what we can expect God to do. When we are confused and accepting responsibilities that the Bible ascribes to God, we can only come to dishonesty or terrible frustration. This book helps us to clarify this issue and challenges us to get on with our work. You will be the poorer if you neglect to read this book. [p. 278](#)

ESSENTIALS: A LIBERAL-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE

by David L. Edwards with response from John R. W. Stott
(Hodder and Stoughton, 1988, 354pp., £5.95)

Reviewed by O. R. Barclay in Faith and Thought, Vol. 114, No. 2/1988; reprinted by permission

The nature and origin of this book needs to be understood. David Edwards, the former Editor of the SCM Press and now Dean of Southwark, asked John Stott if he might write a book based on John Stott's written work as a study and critique of modern evangelicalism. John Stott agreed and contributed much shorter responses to each chapter.

The parts by Edwards are in the nature of a rather wide-ranging description of a standard, moderate liberal-theological position and criticism of the evangelical position on a number of key issues. He says that he hopes to persuade evangelicals to face liberal criticism and to encourage liberals to read evangelical books. Most of what he writes is in fact familiar to most evangelicals. They have had to read plenty of liberal books and listen to liberal preachers. His own thinking seems to have been formed by Leonard Hodgson, C. H. Dodd, Vincent Taylor and perhaps Hans Küng. Sometimes one is surprised that such old and not very convincing arguments against the conservative evangelical position should be thought still to carry any weight. Thus [Micah 6:8](#) and [Hosea 6:6](#) are said to show that 'God required no sacrifices of any sort' and Jesus is said to contradict the Old Testament in the Sermon on the Mount. Numerous examples given of supposed contradictions in the Bible can really be maintained in this sometimes almost simplistic way only if someone has not read the evangelical literature that has been available for the last 30 years. This makes the rather long and sometimes almost rambling 'critiques' a little unsatisfactory. It is not always easy to get to the heart of the argument.

By contrast Stott is far more crisp, analytical and sharp in exposing the fact that different issues are frequently being confused. He is at least equally well read in

theological literature, but as he himself regrets, he finds himself cast in the role of the defender rather than the proclaimer and the latter is his greatest gift.

The whole discussion is carried on in an exceedingly gentlemanly tone. Nevertheless the gap between the two is wide. As Stott remarks in his brief, seven-page epilogue, the basic differences concern the question of 'authority and salvation'. That is to say the authority of the [p. 279](#) Bible, and what Stott calls 'the heart of the Gospel' which is the objective and substitutionary atonement.

On the first, Edwards repeatedly says that he does not see how modern man can accept the reliability and final authority of the Bible. He criticizes evangelicals for the tendency to 'see faults in us, but never in the Bible' (p. 249). On the second it is clear that even if he was willing to say that the Bible taught substitutionary atonement, he could not accept it. The Bible's teaching on divorce, homosexual practice and other matters also, he first questions and then says that in any case we cannot believe that it is right.

Unfortunately the section on the atonement is not the clearest part of the book because Edwards does not seem to have read Stott's recent book, *The Cross of Christ* thoroughly. For instance he describes the position of Aulen in 'Christus Victor' as if it was an argument against Stott's position when Stott in that book had described it very similarly and accepted it as a *subsidiary* aspect of the atonement. Stott also is a little loath to repeat what he has recently written more fully elsewhere. Only here I think does Stott (rightly) charge Edwards with being 'unfair' to him (in response to Edwards' charge that Stott has been unfair to his representation of the views of others). If we are to judge by Edwards' fifty-page chapter on this topic I think we must say it is not clear how he can maintain that he really has an objective rather than subjective view of what the Cross has achieved. Indeed it is not at all clear what Edwards' doctrine of the atonement really is. When in his summary he says 'the dying Jesus soaked up evil as a sponge soaks up water' (p. 156), one is not really clear what this means theologically.

Finally, Stott avoids putting in the knife as I think he might have done. Edwards starts with an acknowledgement of the success of the evangelicals and pleads that if only they would become less distinctively evangelical and a bit more liberal, they might reach the outsiders better. He thinks substitutionary atonement unintelligible to the modern man. Stott could have replied that it is precisely that kind of Gospel preaching that has been so successful, far more successful in fact than the sort of view of the Cross that Edwards has advocated to reach the outsider. Stott was, after all, for a good many years one of the best university evangelists, and his books in which this offensive and apparently unintelligible truth is set out are still a very effective means of bringing unbelievers to faith. Why has the school of thought that Edwards represents been such a relative evangelistic failure? One does not question Edwards' sincerity in believing that a more liberal stance would be more successful, but the facts of this century's history [p. 280](#) are not on his side. Although Edwards mentions some of the psychological reasons which might account for the rise of the new evangelicalism, he is rightly concerned almost entirely with their theology. What he cannot acknowledge, of course, is that it is precisely the evangelical theology which has been used by God and has made people like John Stott fruitful evangelists in the modern world.

Perhaps the position is most clearly seen in the section on miracles, where Edwards simply cannot believe that modern man will accept the biblical miracles and Stott points out that many prominent Christians in science do in fact accept these things as a matter of faith, and find no conflict with science.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

by John R. W. Stott

(Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1986) Pp. 383, £14.95

Reviewed by Robert L. Reymond in *Presbyterion*, Spring 1987

'What ... I shall try to show in this book, is that the biblical doctrine of atonement is substitutionary from beginning to end' (p. 10). In these words the renowned British rector emeritus of All Souls Church in London states the central concern of his latest book, *The Cross of Christ*. This he proceeds to do in opposition to any 'explanation of the death of Christ which does not have at its centre the principle of "satisfaction through substitution", indeed divine self-satisfaction through divine self-substitution' (p. 159). But while *The Cross of Christ* is a remarkable book on the atonement, it is more than that—it is an exposition of the implications of the cross for the individual Christian, family, church and world. Here is, in the main, good theology written at its devotional best.

With the engaging style, organizational skill, and depth of penetrating scriptural insight which the Christian reading public has come to expect from him, Stott captures the reader's interest with his opening sentence and draws him irresistibly into his subject which, he argues, was the central interest of Jesus and his apostles. It will be readily apparent to the reader that he is sitting at the feet of a mature pastor-theologian—and a practised craftsman in the art of communication. Stott arranges his material in four parts roughly equal in length: 'Approaching the Cross', 'The Heart of the Cross', 'The Achievement p. 281 of the Cross', and 'Living Under the Cross'. He brings his study to a close with a concluding chapter: 'The Pervasive Influence of the Cross'.

In Part I Stott argues compellingly that Jesus, his apostles, and his worldwide church all made the cross central to their respective ministries (chap. 1). In response to his question, 'Why did Christ die?' (chap. 2), he urges that while it is true, on the human level, that Jesus was executed (unjustly and illegally) as a criminal 'under Pontius Pilate', yet on the divine level, the Father *gave* his Son up to death and the Son by his own internal resolve voluntarily *surrendered* himself to death in harmony with his Father's will for him. 'Looking [then] below the surface' (chap. 3), after offering an initial construction of the meaning of Christ's death (Christ died a penal death for our sins in order to bring us to God), Stott analyzes Jesus' Last Supper sayings, his Gethsemane sayings, and his cry of dereliction on the cross to enforce this initial construction.

In Part II, obviously the heart of the book, Stott addresses 'the problem of forgiveness' (chap. 4) which springs from the conflict between the majesty of God (his holiness and justice) and the gravity of man's sin. Against lesser, defective ('cheap') solutions to this problem, Stott argues that God's need to uphold his majesty required, if men were to be forgiven, that he receive 'satisfaction for sin' (chap. 5), which out of love for sinners ([John 3:16](#)) he himself provided in the death of his Son (chap. 6). Here Stott vigorously contends for a real substitutionary atonement in which Christ bore not only the pain but also the *penalty*, the *curse*, and the *death* which our sin deserves, enduring the full *penal* consequences of our sins, satisfying thereby divine justice. Only through a 'satisfaction' provided by an acceptable 'substitute', Stott argues, is God able to forgive sinners.

In Part III he exegetically demonstrates that by *propitiating* divine wrath (over against C. H. Dodd's insistence that He only expiated sin), *redeeming* us from sin's bondage, *removing* our guilt, and *reconciling* us to God, Christ's death 'saves sinners' (chap. 7). The cross also 'reveals God's justice, love, wisdom, and power' (chap. 8), and 'conquers all evil' (chap. 9).

In Part IV Stott draws out the significance of the substitutionary atonement for Christian life and duty. He urges that Christ's 'propitiatory' sacrifice demands from the Christian church 'eucharistic' sacrifices (chap. 10), and requires of the redeemed *self-denial* (the denial of whatever we are by the fall) and *self-affirmation* (the affirmation of

whatever we are by creation and redemption), both to become means to *self-sacrificing love* in the spheres of home, church, and world (chap. 11). The cross also directs our conduct toward our [p. 282](#) enemies (chap. 12) and, while not answering every question that might be raised about suffering, makes our and the world's (sometimes almost unbearable) suffering more manageable (chap. 13). Some of the book's most moving passages occur in this chapter in connection with the cross and human suffering. Consider just one:

I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as 'God on the cross'. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. (pp. 335–336)

Stott concludes his study by insisting that the cross must be allowed to pervade the whole of Christian faith and life with its influence—as the ground of our salvation, the hub of our experience, the focus of the church's preaching (even under persecution), the motivation for our holiness, and the sole object of our boasting.

A further observation is in order with regard to the book's content: in addition to its major argument, another valuable feature of the book is Stott's running interaction not only with various theological traditions (e.g., Trent on justification, pp. 183–187, and on the Mass, pp. 264–267) and with minds who stand on the 'cutting edge' of contemporary theological thought (e.g., Dodd, Barth, Moltmann, Küng, Hengel), but also with contemporary movements and issues (e.g., the modern 'human potential' movements, pp. 274–276, the authority of the state and civil disobedience, pp. 304–309, and the 'just war' question, pp. 306, 308, 309). His insights are always thought-provoking, carefully stated, and balanced.

Regardless of one's personal understanding of the nature of the atonement, one can only appreciate the 'disciplined fire' with which Stott writes as he organizes his material and develops his case. Committed as I am to the Reformed faith, I, of course, can only voice my hushed and awed 'Amen' in response to the author's insistence upon the centrality of the cross in Scripture, church and life, and his argument for a *substitutionary* atonement in which Christ—the God-man—is presented as dying not only on our behalf but also *in our* [p. 283](#) *stead*, not only in order to bear the suffering due to us for our sin but also to bear our *penalty*, our *curse*, our *death* as well (cf. esp. pp. 141–149). His orthodox trinitarian and christological views are also made explicit along the way over against the ancient heresies (pp. 141–161). And I was struck more than once—indeed, many times—with the thought that a busy preacher would be rewarded for his labours with many a good quotation and sermon outline if he quarried in Stott's rich minelode of salvific reflection.

But two things did trouble me. I mention them, not to detract from Stott's great literary achievement or to diminish the sale or distribution of this remarkable book in the slightest, but simply to be faithful to Scripture as I understand it. First, while I do not fault Stott for failing to deal in any extensive way in his study of Christ's atonement with the question of its design ('For whom did Christ die?') (this was obviously not his concern), it was not a little disconcerting to find in a book which argues so convincingly for a *real*

substitutionary atonement in which Christ's death 'satisfied' divine justice as He bore the penal consequences for our sins that in the *one* paragraph in the entire book (pp. 146–147) (if there are others I missed them and I read the book with care) in which he addresses the question, he declares that our Lord died 'inclusively', 'not exclusively', for the 'totality' of the 'godless among both the Jews and the Gentiles'. If these words mean anything, Stott is teaching here that Christ died as the *sin* bearer, the *curse* bearer, the *death* bearer for *every* man, that is, that Christ's atonement is *universal* in its substitutionary character. But how then can Stott avoid the conclusion that all men must be forgiven since their Substitute has already *borne their sin, become their curse, and died their death* for them? Is it not precisely this implication in a real substitutionary atonement which drove the Arminian to replace *penal* substitution for something else, namely, the governmental theory of the atonement (cf. J. Kenneth Grider, 'Arminianism', *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*)? I would submit that Stott cannot have it both ways: either Christ died substitutionally (which Stott affirms) but then *exclusively* for his sheep, his church, his people (which latter feature he denies) or Christ died *inclusively* for all men (which Stott affirms) but then not truly substitutionally. For him to argue for both of the just stated affirmations irresistibly leads either to soteric universalism or to the impugning of God's justice *vis à vis* the injustice of exacting double jeopardy against the sinner. (And I must say in passing that it also was not a little disconcerting for an ardent admirer of B. B. Warfield, which I am, to find Stott in this context depicting Warfield as a representative of the governmental theory of the atonement [p. 122], which theory [p. 284](#) Warfield expressly repudiated in his *The Plan of Salvation* as a 'death wound' in the heart of the biblical atonement.)

My second problem relates to the way in which Stott relates the Father to the cross in the sub-section 'God in Christ' of his sixth chapter entitled 'The Self Substitution of God'. I, of course, concur with him that Christ as the eternal Son of the Father is one with the Father in his essential being, and I concur too that the Son humbled himself ([Phil. 2:8](#)) and became flesh ([John 1:14](#)), sin ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)), and curse ([Gal. 3:11](#)) for us. But to conclude from these propositions, as Stott does (following Barth and Cranfield), that what we must understand Christ's work at heart as being is nothing less than the self-substitution of himself on the Father's part in his Son ('the righteous, loving Father humbled himself to become in and through his only Son flesh, sin, and a curse for us'—p. 159) seems to move beyond the carefully nuanced tolerances of Scripture which seem always to portray the Father in the great transactional work of cancelling sin at the cross as remaining the legal representative of the offended Godhead, man as the offender, and Christ, the God [the Son]-man, as our Father-given substitute to 'satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God'. I know of no Scripture (including [2 Cor. 5:19](#)), when properly interpreted, which would have us construe the nature of the cross-work of Christ as really the Father's *self*-substitution for us. If it is the Father who, in his Son, 'humbled himself and became flesh and sin and a curse' for sinners as Stott insists, if it is really the Father who, in his Son, substituted himself at the cross, it is difficult to understand why it is the *Son* who received the exaltation to Lordship at his resurrection and ascension, the praise and the adoration and the acclaim of the saved of all nations in the Revelation, and before whom every knee will bow. I would respectfully suggest that in his very necessary and proper concern to deliver the substitutionary atonement from unscriptural representations of it, and to exalt the cross of *Christ* before our eyes, Stott by his own representation here may have inadvertently diverted our gaze *away* from Christ, God's Son, who alone died the 'God-forsaken' death of the cross *toward* the Father who loves his Son supremely and who desires that his *Son* be honoured among His many brethren for what *he* did at Calvary ([Rom. 8:29](#); [Phil. 2:9–11](#)). I have real misgivings about any representation of the

atonement which would insist that its details necessitate us saying that it was the *Father*, in his Son, who humbled himself to become flesh, sin, and curse for his fallen creature man. When we consider the cross, surely Stott is right when he states that we must see the Father's love and justice. And Christ's being forsaken of God at the cross was surely a horrible grief to both p. 285 Father and Son as the Father endured the costly grief intrinsic to his 'delivering his Son up for us all' ([Rom. 8:32](#)) and as the Son endured the costly grief intrinsic to his surrender to the experience of being forsaken of God. But I question the propriety of saying that we must also see the Father's *self*-substitution at the cross.

Except for these two caveats, I wholeheartedly commend this splendid book on the atonement to pastors and thoughtful Christians alike.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Edited with an Introduction by Bruce Chilton

(Issues in Religion & Theology 5 London: SPCK/Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1984)

Pp. 162 \$3.50 pb.

Reviewed by I. Howard Marshall in *Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. LVIII/No. 3 July 1986.

The topic of the Kingdom of God is presented as the main theme of the message of Jesus by the synoptic Evangelists, and therefore it is not surprising that it has generated a remarkable amount of exegetical and theological discussion. Students will be especially grateful for this new addition to the series *Issues in Religion and Theology*. The aim of the book is to present a representative sample of essays illustrating the progress of modern scholarship and the issues which are still of significance. The introduction by Bruce Chilton sets the scene against the background of the very different approaches of A. Ritschl and J. Weiss. One extract is selected as illustrative of scholarship between the wars—from R. Otto who emphasised the dynamic presence of God revealed in the exorcisms of Jesus. The remaining discussions are all post-war. An essay by W. G. Kümmel from 1964 summarises some of the exegesis in his book of twenty years earlier in which he demonstrated the coexistence in Jesus' ministry of imminent expectation of the kingdom and also of the signs of its presence. In a remarkable essay, now offered in English translation, E. Grässer, who is best-known for his thesis that Jesus proclaimed only the imminent future coming of the kingdom and that the early church proceeded to rewrite the tradition in the light of the delay of the parousia, argues against reinterpreting the kingdom of God in social and political terms; following K. Barth he insists that it is God's action in sheer grace. And among other p. 286 significant remarks he comments: '[the inauthenticity of the sayings ascribed to Jesus], not the authenticity, is what has to be proved, and that is generally true for the synoptic tradition'. To which one can only say 'Amen!' M. Lattke writes on the Jewish background of the concept, showing that it is far from uniform, and this point is also taken up by T. F. Glasson who argues that the 'eschatological consensus' that Jesus taught against a background of belief in the apocalyptic hope of a kingdom that does not belong to this world at all is simply not supported by the texts. (What Glasson does not appear to have considered sufficiently is the place of the hope of a this-worldly messianic age in Judaism and in the teaching of Jesus. I doubt whether this notion can be sharply separated from expectations of the end of the present age.) The collection also makes room for some extracts from N. Perrin's book *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, which solves the time-problem by claiming that 'kingdom of God' is a symbol which evokes the idea of God acting on behalf of his people. A not-unrelated view is established exegetically by the Editor in an extract from his book *God in Strength* in which he claims that the diction of Jesus can be explained from that of the Targums where the phrase expresses the idea of God acting in strength. Finally,

a useful survey essay by H. Bald considers the important question, raised especially by H. Schürmann, as to whether God or the kingdom of God stands at the centre of Jesus' message.

Within the confines of 162 pp. selectivity is inevitable and much has to be left out. Nevertheless, this is an excellent, representative choice of material which will give the flavour of post-war discussion of the kingdom of God. The Editor is of course anxious to show how discussion is moving beyond the Kümmel-Ladd-Schnackenburg consensus into new paths, but it is only right that a volume such as this should be given direction by one who is eminently well-qualified to do so both by his judicious appraisal of the work of others and by his own creative contribution to the discussion. [p. 287](#)

Journals referred to in this issue

Faith and Thought

A Journal devoted to the study of the inter-relation of the Christian Revelation and modern research, published April and October by the Paternoster Press on behalf of The Victoria Institute, 29 Queen Street, London, EC4R 1BH.

World Evangelization

is published bimonthly by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE), to provide information, inspiration and motivation for world evangelization; sent free of charge but gifts are accepted. Write for details to: 2531 Nina St., Pasadena, CA 91107, USA.

Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith

A journal dealing with the interaction between science and Christian faith in a manner consistent with scientific and theological integrity—published quarterly for US \$20 per year by the American Scientific Affiliation, 55 Market Street, Ipswich, Mass 01938, USA.