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Editorial

Some years ago I visited the shrine of a sufi saint, Qamar Ali Darvesh, who died 800 years ago at the age of 18. His tomb is some 24 kilometres from Pune in Western India. I watched Hindu and Muslim worshippers ascend the steps of this red and green canopied shrine, (heads covered and with garlands of flowers, incense sticks and handkerchiefs) and make their petitions to the Almighty through the spirit of the departed saint. In the courtyard outside the shrine lay two large stones rounded in contour. The larger one weighed about 70 kg. and the smaller one slightly less. Eleven men surrounded the larger stone and with the tip of the index finger of their right hands touched the stone and called aloud on the name of the saint. The stone dramatically rose about 2 metres and stayed suspended until the breath of the participants sounding the name ran out. The stone plummeted to the earth with a dull heavy thud. Similarly, with the smaller stone, nine men, neither more nor less, achieved the same result. 'Modern' physics may offer an explanation in terms of the exact amount of bio-energy generated complementing the sound frequencies that resonate with the particular vibrations of the rocks. But for the pilgrims to Shivapur this 'miracle' was convincing proof of the power of the spirit of the departed saint now residing in the shrine.

Western scholars imbued with the rational spirit of the Enlightenment and the scepticism of modern science relegate such beliefs in the spirit world to the cosmology of a pre-scientific age. Biblical scholars have generally followed the same path and given only a minor place to such issues in their commentaries on the biblical text. The efforts of Bultmann and his kin to demythologise these biblical 'myths' in the interest of self-understanding and existential decision are well known. Others have reduced 'principalities and powers in the heavenly places' to the evils of socio-political structures. As Peter O'Brien points out in his article, even evangelical scholars have been unduly influenced by this spirit of uncertainty and even scepticism.

However, the fact of universal religious belief and experience demonstrates the reality of the unseen world of good and evil spirits who can be influenced by correct ritual. Primal religions of the tribal peoples of the world evidence amazing insights into the spiritual world and the exercise of supernatural powers in the appeasing or controlling of spirits. The so-called developed religions of Hinduism and Buddhism exhibit no less absorption with the spirit world and cultic practices to maintain cosmic harmony. Folk Islam has the same awareness of the spirit world, as the three case studies from Pakistan indicate. It is very significant that with the decline of vibrant and living [p. 340](#) Christian faith in western society, an increasing number of 'secular' people are turning back to the cultic beliefs and practices of the pre-Christian era. Astrology, and the number of practising witches and temples dedicated to Satan are increasing faster than churches. Under the broad umbrella of new age philosophies and religions, the new paganism will undoubtedly be the great challenge to the Christian faith in the 21st century—as was paganism in the third and fourth centuries. The finality of Christ is once again the touchstone of our theological debate and will always be so. The next issue of ERT will address this subject.

Churches are already finding that depaganised social customs are being remythologised. For example, Halloween, eagerly looked forward to by countless children with its fun of 'trick or treat' is being reinvested with original Celtic cultic practices involved with the struggle of good and evil cosmic powers. Churches are being forced to ban its celebration, or provide alternative customs. While the universal experiences of all religious faiths affirm the reality of the unseen cosmic world, our belief in this reality does not stem from our common human experience, but from the revelation of God as given in Scripture and pre-eminently in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the only incarnate Son

of God. None can deny that for Jesus, the Kingdom of God was in deadly conflict with the kingdom of Satan and his spirits and that the Cross was the moment of his triumph over all demonic powers. Jesus was careful not to attribute every human event or sickness directly to demon possession, a lesson the enthusiastic charismatic Christian needs to learn today. Moving from extreme scepticism to extreme credulity is no solution to the human dilemma. Scripture reminds us that Satan is both a deceiver, a wolf in sheep's clothing and a roaring lion 'looking for someone to devour'. We are all dependent upon the wisdom of God to discern the spirits, whether they be of God or of Satan.

Just as Christ's mission involved power encounter in furtherance of the truth claims of the gospel, so the Church today is increasingly aware of the same power encounter. As the pastor of an Indian church I found myself confronted with situations where I had to discern the boundary between mental ill-health and demon possession. Alas, my theological training in the West did not prepare me for this eventuality! More Hindus and Muslims come to faith in Christ through experiencing that the power in Jesus Christ is greater than the power of their own deity or prophet than by any other means. Instances of healings, exorcisms, guidance and visions are more powerful than is preaching isolated from living. Our gospel must meet the needs of the whole [p.341](#) person, whether explicitly or implicitly expressed. Justification by faith cannot be separated from the just living by faith. Power encounter with cosmic evil calls for a renewed emphasis on unceasing prayer, personally and corporately expressed. Those directly engaged in confronting naked evil, whether in religious or secular contexts need protection and empowering support through the prayers of God's people. Mission is always a costly task, a dangerous entry into enemy territory. [p. 342](#)

Christ Cleanses Buildings and Delivers People: Four Case Studies

Vivienne Stacey

Reprinted with permission from Christ Supreme Over Satan (Lahore, Masihi Isha'at Khana)

Cosmic spiritual warfare is a common experience of those who live in situations pervaded by occult and demonic practices. The author, who has been given special spiritual gifts of discernment and exorcism shares her experiences in this warfare, trusting in the protective and conquering power of Christ's work on the Cross. With hesitancy she shares these experiences motivated only by the desire to glorify her risen Lord. Readers are urged to pray for her on-going protection.

Editor

A friend of mine once told me of an incident when she was a child growing up in South America. Her father was away on an evangelistic tour and her mother was alone in the house with the children. Some thieves planned to rob the house but when they came near it they saw several men in white guarding the house and so they desisted from their evil plan. Later they enquired from my friend's parents about their guards. There were no

human guards. The occupants of the house never saw them. Presumably they were angels—‘ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation’ ([Heb. 1:14](#)). In the United Bible Training Centre, where I worked for twenty years we had no regular watchman. Generations of students prayed diligently that God would send his guardian angels to protect us and I am sure he did. With our physical eyes we are not often permitted to see the hosts of the Lord but the Bible gives clear teaching about their presence.

In the book of the prophet Zechariah, chapter [2](#) verse [5](#), we read about a wall of fire around Jerusalem: ‘For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.’ Once I saw a wall of fire. Three of us were living for ten days in a village near Rahim Yar Khan conducting evening meetings for Christians and visiting Muslim and Christian homes during the day to share the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. We were aware of opposition to our message and learned that some local people were using magical powers to bring to nothing our efforts. The conflict between good and [p. 343](#) evil, light and darkness, the hosts of the Lord and the powers of hell grew very fierce. We were acutely aware that we were not fighting ‘against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ ([Eph. 6:12](#)). We knew the victory was the Lord’s and we asked him for grace to stand during those evil days. One night at about 2 a.m. I went outside to the bathroom. At the door of our one-roomed house I stopped and gazed. I could see a wall of fire. I knew that it was not a light of this world and I deliberately noted details about it. The wall was six feet high. One portion of it could not be seen, as a building in the middle of the village square blocked the view. The wall of fire continued for several feet on the other side of the building. Thus, I estimated the length of the wall of fire and noted where it started and where it ended. Some minutes later when I returned to the room the wall of fire was no longer visible.

In the morning one of my companions and I went to see whose compound it was that had had this divine protection. We had been praying especially for a family engaged in devil worship that they would repent, come to Christ and be saved. Unknown to us they had left their former house and walled garden and were now living in the area marked by the wall of fire. We visited the home and announced that salvation had come to this house. One of the family then and there accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. One by one other members of the family did so over a period of months. One might enquire why such a vision was given. Perhaps it was so that in the fierce conflict with satanic forces which involved sudden and severe illness, black shapes going through our room, the shaking of my bed, a horrible nightmare, strange knockings and inexplicable bloodstains, we might know that all was not evil and that ultimate victory belonged to God. Sometimes the Lord encourages his servants with visions as he did the apostle Paul in Corinth ([Acts 18:9, 10](#)), and the servant of Elisha ([2 Kings 6:15–17](#)). Sometimes Christians do not seem to be so protected or encouraged. We are in an area of mystery. By faith we know that ‘the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them’ ([Ps. 34:7](#)) and that whatever happens occurs only by God’s permission as the story of Job so clearly shows ([Job 1:11, 12](#)).

CASE STUDIES IN EXORCISM

1). A Haunted House

Sometimes a building is so invaded and infested by evil powers that a radical exorcism is needed. My most outstanding experience in this [p. 344](#) area was in connection with a house in Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. The house was purchased by Peter Zwemer,

brother of the famous missionary Samuel Zwemer, in about 1893 for a very small sum as the local Arabs thought it was haunted and did not want to live in it. Through the years some of those who lived in the house had troubles which might have had satanic origins. Peter died at the early age of 29. One missionary died under strange circumstances, perhaps having committed suicide. Another was mentally ill and had to leave. Another couple departed greatly discouraged. The Arabs until recently still considered the house haunted, saying that evil spirits frequented the main staircase and the roof in particular. When I heard that Muslim Omanis reckoned that a house occupied by Christian workers was possessed or haunted I was full of indignation. Some months later when I was flying into Muscat on my second visit the Lord clearly commissioned me to deal in his name with this situation.

How does one set about fulfilling such a commission? My visit was to last eight days and I would be staying in the 'haunted' house with an American nurse. At supper the first evening I broached the subject. I asked my hostess to tell me more about her house and why the Arabs considered it to be possessed. She was surprised that I raised this subject as she herself was planning to ask my advice about some demon-possessed patients. I said I would pray for her and with her about the patients but that I had no commission to deal with people but only with the house. I explained that I could proceed only if we were in complete agreement and on condition that if either of us needed the other's help we would call each other by day or night. Also when we were free from our other work we would take all possible opportunities for prayer and Bible study together. We generally managed to spend two or three hours each day praising God, praying and reading the Bible. We read through the whole of Isaiah. Muscat is surrounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth side by the sea. One evening my companion and I were praying on the roof when suddenly she called out: 'Look at that rock. It is illuminated.' I could see nothing except the black outline of the rock. Three times she saw it illuminated. The third time I also saw the rock illuminated by a heavenly light. Immediately I said: 'Yes, despite the presence and power of evil, these mountains are full of the hosts of the Lord' ([2 Kings 6:15-17](#)).

My first task had been to find out what was really wrong with the house. Diagnosis is all-important. I asked the Lord to show me and I took practical steps to find out where evil particularly dwelt. I meditated and prayed in various parts of the house—in the kitchen, the [p. 345](#) sitting room, on the stairs. Several nights I was driven out of my bedroom by satanic forces. Even kneeling by my bed I found it too terrifying to stay. One night I called my companion. We prayed together and I spent the rest of the night sleeping on the floor in her room. Throughout the eight days I rarely slept for more than an hour at a time and never for more than five out of twenty-four hours. The Lord gave me extra strength and I was able to pray and meditate and carry out my normal programme of Bible teaching and evangelistic meetings with Pakistanis in the areas around. One night all hell seemed to be let loose and I decided that I would read in the sitting room Isaiah's servant song about the death and victory of the Lord Jesus Christ ([Isa. 52:13-53:12](#)) and praise God whatever happened. I knew that the local people claimed that sometimes they 'saw' spirits on the roof and so another day I set out to watch and pray on the roof.

At that moment the Lord clearly warned me that if I went on the roof I would be killed. Then the words of the communion service came to my mind: 'Preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life' and I knew I was safe provided I did not go on the roof at that time. For some days I had prayed specifically that I might know what spirits inhabited the house and its environs (it had a small garden). The answer was clear—spirits of suicide, depression and fear. I commanded them in Jesus Christ's name that they should go. There was no clear proof that the spirits had gone and there were still other manifestations of

demonic activities. One night I found my companion nearly choking. I asked her permission to put my hands on her throat and neck and to pray in Jesus' name. Immediately she was all right. She had heard a strange noise between her bedroom and the sitting room. The next day I dusted all the objects in the wall cupboard of the sitting room, some of which were souvenirs from Africa. She enquired what I was doing and I explained that I was praying over each object that it would be cleansed through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. She then joined me in this exercise. Some weeks later she wrote to explain that she had found one object that was probably the cause of some of the trouble in her room—a curved Omani dagger which had been used to ward off evil spirits from a mother and baby. She had taken it from the patient, hidden it in her room and forgotten about it.

Before I left Muscat I was able to tell her that the house was cleansed through the power and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and that any subsequent evidences of evil would be attacks from outside and could be repudiated and repulsed in the name of Jesus Christ. No longer would the Arabs have reason to note that a Christian home was the dwelling place of evil spirits. On return to Pakistan I wrote confirming [p. 346](#) this and quoting [Isa. 60:18](#) in regard to her house: 'You shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates, Praise.' The Lord also had his therapy for me after this long struggle. I had the opportunity to go weekly for six consecutive weeks to a communion service. The Lord ministered to my body, soul and spirit as I heard again the words when I took the bread: 'The body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.' Truly Jesus Christ protects and cleanses.

The following principles clearly emerge from the incidents I have just recorded:

1. The Lord's commissioning is needed for each episode of such a ministry.
2. The ministry is a team ministry and is built on the Lord's commissioning, prayer, praise, Bible study and obedience.
3. The Lord gives discernment and guidance when he sees it is needed.
4. The deliberate challenge to Satan and his demons brings a backlash and fiercer conflict for a while.
5. The victory is Christ's and rests on his word, his authority and faith in who he is.
6. The Lord sometimes gives visions to encourage and strengthen his servants.
7. The glory is the Lord's alone. He alone will be exalted. His glory he will not give to another ([Isa. 48:11](#)). Praise was an integral part of the whole episode.
8. It is not wise to talk unnecessarily about such happenings. Only now after more than eleven years have I shared this experience apart from a few occasions when I was especially constrained to speak.
9. Obedience to Jesus Christ's command and the cleansing which followed proved to be the basis for future fruitfulness and blessing in Oman. A year later I returned to Oman for a Bible teaching ministry and stayed in the same house. There was great peace and serenity and much freedom to expound the scriptures.
10. The Lord strengthens us physically and spiritually for what he commands.

2). A Sick Girl Healed

In Saudi Arabia I was once the guest for dinner of a Christian Pakistani couple and their two small children. They had lived in Riyadh, the capital, for several years and had all kept fit and well. A few months [p. 347](#) previously they had moved to their present house and had all been sick off and on. The little girl was especially unwell. My host and hostess asked me what I thought about the situation. I replied that the sickness could be due to natural causes like a contaminated water supply or that it might have a satanic origin due

to evil powers inhabiting the house. At this one of the other guests laughed and I knew that I could not proceed to explain more. I promised to pray for the family. I shared the problem with the couple with whom I was staying and we specifically prayed for healing and for the Lord's victory. Unexpectedly I visited the home the next day. The scoffer was not present. The little girl was still ill. I suggested to the parents and the three other visitors that we should join together as a team and pray for cleansing in each room of the house.

Accordingly we went from room to room and prayed for the casting out of evil and for cleansing through the blood of Christ. We then praised God and prayed for those who used the particular room and for its special uses. In the kitchen we prayed for the one who cooked, for those who ate the food etc..

A Muslim neighbour visited this house a few hours after this service of exorcism. She exclaimed in astonishment: 'Your little girl is now well and your home has a different atmosphere. What has happened?' The lady of the house told her of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and how a group of believers had prayed and that all evil had been expelled. This proved an effective way to share with her the good news of Jesus Christ's victory over sin and evil.

Suggested prayers for exorcism for places

1. God, the Son of God, who by death destroyed death, and overcame him who had the power of death, beat down Satan quickly. Deliver this place (room, house, church) from all evil spirits; all vain imaginations, projections and all deceits of the evil one; and bid them harm no one but depart to the place appointed for them, there to remain for ever. God, Incarnate God, who came to give peace, give peace. Amen.
2. In the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the Most High God, I bind you, evil spirit(s), and command you to leave this place (etc.), to harm no one, and to go to your own place, never to return. Amen.

3). A Demon-possessed Girl

In 1977 I was a guest for a few days of some expatriates in a large city of Pakistan. As two of us were sitting at lunch the Christian [p. 348](#) headmistress of a girls' school rushed in and said: 'Please come and help us straightaway. One of the girls is demon-possessed and I don't know what to do.' My hostess asked me to come. We found the Pakistani matron at the bedside of a fourteen year old girl who was one of the schoolchildren living in the girls' hostel. Her parents were away working in the Middle East. I asked for some background information and was told that the family had been involved in some occult practices and that sometimes the girl was troubled by evil spirits. Sometimes she would behave normally. At other times she would behave like a very young child and her speech would be slurred. Sometimes she would be hysterical and at other times apparently unconscious but with her eyes open and staring. I was informed that she was possessed by four demons. The group looked to me for leadership and guidance in this situation which was having a disturbing influence on the school and hostel.

First, I wanted to make my own diagnosis. The girl was not fully herself. Her speech was somewhat slurred but she was able to comprehend what was said to her. I asked her a few questions and then requested her to read a few verses from 1 John chapter [1](#). When she came to verse [7](#): 'but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin,' her speech slurred even more and she read like a six year old child. She had particular difficulty in reading about the blood of Jesus and there was a kind of involuntary jerk when she came

to this phrase. After several efforts she finished reading the verse. She was gradually being taken over by other forces and was nearly unconscious. I decided to speak to the demons. To test them I said: 'You are five'. I had already been told she had four demons. Immediately in a voice totally different from the girl's the answer came back: 'We are four.' I then commanded the demons to give their names which they did. One was called Matthew, another was Pharaoh, another Parkash and the fourth was Kanta. These names generally belong to members of three distinct religious groups—Christian or Jewish, ancient Egyptian and Hindu. I was convinced that the girl was demon-possessed. As we prayed and praised God singing hymns of praise around her bedside she became more violent and hysterical. She had more than usual strength and I realized that two people should stay with her.

In such a situation one needs a team of committed Christians. I had little previous knowledge of two of the group. The matron had already shown her superstitious frame of mind by wanting to light candles and p.349 sprinkle water. I did not know anything about the spiritual state of the headmistress but she had asked for help. However, the Lord gave me the conviction that I was to mobilize the people he had sent. Accordingly I requested the missionary and the headmistress to go through all the rooms in the school and hostel and to pray for the casting out of evil and for the Lord's blessing. The matron and I stayed with the girl and were later joined by another missionary. We praised God in song and word and the girl grew more violent. After an hour or so she quietened down. Although she regained consciousness she was not fully herself. I asked her to say the refrain in each verse. Her concentration gradually improved but when we came to verse 15: 'but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea', she gave a violent start. We then remembered that one of the evil spirits was called Pharaoh but we had not chosen this psalm for that reason or even remembering that that particular verse occurred in the psalm. We chose the psalm because repetition was easier for someone in her state than reading alternate verses or a passage. We talked to the girl and asked her if she wanted to be delivered from these evil spirits. She was terrified of them. They gave her knowledge of future happenings, for example, that a certain person would come at a certain time later in the day even though he was not expected. These 'foretellings' were generally correct to the minute. The next night the spirits told her that she would die at 2 a.m. and she believed them on the basis of their previous accuracy. We told her that this was a lie and that they were trying to terrorize her but that she should trust in Jesus Christ who had overcome death and the powers of darkness on his cross for ever. We explained to her that we were all going to pray for the demons to leave her. We each commanded them to leave and to go to the place reserved for them unto the day of judgment. However, there was no sign that they had left. We promised to watch and pray with her through the night and assured her that she would be alright.

Her state had created an atmosphere of fear in the school and hostel. I asked the headmistress if I might speak to the whole school. I explained to the staff and pupils that this girl was being oppressed by Satan but that nothing could stand against the power of the name, the blood and the praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. I urged those in the hostel to praise God in their dormitories at any time when they were afraid. I taught them to say as many things as they could remember about Jesus and after each saying to declare 'Jesus is King'. Accordingly one would say 'Jesus is Saviour' and the others would respond 'Jesus is King'. Then another would say 'Jesus is the Good Shepherd' and all would say 'Jesus is King'. We counselled several schoolgirls and some p.350 accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. They were all from the Christian community but most were without personal living faith.

Two of us stayed with the girl through the remainder of the day, all night and through the next day and night. We took it in turn to watch and pray. She still had attacks. We knew that the victory belonged to Jesus and realized that there were three possible explanations for these attacks fresh possession by other spirits, counterfeit attacks or else that the original four demons had not yet left her. We had no doubt about Jesus' ultimate victory. However, although the girl was responsive to biblical teaching it was not until weeks later that she accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour and entered into a personal relationship with him. This delay together with the influences from her family background and the fact that there has been a history of magical and occult practice on the compound of the school and hostel probably made this a very stubborn case of demon-possession. There were other struggles to be endured and other cleansings to be done and other victories to be demonstrated and for several months the Lord's servants were tested. Eventually all was clean and calm.

4). Jesus Heals a Man With an Unclean Spirit

Let us first look at the principles which emerge from a study of the Lord Jesus Christ's deliverance of the man with an unclean spirit in [Mark 1:21-28](#). Then we can turn to a study of his dealings with other evil spirits. Finally we analyze a few contemporary case-histories of people troubled by evil spirits to see what we can learn for the exercise of the church's ministry of deliverance today.

Mark writes of the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples: 'And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God'. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him'. And the unclean spirit, convulsing and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him'. And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee' ([Mk. 1:21-28](#)). p. 351

From this incident recorded in the gospel according to Mark we should note the following points:

1. Jesus Christ taught and acted with evident authority ([Mk. 1:22, 27](#)). All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him by God ([Mt. 28:18](#)). The ordinary people of Capernaum were astonished at his authoritative teaching and commands.
2. Probably this authority in Jesus Christ's teaching and presence drew the possessed man to the synagogue and precipitated a power encounter ([Mk. 1:23, 24](#)).
3. The man had an unclean spirit or 'the spirit of an unclean demon' ([Lk. 4:33](#)). Evil spirits can generally be categorized e.g. a dumb spirit ([Lk. 11:14](#)); a spirit of divination ([Acts 16:16](#)); a spirit of infirmity ([Lk. 13:11](#)).
4. The unclean spirit within the man, not the man, spoke to Jesus Christ ([Mk. 1:24](#)).
5. The unclean spirit recognized who Jesus was—Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God ([Mk. 1:24](#)).
6. The unclean spirit tormented and severely troubled the man he possessed. He convulsed him and cried with a loud voice when he was rebuked ([Mk. 1:26](#)).
7. Jesus Christ commanded the unclean spirit to be silent, that is, to be muzzled, and to come out of the man ([Mk. 1:25](#)).

8. The conflict was intensified but the unclean spirit came out ([Mk. 1:26](#)).
9. Jesus Christ knew that he was dealing with one spirit not several, despite the spirit's reference to 'us' ([Mk. 1:24, 25](#)).
10. Jesus Christ had to face the question of publicity ([Mk. 1:28](#)).

A study of the seven other accounts of the deliverances by the Lord Jesus Christ of possessed individuals endorses these principles and adds to them. The accounts, sometimes found in only one or two, or in all three of the synoptic gospels, are:

- a. The record of Mary of Magdalene from whom seven devils were cast out ([Mk. 16:9](#); [Lk. 8:2](#)).
- b. The healing of the woman bent double ([Lk. 13:10-17](#)).
- c. The deliverance of the epileptic boy ([Mt. 17:14-21](#); [Mk. 9:14-29](#); [Lk. 9:37-43](#)).
- d. The casting out of the dumb spirit ([Mt. 9:32-33](#); [Lk. 11:14](#)).
- e. The deliverance of the man with a blind and dumb spirit ([Mt. 12:22](#)).
- f. The deliverance of the man with many demons ([Mk. 5:1-20](#); [Lk. 8:26-33](#)). p. 352
- g. The casting out of an unclean spirit from a Syrophenician girl ([Mk. 7:24-30](#)).

Further principles emerging from a study of Jesus Christ's ministry and not noted in the analysis of the first incident ([Mk. 1:21-28](#)) are:

1. The repetition of the command to the evil spirit to come out of the person. In Greek the imperfect tense of the verb 'come out' is used in [Mark 5:8](#) to indicate repetition.
2. New Testament exorcisms were mostly carried out publicly wherever the need for them became apparent, for example, in the synagogue ([Mk. 1:23](#)) or in the open air. One exorcism was carried out when the sufferer was absent ([Mk. 7:24-30](#) compare [Mt. 15:21-28](#)).
3. The necessity of a person's being filled with the Holy Spirit after being emptied of evil. The Beelzebul controversy as recorded by Luke implies this ([Lk. 11:14-26](#)).
4. Jesus' exorcisms relate closely to faith and prayer ([Mk. 9:19, 29](#); see also [Mt. 17:17, 20](#); [Lk. 9:41](#)).
5. Jesus' rapid, accurate diagnosis is a striking feature of his authority, and his 'doing all things well' ([Mk. 7:37](#)).

Vivienne Stacey is a member of *Interserve* and works in the Middle East. p. 353

Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church

P. T. O'Brien

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We are printing this longer-than-usual article because in interpreting the Biblical concept, 'principalities and powers' for our contemporary world, it lucidly shows the influence of the

interpreter's own pre-understanding. It raises fundamental issues about our hermeneutical method on the relationship of myth to metaphor, symbol and analogy. Also, the article is fundamental to our theme, 'Christ and Cosmic Conflict'.

INTRODUCTION

The following study is an exegetical exercise which attempts to determine what the New Testament writers, and Paul in particular, meant by the phrase, 'principalities and powers', and its equivalents. At the same time the paper is a study in hermeneutics and the history of interpretation, for these and related phrases have been widely used in a variety of ways within contemporary theology. They function to define the concerns and mission of the Church and are currently being applied in diverse political, cultural and ideological circumstances. Ronald Sider, for example, recently commented: 'To announce Christ's Lordship to the principalities and powers is to tell governments that they are not sovereign.'¹ Earlier in the same article Sider had noted: 'There is growing agreement that when St. Paul speaks of the principalities and powers ..., he refers *both* to the socio-political structures of human society *and* to unseen spiritual forces that undergird, lie behind and in some mysterious way help shape human socio-political structures.'² Sider's references to governments, and the principalities being identified, in part at least, with 'the socio-political structures of human society' are consistent with a recent trend among contemporary theologians. Are this and other diverse usages of the New Testament references to the powers legitimate? And what **P. 354** hermeneutical presuppositions are (implicitly or explicitly) appealed to in order to generate such conclusions?

The purpose of this study, which seeks to probe into these and related questions, is fourfold: first, to provide a brief history of interpretation indicating how major interpreters since the end of the nineteenth century have understood Paul's references to the powers. Second, special attention will be paid to the significant hermeneutical presuppositions of these writers as well as the principles of interpretation used by them. Next we shall attempt to enunciate the main lines of the New Testament teaching on the powers, though in the nature of the case our remarks will necessarily be brief. Finally, some brief concluding remarks will be made about the relationship of the powers to the structures.

I. THE DEBATE OVER THE POWERS IN RECENT THEOLOGY

(a) Isolated References in the Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century little attention was paid to the principalities and powers as part of Paul's teaching. Statements about the powers were either read as a confirmation of the conventional orthodox doctrine about angels and devils, or else they were seen as the last vestiges of an antiquated mythology in Pauline thought with which more enlightened ages need waste no time. The quote of Otto Everling³ is pertinent: 'the utterly subordinate significance of this segment of Paul's thought world seems to have become too generally axiomatic for one to give serious attention to it.'⁴

¹ R. J. Sider, 'Christ and Power', *IRM* 69 (1980), p.17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ In the introduction to his *Die paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie* (Göttingen, 1988), p. 4.

⁴ Quoted by H. Berkof, *Christ and the Powers* (ET. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1962), p. 72.

The older liberal theologians of the nineteenth century, regarding the cosmology of the New Testament as essentially mythical and obsolete in character, thought they could safely eliminate it along with all other mythological elements. They distinguished between the essence of religion and the temporary garb which is assumed. The kerygma was reduced to Harnack, as a representative example, to a few basic principles of religion and ethics which are timeless and eternal. Although it is only within concrete historical processes that they are realized, we are all capable of verifying them in our own experience at whatever period we happen to live. References, then, to the p. 355 principalities and powers in Pauline thought are eliminated as part of that antiquated mythology.?

(b) The History of Religions School

Representatives of the History of Religions school were the first to discover the extent to which the New Testament is permeated by mythology.⁵ For them the importance of these documents lay not in their *teaching* about religion and ethics but in the *actual* religion and piety. All the mythological imagery with its apparent objectivity was either of secondary importance or else completely negligible. Martin Dibelius' work on the spirit-world in the thought of Paul⁶ was a product of this school. In a detailed piece of scholarship he placed Paul's expressions in the context of contemporary religious thought. Following Everling Dibelius sought to show: that a world dominated by supernatural forces was central to Paul's thinking; that these forces were hostile to mankind; and that this was the framework within which Paul developed his views about man's existence and the work of Christ. Dibelius considered Paul's uniqueness lay in his belief that the powers were conquered in Christ. But the mythological imagery itself was of value only from the viewpoint of comparative religion. Since in our time 'ideas of spirits and devils' are 'in the process of disappearing' the language of the powers has no meaning for us. So we must get to the essence of Paul's message concerning man's existence and Christ's work. The high-water mark of the apostle's teaching was the experience of mystical union with Christ, in whom God took symbolic form.

(c) Bultmann and the Existentialist Approach

If little attention was paid to the powers in Pauline thought during the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, then in the 1930s a change occurred. A number of German theologians, after the rise of p. 356 Nazism, began reading the relevant Pauline texts in a new way. Heinrich Schlier, one of the first to consider that these passages found a strong resonance in the atmosphere of the times, as early as 1930 observed that although the background of the Pauline conception of the powers had been studied in the context of

⁵ Many influential scholars representing this viewpoint came to the conclusion that not only did Christianity have its own myths, but also it had been significantly influenced at its formative stage by particular myths of other religions, esp. those of Jewish apocalyptic, of Gnosticism and of the Hellenistic mystery religions; note the treatment of J. D. G. Dunn, 'Demythologizing—the Problem of Myth in the New Testament', in *New Testament Interpretation. Essays in Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 285–307.

⁶ *Die Geisterwelt in Glauben des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909).

comparative religion, 'we have generally neglected even to ask whether Scripture and Christian tradition might be thinking of definite life experiences when they speak of the devil and the demons.'⁷ For Schlier the powers were not objective realities but projections of what we might call, with Bultmann, man's 'self-understanding'. Schlier was later to change his own theological position⁸ but his contribution at this point of time was important since it gave expression to an existential understanding of the principalities and powers.

Bultmann himself had understood the powers as expressions, on the one hand, of man's inability to control his world and the future, and, on the other, in terms of the New Testament's call for existential emancipation.⁹ What hermeneutical principles had led Bultmann to arrive at these conclusions? Central to his hermeneutic in relation to the New Testament was his understanding of myth.¹⁰ For Bultmann the gospel is not separate or distinct from myth; rather, it is embodied in the mythical language of the New Testament. To discard the myth is to discard the gospel itself. Bultmann uses myth in three distinct though related ways (these are not necessarily fully compatible with each other): first, myth is a way of speaking 'of the other world in terms of this world, and of the gods in terms derived from human life'.¹¹ Second, myth explains unusual phenomena in terms of the invasion of supernatural forces. It is necessarily bound up with a primitive or prescientific way of looking at the world. So Bultmann writes: [p. 357](#)

The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character. The world is viewed as a three-storeyed structure, with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the world underneath. Heaven is the abode of God and of celestial beings ... The underworld is hell ... The earth ... is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his demons on the other. These supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that men think and will and do.¹²

This particular view of myth had a long history, stemming from the period of the enlightenment, and it persisted in the intellectual circles in which Bultmann moved. Mythical thinking, then, was essentially uncritical thinking.

Bultmann's third concept of myth may be discerned in his statement: 'The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially'.¹³ These three distinguishable accounts of myth Bultmann sought to hold together. As understood by him myth is almost all-embracing and includes, for example, not only the three-decker

⁷ Cited by Berkhof, *Christ*, p. 73.

⁸ The above-mentioned statement does not appear in the later English Translation, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961).

⁹ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 1 [ET. London: SCM, 1952], pp. 258f.; cf. the recent article, part of which is devoted to the theme of the Pauline powers, by L. Bautista, H. B. Garcia and Sze-Kar Wan, 'The Asian Way of Thinking in Theology' *ERT* 6 (1982), pp. 37-49, esp. p. 43.

¹⁰ In this analysis of Bultmann's hermeneutics I am especially indebted to A. C. Thiselton's writings, especially *The Two Horizons* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), pp. 252ff.

¹¹ Thiselton, *Horizons*, p. 252.

¹² 'New Testament and Mythology', in *Kerygma and Myth. A Theological Debate*, ed. H. W. Bartsch (ET. London: SPCK, 1972, 1972) p. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

view of the universe, miracles, God's sending his Son in the fullness of time, the resurrection of Christ as an event, and all statements about future eschatology, but also those motifs which have particular reference to our theme, viz. demon possession and the notion that supernatural powers influence the course of history.

Bultmann next enunciates the task facing the Christian interpreter of the New Testament. It is not that of trying to 'save the kerygma by selecting some of its features and subtracting others, and thus reduce the amount of mythology in it'.¹⁴ Nor is it with the older liberal theologians to regard mythology as relative and temporary and therefore to eliminate it altogether while retaining only the broad, basic principles of religion and ethics. Instead, the New Testament itself, for the following reasons, compels us to engage in the task of demythologization,¹⁵ that is, of reinterpreting the mythological elements along existential lines: first, its mythological language is really intended to speak of human existence and to challenge man to a new self-understanding p. 358 and existential decision. Second, various myths within the New Testament contradict each other, thus demonstrating that myth is no more than a way of speaking. Third, the process of demythologizing has already begun in the New Testament itself, especially in the way eschatological language is handled. So, to engage in the hermeneutical task of demythologizing is not to reject Scripture but the world-view of Scripture, which is the world-view of a past epoch. By demythologizing the interpreter will eliminate false stumbling-blocks and 'bring into sharp focus the real stumbling-block, the word of the cross'.¹⁶

Käsemann, in his paper entitled 'The Eschatological Royal Reign of God', which he read at the 1980 Melbourne W.C.C. conference, carried through Bultmann's hermeneutical principles consistently with reference to the principalities and powers. He acknowledged that when the New Testament referred to these authorities it seemed to indicate that they were personal. It was necessary, however, according to Käsemann to 'criticize and demythologize the language and ideas of an antique world-view as out of date ... since only in this way can we have a true perception of the reality of our contemporary life and present world' (p. 4). Käsemann then reinterpreted the Pauline statements and understood them to refer to *particular* demonic structures which need to be exorcized in the name of Christ.

By way of response it is not our intention to attempt a comprehensive critique of Bultmann's hermeneutics. Our aims are much more limited. But the following need to be noted in-as-much as they bear on contemporary interpretation of the Pauline references to the principalities and powers. In many respects Bultmann's existentialist interpretation crystallizes, though it develops beyond, previous scholarly assessments of the powers. At the same time the current debate cannot be adequately understood apart from his contribution. We may not be entirely satisfied with Bultmann's answers. But there is no doubt that he has raised some relevant questions in their most acute form.

(i) On the positive side, it is noted that Bultmann's hermeneutics is 'never *only* a matter of understanding, but also of *hearing* and of *appropriation*'.¹⁷ Its purpose is to bring about encounter and dialogue. And although one may have serious questions about his

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ On the antecedents to Bultmann's demythologizing see especially Thiselton, *Horizons*, pp. 205ff., and Dunn, in *Interpretation*, p. 289.

¹⁶ R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (ET. London: SCM, 1960), pp. 35f.

¹⁷ Thiselton, *Horizons*, p. 287.

demythologizing the presupposition of such a reconstruction is that the New Testament writings have something to say to the present.

(ii) Bultmann has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to [p. 359](#) the issue of the interpreter's 'pre-understanding' as he approaches the text of the New Testament. He has argued that there is no neutral or pre-suppositionless exegesis, so that the hermeneutical task is a circular one, with constant interaction between object and subject, text and interpreter. In this dialectical process he claims there can be no finality, only an approximation to the truth of the Word of God in a particular culture or situation. The interpreter's pre-understanding is the critical factor in this process.¹⁸ But Bultmann himself has been criticized by N. A. Dahl for 'absolutiz[ing] ... his philosophical "pre-understanding" in such a way that he decides in advance what the New Testament writings may or may not really say'.¹⁹ Even if Dahl's criticism is not wholly correct regarding Bultmann's *view* of pre-understanding (and the latter recognizes that pre-understanding is a starting point which must be corrected in the light of the text), the way in which he has let his own pre-understanding be shaped in *practice* is certainly open to criticism.²⁰ In effect his pre-understanding is essentially a pre-commitment to an existentialist interpretation of the gospel, resurrection, eschatology, and the powers, etc., in a twentieth century Western cultural context.

(iii) Serious questions and criticisms have been raised about Bultmann's three-fold understanding of myth. On the one hand it is considered his *concept* of myth is too all-embracing.²¹ It confuses myth and analogy and if pressed makes it in effect impossible to speak of God at all. Bultmann recognized that it was legitimate to talk of 'God as Creator' by analogy, but once he allows this, is it not possible to argue that much of the so-called 'mythological language' of the New Testament is metaphor, symbol or analogy after all? Several scholars have cautioned us about assuming the biblical writers necessarily used mythical imagery uncritically. Albright, for example, insists that they no more thought of heaven as literally 'up' than the modern man thinks of the sun as literally 'rising'. Minear has concluded that the author of the Apocalypse did not believe naively in a three-decker universe, while others have argued that myth is to be understood not as an outmoded primitive world-view, but as vivid imagery which functions with an [p. 360](#) inner logic. It is 'not a thing of the past, but characterizes man in any epoch'.²² Further, the belief about supernatural interventions in the affairs of men is not necessarily primitive or pre-scientific, as the Enlightenment view of myth would imply. Pannenberg has rightly asserted: 'The acceptance of divine intervention in the course of events ... is fundamental to every religious understanding of the world, including one which is not mythical in the sense in which comparative religion uses the term'.²³ And pertinently he adds that even belief in demons is not specifically mythical. It is clear that these last points are

¹⁸ On the importance of pre-understanding, in relation to the New Testament text, together with important safeguards see G. N. Stanton, 'Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism', in *Interpretation* pp. 60–71; cf. also B. J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979), pp. 40ff.

¹⁹ N. A. Dahl, *The Crucified Christ and Other Essays* (ET. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), p. 97, cited by Thiselton, *Horizons*, p. 283.

²⁰ Thiselton, *Horizons*, p. 283.

²¹ Dunn, in *Interpretation*, p. 297.

²² So Karl Jaspers, cited by Thiselton, *Horizons*, p. 289.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

particularly significant for other interpreters besides those within the Bultmannian existentialist school.

(iv) On the other hand, if Bultmann's definition of myth is too all-embracing, then paradoxically his *understanding* of the *truth* of myth is too narrow. He has been attacked by his more radical disciples for not carrying through his demythologizing programme further. If 'the self understanding of the man of faith is really the constant in the New Testament'²⁴ then where does Christology really fit in? If faith relates to man's possibility of authentic existence then this can not be tied exclusively to Christ. Critics from the right have argued that Bultmann has reduced theology to anthropology, or at the least Christology to soteriology. And as far as the Pauline principalities are concerned Bultmann's reductionist interpretation leads him to assert:

He [Paul] is thereby only expressing a *certain understanding of existence*: The spirit powers *represent* the reality into which man is place as one full of conflicts and struggle, a reality which threatens and tempts.²⁵

The objective, malevolent activity of Satan and his minions has been effectively reduced, even removed, through this demythologizing programme.

(d) Cullmann's Two-fold Interpretation: Angelic Powers and Civil Authorities

We next turn to the important and influential contribution of Oscar Cullmann to the subject. Cullmann addressed himself to the question of the *exousiai* ('authorities') in [Rom. 13:1](#).²⁶ To whom does this term [p. 361](#) refer? It is, of course, clear that the civil authorities are being spoken about. What has been in dispute is whether there is in *exousias* a double reference—that is, not only to the civil authorities but also the angelic powers standing behind, and action through these civil authorities. The suggestion of a double reference goes back to Martin Dibelius (who, however, later abandoned it) and, in addition to Cullmann, it was taken up by K. L. Schmidt, G. Dehn, K. Barth and others. Cullmann argued that the two-fold interpretation was 'thoroughly justified as an hypothesis, from the standpoints of philosophy, Judaistic concepts, and the early Christian and Pauline theology'.²⁷ His reasons²⁸ were as follows:

(i) Whenever *exousia* occurs in the Pauline letters in the plural or in the plurally used singular with *pasa* (except for [Tit 3:1](#)) it clearly signifies invisible angelic powers (1 Cor. [Eph. 1:21](#); [3:10](#); [6:12](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [2:10](#), [15](#); cf. [1 Pet. 3:22](#)).

(ii) The subjection of the powers is a central dogma of the primitive Christian confession and therefore of Pauline thought.

(iii) [1 Cor. 2:8](#) is a strong ground for the double reference to both spiritual and human forces, while in [1 Cor. 6:1ff.](#) the mention of angels in connection with the litigation by Christians in the civil courts is best explained by reference to the idea of the civil authorities as the executive agents of angel powers.

²⁴ H. Braun, cited by Dunn, in *Interpretation*, p. 298.

²⁵ *Theology* 1, p. 259, our italics.

²⁶ He expressed his views in *Christ and Time* (ET. London: SCM, 1951) and subsequently in *The State in the New Testament* (ET. London: SCM, 1957). Note especially the excursus in the latter volume, pp. 95–114.

²⁷ *State*, p. 114.

²⁸ Note C. E. B. Cranfield's treatment in *A Commentary on Romans 12–13* (Edinburgh: Oliver, 1965), pp. 66f., and more recently *The Epistle to the Romans* 11 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979), pp. 657f.

(iv) Early Christianity shared with late Judaism the belief that invisible powers were at work behind the earthly phenomena; especially there was a firm belief in the angels of the nations.

Considerable opposition to Cullmann's theory was voiced by a number of critics on linguistic, exegetical, historical and dogmatic grounds. C. D. Morrison²⁹ charted the course of the debate, and the more important objections brought against the theory are as follows:

(i) The term *exousia* is not accompanied here by *arche* nor does it form part of a list of (at least two) terms. The occurrence at [Rom. 13:1](#) thus differs from all others in the Pauline corpus whenever it refers to spiritual powers.

(ii) Unlike other passages in Paul that have reference to the powers, [Rom. 13](#) is not explicitly concerned with the work of Christ. [p.362](#)

(iii) Cullmann has drawn too much out of the text of [1 Cor. 2:8](#) in understanding the rulers as both human and spiritual forces.³⁰

(iv) There is no evidence in the New Testament that the hostile spiritual powers were re-commissioned, after being subdued, to a positive service of Christ. If this was followed logically it would suggest that in Christ the powers themselves rule the believer. Quite the reverse. In being united to Christ believers are no longer subject to the spiritual powers of the world (cf. [Col. 2:20](#)).

(v) Paul's teaching in [Rom. 13:1-7](#) is best understood against an Old Testament prophetic, apocalyptic and wisdom tradition of God's appointment and use of human rulers for his own purposes.

Although Morrison³¹ furthered Cullmann's hypothesis by seeking to prove that 'a common Graeco-Roman concept of the State' by which rulers were 'divinely appointed in relation to a cosmic system of spiritual powers' was shared alike by the Graeco-Roman world, Hellenistic Jews and early Christians and therefore is an assumption lying behind Paul's use of *exousiais* in [Rom. 13:1](#), serious doubts have been raised against it. The fact that nowhere in the New Testament is the relationship between civil rulers and spiritual powers explicitly affirmed is, *contra* Morrison, reason for doubting its presence.³²

(e) Ethical and Socio-Political Structures

We have already noted that a number of German theologians, during the period between the two world wars and especially after the rise of Nazism, began reading the Pauline texts about the powers in a new light. In the English-speaking context this discussion arose after World War II. As a post-war theory it assumed that when the apostle Paul spoke of the 'principalities and powers', as well as equivalent terms, he was alluding to structures of thought such as tradition, convention, law, authority and even religion, particularly as embodied in the state and its institutions, rather than to demonic intelligences. The exponents of this increasingly fashionable theory were all Western or Western-trained theologians, and this of course raises the question as to whether they were predisposed

²⁹ *The Powers That Be. Earthly Rulers and Demonic Powers in Romans 13:1-7* (London: SCM, 1960), esp. pp. 40ff.

³⁰ Note the recent assessment by W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities, The background, meaning and development of Pauline phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai* (Cambridge: University, 1981), pp. 118-120.

³¹ *Powers*, pp. 63-101.

³² Cranfield in his more recent *Romans*, p. 659, has stated that he now regards the double reference interpretation as less probable than the view that Paul had in mind simply the civil authorities at [Romans 13:1](#).

culturally to interpret the expressions [p. 363](#) of Paul along definite structural lines. Certainly the number of third world theologians writing on and reflecting this viewpoint was not large.

On this recent view Paul's obscure references to the heavenly powers speak relevantly to our own earthly situations. On the other hand, advocates of this line have admitted they had great difficulty in finding in the New Testament any allusions to social structures, which have become a significant modern preoccupation. The new theory now solves both problems simultaneously. 'We lose the demons and gain the structures, for the principalities and powers are structures in disguise.'³³

In the following analysis we draw attention to the major contributions and later comment on the relevant hermeneutical principles:

(i) Gordon Rupp³⁴ writing in the aftermath of the second World War drew attention to the Pauline expression 'principalities and powers' at the beginning of his book. By this phrase, borrowed from late Jewish apocalyptic thought, Paul meant 'supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings who inhabited the stars and ... were the arbiters of human destiny,' enslaving men 'beneath a cosmic totalitarianism'.³⁵ However, without any exegetical justification he simply transferred the expression to economic, social and political forces. Rupp spoke of the 'little people' who in every era had felt themselves to be nothing more than the playthings of great historical forces and now in the twentieth century believed they were the victims of 'great economic and sociological pressures'. Down the centuries, according to Dr. Rupp, the principalities and powers have assumed many disguises. Today, as terrifying and as deadly as ever, they are the economic, social and political forces.³⁶

(ii) Hendrik Berkhof's monograph, *Christ and the Powers*,³⁷ has been influential in this debate (for example, note Yoder's indebtedness). His thesis is that Paul borrowed the vocabulary of the powers from Jewish apocalyptic, yet his understanding of them was different. Jewish apocalypses thought primarily of the principalities and powers as heavenly angels; Paul regarded them as structures of earthly [p. 364](#) existence.³⁸ He demythologized them! Although the apostle may have 'conceived of the Powers as personal beings ... this aspect is so secondary that it makes little difference whether he did or not'.³⁹ According to Berkhof such powers are to be identified with the *stoicheia tou kosmou* ('elemental spirits of the universe') of [Galatians 4:3, 9](#) and [Colossians 2:8, 20](#). He translates the expression as 'world powers' and considers they are seen in human traditions as well as religious and ethical rules. The powers (e.g. tradition, morality, justice and order) which were created by God have become tyrannical and the objects of worship. They both preserve and corrupt society. But Christ has overcome them for, in his cross and resurrection they have been 'unmasked as false gods' and 'the power of

³³ J. R. W. Stott, *God's New Society. The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 271.

³⁴ *Principalities and Powers. Studies in the Christian Conflict in History* (London: Epworth, 1952).

³⁵ Pp. 11f.

³⁶ Cf. also the writings of W. Stringfellow, especially *Free in Obedience. The Radical Christian Life* (New York: Seabury 1964), pp. 49ff.)

³⁷ (ET. Scottdale, Pa.: 1962).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

illusion' has been struck from their hands.⁴⁰ As a result Christians see through the deception of the powers and refuse, in principle at least, to be enslaved or intimidated by them. The 'Holy Spirit "shrinks" the powers before the eye of faith'⁴¹ so that the believer sees their true creaturely existence. Also the church announces to the powers that their unbroken dominion has come to an end and wages a defensive warfare against them; it is thus along these lines that Berkhof sought to explain [Ephesians 3:10](#) and [6:10–17](#).

(iii) The contribution of Amos N. Wilder, to this debate, an article entitled 'Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics',⁴² has given a fresh and clear rationale for the place of the principalities and powers in a 'kerygmatic social ethic'. Wilder concedes that quantitatively the New Testament says little about politics, economics and the structure of social institutions. Qualitatively, however, it contains highly significant material. Wilder is concerned to find a truly scriptural basis for social ethics. He is not satisfied with a 'general undifferentiated summons to obedience or love', which he says is 'an impoverishment of the biblical ethic' and 'an unwarrantable assumption'. Recent biblical theological insights have placed this matter of social ethics in a new light so that it is now possible to set forth a kerygmatic social ethic using the whole [p. 365](#) Bible as a basis rather than some narrow dimension such as the social ideals of the prophets or Jesus. The kerygma with its appeal to the saving events of the divine operation in history and to the promise and fulfilment motif provides a genuinely biblical basis for this social ethics. Wilder then turns specifically to the Pauline statements about 'the principalities and powers' and 'the rulers of the world'. He claims the apostle is using mythological language to describe 'the victory of the gospel over the tyrants of this world, its false authorities'.⁴³ The apostle's language and perspective must be demythologized or 'translated into contemporary terms without forfeiting the evangelical substance'.⁴⁴ Wilder, however, distinguishes this demythologizing from Bultmann's programme of 'existential interpretation', because he believes the latter's individualistic and ahistorical approach cannot do justice to the full dimensions of the New Testament message.

For Wilder the mythological-eschatological victory over the cosmic tyrants in the cross of Christ ([Col. 2:15](#)) is not concluded. 'This struggle continues in the eschatological experience of the church itself, only to have its final conclusion at the return of Christ'.⁴⁵ And how can this struggle be described? To answer in non-mythological terms, it is a conflict with 'the structural elements of unregenerate society, the false authorities of culture. The dethroning of such authorities and the weakening of such power principles constitute the central tasks of Christian social action'.⁴⁶

Paul has used the language of his time to describe what we call secular error, secular false gods, the idols of the market place, etc. These are 'the rulers of this age which are

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 38f. Note also Stott, *God's New Society*, p. 269, and especially his clear and incisive analysis of the recent debate (pp. 267–275) about the Pauline powers being interpreted as ethical and socio-political structures.

⁴¹ Stott, *ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴² First published in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube. (Cambridge: University, 1964), pp. 509–536. Reprinted as *Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966). References below are to the later edition.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

passing away'. When the Christian Church attacks these false authorities in culture and politics it is engaged in a strategic attack upon the corrupted structures of society, that is, against 'the world-rulers of this darkness' ([Eph. 6:12](#)).

(f) Structures and Unseen Spiritual Forces—A Conservative Viewpoint

From this broad category several recent writers representing a conservative theological standpoint need to be considered. Each has been influenced by the work of Berkhoff, while at the same time they take the debate still further in a 'political' direction. Each interprets the powers in a two-fold way, i.e. the principalities are regarded as *both* [p. 366](#) the socio-political structures of human society *and* the unseen spiritual forces lying behind these structures. In observing a double significance they differ formally from the position of Rupp, Wilder, etc. Materially, however, the differences with these latter writers are not great, for once they have conceded Paul's 'powers' refer *also* to unseen spiritual forces,⁴⁷ their whole emphasis falls upon the principalities as structures, especially of a political kind.

(i) The treatment of the Pauline principalities and powers by John Howard Yoder⁴⁸ is set within a wider context of Christian social ethics in which the author advocates a specific kind of pacifism (which he calls 'revolutionary subordination') and 'a theologically coherent radical attitude toward society'. Yoder argues that biblical scholarship over the last generation has come to a striking degree of clarity and unanimity⁴⁹ regarding the 'powers'. He thus seeks 'not to [explicate] ... the Pauline doctrine of the powers ... but to [illuminate] ... the way in which this doctrine meshes with modern understandings and questions'.⁵⁰ His study, then, is not a work of exegesis, though he would claim that it is exegetically based and hermeneutically valid.

Yoder decisively rejects the view, held by so many earlier and present day scholars, that Paul's teaching on the powers is 'archaic or meaningless ... [Rather it] reveals itself to be a very refined analysis of the problems of society and history'. In fact, it is 'far more refined than the other ways in which theologians have sought to describe the same realities in terms only of "creation" or "personality" '.⁵¹ Paul, in his references to 'principalities and powers', 'thrones and dominions', [p. 367](#) etc., was using language of political colour. The relevance of this language to 'the institutions and ideologies of our times need not imply the rejection of all the more literal meanings which the language of

⁴⁷ G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers. A Study in Pauline Theology*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) drew attention to three structures: first, 'pagan religion and pagan power' including the state; second, the law which is good in itself, since it is God's, becomes demonic when it is 'exalted into an independent system of religion'; the third power is those recalcitrant elements in nature which resist God's rule, e.g. wild animals, diseases, storms and even the whole of creation's bondage to corruption. But twenty years later, in his more recent commentary on Ephesians Caird shifted his ground by conceding that Paul was referring to 'spiritual beings' which operated in and through the structures, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford: University, 1976), p. 91.

Similarly, Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall. A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Collins, 1960), identified the principalities with structures but later said the terms referred to spiritual entities as well, *Ephesians 11* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 800. For further reading see G. H. C. Macgregor, 'Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul's Thought', *NTS* 1 (1954–55), pp. 17–28, and A. vanden Heuvel, *These Rebellious Powers* (London: SCM, 1966).

⁴⁸ *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 137f., 142.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

the demonic and of bondage can also have'.⁵² But such a statement appears to be simply a concession on Yoder's part. For him the powers are pre-eminently the structures, institutions and ideologies of our times, a point which comes out clearly in his later exposition.

The author examines the issue of political involvement in the context of the Christian's attitude towards the civil order. In his dealing with the issue of a responsible political involvement which is compatible with the Anabaptist understanding of discipleship, Yoder speaks of 'revolutionary subordination' and 'accepting powerlessness'. The liberating power of the gospel eradicates the patterns of domination and submission. 'Revolutionary subordination', the proper Christian posture toward the civil order, is based in part on the Pauline advice to women and slaves as well as the manner in which he advises Christians to relate to the state. Significant for our purposes, however, is that the whole question of the Christian's political involvement, with its 'revolutionary subordination' and 'accepting powerlessness', is integrally related to the confrontation with the powers which took place in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Yoder 'the proper Christian posture toward the civil order cannot be decided on the basis of a theocratic conception or an appeal to general political obligations ... these patterns must finally be judged in the light of the cross of Christ'.⁵³ The Christian's submission to the state grows out of an attempt to imitate the work of Christ on the cross. It is, he adds, 'only at one point, only on one subject—but then consistently, universally—is Jesus our example: in his cross'.⁵⁴

Space prevents us from examining Yoder's position in detail. However, three brief criticisms, relating to the overall purposes of this essay, may be made. First, we cannot 'consistently and universally' imitate the work of Christ on the cross.⁵⁵ Second, it may be seriously questioned whether Christ's death on the cross provides a pattern for the Christian's political involvement at all. Third, Yoder describes Jesus' relationship to the powers as one of 'subordination'. His work is characterized by 'the voluntary subordination of one who knows that p. 368 another regime is normative'.⁵⁶ But 'subordination' describes Jesus' relationship to the Father. He was victorious over the powers in his cross, not subordinate to them in some revolutionary way. The New Testament consistently interprets the clash with the forces of darkness at the cross as denoting Jesus' victory over them ([Col. 2:15](#); cf. [In. 12:30](#); [Heb. 2:14](#)). One wonders whether Yoder has been influenced by his own background and, in particular, Mennonite notions of pacifism when he views our Lord's death in this way.

(ii) Richard Mouw's treatment of the powers, like that of Yoder, is set within the context of political questions. In his volume, *Politics and the Biblical Drama*,⁵⁷ he contends that to discuss theology is to raise political issues. In particular the questions he raises (What is the 'kingly' task of the Christian community? and, Is it permissible for Christians to attempt to gain political power?) lead him to an examination of the Pauline references to 'principalities and powers'. He then helpfully surveys the literature produced on this

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 141f.

⁵³ R. J. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 111.

⁵⁴ Yoder, *Politics*, p. 97; cf. Mouw, *Politics*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Note Mouw's detailed criticisms, *Politics*, pp. 112–116.

⁵⁶ Yoder, *Politics*, p. 192.

⁵⁷ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

theme in the two decades prior to 1976, noting the following points of consensus: (a) Paul believed in a plurality of created spiritual powers. (b) Although drawing on a biblical tradition the apostle went beyond the Old Testament by ‘depersonalizing’ the powers, partially at least (note the indebtedness to Berkhof).⁵⁸ They may now be identified with national or racial groupings, religious doctrine, moral rules, technology, sexual desires, altruism, etc. However, Mouw does recognize the problems of demythologizing Paul’s language and wonders whether the apostle’s statements do ‘commit us to the belief that there is an “ontological” or “causal” residue that exists “over and above” observable individual and sociological factors’.⁵⁹ In other words, to what extent does Paul’s language commit us to regarding them as personal spiritual beings? (c) The powers exercise their influence in the regular patterns and structures of social life. This is not to suggest, however, that ‘political leaders are demon possessed or communing with the spirits in some popular sense of these phrases’.⁶⁰ (d) As created instruments of God the powers were intended to assist man’s orderly existence, but now subsequent to the fall they present themselves to us as possible objects of idolatry.

Mouw also recognizes several areas of disagreement in the current p. 369 debate over the powers: (a) How many references does Paul actually make to the principalities? (b) How has the redemptive work of Christ affected the status of the powers? That is, in what sense have they been overthrown and yet continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests? (c) How does the Christian community relate to the powers in the light of Christ’s redemptive work?

The author also notes that in previous discussions of the powers writers begin by describing the scope of the topic in very general terms; but they almost always apply it to the political realm alone. While Mouw himself recognizes the need for study and application in other areas he himself recognizes the need for study and application in other areas he proceeds to do the same thing! Finally, in a lengthy section dealing with the powers and political involvement Mouw interacts in detail with Yoder’s presentation. This debate is set within the Anabaptist-Reformed dialogue and, while rejecting Yoder’s specific recommendations regarding ‘revolutionary subordination’ and ‘accepting powerlessness’, he concedes that the latter’s work, *The Politics of Jesus*, with its treatment of the Pauline powers, adds significantly to our understanding of the political message of the New Testament. Mouw concludes that we do not need to face death in the way Jesus did, nor confront the powers after the manner of his work on the cross. ‘His was *the* confrontation with the Powers—the means of their ultimate defeat’.⁶¹ What then is the responsibility of the Christian in the light of Christ’s victory? We do not need to fear the powers because of Christ’s encounter with them; rather, we can now enter their domain and engage in political activity ‘seeking to promote justice and righteousness in the confidence that they cannot separate us from God’s love’. But what has happened to the preaching of the gospel and the turning of people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God? Is all this subsumed under a political message?

(g) Principalities and Powers: Angels Serving God, not Hostile Supernatural Authorities

⁵⁸ Mouw, *Politics*, 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The most recent examination of our subject, the Pauline principalities and powers, is also the most thorough and comprehensive exegetical treatment to date. I refer to the Cambridge S.N.T.S. Monograph of Wesley Carr, entitled *Angels and Principalities* and published by C.U.P. in 1981. As the sub-title suggests this work is concerned with the background, meaning and development of Paul's phrase 'the [p. 370](#) powers and authorities'. Carr challenges the commonly accepted scholarly opinion that Paul and his contemporaries inhabited a world thought to be dominated by hostile superhuman powers, of whom Jews and Gentiles alike lived in fear. Like many previous scholars Carr began his study with an examination of the pre-Christian Jewish and pagan background to the apostle's thought. But his conclusions are very different from those of his predecessors. He claims that in the Jewish writings up to the mid-first century A.D. terms such as *archai*, *exousiai* and *dunameis* are confined to the angels and archangels of Yahweh and are never used of demonic forces. The few references in paganism during this period to angels and powers have no clear point of contact with Paul's work. From his study of the background material Carr concludes that 'the concept of might forces that are hostile to man, from which he sought relief, was not prevalent in the thought world of the first century A.D.'⁶²

In the central part of his book Carr examined the major Pauline texts under the headings: the powers and Christ triumphant ([Col. 1:16; 2:14f., 18; Php. 2:10](#); the 'enemies' of [Ps. 110:1](#)), the powers and the spiritual world ([Rom. 8:387f.](#) and references in Ephesians), and the powers in relation to the political world ([Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; 6:1ff.](#)). The principalities and powers, according to Carr, are to be understood in a good sense of spiritual beings which are in a positive relationship to God. The reference in Colossians and Ephesians (except [6:12](#)) contribute to the Christology of the two letters 'not by pointing to any achievement of Christ in battle hostile powers, but by associating him with God as the one who receives the recognition and worship of the heavenly host'.⁶³ At [Rom. 13](#) and [1 Cor. 2](#) *exousiai* refers simply to human authorities, while [1 Cor. 6:1ff.](#), with its reference to angels, in no way contributes to the interpretation of [Rom. 13:1](#). Carr argues that Paul's usage of the language of the powers and associated terms conforms of basic Jewish usage. Further, this terminology would have conveyed to the Gentile readers of Paul's letter notions of power and authority that are associated with God rather than with hostile forces.

However, according to Carr, a development took place in Christian thinking about the powers after the time of Paul. The interpretation of the work of Christ as a defeat of hostile powers is certainly found in Christian thought by the end of the second century A.D. There is a humanizing and psychologizing of the powers after the mid-first century in which magic divination, idols, planets and fate played their [p. 371](#) part. The climax of this development occurred in Origen with whom there is a reinterpretation of the Pauline texts and development in the doctrine of the atonement.

But, Carr concludes, this was far from being a fundamental part of the background and proclamation of the Christian message. The idea of mighty forces of evil being ranged against man was not part of the earliest Christian understanding of the world and the gospel. If Carr's conclusions are correct, then his study has important ramifications for the contemporary debate about the meaning and relevance of the Pauline powers. Bultmann and many of his followers concluded Paul's language needed to be demythologized. Carr

⁶² Carr, *Angels*, p. 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

contends, in effect, that the language of evil powers does not need to be demythologized at all, since the principalities are good not evil.

In spite of the many fresh insights of Carr's monograph one must conclude that his work fails to convince for the following reasons:

(i) There is still no consensus among scholars regarding the precise significance of the Jewish and pagan background material to the Pauline statements about the powers. All sorts of contrasting conclusions have been drawn from the time of Dibelius through Cullmann and Morrison up to the present with Carr's monograph. This most recent work makes claims that, at best, are only provisional. Certainly Carr's reading of the texts runs counter to the commonly accepted scholarly opinion that Paul and his contemporaries inhabited a world believed to be dominated by hostile superhuman powers, of whom Jews and Gentiles alike lived in fear. Further scholarly interaction and careful assessment are called for.

(ii) A major weakness of many of the studies of this Pauline theme of the powers is the limited nature of their investigation, and Carr's work is no exception. The issue of the Pauline principalities ought to be set not only against the contemporary background of first century Palestine but also within the wider framework of the holy war tradition in Scripture, including both Old Testament relating to the God who fights and the renewal of that war tradition in the ministry of Jesus in the New. The author's inability to see that the demons which Jesus confronted in the Gospels have anything to do with the principalities and powers of Paul's letters is a serious weakness (see below). Carr's monograph fails because it is not set within or checked against an integrated biblical theology.⁶⁴ p. 372

(iii) At an exegetical level Carr's handling of [Col. 2:14f.](#),⁶⁵ and other Pauline texts was in our judgment unsatisfactory. Admittedly [Col. 2:14f.](#) is a notoriously difficult crux and on a number of exegetical issues scholars have been divided, e.g. the relationship of the forgiveness in v. [13](#) to what follows; whether or not we have a hymnic fragment; if so, its relationship to the context; the meaning and nature of the *cheirographon*, etc. But Carr has erred in removing every note of conflict from the passage and therefore of rejecting any idea of victory over or defeat of alien enemy powers.

(iv) This criticism is confirmed when we note the author's handling of [Eph. 6:12](#). He is obliged to say that the verse is unlikely to have been part of the original Pauline text since it represents a departure or declension from his notion of the Christian life and of the nature of the world. There is no textual evidence in support of this contention. Since the text as it stands does not fit Carr's reconstruction we must conclude that his understanding of Paul's thought, at this point, is incorrect. Not all the powers are 'goodies' even though Carr thinks they are.

(v) Finally, questions must therefore be raised as to whether Carr has really grasped correctly the Pauline world view at all. And since this conflict and victory motif is taught in other documents of the New Testament (see above), as Carr himself concedes, it would see that the notion of mighty forces of evil ranged against man was consistently part of the earliest Christian understanding of the world and the gospel.

II. HERMENEUTICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODS

⁶⁴ Cf., the recent work of C. H. Sherlock, *The God Who Fights. The War-Tradition in Holy Scripture* (unpublished Th. D. thesis, Australian College of Theology, 1980), which seeks to remedy this deficiency.

⁶⁵ *Angels*, pp. 52–66.

In the previous sketch we have sought to indicate how major exponents since the end of the nineteenth century have understood Paul's references to the powers. Comments and criticisms have been made along the way. The area of study is a limited⁶⁶ though significant one. There is considerable value in examining a narrow theme such as the principalities and powers since it is then possible to focus on significant hermeneutical factors. We now turn to evaluate the important assumptions of these writers as well as the interpretational methods employed by them. **P. 373**

(a) Mythical Language and an Outmoded World-View

Any study of the principalities and powers quickly runs into problems of language, for the apostle Paul as well as other New Testament writers uses terminology that is strange to us. The majority of theologians examined above thus *assume* that such statements about spiritual powers were last vestiges of an antiquated mythology in Pauline thought which needed to be removed by one method or another. Everling in the nineteenth century believed no serious attention ought to be given to it. The older liberal theologians said these mythological elements could be safely eliminated as part of the temporary garb, rather than essence of religion. Dibelius recognized that a world dominated by evil supernatural forces was central to Paul's thinking, but nowadays ideas of spirits and devils have no meaning for us. Bultmann, on the other hand, did not seek to discard the mythological language for this would involve discarding the kerygma itself. He too assumed that mythical thinking was uncritical and necessarily bound up with a primitive or pre-scientific way of looking at the world. But the mythical elements were to be reinterpreted along existential lines.

More recent writers from a variety of theological standpoints (including an evangelical one), presumably embarrassed by the mythical language of the apostle, also speak of demythologizing the powers. Rupp and Stringfellow simply transferred the expression to economic, social and political forces; Wilder, who rejects Bultmann's individualistic and ahistorical approach of existential interpretation, nevertheless claims that the apostle's language and perspective must be 'demythologized' or translated into contemporary terms without forfeiting the evangelical substance.

Berkhof, whose writings have been influential in evangelical circles, argued that Paul himself 'demythologized' the powers, regarding them as structures of earthly existence. His understanding, at this point, was different from that of late Jewish apocalyptic which thought of the powers as heavenly angels. Mouw, writing from a Reformed background, recognized the need to 'demythologize' the principalities, though he does concede that there may be an 'ontological or causal residue' over and above what results from the demythologizing process.

We have already examined the question of myth and the mythological language of the New Testament in the context of Bultmann's existential interpretation. It was noted by some: (i) that myth was not to be understood as part of an outmoded primitive **p. 374** world-view, but characterizes man in any epoch; (ii) that belief about supernatural interventions in the affairs of men is neither mythical, naive nor pre-scientific (as the

⁶⁶ We have avoided the temptation to add names of other writers to the list simply for the sake of completeness, particularly when their treatments and the hermeneutical principles underlying them have already been examined in connection with others. Although various Liberation theologians might have been surveyed, their contributions frequently related to the Exodus motif while their references to the Pauline powers, as far as I was able to discern, were few. The limitations properly imposed on this paper prevented such a wide-ranging assessment.

Enlightenment view would imply); (iii) and that belief in demons is not specifically mythical, as Pannenberg rightly points out.

Further, certain third world theologians have often claimed that a biblical, and especially Pauline, perspective on the powers is perfectly intelligible in their own cultural contexts. The Pauline view of the world does not present a stumbling block to these scholars, and the inference must be that the problem lies with the Western theologians and their cultural conditioning rather than the Pauline language, if it can truly be shown—and we believe it can—on exegetical and biblical theological grounds that his statements reflect a divine view of reality rather than some concession or accommodation to his own milieu which we must then lay aside.

(b) Interpretation of Background as a Hermeneutical Principle

Our investigation into the scholarly study of the Pauline principalities has raised in a particularly acute form the distinct though related hermeneutical issue about the cultural context of or background to the apostle's statements. Pressing questions arise: what were the Jewish and pagan backgrounds to the Pauline teaching? Was Paul influenced by them, or did he modify them? If so, in what ways? And are we committed to such a viewpoint as part of the apostolic teaching? As we have noted Dibelius, Cullmann and Carr gave varying answers to the first question. Furthermore, their particular interpretations of the background to the apostle's thought greatly influenced, even controlled, their exegesis of the Pauline texts. So Cullmann saw a double reference to angelic powers and civil authorities in *exousiai* ('authorities') at [Rom. 13:1](#), because he believed, in part at least, that this was confirmed by the common view early Christianity shared with late Judaism about invisible powers being at work behind the earthly phenomena. The double reference was present, even when not explicitly stated by Paul, since it underlay his thinking. Carr, on the other hand, interprets the background material about the supernatural powers in quite another way—they are good not evil—and so he arrives at quite different conclusions from his study of the Pauline texts. Berkhof's view is different again: Paul took over the language of the powers and the notion that they influence events on earth from his intellectual and religious environment. But the apostle himself 'demythologized' the principalities so that they were structures of [p.375](#) earthly existence rather than heavenly angels or the like. The cynic might be tempted to say that, in some cases at least, the interpreter has read his pre-understanding into the first century background material and from this source into the Pauline teaching itself.

(c) Pre-Understanding and the Text

In the recent hermeneutical debate, particularly since the contribution of Bultmann, the issue of the interpreter's pre-understanding as he approaches the text of the New Testament has been regarded as extremely important. Bultmann is right in arguing there is not neutral or presuppositionless exegesis. There is a constant interaction between subject and object, text and interpreter. But this does not mean there can only be an approximation to the truth of the Word of God in a particular culture or situation.

The interpreter's pre-understanding is not to be regarded as definitive, but nor is he to lay aside his own preliminary understanding, becoming a kind of *tabula rasa* who then indulges in some form of pneumatic exegesis. Instead, he must allow his own presuppositions and pre-understanding to be modified or even completely reshaped by the text itself. An exegesis guided rigidly by pre-understanding will be able to establish only what the interpreter already knows. So there must be constant dialogue between interpreter and text. The hermeneutical circle is not only unavoidable but also desirable.

As the text is given priority so it will interpret the interpreter; the authority of Scripture is taken seriously and God's speaks to me in my situation.⁶⁷

As far as the Pauline teaching on the powers is concerned many expositors, as we have already seen, cannot accept the notion that these principalities are personal, supernatural beings who were defeated by Christ in his death. One way or another writers on this theme representing all shades of theological opinion have sought to evade this conclusion. Now if by careful grammatical and historical exegesis it can be shown that the Pauline language is not speaking of such beings, well and good. But in most cases the arguments have been along other lines, and one wonders whether the pre-understandings are not at best presuppositions which have not adequately been tested, or at worst prejudices.

The same kind of question might be levelled against the complementary notion that the powers are to be identified with the structures of human society, particularly of a political kind. The hermeneutical p. 376 methods employed vary (cf. Käsemann and Mouw)⁶⁸ but the conclusions are the same. It might of course be argued that the general consistency of the final results pointed to the correctness of the conclusions. But another suggestion might be that the destination had already been chosen so that it did not particularly matter which route was taken to reach the common goal!

(d) Interpretation and Biblical Theology

In evaluating the work of Wesley Carr we have already noted that a major weakness of many studies on this Pauline theme has been the limited nature of their investigation. I refer to the wider framework of the holy war tradition in Scripture, from Old Testament to New, within the prophetic tradition and the ministry of Jesus. In short, the Pauline powers are not studied within an integrated biblical theology in which the ultimate purposes of God for his creation are expounded. The victory of Christ over Satan and his minions can properly be understood within those revealed purposes of God, and at the same time the ongoing responsibilities of Christian people *vis-a-vis* the powers can be discerned. Questions as to whether the Christian has any political responsibilities can then be answered in the light of this integrated biblical theology rather than through some slick identification of the powers with political structures. Mouw and to a lesser extent Wilder have indicated an awareness of this need, but neither has developed the point nor effectively checked their own pre-understandings in the light of it.

II. THE MAIN LINES OF NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE POWERS

A variety of viewpoints about the powers in Paul has been presented in our historical survey. In significant instances these results have reflected differing hermeneutical assumptions and methods. Conscious of some of the hermeneutical pitfalls we propose to look at the main lines of the New Testament teaching on the theme, especially in the light of the dominant view that the principalities are concrete historical, social or psychic structures or institutions. P. 377

(a) Texts in Ephesians and Colossians

⁶⁷ Stanton, in *Interpretation*, p. 68.

⁶⁸ See above.

The three main references in Ephesians to the principalities and powers are chapters [1:20–21](#); [3:10](#) and [6:10ff](#).⁶⁹ In the first Christ is said to have been raised by God ‘far above all rule and authority, power and dominion ...’. The difficulty with interpreting this to mean ‘far above all earthly rulers and institutions’ is that the realm in which Christ has been supremely exalted is specifically designated as ‘in the heaven-lies’⁷⁰ at God’s right hand. Earthly structures do not fit this context. At chapter [3:10](#), again because of the allusion to ‘the heavenly places’, the interpretation which considers Paul to be asserting that God’s manifold wisdom is made known through the church to the power structures on earth is very strange indeed. Finally in chapter [6:10ff](#), the Christian’s spiritual warfare is said to be ‘not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers ...’. On the more recent view this must mean that the believer does not war against human forces, but demonic structures. However there are several serious weaknesses with this understanding: first, as in the two previous references, there is the awkward addition of the phrase ‘in the heavenly places’. These principalities and powers are in the heavenly realm. Second, the references to ‘the world rulers of this present darkness’ and ‘the spiritual hosts of wickedness’, as well as the kind of armour needed to withstand them, fit supernatural powers more easily, particularly when it is noted that the devil is mentioned twice (vs. [11](#), [16](#)) in this context. The view that the phrase means ‘not with human but with demonic forces’, which until recent times has been universally held is still more satisfactory on exegetical grounds. Stott,⁷¹ after his exegetical critique, claims, ‘I have not come across a new theorist who takes into adequate account the fact that all three references to the principalities and powers in Ephesians also contain a reference to the heavenly places, that is, the unseen world of spiritual reality’. Perhaps this is also why both Caird and Barth, when writing their commentaries on the Letter to the Ephesians, modified their earlier positions in the direction of supernatural spiritual forces.

The evidence of Colossians is best understood along similar lines. At chapter [1:16](#) the principalities and powers, together with thrones and dominions as part of ‘all things’, have been created in Christ, as well as [p. 378](#) through him and for him. These same authorities are said to have been reconciled in him (v. [20](#)) so that the universe is again placed under its head and cosmic peace has been restored. When Paul speaks of reconciliation on this wide front he probably includes the notion of pacification, since some of the principalities and powers are not depicted as gladly surrendering to God’s grace but as submitting against their wills to a power they cannot oppose.⁷² Although the point cannot be established decisively from verses [16](#) and [20](#), the most natural interpretation is that four classes (‘thrones, dominions, principalities and powers’) of spiritual and supernatural forces (possibly representing the highest orders of the angelic realm) are in view.⁷³ In our judgment this personal interpretation also makes the most sense out of chapter [2:15](#). In a statement full of picturesque language and graphic metaphors Paul asserts that God stripped the principalities and powers—who kept men and women in their dreadful

⁶⁹ The issue of the Pauline or post-Pauline authorship is not particularly relevant to the exegetical issues and need not be examined.

⁷⁰ Note A. T. Lincoln, ‘A Re-Examination of “the Heavens” in Ephesians’, *NTS* 19 (1972–73), pp. 468–483, esp. p. 472.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁷² For a discussion of this crux see my article, ‘Col. 1:20 and the Reconciliation of All Things’, *RTR* 33 (1974) pp. 45–53.

⁷³ For details see E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (ET. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 51.

clutches because they possessed the damning indictment, man's signed acknowledgement of his indebtedness—of their authority and dignity. Not only so, but having divested these principalities on the cross God exposed to the universe their utter helplessness. He had paraded these powerless 'powers and principalities' in his triumphal procession in Christ, making plain to all the magnitude of his victory. Their period of rule is finished; they must worship and serve the victor. They have been pacified ([1:20](#)); overcome and reconciled, yet not finally destroyed or appeased. They continue to exist, opposed to man and his interests ([Rom. 8:38, 39](#)). But they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their ultimate overthrow though future is certain ([1 Cor. 15:24–28](#)). Such language describes supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings, as Käsemann acknowledges when he admits that the language and ideas need to be demythologized.

Before leaving Colossians a comment should be made regarding the expression 'the elements of the world' (*stoicheia tou kosmou*, [Col. 2:8, 20](#); [Gal. 4:3](#); cf. v. [9](#)). The precise meaning of this phrase has puzzled Christian interpreters since very early times as Bandstra has shown in his stimulating study on the history of the exegesis of these passages.⁷⁴ One line of interpretation has been to regard *kosmos* as denoting the [p. 379](#) material, physical world, with *stoicheia* pointing to the elemental parts of that world. Eduard Schweizer⁷⁵ a recent commentator on Colossians, has pursued this line of the physical elements. He suggested that the Colossian 'philosophy', which Paul was seeking to correct in his letter, had been influenced by Pythagorean ideas in which cosmic speculation about the elements had been ethicized. The elements exercised power in much the same way as the law did. Purification of the soul took place by abstaining from meat, etc. To behave in accordance with these elements was a matter of life and death, but in fact led to a kind of slavery to innumerable legalistic demands. Whether Schweizer's detailed arguments with reference to a Pythagorean background convince contemporary New Testament scholars or not, he has certainly opted for an impersonal understanding of *stoicheia*, meaning 'elements' or 'elemental principles,' and such a view lends itself more easily to being reinterpreted with reference to a structural understanding of the principalities and powers. However, the majority of commentators this century have understood the *stoicheia tou kosmou* in Galatians and Colossians as denoting spiritual beings, regarded as personal and active in the physical and heavenly elements. It is probable that in the syncretistic teaching being advocated as Colossae these *stoicheia* were grouped with the angels and seen as controlling the heavenly realm and man's access to God's presence.⁷⁶ (Jewish apocalyptic literature had already associated angels closely with the heavenly powers. According to Jubilees [2:2](#) each of the elements had its own angel to rule over it, while in Enoch 60:11, 12 reference is made to the spirits of the various natural elements. In the New Testament at [Acts 7:53](#); [Gal. 3:19](#); and [Heb. 2:2](#) the Jewish tradition regarding the angelic mediation of the law is mentioned, and in [Gal. 4:3](#) some close connection between, or identification of, these angels and the *stoicheia* is required.)

(b) A Survey of the Wider New Testament Teaching

⁷⁴ A. J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World* (Kampen: Kok, 1964).

⁷⁵ *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (Zurich: Benziger, 1976) pp. 101f.

⁷⁶ For a survey of the ways this expressions has been understood by Christian interpreters see my *Colossians and Philemon* (Waco, TX.: Word, 1982), pp. 129–132.

Up to this point our critical comments have been made only with reference to the evidence of Ephesians and Colossians. It is now necessary to survey the wider New Testament teaching, though in the nature of the case our remarks will necessarily be brief.

The powers of evil are referred to by an unexpected variety of names [p. 380](#) in the New Testament, and they appear in the Synoptic Gospels, John, many of the epistles and the Book of the Revelation. In addition to 'principalities' and 'powers' we read of 'authorities', 'dominions', 'thrones', 'names', 'princes', 'lords', 'angels', 'devils', and 'unclean or wicked spirits'. In the singular there is also mention of 'Satan' or 'the devil', who is called 'Beelzebul', 'Beliar', 'the evil one', 'the accuser', 'the destroyer', 'the adversary' and 'the enemy'.⁷⁷ He also appears as 'the prince of demons', 'the prince of this world', and 'the prince of the power of the air'. The New Testament is reserved in its statements about the principalities; it has no theoretical or speculative interest in them. It provides no description of the phenomena, and makes no attempt to differentiate among them or to arrange the names or appearances systematically. It would appear that the names given to the powers of evil are in large measure, inter-changeable. One distinction is clearly drawn, namely, that the demons, spirits, angels, principalities and powers are regarded as subordinate to Satan or the devil. They are his innumerable powers seen as organized into a single empire (note especially [Mk. 3:22–30](#); cf. [Lk. 10:17f.](#); [Rev. 12:9, 16:13ff.](#)). They are manifestations of the devil's power.

The New Testament teaches that the principalities and powers are kinds of personal beings. This is obvious from the names that they bear (they are called gods, princes and angels, while Satan is the prince of this world, the god of the world, the accuser, the adversary, the destroyer, etc.), and from the nature of their operations and activities. To speak of 'personal beings' means that they 'manifest themselves as beings of intellect and will, which can speak and be spoken to. They are something which is capable of purposeful activity'.⁷⁸ This is not to suggest that they are always encountered as individuals. Sometimes they are examples of a species (cf. [Mk. 5:9](#), 'My name is Legion for we are many'). The principalities are not only kinds of personal beings with will and intelligence, but also beings of power.

There are, in the New Testament, five stages in the drama of the principalities and powers and it may be convenient for us to mention these in order: [p. 381](#)

(i) Their original creation

In a passage already referred to, [Col. 1:16](#), we noted that all things were created through Christ. The statement is amplified in the following words: 'whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him'. The forces of tyranny that hold sway over men's lives—and perhaps some of the Colossians were troubled by this—are, in fact, a part of creation and subject to Christ as Lord (cf. [Rom. 8:38, 39](#)).

(ii) Their subsequent fall

Several passages in the New Testament refer to the subsequent fall of these supernatural authorities, e.g. [Jude 6](#) and [2 Peter 2:4](#). At the same time the hymnic passage of [Col. 1:15–20](#) implies a serious dislocation or breach. Although there is no specific mention of it, a cosmic rupture of enormous proportions is implied, since the high point of the hymn refers to the reconciling work of Christ, by which 'all things' that have been created are

⁷⁷ For details see H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (ET. Herder: Freiburg, 1961), and R. Yates, 'The Powers of Evil in the New Testament', *EQ* 52 (1980) pp. 97–111.

⁷⁸ Schlier, *Principalities*, p. 18.

now pacified in Christ's death. [Col. 2:15](#) is to be understood along similar lines for the principalities needed to be disarmed and their utter helplessness made plain to all since they had rebelled against their creator. They became independent and autonomous, manifesting a self-centredness that is in opposition to God and his power.

(iii) Christ's defeat of the powers of evil

In most of the New Testament references to the powers of evil there is some mention of God or Christ's supremacy or victory over them. Christ is supreme in the temptation. Driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, the traditional place of temptation and haunt of wild beast, Jesus faces the Satanic onslaught ([Mk. 1:13](#); [Mt. 4:1-11](#); [Lk. 4:1-13](#)). He is victorious as he chooses the mission committed to him by God and which will finally be vindicated by the Father, even though it leads through suffering and humiliation. This victory over Satanic temptation is held up as an example and an encouragement to Christians in their perseverance in suffering ([Heb. 2:18](#); [4:15](#)).

Jesus is supreme over evil spirits. In the Beelzebul controversy it is made plain that by the finger ([Lk. 11:20](#)) or Spirit of God ([Mt. 12:28](#)), not by the power of Beelzebul, that Jesus exorcises the unclean spirits. He is the one through whom the kingdom of God operates to destroy the power of Satan ([Mk. 3:23-26](#); [Mt. 12:26](#); [Lk. 11:18](#)). He is able to enter the strong man's house and plunder his goods ([Mk. 3:27](#)). Every [p. 382](#) exorcism is a further spoiling of Satan's goods and signifies his defeat. Jesus is also shown as delegating his power over evil spirits to his followers who then exercise it as his representatives ([Mk. 3:14](#); [6:7](#); [Mt. 10:1](#); [Lk. 9:1f](#); [10:1](#)).

Christ's victory over Satan and the powers of darkness occurs preeminently in his death, resurrection and exaltation. In John's Gospel there is a clear and obvious connection between the defeat of Satan and the death of Jesus: 'Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself'. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.' ([Jn. 12:31-33](#), NIV). The same point about the victory over the evil powers at the cross is brought out in [Col. 2:14, 15](#) (cfr. [1:20](#); [Heb. 2:14, 15](#)), as we have observed above. In Eph., [1:20-23](#); [4:7-11](#) (cf. [1 Pet. 3:19, 22](#)) the exaltation of Christ is proof that he is superior to the powers of darkness: he is Lord.

In these cases the victory of Christ over the powers of evil is asserted as a fact, and believers are called on to recognize the fact and live accordingly. So [Col. 2:20](#); [3:1ff.](#) make it plain that the Christians at Colosse have died and were raised with Christ out from the sphere of influence of the powers, and ought to live as those free from the binding rules and regulations.

The triumph of Christ over the principalities is a frequent theme of the New Testament. They have been overcome by him and condemned to await the final ruin of their power.

(iv) Their continued hostility

For the time being, however, the triumph of the crucified, risen and glorified Jesus Christ over the principalities is hidden. It is not yet final as far as the world is concerned. At this present moment the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, or, to put it in the language of Ephesians, the prince of the power of the air is the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient ([2:2](#)).

Although defeated foes, the principalities and powers continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests. This is a reality even for the believer. The recipients of Peter's first letter are exhorted to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith for he, their enemy, 'prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' ([1 Pt. 5:8](#)). [Eph. 6:12](#)

underscores the reality of our engagement with the powers of darkness. There will be no cessation of hostilities until our departure to be with Christ or his return, whichever is the sooner. Our struggle is not [p. 383](#) with human beings but with supernatural intelligences. Our enemies are not human but demonic and are powerful, wicked and cunning. But the power of God is stronger and we are to make use of it to the full ([Eph. 6:10ff.](#)), knowing that neither these powers nor anything else in the whole of creation will be able to separate us from God's love ([Rom. 8:38f.](#)).

(v) Their final overthrow

If Satan and his hosts continue to exist in order to make war on the saints, then their time is short ([Rev. 20:3](#)). The final outcome is certain and their ultimate overthrow has been fixed by God, as [1 Cor. 15:24–28](#) and the many references in Revelation make plain: 'And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever' ([Rev. 20:10](#)).

THE PRINCIPALITIES AND THE STRUCTURES

The powers of evil then are to be understood as personal, supernatural agencies, but what is their relationship to the structures, traditions, institutions,⁷⁹ etc.? Can they use these things? Satan and his hosts exist by influencing the world and mankind at every level. Satanic power, though hidden, is no less real for all that. Satan works through the events of history. According to [1 Th. 2:18](#) he hinders Paul (cf. the activity of Satan in the circumstances surrounding Job's life). According to [Rev. 2:10](#) the devil will cast some believers into prison. The inherent distresses of life according to [Rom. 8:38](#) are related to the evil powers mentioned in the same verse, while in the Gospels illness is occasionally due to Satanic or demonic activity (cf. [Mt. 9:32](#) the dumb man; [12:22](#), blindness; [Lk. 9:42](#), epilepsy).

Christian teachers and their teaching are subject to attack and distortion by the principalities and powers. Paul speaks of false apostles who have entered the churches, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 'And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness' ([2 Cor. 11:13–15](#)). And heresy is clearly assigned to their activity. 'The Spirit expressly says that in the last times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to [p. 384](#) seducing spirits and doctrines of demons' ([1 Tim. 4:1](#); cf. [1 Jn. 4:1](#)). According to [Col. 2:20f.](#) the elemental spirits of the universe made use of the legal demands of the false teachers in order to bring the Christians at Colosse into bondage. It would appear that social, political, judicial and economic structures can become demonic. This seems evident to anyone who has considered the state: in [Rom. 13](#) it is the minister of God, while in [Rev. 13](#) it has become the ally of the devil.

But at this point we might well ask whether 'structures' is the right word. The biblical emphasis is that the powers of evil work in and through people, rather than impersonal structures. In speaking of the latter we are inclined to remove any responsibility for action from those who are responsible human agents.

Further, to identify 'the powers' with human structures of one kind or another leads to several erroneous consequences. First, we do not have an adequate explanation as to why structures do not always become tyrannical. Second, we unjustifiably restrict our

⁷⁹ Note the treatment by M. Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall* (London: Hodder, 1981), pp. 86ff.

understanding of the malevolent activity of Satan, whereas he is too versatile to be limited to the structural. And this is the great weakness of the new theory with its identification (by some of its advocates) of the principalities with multi-national corporations and the like. Third, we become too negative towards society and its structures. For if we identify the powers of evil with the structures we will seek to dethrone them, or to fight against them. Advocates of the new theory may warn against defying the structures; they have to be warned against demonizing them. Both are extremes to be avoided.

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Conversion: To Cosmic Christ?

Sunand Sumithra

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In this article the author explores some of the theological issues in contemporary cosmic Christologies and their implications for conversion. He suggests some emphases needed in a biblical alternative.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Pluralism and the shrinking of the globe are two stubborn but important facts of our time. Inevitably they have created dangerous global tensions. Religion, being the most potent cause of strife in human history, is the main culprit directly or indirectly. What is at stake is the peace and harmony of mankind—nay, its very survival. Under such threats, it is imperative that the unity of mankind somehow becomes the goal of all current human enterprises.

In short, the problem is: How should the traditional concept of Christian conversion be reinterpreted in a situation of the world as a neighbourhood where pluralistic claims of salvation are threatening human survival? Since such issues arise not so much in Church worship or renewal meetings as in the confrontation of the gospel with other religious and secular systems, they are decidedly missiological.

I. CONTEMPORARY COSMIC CHRISTOLOGIES

Though it is difficult to locate the birth of twentieth century cosmic christologies, it is easy to see that the background of the 1960s was conducive to such a birth, particularly the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi, 1961, with its theme, 'Jesus Christ—The Light of the World'.¹ Joseph Sittler (then a professor of theology at the

¹ Allan D. Galloway had already used the term for his book *The Cosmic Christ*, New York, 1951.

university of Chicago) had used the phrase 'cosmic Christ' in his address to the assembly, 'called to unity', and so is generally considered the originator of the idea, ever since it has not ceased to be one of the most crucial theological issues to date. P. 386

Taking [Col. 1:15-20](#) as his basis, where the word 'all' is repeated at least six times, Sittler concludes that God's redemption is not smaller than the repeated 'all', it is 'cosmic in scope'. In the same line of thought and in the spirit of the Assembly, Paul David Devanandan affirmed that the purpose of incarnation was that 'the whole creation will be transformed into a totally different realm of being where God's will is done', and in his return Jesus Christ will 'gather the whole world into his kingdom'. Devanandan is quite clear that the 'redemptive purpose in the incarnation is all inclusive', and more, that 'the whole of creation in all its being is already redeemed by the work of Christ', and so the Gospel is only 'calling men to accept what they already are'—namely already redeemed. Summarizing his understanding of Christian renaissance of religions, he concludes:

One cannot resist the impulse of faith that believes in a God who is also the Lord of history, and in a creative Spirit who is ever at work in the world of men, redeeming it even in its present involvements and directing its course to the ultimate fulfilment of his purpose, that in all religious revival God is somehow at work.²

A more precise description of 'resisting the impulse of faith' and the 'somehow' would have led Devanandan to different results.

And so the New Delhi Report affirmed this new approach to religions:

The Church is sent knowing that God has not left himself without witness even among men who do not know Christ and knowing also that the reconciliation wrought through Christ embraces all creation and the whole of mankind... In the churches we have but little understanding of the wisdom, love and power which God has given to men of other faiths by their long encounter with Christianity. We must take up the conversation about Christ with them, knowing that Christ addresses them through us and us through them.³

It is clear that in this revolutionary approach to other religions where 'Christ addresses ... us through them', cosmic christology has already been approved by the New Delhi Assembly.

Among the Roman Catholics, Vatican II was undoubtedly the watershed in their theology of religions. Basing its findings on God's desire that all men should be saved, Vatican II discerned that such a salvation embraces all humanity and further that God's saving grace is already in operation in them all. Hence, to p. 387

those who through no fault of theirs are still ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and His Church, yet sincerely seek God and with the help of divine grace strive to do His will as known to them through the voice of their conscience, those men can attain the eternal salvation. Nor does divine providence deny the assistance necessary to salvation to those who, without having attained, through no fault of their own, to an explicit knowledge of God, are striving, not without divine grace, to lead a good life.⁴

Vatican II also further clarified that 'all this holds true not only for Christians but for all men of goodwill in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way ... we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being

² Paul David Devanandan, *Christian Concern in Hinduism*, CISRS Bangalore: 1961, p. 82.

³ *The New Delhi Report*, Associated Press, New York: 1962, pp. 81-82.

⁴ *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, 13-17.

associated with this paschal mystery'.⁵ Thus 'whatever good is latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples' they are redeemed and perfected by Christ. The *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* stated that whatever is 'true and holy' in the non-Christian religious traditions reflects 'a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men' and is Christ. Thus Vatican II arranged all religions in concentric circles—Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, and finally atheists!

The church recognises that in many ways she is united with those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian; finally those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. [Rom. 9:4–5](#); [11:28–29](#)). But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these are Moslems ... Nor is God Himself distant from those in shadows and images seek the unknown God ... Nor does divine providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who ... have not attained at an explicit knowledge of God but who strive to live a good life thanks to His grace.'⁶

It is significant to note that the basis for inclusion in each circle is respectively faith in the Catholic Church, in Jesus Christ, in God and finally in moral values.

During the Vatican sessions, Raymond Panikkar developed and published an even more radical approach in his book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), perhaps the best-known work in this area. Exegeting a well-known text from the Hindu Scriptures (*Janmadi* p. 388 *Yasyatah*), which speaks of the cause of all things as well as their power and goal, but leaves it unspecified, Panikkar affirms that this unknown, unnamed 'that' is Christ. Christ is there already in Hinduism, unknown, waiting to be discovered. He develops his ideas in several steps:

First, Christ is not *only* the historical Jesus, but more than Jesus. Hence Christianity has no monopoly on Christ, since Christ spills over into other religions. Second, since every religion speaks of the necessity of a link between the absolute God and the relative universe, it is valid for Christians to name this link Christ. He agrees that Christ is the 'only Mediator' present and active in all religions, whatever the form or the name—including, of course, Christianity. Third, Panikkar infers that though the faith in Jesus Christ may not be exactly corresponding to the response of men to the corresponding links in other religions, yet there is enough convergence among these various links to identify them under one name—Christ. Finally, for Panikkar Christ is Man, but not a single individual man.

Christ has human nature indeed, he is Man, but he is not a person. He is divine person ... Christ is man, but not *one* man, a single individual; he is a divine person incarnated, a divine person in hypostatic union with human nature.'⁷

Panikkar declares therefore that Hinduism needs to die and be resurrected in Christ; since Christ is in Hinduism, a Hindu is saved by Christ.

Karl Rahner, H. R. Schlette and Hans Küng are other theologians who have systematically developed the theology of the salvific value of non-Christian religions. The notion of 'anonymous Christians' as developed by Rahner is a post-Vatican concept.

⁵ *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 19–22.

⁶ *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, 2.

⁷ 'The Meaning of Christ's Name', in *Service and Salvation*, Ed. Joseph Pathrapankal, C. M. I. Bangalore: 1973, pp. 242ff.

Answering the important question of religions, whether they have any salvific value for their adherents *before* they are confronted with the gospel of Christ (i.e., in the ‘pre-Christian history’ of the religions), Rahner affirms they do, on the following grounds: firstly, God’s will ([1 Tim. 2:4](#)) for the salvation of all men means that he must also provide the means for the salvation of all people at all times, and secondly because salvation is not a matter of inner individual spiritual dimension but is necessarily realized through and in concrete historical/social life. The consequence is that the Spirit who provides such universal salvation in every religion becomes the ‘spirit of Jesus Christ’:

In so far as the universal efficacy of the Spirit is always oriented towards the [p. 389](#) high point of the historical mediation, it can be truly said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the onset the spirit of *Jesus Christ*, the logos of God who became man.⁸

Since men and women, saved in other religions, are saved through Christ, they must be considered, says Rahner, not merely as *non-Christian* but as ‘someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian’. So every religion becomes ‘Christianity of an anonymous kind’.

H. R. Schlette develops his theology of religions in a similar vein. In one world history, according to Schlette, there are two sacred histories—one general sacred history, comprising all the religions and another special sacred history with the religion of Israel and the church at its core. So for him it is valid to speak of ‘non-Christian religions as the ordinary and the way of the Church as the extraordinary way of salvation’.⁹ The uniqueness of the Church is that it is a concrete demonstration as well as a representation of universal salvation. The Church must therefore ‘enquire into the general sacred history which runs parallel to it’ for her own self-understanding.

Following Schlette, Hans Küng also sees the ‘vast panorama of history within which the covenant idea is preserved in two concentric circles: the Noahite covenant with the whole of mankind and the covenant with Abraham for Israel alone’.¹⁰ This means, according to Küng, that in God’s salvation, ‘there is no extra, only an intra; no outside, only an inside’. Hence, the mission of the Church is to be in the ‘midst’, ‘alongside’ and ‘with’ other religions, ‘serving’ them so that ‘from being Christians *de jure*,’ their adherents ‘may become Christians *de facto*’.

Though many more examples of Cosmic christologies could be given,¹¹ the above will at least indicate the direction of current thinking on religions. At this point a brief word is necessary about ideologies; as noted earlier the cosmic Christ is at work also in ideologies. Religions and ideologies have several things in common. Both give not only a [p. 390](#) comprehensive world-view but also similar truth-claims, eschatological vision and *modus operandi*. But there is one important distinction: while religions define the *destiny* of man and therefrom derive the *meaning* of present human life, the ideologies proceed the other way round: without any anchorage in the eternal realm, they describe primarily the meaning of human existence and from there project a self-styled destiny of mankind. Ideologies are therefore basically this-world oriented. We could also give ideologies an

⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, New York: 1969, p. 321f.

⁹ H. R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, Burns & Oates, London: 1963, pp. 74–75.

¹⁰ In J. Neuner, ed., *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, Burns & Oates, London: 1967, p. 10.

¹¹ There are several versions of cosmic christology, e.g., *Unbound Christ* of Stanley J. Samartha; *Acknowledged Christ* of M. M. Thomas; *Undiscovered Christ* of Braybrooke; John Hick’s *Equality of All Religions*; Mercea Eliade’s distinction between historical time and mythical time which brings Christianity on the level of the myths of other religions, and so on.

apparently self-contradictory label: secular religions, for the basic core of 'secular' is this-worldly as against the world-to-come, the eternal, as the etymology of the term secular reveals.

In what way is Christ at work in the ideologies of our time? The obvious answer is in the Christian values and principles these ideologies and the revolutions they have caused are saturated with, such as in the classless society of Communism (secularised version of the Kingdom of God), in the ideals of liberty (the Image of God), fraternity (*koinonia*) and equality (justice/righteousness of God), involvement in history (Christian discipleship) and so on. Christ as the Lord of history is active in history through these movements of liberation, by supplying them with values and ideals they can strive after. Without Christ at work in them, they would become dehumanizing, satanic, devouring their own children.

II. SOME MAJOR THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY

Even a quick analysis of the above shows that several christological and soteriological emphases are at stake here. *Firstly*, a positive approach to all non-Christian religions which is the driving force behind all cosmic christologies is in turn driven by the magnificent obsession with the survival of mankind. In its empirical, existential approach, this obsession with human *survival* so dominates thinking that the unity of mankind becomes the goal of the *progress* of mankind. Such an understanding goes beyond the positive assessment of non-Christian religions as 'hunger' which is satisfied or 'fulfilled' in Christianity—such as is found in the 1928 Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council, where such approval of all religions began. Behind a obsession is the fear of the destruction of mankind such as through nuclear holocaust which appears imminent. Behind all cosmic christologies there is a deistic understanding of God, that he is not really concerned about his world and has left it to make its own destiny. Further, this also means, ultimately, a secular understanding of history—to look at history necessarily without God. Starting with an **P. 391** empirical context, cosmic christology inevitably bypasses truth as a value. It is more concerned with 'facts' or 'context' as seen by man rather than with revelation as given by God, for example, in the Bible. This lack of concern for truth does not, paradoxically enough, discourage conversions but encourages them. Since Christ is in all religions, it does not matter whether one converts from the Hindu faith to a Christian faith or vice versa—the traffic across the border of religions has increased where cosmic christologies are accepted.

Secondly, in spite of taking the biblical support of passages like John, [1:9](#), [Ephesians 1](#), [Colossians 1](#), Acts, [17](#) etc., it is difficult to see how the biblical dualism of God and evil can lead to such an understanding of a cosmic Christ; only an inclusive attitude such as found in Hindu monism could lead to such a goal. Human freedom, personality, history—all belong to the fall, to the transient in Hindu monism, which has the 'absolute goal' of summing up everything in the unknowable Brahman. It seems to me that the cosmic Christ idea is basically another name for this Brahman.

Thirdly, the heart of cosmic christology, the separation of the *person* of Jesus from the principle or idea of Christ, goes against the grain of Chalcedonian christological formula. This rejection of tradition by cosmic christologists is no surprise, since, starting from an existential situation they can hardly give a place of Church history in their thinking. Whatever be the history of the Chalcedonian session, the non-speculative preciseness of its christological definition (two natures in one person, without confusion, without change, without division and without separation) can be attributed only to the providential ruling and wisdom of God who rules and overrules over the affairs of men.

In attempting to define the idea of Christ in total separation from the human nature of Jesus, cosmic christology is a radical christology.

III. IS ONLY JESUS THE CHRIST?

Thus the present debates in cosmic christology ask in a fresh way questions asked earlier in different ways—the questions concerning the relationship between general and special revelation, between God-head and manhood in the person of Jesus Christ, and between the Christ of faith and Jesus of history.¹² They also include the issues in the relationship of Christology to Jesulogy, between Christology from **P. 392** above or below, or *pro nobis* and *extra nos*.¹³ All this means that the theological validity of restricting the revealed Messiah only to the person of Jesus of Nazareth needs a relevant clarification.

Wolfhart Pannenberg put his finger on this sensitive spot in the first of his ten christological theses where he says that the heart of christology is the affirmation that this man Jesus is God. The issue here is to give a reason for our belief that in this man Jesus the fullness of godhead dwells bodily. To what extent did the truth of Christ in the Old Testament become the fact of Jesus in the New, or the promise of the Messiah a fulfilment in the Son of Mary and Joseph?

Already some decades back Edwyn Bevan had written with firm conviction:

The great dividing line is that which marks off all those who hold that the relation of Jesus to God—however they describe or formulate it—is of such a kind that it could not be repeated in any other individual—that to speak, in fact, of its being repeated in one *other* individual is a contradiction in terms, since any individual standing in that relation to God would *be* Jesus, and that Jesus, in virtue of this relation, has the same absolute claim upon all men's worship and loyalty as belongs to God. A persuasion of this sort of uniqueness attaching to Jesus seems to me the essential characteristic of what has actually in the field of human history been Christianity.¹⁴

Similarly E. O. James asserts,

The Godhead attributed to the founder of Christianity, alike in the New Testament and by the Church, renders it unique in the history of religion. Nowhere else had it ever been claimed that a historical founder of any religion was the one and only supreme deity.¹⁵

It is for this reason valid to say that Christianity is founded neither upon the truth of incarnation nor the cross, but upon the fact of resurrection, emphasizing the significance of the claims of Jesus. In several ways the cruciality of Jesus can be substantiated. The apostle Paul, for example, started, right after his Damascus experience, to prove that this Jesus was the Christ. Jesus himself, though he began his ministry with the announcement and the message concerning the coming Kingdom of God, towards the end his ministry specifically drew attention to himself. Both Peter's 'No other name' and Jesus' 'No one comes to the father but by me' speak not so much of Christ, as of the name/ **p. 393** character of the historical person Jesus. The Greeks wanted to see Jesus, not the Jewish

¹² The present heresy of the Jesus Only movement, denying the trinitarian concept, is a reaction to cosmic christology.

¹³ Due to limitation of space in all these debates, only the issue limiting Godhead exclusively to the man Jesus can be considered in the following.

¹⁴ E. R. Bevan *Hellenism and Christianity*, Allen & Unwin: 1921, p. 271.

¹⁵ Quoted in E. O. James *Christianity and Other Religions*, Hodder & Stoughton: 1968, p. 170.

messiah. John repeats the claim of Jesus, 'Believe in me' as the heart of conversion. The unbelieving Thomas accepted Jesus as 'my Lord and my God'. Even in our time, though non-Christians have often been offended by the exclusive claims of Christianity and also by the discovery of Christhood in their religion, without exception they have been attracted by the historical figure of Jesus. His life and character are now universal values. In the light of this, it is most difficult to deny the normativity of Jesus for Christian faith.

This means that evangelism is not merely to 'name the name', nor even merely to introduce Jesus ('Mr. Jones, this is Jesus'), but primarily to confess saving faith in Jesus ('Mr. Jones, this Jesus is Christ').

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY FOR CONVERSION

The Bible portrays conversion as a turning from idols to the living God. Essentially therefore, conversion has two turnings—a turning away from sin (repentance) and a turning towards Jesus Christ (faith). In the English language, the intensive prefix con- (instead of re-, ob-, in- or per-) rightly reflects the biblical sense that *conversion* is a total personal turning, not merely a person turning partially to Jesus Christ. It is a relationship, the response of one person to 'The Other'. In his 12-volume history of Christianity, Kenneth S. Latourette observes that though in many regions of the world mass movements to embrace Christian faith can be seen, yet in every case prior to such mass movements there have always been a few individuals who have been touched by the gospel and who have been the demonstration of the power of the gospel to these masses. That is to say, in the history of the Church also, conversion has been primarily individual, before any sociological or structural aspects developed. In fact, some have striven to show that the very concept of individual personhood is a Christian contribution to human civilization.

Further, like other personal relationships such as friendship or marriage, conversion is both a decision as well as a process. John Stott observes that though repentance and faith are decisions, conversion is a process whereby a person's relationships with the Church, the society and culture also are transformed. Just as married life is an unfolding of a personal relationship, conversion also is a growing relationship between the saved one and the saviour, moving towards perfection/maturity. And like marriage, conversion is also an unrepeatable decision—no one can be converted more than once! Paul [p. 394](#) Devanandan calls his turning away from Hendrik Kraemer's negative approach to religions a second conversion. This is hardly appropriate. One might call it a shock or rebellion or a discovery etc., but conversion in the biblical sense as sketched above does not suit Devanandan's experience. But this raises two relevant questions.

Is there a decisive element in conversion? The question is relevant because as a process conversion has apparently many levels of response, as many have attempted to show. M. M. Thomas speaks of three levels: the first level where people accept the principle of self-giving love or the Cross as ultimate, the second where the pattern of the suffering servanthood of Jesus is accepted, and the final level where the person of Jesus himself is accepted. One author grades thirteen stages: beginning at the level of persecuting Christians, working slowly upwards to more positive stages, to hostility, rejection, resentment, evasion, aloofness, suspicion, neutrality, interest, sympathy, inquiring, association, acceptance, identification and participation in Christian faith. Whatever the stages of terminology, one's personal trust in Jesus must mark the decisive step in conversion—as Jesus said, this is where a person turns from darkness to light.

The second issue pertaining to the subject of conversion is: who or what is converted? The relevance of this question is clear when we consider that in cosmic christology, since

Christ is found in other religions, the approach was to convert religions themselves. So Panikkar spoke of Hinduism passing through death and resurrection in Christ, coming out as a transformed or Christian Hinduism; M. M. Thomas suggests that since Christ is being in-formed (that is, being formed within) in Hinduism, it is better to speak rather of Hindu Christianity! Balasurya of Sri Lanka writes of conversion not just of persons but also of societal, systemic and cosmic conversions! Hindus allege that Christian conversion is change of one's social or religious allegiances.

We must admit that it is valid to affirm that reformation of religions is caused at least partly by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also valid to assert that a person's relationships to social or religious structures must also undergo change in his or her conversion. But it is better to term these changes renaissance or reformation or whatever, rather than conversion, since conversion is basically a change in the personal relationship between two persons, man and God. Though the Old Testament speaks of conversion of nations, such as the nation of Nineveh, still it is a personal decision on the part of each of Nineveh's citizens to repent in dust and ashes. *Metanoia* as the renewal of the *mind*, and *pistis* as trust *in a person* are personal elements in the Bible. p. 395

SOME NEEDED EMPHASES

The following initial emphases are necessary in response to the above discussions.

1. If the fact of the world as a neighbourhood brings us the awareness of other religious claims for salvation as serious alternatives to salvation in Jesus Christ, and if cosmic christology approves other religions by discovering Christ's salvation in them, then there is an urgency for Evangelicals to develop a theology of pluralism of religions. The consequence of not clarifying a biblical approach to pluralism would be, sooner or later, a rejection of the Christian Church and her mission as totally irrelevant, as well as a rejection of the Bible and Jesus as God's supreme and final revelation. No doubt 'an ecumenical theology of pluralism' is a contradiction in terms, but do we have an evangelical theology of pluralism? I would like to summarize such a theology as a starter for discussion:

a) If we accept the God of the Bible as all-knowing, all-powerful, holy and gracious and unchanging, then we need also to accept the revelation of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah (Old Testament) fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (New Testament) as normative for Christian faith, not merely illustrative.

b) Because the truth and goodness in non-Christian religions are in the form of general ideals rather than concrete truths, and also because such truth and goodness are inevitably mixed with falsehood and evil, they are not adequate to lead their adherents to salvation apart from their trust in Jesus Christ.

c) Though the post-Christian history of religions shows a Christian renaissance in them thereby bringing them nearer to Christian values and goals, it must be born in mind that in our time there are also counter-developments in religions which cancel any Christianization of religions or its significance. The processes of secularization and religious resurgence are two such counter movements.

2. Christian philanthropic efforts for centuries, no doubt partly motivated by Christian missions, have led to a gross misunderstanding by non-Christians and Christians alike that Christianity is a religion of love, compared to Islam as the religion of freedom (submission to Allah the true freedom) and Hinduism as the religion of truth (of ultimate monism). Such a misconception is also partly responsible for cosmic christologies where the Christ-principle is the self-giving sacrificial love of the cross. In such a situation, I am convinced that an adequate emphasis on the holiness of God is imperative. For the Cross of Jesus is

no example of God's love, but of His *holy* love: the Cross is the p. 396 moment in human history when God's holiness and love meet. Though grace and truth came through Jesus, it must not be forgotten that prior to Jesus the Law had amply revealed God's holiness; thus the Messiah is called the Holy One. Moreover, if the Old Testament concept of holiness is primarily ritual, the New Testament concept is primarily spiritual. So I suggest that not love but holy love be presented as the Christian distinctiveness. As John Taylor demonstrates in his book, *The Go-Between God*, the idea of self-sacrificing love is found not only on the cross but throughout nature and history: the white blood corpuscles dying for the sake of the rest of the body; the mother bird or animal sacrificing herself for the sake of her young ones, and many heroes and heroines throughout the centuries giving their total lives for the sake of other people are some of the obvious examples. But it is hard to find another example of holy love where 'justice kisses mercy'. Jesus is the concrete example of God's whole nature.

Jesus, himself called the holy one, not only addressed God as 'Holy Father' but also taught us to hallow his name. The early apostles called Christians 'saints', the holy ones, not just good or generous or kind people. The Church herself is called 'the holy nation'. The development of monasteries and monastic life in the Church reflects this intense desire for holiness; and it is from these monks and nuns that love was demonstrated! A rejection of emphasis on holiness as is the case in our time, leads to several perversions of the gospel: if God's holiness is under-emphasized then man's sinfulness too is underemphasized. The whole question of God's electing a particular people become a problem and universalism will then be the ultimate goal. But the question of theodicy will be an insurmountable issue. Cosmic christologies, diluting such an understanding of God as the wholly Other and wholly Perfect, make him deistic and result in unnecessary worry about the survival of mankind. We tend to forget that God's mills grind exceedingly slowly, but they grind exceedingly small—as in the case of the Canaanites.

Such an emphasis on God's holiness must show forth also in our life—what the late Francis Schaeffer termed The Great Evangelical Disaster is only too true: the failure to live what we preach. Here we are speaking not just of Otto's idea of the holy as the Majesty, the Numinous, but beyond that, that the experience of the holy in concrete in Jesus. This is a Christian distinctive not found in other religions, or, more precisely, the hunger for it in other religions is satisfied in the example of Jesus.

3. Since an over-emphasis on the Cross of Jesus has led to a truncated understanding of the gospel, I think it is relevant to bring p. 397 back now an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus. Beyond the popular Evangelical understanding—that if I believe that Jesus died for my sins and accept him as my Saviour I will be saved—the New Testament gives the needed complement: 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' ([Rom. 10:9](#)). An adequate emphasis on the demonstration of the power of resurrection in our life more than the truth of the cross in our preaching is also the needed antidote to the dangers of cosmic christologies of our time.

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Astrology and Other Methods of Divination

Anthony P. Stone

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The author who is a long-term student of the astrological systems evaluates astrology in the light of modern scientific knowledge and concludes that it is a form of divination. He traces the use of astrology, divination and occult practices in the biblical record and discusses their relationship to demonic powers. In the postscript the author reflects on the ways Christ guides his people.

Editor

When an astrologer is given a problem, such as the prediction of future events, counselling a client, or fitting the life of a well-known person to his/her horoscope, the sequence of steps followed is typically this: (1) a horoscope is drawn up; (2) symbolic meanings for the planets, signs of the zodiac, etc., are called into play; (3) rules of interpretation are considered; (4) an answer is given.

Medieval Europeans thought that astrology was the science of celestial influence, and Indian astrological texts speak of what the planets are thought to do. The notion that astrology deals with celestial influence is very persistent, but false.

I shall argue that astrology is not science, but divination. We shall then look at what the Bible says about divination and related topics, and classify the various passages according to what they actually say. God has forbidden some methods and given us others. Astrology is forbidden both directly and (as divination) indirectly. It is then possible to understand better the place of these things in spiritual warfare.

ASTROLOGY AND DIVINATION IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE

The following points illustrate the fact that astrology is not set up to deal with celestial influence. Not all the planets are used; the three planets discovered in modern times and the minor planets (asteroids) are [p. 399](#) usually neglected. The nodes of the moon's orbit are treated as planets in some systems. In addition, there are several different systems of unobservable, imaginary planets, both in Western and in Indian astrology.

Usually, not all the stars are considered, but only the signs of the zodiac. Similarly, the 3-dimensional picture of the planetary and stellar positions is not usually considered; only positions in the plane of the zodiac receive attention. Also, the signs of the zodiac have different starting points in different systems, varying by nearly one sign.

Indian astrology contains a number of non-astronomical methods. For instance, some methods of deciding on a birth time, when this is not known, make use of the posture of the enquirer.

If astrology dealt with celestial influence, it would be organized like a science, but we shall see shortly that this is not the case. Before that, we need to look at the meaning of 'divination', which is the technical term for all ways of seeking information not available by ordinary means. The following examples illustrate this:

In ancient India the qualities of a prospective bride might be decided by collecting eight lumps of earth from different places, varying from an exceptionally fertile field to a cremation ground, and the girl being asked to choose one lump. The interpretation was

analogous to the source of the chosen lump. This is a case of *external* divination, because there is no scope for any intuitive modification of the result.

The oracles of the ancient Mediterranean world gave answers to questions while in a trance. Such methods are called *internal* divination. The use of Tarot cards involves both an external component, the cards, and the internal component of the card reader's feelings and intuitive response.¹ This is therefore an example of *mixed* divination.

We may now contrast science with divination, and identify astrology as divination.

1. Science has a direct connection with its subject matter. For example, weather is predicted from observations of weather. Divination from external signs uses symbolic connections (e.g. the lumps of earth from different sources). Astrology also uses a very rich collection of symbolic connections. For instance, certain planetary configurations are considered to indicate various forms of weather.

2. Science rejects theories which are inconsistent with known facts, whereas divination retains all methods. Practitioners of divination often p. 400 use a range of different methods. Astrology contains many inconsistent systems, and we can mention only a few. There are at least fifteen different ways of dividing the zodiac into twelve parts (the twelve 'houses') relative to the horizon of a place. Western astrology has at least five methods and Indian astrology forty-five methods, for predicting the time of future events, and these generally differ. There are also many schools of astrology, which differ widely.²

3. Scientific theories are subject to open discussion, and the rules governing them are the same for everyone. The rules of divination, however, are not explained and diviners use whatever works for them. Astrologers, too, seek success among the various inconsistent methods available. The rules of astrology are not usually explained, unless it is with reference to other, unexplained, astrological principles.

4. Science is restricted to repeatable processes and looks for causal explanations of them. Divination makes use of chance conjunctions of events, and the diviners intuition. The same is true of astrology.

5. Science expects success; astrology and other methods of divination hope for success.

DIVINATION AND OCCULT PRACTICES IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

There are several words for divination and related occult practices in the Old Testament. We shall look at them individually, and also at their linguistic interrelationships.

Divination (*qsm*) is used in a wide range of meanings: divination in a bad sense ([1 Sam. 15:23](#)); words of false prophets claiming to speak from the Lord ([Jer 14:14](#)); but also the words of a king ([Prov. 16:10](#)). In [Ezek. 21:21](#) there is divination by arrows, teraphim, and inspection of livers, and in v. [22](#) 'divination' also means the object indicating 'Jerusalem' in these procedures (ET 'lot').

To show the linguistic usage, each Hebrew and Aramaic root will be translated consistently in what follows. (The context will show whether 'divination' means *qsm* or divination in general.) We cannot hope to give all biblical references to divination, but we shall attempt to list all divinatory occurrences of the ten terms explained here.

Augury (*nchsh*) also has a variety of meanings. It describes Joseph's professed cup divination ([Gen. 44:5, 15](#)) as well as Balaam's activities ([Num. 24:1](#)). In [1 Kg. 20:33](#) it

¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) 129–132.

² For further material see Anthony P. Stone, *Hindu Astrology: Myths, Symbols and Realities* (New Delhi/Pune: Select Books, 1981), and reference 15 below.

means 'to watch for a sign'. There is also [p. 401](#) a figurative use when Laban says he has 'augured' that the Lord blessed him because of Jacob ([Gen. 30–27](#)).

It is not clear what sort of procedure is described as *soothsaying* ('*nn*), so the KJ 'observing times' sounds too precise. *Sorcery* (*kshp*) often refers to magical practices, but the sorcerers of [Jer. 27:9](#) are individuals who speak to the people, along with diviners, soothsayers, prophets, and dreamers. At Endor, Saul visited a woman who was 'mistress of a spirit ('*ob*)' The term *medium* (*yidd'oni*) is used only in conjunction with spirit, so it refers to a related spiritist practice. *Teraphim* (*terapim*), explained as household gods, were used for divinatory inquiry ([Ezek. 21:21](#); [Zech. 10:2](#)).

Chaldeans (*kašda*) are among the wise men mentioned in Daniel, and were probably astrologers (as in NIV). The word translated 'astrologers' in the KJ is *ašap*, an enchanter. The 'soothsayers' in the King James translation of Daniel are what we shall call *dividers* (*gazar*). The RSV gives 'astrologers, and the babylonian dividers (*hbr*) of the heavens ([Isa. 47:13](#)) obviously were astrologers, but this is not absolutely certain in the case of the men mentioned in Daniel.

The Biblical statements about divination and other occult practices fall into three main groups.

First, there are statements which are *neutral*. The practices may simply be described, as in the account of the king of Babylon's choice between Jerusalem and Ammon ([Ezek. 21:21f](#)). There are also figurative uses of the terminology ([Gen. 30:27](#); [Prov. 16:10](#); [Gal. 3:1](#)).³

The *second* group contains two sets of statements *condemning* divination and other occult practices. The first set is found in the Torah, and given God's basic condemnation of the occult. The Law given on Sinai included the death penalty for being a sorceress ([Ex. 22:18](#)). The two following verses prescribe the same penalty for bestiality and for sacrificing to another god. This shows the seriousness of these acts.

The further commands recorded in Leviticus give a plain proscription of augury and soothsaying ([Lev. 19:26](#)). The penalty for consulting spirits and mediums is death ([Lev. 20:6, 27](#)), because they are (spiritually) defiling ([Lev. 19:31](#)).

Deuteronomy has a more extended list of practices found in other nations, which are forbidden to the Israelites: fire offering of children, [p. 402](#) divination, soothsaying, augury, sorcery, enchantments (*chbr*), inquiring of spirits and mediums, and inquiring of the dead ([Dt. 18:9–14](#)). Note that [Dt. 18:14](#) uses the pair of terms, 'soothsayers and diviners', to stand for all sorts of diviners. It is specifically said that these things are abominable to the Lord (v. [12](#), cf. v. [9](#)). The extensive nature of the list shows that all such things are being forbidden. Astrology therefore comes under the biblical condemnation of divination. It is also clear that God will continue to guide (vv. [15–22](#)).

The statements in the second set are *consequent* on the condemnations of the first set. Samuel speaks of the sin of divination in parallel with 'iniquity and teraphim' ([1 Sam. 15:23](#)). Saul had expelled the spirits and mediums from the land ([1 Sam. 28:3](#)), but consulting a spirit was part of his disobedience to the Lord ([1 Chron. 10:13f](#)). The Assyrian captivity is attributed to sins such as fire offering of children, and divination and augury (perhaps again a representative pair of practices; [2 Kg. 17:17](#)).⁴

³ See also [Gen. 44:5, 15](#); [1 Kg. 20:33](#) (augury); [Ex. 7:11](#) (sorcery); [Num. 22:7](#); [Josh. 13:22](#); [1 Sam. 6:2](#); [Isa. 3:2](#); [Mic. 3:11](#) (divination); [Jdg. 9:37](#) (soothsayer); [1 Sam. 28:7–9](#); [Isa. 19:3](#) (spirit, medium); [29:4](#) (spirit); [Hos. 3:4](#) (teraphim); [Dan. 5:11](#) (magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers).

⁴ See also [2 Kg. 21:6](#) (augury, soothsaying, spirit, medium); [2 Ch. 33:6](#) (adds sorcery); [2 Kg. 23:24](#); [Isa. 8:19](#) (spirit, medium); [Isa. 2:6](#); [578:3](#) (soothsayer); [Mic. 5:12](#) (and sorcery); [2 Kg. 9:22](#); [Nah. 3:4](#); [Mal. 3:5](#) (sorcery).

[Jeremiah 10:1-16](#) is most important as it contains an explicit command not to study astrology or take note of astrological predictions. This makes it clear that the prohibitions in the Torah apply also to the specific case of astrological divination.

The basic statement, as a message from the Lord, is in vv. [2-3a](#), and is in inverted parallelism:⁵

Do not learn the way of the nations,
and do not be frightened by the signs in the sky,
although the nations are frightened by them,
³for the customs of the peoples are worthless.

The rest of the passage deals with idolatry, but also links up explicitly with the celestial signs of astrology. Babylonian astrology used both usual and unusual events, for example:

If a north wind blows when the new moon appears, there will be a flood in that month.⁶

These signs were thought to be signs given by the various Babylonian gods. In vv. [10-13](#) it is said that the Lord made the earth p. 403 and it is he who brings earthquakes (v. [10](#)), thunder, clouds, lightning, rain, and wind (v. [13](#)). Now, all of these things are signs in Babylonian astrology.⁷ Hence if we revere God, we have no need to fear these 'signs'. At Ugarit, too, the Canaanites worshipped the heavenly bodies and interpreted celestial signs.⁸ Hence the fact that v. [13](#) lists effects attributed to Baal⁹ may also have an astrological reference.

Because of the parallelism, v. [3a](#) applies both to idolatry and to the astrological signs in the sky. There is another very important point. In v. [2](#), the Hebrew phrase translated 'learn the way' is literally, 'learn into the way (*'el-derek*)'. There are only two other places in the Hebrew Bible where the phrase is used in this sort of metaphor: [2 Chron. 6:27](#) (learning God's way) and [Prov. 7:25a](#) (getting into immoral ways). So it implies serious involvement.¹⁰ Hence, in this passage, God is telling us not to get into the study of astrology, and not to take note of astrologers' predictions.

The following New Testament incidents may be included in this set. A girl who divined by means of a spirit of 'python' was delivered by Paul and lost this ability ([Acts 16:16-19](#)). Converts at Ephesus burned their books of magic ([Acts. 19:19](#)).¹¹

The *third* group of biblical statements shows the *inadequacy* of divination. Balaam says, 'There is no divination in [(?) regard to] Israel/No augury in [(?) regard to] Jacob' ([Num. 23:23](#)).

⁵ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); William McKane, *Jeremiah Vol. 1* (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

⁶ R. C. Thompson, *The reports of the magicians and astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum* (London, 1900) no. 29.

⁷ R. C. Thompson, *op. cit.* nos. 263-267 (earthquakes); nos. 253f, 256-23 (thunder); nos. 87, 139, 248 (clouds); nos. 256f, 259, 262 (lightning); nos. 139, 250-253, 256-260 (rain); no. 68f, 123, 137, 141, 258 (wind).

⁸ John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2nd edn, 1965) 193-4.

⁹ Lawrence Boadt, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982) 87; William L. Holladay, *op. cit.* 335.

¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 327.

¹¹ See also N. T. passages condemning sorcery: [Gal. 5:20](#); [Rev. 9:21](#); [18:23](#); [21:8](#); [22:15](#).

False prophets and diviners, even when claiming to speak for the Lord, are not to be heeded ([Jer. 14:14](#); [29:8](#); [Ezek. 13:1-23](#); [22:28](#); also [Jer. 27:9](#), along with dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers).

Some of the best known passages about astrologers fall into this category., Isaiah chapter [47](#) says that the Babylonian astrologers (v. [13](#)) cannot tell when God's judgment will fall on Babylon, and their sorceries and enchantments cannot ward it off (vv. [9-12](#)).

In Daniel chapter [2](#), the Chaldeans were not able to tell the king what his dream had been ([Dan. 2:2, 4, 5, 10](#)), and Daniel explains that no wise men, enchanters, magicians or dividers would be able to succeed (v. [27](#)) because the dream was from God, who revealed both [p. 404](#) the dream and its meaning to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar then made Daniel chief prefect over the wise men of Babylon (v. [48](#); in [5:11](#) they are enumerated as magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and dividers).¹²

In the book of Esther, Haman had lots cast to select an auspicious day on which to approach the king, so that he would obtain the king's permission to massacre all the Jews in the Persian empire ([Esther 3:7](#)). Through Esther's intercession the Jews were saved and Haman was hanged ([9:24f](#)).¹³

The story of the Magi ([Mt. 2](#)) shows astrologers (v. [1f](#)) being guided by a passage of Scripture (vv. [4-6](#)).¹⁴ Simon the magician changed on his conversion from being a great man to being the most spiritually needy Christian ([Acts 8:9-24](#)). The magician Elymas was made temporarily blind when he opposed Paul's preaching of the gospel ([Acts 13:6-12](#)).

God has, of course, always provided his own methods of guidance. These may be listed as: direct guidance (including the words of Jesus), angels, dreams and visions, signs and wonders, sacred lot, Urim and Thummim, prophets, and Scripture.

THE PRACTICE OF DIVINATION AND DEMONIC POWER

There are two kinds of spiritual reality: the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness ([Col. 1:13](#)), or the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan ([Acts 26:18](#); [Mt. 12:26](#)). God's methods of guidance belong to his kingdom, and since astrology and other forms of divination are not approved by God, they belong to the kingdom of darkness. Consequently, any contact with these practices has its dangers. Their continued study or use leads to deception and can result in demonization of various kinds.

As *deception*, divination leads to wrong attitudes to God. It encourages a self-centred approach to life when it focuses on questions like, 'When will I get promotion?', or 'When will I get married?'. It neglects God when it seeks to control situations, either by occult knowledge (e.g. when to start some venture) or by protection [p. 405](#) from an adverse planet (e.g. through talismans or worship of the planetary deity).

There is an 'esoteric' form of astrology which applies it to personal spiritual advancement, often in connection with a belief in reincarnation and *karma*. However, the philosophy of the perfectibility of the self is quite different from the gospel of Christ.

Divination also leads to wrong attitudes to other people. A person is liable to be stereotyped on the basis of their astrological sun-sign (for instance), both by friends and

¹² See also [Dan. 1:20](#) (magicians, enchanters); [Dan. 2:2](#) (magicians, enchanters, sorcerers with Chaldeans); [4:7](#) (magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers); [5:7](#) (enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers), [15](#) (wise men, enchanters).

¹³ See also [Num. 24:1](#) (augury); [Isa. 44:25](#); Jer., [29:8](#); [Ezek. 12:24](#); [21:23](#), [29](#); [Mic. 3:5-7](#) (divination); [Zech. 10:2](#) (adds teraphim).

¹⁴ Further details are given in Anthony P. Stone, *We Have Seen His Star* (New Delhi: TRACI, 1983).

employers. Apart from being statistically unsupported,¹⁵ this attitude denies free will and the grace of God.

The false prophets of ancient Israel were deceptive because they wrongly claimed to be speaking words from God. John advised Christians to beware of false prophets and 'test the spirits' ([1 Jn. 4:1](#)). Paul told the Corinthians to 'weigh carefully' what Christian prophets said ([1 Cor. 14:29](#)). This is also necessary today. Selwyn Hughes gives a contemporary example:

I was at a meeting in Wales, many years ago, when someone 'prophesied', saying things that were absolute rubbish, then tagged on the phrase: 'Thus saith the Lord.' The pastor who was in charge, immediately got up and said, 'Thus saith the Lord? I wouldn't put my name to that—let alone the Lord's!'¹⁶

Astrologers like to say that [Jeremiah 10:2](#) establishes that there are signs to be found by astrology, which, however, we should not fear. We have seen that this is not what the passage says.

The *demonic* nature of the spiritist seance is well documented.¹⁷ The spiritist connections of astrology are less well known. Ankerberg and Weldon¹⁸ have given a wealth of examples and references to astrologers who are helped by spirits. They quote the testimonies of three converted astrologers who conclude that spirits provide the power in astrology. Some astrologers, though, do not realize this for a long time, if ever. There are even books of astrology whose human writers testify that they were dictated by spirits. p. 406

It is clear, then, that it is unsafe to become involved in the predictive processes of divination. Study, if done at all, has to be from outside.

Because of spiritual warfare, the burning of books of magic by Christian converts in Ephesus ([Acts 19:19](#)) was not an over-reaction. It has frequently been found necessary today.¹⁹ Here is an example from the writer's own experience.

The writer bought a particular compendium of Indian astrology for his historical studies. Later, he felt that God was telling him to burn the book because it was an adverse spiritual influence. On hearing that he no longer had the book, a Hindu astrologer commented, 'That book has many bad things in it'.

The victory of Christ on the cross provides the Christian with all that is necessary to combat Satan's wiles with divine power. Christ has conquered the powers ([Col. 2:15](#); [1 Pet. 3:21f](#)), and is able to meet any need, whether for wisdom, understanding, guidance, protection or deliverance.

¹⁵ G. Dean, *Recent Advances in Natal Astrology* (Subiaco, W.A.: Analogic, 1977) 75; Michel Guaquelin, *The Truth About Astrology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 129.

¹⁶ Selwyn Hughes, *Every Day With Jesus*, September/October 1991 (Farnham, Surrey: CWR) notes for 29 Oct.

¹⁷ E.g. Kurt E. Koch, *Christian Counselling and Occultism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1965); *Between Christ and Satan* (Grand Rapids: Kregel) [1968]; Victor H. Ernest, / *Talked With Spirits* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1973); J. Stafford Wright, *Christianity and the Occult* (London: Scripture Union, 1971)

¹⁸ John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Astrology: Do the Heavens Rule our Destiny?* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1989).

¹⁹ Kurt E. Koch, *Christian Counselling and Occultism* (*op. cit.*) 129, 134. *Occult Bondage and Deliverance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981) 90.

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Astrology was my Hobby A Personal Account

Oswald Chakravarty

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BOOKS AND CHARTS

When I was 15 my uncle began to teach me the fundamentals of astrology. After a few months study of books and horoscopes, a friend showed me his hand. Instead of looking at his palm I decided to cast a horoscope for the time at which he questioned me. He was very surprised to find that even without looking at his hand I could tell him many things about his past. I predicted that he would get a job in a factory. He did not believe me—but a few weeks later he came to congratulate me on my accuracy! Such incidents encouraged me to study astrology still further.

Then God made me spiritually alive and for a few months my interest in astrology died down. When I asked some friends whether I should continue to practise it, they said that astrology was scientific and that there was nothing wrong with it, but that it could be used to help people. They could not have been more wrong.

Now I studied astrology from many books. When anyone came to consult me, I used to make a chart for the time of the question and consider all the astrological factors which showed up in it. I would meditate on these factors, keeping the question in mind. Ideas would come into my mind, which I noted down. Suddenly, the answer would be on my tongue.

My predictions sounded strange to me and I wondered how they could possibly take place. But the things I said came true!

By now I was completely absorbed in astrology. Looking for the astrological cause for everything filled my waking hours. Although I did not notice it, the Bible had become a bore and I did not like to pray. The only things which interested me were astrology, palmistry and numerology. Soon Tantra was added to my reading list.

SURPRISES

One day in 1970 my teacher at college showed me his palm and I was able to tell him what he wanted to know. Then he told me that his father was an astrologer, and invited me to his home. P. 408

His father was indeed a successful part-time astrologer. Whenever he used his powers of prediction he worshipped the gods of the various planets in order to appease them. Otherwise, he said, they would have a bad effect on the astrologer and his family.

He then revealed that his own brother had been unable to pass his final examinations because of practising astrology. When he gave up astrology for a time and worshipped the gods, his powers of concentration gradually returned and he eventually got through his examination.

This reminded me that I, too, was unable to pass my examinations at the first attempt. The books agreed with the remedy suggested by the astrologer but I knew that to worship other gods would be directly to disobey the first two of the Ten Commandments: *You shall have no other gods before me, and you shall not make for yourself a graven image ... you shall not bow down to them or serve them.* So I did not worship the planetary gods.

In those days I became very irritable. At times there was such a storm of evil thoughts in my brain that I thought I was going mad. Sometimes I even felt like killing people and used to lock myself in my room until the urge died down.

I also suffered from headaches, hypertension and nervousness. After I had used the power of predicting the future for anyone, I used to feel very tired and weak.

Another startling fact was that many of those who consulted me slowly developed an aversion to the Bible. Jesus and all the things of God. I just could not understand what was wrong, as I had been telling them things which proved correct.

HOBBY MY MASTER

One day, a boy who used to travel to college and back with me seemed to me to have a peculiar look in his eyes, as if he were going to die very soon. Next day, when the two of us were standing with a teacher at the bus-stop, a speeding truck knocked the boy down and ran over his head, killing him instantly.

A month later, I was talking to another friend when I noticed that he had the same peculiar look in his eyes, as if he would die the next day. Next morning the newspapers reported that he had been killed in an accident. Now I was scared. A fearful power had appeared in me and I was helpless to get rid of it.

Sometimes the thought of killing myself came into my mind, but the spirit of God showed me that this was an absurd thought and that I [p. 409](#) should seek release from it. It was as if I were no longer master of myself, but a slave to some powers which were trying to destroy me. I had started with astrology as a hobby, but now it had become my master. I longed for release.

Then I thought of the astrologer who had advised me to leave astrology. I went to him again and he told me I must give up astrology for a while and worship the gods of the planets.

Now I knew that I was in a fix and could not escape from Satan's clutches on my own. I tried to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ, but it was very difficult even to get down on my knees to pray. But God was merciful and when He saw that my desire to be freed was real, He put a desire in my heart to study the Bible.

First, I passed my final examinations and then I was able to get down to more serious study of the Bible. After some months I found that I had given up astrology. I had the courage to turn away the people who came to consult me. They were very surprised, but I knew the evil effect of using powers which God has forbidden us to use:

There shall not be found among you ... anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, ... For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.

[\(Deut. 18:10-12](#) RSV)

BOOKS BURNT

In December 1971 I developed a strong urge to burn all the occult literature I had. But I did not want to—after all, I had spent hours preparing those notes and charts. So I put the thought away from my mind. Two weeks later the same thought came back to me: that I should burn all my occult literature. So I prayed to Jesus that if this thought was from him it should remain, otherwise it should fade away.

After another month the urge was still there, so I took out all my charts and burned them. But that night there was no sleep, only an even stronger urge to destroy every last trace of astrology, which meant even my carefully prepared notes.

Next morning I took the step of burning everything. As everything burned up, I felt as if a burden had been lifted from me. Now studying the Bible and praying was a very interesting and lively affair, because my obedience to Christ had restored my friendship with him.

At this stage I made a fresh commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and was very happy. My headaches, nervousness and the storm of [p. 410](#) confusing thought had stopped. I now came across this verse in Lev. ([20:6](#) RSV):

If a person turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people.

This is just what had happened to me. God has set His face against me. My experience confirmed the truth of this verse.

Now that I had left the works of Satan and turned to God, the things which had been predicted about me did not come true. Now my future was in the hands of that Person who can change the future easily. He had forgiven my past and taken control of the future.

After some months, however, I again looked at somebody's palm, told the past and also predicted a few things. That night and the next morning I did not want to pray or study the Bible. When I noticed what was happening I asked God for forgiveness and decided never again to read a person's hand or horoscope.

As I look back, I see that my spiritual life had been crippled by astrology. Jesus has forgiven me and healed my body, soul and spirit. In fact he has given me a new spirit which wants to expose the deceitfulness of doubting and not obeying the Bible, which has been written for our good.

Praise and thanks be to Jesus, the Almighty Lord, for his love and power and for delivering me from what had once so completely mastered me.

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Postscript: Ways of Guidance for Christians

Anthony P. Stone

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Now that we have examined the biblical material, we may summarise the reasons why astrology is illegitimate for Christians:

- (i) Astrology is not found among the methods of guidance provided by the Lord.
- (ii) Astrology is forbidden in the Bible.
- (iii) Astrology does not provide any key to the understanding of the Bible.
- (iv) Astrology does not help in Christian living.
- (v) Any use of astrology lays one open to the possibility of demonic influence.

A method forbidden by God cannot reveal his will. We certainly need guidance on the choice of a career, choice of marriage partner, and many other matters, but most of all we need to know who is in charge of the universe. At the popular level, astrologers say, 'the planets', but Christians say, 'Christ'. What, then, is the Christian view of life, in which there is no need for astrology?

THE CREATOR IN CONTROL

First of all, this universe and all that is in it has a Creator. God not only created the universe; he also keeps it going. He has control over everything, although in the interests of freedom he allows men (and angels) to flout his will, up to a point.

God's nature is love. This means that he always wishes the best for us. 'Always', because *God does not change*. He is not sometimes well-disposed and sometimes ill-disposed towards us. It is our sin he hates, not us ourselves.

THE CREATOR'S PURPOSE

God did not make the universe without any purpose in mind. He wants us to live in eternal fellowship with Him and with each other. God's purpose has been described as a plan for 'the fulness of time', to sum up *all things in Christ* ([Eph. 1:10](#)). This is breath-taking in its scope. But we should note that fellowship with God and with one another is 'in Christ'; there is no other centre of unity. **P. 412**

This phrase, 'the fulness of time', implies a stage at which everything necessary for the completion of God's plan has taken place. Two important principles follow from this. The first is that time and history do not go round and round in circles, but are moving towards an end. Secondly, what we do in time is important; it makes a difference in eternity.

God is One, and the three Persons of the Trinity act in concord with each other. God's angels perform his will perfectly. The opposition to God's purpose comes from Satan and his angels and from men and women who live according to their own plans. Our own plans may be just what Satan wants us to do, in order to further *his* designs. However, Satan and his forces were decisively defeated at the cross. They are now fighting a rearguard action which is ultimately doomed to fail.

As for the evil of men, we noticed in discussing the star of Bethlehem that God brings his purposes to pass by working through men's actions without being involved in their evil. So in spite of opposition, the Creator's plan is *certain to be achieved*.

It will be tragic, however, if some who call themselves Christians *exclude themselves* from God's kingdom by neglecting to do his will.

GOD GUIDES TODAY

Believers in Christ, who belong to him, are included in God's plan, and we can expect him to guide us. How does this happen?

A number of the methods once used by God, such as the Urim and Thummim, and the sacred lot, are no longer used by him. Instead, we have the complete Bible, and the Holy Spirit living within us as believers.

The Holy Spirit's guidance often comes through an inner pressure—a sense of necessity to follow a certain course if one is to be obedient to God, a sense of dissatisfaction until this course is taken, and a sense of peace when it is followed.

God may sometimes speak through a dream or a vision. He has many methods, but we must remember that when God speaks, he will choose the method, not we.

Satan, too, can send dreams, visions and so on, and we have to be on our guard against his deceptions.

Important decisions usually take time and need confirmation. This may come through circumstances, discussion with other Christians, or after continued prayer for guidance. The final confirmation is peace in the heart. [p. 413](#)

Our decisions must always conform to the teaching of the Bible, which gives the Christian the guidelines for his decisions. If we make a wrong decision, it may be corrected by further guidance from God.

Astrological guidance is often concerned with achieving comfort and success, and avoiding reverses and troubles. This is natural. Yet Jesus said, 'Seek ye *first* the kingdom (rule) of God and his righteousness' and whatever is necessary God will provide ([Mt. 6:33](#)). For the Christian who is seeking God's will, the guidance of the loving Heavenly Father is preferable to all other suggestions, *even when* it leads to hardship or death. We are safe in his hands, and only in his hands.

Another important point about God's guidance is that it enables us to choose between *good* alternatives. Paul was ready to preach anywhere, but at any important time God prevented him from preaching until he crossed the sea to Macedonia.

As for the timing of events, God frequently conceals the details until nearly the last moment. This is no problem for those who know they can trust Him. As the psalmist said,

I trust in thee, O Lord,
my times are in thy hand.

([Ps. 31:14f](#) RSV)

CHRIST IS THE ANSWER

How does one come to recognize God's voice and to trust Him? Basically, it is through a *personal relationship* with him. Jesus offers us union with him through the indwelling of his Spirit, if we will but come to him. Then we may walk close to him and become sensitive to his guidance.

One has to *want* to know God's will in order to find it. This involves submitting ourselves to Christ as Lord. Those who acknowledge Christ as their Lord have peace in the face of all circumstances, knowing that he is able to keep them and bring them through all the experiences of this life to a life continuing in eternity. Security is not to be found in anyone else. [p. 414](#)

Southern African Independent Churches Respond to Demonic Powers

George C. Oosthuizen

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In this article the author penetrates the pagan cosmology of witchcraft, sorcery, spirit possession and ancestor wrath that underlies the African understanding of the healing processes from sickness and disease. The failure of the historic churches to understand this cosmology and the relationship between medicine and ritual practices has been one factor in the rapid growth of the African Independent churches which now number six million followers or thirty per cent of the Black population of South Africa. The challenge to contextualise the media of Christ's healing power remains to be met.

Editor

DISEASES AND THEIR CAUSES

In Africa in general a distinction is made between two types of diseases, namely those which could be classified as natural diseases (referred to in Zulu as *umkhuhlane*) and those which could really be 'understood' by Africans only in the context of their cosmology (referred to as *Ukufa Kwabantu*).

The former type of diseases such as ordinary colds, flu, or serious ailments are always presented in somatic symptoms. Behind these diseases are no malicious external factors which loom behind everything, nor are they the victim's fault. These diseases are treated with medicines which are considered to be in themselves effective and which need not be accompanied by any rituals. Traditional medicines p. 415 exist for such diseases. Such medicines can be thrown away without ill consequences if ineffective. They are not considered to have mysterious power in themselves.

The treatment of those diseases which are understood only within the African context (Zulu = *Ukufa Kwabantu*) such as witchcraft, sorcery, ancestor wrath, pollution, spirit-possession, or a disturbed relationship with one's surroundings can be treated effectively only when certain medicines are accompanied by specific rituals. About the mystical forces, Evans Pritchard states, 'The European does not appreciate that the Azande have to take into account mystical forces of which he (the European) knows nothing' (Marwick 1972: 329). The rites used in connection with healing of diseases that are typically African cannot really substitute for rites in the church unless made Christocentric and adapted. The main aim is to restore the disposition, the balance of the affected person in the context of his or her family and community. The person has been put into a disarranged, disturbed, disordered situation and this has to be rectified. The main aim of such a person's adversary is to either destroy him or to influence negatively his social equilibrium which results in all types of misfortune, ill-health, or even death.

Such imbalance has to be rectified and this is possible also through specific medicines and accompanying rituals. When the somatic symptoms are diagnosed as natural, they are treated separately which implies that no special rituals are applied. In the African context no separation is made between the physical and the psychical. Disturbed equilibrium is rectified by treating the whole person, by the holistic approach, and this is

done in conjunction with the supernatural forces which fall outside the ordinary rule of cause and effect. The main emphasis is to take out of the system what has a negative effect upon it and the cause could be often something not in the body, but somewhere in the surroundings or stealthily canalized on or into the body. Such ritualized objects have to be removed either from the surroundings or from the body and when successfully removed the person's health is restored. What is extracted remains dangerous and could be used against others (cf. Ngubane 1977).

WHO ARE THESE ADVERSE FORCES?

The forces of good and evil have special significance and are given special attention within the context of the African Indigenous Churches (AIC). Special reference will be made here to these churches which p. 416 have grown from 9 percent (1950) to 18 percent (1960), to 29.3 percent (1980) of the African population in South Africa, i.e., from 800,000 in 1950 to six million adherents in 1980. Although they are fast-growing movements in some countries in the rest of Africa, nowhere have they grown the way they did in this country. There are a number of reasons for this growth: social and economic deprivation, a place to feel at home, and the contextualizing of Christianity to make it meaningful in this situation. Nowhere else has the office of prophet as healer been highlighted as in Southern Africa.

Within this movement are three main streams: the *Zionists*, influenced by the Christian Catholic Church in Zion (founded by Alexander Dowie in Chicago), which entered this country during the end of the last century; the *Ethiopian* stream which also started at the end of the last century and for whom Ethiopia was a symbol of freedom; and the *Apostolic* stream which entered this country from the USA during the first decade of this century. Zionists, more than the others, concentrate on healing and especially also on these 'diseases' which fall within the context of the indigenous cosmology, to free their members and adherents from adverse forces. Many of these first-century Christians are still deeply involved with aspects of traditional spirituality.

Moral evil depends on the attitudes, inherent tendencies, or behaviour of the individual which is the result of disregarding the generally accepted moral, prescriptions in daily life. These could be understood by a Westerner, but then there are the mystical types of evil which are effected by others, against a person. Here either witchcraft or sorcery is at work. Many Africans have real problems with these factors that are held responsible for misfortunes, illness, and death due to the evil intent of humans who use so-called black magic.

Bewitchment and sorcery lead to death and annihilation. They are seen as the destroyers of life, often through mysterious events and diseases. The witch works through some mystical power which is innate, inherited, or 'constitutionally implanted at an early age' (cf. Marwick 1972:12). A clear distinction should be made between witch and sorcerer. The former achieves her evil by some mystical power without magic and the latter by magic, referred to as black magic. Magic is a morally neutral term but may be used positively (white magic) or negatively (black magic). The former is usually the approach of the medicine man and the latter of the sorcerer. The sorcerer uses rituals and material substances with the aim of controlling mystic forces. Anyone, however, could obtain the *multi* (medicine) for acts of sorcery, i.e., if he or she is prepared to pay for it. As a result of envy p. 417 and jealousy, usually in family relationships, sorcery or counter sorcery methods are used (Bühmann 1983:25). The sorcerer is a poisoner, and the victims often state that their crops or animals have been poisoned. It is the medicine man who solves these problems which are often the result of social conflict.

The problems encountered are explained in different ways. For example, the transition from a traditional to a new cultural environment, from an ontocratic culture to a secularized situation, is expressed through spirit-possession. Here the individual is in the centre and he believes that he is ill as a result of the influence of evil spirits. It is only by way of personal cleansing through exorcism that a person can get rid of these spirits. It is not so much the fact of the change from one culture to the other that brings stress, but stress is experienced because of the tensions in this change. The new culture is not in itself evil, but to change to the new brings stress. This is a major reason why in such situations the role of the diviner becomes more prominent. However, the tendency also exists to hark back to the traditional environment, to the old securities, and here witchcraft and communal cleansing become prominent (Schoffeleers 1982: 1–2, 11–12) (Lagewerf 1985: 1–62).

The role of medicine men has become more prominent, and they are often placed in the context of Christ, prophets, and ministers. They have increased and are no more frowned upon by the black intelligentsia as was the case a decade ago. Many Zionists consult them and some Zionist prophets also receive training as diviners. The AIC has a different disposition to African culture the historic churches, and these churches have taken healing seriously as being associated with religion. This has given prominence to the prophet or prayer healer. Those problems that were the task of the diviner to solve, such as sorcery, witchcraft, evil spirits, and spirit-possession, have to be taken seriously.

Spirit-possession reflects the human suffering involved in the transitional stage from the traditional microcosmic worldview to the macrocosmic worldview. The all pervasive influence of evil spirits on the minds of people affects their adaptation to the new situation, and for this reason, there is an emphasis on washing off evil, such as in the church which had at their Pentecost services in Clermont not less than ten thousand people from various parts of South Africa. At this occasion 1,439 were baptized (1,050 women, 389 men) and practiced *isiwasho* when thousands went through the baptismal pool from 9:00–11:30 a.m. on Sunday May 18, 1986, to wash off symbolically (symbol in the African sense) what is negative on them. [p. 418](#)

THE ANGUISH OF TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN CULTURES

A deep feeling prevails that Africa must get out of its slumber into the modern world (cf. Okot p' Bitek 1972). This highlights the despair which prevails among those who would like to see Africa moving to the front line of modern progress. However, there is in the modern man a lack of 'empathy,' which could be explained as a person's ability to identify new aspects of a changing environment and act accordingly (cf. Lerner 1958).

Which world must the traditional African escape? Africa's preoccupation with adverse mystical forces stems from frustration. In order to move away from the old type of economic existence, ego goals must develop within the context of common goals, personal responsibility is called for, and adaptation in the work situation is also necessary.

A distinction must be made between those black Africans who no longer have a third-world but a first-world outlook and the vast majority who are still either embedded or partly rooted in the third-world tradition. About 70 percent of Africa's black population is still unurbanized. From indifference to or rejection of Western culture, technology, and scientific development the tendency is now toward acceptance.

The secret of man's adaptation and progress in new situations is related to the fact that man is a whole; his whole life is affected when he enters a new situation, but the problem arises when what happens to him, is understood by only a part of him.

Development cannot take place in one isolated sphere of a human being's existence (Fromm 1979: 272). Emmanuel Milingo, the deposed Roman Catholic bishop of Lusaka, maintains that if Zambia wants to become truly modern, African, and religious, it has to rid itself of one of the major obstacles to modernization, namely the belief in evil spirits (cf. Schoffeleers 1982: 24). How can people develop away from the shackles of a worldview in which so much suspicion and jealousy prevail, which are often reflected in their beliefs in demons, evil spirits, spirit-possession, witchcraft, and sorcery? The solution should be examined 'in terms of transitions from magic to science, from myth to historical time, and from the closed, unitary or ontocratic society to the open plural society' (Turner: New Era).

Africa has to change; otherwise it will remain shackled to the thoughts about contra-forces being responsible for its situation. In traditional terms these forces are described in the form of evil spirits, demons, spirit-possession, sorcery, and witchcraft, but in modern terms the adversaries are still seen in terms of the evil forces of p.419 colonialism. Peter Enahoro, a leading African publisher and journalist in a monthly magazine, *Africa Now*, February 1985, mentioned that when Africa reflects on the quarter century of its independence the emphasis will be on 'imperialist exploiters who invaded our land. Nearly forgotten will be the great question: What has Africa done with its independence in 25 years? ... Should we not by now have progressed on the road to re-establishing our self-confidence?'

A deep-seated frustration is found in Africa because of its inability to adapt to the modern situation, and this has as a reaction a belief in the proliferation of the evil with its negative demonic forces. Adeney states that when a missionary or local church leader has to face issues concerning sorcery, he should 'check out the lines of tension in the local structure, probing for the sociological ingredients in the trauma' (Adeney 1974: 13, 394). The desire to accept the new situation brings forth numerous guilt feelings which are symbolized as evil spirits which want to counteract the new steps taken. Furthermore, the frustration stems from the low level of 'industrial mentality' which, according to a Nigerian systems engineer, is the greatest obstacle in Africa's industrial progress. He states:

Industrial mentality is a psychological orientation of the mind which puts the latter in adventurous frame within which the mind becomes truly the architect of its own future, deliberately designing its own trajectory of development and systematically 'conquering' obstacles confronting it in the process; the industrial mentality is the agency by which scientific and cultural development are deliberately projected into a technology for the satisfaction of apparent needs and industrial mentality is acquired by long exposure to and practice in practical industrial problem solving situations. (Anyiwo 1977)

Women, however, are greatly affected by the new situation, by the process of modernization, and this is evident in the fact that they find their refuge in the churches and especially in the indigenous churches, where many act as prayer persons and prophets. Many women are among those who feel at times possessed with evil spirits in their various forms. The other issue is the fact that there is still a strong group-consciousness in Africa which is also evident in the many small face-to-face church groups. Group-consciousness can be tyranny or security. In this approach the law of participation is very prominent; for example, everything and everyone can have a share in everything and everyone else. Here the group takes precedence over the individual. An isolated human being in Africa is an anomaly: 'I am only because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.' This interrelationship often stultifies innovation and the spirit of inquiry because tradition has all p.420 the answers, and jealousy reigns where an individual in the group excels and such a person easily becomes the object of witchcraft and sorcery.

CONFLICT OF COSMOLOGIES

Traditional man is not surrounded by things but by beings. The world is not objectified as in the case of science but subjectified. The personality of life in Africa is important. The very humanity of a person depends on integration in the family, clan, or tribe. Self-conception becomes a projection of the group. The traditional group 'orientation' does not allow any challenges to the timeless status quo. Development implies creative unrest, the technoscientific disposition invokes a never-ending questioning of everything. All the acts from birth to death and the hereafter bind a person as a communal being to all around him. When disequilibrium is experienced in the community, the main task is to detect the enemy of social equilibrium and such an enemy has to be destroyed. The diviner has in this connection a special task.

Africa's concept of *time* must also be considered. Temporality is an aspect so fundamental and obvious in human existence that the concept of time is indispensable to interpret the world and people. Africa's emphasis on the past has affected its progress toward the future. When the centre of gravity is in the past, what happens in the present has to fit into the past; otherwise, it disturbs the harmonious relationship with those in the past, because the past is sacral. If this past is disturbed, the forces of evil are unleashed.

The new emphasis on the future dimension has led to social and political instability. A great misconception exists concerning the time aspect and its emphasis on the past, but also with regard to the recently discovered future. The future is something to work at. In the secularized world the mystery of the future predominates, and those come-of-age in the modern world have at their disposal unparalleled creative and transforming power. It took Europe nearly a thousand years to develop science and technology to what it is today. Too often it is expected that Africa will attain this development in a hundred years without real genuine preparation. This expectation should largely be put at the door of the colonial powers.

The attitude to *nature* itself also influences the world of supernatural forces. In traditional thinking, the earth is the symbol of the mother, which is one of the central themes in modern African literature. In Africa people have a personal relationship to nature. Nature does not consist of objects but is personal. In nature we find gigantic forces [p. 421](#) —some adverse, some well disposed. In traditional Africa, the world is a mythical concept, whereas the Bible puts the world in the dimension of time and history (Gogarten 1953). Secularization made a break with the everlasting cycle of nature and ever presence of myth (van Leeuwen 1964: 331). Secularization brought freedom, making room for people among all the forces that bound them. They have been emancipated from the ontocratic concept of the universe, namely that it is full of beings some of which are continuously struggling to disturb the balance.

The Westerner's relationship to the earth is primarily a horizontal, pragmatic relationship, i.e., a rational relationship, while traditional Africa's relationship to it is primarily intuitive and emotional. Land for the Westerner is basically economic; for Africa the earth is a mother. So many forces, however, disturb the relationship with mother earth and have to be counteracted. It is evident that a worldview based on a primal religious outlook cannot as such incorporate ideas about nature, time and history, people and community which could be an integral part of modern development. Even Christianity in Africa has not played the role it did for Europe in connection with the development of that continent.

The traditional primal communities thus remain obstacles in the process of development, and this accounts for much of Africa's frustration and its inhibition by evil forces. What is evil and bad should be seen in terms of the community and not merely in

terms of personal and group morality. Where microcosmic boundaries are broken down and adaptation to a wider world takes place, this leads to changing social structural circumstances and a more universal outlook. Religion is an integral infrastructural aspect of the African community, which could not be said of capitalism, for example. But religion could stultify the dynamics of articulation, especially where evil forces still supposedly predominate.

Modernization leads in most traditional cultures to personal psychic stress, especially via the urban industrial institutions and patterns because of social disruption. Although some doubt that the urban milieu brings distress, tension, and insecurity, and thus personal disorientation, the South African black cities have proved what social disruption as a result of economic and political deprivation can lead to. Traditional and semitransitional societies in the urban areas are not symbols of security and tranquility; they all experience tension, insecurity, and even fear of many unpredictable evil forces.

Many of the fears that haunt traditional Africa will be partly obliterated when the process of modernization becomes more [p. 422](#) effective and complete in Africa. This will include: a) openness to new experiences such as a new environment, different peoples; b) readiness for social change; c) allowance for differences of opinion without considering this to be a threat; d) time valued as an important commodity; e) planning seen as important; f) the replacement of the old fatalism with its emphasis on the looming dangers of evil forces such as bewitchment, sorcery, spirit-possession by the knowledge that such forces are either imaginary or can be controlled; g) a greater role played by educational and occupation aspirations; i) greater value placed on human dignity and rights (Inkles and Smith 1974: 20–25).

The present confusion, bewitchment, and suffering will last as long as there is insufficient basic training. In this country it will last as long as people have no horizons but are kept in ghettos because of a maladjusted educational system leading to sociopolitical discrimination.

RESPONSES OF AIC CHURCHES

It has already been indicated that human suffering is seen in the context of spiritual possession; that bewitchment and sorcery are considered to be major obstacles on the road to modernization; that we need to take these phenomena seriously as the Bible does; and that 'sin' should be seen within the African context as resulting in physical and psychical sickness and God, but also between persons in the family of the victim and such a person and community.

The movement to judge these phenomena in the light of the Bible is especially strong in the AIC. In the historic churches a schizophrenic attitude prevails: members pretend to uphold the stance of these churches but many believe in such forces and want to seek help where help is given outside these churches. Also in this regard the problems of the African have been ignored. The responses of Western-trained ministers of religion, Western-trained medical doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologist toward these phenomena are preconditioned or they simply ignore them. They are not in a position to give assistance in this regard. The unwillingness to give attention to traditional beliefs, religious practices and values, the interpersonal and social structures of the Africans at the Western-oriented hospitals have driven many African patients to their traditional healers where they are not things but persons with real problems which have to be understood within their cosmology. Now that African psychiatrists and psychologists, also pastoral psychologists, have come to the fore in many parts of Africa, there are determined attempts to understand better these [p. 423](#) phenomena, namely bewitchment, sorcery, and spirit-

possession. Although there may be disagreement about the potential harm in these issues, it is important to assess the effect they do have on people's health. Furthermore, the Bible does not conceal such issues as sorcery (cf. [Deut. 18:10](#); [2 Kgs. 17:17](#)). The AIC takes these issues seriously and offers pastoral care to victims with the result that it attracts many people, also from the 'historic' churches.

A vital concern in Africa is to retain the equilibrium in social relationships. Sorcery and witchcraft are considered to be antisocial evils that disturb social relations, because their source is so often jealousy within the extended family. They affect the health and the general well-being of the victim. In traditional society such relationships are restored through confession and some visible symbolic rituals which are performed to reconcile those whose relationships have been disturbed. Often this is the slaughtering of a black and a white chicken representing the guilty and offended party or merely the slaughtering of an animal.

Important in this procedure are symbolic acts. Although prayer is important, only a few AIC prophets (of those questioned) emphasized prayer. Prayer is necessary and it has value, but of vital importance is the concrete reconciliation with the person to whom a wrong has been done. Thus, reconciliation is necessary not only between the sick person and God but especially also between the guilty and the offended. Thus it is not a matter of prayer only. Confession of wrongs done takes place regularly in the AIC services, and mutual forgiveness is to them a significant part of reconciliation. Their face-to-face services do much in this regard. For the African sin is a concrete existential reality, and many Africans in the historic churches see sin and confession in the terms and symbols of traditional religion (cf. Nxumalo 1979: 29–30). The question of restoring relationships is a major task of the diviner and it is a major task of the prophet in the AIC. As was the case in the traditional society where the penitent has to seek reconciliation with its community, so, in the AIC with their revival services (*umvusilelo*), reconciliation is affected among themselves and with God. This is a regular process.

The ancestors are regularly brought into this procedure, and for most of the AIC prophets this is also the case. Of the prophets consulted, 84 percent said that the ancestors play a role in witchcraft, sorcery, and spirit-possession procedures. Those who fail to adhere to the taboos and injunctions of the hierarchy get sick, go insane, or even die. The reason for such transgressions is often given as sorcery or bewitchment. If these are removed, obedience will be restored. The problem is [p. 424](#) that the individual himself is then not held responsible, so that individual guilt is obscured. In Africa public confession is important, and this is one of the main features of AIC services. Much emphasis is put on relieving tensions due to unsocial behaviour. In certain cases the prophecies that expose individuals guilty of antisocial behavior can lead to ostracism. Wickedness could also be the mass reaction of a group which projects its destructive instincts on an individual who is considered to be undesirable and who gets the role of the scapegoat. Balz states: 'All human societies so far known have produced scapegoats in more or less barbaric ways, by killing or isolating people from human solidarity' (Balz 1984: 374).

CHRISTIANISING TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS

The main issue concerning purification rites in the African context is *fortification* against misfortune and the forces of evil. Because there are typical African diseases which the 'historic churches do not take into consideration, people are not in a position to fortify themselves against their onslaughts. They either go to the traditional diviners and herbalists or to their replacements within the AIC, namely the prayer healers, their ministers, or prophets. There they find additional means of protection beyond the

scriptural message that God cares, the prayers offered, and the sacraments given as in the historic churches. The sacrament of baptism as practised in these churches is found to be adequate, but in the AIC it has also become a purification rite.

Furthermore, the cords around the body, ankles, and neck, the vestments, the stars, the beads, the pieces of string around the wrists, candles, ashes—all these serve as protection against evil forces. Then the washings (*isiwasho*), vomitings (*palaza*), emetics are all used to wash off the negative ‘magic’ or get the evil forces out of the system. All these objects have ‘power’ which comes either from God, the Holy Spirit, or the ancestor spirits and which protects and purifies a person against the forces of evil. These protecting objects or cleansing actions are basically Christianized replacements of what is found in the traditional context. The mentioned objects in the AIC are protecting those who wear or use them against the evil spirits. In the AIC the emphasis is on protection and fortification, not on attacking the forces of evil as is the case within the traditional society. In the traditional society the evil when taken out could be restored to the evildoer. What is taken out and discarded could be used as a potent means against someone else or in retribution. The AIC do not act this way as will be p. 425 indicated later. They do not activate sickness in adversaries but only heal the victim.

Water as the symbol of life and healing from the effects of evil spirits plays a significant role in the exorcism practices of the AIC. The Roman Catholic Church’s *Collectio Rituum* has special reference to evil spirits in its blessing of the water which reads *inter alia*: ‘And instil into this element prepared by many cleansings the power of the blessing: Grant that this creature of thine, in the services of the mysteries, may effect the purpose of divine grace to banish all evil spirits and drive away diseases’ (*Collectio Rituum*, Durban, 1960: 163). The prayer continues to ask that houses, blessed with the blessed water, be freed from all uncleanness and delivered from all harm. ‘Let no noxious spirit remain there ...’ (ibid). When this attitude is observed by the African, the traditional practices and witchcraft are pushed into the background and there is not the temptation to seek the help of the diviner (cf. Nxumalo 1979: 35).

EXORCISM AS A HEALING PRACTICE

Exorcism is an important activity in AIC. It is now considered to be of importance to the pastoral ministry in the African context. It has been indicated above how social, economic, and political issues can lead to tensions and to maladjustment and to the belief in the omnipresence of evil forces or an evil force. This is part of the worldview of the traditional African.

Masamba ma Mpolo, a Baptist minister from Zaire, presently with the Department of Family Education of the World Council of Churches, states:

Beliefs in bewitchment are functional in as much as they are used as a channel through which people can deal with hate, hostility, frustration, jealousy, guilt, and sexual fantasies which are not culturally overtly expressed. Therapeutically, beliefs in bewitchment create social abreactions, thus preventing the formation of severe individual neurosis... In general, the individual deals more easily with external than with internal dangers... Aside from facilitating the discharge of aggression, in culturally accepted ways, beliefs in bewitchment serve another psychological function: they resolve ambivalent feelings which are encountered in the ambiguity of social relationships ... (cf. Masamba ma Mpolo 1984: 3, 150–151; (quoted by Lagerwerf 1985: 37).

Masamba ma Mpolo sees bewitchment as functional in various respects, namely, helping the individual psychologically to deal with his or her personality crisis and mistrust of the environment; through p. 426 bewitchment the person unconsciously

affirms his or her worth because this person makes claims for his or her identity. It is also related to the individual's psychosocial concern, i.e., as a means to affirm himself in the context of the social system of thought and relationships. Above all, it is a symbolic acting out of inner guilt feelings.

The Zionists strongly oppose sorcery which is to them a most hostile activity. They feel that they are not always fully accepted by the community and that traditional forces are used against them. Those who become marginal in their churches are considered to be the most susceptible to the adverse activities of evil forces. Only by devoting themselves fully to the demands of their church are members certain of protection and fortification against such negative attacks.

The counter elements used against the attacks of sorcerers are inner cleansing through drinking a mixture of seawater (or water with salt) and ashes. Praying together as a group, laying on the hands, hitting the person with the hands or 'holy' sticks are various methods used. Often these acts have been preceded by a revival service (*umvusilelo*).

In a survey of Soweto and around Durban of prophets/prayer healers in the Zionist churches, various replies were received concerning whom and how the typical ethnic diseases effected by sorcerers should be treated. A well-known leader of a Zionist church, who acts also as a prophet, maintains that *ufufunyane* (a kind of hysteria) caused by evil spirits, 'is caused by various "mixtures" used to get your brains off. Like a drunken person, the person's brains do not work. If pills are given by the doctor, then the brains come back. After this I give the person water over which I have prayed. The *umthandazi* can kill the disease.' One *umthandazi* (prayer healer) stated that the victim is given water blessed by her, and once the person drinks that water the *ufufunyane* (foreign evil spirits) get immediately out of the person 'because it does not want things that are blessed.' Another *umthandazi* stated that she mixes 'holy water' (i.e., water prayed over) with ash or salt or seawater and *impepho* (incense used to draw the attention of the ancestors). It is used for 'vomiting, purging, and steaming.' For the *ufufunyane*, the *umthandazi*, or *umprofeti* are recommended as healers as they 'can "see" ' and through praying, the *ufufunyane* will tell you 'how it came in and how it will get out'. Medicines are also used. It is not only prayer, but also certain ritual incisions that have to be observed.

In the case of *isliao* (food poisoning by a sorcerer), the prophets replied (as follows) to the question: 'Who should treat this disease? Why this person?' Five stated that the prayer healer should treat the [p. 427](#) victim, three referred it to the herbalist (*inyanga*), one to the diviner (*isangoma*), and one maintained that the prayer healer, the diviner and the *inyanga* could treat it, but only one who referred to all these three included the Western doctor, which was also put as an option. None of these prayer healers referred only to prayer as a means of healing in this case. It has been stated by some of the prophets that a prophet has to 'see' which doctor should treat the victim. 'See' here refers to a special ability found also with the diviner in the traditional context. The prophet 'sees' because he or she is in contact with Holy Spirit and/or the ancestors. Some maintained that if the *isangoma* has learned about traditional medicine she or he may also be able to help, otherwise not. The prayer healer 'can give holy water (*isiwasho*) to take out the poison,' i.e., to vomit (*palaza*); she or he gets advice from the ancestor ('messenger') to help the suffering person. Another prayer healer stated: 'the prayer healer can chase away everything through God's spiritual power.'

Those who referred to herbalists as the best persons to refer the victim to maintained that they prepare the medicine (*muti*) for *idliso* victims and they are thus the best able to counteract or neutralize it—'they can also reverse the process through herbs.'

All stated this condition (*idliso*) is caused by medicine (*muti*) received from the herbalist (*inyanga*); it is ascribed to jealousy or hatred. One stated that 'as the name indicates ("*idliso*", to be made to eat),' a person eats something which has been mixed unawares with herbs.

ZIONIST REACTION TO SORCERY

It is clear that the treatment of various diseases that fall within the context of African cosmology is not based solely on prayer but also on specific ritual procedures. Zionists, however, strongly react against sorcery and they resist it vigorously, as Kiernan also points out elsewhere (cf. Kiernan 1985). It is an evil which has to be eradicated by all means, even though the assistance of a diviner is not frowned upon by a number of Zionist prayer healers and is, in fact, even encouraged. They do not create a witch-hunting atmosphere to discover the culprits, but they simply react against its influences which they believe to have negative effects. In this way they uphold the positive values of their church community in protecting and fortifying them against the negative attacks of sorcerers.

In Christianity, Satan, the devil, the great adversary, uses evil forces, p. 428 over which he has dominion. For the Zionist these forces are not abstractions or myths but they are very real, and one of the main emphases in the movement is on keeping their flock intact from these forces which are activated primarily by negative human acts and to help others who come to them for help. Zionists firmly believe in the power of such concrete evil forces which are directed through certain specific agents and their means to afflict specific persons. It was only in the eighteenth century that belief in witches was declared a heresy in the Church of England, but exorcism as a rite was not declared null and void as most Protestant churches believe. The Zionist emphasis on exorcism might not be as unscriptural as it seems to some. Even the Zionist's ritual emphasis may be a meaningful exercise within the context.

The real antagonist in Zionism is the sorcerer—it is as if Satan is pushed into the background because of the strong feeling of the looming presence of these evil forces. Satan does not work through certain ritual but tempts people directly into doing what is morally wrong such as violent acts which disturb the peace of their group. Satan attacks the group; the sorcerer attacks the individual. Satan is spiritual; the sorcerer is human.

Here the processes used by the diviner also come to the fore. Perhaps reference should be made to the psycho-therapeutic process of the diviner (cf. (Mkhwanazi 1986: 9–94). Three different stages may be described. First is the divination stage when incense is burned and the ancestors are called up to be present at the diagnosis session. The clairvoyant powers are received by the diviner through the voices of the ancestors who address the diviner. Only when they are ready to assist will the diviner act. When the diviner is ready, he or she then faces the client and the *vumisa* method begins. This method ascertains by successive statements by the afflicted person and his or her relatives the reasons for the problem. This is the first part of the therapy process. Here it is the diviner who informs the client or victim of the nature and cause of the illness or discomfort. At this stage (which lasts 20 to 30 minutes) the diviner is most active. The second stage of therapy follows in which the client/victim asks questions and clarification from the diviner. The diviner now informs the client/victim and his or her family how the disturbed behaviour occurred. This is explained from the traditional belief system. The provision of such a belief system appears to be of some therapeutic value for the patient. 'Reassurance, explanation, advice, suggestion, direction are important variables in this stage of the diviner's therapeutic process. The diviner gives the reassurance by accepting the patient's

problem as nothing unusual and p. 429 indicates that it can be treated' (*ibid*: 93). The therapeutic process is also now outlined, e.g., what the client/victim should avoid and what rituals should be performed, for example, the slaughtering of an ox or goat.

In this stage the relationship between client/victim and the diviner has become one of confidence in which the former discloses matters that are disturbing to him; his difficulties are analyzed by the diviner and information and understanding given of his or her difficulties.

In stage three the actual treatment procedures, rituals to be performed as part of therapy, animal sacrifices, the period of treatment, and location of the therapy treatment (in patient's family or home of the diviner) are discussed. In most cases it is done at the diviner's home. In this phase patients continue to unburden themselves of issues which trouble them. The patients' problems qualify the length of treatment. Lots of hope is offered to the patient by the diviner (*ibid*. 93–94). Empathy, warmth, and genuineness are characteristics revealed by the diviner toward the client/victim.

The approach of the prayer healer/prophet does not differ in intensity, in empathy, warmth, and genuineness from that of the diviner. The prayer healer/prophet in the Zionist context fills the vacuum created in the historic churches where healing (except for the often impersonal prayers) is relegated to a cold atmosphere of Western-orientated hospitals or asylums, where the patient does not encounter the warmth and empathy, even genuineness, she or he experienced with the diviner. Just as in the case of the diviner, the presence of the Holy Spirit and/or the ancestors are also important. In some cases candles are lit—white represents the Holy Spirit, another colour, say green, the ancestors of the prophet, and blue or yellow the ancestors of the victim. Not only is the presence of the ancestors important but those of the prophet and those of the client/victim should not be in discord about the diagnosis and procedures. Here also the clairvoyant powers are received from the Holy Spirit and the ancestors. About 16 percent of a sample of prayer healers maintained they receive visions only through the work of the Holy Spirit while the others emphasized also the cooperation of the ancestors. In some cases ancestors seemed to take precedence over the Holy Spirit.

During the first stage the illness is established and is usually conveyed to the prayer healer through a dream or a vision. The dream comes the night before the arrival of the victim or in the case of an unannounced arrival, the diagnosis is given 'like lightning through a vision'. After this the patient is questioned about his or her illness. Then follows the explanation by the prophet as to what and how it all p. 430 happened, and finally the victims are treated and given reasons for the procedure.

During this stage there is much communication between the prophet and patients. They are also treated in the prophet's home or with their relatives. The social communication is part of the therapy. In many cases chickens, or a goat or sheep, or even a beast, are slaughtered. Often the victim is informed by the prophet of some secretive rituals that have been performed against him or her by the mystical assailant. Hardly any cases have been encountered either in Soweto or in the townships round Durban of bewitchment, i.e., being negatively affected by persons who have some mystical power in their personalities, without the use of magic, to harm others. The Zionists are considered to be experts in granting people protection and fortification against the powers of evil. This account to a great extent for the growth of the movement. What holds them together are the potential attacks and destruction that the mystical assailants could achieve if they were not strengthened against them.

One could argue, and this seems to be a valid argument, that much of the emphasis on the mystical aggressors stem from the subconscious reaction to an unfriendly environment. Zionists are emphatic that sorcerers will never get a foothold or be able to

act in their circle; if it does happen at very rare occasions, it shatters the group. The main emphasis is that the destructive forces are from the outside, not from the inner circle. But such an outsider is never specially mentioned. It is not the sorcerer who has to be destroyed or eliminated—as is the case with a witch—but only the evil acts of the sorcerer. Very few Zionist healers work only through the Holy Spirit and prayer. As has already been indicated, ancestors play a significant role, as well as ritual cleansing through vomiting, steaming and emetics.

Sorcery gives Zionists a sense of cohesion in a fiendish world where an incessant enemy has to be confronted. The process of modernization in changing the traditional world has made sorcery a force to be reckoned with, and the Zionists have become experts in counteracting its evil effects. This is why AIC have become a source of strength for many. It has a special way, based on the African worldview, of alleviating suffering.

THE PROPHET AND CONTEXTUAL HEALING

The office of prophet, which disappeared in the church during the end of the third century, mainly as a result of the reaction against Montanus and his prophetesses, Prisca and Maxmilla, has reappeared after nearly P. 431 seventeen centuries in the Zionist churches in Southern Africa. In the nature religions one find the *shamaans*, who are also seers, and this is referred to as actual prophecy. The Zionist prophets, however, are not so much concerned about the future as about the specific needs, especially healing of people. In the small, dynamic AIC communities which are often substitutes for the extended family, the prayer healers keep the relationships on a healthy basis. Here the members feel supported and protected. The flag planted at the open space utilized for worship keeps evil forces away, as do the candles, the vestments, the sea sand sprinkled in and around the house, the crosses and the holy staves which ward off the attacks of sorcerers.

The office of prayer healer in the AIC indicates a vacuum in the counselling and psychotherapy within the historic churches. A much greater understanding is found in the AIC of the complex relationship between culture and healing, ie., in its physical and psychiatric context. It is being better understood, especially in a new cross-cultural psychiatry, that the reality is not intrinsic to our perception of the world—the Western fallacy—as it is defined by our assumptions of the world. On the contrary, each culture is important in its own right, and this is what the AIC and its activities wish to say. Disease is thus not a separate entity stuck away in its pure form under the layers of cultural camouflage. It must be studied within the context of specific cultural norms and the accepted patterns of normative behaviour within which it occurs.

In spite of being in contact with a secularized worldview, the animistic and personalized, rather than scientific and mechanistic worldview, predominates within many in the AIC. Thus to be therapeutic, treatment of illness among black people should be presented in a manner culturally meaningful to the patient's prior experience and expectations. These expectations are not fulfilled in the historic churches as far as their counselling is concerned. Industrialization and urbanization have led to the disappearance of the 'tradition-directed personality' while the 'inner-directed personality' has not yet taken shape. This leads to psychiatric problems, but here also the AIC acts as a modernization process to assist in this transition.

It is important to see what actually is at stake when, for example, a person believes she or he has an evil spirit as a result of the activities of a sorcerer. Such external dangers can be removed much more easily when the danger is internal since it prevents severe individual neurosis. Spirit-possession, bewitchment, and sorcery could be related to a person's psycho-social crisis, especially in rapid social change. To project one's

weaknesses on evil spirits who possess or who influence p. 432 one's behaviour has an effect on the concept of guilt. This is also the case when sin is washed off or removed through vomiting and emetics. These have theological implications which may be criticized, but when they lead to positive healing, the situation becomes ambivalent. But acts performed in a culture cannot be summarily described as 'pagan.' The Bible is often more lenient than the legalistic approaches of ecclesiastic authoritarianism.

The Western displacement of the African approach to the biblical message should be confronted even within the so-called historic churches in Africa, and alien forms of pastoral care in some of these churches should be replaced by an approach which comes nearer to the realities of Africa. In counselling, the symbols that live in their minds should be utilized in such a way that individuals can express their inner feelings. In dealing with sorcery, some form of ritual assistance is necessary. Symbols and signs are important in African therapy as is evident in the AIC at their services and baptisms. A contextualization of the pastoral approach to evil forces should take place; much more will be attained when prayer is supplemented with specific rituals. It is necessary that exorcism not become an obsession. Instead of looking at the world as loaded with evil forces, it should be viewed as in the hands of the infinite almighty Creator whose love has been revealed through his Son who abides with this world always.

Demon-possession cannot be looked upon as mere illusion or superstition or as a psychological imbalance. Scripture writers took it seriously and handled it in this spirit for the sake of those who felt themselves possessed. These people receive close attention in the AIC. Sunday after Sunday the North Beach of Durban witnesses exorcism practiced by the AIC on people coming from many parts of the country such as Soweto, Mamelodi, Bloemfontein, as well as Swaziland, Lesotho, Boputhatswana. To many the sea is the best place for this activity.

In their whole approach to healing the AIC act spontaneously. The outcome is an adapted, contextualized approach within the cosmology of those among whom they live and work. This accounts for the meaningful way in which they handle the vicissitudes against body and mind in the modern situation.

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The Kingdom of God and Evil

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The affirmation of the reign or the Kingdom of God continues to raise questions about the problem of evil in the world.

I. GOD REIGNS BUT EVIL CONTINUES

Already the absolute reign, the domination implied by even the whole idea of God, creates a glaring enigma of the reality of evil. The Scriptures proclaim this reign. Several psalms celebrate the majesty of Yahweh and the glory of his eternal throne; Yahweh is King by virtue of his creation of the world and by the universality of his rule: 'his kingdom is over all' ([Ps. 103:19](#), cf. [Ps. 24, 29, 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 115](#) and even the ancient oracle of Balaam, [Num. 23:21](#)). The New Testament does not ignore the theme. The book of Revelation repeats the title of 'Pantocrator.' Paul takes up the theme 'King of ages (centurien)' ([I Tim. 1:17](#), cf. [Jer. 10:10](#)) and develops it in the phrase 'God who in eternal felicity alone holds sway, King of Kings and Lord of lords' ([I Tim. 6:15](#)) as in the proposition: 'he governs everything according to the purpose of his will' ([Eph. 1:11](#)); Jesus, who frequently pictures God as King or as master in his parables, stressed that the smallest event depends on his will ([Mt. 10:29](#)). In this certainty no one can avoid the problem of theology: how is it that God, whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil, can let injustice be manifest and even bring it into his empire? Does he treat human beings as the fisherman treats the small fry of the sea? Habakkuk asks the question with all its difficulties ([1:13-14](#)) and our own day seems more sensitive than any other to this difficulty. As expressed by Camus in *The Plague* or by the Dostoevsky of *The Brothers Karamazov* in connection with the suffering of children, this question has provided for modern man more than enough arguments against belief. It has been called 'the rock of atheism': if this problem does not always lead to an atheistic position, it keeps a large number away from the God of 'onto-theology' and **P. 436** 'moral monotheism' to use Heidegger's and Ricoeur's phrases—from the God of traditional and, to be sure, biblical Christianity.¹

But, for the reign or Kingdom which the gospel announces right at the centre of the Christian proclamation (cf. [Acts 20:25](#)) and with which our studies are concerned, the connection with the problem of evil is even closer: the reference to evil belongs to its very definition. How does one distinguish the reign which *is coming* from the reign which *is* (and always has been)? The latter includes evil in a mysterious way, while the former abolishes it. The rule of the Creator as Creator, of God as God, consists in the fulfilment of his decretive will; the rule promised and announced as good news brings with it the total fulfilment of his perceptive will 'on earth as it is in heaven.' The gospel of the Kingdom which is our concern is presented as an answer to the problem of evil that has arisen under the universal rule of God; no theoretical answer but one that liberates in this life, in

¹ Let me mention three excellent books among those examining this question philosophically: *C. Werner ...* (excellent in the resumé and classification of solutions proposed in the course of history, less good in his conclusions); *Lucian Jerphagnon ...* which is chiefly concerned with suffering; *Etienne Borne ...* the best writer and thought, but which tends towards Christianity that is both Kantian and ardent. As a reply to the atheist use of the problem of evil, I recommend ELMAJCALL.

the here and now; an answer that is not concerned with the *origin* (vide malum? Where does evil come from?) but with their *end* of evil.

That that is the content of the biblical teaching scarcely seems to us to be in question. Let us remember that Zechariah associates the great day when Yahweh will be King of all the earth ([14:6, 9](#)) with the end of all cursing (v. [11](#)), then with even the holiness of the most humble objects, working pots, horse bells (v. [20](#)). Isaiah contemplates the same reign in its beauty ([33:17](#) ff.); for Yahweh's being King and Saviour coincides with the healing of all sicknesses and the forgiveness of all sins (vv. [22, 24](#)). The connection of these prophecies with other passages shows that this reign of God will be identical to the reign of the Messiah. According to Zechariah, Yahweh will cause living water to spring forth for purification and will achieve his ends ([13:1, 9](#)) due to the suffering of a partner who is so much one with him that Yahweh himself is said to be pierced in the person of the coming Shepherd ([12:10, 13:7](#), cf. already [11:4ff.](#)); this Shepherd must be identified with the new Solomon previously announced ([9:9ff.](#)); we cannot think of two different reigns. In the same way Isaiah certainly considers the messianic reign as the reign of God, and that is why the promised child, davidic prince of peace, will have the divine name of 'wonderful p. 437 counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of eternity' ([9:5](#)).² The promise given for the hope and universal harmony, 'they shall not hurt nor destroy any more,' and 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea' ([Is. 11:6-9](#)). It is the time of the Lord's banquet when he 'will cause death to vanish forever ... when he will wipe away the tears from all faces' and will kill Leviathan, the writhing, crooked serpent, with his great sword ([Is. 25:6-8; 27:1](#)). Preaching the Kingdom of God, John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles proclaimed clearly the victory over evil, over falsehood and war, over sin and hatred, over sickness and death.

How does faith, which accepts the Word today face the reality of present day evil? First we will show the acuteness of the problem and we will resist the attraction of some speculative solutions. We will try to bring to light the temporal structure of the forwarding of the reign or Kingdom, then interpret the phenomenon of evil in our day. Finally, we will attempt to enter, if we can, the depths of divine wisdom that controls our history, since we believe that 'it is given to us to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven' ([Mt. 13:11](#) and parallels).

In the coming of the reign of God, with the victory that it implies over evil, was for us only a future event, nothing more than something to wait for, the continual existence of evil would not be surprising. But the gospel of the kingdom certainly says something quite different. The preaching formula of John the Baptist and of Jesus (at the beginning): 'the reign of God "eggiken" '—has a certain ambiguity about it, but it indicates at least the imminence of the coming and suggests that the inauguration of the Kingdom takes place during the time of the New Testament (the same form of words is used twice in [Mt. 26:45, 46](#) for an immediate event). Moreover, Jesus said once that the Kingdom has *come upon* his hearers ([Mt. 12:28](#)) and he carries out exorcisms in this connection; these are signs of his victory over the evil one, this powerful enemy that must be bound to set his captives free. He says to the Pharisees: 'The Kingdom of God is "entos humon" '([Lk. 17:21](#)). The idea of imminence does not seem to us to be sufficient to do justice to the force of the expression. The much discussed 'logion' on the era inaugurated by the ministry of John the Baptist is best understood as dealing with the introductory phase of the Kingdom, the transition between the old and new economies; the Kingdom is clearing the way with violence ('biazetan'—middle voice), the violence shown by exorcisms, and the people who

² We could certainly quote many other texts: Ezk. 34 (the shepherd-king is Yahweh but also the new David), Dan. 7 (the eternal, heavenly Kingdom of the Son of Man).

share in the violence are those who are [p. 438](#) taking possession of the Kingdom. At the beginning of the same chapter (vv. 4ff.) Jesus pointed out that the signs of the messianic Kingdom, according to the prophets, are being fulfilled in his ministry. The accounts of the passion put the emphasis on the majesty of the crucified, and the promise made to the penitent thief suggests that the entry of Jesus into his Kingdom is the very same day of his answer ([Lk. 23:42-43](#); the paradox is perhaps already present, hidden, in the dialogue of [Mk. 10:37-38](#)). The fourth gospel makes use of the simile 'lifting up' in the same way and Jesus announces the defeat of the Prince of this world or the cross ([Jn. 12:31](#)). The first coming of Christ, John explains, had as its object the taking away of sin, the defeat of the works of the devil ([I John 3:5, 8](#)). Paul underlines that sin has been condemned in an effective way, which was impossible for the law ([Rom. 8:3](#)) and that Christ has triumphed over the powers of evil ([Col. 2:15](#)). As a result, when the Holy Spirit communicates the benefits of the work of Christ, it is the substance of the Kingdom of God that Christians receive ([Rom. 14:17](#)). The reign or Kingdom was inaugurated, the victory over evil has been won.

II. RESISTING SPECULATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

The author outlines his biblical reasons for rejecting the dispensational theory of the postponement of the Kingdom to the post-church age. With clarity and sharp analysis he then shows that the speculative response to the problem of continuing evil in the world of Karl Barth, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Paul Ricoeur are inadequate or false. In different ways each of these scholars minimises the presence and power of evil, the finality of Christ and looks for metaphysical solutions. Barth reduces faith to an ontological necessity, Teilhard deifies the universe and Ricoeur mythologises Christ as a symbol of sacrificial love.
Editor

III. THE ALREADY AND NOT YET

A truth that is widely acknowledged supplies a first answer. We have only called to mind a half of the scriptural teaching in stressing that the reign or the Kingdom is *already* inaugurated; we must add that it is *not yet* manifest. The duality of the present and future aspects, of the inauguration by the first coming and the consummation by the second, [P. 439](#) is a benefit that we consider to have been acquired ever since the work of the salvation-history school, and of evangelical scholars, of men like O. Cullmann and H. Ridderbus. The supporters of realised eschatology cannot do justice to the indications in the parables of the Kingdom which announce a development over a period of time, with a beginning as scarcely credible as a mustard seed, and a glorious end. Jesus foresaw a history that has to unfold before the end, before the coming of the Son of Man.³ The expectation of the Kingdom by the earthly church which prayed: 'thy Kingdom come!' was not the misunderstanding of mythologist-disciples but the sound grasp of the words of the Lord. Moltmann and Pannenberg, in making of the resurrection of Jesus the ratification of the promise and the anticipation of the end, have at least brought to light that the 'already' of the gospel cannot nullify the expected 'not yet.'

Many authors, however, leave in the shade the feature which makes this teaching clear and precise in the New Testament: namely that the presence of the Kingdom is only experienced in the Spirit, the Spirit who quickens the inner man, while the Kingdom has

³ Among texts to consider are Mt. 8:29; 11:6, 13 (the parables of the seed, of leaven, of the treasure, all hidden at first); 24:5, 14, 49; 25:5; Mk. 4:27, Lk. 17: 20ff; 19:11ff.

not yet come for the outer order of the world, with which we are at one in the body. Without this being made plain, the 'already' and the 'not yet' are mixed and are contrary to one another. One tends to swing from one to the other without any clear-cut conclusion. Certainly, the scholars we have mentioned recognise that the Kingdom has been inaugurated in a veiled manner, perceived by faith and not by sight, but they do not draw the conclusion; we believe that they have fallen under the influence of an anthropological monism which dominates the modern mentality and which some, happily, are beginning to dispute in biblical studies.⁴ Without being platonic, we must distinguish between two levels: the New Testament never says that the regeneration of the *world* is already accomplished, nor the deliverance of the *body* (the miraculous healings are only 'signs' of a Kingdom not yet seen), the New Testament never says to the believer that he must wait for the resurrection of the inner man, his participation in eternal life, in the life of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is justice, peace and joy *in the* p. 440 *Spirit*, of which the gift is the earnest or first fruits; the Spirit quickens the inner man, while the body is still awaiting its redemption, with all creation groaning in all its parts, and is decaying day by day as the frame of this world is passing away (cf. Rom., [8:10](#), [20-23](#); [14:17](#); [I Cor. 7:31](#); [II Cor. 4:16ff.](#))

If the Kingdom or reign which means victory over evil is present only '*in spiritu sancto*' the continued existence of evil after the inauguration of the Kingdom is no longer the same stumbling block, for all do not have the Spirit, and the old world, rotten with sin, is still in existence. Death, conquered in him who is the pioneer of life and in the spiritual resurrection of his people, is not yet 'put under his feet' ([I Cor. 15:20-28](#)). The Adversary, thrown out, and bound so that he cannot hinder the evangelisation of the world, still creates havoc on earth in the little time remaining to him ([Rev. 12:12](#)).

But if the delaying of the manifestation, of the event explains the continued existence of evil, what should we say of its *virulence*, of its growing virulence?

IV. THE ENEMY'S COUNTER-ATTACK

The vision of the book of Revelation that we have just quoted suggests an intensification of satanic activity, despite its defeat and its limitation—as a counter-attack to defeat and limitation ([Rev. 12:12](#)). In the same way Jesus presents the sowing of tares, which must *grow* with the wheat in the world, as the enemy's counter-attack to the good seed of the Son of Man ([Mt. 13:28](#)). This thought can help us in interpreting the increase of iniquity and suffering in our century *after* Jesus Christ (while at the same time admitting this sometimes debatable increase: pure paganism was not so beautiful!).

The book of Revelation reveals the secret of this counter-attack. It is to be found in a diabolical aping: a false trinity gets itself worshipped on earth, Dragon, Beast and False Prophet. They take Babylon as their associated, the Harlot, detestable caricature of Jerusalem, the Bride. The Beast, synthesis of the beasts of Daniel, apes the Christ. It inaugurates its reign by being slain and by a pseudo-resurrection ([Rev. 13:3](#)), it receives an imitation of the divine name (it 'once was alive, and is alive no longer, but has yet to ascend' [Rev. 17:8](#)) that implies 'parousia' (*parentai*). This Beast, the Messiah of Satan, is doubtless to be identified with the Antichrist of which John speaks (we have difficulty in not pressing the substitutional meaning of the preposition 'anti'); the paradox of the Beast

⁴ cf. James Barr 'Old and New in Interpretation' (SCM Press, London 1966) pp. 52ff: monism is linked with the opposition between the Greek and Hebrew mentality, itself called into question.

who 'is' the eighth of these heads, and p. 441 yet is also one of the seven ([Rev. 17:11](#))⁵ is parallel to that of the Antichrist that the apostate teachers of the time of the apostle represent and which nevertheless resembles a figure that is coming.⁶ This is a pattern that is found in the present activity of the mystery of iniquity and then its release, which will be the *parousia* ([2 Thess. 2:9](#)) of the man of *anomia*, (lawlessness). This man who raises to the highest pitch the adamic pretension to be equal to God does so in mimicking the Christ. He is the man who makes himself into a god in order to ape God made man: not only a sinner but apostate, not only heathen but Antichrist.

The virus of Satan's virulence is hidden in the subtlety of his counterattack. We should not be surprised if evil is yet more evil in the 'post-Christian' world: *corruptio optimi pessima!* The devil is incapable of creating: he needs the finest model in order to produce the most hideous imitation.

This understanding helps us to perceive the evil of our time. We are certainly present at the *return of Dionyses*,⁷ as Jean Brun so brilliantly demonstrates: because the eighth King is already the sixth, the Beast of paganism who will arise at the end, and the Antichrist is bringing about the purpose of original sin. But the specific characteristic of contemporary evil is that it is post-christian. Humanism secularises men's biblical privilege, historicism secularises the biblical stress on history, political ideology secularises the message of the Kingdom of God. Secularisation itself imitates the de-divinisation of the world by Christianity. The arrogance of man who makes himself God and destroys the earth (cf. [Rev. 11:18](#)) would not have been possible without the rise of modern science and science would not have been possible without the biblical vision of the world. Paul Schütz demonstrates this with passionate eloquence when he insists on two types of man: the scholar and the politician. He develops the paradox p. 442 formulated by C. F. von Weizacker from several points of view: 'Christus ermöglicht den Antichrist' (Christ makes Antichrist possible).⁸ He explains how the subject-object pattern is rooted in the awareness of sin that Christianity has introduced and how the theme of the new creation has been secularised in revolutionary thought; he even sees how the theology of the Wholly Other, which offers itself as a super-Christianity, is already anti-Christianity.⁹

The last remark expresses, in connection with a particular theology, what is brought out by the interpretation of post-christian evil as *apostasy*. The evilness of evil, after Jesus Christ, is false Christianity, which begins with the adulteration of Christian truth in the

⁵ Whether the Beast is Rome, more or less literally, is not in doubt. But we Jean on the primacy of the biblical symbolism in Revelation and the influence of Daniel 7 to take into account that the heads are not successive emperors. Can one consider that they represent the seven world empires? The five that have fallen (v. 10): Egypt, Assyria, and the three first of Daniel; the sixth that reigns: Rome (the fourth in Daniel); the eighth, figure of Christ, is the same (666), resurrected, after an indistinct seventh (Christianity?). Paganism, given its death wound by Christ at the time of Rome, will have a remarkable resurrection before being destroyed.

⁶ We are following completely J. R. W. Stott, *Epistles of John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary 1964) pp. 103–109.

⁷ *The Return of Dionysos* (Paris: les Bergers et les Mages 1976, 2nd. ed. revised) 252 pp.

⁸ *Parousia: Hoftnung und Prophetic* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider 1960) p. 601: it is the entire section in pp. 587–617 which concerns our studies and even beyond that section at p. 624: 'Fleishinerding ... etc.' ('the becoming flesh of the eternal Word is the unleashing ... of flesh').

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 602, 605ff, 615ff. and for the last point, p. 609 (p. 608 the dialectic loses the dialogue). The only serious weakness in Schutz's (p. 608 the dialectic loses the dialogue). The only serious weakness in Schutz's theology is the denial that God has predetermined history. Schutz does not consider that there is then no more than a finite God, a god who is not God (p. 622: 'kein Heilsplan'—'no plan of salvation').

church, That is exactly what John makes us understand when he calls the false teachers antichrists. In a stroke, the views of Teilhard on evil as a factor of progress because the evolution which implicates it is the redemptive incarnation, and the para-Hegelian views on the bypassing of ethical monotheism by the incorporation of tragedy into the 'becoming of being,' take on a disturbing colour.

V. THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM

The last question remains: why has God chosen to postpone the manifestation of his reign? Why has he only inaugurated it in a veiled form and in the Spirit? Why has he not removed evil from the world in a stroke? Why has he left to the devil the time for his counter-attack with all the attractions of a false Christianity?

It is said to the martyrs who wanted the time to be shortened that the tally of all their brothers in Christ's service must be complete ([Rev. 6:11](#)): the end has not yet arrived to conclude the opportunity for [p. 443](#) conversion ([2 Peter 3:9](#)); the good news of the Kingdom must first be proclaimed ([Matt. 24:14](#)). We can understand that God does not want any other entry into his Kingdom than that of *faith*: not the automatic incorporation of an 'apokatastase' with metaphysical overtones, but faith which responds to the Word and receives the Spirit. Time is needed for faith therefore, a respite for the old world, during which the Word will be broadcast, the Word which is the power of God, ridiculously feeble in the eyes of the world: 'neither by force of arms, nor by brute strength, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts' ([Zech. 4:6](#)).

This way of faith, this way of love and not of compulsion (cf. [John 14:23](#)) is also the way followed for the inauguration of the Kingdom. The Kingdom comes first, we have said, in a way veiled from the eyes of men, but we know that it is hidden under the cross. It is essential for it to come by the cross. It had to be that it come by the cross, not only to fulfil the scripture, but so that evil should be truly conquered.

This is the mysterious and hidden wisdom which is revealed to us by the Spirit and by the words which the Spirit teaches (1 Cor.). The power of the Evil One over us is the power of accusation (as his name of Satan indicates). He can only be discounted by the shedding of blood that takes away sins. The power of sin is the law ([1 Cor. 15:56](#)) and we can only be delivered by the payment of the debt which made us prisoners of the law, the death of the Just One in the place of the unjust ([Rev. 12:10ff](#); [Col. 2:14ff](#)).

We can comment upon this central wisdom of the gospel of the Kingdom by remarking that only in this way can evil be defeated as evil. If evil had been defeated by a superiority of force, it would have been defeated as a created power: but evil as evil is not a created power but only *corruption*. If evil had been countered by an opposite in behaviour, an example of perfect love, it would not have been defeated but only driven back. In making out of the supreme crime the assassination of the Just One, the voluntary expiation of sins, God triumphs over evil as evil, God turns evil against itself and destroys it as a negative and as a positive factor; God refutes every optimistic theodicy and every tragic philosophy, God inaugurates his victorious reign over evil. The way of the Kingdom has been laid down since then, obliging us to wait in hope until the time when all the elect will have entered the Kingdom of faith and his victory will be manifest.

No other thinking, no other vision can better inspire the *fight* against evil. Those who share in the Kingdom hate the enemy that evil is; they know its reality and can no longer invest in idealism and in utopia; they penetrate to the heart of its strategy and attack the evil of evil (the [p. 444](#) prostitution of Christianity); the certainty of victory already won gives them wings and the power of the Spirit in them renews them. Other studies will show how in different areas of life the fight is progressing. We will recall that the rule of

battle is the way of the Kingdom: according to Calvin: 'we must wage war under the cross'.¹⁰

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Journal and Book Information

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¹⁰ *Institutions* II 15, 4.