Vol 9, No 2 September 1993

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

K3.00

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology by Melanesians for Melanesians. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at a scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians will be considered.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and in duplicate.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* appears twice yearly, in April and October.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

Revd Christopher Garland
Lecturer in Theology
Newton College
PO Box 162
Popondetta, Oro Province
Papua New Guinea

SUBSCRIPTIONS ADDRESS:

Revd Dr Wesley Kigasung
Secretary/Treasurer of MATS
Martin Luther Seminary
PO Box 80
Lae, Morobe Province
Papua New Guinea

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

	Developing Countries	*Developed Countries*	
A.	*Overseas*		
	Surface mail	US$7.00	US$10.00	£7.00
	Air mail	US$10.00	US$13.00	£10.00
	Single copy	US$4.00	US$4.00	£4.00
B.	*PNG*		
	Surface mail	K5.00		
	Air mail	K6.00		
	Single copy	K3.00		
	MATS membership	K12.00		

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

Typesetting and layout by Kristen Pres Inc, PO Box 712, Madang

Cover design by Br Jeff Daly CP and John Kua

ISSN 0256-856X Volume 9, Number 2 October 1993 PNG K3.00

CONTENTS

Editorial: Biblical Interpretation and Local Culture

Fr Christopher Garland, Editor

The articles in this issue either examine, or make use of, the scope of biblical interpretation, as it is applied to local culture. Fr Michael Hough demonstrates just how wide was the scope of scriptural interpretation among the Jews and the early church. He advocates learning from the richness of their approach in teaching modern biblical exegesis, but leaves us with the question of what criteria are to be used to control the exegesis.

Marilyn Rowsome contributes a thorough examination of Paul's treatment of spiritual powers, to show the seriousness of approach in dealing with the manifestation of such powers as sorcery in PNG.

Br Silas describes how he worked with Siane villagers, to take seriously the local outbreaks of sorcery, by adapting a method of biblical exegesis (similar to those described by Fr Michael Hough), and using it to transform the understanding of the Siane myth, on which their practice of sorcery was based. The article is exciting, in that it describes a myth in action, but, as Br Silas himself points out, the counter-myth retains the strongly-dualist ring of the original myth, and so, does not fully deal with the sense of being besieged by hostile powers. The challenge is open, therefore, to see if it would be possible to devise a counter-myth, which would be more "true" to the gospel, and yet, as least as effective within the Siane context. Meanwhile, we await, with interest, a report on more long-term consequences of the use of the counter-myth.

Fr Peter Yeats shows how exegesis of the way Jesus used Old Testament texts relating to the Gentiles could provide a basis for an inclusivist approach to mission, while Marie Brimblecombe argues for a modified inclusivism.

Finally, Professor David Adamo demonstrates how Africans are using imaginative exegesis of the Psalms to relate them to their own situation.

None of the articles is, in fact, written by a Melanesian, although Fr Michael Hough's article describes the basis of his current project to enable students to carry out exegesis of the Bible in such a way as to give them greater scope in interpreting it to deal with the local context, and so it may well eventually beget articles by local writers. Also, Br Silas' article describes a project undertaken in cooperation with local people.

Since this is the last issue I shall produce as Editor, I hand on to my successor, Revd David Vincent, the challenge of stimulating theological reflection by Melanesian people on their own context. Meanwhile, the way of exploring how the Bible appeals to the whole person, to combine intuition and logic, to deal with local challenges, within a basic loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord, seems a fruitful path to take.

In conclusion, I would revert to a contention that I have made elsewhere – that, if traditional Melanesian culture is to act in any way as a preparation for Christianity, it must have some sense of contact with the divine, and not just the handling of an impersonal thing, an "it", but, rather, an encounter with a personal reality, a "thou". I have recently found support for the contention in *The Christlike God*, by John V. Taylor, author of the perceptive study of African religion, *The Primal Vision*. Speaking of a general category of experiences, which he groups together with the hidden power, known in the South Pacific as *mana*, he says that even when such experiences are spoken of in terms of "it", they still possess a personal quality. Commenting on such an encounter with numinous reality by two English female college students, he writes: "While clinging to the word 'it', both of them wanted to insist that the experience was not self-induced, but had been initiated, and intended, by whatever it was that had let them know it was there. The only analogy that does justice to that quality of interaction is that of the meeting of one person with another, and it is this that justifies our use of the word 'personal' to describe all such encounters."[1]

In the passages that follow, Taylor has some perceptive things to say about both animism and the veneration of ancestors. If he is right, as I believe, in seeing something personal about the encounter with numinous reality, then it provides continuity between such intimations of the divine and the full revelation of God in the Bible. The Word, who addresses us in veiled ways in traditional religion, even if that Word is open to a wide variety of human interpretation, is the same Word who became flesh in Jesus Christ. Traditional prayer, in Melanesia, may, indeed, include a response to a personal initiative from God, and not just be a projection from natural or psychological forces within this world. However, such a view may require, for its validation, and for the transformations of the limits of human interpretation, a dialogue

[1] John V. Taylor, *The Christlike God*, London: SCM Press, 1992, p. 60.

with biblical exegesis, and so we are brought full circle to asking how local culture fits with biblical exegesis.

Jewish and Early Christian Use of the Old Testament

Fr Michael Hough

[There were inconsistencies in footnote numbering in the original text. Two footnotes, numbered "4", were shown in the text. However, no footnote reference was shown for the first text reference, and it has now been omitted. There was no text reference to footnote number "18". Further, there were no footnote numbers "22" or "23" in the text, or as footnotes. Footnote numbers "24" to "36" have now been renumbered "22" to "34". Ed.]

Introduction

In this paper we shall be continuing our reflection on the development of exegetical and hermeneutical methods in the scriptures, and parallel literature, and traditions. What we are primarily interested in is not the tracing of the history of the different traditions, but the approach to scripture that each displays. We believe that the key to building up a working hermeneutic cannot rest totally in the literature of the Bible itself. Just as important, is the appreciation of the early Jewish and Christian use of scripture – how they handled what was written, and how they used it in their communities. It is perhaps worth pointing out, once more; that what is being advocated is not a copying of the ancient forms of exegesis. Conditions have changed too much for that, and we are culturally very different. What is being stressed is that scripture is primarily a functional tool, used by the community for the building up of their faith, and for the resolution of human and spiritual struggles. It never was simply a book of recollections. It is this fluid and dynamic understanding of a text that can offer us so much more to our own modern exegesis.

Old Testament Exegesis

One of the difficulties with parts of the Old Testament is that it is often short of specific details. Authors tended to provide outlines that, then, had to be filled in at a later date. This is particularly troublesome in the areas of law, as things expressed in general terms are hard to apply to life. For example, the law, "Keep holy the Sabbath day", seems specific enough, yet it fails to define what activities break the Sabbath command, and which are acceptable. Another example is the law on divorce. Strangely, there is no specific legal text covering divorce as a subject. Deut 24:14 comes close, but that is dealing only with a specific problem – that of what happens, if

a man wants to remarry his former wife, after she had remarried and divorced her second husband, or was widowed. From 24:1, we know that there was a process for the divorce:

> Supposing a man has taken a wife and consummated the marriage, but she has not pleased him, and he has found some impropriety, of which to accuse her; so he has made out a writ of divorce for her, and handed it to her, and then dismissed her from his house; she leaves his home, and goes away to become the wife of another man.

The husband was obliged to deliver a written document to his wife before asking her to leave the house, based on the fact that he had found some "impropriety" (*erwat dabar* – literally a nakedness of a thing/a disgrace) in her. But just what this means is difficult to establish. The same phrase is found in Deut 23:12ff, but, there, the meaning is somewhat different.

There, it is talking about the toilets, and how they must be built outside of the camp, so that God does not see the *erwat dabar* among you (with the Septuagint adding that it has to be done so that God will not find this *erwat dabar* in the camp, and turn away from the people in disgust). But what is this indecent, or unbecoming, behaviour that constitutes grounds for divorce? For Josephus, it needs a wide interpretation:

> He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause . . . and many such causes happen among men (Antiq IV, viii, 23).
>
> About which time I divorced my wife also, as not pleased at her behaviour (Life, 76).

The Mishnah offers an even more liberal view of divorce, with Hillel accepting divorce over a badly cooked meal: ". . . if she spoiled his dish" (Gittin 9:10,c) and Rabbi Aqiba, finding it reasonable to put a wife out of the house, if ". . . he found someone else prettier then she" (Gittin 9:10,e). By the time of Jesus, this had been made more restrictive, with the only justification for divorce being immorality.[1] But that still leaves a problem of definition – just what constitutes immorality? Clearly, it did not mean adultery, as that was punishable by death, but it could refer to a woman going about with an uncovered head, or with bare arms. Because of the imprecise

[1] Vermes, G., "The Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis", in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 206.

nature of Deut 24:1ff, any interpretation was going to depend on local circumstances and traditions.

Another very good example of how texts were handled, in order to make them fit in with a changed theological sensibility, is found in the story of Abraham and Sarah's time in Egypt, which is told in Gen 12:10-19. The story, itself, is scarce on details, and the reader is left with a number of questions. How, for example, did he know that he would be in danger, if the Egyptians found out that his travelling companion was his wife? What happened to Sarah while she was in the harem? How did Pharaoh find out what was causing his problems?[2] Josephus solves the first problem, by making it clear that Abraham knew of the Egyptian's lust for women: "(he) was afraid of the madness of the Egyptians, with regard to women" (Antiq I, viii, 1). After all, this lust is the reason they allowed the female babies of the Hebrews to live, while putting to death all of the male infants.[3] But there is another interpretation, which is found in the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon. Here, we find Abraham having a dream, which spells out what is going to happen at the hands of the Egyptians:

> I saw in my dream, a cedar tree and a palm tree. . . . Men came and sought to cut down the cedar tree, and to pull up its roots, leaving the palm tree alone. But the palm tree cried out, saying, "Do not cut down this cedar tree, for cursed be he who shall fell it". And the cedar tree was spared, because of the palm tree, and was not felled.

Properly understood, this dream prompted Abraham to take the action that he did.

But what happened to Sarah? Josephus has an outbreak of disease and political activity coming to the rescue, when God sent "upon him a distemper, and a sedition against his government" (Antiq I, viii, 1). Elsewhere, she is protected, because Abraham prays hard to God, who sends down an angel to look after her for the one night that she was in the harem. This angel apparently had a big whip, which he used to keep the lust-filled Egyptians away. Again, the Genesis Apocryphon has her rescued by God. He sends "an evil spirit" on Pharaoh, who made it impossible for him to come anywhere near Sarah, who, this time, is in the harem for two years. Whatever the details of the answers to the question, they all come out clearly stating that Sarah remained untouched and undefiled – as befits the wife of the progenitor of Israel.

---

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 207.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

That still leaves us with one question: how did Pharaoh find out that Sarah was married? Josephus' answer is that:

> when he (Pharaoh) inquired of the priests how he might be freed from these calamities, they told him that his miserable condition was derived from the wrath of God, upon account of his inclinations to abuse the stranger's wife (Antiq I, viii, 1).

The Genesis Apocryphon makes it more complicated, having the Egyptian priests being unable to heal the king, and, in their despair, turning to Abraham for some help. They are then told the truth by Lot. All of this sounds very strange to our modern ears, but they were important questions at the time. As they proved difficult for the community, it was reasonable to expect exegesis to come to the rescue.

Another problem that Jewish exegesis tackled was the reconciliation of texts. There are/were historically-irreconcilable difficulties, which the scholars sought to clarify in their expositions. A simple example is found in the law relating to female Israelite slaves. Ex 21:2-6 allows for male Hebrew slaves to have the right to release during the sabbatical year, a right that does not apply to female slaves: "If a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do" (Ex 21:1). The later Deuteronomic Law adds to this certain payments, to which the freed slave is entitled, when he takes his release (Deut 15:12-18), but then goes further than just those concessions, contradicting the earlier laws, by making the status of women slaves the same as that of the man (v. 1). By the time of the priestly legislation, this has been further altered:

> The servants you have, men and women, shall come from the nations round you; from these, you may purchase servants, men and women. You may also purchase them from the children of the strangers, who live among you, and from their families living with you, who have been born on your soil. They shall be your property, and you may leave them as an inheritance of your sons after you, to hold in perpetual possession. These you may have for slaves, you to your brothers, the sons of Israel, you must not be hard masters (Lev 25:44-46).

Now the legislation has been written so as to explicitly exclude the making of fellow Israelites into slaves, while allowing Gentiles to be bought and sold. This apparent contradiction (between the Exodus reading, and that of Deuteronomy, which allows for the freeing of the female slaves) is resolved by reinterpreting the words used. In the Septuagint, for example, we find the word for female slave changed to

read “housemaid”. Now, what the Exodus reading is saying is that the females are not released with the same conditions as the males. Further, with more changes to the words used we find that the Exodus passage comes to refer to a comparison between the lot of a Hebrew servant girl and a Gentile slave. But that then creates further difficulties as the Leviticus reading talks of these Gentile slaves being a “perpetual possession”. The solution to this is not easy, but worth pursuing to appreciate the subtle exegetical skills that such attempted harmonisation requires. Ex 21:26-27 reads:

> When a man strikes at the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys the use of it, he must give him his freedom to compensate for the eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he must give him his freedom to compensate for the tooth.

They understood this as clearly relating to Gentile slaves, as no master would treat a fellow Israelite in this way. But the freeing of the Hebrew slaves is covered by the laws governing the sabbatical and jubilee years. Complicating this further, in an attempt to reconcile the different messages, others see the Exodus regulation as, indeed, applying to the Israelite slaves, and these women were to be released at puberty, or at the age of majority (12 years of age). It is left to the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Ex 12:1 to put all of this together into a solution:

> If a man, a son of Israel, sells his daughter, a minor, to be a bondmaid, she shal1 not go out, as do the Canaanite slaves, who gain liberty through a tooth and an eye, but, in the years of Release, through the tokens, at the Jubilee, the death of her master, and through the payment of money.

That is classical exegesis, ending up with a perfect harmony between the texts, and providing a practical, and clear, solution to a question that could be applied in any number of different situations.

A similar process can be seen at work on texts that later generations of Jews found to be relating to actions and things that were totally unacceptable. Take, for example, the case of child sacrifice to Molech. Lev 18:21 and 20:2 expressly forbid this practice:

- You must not hand over any of your children to have them passed to Molech.

- Any son of Israel, or any stranger living in Israel, must die if he hands over any of his children to Molech. The people of the country must stone him.

In Canaanite rites, children were sacrificed by being "passed through" fire, a practice that was condemned (Lev 20:2-5; Deut 12:31; 18:10). The rite had gradual1y forced its way into Israel, in the area south of Jerusalem (the valley of Ben-Hinnom – 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10; Jer 7:31; 9:5f; 32:35; Ezek 16:21). Not only was this irrelevant to later generations of Jews, it was also very embarrassing.

The interpreters related the Hebrew word for "seed", and the word "Molech", as metaphors for "sons" and "pagan religions", respectively. The texts then relate to fathers, prohibiting them from allowing their sons to become apostates:

> Any man of the sons of Israe1, who shall permit any of his sons to pass to idolatry, shall surely be put to death (Targum Neofiti, Lev 20:2).

Now the text makes perfect sense, is acceptable, and is in keeping with Israel's understanding of her own destiny. The exegetes, respecting the text, have made it apply to their community.

Scripture in the Synagogue

The Targums are important in the study of the use of the Bible in the synagogue, as it is the link between the scripture and *Midrash*,[4] containing all of the elements that were to be later taken up by *midrashic* methodology. Because it is related to a liturgical setting, it is not simply interested in translation, but involves, as well, an interpretation. Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud, in its interpretation of Neh 8:8, presents this useful description of the Targum:

[4] Patte, D., "Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine", in *SBL Dissertation Series* Number 22, Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1975, pp. 1ff.

Neh 8:8	Talmud: Meg 3a
And Ezra read in the book, in the Law of God, interpreting, and giving sense, so that the people understood what was read.	What is meant by the text . . . and they read in the book, in the Law of God, this indicates the Hebrew text; with an interpretation: this indicates the Targum; and they gave the sense: this indicates the verse stops; and caused them to understand the reading: this indicates the accentuation, or, according to another version, the Massoretic notes.

What is striking to a modern exegete, from the above quotation, is that interpretation is made on the basis of the punctuation and the accents used within the text. If you change the vowels (easily done in Hebrew, which was originally written using just the consonants, something taken up in modern Hebrew), then you can also change the meaning. An example will help make this clearer. Gen 22:14 reads: "And Abraham called the name of that place 'the Lord will provide' ". This text has the Hebrew word שֵׁם *(shm)*. By writing it as שָׁם *(sham)*, the Targum Ongelos interprets it, "Abraham worshipped and prayed there in that place". However, by writing it as שֵׁם *(shem)*, the Targum Pseudo Jonathan reads it, "Abraham gave thanks, and prayed there in that place" (with שֵׁם *(shem)* being understood as the Divine Name, i.e., God). Since, in Hebrew, the word קָרָא *(qara)* can have either of two meanings: "to call" and "to pray", it can also be read as the Fragmentary Targum has it, "And Abraham worshipped and prayed in the name of the word of the Lord God". All this from changes in vowels, and using all possibilities of the verbal stems.

Obviously, this opened the Targums up to the possibility of abuse by interpreters. To try to minimise this possibility, the rabbis eventua1ly (certainly by the end of the second century AD) refused to allow anything to be added to the text:

> If one translates a verse literally, he is a liar; if he adds thereto, he is a blasphemer, and a libeller. Then what is meant by translation? Our (authorised) translation.[5]

Thus, the traditional interpretation was the rule of exegesis about how that text had come to be understood by generations of scholars and communities.

[5] From the Tosephta Meg 4:41, cf. McNamara, M., *The New Testament and the Paletinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966, p. 48.

A further insight into how the Targumists understood the Bible is found in their handling of scripture. They firmly believed in the unity of all scripture, and so, collected the Bible around a number of select places dates and people.[6] The principle of exegesis involved is that, in scripture, "there is no before and after", which is one of the 32 rules of Rabbi E1iezer ben Jose Ha-Geli1i. For them, the "before comes after in biblical sections", and, conversely, the "after comes before". This meant that the biblical chronology could be reversed, if required by exegesis, or ignored completely, if interpretation would be hampered by it. Therefore, the rabbis could identify Melchizedek with Shem, Ba1aam with Laban.[7] It has tied Dinah (Jacob's daughter) with Job's wife, Og with the flood, and so on. The importance of this understanding is that, now, the meaning of an event can be understood through its links with similar events that took place, both before and after it. Patte puts it succinctly:

> . . . such an event is prefigured (or prophesied) by an event of the past, and prefigures (or prophesies) events of the future.[8]

Thus history, for the Targums, is "te1escoped" through this identification of biblical events. The example that Paul uses for this principle is from the Targum Neofiti 1 on Ex 12:42: "The night, when Yahweh kept vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt, must be kept as a vigil in honour of Yahweh for all generations."[9] The Targum uses this passage to bring together four most important nights in history – the night of creation, the night of Abraham (the night of the covenant with Abraham, or the night of the binding of Isaac on the altar), the night of the Passover, and the eschatological night of messianic salvation. They are allocated the same calendar date, 15th of Nisan, allowing for such an identification that the rabbis could interpret the Exodus in terms of the Creation story, and see Creation through the events of the Exodus. By studying the Exodus, from the perspective of the eschaton, this latter event becomes the move from this life to the next. This is possible, because of the understanding that all events are God events, and God is One, a belief that is regularly professed in the great Shema prayer of the Jews: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One God." God is acting throughout all history to achieve the one end that He has planned, and the intentions behind individual actions are all a part of this overall divine plan, and, therefore, linked together. Indeed, it would be possible to say that, for the Targumists, history is now closed (with the one exception being the eschatological event that is still to come). Everything that happens is now viewed in

---

[6] Patte, D., *op. cit.*, p. 67.
[7] Daube, D., *The New Testament in Rabbinic Judaism*, London UK: The London Athlone Press, 1956, p. 409.
[8] Pseudo Jonathan on Num 22:5.
[9] Patte, D., *op. cit.*, p. 69.

the light of these central interpretive events. The present just ceases to exist, there being only the past, and the yet to come.

How was this principle arrived at? It stems from the central motivating force behind the targums, that everything in scripture is meaningful, and that it has to be made meaningful for the community. That is why scripture was given, and that is why the Targumists have a role in the synagogue. This explains the strong moralising tendency of the Targums, with the main characters of stories taking on the role of moral types of all humans. To use the best-known example, we can look at the Targum Pseudo Jonathan on Gen 4:8 (the story of the murder of Abel):[10]

> And Cain said to Abel, his brother: "Come, and let us both go into the field." So, it was, that, when they had both gone out into the field, Cain answered, and said to Abel: "I can see that the world was created in love, and good works, because there is partiality in judgment; thus it is that your offering was accepted with favour." Abel answered, and said: "Certainly, the world was created in love, and by the issue of good works it is ordered, and there is no partiality in judgment. But, because the issue of my works was better than yours, so my offering has been accepted before yours, with favour." Cain answered, and said to Abel: "There is no judgment, and no judge, and no world hereafter; there is no good reward to be given to the righteous, nor any account to be taken of the wicked." Abel answered, and said: "Certainly there is judgment, and a judge, and a world hereafter: there is a good reward to be given to the righteous, and the wicked will be called to account." And, because or these words they fell into a dispute in the open field, and Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and drove a stone into his forehead, and slew him.

We can see here how the text is made to fit into the contemporary situation, which is a debate over the existence or non-existence of the world to come, about judgment, and the role that good and bad deeds will have in that judgment. Abel is the good Jew, who goes to his death rather than deny his faith (that there is a judgment, and that good works determine its outcome). Cain, later identified with Satan's line, is the opposite, a person opposed to the teachings of the Law.[11] These two characters have been made into something that is not clearly obvious in the biblical text.

---

10 *Ibid.*, p. 70ff.

11 Cf. Bowker, J., *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to the Jewish Interpretation of Scripture*, London UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 132ff.

They have become "outstanding prototypes of specific virtues and vices",[12] characteristics more of the Jewish community than of the biblical actors. Values were isolated, and then located in scriptural passages, the latter being interpreted to accentuate the values being taught (remembering that the Targums were essentially liturgical texts).

Typological Interpretation of Scriptures

The starting point in a study of typological interpretations is the Haggadah, as this covers the ethical/historical parts of the Bible, linking them for their message and teachings.[13] The widely-accepted description of *haggadah* is that of Zunz:

> The *haggadah*, whose aim it is to bring heaven nearer to men, and to lift men up to heaven, fulfils its calling, on the one hand, by glorifying God and, on the one hand, by comforting Israel. Hence, religious truths, moral lessons, discourses on just reward and punishment, inculcations of the laws, in which the nationality of Israel is manifested, pictures of the past and future greatness of Israel, scenes and stories from Jewish history, parallels between divine institutions and those of Israel, encomiums on the Holy Land, inspiring narratives, and manifold consolations, constitute the primary content of the homilies in the synagogue.[14]

But, *haggadah* is not a scientific process, following, for example, the seven rules of Hillel, or the 32 of Eliezer. It is best understood as an attempt to make the scripture applicable to daily life, and address the texts to common problems faced by believers. To do this, the rabbis attempted to faithfully record, and comment, on every aspect of the nation's past, highlighting those events that showed her greatness, and reinterpreting the obscure and confusing.[15] Israel's history, for them, was no ordinary unfolding of events. It was the action of the living God on, and among, a people that He had chosen as His own. Therefore, nothing happened that did not have the potential for carrying a message to a community living a thousand or more years later. If, today, we read Ex 17:11, we would probably find little more in the text than details of a rather spectacular miracle worked by God during the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt. Not so, for the rabbis: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, writing about 100

---

[12] McNamara, M., *op. cit.*, p. 156.
[13] Rabinowitz, L.I., "The Study of a Midrash", in *JQR* (1967), p. 147.
[14] Schurer, E., *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol 2, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1986, p. 339.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 362.

years after Jesus, saw in it a message about the need for future generations to hold fast to the teachings of the Law, given to Moses on Sinai. While Israel kept faithful to the Law she prospered (as the people defeated the Amelekites, while Moses' hands were aloft). If Israel tired, and put faithfulness to the Law to one side, then she suffered greatly (as Israel was losing the battle when Moses' hands were lowered). Some 30 years later, Eleazer of Modiim saw this story as showing how Moses saved the people from the armies of Amelek, through his prayers, and through fasting. This was made difficult for him, because of the many sins of the people that weighed him down, and wearied his arms, though he was assisted in his task by the help given to him by the patriarchs.[16] Moses (and his actions) then become a type of the rest of Israel, and for God's saving activities in them.

Eschatology, as we will see, was an area of thought that heavily relied on typological exegesis. It gained its impetus from the repressive, political situation the people were experiencing, and worked as a stimulus to their hopes. It helped them to look to the future, when God would turn their sufferings around, and restore them to the peace and happiness that was their lot in the past. The past represented a golden age, when things were as God planned them to be, and where every faithful person rejoiced in the fruits of His presence. It is, therefore, not difficult to see how the events of history, characters from the past, and the prophetic utterances, were looked at to find, in them, some confirmation of their hopes for future salvation. The creation story, for example, is an event that was reinterpreted in eschatological terms. There will be a new creation that is better even than the first one, and this will be preceded by a period of darkness and chaos. But it is there in the future, and this paradise will be again in the messianic age:

> The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold (1 Enoch 91:16).

Adam was also a prototype. His destiny is the destiny of all human beings. As he suffered the anguish of sin and death, so also does every created person have to undergo these trials:

> Oh Adam, what did you do to all those who were born after you? And what will be said of the first Eve, who obeyed the serpent, so that this whole multitude is going to corruption? And countless are those whom the fire devours (2 Baruch 48:42).

---

[16] Gopelt, L., Typos: *The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1982, p. 29.

. . . Adam sinned first, and brought death on all who were not of his own time (2 Baruch 54: 14).

For a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam's heart from the beginning, and how much ungodliness it has produced until now, and will produce until the time of threshing comes! (4 Ezra 4:30).[17]

All humanity bears the marks of Adam. But it is what Adam was like before the fall, who is the type of the newly-created man. He will live in paradise, there will be childbirth without pain, he will share in the tree of life and immortality, and enjoy perfect glory, the latter gifts representing things that even the first Adam did not enjoy. The new Adam will also be an improvement on the original one, being God's "second angel" (2 Enoch 30:121), who will be honoured by the angels, because he is made in the very image of God.[18]

The flood also holds a special place in the typological assessment of the scriptures, representing, for later generations, the chaos and evil that is going to precede the final judgment: ". . . and unrighteousness shall recur once again, and be spread throughout the earth" (1 Enoch 91:6). Just as the flood cleansed the earth of all this evil and godlessness, so, at the end, the final conflagration will carry out its cleansing work:

There shall be a great plague upon the earth, and the earth shall be washed clean from all its corruption (1 Enoch 106:17).

The flood was the first "end of the world", which is typical of the second, yet to come (1 Enoch 93:4). That is why, when we read the account of the flood, in 1 Enoch 83:4, we find that it is written in language that is generally used to describe the apocalyptic end of the world:

I saw a vision of the sky being hurled down, and snatched, and falling upon the earth. When it fell upon the earth, I saw the earth being swallowed up into the great abyss, the mountains being suspended upon mountains, the hills sinking

---

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[18] There is a great story in the first-century *midrash, The Life of Adam and Eve*, that highlights this point: The devil replied, "Adam, what are you telling me? It is because of you that I have been thrown out of there. When you were created, I was cast out from the presence of God, and was sent out from the fellowship of the angels. When God blew into you the breath of life, and your countenance and likeness were made in the image of God, Michael brought you, and made us worship you in the sight of God, and the Lord God said, "Behold Adam! I have made you in our image and likeness" "

down upon the hills, and tall trees being uprooted, and thrown, and sinking into the deep abyss.

This is clearly not just moving the flood from the time of the ancestors into the future. It is a reinterpretation, using the original flood story as being "typical" of man, and his behaviour on earth, and God's response to that behaviour, to interpret the present, and direct the communities' thoughts to the future.

The Early Christian Use of the Old Testament

All of the Jewish methods of exegesis and hermeneutics that we have just looked at are to be found in use in the New Testament, and the early Christian writings. This should not be a surprise, seeing that the early communities were still basically Jewish, and still looked to Jewish history for its own traditional foundations. In this chapter, we shall briefly reflect on the use that Jesus made of the Old Testament, as well as the approaches that can be found in New Testament writings.

There are two important, though somewhat obvious, general points in reflecting on the use of the Old Testament by the early Christian community. The first is that Jesus used the Old Testament as a support for His message, quoting it often, and with great effect. There are 39 quotations that are generally attributed to Him:[19]

1. Quotations occurring in Mark, and the double or triple synoptic tradition:

A: With introductory formulae:

1. Mk 7:6f; Matt 15:8f (Is 29:13)
2. Mk 7:10; Matt 15:4 (Ex 20:12; 21:17 [LXX=21:16]; Deut 5:16)
3. Mk 11:17; Matt 21:13; Lk 19:46 (Is 56:7; Jer 7:11)
4. Mk 12:10f; Matt 21:42; Lk 20:17 (Ps 118:22f [LXX=117:22f])
5. Mk 12:26; Matt 22:32; Lk 20:37 (Ex 3:6)
6. Mk 12:36; Matt 22:44; Lk 20:42f (Ps 110:1 [LXX=109:1])
7. Mk 13:14; Matt 24:15 (Dan 9:27; 12:11)
8. Mk 14:27; Matt 26:31 (Zech 13:7)

[19] Longenecker, R., *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1975.

B: Without introductory formulae:

9. Mk 10:7f; Matt 19:5 (Gen 2:24)
10. Mk 10:19; Matt 19:18f; Lk 18:20 (Ex 20:12-16; Deut 5:16-20)
11. Mk 12:29f; Matt 22:37; Lk 10:27 (Deut 6:4f)
12. Mk 12:31; Matt 22:39; Lk 10:27 (Lev 19:18)
13. Mk 15:34; Matt 27:46 (Ps 22:1 [MT=22:2; LXX=21:2])

2. Quotations found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark:

A: With introductory formulae:

14. Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4; (Deut 8:3)
15. Matt 4:7; Lk 4:12; (Deut 16:16)
16. Matt 4: 10; Lk 4:8; (Deut 6:13)
17. Matt 11:10; Lk 7:27; (Mal 3:1)

B. Without introductory formulae:

18. Matt 23:39; Lk 13:35; (Ps 118:26 [LXX=117:26])

3. Quotations in Matthew alone:

A: With introductory formulae:

19. Matt 5:21 (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17)
20. Matt 5:27 (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18)
21. Matt 5:31 (Deut 24:1)
22. Matt 5:33 (Ps 50:14 [LXX=49:14])
23. Matt 5:38 (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20)
24. Matt 5:43 (Lev 19:18)
25. Matt 13:14f (Is 6:9f)
26. Matt 21:16 (Ps 8:2 [MT & LXX=8:3])

B. Without introductory formulae:

27. Matt 9:13 (Hos 6:6)
28. Matt 12:7 (Hos 6:6)
29. Matt 18:16 (Deut 19:15)
30. Matt 19:19 (Lev 19:18)

4. Quotations in Luke alone:

A: With introductory formulae:

31. Lk 4:18f (Is 61:1f; 58:6)
32. Lk 22:37 (Is 53:12)

B: Without introductory formulae:

33. Lk 23:30 (Hos 10:8)
34. Lk 23:46 (Ps 31:5 [MT=31:6; LXX=30:61])

5. Quotations in John alone, with introductory formulae:

35. John 6:45 (Is 54:13; Jer 31:33)
36. John 7:38 (Is 12:3; 43:19f; 44:3; 58:11)
37. John 10:34; (Ps 82:6 [LXX=81:6])
38. John 13:18 (Ps 41:9 [MT=41:10; LXX=40:10])
39. John 15:25 (Ps 35:19 [LXX=34:19]; 69:4; MT=69:5; LXX=68:5])

There are some observations worth noting about the way that Jesus used the Old Testament. The first is the consistent use of the Septuagint. While most of the differences between the Septuagint and Masoretic texts are insignificant, there are times when the Greek is preferred to known Hebrew versions and the Targums, because the differences better suit the argumentation. In Matt 15:8f and Mk 7:6f, for example, Jesus quotes the Septuagint against the Hebrew:

LXX: In vain do they worship me, teaching doctrines and commandments of men.

MT: Their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by heart.

In Matt 21:16, Jesus quotes the Septuagint of Ps 8:3, reading "praise" instead of the Hebrew and Targumic "strength" and "stronghold". This was done because He wanted to apply the words of Isaiah "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, you have established praise" to the children in the temple. This, and similar examples, give the interesting insight that Jesus used the Bible in translation, rather than in either the traditional Hebrew, or the common Aramaic. And further, that He was sufficiently skilled to be able to pick and choose the most suitable text for His argument.

The second important general observation is that Jesus' main "technique" of exegesis was the *pesher*. We find that, right from the beginning of Luke's gospel, Jesus presents the theme of fulfilment. In the synagogue (Lk 4:16-21, He takes the scroll, and reads from Isaiah the prophet (Is 61:1f), and boldly proclaims: "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your ears". John has Jesus rebuking the Pharisees, saying, if they listened to Moses, they should be listening to Him, because ". . . he wrote of Me" (John 5:39-47). And there are many more that show this *pesher*/fulfilment theme:

Mk 12:10f; Matt 21:42; Lk 20:17:

The parable of the wicked tenants has clear allusions to Is 5:1ff, the parable of the vineyard. Jesus uses Ps 118:22f in a clear attack on His critics: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." Using the Septuagint again, Jesus takes the Psalm and interprets its meaning in the light of His own experiences of rejection.

Matt 11:10; Lk 7:27:

Here we find the clear *pesher* method: "This is the one about whom it is written. . . . See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." He has taken the tests of Mal 3:1 and Is 40:3 and interpreted them in terms of John the Baptist.

John 13:18:

The setting here is the last supper, and Jesus takes the song of David (Ps 41:9 [LXX=40:10]) and applies it to His betrayal at the hands of Judas: "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against Me." This is presented in the language of the Septuagint, and introduced with the fulfilment verse: "But it is to fulfil the scripture. . . ."

It is clear that Jesus is presented as seeing Himself as fulfilling the anticipations of the Old Testament, that He saw the Old Testament from the perspective of His own

ministry. This was the approach that was then taken up by the writers of the New Testament, affecting the way they applied the various methodologies they inherited from Judaism.

General New Testament Approaches to Hermeneutics

Many scholars now refer to the "transformation" of scripture that was carried out by the early Christian writers. It was not that they changed the texts, but, rather, reinterpreted them from the standpoint of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who they believed was the Christ. The Old Testament was searched for texts that could be found to support this developing awareness of who Jesus really was. This was based on two exegetical positions:

1. That the original texts were written with Jesus in mind, though this would not have been in the thoughts of the original author, or the receiving community.

2. That eisegesis was a legitimate form of scriptural analysis. That is, one could take a point and go back into the Bible and find texts to support that point.

This is an important starting point in any study of scripture. These sacred writings provided the authority for the faith, belief, and practices of the community, while, at the same time, were only truly capable of being understood and interpreted by the believing community. Exegesis did not lead to a change in meaning, but, rather, to a discovery of the true meaning of scripture. And this is how the early church understood what we know as the Old Testament. They did not see their hermeneutics as changing what was the accepted interpretation. It was more that they saw themselves as uncovering the full significance of what was originally written.

A major thrust of the exegetical energies of the early church was directed towards finding, in the Hebrew scriptures, proof for their theological position regarding Jesus. A well-known example of this is the great creda1 statement found in 1 Cor 15:1-11, which, as Paul says, is the faith ". . . that had been taught myself". This basic faith is:

Christ died for our sins	in accordance with scripture
He was buried, and was raised to life on the third day	in accordance with scriptures

This is a faith, then, that can be proved by scripture. That is, it was a part of the prophetic message of the Old Testament.

Another popular example is that of Acts 8, where Philip explains Is 53:7-8 to the Ethiopian eunuch, using this text to explain who Jesus was, and all about the significance of His ministry. It is also worth having a brief look at the passion narratives of the synoptics, for these are filled with illusions to the Hebrew scriptures, especially the Psalms. We have the soldiers dividing up the clothes of Jesus (Ps 22:18/Mk 15:24); the people walking past the crucifixion mock Jesus (Ps 22:7/Mk 15:29); the mocking words of the spectators round the cross (Ps 22:81/Matt 27:43); Jesus' cry from the cross (Ps 22:l/Mk 15:34). In John, there is a similar usage: the casting of lots for the seamless robe (John 19:24/Ps 22:18); the satisfying of Jesus' thirst (John 19:28-29) fulfils both Ps 22:15 and Ps 69:21. Ps 69 is thought to be behind other synoptic passages: Mk 15:23/Matt 27:34; Mark 15:36/Matt 27:48. John sees the groundless hatred of the Jews for Jesus as having been anticipated in Ps 69:4 (and possibly Ps 35:19). This same Psalm is, again, taken up by John to explain the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus (Ps 69:9/John 2:17). Paul uses it to show that Jesus was not doing His own work, or following His own plans, but His Father's (Ps 69:9/Rom 15:3), and that the Jews rejected Jesus, because of their spiritual blindness (Ps 69:22-23/Rom 11:9-10). Acts uses Ps 69:25 (and Ps 109:8) to show what happened to Judas (Acts 1:20).[20]

A similar process can also be found as applying to the resurrection. Some basic texts were used, and others were added to them. Going back to our quote from 1 Corinthians, we can ask where the scriptural evidence can be found to support the belief that Jesus' resurrection on the third day was "according to scripture"? It could be Hos 6:2: "On the third day, he will raise us up", or Jonah 1:17: "Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights" (this is the way Matt 12:40 uses this verse). But the key Old Testament text for the resurrection is Ps 110:1 "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right, your foes I will put beneath your feet' ". It is important, because, in it, we find Jesus being taken up into heaven, and His exaltation, being enthroned in a position of power by God (Acts 2:34-35). We can find this interpretation pointed to in Jesus' discussions with the High Priest in Mk 14:62 (and its parallels):

---

[20] Greer, R. A., Kugel, J. L., *Early Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1986, p. 207.

> I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power, and going with the clouds of heaven.

Here we have Ps 110:1 joined with Dan 7:13, and being used to predict the glory and honour that will be with Jesus after His resurrection. Hebrews takes it up the same way (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 10:13; 12:2.[21] Heb 2:6-9 uses Ps 8:46 in a most-creative manner, as support for the same beliefs in Jesus:

> But someone has testified somewhere, "What is the Son of Man, that you are mindful of Him, or mortals that you care for them? You have made them, for a little while, lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet."

This same Psalm was also used in arguments with scribes, and applied as a proof text for the preexistent Lord (Mk 12:36, and parallels). Hebrews, in particular, makes use of this Psalm as the basis of various strands of its Christology. For example, Ps 110:4: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek". This is now used to establish Christ's role as the true high priest of the new covenant. As we have already seen, in the way Jewish theology uses scriptura1 quotations, the texts were used, regardless of the meanings they had in their original settings. They now become proof texts for the living faith of the community. It was not strictly an exegesis, but an eisegesis. The New Testament *interpreted* the Old Testament, and the latter was seen as valuable, in as much as it could provide the foundation for their theology. Given that the early writers and communities were Jewish, that such a foundation could be found would not have been a question. It would have been presumed that it was there.

But these texts would not have been just pulled up out of the memory, and applied to Jesus. They were chosen texts, ones that had some history of messianic application (e.g., Ps 110:1), or which could be applied in a messianic fashion, in the light of the ministry of Jesus (Ps 22 and Is 53). A non-Christian Jew could well have come up with the allegory Paul wrote in Gal 4:21-31, and used it for another purpose. The same thing could be said of 2 Cor 3:7-18 (leaving out the specific Christian references), because the use the early writers made of scripture was not extraordinary. What were unique, were their specific applications and interpretations. The method was common.

[21] See also Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1.

They would take an event from the life of Jesus and read a particular text, in the light of what Jesus said or did. We can see this, for example, in Gal 3:8:

> The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

Abraham, of course, did not hear the gospel preached to him. The promise he received becomes "gospel" only when taken up and read in the light of who Jesus was, and the salvation He brought to all peoples. Because of Jesus, the original text takes on a new significance. When Paul talks about the veil covering the hearts of the Jews of his time, he is making a theological application of something that happened to Moses, and which had nothing to do with blindness in faith. Yet Paul, a great and competent biblical scholar could reinterpret the story in this way. The key to his exegesis was *his* theology, and the needs of *his* community rather than the original sense of the text.

We can follow this line of thinking through, by seeing how a messianic text like Zech 11 is handled. There is no doubt that, in Jewish circles, it was read and understood in a messianic way, with Israel being the flock, and the prophet being the divinely-appointed shepherd. For the early Christian community, Jesus was the Messiah, and so, whatever already existing messianic texts there were, could naturally be applied to Him. Like the shepherd in the story, he is rejected by the sheep (Israel), and sold for 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah has the silver being thrown down in the Temple ("unto the potter" in Hebrew – the treasury), which brings in pictures of Jeremiah, with his images of the potter, and the buying of a field, as part of his prophetic ministry. For the early community, the link was clear – Judas taking the 30 pieces of silver, returning it, and throwing it down in the Temple, and then hanging himself in the potter's field, bought with the money. For them, Jesus represented the fulfilment of the prophecies of Zechariah/Jeremiah, because they could match up some events in Jesus' life with some statements in the prophetic texts. Through this process, new interpretations and new texts are produced that are a collation of the old ones.[22]

Once you allow the meaning of a text to be determined by events in the time of the interpreter's, you end up with a number of different interpretations for the same text. This is what we find in the New Testament.[23] One of the well-known examples of this is the proof text Gen 15:6. Paul uses it to show that Abraham was justified by

---

[22] Ellis, E., *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1957, p. 144.
[23] Dunn, J. D. G., *op. cit.*, p. 96.

faith alone, and not by his works (Rom 4:3ff; Gal 3:6). But James also uses it to prove that Abraham was justified by his works, and not by faith (Jam 2:23). Another good example is the use made of Ps 2:7. Paul's speech at Antioch, refers to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:33), while, in the gospels, it is taken up in reference to the coming down of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism (Mk 1:11, and parallels). Equally flexible, is the use made of Is 6:9f: "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive". In John 12:19f, it shows why the Jews do not respond in an enthusiastic way to the mission of Jesus, while, in Acts 28:25f, it becomes an explanation for why Paul turns from the Jews to take up his mission to the Gentiles. The synoptics use the same passage as a reason for Jesus' use of parables (Mk 4:11f). How can this one passage have so many different meanings? Because the starting point for exegesis is not the setting of the text, but the circumstances, and demands, of the New Testament writer's community. To meet the crisis of faith of the believers, these Old Testament texts are taken up and reinterpreted, out of context, without regard for the original purposes and intent. It was the revealed word of God, and the divine message could be heard through it, whatever its application. It really is only a modern mind that would see such applications as "wrong" and unscientific.[24] Sometimes it goes further than just a reinterpretation. There are examples of where the Old Testament is completely changed by the New Testament. The clear example of this is in the beatitudes of Matt 5:21f; 5:27f. Jesus, here, is presented as the new interpreter of the Law, giving to the people a radically-new understanding of the commandments. Jesus goes far beyond just reinterpreting. The whole meaning of the texts is changed in such a way that it brings the old Law to an end. We see there (vv. 33-37) that He stops the traditional practice of swearing (Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 32:21). Mark 10:2-9/Matt 19:3-8 have Him putting an end to the Mosaic allowances for divorce (Deut 24:1).

Further to this, throughout the gospels, we see Jesus seemingly ignoring the requirements of ritual purity, even rejecting the whole notion completely in Mk 7. In his reflection on Stephen's speech in Acts 7:41-50, Dunn notes that ". . . viewing the Old Testament, in the light of Jesus' words, Stephen used one part of scripture to justify the abandonment of the clear teaching of many other scriptures".[25] This is because Stephen appears to reread the history of Israel, in the light of Jesus' comments on the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple (see Acts 6:14). He sees it as a condemnation of Israel's worship, to the point where he claims that the original building of the Temple was the beginning of Israel's apostasy. This is in marked contract with what is found in passages like 2 Sam 7:13, where Yahweh speaks in

[24] Lindars, B., *New Testament Apologetic*, London UK: SCM Press, 1961, p. 18; cf. Dunn, J. D. G., *op. cit.*, p. 97.
[25] Dunn, J. D. G., *op. cit.*, p. 99.

favourable terms of David's successor building Him a permanent house. Paul does a similar thing, clearly evident in his placement of Christ as the fulfilment and replacement of the Law. Jesus becomes the way to righteousness, not the Law, as spelt out in Lev 18:5. He presents Deut 30:12-14, traditionally interpreted as a call to obedience, in terms of righteousness/salvation through faith (Rom 10:4-9). Such an interpretation gives the Law a temporary authority. It was only meant to be valid for a short period of time, waiting for a more-authoritative revelation to come along from God (Gal 3:19-25). Now Christ has come, the Law is put aside (2 Cor 3:13f), an understanding of the scriptures that is uncomfortably new to the Jews. For this early Christian community, abandoning the clear and literal sense of the text was necessary, if they were to present, and defend, their new theology. The old interpretations and meanings were no longer relevant. If the Old Testament was to be retained as valid, it had to be radically reinterpreted to meet the new demands of the experiences of faith they had met in this man Jesus, whom they believed was the Christ.

It is clear, therefore, that the Jewish scriptures were of great importance for the early Christian community, as they established a link between the Israel of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament. With salvation history seen as unfolding towards them, Jesus could be presented as the long-awaited, and promised, Messiah. He came, fulfilling their hopes, and the more they searched the scriptures, the more they found texts that could be interpreted to speak to some aspect of His life and ministry. This is why the Jewish scriptures remained important for the early church – because they could be reinterpreted in terms of the new revelation of Jesus Christ, though, at times, this reinterpretation meant some considerable modification and conflation of texts was necessary.

As we have already seen, the exegetical method of ***midrash*** was an attempt by the rabbis to contemporise the biblical text under consideration[26] so that it was made more meaningful to the faith community. We saw this in two ways: (a) interpretative translations in the Septuagint and the Targums,[27] and (b) explicit exegesis in the rabbinical commentaries.[28] An example of the first way is found in Matt 2:23, where Matthew says that Jesus' living in Nazareth fulfils the scriptures, which point to the

---

[26] Block, R., "Midrash", in *Dictionaire de la Bible: Supplement*, (Paris) 5 (1957).

[27] We have already seen examples of this kind of thing. Is 9:11 (12) has Aramaeans and Philistines in the Hebrew text, and the more-contemporary Syrians and Greeks in the Septuagint. These were rewritings of the text.

[28] Ellis, E. E., "How the New Testament used the Old", in Marshall, I. H., *New Testament Interpretation*, p. 202 refers to these two ways of interpretation as implicit (translations) and explicit (commentaries) exegesis. While it is a somewhat artificial division, it is a useful framework for dividing up the various New Testament hermeneutics, and we will employ it here, and use some of his examples.

Messiah being a *Nazoraios*. But, which scripture is being fulfilled? Is the scripture being fulfilled Judg 13:5 [the Septuagint=13:7], where it speaks of Samson being dedicated to God as a Nazirite, or is it Is 11:1 (cf. 49:6; 60:21), where the word *netzer* is used, being the word for "branch"? Not that it matters all that much, because either word involves a considerable stretching of the significance of the name of Jesus' home town. But it was important for the early community to see everything Jesus did as having a potential message. It was more important than any establishment meaning of a word of scripture. We can also see this method in action in Rom 10:11:

> The scripture says, "everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame".

The word "everyone" is not found in the Old Testament source. But that does not worry Paul. He has a message to preach, and by adding "everyone" his message is clear. He does a similar thing with Gen 21:10 in Gal 4:30. There, he changes the Hebrew text from "my son Isaac" to "child of the free woman". Why? Because the change was necessary to apply the text to the problem Paul was addressing.

The early community tried to expound the meaning of the events of their faith by expressing it in established biblical terms. We can see this very clearly in the infancy narratives of Lk 1:26-38. This early part of Jesus' life is not written in distinct historical language, but in the language of biblical theology. The facts of the Annunciation are presented for their spiritual significance: God is acting in a decisive way through this young virgin, bringing to fulfilment the history of salvation that has been unfolding through the history of Israel. The language of the Annunciation is the language of Is 6:1-9:7, specifically 7:13f with 1:27, 7: 14 with 1:31, 9:6f with 1:32, 35. There are also clear illusions to Gen 16:11 (1:31), 2 Sam 7:12-16 (1:32, 35), Dan 7:14 (1:33b), and Is 4:3; 62:12 (1:35). A reading through of the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) and the Benedictus (Lk 1:68-79) will show a similar compilation of Old Testament quotations and allusions.[29] This method is powerfully used by Jesus at His trial. In Mk 14:62, we find the words (modified) of Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13 placed onto the lips of Jesus. In their setting in the gospel, they take on a clear messianic note, explaining to the listening community the significance of what is taking place. In this addressing of the contemporary needs of the community, the primary concern was not the original meaning of the text being used. Scripture was used as an adaptable God-given tool to reveal His saving power and presence. It was not seen as being confined to an historical event in the past.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 203.

This process is also linked to the *pesher* method of interpretation that we have seen in our brief look at the methods of exegesis from the Qumran community. New Testament *pesher* is eschatological, in that it takes the Old Testament quotations, and shows them as being fulfilled in the Christian community, which is the community of the end time.[30] There are a number of clear uses of the *pesher* technique in the New Testament that are worth quoting as examples of the reinterpretation of scripture:

> It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you (Gen 21:12). *That is*, the children of the promise are counted as descendants (Rom 9:7-9).
>
> Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (*that is*, to bring Christ down) (Deut 30:12 from Rom 10:6-8).
>
> For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh (Gen 2:24). *This is* a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church (Eph 5:31f).
>
> It is written, "Abraham had two sons . . ." (Gen 21). *These are* the two covenants (Gal 4:22-24).

This is sufficient to show how the Old Testament was understood, and used, by the early Christian writers. It was there to be applied to the events of the new covenant, so that they can be understood as the fulfilment of a long process of salvation. But these applications were not arbitrary. We look at them today, and we say that the methodology lacks a scientific basis, and that the interpretations they come up with are, in fact, "wrong". Wrong, in that they misinterpret the original meaning the text had in its proper setting. They make it say more than was intended by the author. Exegesis, carried out in this way, runs the very real risk of becoming personal and individual, so that any message at all can be found in the Bible, and almost any position defended. But, such criticism misses the point of biblical interpretation for these early communities. They were not searching the scriptures to find out the original meaning of texts. They were searching the scriptures to see if any of the previous revelations of God can help them to understand the meaning of the revelation that had come to them in the person and ministry of Jesus. In doing this, they invested the written word with a depth and vitality that is so often missing from much of the modern historical/critica1exegesis. The New Testament, understood from the perspective of Jewish interpretation, can be different from that which emerges from the critical methods of our Western sciences. The New Testament use of

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

scripture reminds us that there is much more in a text than the original intent of the author. When we have a text, we must take into consideration the original meaning. That should be the starting point (though working out the original meaning is not always an easy thing to do), and is really the primary meaning of the passage. However, in the light of later traditions and experiences, these texts take on something of a prophetic role, witnessing to God's powerful acts in history. An example of this will help us to understand what is happening. Is 7:14 reads:

> Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Scholars differ as to the exact meaning of this passage. Presumably, it relates to a situation in Judah during the reign of Ahaz. We are not sure whose child this baby will be (the prophet's?), but, somehow, he will herald a new time in the relationship between Judah and God, and a closer relationship. God is working out His salvation in history, and this birth will be an important step forward. It is not hard to see how, over the centuries between the time of writing and the ministry of Jesus, this text took on something of a messianic message. It may even have been associated with a tradition of a virgin birth of a Messiah.[31] Whatever of the details, the expectation would have been that this prophecy had to be fulfilled. In Matt 1:22-23, we see this step taking place, with it being presented as a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. It seems that Matthew shows Isaiah as having had a clear and correct vision of what was going to take place some 800 years later. He also presents Jesus as fulfilling prophecies that go back into the past history of the people of God. What we end up with is a text that is now reinterpreted in the light of subsequent historical events. Because we believe that Jesus is God and man, the incarnation means that He is the "Immanuel", as predicted by Isaiah. While Isaiah might not have been talking about a virgin birth, his text, indeed, gives witness to its significance. Matthew, the Jew, could not have imagined a Bible that was not internally consistent, and in keeping with traditional religious beliefs, and it was these beliefs that marked the starting point of exegesis.

This does not mean that the early Christian writers consciously employed exegetical methods. They would not have chosen a specific method appropriate to the task at hand. Rather, they mixed up the various ways of interpretation so that we find *midrash* combined with *pesher* exegesis, illustration with grammatical analysis, and so on. What they did consciously do was to formulate a theological filter, through which

[31] Hanson, A. T., *Living Utterances*, London UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, p. 180.

the Old Testament was viewed. At the very heart of New Testament exegesis is their belief that Jesus was the Christ:

> The Christians began from Jesus – from His known character, and mighty deeds and sayings, and His death and resurrection – and with these they went to the scriptures and found that God's dealings with His people, and His intentions for them, there reflected, did, in fact, leap into new significance, in the light of these recent happenings. Sooner or later, this was to lead, through a definition of what God had done, to something like a definition of whom Jesus was.[32]

It was Jesus who, first of all, transformed the understanding of the messianic texts (and some of the non-messianic texts), and, in doing so, provided the later Christian community with an authority to do likewise.[33] This, they continued to do, using widely-accepted methodologies, and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, ensuring that Jesus was an ongoing source of authority for their work. This represented an enormous change in the understanding of the direction of history, as the Jews were looking forward to the coming the Messiah. Now, after the resurrection, Christians were looking back at the person and ministry of Jesus, as the focus of God's redemptive acts in the past. The Old Testament became a part of the divine preparation, and thus everything, in a sense, became "messianic" – a part of God's preparation for Jesus.[34]

> Messianic prophecy is doctrine, rather than prediction. The prophets were preachers. If there was some, one messianic prediction, which they repealed, and unfolded from age to age, we should expect that they would present it in the form of a religious doctrine, for the practical benefit of the men of their times. . . . As the biography of Jesus is really doctrine, so the prophetic forecast of the Messiah is doctrine, rather than prediction, and is the heart of the religious teachings of the prophets.

This is why the history of Israel becomes salvation history, with everything unfolding in the revelation of Jesus. The exegete's task became the presentation of this messianic message.

---

[32] Moule, C. F. D., *The Birth of the New Testament*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1966, p. 58.

[33] Gerhardson, B., *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Lund: Gleerup, 1961, p. 327.

[34] Beecher, W. T., *The Prophets and Promise*, New York NY: Cromwell, 1905, pp. 175f. This is quoted in Longenecker, *op. cit.*, p. 109, fn. 6.

Conclusion to the Old Testament Reflections

These reflections began by looking at scripture and the meaning of texts, and wondering about the criteria for validity in hermeneutics. The questions arose out of observations made in the methods used in teaching exegesis in Newton Theological College, and wondering if our approach to scripture needs a reorientation. A vital part of this rethinking rests on our understanding of what scripture is, and how it has been used by those who see it as the revealed Word of God. Our studies, up to this point, have presented us with some very important insights, which can be applied in our hermeneutics. The first one is a matter of orientation. Commentators have not been concerned over the original message of a text, whether the author had one specific message in mind or not. The real question for them has been that subsequent generations of believers, in the light of their faith, and in their reflections on their living situations, could find more meanings in the texts than were originally intended. Because the texts are scripture, they have the possibility of breaking out of the normal limitations of language and linguistics. This is just what we have seen happening in biblical exegesis, from the time of the first editings. Other exegetical/hermeneutical observations that are worth noting, in summary, are:

1. The Torah was seen as the will of God for His people, and contained everything that man needed to be faithful to his calling. It was all there in the text, though it may have been hidden, waiting for someone to come along and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uncover its riches.

2. Texts are full of meaning, and it was impossible to imagine that these could ever be exhausted by the searchings of the human mind. In the word of Rabbi Ishmael, again:

   > Just as the rock is split into many splinters, so also may one biblical verse contain many teachings (Sanah 34a – Palestinian Talmud).

3. Finalising the canon of sacred scripture allowed for the full development of the exegetical sciences. The scribes accepted that the texts could not be altered, as they were the perfect Word of God, and so simply needed proper interpretation. This led to a variety of styles of exegesis, as the scholars sought to reconcile differences, and *reinterpreted* existing texts in the light of community beliefs, and forms of worship and government, current in the community.

4. Books became sacred scripture, originating directly from the hand of God. They, therefore, were complete, and had a full and appropriate message for each new generation of believers.

5. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek showed that, in the latter part of the Old Testament period, scribes were prepared to look at the meaning of scripture as entailing more than just the surface or literal meaning. Because scripture was sacred, and, therefore, without error, it always used appropriate language and images. Any apparent deficiencies had to be understood as symbolic language. Philo and the Targums, in particular, made use of this belief. With the use of allegory and metaphor, whole new meanings were given to the traditional stories, all on the basis that the text represented the eternally alive and valid Word of God.

6. *Halakah* and *Haggadah* were exegetical techniques that ensured that biblical passages were always alive and challenging to the receiving community. They opened up new dimensions to the texts that were far beyond those intended by the original authors and editors.

7. The Qumran *pesher* method showed that, for the community of Essenes, the key to interpretation was the life and times of the community. The true meaning of the texts were even hidden from the prophet delivering the prophecy!

8. Jewish *midrash* was the standard form of exegesis, which sought to discover in a text more than the literal meaning. It set out to find the true spirit of the scripture, examining it from all its possible angles to find interpretations not obviously meant. It held that a biblical passage should not just be explained. Such explanation was but the first step in exegesis. Further to this, its meaning had to be extended, and all possible implications drawn out of it, building on every possible association of ideas and images.

9. With the New Testament, we see that this reinterpretation of sacred scripture was an accepted method of exegesis. Jesus regularly reinterpreted texts, giving them their full, authoritative meaning. The early Christian community continued this tradition, reinterpreting the Old Testament in the light of Jesus, whom they believed was the Christ. The interpretive key was their creed, and they searched back through their

received scripture's for proof texts that pointed to the redemptive activity of Jesus.

10. The New Testament authors used all of the exegetical techniques of their times, and approached scripture in the same way as their contemporary Jewish scholars. There is no evidence that their understanding of what a text was, and how it was to be approached, was any different to that of the scribes and Pharisees. Of course, they had a vastly different understanding of the theology of scripture, and, as to their pivotal point, but the basic approaches were the same.

It would seem, therefore, that what is needed in the teaching of exegesis and hermeneutics is a broad-spectrum approach. It must, of course, stress the importance of the scientific/critical methods, but should not stop there. Understanding scripture as scripture means far more than that. What is now needed is the turning of these observations into a methodology, with guidelines and limitations. It is just not possible to apply them directly to scripture today, but that should not rule them out as mere historical curiosities. They have a lasting value that can make God's Word truly alive and truly meaningful to today's world.

Spiritual Powers in Paul's Writings: An Adequate View for Mission in Melanesia

Marilyn Rowsome

[It seems that some of the bibliography was missing from the original text, because authors' names are cited in the text, but there are no corresponding references in the bibliography. For information, those authors' names are now shown in the bibliography, together with those references that could be reliably determined. However, the remaining works, to which the citations refer, are not known. Furthermore, a number of the page numbers shown against author citations in the text are incorrect. Unfortunately, the correct page numbers could not be determined. Ed.]

Introduction: The Issue

"If you want to understand the Melanesian mind, you must think spirits everywhere, and in everything." This was the advice of my national coworkers as I sought to teach and apply the truth of God's Word, in a relevant way, to my Melanesian students. This statement does not mean that Melanesians continually intellectualise about spirit beings, for it is not so much a matter of the intellect, but of the "liver", the life experience of the individual. It speaks of the immanence of the spirits, and their involvement in the total life of the Melanesian community. "People, brought up in traditional Melanesian societies, look at happenings, and see in them the working of spiritual forces, which fill their environment" (Taruna, 1980, p. 1).

Now, according to my Western worldview, there are not spirits everywhere, and in everything. And so I ask myself, "What is the correct thinking – the Melanesian, or the Western, view?" This question is a real issue in my thinking as a cross-cultural communicator. It can only be answered in the light of the biblical view of the spiritual world. So, in this essay, I will investigate biblical teaching on the spiritual powers. Because there is so much material, I will concentrate on the data on principles and powers, as found in Paul's New Testament writings (Part I). From this follows the formulation of a biblical theology of these powers (Part II). I will then review the current thinking about the powers, suggesting an interpretation, which is both adequate for today, and true to biblical teaching (Part III). I will then discuss the implications of this teaching to the task of mission in Melanesia today (Part IV). After such an investigation, in the conclusion, I will be able to give a more adequate answer to the question I have already raised regarding the correct thinking about spiritual powers in Melanesia today.

Part 1: The Biblical Data

On reading the Bible, with my eyes open to this question, I see that God's Word never forgets the fact of evil, and the real strength of the evil powers. From Gen 3 to Rev 21, the Bible outlines a battle between the Supreme Power, God, and His enemies, lesser spiritual powers, working in numerous ways. The New Testament uses a large number of terms to describe the powers of evil – principalities, powers, rulers, dominions, thrones, princes of this world, lords, gods, angels, demons, unclean spirits, elemental spirits, Satan, the tempter, the evil one, destroyer, adversary, accuser, and so on – showing how much the Christians of the early church were concerned with the unseen world. Because of the extent of this data in the New Testament, I will confine myself to the writings of Paul.

(i) The Pauline Material

Paul's worldview included the concept of an invisible world of both good and evil spirits.

He speaks of angels – spiritual beings in the service of God (Rom 8:38, 1 Cor 4:9; 6:3; 11:10; Gal 3:9; Col 2:18; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Tim 3:16; 5:21). But there are also evil angels – demons, who, in particular, are the power behind idolatry (1 Cor 10:19-21). He predicts that, in the last times, these deceitful spirits and demons will become increasingly active to turn men away from the truth (1 Tim 4:1-3). Paul assumes the existence of an evil spirit – the archenemy of God, called the devil, or Satan. He is the ruler of the authority of the air (Eph 2:2), the god of this age, who blinds the minds of men to the truth, to turn believers away from the gospel (1 Thess 3:5), to hinder God's work (1 Thess 2:18), to raise up false apostles (2 Cor 11:14), and to attack the workers of God (2 Cor 12:7). In all this, Paul is sure that Satan's doom is fixed, God will crush him under the feet of the saints (Rom 16:20) (Ladd, 1974, p. 401).

(ii) The Terms used for Spiritual Powers

Paul refers only to good and bad angels, to Satan, and to demons, but he uses another group of words to designate supernatural powers. The following list will show the extent of Paul's use of these words, and their meanings.

GREEK WORD	BIBLE VERSES	ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS
arche ἀρχή	1 Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21 Col 2:10	rule, principality, prince
archai ἀρχαί	Rom 8:38 Col 1:16; 2:15 Eph 3:10; 6:12 Tit 3:1	principalities, authorities, dominions clearly government leaders
archonton ἀρχόντων	1 Cor 2:6, 8	rulers, princes
daimonioi δαιμόνιοι	1 Cor 10:20, 21 1 Tim 4:1	devils, demons
dunamis δύναμις	1 Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21	power, might, strength
dunameis δυνάμεις	Rom 8:38	powers
exousia ἐξουσία	1Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21; 2:2 Col 1:13; 2:15	authority, power, dominion, rule, tyranny
thronoi θρόνοι	Col 1:16	thrones, potentates
kosmokratoroi κοσμοκράτοροι kuriotes κυριότης	Eph 6:12 Eph 1:21	world rulers, sovereigns, despotisms, cosmic powers, worldly princes lordship, dominion
kuriotetes κυριότητες	Col 1:16	authorities, potentates
ochuromata ὀχυρωμάτα	2 Cor 10:4	strongholds
pneumatika tes ponerias πνευματικά της πονηρίας	Eph 6:12	spiritual hosts of wickedness, spirits of wickedness, spirit forces of evil
pneumasin planois πνεύμασιν πλάνοις	1 Tim 4:1	deceitful spirits, seducing spirits
stoicheia tou kosmou στοιχεῖα του κόσμου	Col 2:8, 20 Gal 4:3, 9	rudiments of the world, first principles of the world, worldly principles, men's thoughts and ideas, elemental spirits of the world, world's crude notions
epouranion epigeion katachthonion ἐπουράνιον ἐπιγείων καταχθονίων	Phil 2:10	all who dwell in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, beings in heaven, earth and underground

These words can be summed up in such collective concepts as:

- cosmic powers and authorities;
- principalities and powers;
- the spirit world, with all its kings and kingdoms, rulers, and authorities;
- spiritual and supernatural powers of the air.

In this essay, I will use the term "spiritual powers", or simply "powers", to denote all that Paul speaks of in these references.

(iii) The Meaning of These Terms

Usually these powers are considered evil, and opposing the kingdom of God. But some of these verses speak of created beings existing for God's glory (Col 1:16), with the Christ as their head (Eph 1:21, Col 2:10). To these powers, the manifold wisdom of God will be made known through the church (Eph 3:10). And yet other verses definitely speak about powers opposed to God (Eph 6:12; Col 2:14). I would like to suggest that, by these terms, Paul refers to *all* supernatural beings. There are principalities and powers, which surround God's throne, and act as His agents and emissaries, just as there are principalities and powers surrounding, and working for, Satan. In this essay, I will be dealing mainly with the latter, the evil spiritual powers.

Some writers try to separate the terms Paul uses, finding distinct meanings for each one. Lloyd-Jones says, " 'principality' carries the notion of inherent power. The word 'power' suggests, rather, the expression, the manifestation of that power" (Lloyd-Jones, 1976, p. 58). Mrs Penn-Lewis, commenting on Eph 6:12, limits "principalities" to forces dealing with nations and governments, whereas "powers" have a wider sphere of influence in all realms of life (Penn-Lewis, p. 12). Some writers try to construct a hierarchy, based on these terms, but the variety of ways in which Paul uses the words warns us against this. According to Ladd, "A study of the language Paul uses to designate these angelic spirits suggests that Paul deliberately employed a vague and varied terminology. This is seen, particularly, in his alternation between the singular and the plural forms of several of the words. It is impossible to successfully group this terminology into clearly-defined orders of angelic beings, nor is it at all clear that, by the various words, Paul purposes to designate different kinds or ranks of angels. Probably, Paul was facing views that elaborated distinct orders of angels, and he purposed, by his exceedingly flexible language, which may almost be called symbolic, to assert that all evil powers, whatever they may be, whether personal

or impersonal, have been brought into subordination by the death and exaltation of Christ, and will eventually be destroyed through His messianic reign" (Ladd, 1974, p. 402).

This is, in fact, the thrust of Paul's writing. He has no doubt about the reality of the spirit world. But "he supplies us with no biography of the devil, and no account of the origin of the forces of darkness. His purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to warn us of their hostility, and teach us how to overcome them" (Stott, 1979, p. 261).

"The idea of sinister world powers, and their subjugation by Christ, is built into the very fabric of Paul's thought, some mention of them being found in every epistle except Philemon" (Caird, 1956, p. 8). And yet, Paul has no crippling fear of the spiritual powers (as Melanesians do). Rather, at the heart of Paul's teaching, is the absolute assurance of the victory of Jesus Christ, the great conqueror of Satan and his workers.

(iv) The Source of Paul's Thinking

The ancient world was demon-ridden, to a degree, which we find difficult to comprehend. Leon Morris says, "men of antiquity, in general, had no doubts that the universe was peopled with a host of spirits, some good, and some evil. The spirits exercised influences beneficial, and baleful, on the lives of men" (Morris, 1976, p. 202).

In Greek thinking, every spring, grove, mountain, tree, stream, pool, rock, as well as the wind, lightning, and storms had its demon. For the Jew, the ***shedim*** (Hebrew for evil spirits) haunted empty houses, lurked in the crumbs on the floor, in oil, in vessels, or in drinking water, filled the air in the room day and night. So, Jewish apocalyptic writing, popular Judaism, Hellenism, and pagan gnosticism, all had much to say about spiritual powers. In particular, pseudepigraphal writings of intertestamental Judaism spoke of intermediate beings between God and man, some belonging to God, others to Satan. They ruled over the realm between heaven and earth, so influencing human existence. Evil powers were capable of bringing man into bondage, by causing harm and sickness.

Paul takes up these terms, already used, without much explanation, suggesting that his readers were thoroughly familiar with the usage of such words. But the new meaning he gives is in relation to their rightful place in the universe under Christ, and the possibility of release from the influence of such powers, because of the freedom to be found in Christ.

Paul's knowledge of spiritual powers was not just head knowledge, learned in his academic training. He had persona1 experience with such powers in his own ministry. On Paphos, he encountered the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus, who opposed the work of God (Acts 13:6-13). In Philippi, he was tormented by a fortune teller possessed by an evil spirit (Acts 16: 16-18). At Ephesus, he drove out evil spirits from the sick (Acts 19:12), and witnessed a public burning of many books used in magical practices (Acts 19:19). In each case, in the name and power of Jesus, Paul confronted the powers, showing the supremacy of the Lord Jesus, and the victory to be found in union with Him.

From this background and general survey, I would now like to turn to a more detailed study of Paul's teaching on spiritual powers.

Part II: A Theology of Spiritual Powers

By interpreting and systematising the biblical data on spiritual powers in Paul's writings, a theology of powers emerges. I will describe this teaching, by referring to six stages in the developing drama of the powers.

(i) their original creation;

(ii) their subsequent fall;

(iii) their decisive conquest by Christ;

(iv) their learning through the church;

(v) their continual hostility;

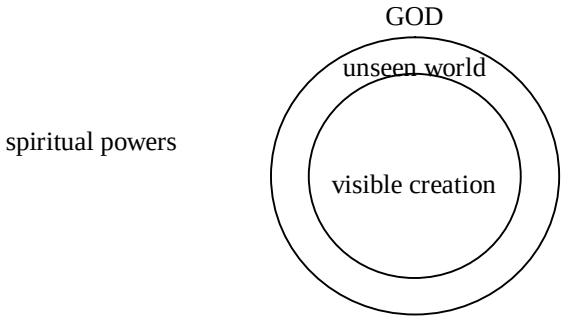
(vi) their final destruction.

(i) Their Original Creation

The powers are linked with creation in Col 1:16. For Paul, the creation encompasses things in heaven as well as on earth, things invisible, as well as visible, for creation includes thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities – that is, the tota1 complement of spiritual powers, both good and evil. All were created by Christ, and for Him.

What was the purpose of the spirit world in God's perfect creation? On this, Paul is silent, but I would like to speculate on this point for a moment. If all the

spiritual powers were created good, then, it is to be assumed that they fulfilled a positive function in God's creation. Glasser suggests that the invisible world formed a link between God and the visible creation, such that the powers were channels of God's love to man.



The powers held life together, giving cohesion, by the formation of forms, traditions, ethics, morality, and justice – all essential elements for societal existence. Berkhof calls the powers dykes, which provide the framework of creation, preserving it from disintegration, by holding society together and, preventing the chaotic deluge from submerging the world.

If the powers are, in fact, rudimentary principles, essential to human society, could this be what Pau1 is referring to, when he uses the word στοιχεῖα (elements) in Gal 4:3, 9; and Col 2:8, 20? Does he mean the essential elements of life, that is, the spiritual powers, which, in their original creation, provided the fundamental links of the universe to preserve the society? Many different interpretations have been given to the concept of στοιχεῖα. In this essay, I can only give a brief summary of the usage of this word, in an attempt to throw light on what Paul meant.

στοιχεῖα literally means objects, which stand in a row, or form a series. The alphabet is an example. So, the word was used for the basic principles, the ABC, or rudimentary teachings, of any subject (as in Heb 5:12).

The Jews used the word to refer to the basic teachings of the law. Paul knew that such teachings could enslave a person, when rituals, taboos, and formal worship became the reality, rather than Christ (Col 2:8, 16, 20-23). He was afraid that the Galatians would lose their newfound liberty in Christ by submitting again to such slavish legalism (Gal 4:3, 9).

The Romans and Greeks used στοιχεῖα to speak about spirits, which indwell the elements, or basic things, of the universe, like air, water, wind, fire, moon, and stars. These ruling spirits acted as intermediaries between God and man, so controlling different things, and places, in the world. Paul states that these spiritual powers are really not gods, for, when compared with Christ, they are weak and pitiful (Gal 4:8-9). Once liberated from these powers, it would be foolish to put oneself under bondage to them again (Hitchen, p. 62).

Whatever Paul referred to by this word, στοιχεῖα, the thrust of these passages is that the στοιχεῖα need not dominate anyone, as they have done in the past, because, in Christ, there is true liberty.

Every spiritual power was created by Christ. He is Lord of all. Whatever the role of the powers was, in the original creation, it is very clear that they do not fulfil this role in the world today. We now turn to the reason for this.

(ii) Their Subsequent Fall

We can only assume the fall of some of the powers, because of the role they play today, and the need of Christ to conquer them. Paul is silent on what actually happened in the heavenly realm, although, in 1 Tim 3:6, he does hint at a proud rebellion led by Satan. This rebellion has meant that part of the angelic world has become hostile to the divine purpose. God's sovereign will has, somehow, permitted Satan and his workers to exercise a large area of power, over the course of this age. The rebellious state of the world is reflected, not only in the fallen condition of mankind, but also in the rebellious state of a portion of the angelic world, the wicked spiritual forces in this evil age.

The powers play a new role in this world, for they seek to dominate man, bringing him into bondage to their rule. This is not their correct place, for Christ is Lord of all (Col 1:16). They occupy this place by convincing men that they are the true reality. It is an exercise of power, by allusion, through their lies and deceit (1 Tim 4:1), so much so that, today in Melanesia, beliefs about the spirits rule the people's lives. The powers are, in fact, usurpers, taking a place in God's creation, to which they have no right. Man without Christ is subject to all the perils that the spiritual world can mount. The spirits are antagonists whom no man can tame. The plight of man, in bondage to them, is indeed a sorry one!

(iii) Their Decisive Conquest by Christ

Here, in fact, is the major thrust of Paul's teaching on powers. Whenever Paul mentions spiritual powers, it is with the implication that Christ is supreme over them. Christ has won the victory, through His death and resurrection. Christ has broken their counterfeit authority, and exposed them to be what they really are. In His death, He did something to the powers to break their hold, to uncover their deception, so that no longer are they able to pose as regents: tyrants, dominating over human beings. In Christ, they are shown to be powerless to separate us from God's love (Rom 8:38). The cross was the scene of a public exposure, and a resounding triumph by Christ.

This is the meaning of Col 2:15, where Paul says that Christ disarmed the principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them, and triumphing over them by the cross. The word translated "disarmed" is ἀπεκδυσάμενος, a passive participle meaning "to strip off". J. A. T. Robinson says that Christ, in His death, stripped off His flesh, through which the powers of evil and death were able to attack men (Ladd, 1974, p. 435). Moule says that Christ stripped off the powers of evil that had clung to His humanity (Moule, 1957, pp. 101-102). Both of these understand the verb to be a true middle voice. MacGregor sees the use of the middle voice "to strip off from Himself" as significant. "Christ took upon Himself the physical constitution of man; God had sent Him 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' – 'flesh', in which the principalities and powers still could make a lodgment. And, in the act of dying, He divested Himself of that flesh, and, with it, stripped off the principalities and powers, thus breaking their dominion, and carrying with Himself, in His victory, all those, who through faith, had come to be in Him, and, thus, shared this experience" (MacGregor, NTS (i), p. 23).

Bruce follows the RSV translation, which takes the middle verb as having an active meaning. "Christ has disarmed the spiritual powers, stripping them of their insignia of rank, or their arms" (Bruce, 1957, p. 240). By His death, Christ triumphed over His spiritual enemies, winning a divine triumph over the cosmic powers (Ladd, 1974, p. 435).

A note on 1 Cor 2:6, 8 is here necessary, for some exegetes see, in these verses, the idea that the principalities and powers, themselves, brought Christ to the cross, doing this in ignorance, because they did not recognise who He was (Barrett, 1968, p. 72). They take ἀρχόντων του αἰῶνος, translated "the rulers of this age", to be a term for spiritual powers. The more natural meaning of ἀρχόντων, in this context, is political rulers, such as Pilate and Herod. (Compare the use of ἐξουσίαις in Tit 3:1

and Rom 12:1-2 to clearly mean "political rulers"). If this is so, then these verses in 1 Cor 3 add nothing to Paul's thought of Christ's victory over the spiritual powers.

Thus far, we have seen that Christ is superior to all the spiritual powers, as Creator, because of His lordship, and, as Redeemer, because by His death, resurrection, and ascension, He triumphed over Satan, sin, and every conceivable force of evil. Christ crucified, and risen, is Lord of all, enthroned supreme above all, as head over every power and authority (Eph 1:21; Col 2:10).

(iv) Their Learning Through the Church

It is in the church that the Lordship of Christ is fully realised. So the presence of a new, redeemed community in the world is a visible sign that reconciliation to God through Christ means freedom from anything, which may bring bondage. As the church displays this freedom, it announces to the powers the many-sided wisdom of God (Eph 3:10).

Stott says, "as the gospel spreads throughout the world, it is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members of every land are the actors. God Himself has written the play, and He directs, and produces it. The cosmic intelligences in the heavenly places are spectators of the drama of salvation" (Stott, 1979, p. 123).

This verse has been interpreted differently. Caird sees that God's purpose is to use the church to inform and redeem the powers, that is the politico-economic structures of human society (Caird, 1954, pp. 66-67). I do not think that principalities and powers can be limited to earthly structures (see Part III), or that the activity of the church, referred to here, is redemptive as well as informative.

If the church is to have this proclamatory role to the powers, then it must, by its very life, display its freedom, by allowing the Spirit of God to set it free from fear, or anything else, which the powers might use to bring bondage to individuals, or to the community of God's people.

(v) Their Continual Hostility

The passages that we have looked at so far suggest that the powers are already subjugated to Christ, having been deprived of their power and influence. But, Eph

6:12 speaks about the Christian wrestling with supernatural evil powers, a conflict, which is going on in the present. 1 Cor 15:24 suggests that there is a time coming, when every power shall be defeated, and shall submit to Christ. This paradox of the powers already defeated, and yet not defeated, the powers already subjugated, and yet then to be subjugated, is expressed and held by Paul, especially in the book of Ephesians.

The Christian is caught in the middle of this tension that, on the cross, the powers were disarmed, and yet Satan is not yet destroyed, as he will be, when he is cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). His final defeat will be accomplished at the return of Christ. The whole interim period between the Lord's two comings is to be characterised by conflict. The peace, which God has made, through Christ's cross, is to be experienced for those in the midst of a relentless struggle against evil. And, for this, the strength of the Lord and the whole armour of God are indispensable (Stott, 1979, pp. 262-263). Note the defensive nature of the armour, with which Christians are provided. We are not to attack Satan and his workers, but, rather, we are to stand free in the victory that Christ has already won. We are to hold the powers at a distance, by staying close to Jesus, drawing upon His power, might, and strength (Eph 6:10).

God's kingdom means the divine conquest of His enemies, a conquest, which, according to Ladd, is accomplished in three stages. With the death and resurrection of Christ the victory was begun. Christ curtailed the power of the evil forces. "The power of the kingdom of God has invaded this present evil age, so that men now may know the rule of God in their lives" (Ladd, 1959, p. 50). The very fact that we can be delivered from the power of Satan speaks of his defeat. Satan and his workers have been thrust down from their pinnacle of power.

The final two stages in the conquest occur when Christ returns. The first of these is at the beginning of the millennium, when the evil powers are bound in the abyss (Rev 20:3). The last stage is after the millennial reign Christ, when the last enemy, death, is destroyed, and Satan and his evil forces are thrown into the lake of fire (*ibid.*, pp. 45-46). Ladd concludes, "to the human eye, the world appears little changed. The kingdom of Satan is unshaken. Yet the kingdom of God has come among men, and those who will receive it will be prepared to enter into the kingdom of glory, when Christ comes to finish the good work He has already begun. This is the gospel of the kingdom" (*ibid.*, p. 51).

And so, the Christian in this world finds himself in a conflict against the hostile spiritual powers. And yet, it is a conflict, of which the outcome is already assured. Two illustrations may help to clarify this tension.

(a) In a military battle, the outcome of the war is decided by the leaders, at a point in time, but then follows the long, slow, mopping-up operations. The death and resurrection of Christ was the clear turning point in this spiritual battle. The outcome has been decided, and yet the conflict continues, until Christ returns.

(b) A ferocious dog terrifies everyone by its bark, and yet, on closer inspection, the seemingly dangerous dog is found to have its teeth removed, and so, is really powerless. Knowing this changes one's whole attitude to the dog. Likewise, the powers have exalted themselves, magnifying their authority, so as to tyrannise far beyond their reality.

Each illustration shows that the disarming of the powers, a fact of the past, was the first stage in the victory. The Christian lives in this present evil age (Gal 1:4) until the destruction of the last enemy, death, the final operation in the victory (1 Cor 15:26). How then are we to live in the interim? As free men, liberated from the continuing power of evil, living under, and declaring, Christ's supremacy in every situation in life. This is the essence of the Christian life.

(vi) Their Destruction – The Final Restoration

The goal of God's redemptive purpose is the restoration of order to a universe that has been disturbed by evil and sin. This means a total cosmic reconciliation, involving mankind (2 Cor 5:19), the spiritual world (Eph 1:10), and nature (Rom 8:19-23). All things will be reconciled to God through Christ (Col 1:20). There is to be a restoration of all things to their rightful place and purpose in creation, as Jesus is acknowledged as Lord by every creature on earth, and in heaven, and under the earth (Phil 2:10-11).

In the final consummation, the total cosmos will be delivered from the curse of evil. So, what is to become of Satan and his kingdom? Shall the evil spiritual powers again function in the right way, or shall they be removed, or destroyed? Paul does not answer all our questions here, but he does make plain that every alien authority and power will be overcome. One of the purposes of the mission of Christ is to destroy every rule and authority and power, for He must reign until He has put all His enemies

under His feet. When He has done this, He will deliver the kingdom of God to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-25). We have already said that Paul imagined Christ as beginning this kingly rule at His ascension.

We need to go to other scriptures to help us answer the question of the future of the spiritual powers. Jesus, Himself, speaks forcefully of the eternal destruction of the wicked (Matt 25:31-46). Peter and Jude speak of the coming judgment of the fallen angels (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). Revelation tells us that Satan and his followers will suffer eternal judgment (20:10; 21:8), and that nothing impure will enter the New Jerusalem (21:27). A theme of Psalms is that God, the King, will conquer and destroy all His enemies. And so, our understanding of God's cosmic plan of reconciliation must be consistent with such scriptures, even if we cannot fully understand how this is possible (Snyder, 1978, p. 49).

Some interpreters have seen the language of reconciliation as meaning "a universal home-calling", salvation for all creatures, human, and angelic. Origen says that the fallen angels benefit from the reconciliation. Glasser believes that the powers will, once again, fulfil their divinely-appointed function in God's creation.

But a word of caution is needed here. Universal acknowledgment of Christ's Lordship does not mean universa1 salvation. Many will bow before Christ's rule unwillingly. There is no clear statement in scripture that Satan, his spiritual workers, or his human followers, will be reconciled to God in the last day. Rather, it is clear that their end is the lake of fire and eternal punishment. It seems to me that cosmic reconciliation is only possible with the removal of Satan and the evil spiritual powers.

Even though Paul does not answer our specific questions on this, he is certain that this eschatological reconciliation will be accomplished through the blood of the cross (Col 1:20). The death of Christ means triumph over evil spiritual powers (Col 2:14-15), and the final consummation is but the effective extension of the victory won on the cross.

Summary

This, then, is Paul's teaching on spiritual powers, and especially those evil powers, which work against God and His kingdom. In all Paul's references to principalities and powers, he has an ethical and not a theoretical point to make. We have a new life in union with Christ, and, living this new life, makes the powers

obsolete, for they have no opportunity to do their work of destruction, or to bring us into bondage.

Part III: Current Interpretations

Traditionally, it has been assumed that Paul, in his teaching on spiritual powers, was speaking of personal demonic intelligences, the unseen spiritual powers of this evil age. But, in post-war times, other interpretations have become fashionable. It is thought that Paul was referring to structures of thought (tradition, convention, law, authority, religion), especially, as embodied in the state, and its institutions.

Gordon Rupp says, "down the centuries, the principalities and powers have assumed many disguises. Terrifyingly deadly, they are sometimes sprawling across the earth in some gigantic despotism, at times, narrowed down to one single impulse in the mind of one individual man. But the fight is on. For believers, fighting there is the certainty of struggle to the end. But there is also the assurance of victory" (Stott, 1979, p. 268). In saying this, Rupp transfers the expression "principalities and powers" to economic, social, and political forces. Hendrik Berkhof equates the powers with human traditions, religious and ethical rules, which were created by God, but have become tyrannical, and, themselves, objects of worship. In Christ, these powers are "Christianised", or "neutralised", as they return to their God-appointed roles (*ibid.*, p. 268). Markus Barth says, "by principalities and powers, Paul means the world of axioms and principles of politics and religion, of economics and society, of morals and biology, of history and culture" (*ibid.*, p. 270).

Each of these scholars has made Paul's references to spiritual powers speak relevantly to our own earthly structures. This interpretation reflects modern thinking, which rejects belief in angels and demons as archaic. At the same time, it draws on an unhealthy preoccupation with world structures, such that "principalities and powers become structures in disguise" (*ibid.*, p. 271). It is true that the vocabulary of spiritual powers is used of political authorities in Rom 12:1-3 and Tit 3:1. In other contexts, however, Paul stresses the supernatural nature of these powers, by using the term "in the heavenlies", meaning the unseen world of spiritual reality (Eph 1:20; 3:10; 6:12). This is particularly clear in Eph 6:12, when Paul says that the Christian's warfare is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark age, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms", traditionally understood as "not with human, but with demonic, forces".

Spiritual powers can, in fact, use earthly structures for good or evil. The powers may become incarnate in concrete forms, such as, culture, political structures, the state, economic systems, materialism, affluence, traditions, laws, legalism, public opinion, philosophy, nationalism, sexuality, permissiveness – in fact, they can take hold of anything for their own purposes. In themselves, these things are not evil, but they can become tools of the supernatural powers, in order to enslave man to things that have no true authority. The power of the godless Hitlerite regime is a classic example. John Stott warns us against identifying the powers only as human structures. In doing this, we limit demonic activity to these structures, and tend to class all human structures as evil, denying the possibility of good in society (*ibid*., p. 274).

We must acknowledge the reality of personal spiritual powers, and discern the means they use, or "the clothes they wear" to accomplish their evil purposes in the society in which we live. This is, in fact, an important task of any cross-cultural worker – to recognise the tools, which the powers use to bring bondage, both in his own culture, and the culture in which he works. And so, we now turn to the implications that an adequate theology of the powers has on the missionary task today.

Part IV: Implications for Mission

Any biblical theology of mission must consider seriously Paul's teaching on spiritual powers. Our theology of powers will affect the way we view the missionary task today.

Obviously, we need a good balance in our own thinking about powers. C. S. Lewis warns "that there are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They, themselves, are equally pleased with both errors" (Lewis, 1942, p. 9).

With this warning, I would like to suggest four areas of mission, which will be significantly affected by our theology of spiritual powers.

(i) Our Motive for Mission

The world is held under the bondage of Satan and his workers. People, outside of Christ, are blinded to the truth of God's word by evil powers, who have exalted themselves to a position of authority, in order to snatch away the glory and honour due

to God. Satan is a liar, a deceiver, and a trickster, who uses every spiritual power available to him to bring mankind into slavery to himself, so cutting man off from knowing the love of God. Knowing this, every Christian, who has already been released from this bondage, should want to share the good news of victory in Jesus Christ with those still bound, so that they, too, can be released, in order to be what God created them to be.

Surely, this is one reason why people cross cultural barriers with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Melanesians, today, are held in fear by the tricks of Satan. Ancestral spirits are believed to determine the destiny of the living. Fear and bondage result. I believe that this is Satan and his workers masquerading as dead ancestors, in order to bring people into slavery, through fear, and the rigid observance of taboos. The missionary task is to announce to the world the tricks of the evil powers, to unmask them for what they are, and to liberate people, so that they can enjoy fellowship with God, worshipping and serving Him with their total lives. Everyone today, at some time, feels in the grip of forces that are stronger than themselves. Paul had a message for such people. We, too, have the same message for every person in every society today. It is a message of liberation and freedom, obtained only through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Let us declare the message everywhere.

(ii) Our Strategy for Mission

As we go with this task, our theology of the powers tells us that we are in a battle. We have an enemy, whose desire it is to oppose the work of God, and keep people in bondage. The devil fears, and hates, the gospel, for it is God's power to rescue people from this tyranny (Rom 1:16). We must be aware of the forces, against which we wrestle, know their strategies (2 Cor 2:11), and stand against them. God provides His workers with armour for the battle. It is our responsibility to take it up, put it on, and use it confidently against the powers of evil. We do this in total dependence on Christ, knowing that, in Him, we are more than conquerors, because He has already won the victory. We dare not launch into mission with any other attitude.

(iii) Our Approach to Traditional Spirit Beliefs

A mission comes to a new field. In an animistic society, the missionaries encounter strong beliefs in the spirit world. Immediately, the question arises "what

will be the view of the mission to these beliefs?" Different approaches have been taken in the past. Malinowski, in 1945, was bold enough to say, "all efforts of European missionaries, educationalists, and administrators have failed, until now, in their treatment of witchcraft" (Aherns, 1977, p. 163). I would like to review the possible approaches to spirit powers, and suggest one, which is appropriate to mission in Melanesia, in light of the theology of the spiritual powers, which has been outlined in this essay.

(a) Denial of Spirit Powers

It has been common for missionaries to deny the reality of spirit beliefs, classing them as superstitions, as a result of ignorance. The presence of spirit powers is a matter of daily experience for the Melanesian. So, a denial of the reality of spirit beings is totally unsatisfactory to Melanesians. In Toabaita, in the Solomon Islands, the early missionaries denied the existence of spirit beliefs as mere speculation and superstition. But, such a treatment never really did away with the belief. Festus Suruma, a Toabaitan, says, "every generation of my people will always believe in ancestral spirits. Instead of denying the whole thing, I must provide another alternative, centred on scripture" (Suruma, 1979, p. 35).

We have seen that, theologically, there is no basis for a denial of spiritual powers. "Satan is at his wittiest when he succeeds in persuading people that he does not exist" (Stott, 1979, p. 265). A missionary, who takes this approach, surely cuts himself off from the very needs of the people, resulting from their daily life experience. He may feel that he has been successful in convincing the minds of the people that such beliefs are not valid. But this is not a matter of the mind, but the liver. The belief in spirits will go underground. It will not be abandoned.

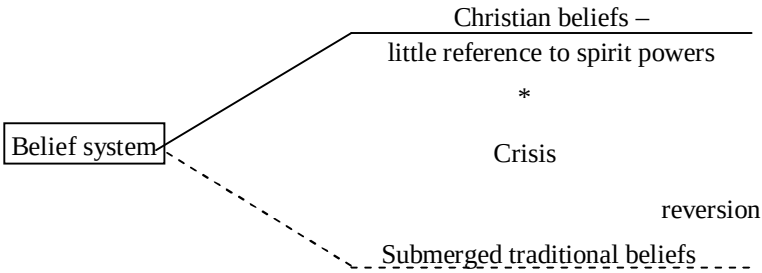
Denial of spirit powers encourages a split-level Christianity. A Melanesian can very easily end up with a dichotomous belief system. He may normally operate, according to the Christian teaching he has accepted, even if it is unrelated to his previous religious experiences. But, in times of crisis, such as sickness or death, he quickly reverts to his submerged traditional beliefs. It is not uncommon for a professing Christian to go to a witchdoctor, or magic man, in times of sickness, especially if the Christian way has not produced the desired results.

Some missionaries have recognised the existence of spirit powers in Jesus' time, but deny their activity today. This, too, is totally unsatisfactory for Melanesians, who *know* the reality of spirits in today's life experiences.

I would re-echo Suruma's cry – there must be another approach, which is biblical and practical.

(b) Mixing of Beliefs – Syncretism

Another approach, which missionaries have taken, is to accept the reality of the spirit powers, and to incorporate these beliefs into Christian teaching. The motive, as expressed by Nilles, a Catholic missionary, has been good. "The social and psychological values and merits of the old traditional practices and beliefs, and their influence upon the daily lives of the community members, are too deeply rooted to be totally discarded without leaving a vacuum of frustration" (Nilles, 1977, p. 176). A genuine attempt to indigenise has been made by keeping traditional rituals, and pouring into them new meaning. But, because of the implicit connotation of any form, often the results have been syncretism, which is questionable. Those, who take this approach, believe that these syncretistic tendencies will be overcome in future generations.



Based on this approach, missionaries have attended traditional spirit ceremonies, giving their blessing to the ritual performed in the presence of a cross. They have called upon the spirits of the ancestors, in their intercessory role, for the living community, while still stressing that these spirits do not have autonomous power over the living (ibid., p. 183). When Christian and traditional beliefs have been mixed, so that there is no clear understanding of the biblical truth about powers, but, rather, syncretism, then I would question the validity of such an approach. Surely there is another way.

(c) Acceptance in Theory, Denial in Practice

Most Western evangelicals, when questioned about spirit powers, would acknowledge the existence of Satan and his workers, but such a belief is divorced from their life experience. You may hear accusations cast at Satan, for his work of trying to make the Christian fall, but little thought is given to principalities and powers. So, many evangelical missionaries find themselves agreeing with Melanesians, when it comes to the concept of spirit powers, but then find themselves unable to minister to their national friends, because their experience is far from the Melanesian experience with spirit powers.

I can see two possible reactions to this situation. The first is to class everything to do with traditional beliefs as demonic, and of Satan, and so declare all customs and beliefs as "*tambu*", not to be entered into, or spoken about. This, in fact, leaves the same vacuum that results from denial. The second is to acknowledge spirit beliefs, when questioned, but ignore them in the ministry of preaching, teaching, and counselling. The content of courses in Bible colleges, or the material presented from the pulpit (by both missionaries and nationals), reflects the fact that this approach has been quite common in Melanesia.

The danger in this approach is that biblical teaching becomes unrelated to the life experience of the individual, and the community. If we do believe that scripture speaks to the experience of every individual, then we must find bridges to cross the gap between biblical doctrine and life experience. The biblical teaching on spiritual powers is very clear. The life experience of Melanesians means involvement with spirit powers. And so, in Melanesia today, we must relate the biblical teaching on spiritual powers to the life experience of Melanesians, helping them to discover that God's Word speaks to them in the total experience of their own culture.

(d) An Adequate Approach for Melanesia

We now have what I see as an appropriate answer to the question, "What should be our view of spirit beliefs?" We must acknowledge the reality of spiritual powers, know the biblical teaching concerning these powers, and relate this teaching to the life experience of those to whom we minister.

To do this, we must recognise that Pau1's teaching on spiritual powers is rather abstract, as is characteristic of Greek thought. The terms Paul uses for spiritual powers (see page 39) are abstract ones. He does speak of idols, behind which are demons (1 Cor 10:20). He does warn against worshipping idols, and practising

witchcraft (1 Cor 10:14; Gal 5:20). But, in general, Paul uses abstract terms and thought when speaking about powers. Melanesians are not normally abstract thinkers. We may boldly proclaim the message, "principalities and powers cannot harm you; have nothing to do with dominions and authorities; struggle against spiritual forces in Christ's strength; victory over evil spirits is yours, in union with Christ". But, I suggest, this sound biblical teaching is unintelligible to a Melanesian, for it is unrelated to his life experience. It is not that he does not encounter spiritual powers, or fear their influence on him, but it is a matter of the terminology used for these powers. Paul's terminology is, in fact, a foreign one to Melanesians. Our message needs to include the words "sorcery, ancestral spirits, spirits of the bush, *masalai* (creative spirits), *sanguma*, love magic, chants, and divination". "*Sanguma* and *masalai* cannot harm you; have nothing to do with love magic or hunting magic; struggle against the powers of the spirits of nature; victory over every kind of evil power is yours in union with Christ" – this is the message, which is good news to Melanesians.

Yes, the powers are at work in every society. Their desire to enslave man remains unchanged. But the terminology used for spiritual powers will vary in every society. Festus Suruma says "the numerous spirit beings, known by local terms in animistic societies, cannot be anything else but the same spirit beings, known in biblical language as demons, spirits, unclean spirits, evil spirits, etc." (Suruma, 1979, p. 38).

It is the task of the missionary to discover the terminology used for spiritual powers, by people in that society, and then to relate the Christian teaching on powers, in these terms, so as to speak to the life experience of the people.

Chart 1: Spiritual Powers

Paul's terms – Greek	Pidgin terms	Mid-Wahgi terms
principalities, powers, rulers, dominion, authorities, thrones, princes of this world, lords, angels, gods, demons, idols, elemental spirits, Satan, devil, Prince of this world	spirit nogut, was, sanguma, masalai, tambaran, posin, marila, kawawar, kambung nogut, askim mambu, singsing nogut, spirit bilong daiman, spirit bilong rop, ston, wara, bik, etc.	kipe, bolim, geru, kunje, kum tangil ngo, kipe kangi, kipe wal, kipe simbil, kipe tanji, asamb, bande, enj konge, kameng

OT terms	Western world
idols, Baal, Asherah, high places, altars, magic, spells, charms, astrology, false prophets, dreams, omens, sorcery, spirits of the dead, divination, Ex 22:18; Lev 20:6-7; Deut 18:9-13; Is 47:9-13; Jer 23; Ezek 13:18	occult, ESP, TM, human traditions, philosophy, permissiveness, immorality, materialism, affluence, political, social structures, these can be tools of evil powers

In Chart 1, I have compared the terms for spiritual powers, used by Paul, with the terms used in Pidgin, and in the local vernacular. The striking thing is the use of concrete concepts, in relation to powers in Melanesia (some of the terms translated are sorcery, witchcraft, divination, love magic, spirits of the bush, or mountain, or stream, ginger, lime, magic parcels). It is interesting to note the use of simi1ar concrete things in relation to powers in the Old Testament. It is not surprising to find this similarity, since the practical life experiences of Melanesians are closer to the Hebrew culture than the Greek culture. In particular, there are many warnings in the Old Testament about consulting the spirits of the dead (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:11; Is 8:19; Jer 27:9), and yet, there is no mention of this practice in Paul's writings. So the Old Testament is an excellent source book for helping to explain, and illustrate, in concrete terms, the abstract teachings of Paul. Culturally-equivalent stories provide practical demonstrations of God's power over evil. I will illustrate this with three such stories.

(a) Yahweh's power is seen to be greater than the power of the Egyptian gods, as Moses challenges Pharaoh and his magicians (Ex 7-14).

(b) Elijah, the prophet of God, demonstrates that Yahweh's power is greater than the power of Baal, in this encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel (1 Kings 18).

(c) Josiah is a man approved by God, because he put away all the objects used in the worship of Baal, Asherah, and the stars (2 Kings 23 – see the drawing in the Good New Bible, p. 395). If Josiah had been a

Melanesian, it would have been the masks, carvings, ginger plants, parcels, and bones of ancestors that were burnt in the fire.

There are stories in the New Testament, too, which provide living demonstrations of God's power over evil forces. Jesus proves He is Lord of evil powers in His encounter with evil spirits (Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20). Paul demonstrates victory in Jesus' name, in his encounters with sorcerers and magic practices (Acts 13:6-13; 16:16-18; 19:12-19). The use of such examples, to teach the theology of powers, is essential in Melanesia, because truth is seen not so much in talk and theory, but in concrete practical demonstrations. Tippett's concept of a power encounter must be taken seriously in Melanesia, so that we don't just talk about God's power being greater than evil powers, but that we live by this truth, demonstrating it in our life, ministry, and encounters with the powers.

(e) A Note for the Western World

This application of biblical teaching to the life experience of people is a must for any culture. I can see that a theology of spiritual powers has been overlooked in the Western world, also. Spiritual powers manifest themselves in different ways in every society. The Western world, too, must be ready to recognise the clothing of the spiritual powers in their society (see Chart 1). Once the tools of the powers are discerned, Western Christians can begin to unmask the powers, to take the biblical teaching on powers seriously in their own culture, and come to experience the liberty and victory that is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. The Content of Our Teaching

We have already seen that our theology of spiritual powers will influence the content of our message, and, therefore, the content of our teaching. This has special application for me in my teaching ministry in a Bible college. My students need to go out with a message, which is relevant to their people. It is obvious that a Western theological curriculum will not deal adequately with the whole area of spiritual powers. It is not sufficient to add onto our Western systematic theology a section on powers, because we are in a Melanesian context. The development of an ethnotheology for Melanesia will need to take seriously the whole truth of scripture, as it is related to the spiritual powers in Melanesia. This, in itself, could be the topic of further reading and research, but, here, I would like to suggest several points of

teaching that I feel need to be emphasised, if this biblical theology of powers is to be made relevant to the Melanesian life experience.

(i) God: The Maker and Owner of All Things

The doctrine of God as the Creator should be the starting point of any theology, for this truth clearly states God's sovereignty over every created thing.

This unique, Almighty God, who is holy, omniscient, omnipresent, and transcendent, is completely different to the immanent spirit beings of the Melanesian world. God is a personal being, who shows mercy, love, and compassion. He is omnipotent, His power being greater than any other power. He is the great Protector and Provider, who can shield us from any evil influence in our lives, and supply all our physical and spiritual needs. The character of God can be taught by studying His dealings with mankind, both with individuals and with nations, throughout history. This teaching on the character of God needs to be deeply embedded, at a worldview level, both in theory and practice. It is no use introducing this teaching at the time of a crisis, when thinking has reverted back to traditional beliefs. It needs to be taught in fair skies, as preparation beliefs. It needs to be taught in fair skies in preparation for the challenges, which will come with the dark skies. Then a crisis can, in fact, prove, and reinforce, this teaching.

(ii) Man: His Origin, Nature, and Purpose

Man, as a created being, has a special purpose in God's creation. He is to act as vice-regent, being responsible for God's creation. This chief purpose is to honour and glorify God. It is as we discover what man was created to be that we realise that something has spoiled God's perfect creation. Good teaching on man, as God created him, man in his fallen condition, and man recreated in Christ, will help Melanesians to see God's intended role for them, and, in particular, their relation to spirit powers in God's world.

(iii) Spiritual Powers: Their Origin, Activity, and Evil Purposes

It is important for Melanesians to understand that evil powers were originally created good and perfect by God, their Maker. There needs to be teaching on the fall of Satan and his angels, and the entry of evil into the world. God's perfect order for

creation has been disturbed by sin, such that the powers have become usurpers, dominating man, and separating him from fellowship with God. Man, in this state, needs liberating. Melanesians need to appreciate the needs of their people, who are still bound in the dominion of darkness.

(iv) Jesus Christ: The Liberator

Jesus Christ became perfect man, in order to defeat the power of sin, Satan, and death. By His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has won the victory over every evil power. In Melanesia, there can easily be an undue stress on Christ's death, and the power of His blood. There must be stronger teaching on the resurrection and ascension of Christ, for He must be known, and experienced, as the risen, ruling Christ. As the living Lord, He has power and authority over every other spiritual power.

(v) The Christian Life: A Break with Spiritual Powers

The need to turn away from dependence upon any kind of power, outside of Christ, needs to be strongly stressed. When speaking of powers, it is important to realise that Melanesians distinguish between powers, which bring harm (sickness, death, disaster), and powers, which bring good (gardens, successful hunting, healing, protection, obtaining a wife). A Christian is keen to have nothing to do with powers, which bring harm (Pidgin: *sanguma*, *posin*, *spirit nogut*). But those rituals and practices, which are for the good of the individual and the community, can be easily retained, for they are not seen as evil. The Pidgin translation of magic as "*posin*" actually supports this thinking, for it restricts magic to the power to kill. A better translation would be "*ol kain kain pawa*" (every kind of power), for the Bible clearly speaks against the use of any magic. It is evident that this emphasis is needed in Melanesia, because of the number of Christians, who have dissociated themselves from magic for evil purposes, but continue to use magic for planting gardens, or fishing, or hunting. And so biblical teaching on a Christian's relationship with powers must be translated to the practices of the daily lives of Melanesians.

Conclusion

I now return to the original issue. "What is the correct thinking about spirits?"

After this investigation of the biblical teaching on spiritual powers in Paul's writings, and its implications for mission in Melanesia, I would like to pass on some advice to those working in animistic societies. We need to think seriously about the spiritual powers expressed in traditional beliefs. These powers are real and powerful to those in the society. But, we need to turn the eyes of the people to Christ, who rules supreme over the spiritual powers, as Creator, Redeemer, Victor, and Living Lord. Yes, be aware of the presence and power of spiritual powers, but know, and proclaim, the greater power of God, and the victory every believer has, in union with Christ, in this present age. Point people to the certainty of complete triumph over every spiritual power, in the return of Christ and the consummation of this age. With this clear teaching firmly fixed in your thinking, and demonstrated in your life, meet the needs of both unbelievers still bound by spiritual powers, and Christians still living in fear of the spirits.

Yes, a biblical theology of spiritual powers, which is adequately related to the life experiences of the people, will transform your life and ministry, just as it has changed my life and ministry in Melanesia today.

Bibliography

Aherns, T., "Concepts of Power in Melanesia and a Biblical Perspective", in *Missiology* (1977), vol 5 no 2, pp. 141-173.

Barnhouse, D. G., *The Invisible War*, London UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1965.

Barrett, C. K., *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Adam & Charles Black, 1968.

Berends, W., "The Biblical Criteria for Demon Possession", in *The Westminster Theological Journal* (1975), vol 37 no 3, pp. 342-365.

Bruce, F. F., *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, London UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1961.

———, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, London UK: Tyndale Press, 1963.

Caird, 1954.

———, 1956.

Cole, R. A., *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1965.

Douglas, J. D. (ed.), *New Bible Dictionary*, London UK: IVF, 1962.

Hitchen, J. M.,

Kittel, G. (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1964.

Ladd, G. E., *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, London UK: Paternoster Press, 1959.

———, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1974.

Lenski, R. C. K., *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistles*, Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1964.

Lewis, C. S., *The Screwtape Letters*, London UK: Collins, 1942.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M., *The Christian Warfare*, London UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976.

MacGregor,

Martin, R. P., *Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1972.

Morris, L., *The Cross in the New Testament*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1976.

Moule, H. C. G., *Colossians and Philemon Studies*, London UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1957.

Murray, J., *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1968.

Nave, O. J., *Nave's Topical Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1977.

Nilles, J., "Simbu Ancestors and Christian Worship", in *Catalyst* (1977), vol 7 no 3, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, pp. 163-198.

Penn-Lewis, J., *War on the Saints*, Fort Washington PA: CLC, nd (abridged).

Pentecost, J. P., *Your Adversary the Devil*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1969.

Ridderbos, K., *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1953.

———, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1975.

Sanders, J. O., "Doctrinal Series: Anthropology, Angelology, Demonology", Auck1and: NZBC, nd.

Simpson, E. K., and Bruce, F. F., *Ephesians and Colossians*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1957.

Snyder, H. A., *Community of the King*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1978.

Stott, J. R. W., *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians*, London UK: IVP, 1968.

———, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1979.

Suruma, F., "Toabaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God's Word", Unpublished BTh thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, 1979.

Taruna, 1980.

Tippett, A. R., "Evangelisation of Animists", in *Let The World Hear His Voice*, J. D. Douglas (ed.), Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1974.

Tuza, E., "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia", in *Powers, Plumes, and Piglets: Phenomena of Melanesian Religion*, Canberra ACT: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979.

Unger, M. P., *Demons in the World Today*, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1971.

Wuest, K., *Word Studies: Ephesians and Colossians*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1953.

Yates, R., "The Powers of Evil in the New Testament", in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol 52 no 2, pp. 97-11l.

Myth and Counter-myth in the Siane

Br Silas SSF

[In the original, the texts for footnote numbers 5 and 6 were transposed. This has now been corrected. Ed.]

Introduction

Wherever people gather in groups to share life together, they develop a common identity, values, and worldview, and ways to restore order, when they are threatened. These features must be communicable to the next generation, and newcomers to the community, if it is to survive. One of the chief ways, in which this takes place, is through the use of myth, a complex of stories, which, together, explain why the community exists at all, and what sort of behaviour is required, if it is to continue to do so.

Although it is fairly easy for scholars to identify the key myths, at least in the literature of writing peoples, they turn out to be rather difficult to define.[1] For the purposes of this article, the most useful definitions are functionalist ones, such as Malinowski's: "Myth fulfils . . . an indispensable function; it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards, and enforces, morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual, and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is . . . not an idle tale, but a hard-worked force; it is not an intellectual explanation, or an artistic imagery, but a practical charter of . . . faith and moral wisdom."[2] Thus, the main point of a myth is that it "works", in creating and maintaining the community, whose property it is: a good myth is one, which expresses the identity of a community, and provides it with a framework, within which to understand the world, and respond to it in appropriate ways. But, precisely because the central myths are so important to the life of the community, they are highly resistant to change, or discussion: to question the myth is to threaten the social fabric. As a community changes, its foundational myths can become its prison.

---

[1] Of the making of definitions there seems no end. J. W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974, for example, lists 12 different ones before adding one of his own: stories or literature, which expressed the faith and worldview of a people. Definitions of the term "myth" depend largely on the interests of the writer; a broad functional definition, such as I am using here, occurs sufficiently often among other writers to justify its use.

[2] Quoted by M. MacDonald, "Symbolism and Myth", in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions Point* 6 (1984), E. Mantovani, ed., Goroka: Melanesian Institute.

The best example of this process in the biblical record concerns the complex of stories, which comprise the Abraham myth (Gen 12-24),[3] which, in some form or other, has been the foundation of Jewish identity for more than 2,500 years. The strong sense that they were "sons of Abraham", set them apart from the other nations, preserved the integrity of the Jewish people through long periods of exile, occupation, and diaspora, which would have destroyed most communities, and formed their understanding of their place in the world. The example of Abraham's trust in God's promises, and patience, despite apparent setbacks (e.g., Gen 22), became the basis of their faith; and circumcision, their key cultic activity, was ascribed to his example (Gen 17). The Jews, as a community, were inseparable from the Abraham myth, which bore their identity, worldview, and values. This explains much of the opposition encountered by Jesus: His questioning of the value of the myth (John 8:31-59) led to a violent response, and probably contributed to His death. By questioning the value of descent from Abraham, He was threatening the very basis of Jewish identity, and so, their future as a people.[4]

But, by the time of Jesus, such a challenge was overdue. The Abraham myth had become less a focus for Jewish identity than a vehicle for its chauvinism, and a justification for the ever-increasing demands of the Law. In the primitive church, these attitudes, among Jewish Christians, caused serious problems, and it seems to have fallen to Paul to try to renegotiate the relationship between Jews, Gentiles, and God, as evidenced by the degree to which the subject dominates his writings. But, instead of confronting the myth as untrue, or invalid, he conducts a counter-myth, which uses the materials of the original story, but rearranges, and reinterprets, them to arrive at new conclusions.[5] At no point, does he question the Jews' claims to special status (see Rom 3:1-4), but he contends that the true descendants of Abraham are those who live by faith (Gal 3:6-9; Rom 4:13-18), and criticises the effectiveness of Jewish practices, as a means of sharing his blessings (Rom 2:28-29). Instead, he implies that, in baptism, all claims, based on descent, are nullified (Rom 6: 1-6; 7:1-6), and so, the way is clear for Jews and Gentiles, alike, to become the true children of God (Eph 2:11-22).

---

[3] In referring to the story of Abraham as a myth, I am not implying that it is untrue. The point about a myth is that for practical purposes, it doesn't matter if it is true or not. It works to create a culture, and so, on existential grounds, is accepted as "true".

[4] See also John the Baptist's attitude in Matt 3:9, Lk 3:8.

[5] According to some readings of his work, Paul did not so much present a new interpretation of the Abraham-myth, as represent the original, uncorrupted version. For our purposes, this distinction is academic, and the main point is that he departed from the accepted interpretation of his time.

Had Paul confined himself to attacking isolated outbreaks of legalism and exclusivism in the church, he probably would have lost his battle to gain equal status for Gentile Christians. The power of the myth lay in the fact that it was an integrated way of looking at the world, and functioned on a number of different levels at once. In order to break the destructive patterns of behaviour in the church, he had to construct a counter-myth, which, using the same materials and assumptions, and addressing the same issues, pointed to a different course of action. Any patterns of behaviour in a community, which are rooted in its foundational myth, will resist change, because the identity of the people depends on their faithfulness to the myth. It is only the construction of a counter-myth, which preserves the element of identity from the original myth, but prescribes a different pattern of behaviour, that makes a change of behaviour possible. The remainder of this paper describes, and evaluates, a counter-myth, which we constructed, initially, to try to prevent outbreaks of torture, but, eventually, to confront the dominant sorcery myth of Siane society.

Myth . . .

Investigation of Siane society[6] has not yielded any signs of a "traditional religion", in the theistic sense, although respect for, and fear of, ancestors and spirits has its place. Neither do the Siane rely much for their sense of identity on a mythical history of their origins – modern Siane identity, at any rate, is located largely in the here (this world) and now, in relationships of blood, marriage, and land rights, in customs, and language. As long as these relationships continue in harmony, it is assumed that the clan controls its own destiny, and can thrive, and grow, in security. For these reasons, although most clans have their stories of origin, and culture heroes, relatively little weight seems to be attached to them, and they cannot be said to embody the clan values, identity, and worldview. However, this cannot be said of the complex of interlinked stories, beliefs, and practices relating to sorcery (Pidgin: *sanguma*), as I hope will be made clear below. So the term "myth" seems justified, even though the complex lacks narrative structure, and seems to have little in common with, for example, the story of Abraham.

The Siane worldview presupposes a closed, orderly, and harmonious world, in which even such unpredictable events as war follow prescribed patterns, unless there is interference from "outside", in which case, chaos and disorder quickly follow. The quintessential "outsider" is an evil spirit, itself a rather minor creature, which, at times,

[6] The Siane valley straddles the border between Eastern Highlands and Chimbu Provinces. Siane-speakers number 30,000-40,000. Evangelism of the area, by both Anglicans and Lutherans, began in the mid-1950s.

may take up residence in a dog, cricket, or other creature of the grasslands, which takes possession of (almost always) a woman, and so, wreaks havoc within the clan. It is said to enter its "host", either through the nostrils, or the fingernail-bed, and take up residence, either in the womb, or the temples, and "sorceresses" of this type are thought to gather in groups under a "queen", in order to assault the clan, under the direction of their "spirits-familiar". Thus, according to the myth, the immediate consequence of spirit-possession is the formation of a seditious secret society, threatening the clan's regular power structure. The spirits are believed to feed on human livers, extracted from living victims, although exactly how this takes place is unclear.[7] According to some accounts, the spirit enters an intermediate vehicle, usually a dog, to perform the necessary operation, and eat the liver itself, but others claim the women remove the liver and eat it. In either case, the extraction leaves no trace, but the victim falls ill for no apparent reason, and, unless the liver can be restored, soon dies.

Thus, any unexplained death is seen, not just as a loss to the clan, but as evidence of possible sorcery, with its subtext of clan vulnerability, and a threat to its power structure and identity. Whether or not the suspicion of sorcery is acted upon, seems to depend on other, additional circumstances discussed below: if it is, the next step is to enquire of the body whether it was a victim of sorcery. Since almost anything (an insect settling on the body, small movements due to the onset of rigor mortis, an elusive smell) can serve as a positive answer from the dead man. And so, since the interview takes place indoors, in near darkness, confirmation of the clan's suspicions is almost inevitable. In order to identify the culprits, the women are rounded up by the young men (usually at gun- and arrow-point), and interrogated. Suspicion naturally falls on those who had a grudge, or reason for one, against the deceased, but, if a confession is not forthcoming, further confirmation is sought from an external "white witch", who, for a substantial fee, will identify the culprits.

The purging process now dramatically enters a new phase. The normal routines of the clan are swept away, as the leaders step aside, and, in effect, abdicate power to the young men, who, for the next few days or weeks, will dominate all aspects of clan life. They arrest the sorceresses, and begin a process of "exorcism", which rests upon the theory that pain inflicted on the sorceress is also felt by the inhabiting spirit, which, with sufficient pain, can be induced to leave. The evidence that the spirit has, indeed, been driven out, is that its former host makes a full confession of her own crimes, and names the other women involved.

[7] It is unclear, from the stories, whether "possession" is involuntary, or by invitation of the host. One stated aim of the "exorcism" is to deliver the woman of an unwelcome invader, but the fact that she later has to pay compensation to her victims' families, presumes some moral responsibility on her part.

A rope is tied under the arms, or around the neck, of the sorceress. This is passed over the rafters of the house, and tightened until she is suspended over the fire. As she is burnt, her thighs and biceps are pierced through with knives, and red-hot wires are passed through the wounds. If no "confession" results, the torture may continue all night, or she may die – in which case, it was the spirit, not the torture, which killed her to prevent her from talking. Since a "true" confession implicates other women, there is no natural end to the process, and the scope and intensity of the process could continue indefinitely – in one case virtually all the women of the clan were eventually accused – but, in practice, interest tends to flag after a few weeks of chaos and spasmodic activity, and the community returns to some degree of equilibrium.

Although the events described are very exceptional, and abnormal, in the life of the clan, they act out, test, and refine, the key beliefs and structures, which maintain its existence, and stories of sorcery, and its consequences circulate constantly to drive the message home. As already mentioned, Siane society operates on the presumption that, if its social relationships are well-ordered, and stable, its world will be predictable and friendly, but when they are disturbed, chaos and death rapidly follow. This worldview gives rise to both the *sanguma* myth, and its acting out, in the dissolution of clan structures, and anarchy, which accompany the clan's response. The "normal" power structure in the Siane revolves around the older men, particularly those who were first-born, and have several grown-up sons of their own, who administer the community's land, and so, have some measure of control over its economic life. Younger men have less status and unmarried "boys" virtually none, though these distinctions have become blurred, since male initiation died out, and the better-educated young men may now have disproportionate status. Right at the bottom of the social pyramid, are the women, who are viewed with suspicion, or even fear. This is partly because female fertility is, itself, seen as a magical, powerful property,[8] but may be more to do with the ambiguous relationship of women to the clan as a whole. Being patrilocal and patrilineal, men hold the land, and marry women from outside the clan; so, a married woman is, by definition, an outsider. Her loyalties are divided between her husband's clan and her own, which may be an enemy. Thus, in any given clan, the

[8] Incidentally, the way the myth is constructed, reflects the "sacred geography" of the Siane, in which the mountain and the valley tend to be men's and women's domains, respectively. Men handle hunting, karuka nuts, and bush materials – all from the mountain, and believe their ancestor-spirits congregate there. Men, alone, plant the phallic-shaped yams, which grow at higher altitudes. The valley is associated with red pandanus (linked to menstruation), the globular yams, planted exclusively by the women, and the sanguma spirits, which take the form of a valley-dwelling insect. When sorcery is discovered, it may be perceived as an invasion by the women's (valley) domain.

wives are a potential fifth column, threatening its leadership, and so its potency and future.

However, as already mentioned, not every unexplained death seems to confirm fears of sorcery. In the three cases, with which I have been involved, the following could be considered aggravating factors:

1. The leadership, and, therefore, the clan, was weak or divided, and this had a direct effect upon the well-being of its members. In one case, the lack of leadership had disrupted garden work, and so food supplies, and a succession of deaths, leading to the charge of sorcery, could otherwise have been blamed on the combined effects of heat, drought, and hunger. In the second, the leadership had lost control over some of the young men, who had committed a series of thefts against neighbouring clans. One spectacular theft involved more money than even the combined resources of the clan could repay, and the aggrieved clan had threatened sorcery in retaliation. Interestingly, this threat was not mentioned at all when sorcery was feared to have taken place! In the third case, the clan had been divided between two different candidates at the time of the national election, and the resulting fighting had led to a death. Accusations of sorcery began just a fortnight before compensation was due to be paid on the deceased, and so put the matter to rest.

   Each of these cases could be read as an example of "scapegoating", i.e., the transfer of blame and punishment from the group, as a whole, to a powerless individual, or sub-group. The malaise in the clan is real, but the way the myth functions is to project blame away from the real culprits to those who cannot fight back.

2. In every case observed, there was a large group of disaffected young men in the clan. Traditionally, these have no significant status in peacetime, and their alienation has been aggravated by the education system. Many of them have been sent away to high school, but dropped out, or failed to find work after graduation. They are often further marginalised by the older people, who worked hard to pay school fees, only to see their expectations of rich rewards come to nothing, and, as a result, may find it hard to pay bride price, or find a voice in the community. During a sorcery purge, however, they are promoted from the margins to the centre of society, and, for a few days, at least, rule the roost – possibly an incentive to inflate claims that sorcery has taken place. In this regard, it

is interesting that two of the three cases took place during school holidays, when bored students added to their numbers.

Thus, it seems likely that underlying the immediate threat from sorcery is a more diffuse sense that all is not right with the clan. Clans, where there is a secure leadership, harmony, unity, and a feeling that the group is in control of its own destiny, are unlikely to overreact to an unexplained death, but in an atmosphere of dissatisfaction, frustration, fear, and community disintegration, the search is on for a scapegoat, to be purged in an outbreak of anarchy and violence. So, if the church is to bring the gospel into the heart of Siane life, it must address not only the fear of sorcery, but the whole complex of community disorders, which contribute to the perception that fear has become a reality. This, of course, is a long-term pastoral challenge, beyond the scope of this paper – ultimately, the clan must be refocused around the worship of, and allegiance to, Christ, if fear is to be banished for good. But a counter-myth, which uses the same stories, in light of the knowledge of Christ, to reach a different set of conclusions, can help to begin to bring this about.

. . . and Counter-myth

Up to the present day, the church has had little success in countering the *sanguma* myth in the Siane, and, if anything, sorcery trials are becoming both more frequent and more destructive. This is probably because the church's critique has always focused on a single issue rather than the whole package of ideas and perceptions, which comprise the myth, and, through it, the basis of Siane society.

Thus, some clergy doubt the existence of sorcery. Although they may receive formal support from a few clan members, who don't wish to be seen as "primitive", my own experience is that the issue is simply not negotiable, and this is to be expected, where a myth is at stake. Because it represents a whole integrated worldview, the myth is perceived as subjectively, existentially, true, and is not up for argument. Casting doubt on its validity simply confirms the view of the people that, as outsiders, church workers cannot understand, and, therefore, should be excluded from the discussion.

A second approach, is to criticise the torturing of the women as being incompatible with Christianity, but this fails to take the problem seriously. If sorcery actually has taken place (and, from the Siane point of view, by this stage, it has), there is every reason to believe that more people will die, unless the spirits are driven out. In such a case, a little suffering, or even death, is a smaI1 price to pay, and it is

irresponsible of the church to urge the clan simply to do nothing, and open itself to possible extinction when a remedy is to hand.

Thirdly, some church workers abandon attempts to confront the myth, and limit themselves to trying to mitigate its effects: urging moderation on the young men, bathing the victims, as they hang over the fire, finding medical attention for them, and helping them to run away, if threatened. Obviously inadequate, as a Christian response, this strategy also seems rather self-defeating. Since the whole point of the "exorcism" depends on inflicting sufficient pain, reducing the intensity of the pain may simply mean it must be continued for longer.

None of these solutions has been well received by the people, and, if *sanguma* stories are, indeed, part of the foundational myth, it is easy to see why this should be so. Each of these approaches detracts from the myth, without putting anything back. It is perceived as weakening the clan, by neutralising the power of the myth, without supplying any alternative. A counter-myth must be provided, which addresses all of the same issues as the myth it seeks to replace – the destiny, security, order, and well-being of the clan – and also offers a remedy for the immediate problem of sorcery.

The counter-myth, described here, consists of two parts: a critique of the traditional view of *sanguma*, in its own terms, and a Christian alternative, which seeks to remedy both the immediate problem and the underlying insecurities. It rests on a strongly dualistic view of good and evil, and could be summarised thus:

1. Traditional solutions are not, and can never be, effective against sorcery, because they deal only with the surface phenomena, and ignore the root of the problem.

2. The root of sorcery is Satan, who has been made honorary leader of the clan, by the whole clan's misdeeds.

3. The solution is to drive Satan from the clan, and replace him with Jesus, who will protect it from all evil.

The whole was presented as a series of parables from Siane daily life.

1. Sorcery was likened to kunai grass in the garden, which will grow again, as often as it is cut, for as long as its taproot remains in the ground. Sorcery has a shoot (woman), and a root (Satan), and, however many women are "exorcised", the problem will persist and thrive, unless Satan

is expelled. Furthermore, the use of violence (Satan's tool) to drive out sorcery (Satan's tool) is as futile as trying to douse a house fire with kerosene. Places, where there are regular purgings of this kind, continue to be plagued with sorcery.

2. Jesus wishes to ring-fence this clan in such a way as to prevent any evil spirits from entering.[9] But the clan, itself, rejects this solution: members, themselves, break Jesus' fence, in order to follow Satan into sin, and, themselves, invite Satan to share the life of the clan. If he then makes himself at home, and behaves according to his nature, it is the fault of the whole clan. The only remedy is for all to unite to drive him out, and restore the clan under Jesus' protection.

3. This means the whole community must repent, and be restored to the church. The act of repentance had three parts, beginning with a sprinkling with holy water to drive out the evil spirits. After this, at the insistence of the people, each woman had to come and swear on the Bible that she would avoid any involvement with sorcery, and this reflected a popular belief that, having sworn in this way, an attempt by the women to harm others would only harm themselves. Finally, all were received back into communion in the church.

So far, this approach has been tried on three occasions, where the inquisition and exorcism process had already begun, and, in each case, it seemed to bring the process to a halt, restore equilibrium to the clan, and bring about a reconciliation with the church. In these respects, it can be viewed as a "success", though the longer-term benefits are harder to assess. It is encouraging that the counter-myth has given, and gives rise, to spirited theological discussion, which suggests it is being internalised, and is becoming part of the clan worldview, but it remains to be seen whether it will become truly part of clan life. The long-term transformation, as already noted, will depend more on committed pastoral care.

Inasmuch as the intervention has already been a "success", I believe it is because the counter-myth functions in the same way as the myth it seeks to replace. It confronts insecurity and disorder in the clan, and supplies a remedy. By emphasising community faithfulness, it restores the role of the leaders, as responsible for ensuring the Christian commitment of their people, for the sake of the clan. It gives the whole

[9] Useful support for this point derives from the confessions of some sorceresses, who claimed that they were unable to invade the body of a devout Christian - when they tried, they were prevented, at the wrist or neck, by a whirling, propeller-like object.

clan a sense of control over its future, and preserves a place for the youth, in rounding up the women (at gunpoint!) for the act of repentance. Most of all, it gives a theological framework, and, in the church, a focus of unity, with which the clan can work through its problems.

Critique and Conclusions

Although the myth-counter-myth approach seems effective in this case, some important questions remain. It could be argued that it falls short, because of its essentially conservative nature – it restores the traditional power structure, without questioning it. In particular, it fails to question the role of women as statusless, marginal, and potentially threatening, and so, leaves them as potential scapegoats for the future. This is, to some extent, because of the way the approach developed, and was used, as an emergency intervention, to prevent further suffering and death, rather than as a systematic vision of a restored Siane society. But the status of women is, in any case, not susceptible to much change at the moment, for, as long as the men hold the land, and the women have to move to marry, they will remain outsiders in the clan. Even our contention that the men were as much to blame as the women in "inviting Satan into the clan" proved to be the hardest item for the Siane men to accept.

A more serious question, in the long run, is whether the counter-myth, as well as being useful, is also "true", or whether the basic character of the gospel has been lost, in the attempt to give it the same properties as the original myth. Is this lurid, magical, dualistic story the gospel at all? This, of course, is an old missiological problem: whether it is possible to change the form of the gospel message (even by translating it into another language) without destroying its content. The best that can be said, in this case, is that the central gospel message (Christ is able and willing to save all who come to Him) is clear enough. The lurid trappings are only a means to communicate this vital fact, and, in themselves, do not say anything wrong about God.

Did Jesus Envisage a Gentile Mission?

Peter Yeats

[Footnote number 4 was missing from the original. As a result, footnote numbers 5 to 35 have now been renumbered to footnote numbers 4 to 34. The title of the book, authored by Wilson in 1973, as cited in a number of footnotes, was not shown in the bibliography of the original, and is not known. Ed.]

Introduction

This paper had its beginnings in a reading heard at evening prayer. The institution, in which I work, uses the Good News Bible for worship, and the reading was from Matt 20:17-28. Two words, in particular, struck me: in v. 19, the gospel says, "They will condemn Him to death, and then hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him, whip Him, and crucify Him", and v. 25 says "the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority". The word "Gentile" is quite common, and is used, even by Christians. A Gentile is a non-Jew. But the word "heathen", certainly in modern English, is usually used somewhat negatively. Was this latter word the original word used in the gospel, or was it the choice of the translator?

The answer, on looking at the Greek, was that it was purely the choice of the translator; in Greek the word translated as "heathen" (and in other parts of the GNB as "pagan") is, in fact, the same as the word for Gentile – ἔθνος = "*ethnos*". So, given that the GNB, as it states in its introduction, "Seeks to express the meaning of the Greek text in words and forms accepted as standard by people everywhere, who employ English as a means of communication", how justified was the translator in using what is, in English, a pejorative term?

In one sense, the question is not so much about the use of a particular word. As will be discussed later, "ethnos" does have a variety of meanings – but the way in which the gospel writers portray Jesus' dealings with Gentiles, and, especially, the reason for the marked change, which occurs within the gospel of Matthew. In Matt 10:5-6, we read, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go, rather, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". By the end of the gospel, this has changed to, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations". Matthew makes no attempt to hide the apparent contradiction, whereas, in the parallels of Matt 10:5-6 (Mk 6:7-13 and Lk 9:1-6), the exclusivist words are omitted. Both

Matthew and Mark relate the story of the Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21ff; Mk 7:24ff), while Luke does not mention it at all. If the issue of how the early church should respond to the Gentiles had been resolved, albeit with the struggles and arguments described in Acts, before the gospels were set down, why then were the contradictions allowed to remain, unless the writer of Matthew did not see them as contradictions? The answer to this apparent lack of concern, particularly within the gospel of Matthew, could well be found in the writer's particular "Jewishness", and in his view of the place of Jesus within salvation history, from a Jewish perspective.

This paper will attempt to explore whether this underlying theme, of Jesus being the fulfilment of Judaism, can be used to reconcile the contradictions, by looking, in particular, at two strands to be found within Jewish thought, as it relates to universal salvation. The first of these is the eschatological motif, which plays a major part in the gospel of Matthew: Jesus initiated the eschatological dawn, which would bring the nations to Zion. The second strand, which does relate to the first, is that of the place of Israel within salvation history, and, especially, how the priority of Israel could be seen as crucial for universal salvation: a priority, which is reflected in the gospel of Matthew. Both of these strands may help in understanding why it seems that the teaching of Jesus changes, as His ministry, as portrayed by Matthew, progresses.

We shall begin by looking at the way "*ethnos*" is used in the gospels. This will, it is hoped, answer the original question of why the translator of the GNB used the words, which he did. At the same time, it might explain why many of the references to Gentiles can be omitted from the present discussion. We shall then try to examine some of the contemporary attitudes to Gentiles in the first century AD. This will help to explain why the two strands of eschatology, and the place of Israel in salvation history, were chosen to be explored further. The discussion will then go on to look at how Jesus is reported, by Matthew, to have reacted to Gentiles within His ministry, looking at some of the arguments presented by scholars to explain the contradictions. The final two parts will try to deal with the two strands mentioned above.

The Use of "*Ethnos*" in the Gospels

The most commonly-used word in the Greek New Testament, which is translated as "Gentile", is the word ἔθνος = "*ethnos*" (race, nation), a word used in the Septuagint to translate 13 Hebrew words, all of which have the connotation of non-Jewish peoples or nations; the Septuagint word for the Jewish people is λαὸς = "*laos*" (people, tribe, nation). There are 162 references to "*ethnos*" in the New Testament, the majority in the epistles and the book of Revelation. Within the

gospels, the word occurs as follows: Matthew, 15 times; Mark, 6 times; Luke, 13 times (Acts, 43 times); and John, 5 times.

In the case of the fourth gospel, the writer seems to make no distinction between "*ethnos*" and "*laos*", and, therefore, includes the Jews, themselves, into "*ethnos*", possibly because he saw their refusal to acknowledge Jesus as a sign that they, too, were part of the evil world.[1] One rather striking example of this is in John 11:50: "Don't you realise that it is better for you to let one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?", in which the author switches from "*laos*" to "*ethnos*". This may well be for stylistic reasons, but, at the same time, it is interesting that, at this crucial point in the gospel, the nation of Israel is identified with the Gentiles. What can be noted from the writer's use of "ethnos" is that the term is pejorative, but the target of the word is reversed: the Jews are now that which the Jews thought the Gentiles to be.

Luke also moves between the two words, although it has been suggested that he tends to reserve "*laos*" for the church, with "*ethnos*" referring to all outsiders, including the Jews.[2] It could, though, be argued that as Luke/Acts can be seen as the particular "Gentile gospel", written by a Gentile for Gentiles, the Jewish understanding of the two words would be possibly neither understood, nor found to be agreeable; as mentioned above. Luke does not use some of the harsher references made by Matthew, such as the story of the Syrophoenician woman. Either he did not have access to these parts, or else he found them a source of embarrassment.[3]

One minor point, which does arise from Luke/Acts is that, in Acts 10:28, the word ἀλλοφύλῳ = "*allophulo*" (foreigner) is used instead of "*ethnos*". This is the only time that the word is used in the New Testament; in the Septuagint, it is the word used to describe the Philistines.

As we move on to the other two gospels: Matthew and Mark (and, indeed, many of the parallel references in Luke), it can be seen that many of the uses of the word "*ethnos*" seem to be a criticism of practice, rather than of people, stressing the difference between those who worship the One God, and those who worship many gods. As such, it is translated into English as "pagans", or "heathen". In English, these words have taken on a pejorative meaning, but there are no alternatives in Greek, "*ethnos*", used in this sense, was more a statement of fact; there was no alternative

[1] Turner, 1980, p. 302. Cf. Schmidt, K. L., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, p. 371.
[2] Turner, 1980, p. 302.
[3] For more on the Lukan omissions see Wilson, 1973, pp. 49-51.

word to describe those who did not worship the One God. In a sense, it was a criticism, as, for the Jews, the worship of the One God was the only true worship, but, unlike the English word, "heathen", which many non-Christians would find offensive, "*ethnos*" was merely a description of non-Jews – even if its context tended to be critical. Examples of its use in this way can be found in: Matt 6:7 ("When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases, as the Gentiles do"); Matt 5:47 ("the Gentiles love only their compatriots"); Mk 10:42 ("the rulers of the Gentiles are despots"); and Matt 20:17-28, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

This, then, answers the original question of why the translator of the GNB used the words "pagans" and "heathen": in English, there is no real alternative. But, it does not answer the deeper question of why, in the gospel of Matthew, there seem to be two different views of the Gentile mission.

It is worth mentioning here that Matthew, as opposed to Luke and John, is consistent in his use of terms. For him, "laos" is always the people of Israel, and "ethnos" always refers to the Gentiles.[4] This provides us with a clue as to the way Matthew is working, as he provides a clear contrast between Israel, which rejects Jesus, and the Gentiles, to whom the gospel is given. A striking example of this is in Matt 27:25, in which the "crowd" accepts responsibility for Jesus' death; Matthew changes from using ὄχλου = "*ochlou*" (crowd, multitude) in v. 24 to "*laos*" in v. 25. In other words, the crowd is not just a gathering of people, but the people of Israel, as a whole.

Jewish Attitudes to the Gentiles

The intention of this section is to try, briefly, to pinpoint the various strands, which seem to occur in the way the Jews thought about the Gentiles, and how they actually treated, and reacted to, the "*ethnos*", especially in the first century AD, in other words, the time which would have influenced both Jesus and Matthew.

One problem, here, is that there are many strands, which can be taken up, certainly within the Old Testament, strands which develop as the history of Israel developed,[5] some more positive towards the Gentiles than others. The general indication seems to have been that, although God has an interest in, and, indeed, a relationship with, the Gentiles, that interest was of little concern to the Jews, and was

[4] Sabourin, 1983, p. 66.
[5] Senior, 1983, p. 134, and Verkuyl, 1975, pp. 91ff.

rarely explored theologically.[6] References, such as Amos 1:3-2:3; 9:7; 19:19-25; and Is 45:1, indicate this divine interest, but there is no comment on it. The writings of the pre-exilic period are, on the whole, more positive than those of any other period. God was seen to be working within a universal context, in His creation of all things, in the covenant with Noah, which was for all humanity, and, in His call to Abraham, in whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). This universalism seems to have reached a peak in the writings of Third Isaiah, in which it is prophesied that God will even make some of the Gentiles priests and Levites (Is 66:21).

This positive view changed in the post-exilic period, probably as the Jews attempted to strengthen their position as a nation; both intermarriage, and mixed worship, between Jews and Gentiles were seen, not only as a threat to the Jewish race, but also to the religious community.[7] Much of the thinking about the Gentiles was based on the conclusion:

> "Since the true God has made Himself known to Israel, He is to be encountered only in Israel; and since the God of Israel is the only true God, He is also the God of the whole world. The first conclusion emphasises isolation, and exclusion from the rest of humankind, the second suggests a basic openness, and the possibility of reaching out to the nations."[8]

Thus, the relationship between God and the Gentiles was set within the relationship between God and Israel, and God, not humanity, would work out the ultimate salvation of the Gentiles within the God/Israel relationship. This view can be most clearly seen in the Jewish apocalyptic writings, in which the Gentiles will be led by God to Mount Zion to take part in worship of Him, and in the Messianic banquet. At the same time, there is a strong motif of eschatological revenge: that the nations will come to Zion, but as subjects of Israel, bringing their wealth to Israel, and bowing down before Israel (Is 60:11; 45:14).[9]

The above can be seen very much in a passive sense, in that the expectation of the bringing of the Gentiles to salvation, either through the place of Israel, as a "light to the nations", or in an eschatological gathering, or even both, was seen as being the work of God, without the need for human assistance. Such a fact might explain why there was so little comment on the universalist passages of the Old Testament: the relationship between God and the Gentiles, was noted, but it was God's problem, not

---

[6] Senior, 1983, p. 107.
[7] Cohen, 1987, pp. 50-51.
[8] Bosch, 1991, p. 19.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 19. For more on Jewish apocalyptic, see Russell, 1964, and Nickelsburg, 1981.

Israel's. Yet, even after saying this, there was a certain amount of conflict within Judaism, as can be seen by attitudes towards conversion, an issue, over which Rabbis seemed to disagree: was a convert a "full-Jew", or only a "part-Jew?[10] Cohen makes it clear that conversions did take place, and that, often, converts were fully accepted, but the question still arose as to whether one could be a Jew, without being born as one. The fact that such a question was raised again points to the passive nature of Israel, in the salvation of the Gentiles. If one can only be a Jew by birth, then mission activity is unnecessary, as such activity cannot alter whether one is of the house of Israel or not.

This all goes some way in helping to explain the hesitation of the early church in taking up the Gentile mission. Such a mission, by its very nature, involves an active participation, an actual going out, which contradicts much of Jewish thought, which was more centripetal in nature. This is particularly true of the eschatological strand, but it will have to be seen whether the other strand, Israel, as a light to the nations, can be taken as being centrifugal.

Jesus and the Gentiles

In the gospels, there are only three clear examples of Jesus' helping Gentiles: the curing of the Gadarene demonic (Matt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20), the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13), and the curing of the Syrophoenician women's daughter (Matt 15:21ff; Mk 7:24ff). In addition to these, it could be argued that the crowds, who followed Jesus, must have included Gentiles, thus coming into direct contact with Him, although Sabourin discounts this.[11] In the case of the Gadarene demonic, it is never stated that the man is a Gentile, although the text does hint at it: he is looking after swine; the scene is set in the Decapolis, and the man uses the phrase "the Most High God" (v. 7), which, in the Old Testament, is used mainly by non-Jews.[12] The last of the examples, the Syrophoenician woman, is of particular interest, because of the dialogue, which takes place between Jesus and the woman, and especially the language used by Jesus. As mentioned earlier, Luke does not use this story at all.

What stands out in the story are the somewhat harsh words used by Jesus in His original refusal to help the woman: "Let the children be fed first. for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." It is certain that the term "dogs"

[10] Cohen, 1987, pp. 50-55.
[11] Sabourin, 1983, p. 72.
[12] Wilson, 1973, p. 11.

was an insult, and would have been understood as such. There is some discussion among scholars as to the actual way κυνάριον = "*kunarion*" (dog) is used. It has been suggested that it is a diminutive, meaning "puppy", or a household pet, both of which would soften the insult.[13] But, as the story develops, Jesus does relent, but not until the woman has acknowledged the priority of the Jews,[14] or, as Jeremias puts it more emphatically, "Jesus does not grant her request until she has recognised the divinely-ordained division between God's people and the Gentiles. The division "remains sacred".[15]

Wilson goes on to use this story as a way to point out the links between the three examples of Jesus helping Gentiles, and, by doing so, tries to show that they are exceptions to His normal practice. Wilson points out that, in a similar way to the centurion's servant, the healing is done at a distance, without Jesus actually being present with the person to be hea1ed. It must be said, though, that, while this is clearly true in the case of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, in the case of the centurion's servant, it is equally clear that Jesus was, in fact, on His way to cure the man. He is stopped before He gets there.

The second factor, which points to these three examples as being exceptions, rather than the basis of a rule, is that Jesus, Himself, felt the need to contradict any idea among His followers of a Gentile mission, in both 10:5-6 and 15:24, Wilson, following Munck, concludes:

> "We can go on to suggest that these words may have been spoken to the disciples, to prevent them from misunderstanding Jesus' exceptional dealings with the Gentiles, and concluding that He intended there to be a Gentile mission."[16]

There is, though, a more positive side. If miracles are, in themselves, a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God (Lk 11:20), then the inclusion of Gentiles into the miracle of healing is, itself, a sign of their inclusion in the kingdom. Many of the references to the Gentiles are included as part of a strong eschatological motif, in which the inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God is seen as a fulfilment of all things. In particular, the symbolism of the Messianic banquet stresses that, in the end, the nations will sit down to feast on the same basis as the chosen people. By

---

[13] For the arguments over the meaning of *kunarion*, see Wilson, 1973, pp. 9-10, and Jeremias, 1958, p. 29. Jeremias rejects the idea of the word being a diminutive, as Aramaic has no such form.
[14] Wilson, 1973, p. 12.
[15] Jeremias, 1958, pp. 41-46.
[16] Wilson, 1973, p. 12.

using the banquet theme, Jesus removes the common idea of vengeance from the Jewish eschatological expectation.[17] At the same time, He also breaks away from the idea that the nations would come to Zion as subject pilgrims. Jesus shifts the boundaries of who are God's people from Israel, itself, to include all those who respond to the grace of God.[18]

There are, also, important references to the Gentiles, which do not fit into the eschatological category, and which present a much more positive view of a Gentile mission: Matt 26:13 (par. Mk 14:9), and Matt 24:14 (par. Mk 13:10; Lk 21:13). As they stand, both of these indicate that the gospel will be spread before the eschaton. Indeed, Mk 13:10 implies that the gospel proclamation to all nations must happen before the eschaton. They stand in direct contradiction to Matt 10:5-6, 23; and Matt 15:24. There would appear to be two distinct, and contradictory, strands to be found in the gospel. One way of resolving this contradiction is to deny the authenticity of one or other of the strands: Harnack argues that all references to a Gentile mission, in the teaching of Jesus, are not authentic, whilst Spitla rejects the authenticity of the particularist sayings. Bosch accepts both strands as being authentic, and as being non-contradictory; Matt 10:23 refers to a continuing Jewish mission during the whole period between the resurrection and the parousia, not, in itself, denying a Gentile mission during the same period, as envisaged in Matt 24:14.[19]

A further attempt at resolution is to be found in the concept of "representative universalism". Jesus' primary task was to create "such a community in Israel in the faith that it would transform the life of His own people, and that a transformed Israel would transform the world".[20] As Wilson points out, this view does have the advantage of explaining why Jesus restricts His mission to Israel, and explains His choosing of the 12 disciples as a symbol of the restitution of Israel. But, what it fails to take into account, is the condemnation of Israel by Jesus for their failure to repent, and that He connects the obduracy of the Jews with the future inclusion of the Gentiles, as envisaged in the theme of the Messianic banquet, and in references, such as Matt 8:11; 10:15ff; 11:21-24; 12:38-42; and Mk 11:15-17.[21]

We shall return to this point again, in the final section, as it, in turn, reflects the idea of the Gentile mission being possible only through Israel: Israel being either the

---

[17] Jeremias, 1958, pp. 41-46.

[18] Senior, 1983, pp. 152-158.

[19] For these references, see Wilson, 1973, pp. 21-23. Bosch's view can be further seen in Bosch, 1991, pp. 59-62.

[20] Manson, T. W., *Jesus and the Non-Jews*, London, 1955, p. 18, quoted in Wilson, 1973, p. 23.

[21] Wilson, 1973, p. 23.

preparation for such a mission, or, as already suggested, the refusal of Israel to accept Jesus and His mission, being the cause of the Gentile mission.

The Eschatological Interpretation

Jeremias[22] puts the solution onto an eschatological basis, by reinterpreting Mk 14:9, which, in turn, opens up the eschatological interpretation of the "contradictions" in Matthew. In Jeremias' view, the phrase **ὅπου ἐὰν** = "*hopou ean*" (wherever) should be understood in terms of time, rather than place, as in Mk 9:18, and should, therefore, be translated as "whenever", rather than "wherever"; **εἰς μνημόσυνον** = "*eis mnenosunon*" (for a memorial) refers to God's remembrance of the woman's deed on judgment day, the term being used, as in Gen 30:32; Num 10:9; and Ps 25:7; and **κηρυχθῇ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον** = "*keruchthe to euangelion*" (is proclaimed the gospel) represents the primitive church view of "*euangelion*", found in Rev 14:6, the apocalyptic proclamation of the eternal gospel. Thus, Jeremias translates Mk 14:9 as: "Amen, I say unto you, when the triumphal news is proclaimed (by God's angel) to all the world, then will her act be remembered (before God), so that He may be gracious to her (at the last judgment)." Although Wilson agrees with Jeremias' conclusion that both Mk 13:10 and 14:9 should be interpreted eschatologically, he does not agree with Jeremias' method, and questions his linguistic arguments.[23] Wilson concludes:

> "We have found that Jesus did not expect there to be a historical Gentile mission, and that His teaching on the Gentiles is inseparably linked with His teaching on eschatology. . . . Jesus believed that the parousia was imminent, so that there was no room for a historical Gentile mission. He maintained a positive hope for the Gentiles, but believed that this hope would be fulfilled in the apocalyptic events of the end time; then, and only then, would the Gentiles enter the kingdom of God."[24]

In many ways, this solution does manage to hold together the two strands in the teaching of Jesus, and explains the way in which the Gentile mission did, in fact, develop in the post-resurrection period. The resurrection can be seen as the dawn of the last day,[25] and the impetus for mission is in the realisation that, although the drawing of the Gentiles to Zion is God's work, "It offers the possibility of cooperating

[22] Jeremias, 1958, p. 22.
[23] Wilson, 1973, pp. 25-26.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[25] Jeremias, 1958, p. 74.

with God, in His gracious anticipation of the decisive hour of redemption, described in Is 25."[26]

It also has the advantage of not only fitting in with the words of Jesus, but, at the same time, seeing the message of Jesus as being a part of, or at least influenced by, the post-exilic Jewish apocalyptic material. At the end, the Gentiles will come to Zion, and worship the One God, and, in Jesus, that end is now, or, at least, the beginning of the end is now.

What it fails to do is to hold together the tension within the gospels of a future eschatology, and, if one can use the phrase, a present eschatology. The eschatological reaching of Jesus is only a part of His teaching, and, to concentrate on it, is to ignore the rest of His ministry, especially the central motif of the kingdom of God. As Kasper points out,[27] this concept of the kingdom of God is not a new idea of Jesus: it runs through Jewish thought, but again very much in terms of eschatology:

> "Eschatological and apocalyptic statements transpose an experienced and hoped-for salvation into a mode of fulfilment. They have to do with the certainty of the belief that, at the end, God will reveal Himself as the absolute Lord of all the world."[28]

Jesus gives a new twist to this, by announcing that the fulfilment of that hope is now, and that the new age has come. His ministry, His miracles, and, ultimately, His death and resurrection, do not point forward to what is to come, but point to what is already present.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Jesus destroys the boundaries, which the Jews had built up around themselves in the post-exilic writings. Although He never disputes the basis of apocalyptic thought, Jesus redefines the concept of the people of God. No longer does it refer only to Israel, but to all those who respond to God. Narrow nationalism was no longer an adequate boundary.

Universal Salvation Through Israel

In the Old Testament, there is major tension between the ideas of particularism and universalism. The former is the most prominent in the writings, as it involves the

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[27] Kasper, 1977, p. 74.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

basic concept of election: that Israel was the chosen people. As mentioned earlier, and further discussed by Bright,[29] part of the tension is between the ideas of monotheism and election. If there is only one God, then He must be a universal God: yet He has chosen Israel, and has a special relationship with Israel. As already discussed, this led, especially in the struggles for a national identity, to the idea of the subjugation of the nations to Israel, and thus to God. The relationship between God and the nations may have been mentioned, but it was never really followed through.

Mendenhall[30] points out that there is no direct reference to Israel being the "chosen" of God before about 623 BC, although the direct mention of the idea at that time was an expression of a belief already held. The Hebrew word for "election", בָּחַר = "*bahar*" seems to have two essential characteristics: that of a careful choice brought about by need, and the implication of a part of a group being set aside in order to perform a particular function within the larger group.[31] Seebass, in relation to this latter characteristic, says:

> "The horizon of the election of the people of Israel, is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which, as a whole, the "individual" Israel was chosen. "*Bahar*", as a technical term for the election of the people of Israel, stands under the symbol of universalism."[32]

Thus, in this interpretation, Israel as the chosen of God, is not set aside as a special case, with the nations being, in turn, rejected, but is chosen, in order to perform a special function within all the nations of the world, including Israel. Indeed, both of the characteristics of the word "*bahar*" would, in themselves, seem to discount any form of particularism. The idea of being "chosen" is more of a duty, indeed possibly a burden, rather than a privilege, to those who are chosen.

This all reflects back to the book of Genesis, in which the plan of God is revealed. Gen 1-11 describes the problem, the sin of *all* humanity, the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the wickedness of the people of the world before the flood, and the pride of a united population, which attempts to build the Tower of Babel. Up to this point, there is no distinction in the way God acts with people, unless the distinction is between the righteous and the unrighteous: even the covenant with Noah is between

---

[29] Bright, 1960, p. 429.
[30] Mendenhall, G., "Election", in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 76.
[31] Senior, 1983, p. 94.
[32] Seebaas, H., "Bachar, II-III", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1977, vol 2, p. 84.

God and "all living beings". In Gen 12, the solution to the problem is presented, continuing, it could be argued, until Rev 22. One man, Abraham, is chosen, not as the sole beneficiary of God's favours, but, so that, "through you I will bless all the nations".

This universalist strand to the Old Testament often seems to get lost, as the writers focus more and more on Israel, itself. The word "*bahar*" came to signify the choosing of the king, during the period of the monarchy, and then the choosing of the sanctuary of the Temple, built by the kings, for the people to worship in. Thus, the concept of election became caught up in a particularist view, which, in turn, led to the eschatological idea of the nations having to come to Zion to worship God at the end. Israel and the Temple were chosen by God, to the exclusion of others, therefore, the others had to come to the Temple as the only place to worship God.

But, the universalist strand once again becomes more explicit in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, who struggles with the tension produced by the two strands. He deals with the salvation of Israel, but does so in the context of God's work in the world. The exile in Babylon is linked with the slavery in Egypt. But the new Exodus, from Babylon, will be of international importance, involving the collapse of the Babylonian empire, and the raising up of Cyrus as the Lord's "anointed": a foreigner, who is "chosen" to take a leading part in the salvation of Israel. In the devastation of the exile, and in the new exodus, Israel displays its function among the nations:

> "I have a greater task for you, my servant. Not only will you restore to greatness the people of Israel, who have survived, but I will also make you a light to the nations – so that all the world will be saved" (Is 49:6).

As Seebass comments:

> "It [the word "*bahar*"] is used paradoxically in the preaching of this prophet to show vividly, and clearly, that Israel was chosen for the nations, and, at the very moment she was destroyed, was put in a position, where she could enter into a lawsuit with the nations."[33]

It must, though, be stressed that the more-universalist attitude of Deutero-Isaiah is set within the particularism of the eschatological pilgrimage to Jerusalem, including the motif of subjugation (Is 49:7, 23). What is found in the words of the prophet, is a willingness to talk of God in terms of the world, rather than just Israel.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Conclusion

How then does all of this fit in with the gospel of Matthew, and the question of the possible change in the attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles, as expressed by the evangelist?

For Matthew, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the Jews is seen as a refusal by the Jews to accept their position as the chosen people of God. Therefore, God selects another group, the church, to continue His purpose. The parable of the tenants in the vineyard (21:33-46) makes clear that the kingdom of God will be given to another nation (ἔθνει = "ethnei" (to a nation) – v. 43), because of the failure of Israel to produce the fruit required by God. This can be referred back to the two characteristics of the word "*bahar*", mentioned above: Israel was chosen because of a particular "need": the fulfilment of the plan of God. As the need changes, in the incarnation, so, the responsibility shifts to another group. This is not a rejection of the Jews. Being "chosen" describes a function within a group, and the function, which Israel had is given to another part of the group, to be performed for the benefit of all, including the Jews. Indeed, Israel still plays a part in the plan, as the people from whom salvation comes. Jesus does not reject the priority of the Jews, but He does universalise the plan of God more explicitly, by working through the Jews. During His lifetime, there was no point in going out to the Gentiles, as there was, as yet, for them, no good news. What Jesus taught was aimed primarily at the Jews, who, however much they might have disagreed, would have understood what He was trying to say. But, after the resurrection, Jesus, Himself, takes on a new universal significance.

The death and resurrection of Jesus signify the good news of the great commission. Without them, there is no good news for all humanity: only a reinterpretation for the Jews. The gospel depends on the resurrection. The life and teachings of Jesus were set within the context of Judaism, and many of the images and concepts, which He used, were those of Judaism. In this sense, most of His ministry can be seen as a fulfilment of the Old Testament, the particular salvation history, which God was working through Israel, and, as such, was directed toward the people of Israel. This is not to say that there was nothing in His teaching for the Gentiles: the basic ethic of love, the idea that God cares for all His creation, these would have been "good news". But, in itself, the teaching of Jesus was not original: others had said it before. What was different, was the authority, which Jesus claimed for what He taught, an authority, which was ultimately shown in the resurrection. Thus Jesus, in His life, was not denying the possibility of a Gentile mission in the future, but he was denying the possibility of one at that particular time. There could be no Gentile

mission, indeed no good news, until the full implications of the teachings, life, and resurrection of Jesus had been worked out:

> "The Christological authority, implicit in the graceful words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, was now explicitly revealed as the authority and mission of God's Son. This dynamic gives birth to mission theology, properly so called, of the New Testament."[34]

Thus, in Matthew's gospel, we see a development in the way the plan of God is both revealed, and carried out. By the end of the gospel, the universalist strand has become explicit, as salvation history reaches a fulfilment. Even the eschatological motif of the nations coming to worship in the Temple is somewhat negated, for Matthew, by the destruction of the Temple, which will remain "abandoned and empty" (Matt 23:38), and by the final command of Jesus for His disciples to "Go" to the nations of the world.

The salvation, which is in Jesus, is not for Israel alone, although it is to be revealed through Israel: the theme reaching back to Abraham, and through the prophets. His mission was to be a light to all humanity, shining, first of all, through Israel, and, from these, to the rest of the world. The time of the Gentiles would come after the resurrection.

Bibliography

Bosch, D. J., *Witness to the World*, London UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980.

———, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Bright, J., *A History of Israel*, London UK: SCM Press, 1960.

———, *Covenant and Promise*, Bombay: SL Paul Publications, 1982.

Cohen, S. J. D., *From Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1987.

Jeremias, J., *Jesus" Promise to the Nations*, London UK: SCM Press, 1958.

Kasper, W., *Jesus the Christ*, New York NY: Paulist Press, 1977.

Kummel, W. G., *Promise and Fulfilment*, London UK: SCM Press, 1957.

Nickelsburg, G. W. E., *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1981.

Russell, D. S., *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, London UK: SCM Press, 1964.

[34] Senior, 1983, p. 158.

Sabourin, L., *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, vols 1 & 2, Bombay: SL Paul Publications, 1983.
Senior, D., and Stuhlmueller, C., *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, London UK: SCM Press, 1983.
Turner, N., *Christian Words*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1980.
Verkuyl, J., *Contemporary Missiology*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1975.
Wilson, 1973.

Christianity and Other Religions

Mark Brimblecombe

We need a theology of other religions, if we are to see the revealing activity of God in its widest context (Keith Ward)[1]

According to Genesis 1-11, the common ancestors of every tribe understood some truth about God, and His purposes for humankind. However, sinful rebellion against God led to the fragmentation of the human family, resulting in the proliferation of tribal groups. The different religions, which emerged from these diverse groups, may be explained in relation to this "Genesis" story. In this regard, it is worth noting that scholars of religious history contest the once-popular evolutionary theory of the development of religions (i.e., from animism, to polytheism, to monotheism).[2] Instead, we may regard the religions of the world as containing a remnant of God's original revelation of Himself, combined with acquired knowledge about God, through reason and nature. However, alongside this, there has also been the darkening of the human mind, because of its rejection of the one true God, and His revelation to humankind (Rom 1: 18-32; 2:12-16).

Can There be a True Religion?

Each of the different religions in the world presents their own picture of reality. Each has its own ideals and goals. While the religions contain much, which is symbolism, there is also a lot of factual content. There are claims about the nature of ultimate reality, human history, and destiny. To the extent that a religion embodies truth claims, these claims can be challenged. Where two views are contradictory, only one of them can be true logically. As Keith Ward says:

> Where claims conflict, we have to choose one. That is not arrogance, nor should it lead to intolerance. It is logically unavoidable, and compatible with the greatest respect for the different opinions of others. It is, quite simply, our opinion that it is true. But that does not mean it is just "true for us" (a senseless

[1] Keith Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt*, London UK: SPCK, 1982, p. 163.

[2] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions", in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, vol 2 (G. H. Kehm, trans.), Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1971, pp. 63-118.

> phrase, if ever there was one), as though something else could be true for other people. If it is true, it is true. Either God created the world, or he did not. We cannot demonstrate its truth to everyone. But we believe it to be true. There is no escape from the necessity of making such choices.[3]

So, religion is not a matter of preference, but of making a statement about truth and reality. The truth is personal, concrete, and historical.[4] The ideology of pluralism, which considers everything as subjective and relative, must be rejected. As C. S. Lewis puts it, Christianity is somewhat like mathematics in this regard:

> If you are a Christian, you do not have to believe that all other religions are simply wrong, all through. . . . If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist, I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race has always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most. When I became a Christian, I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that, where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right, and they are wrong. As in arithmetic – there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others.[5]

Christianity is True, But Does not Have All the Truth That Can be Known

The Christian points to Jesus as the master-clue, in the common search of humanity for salvation, and invites others to follow.[6]

Christianity claims to be true, in what it says about God, and His revelation in Jesus Christ. This truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the ultimate measure of truth and reality. It is not the truth of propositions only, but truth, found in the person of Jesus. Therefore, this is apprehended by commitment to a person, and not simply by intellectual analysis.

The Christian will not allow compromise, syncretism, or theological relativism, to obscure this essential message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Stephen Neill puts it:

---

[3] Keith Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt*, p. 164.
[4] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989, p. 170.
[5] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York NY: Macmillan, 1943, p. 43.
[6] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 158.

> Simply as history, the event of Jesus Christ is unique. Christian faith goes a great deal further in its interpretation of that event. It maintains that, in Jesus, the one thing that needed to happen has happened, in such a way that it need never happen again. . . .
>
> Making such claims, Christians are bound to affirm that all men need the gospel. For the human sickness, there is one specific remedy, and this is it. There is no other. Therefore, the gospel must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, and to the end of time. The church cannot compromise on its missionary task without ceasing to be the church. If it fails to see, and to accept, this responsibility, it is changing the gospel into something other than itself. . . .
>
> Naturally, to the non-Christian hearer, this must sound like crazy megalomania, and religious imperialism of the very worst kind. We must recognise the danger: Christians have, on many occasions, fallen into both of them. But we are driven back, ultimately, on the question of truth.[7]

But this does not mean that Christianity today has all the truth that can be known. The Christian expression of faith is, itself, always in the process of development. It begins with the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and moves toward the greater revelation of Christ at His second coming. "Now, I can know only imperfectly, but then I shall know, just as fully as I am, myself, known" (1 Cor 13:12, NJB). Christian truth and knowledge, from the perspective of limited human experience, must always grow, because the Christian faith is a relationship with an infinite and all-knowing God.

The apprehension of truth is also the task of every generation, as truth is expressed in terms intelligible for that generation. In this process, Christian truth is often redefined in clearer terms, and at other times, obscured by the dominant philosophies and ideologies of the age. At times, dialogue with other religions may help clarify the truth.

The Truth in Other Religions

When the apostle Paul spoke before the philosophers of Athens (Acts 17: 16-34), he recognised that God had already revealed to them certain truths about Himself

[7] Stephen Neill, *Crisis of Belief: The Christian Dialogue with Faith and No Faith*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984, p. 31.

and human reality.[8] Like Paul, we should also appreciate that God has not left Himself without a witness in the world's religions and cultures.

If God is everywhere guiding people to an insight into His own reality, no great religion will be without the touch of God's grace. None will be just wrong, in its entirety. Each will have something of great, and maybe unique, value to contribute to our understanding of God. It would be a terribly restrictive view of God's love to say that He had only revealed Himself in one tradition, and not at all to others. We must believe, then, that something of God is truly seen in all the great religious traditions.[9]

Christians should be willing to learn from others, and be open to see the truth embodied in other religions. While the Christian believes that all the necessary truth for life is present in Christ, and His message, the criticism, and claims, of those in other religions may help in seeing more clearly this truth, which is implicit in the gospel. Christ is the true light, and we should welcome all reflections of that light in others.

There is something deeply repulsive in the attitude, sometimes found among Christians, which makes only grudging acknowledgment of the faith, the godliness, and the nobility to be found in the lives of non-Christians. Even more repulsive, is the idea that, in order to communicate the gospel to them, one must, as it were, ferret out their hidden sins, show that their goodness is not so good, after all, as a precondition for presenting the offer of grace in Christ.[10]

Other religions may also show us further truth and reality. Although, as Stephen Neill says, "we may find, in the end, that this also was an aspect of the message of Christ that we had somehow overlooked."[11]

Salvation for Non-Christians?

God will be the final judge of who is saved, and who is not. This should be a warning to those who pretend to make a judgment in advance. At the second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic church affirmed that there may be men and women,

---

[8] Paul quotes one of their own Greek poets to show this (Acts 17:28).
[9] Keith Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt*, p. 154.
[10] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 180.
[11] Stephen Neill, Crises of Belief: *The Christian Dialogue with Faith and No Faith*, p. 283.

outside of the church, who have responded to the light they have, and so be saved.[12] These are people, who respond positively to God, and throw themselves upon His saving mercy (cf. Lk 18:13). Christians agree this is true of those persons mentioned in the Old Testament, who found forgiveness and fellowship with God. While they did not know Jesus, and His way of salvation, they were accepted by God, on the basis of their positive response (faith) to God, and His revelation to them (cf. Rom 4:3; Heb 11:1ff).

But what of those from other religious traditions? The apostle Peter indicates that the same is true of Gentiles, like Cornelius: "I now see how true it is that God has no favourites, but that, in every nation, the man who is god-fearing, and does what is right, is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34 NEB). God saves people by His grace, in response to their faith in Him (Eph 2:8). To people like Cornelius, the gospel of Jesus Christ brings knowledge of the basis of their salvation – the forgiveness of sins through the cross of Jesus. So, to those, like Cornelius (those who come to hear the gospel), and to those, who have never heard about Christ, we can apply C. S. Lewis' observation, "We do know that no man can be saved, except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him."[13] This, again, leaves open the possibility that some, who do not know Christ (not "all", as the universalist claims), are, nevertheless, saved through Him, because of their positive response to God.

---

[12] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964. "Those, who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ, or His church, but who, nevertheless, seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try, in their actions, to do His will, as they know it, through the dictates of conscience, those, too, may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found among them, is considered by the church to be a preparation for the gospel, and given by Him who enlightens all men that they may, at length, have life. But, very often, deceived by the evil one, men have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rom 1:21 and 25). Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Hence, to procure the glory of God, and the salvation of all these, the church, mindful of the Lord's command, 'preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk 16:16), takes zealous care to foster the missions." *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, A. Flannery, ed., New York NY: Costello Publishing, 1975, pp. 367-368.

[13] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 65.

Conclusion

The conclusion, which Lesslie Newbigin gives to his own discussion of this topic, is filling. He describes his position as, "exclusivist, in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist, in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist, in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace God to the members of the Christian church, but it rejects the inclusivism, which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist, in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God, in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism, which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.[14]

Further Reading

Stephen Neill, *Crises of Belief: The Christian Dialogue with Faith and No Faith*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984, especially pp. 30-33, 276ff.

Christopher Lamb, "The Claim to be Unique", in *A Lion Handbook: The World's Religions*, Tring UK: Lion Publishing, 1982, pp. 357-363.

Norman Anderson, "A Christian Approach to Comparative Religion", in *The World's Religions*, Sir Norman Anderson (ed.), Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 228-237.

[14] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, pp. 182-183.

The Distinctive Use of Psalms in Africa

Revd Dr David Tuesday Adamo
Department of Religion/Philosophy, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

Introduction

The book of Psalms has a unique place in the Bible. Along with the book of Isaiah, the Psalter is one of the two Old Testament books that have been most frequently quoted in the New Testament.[1] Because of this uniqueness, the early Christians enjoyed quoting the book of Psalms. It is reported that Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it "The Prayer Book of the Bible".[2] Throughout the Christian centuries, the Psalms have received special attention among Christians.

B. W. Anderson has testified to the unique place that the book of Psalms has enjoyed in the church liturgy when he says:

> Today, in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, especially where the ancient monastic usage is still preserved – the entire Psalter is recited once each week. In the Anglican church, the Psalms are repeated once a month. And, in other churches in the Protestant tradition, the profound influence of the Psalter is evident in the responsive reading of selected Psalms, or in the singing of hymns. Indeed, when one considers the enriching and invigorating influence, which the Psalms have exerted upon preaching, worship, and devotional life, it is no exaggeration for Christoph Barth to say that the renewal and reunion of the church, for which we are hoping, cannot come about without the powerful assistance of Psalms.[3]

The special place that the book of Psalms has enjoyed in the Bible, and in the Christian churches, has influenced biblical scholars. They have paid special attention to the study of this book, by introducing several methods of approach in order to understand the book.

One approach is the attempt to determine the author, and the date of the book of Psalms, according to its superscription. Other approaches are attempts to determine

---

[1] Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of Depths*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1974, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

the literary types and "situation in life" (form criticism), and the theological thoughts of each author, or book, of the Psalms.

The unique place, enjoyed by the book of Psalms, among Christians is not limited to Western Christians. Such is also true among African Christians. This writer remembers that, in his primary-school days, the first passages he learned to read and memorise were in the book of Psalms (Ps 1, 8, 21, and 23).[4]

The unique place given to the book of Psalms in Africa has led some specific African Christians to formulate some unique African methods of approaching the book of Psalms, in an African context.

The aim of this report is to discuss some of these distinctive uses of Psalms in Africa, and the justification for them.

The History of Psalms Research

Evidence of the earliest studies of the book of Psalms can be seen in the ways of dividing the book of Psalms into chapters and verses (150 chapters) and into a fivefold arrangement, or five books.[5] Further formal arrangement within this fivefold division of the books of Psalms was also evident in the provision of titles in the superscriptions. While some of the Psalms have "of David" in their titles, and generally use the divine name "Yahweh", others have the titles "of the sons of Korah", and "of Asaph". The Psalms, which use "Yahweh" and "of David", are referred to as the "Yahwistic Davidic collection". Others, which use "Elohim", with the title "of David", are called "Elohistic Davidic Psalms".

After reading these superscriptions, with the above titles, it became natural for scholars to attempt to date individual Psalms, and try to refer them to specific historical events in the history of Israel, even though these headings were not part of the original text. It is also natural to try to determine the authorship, by the evidence provided by the superscriptions. Thus, the Psalms, with the superscriptions "of David", were attributed Davidic authorship. Those scholars, who rejected the Davidic authorship of most, or all, of these Psalms, tried to link those Psalms with a later specific historical event. For example, Ps 46 was linked with the period of "the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian in 701 BCE, and Ps 74, with the fall of

[4] This was in 1958, in primary 2, in my village school (Irunda-Isanlu, Nigeria).
[5] Book I: 1-41, Book II: 42-72, Book III: 73-89, Book IV: 90-106, Book V: 107-150.

Jerusalem in 586 BCE"[6] Some of the religious ideas in a Psalm were sometimes used as the criteria for the date of that Psalm.

As early as the 19th century, the use of the superscription, with the titles, to date, and determine the authorship, of Psalms, had already been regarded as unreliable and "insignificant".[7] Serious scholars have realised that such a method will not adequately provide the meaning of Psalms. Thus, the above method was abandoned.

Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) became a member, and leader, of the group called "Religions Historical School", who were tired of the Wellhausen school of historical-critical method of study.[8] Gunkel, aiming at retelling the history of Israel's faith, in the light of the ancient Near-Eastern culture, has made a very important contribution to the study of the Psalter. He tried to establish the fact that "the historical settings of the Psalms" were not in the "historical events but in the cultic life of the community". Hermann Gunkel classified Psalms according to their literary types (*Gattungen*), and each, with its setting in life (*sitzim im heben*). Five major types, with their settings, were recognised by Gunkel.[9]

1. Festive hymns
2. Individual thanksgivings
3. Communal laments
4. Individual laments
5. The royal psalms

Gunkel also identified some lesser types as pilgrimage songs, Torah liturgies, and wisdom poetry. He believed that the simplest, and shorter, of these types were the oldest. Therefore, the communal must be older than the individual. Thanksgiving must also be older than the lament.

The "I" did not represent the community, as previously held, but the individual worshipper, who must be a king, or a leader, of the congregations.

---

[6] G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, London UK: Gerald Duckworth, 1974, p. 174.
[7] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, London UK: SCM Press, 1979, p. 509.
[8] Albert Eichhorn, W. Wrede, Wilhelm Bousset, and Ernst Troeltsch are members of the group. E. Gerstenberger, J. H. Hayes, ed., San Antonio TX: Trinity University Press, 1977.
[9] G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 178.

According to Hermann Gunkel, all these Psalms have their sources in the life of the people. Therefore, cult is the setting in life of most of these types. By making the classification, Gunkel was successful in moving the problem of dating the individual Psalm to the types, and their literary history.

Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965) was one of the most eminent pupils of Gunkel. According to him, the only way to understand the hymns and complaints songs is to see them in relation to the comprehensive framework of the Israelite celebration of the annual New Year festival of the enthronement of Yahweh. Mowinckel maintains that the "workers of iniquity", mentioned in the individual laments, are sorcerers, who brought suffering on the people. These Psalms, therefore, "invoked divine power to break their spell".[10] Mowinckel says, further, that the oracular passages in the Psalms are actually written by the cultic prophets, rather than the canonical prophets. We have seen that Mowinckel has pursued further the work of his teacher, Gunkel. He investigated, further, the cultic setting, and expanded the categories of genre into cultic and historical ones.[11]

Gunkel's formulation has been developed along two major lines: the literary genre, and sociological function. Among those who received first-hand instruction under Gunkel, and have made great contributions to the study of form criticism are Hans Schmidt, Emil Balla, and Joachim Begrich.[12]

After the Second World War, there was a change in the interpretation of Psalms. Although Gunkel's approach was accepted, with some degree of modification, a theological interpretation was added. This is form criticism, governed by a theology of the word of God. At this time, study of the Psalms was guided by the idea of revelation of the divine will. Gerhad von Rad puts Psalms in juxtaposition with salvation history in the Old Testament.[13] Claus Westermann's book, *Praise of God in the Psalms*, is an example of this theological approach.[14] The most important reason for this critical work on this line is to clarify Yahweh's message to His people. The oracles in the Psalms are studied, because the oracles came from God. Another classical example of a form critical study, governed by a theology of "the word of God", is Christoph Barth's *Introduction to the Psalms*.[15]

---

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1962, I, pp. 29-30.

[12] E. Gerstenberger, *Old Testament Form Criticism*, pp. 180-183.

[13] Gerhad von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1962.

[14] Claus Westermann, *Praise of God in the Psalms*, Richmond VA: John Knox Press, 1965.

[15] Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1966.

In the 1960s, the influence of Barthian theology of the word of God was actually diminishing. People were more concerned about Gunkel's genres and settings. The feeling to go back, and re-examine his genres of Psalms, and their settings, so as to avoid hasty conclusions, was high. Eventually, the same form of method of classifications was used, with some minor changes. Instead of the concern about the "pious soul", or the "word of God", behind the texts of Psalms, the emphasis was more on the sociological setting of the Psalms. This is sometimes called the "ritualistic approach". The ritualistic approach to the Psalms study was greatly influenced by the result of archaeological work from the ancient Near East. Scholars, like S. H. Hooke, A. R. Johnson, A. Bentzen. L. Engnell, and G. Widengren, took the results of archaeology of the Near East, especially that of the discovery of Ras Shamra tablets, and looked for similar ritual and festivals in ancient Israel. These scholars were quick to recognise some affinities between the Canaanite and Babylonian ritual, and the Old Testament practices. The result is that they assigned almost all the genres in the Psalms to the New Year festival.

The form critics, who worked on the basis of the "word of God" behind the texts of the Psalms, were also influenced by the result of archaeological work in the Near East.

Covenantalism became the focal point for their theological formulation. Scholars, like Eichrodt, Von Rad, and others, tried to demonstrate the fact that the ancient Near Eastern treaty scheme had been adopted by Israelites, in order to express their covenantal relationship to Yahweh.[16] As a result, covenant became the "master key" to the understanding of the Old Testament. Virtually all the genres of the Psalms were attributed to the covenant festival.[17]

Modern scholars of form critical studies have also been influenced by the liturgical use of Psalms. Although we have very little information concerning the early history of the liturgical use of Psalms,[18] the Mishnah (Tamid 7:4), has a list of special Psalms used in the temple for each day of the week.. The tractate ***Sopherim*** also gives some information about those Psalms used for festivals. The titles of the Psalms probably give an indication of the liturgical use of Psalms, in the early period.

---

[16] Gerhard Von Rad, ***Old Testament Theology***, 2 vols. Walther Eichrodt, ***Theology of the Old Testament***, 2 vols, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press. 1967.

[17] J. H. Hayes, ed., ***Old Testament Form Criticism.***

[18] G. W. Anderson, ***A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament***, p. 179. Some words, like תְּהִלָּה = ***tehilla*** (praise), תְּפִלָּה = ***tepilla*** (prayer), and תּוֹדָה = ***todah*** (thanksgiving), though they may not be parts of the original texts, may indicate the type of use.

Today, some Roman Catholic, and the traditional Eastern Orthodox, churches still recite the entire Psalms each week.[19] In Anglican churches, Psalms are read every Sunday. In some other churches of the Protestant tradition, Psalms deeply influenced worship in the form of prayer and responsive reading every Sunday. It influenced some of the great hymns of the churches.

Psalms in Africa

Liturgical Use of Psalms

Western scholars, as discussed in the preceding section, have mostly done Psalm research. The works and the methods that have been discussed have been by Western scholars. The few Africans, who endeavoured to involve themselves in Psalm research, followed the Western ways, verbatim, with little attention, if any, to the tremendous effort by African Christians to make use of Psalms, in an African context. Unfortunately, the Western hymns, which were influenced by Psalms, and translated for use in the mainland missionary churches, were sung exactly with the Western tune, and exact phraseology, without any attempt to contextualise them. Psalms were also recited, and read, in the African churches, as it is done in the West.

However, the African Independent churches have devised a distinctive classification, and use, of Psalms, in an African context, which we shall examine in this section of the paper. The churches that were consulted are mostly Nigerian African Independent churches, such as Cherubim and Seraphim Movement, The Apostolic, Christ Apostolic, Celestial church of Christ, and others.

Protective Psalms

African Independent churches, mostly in West Africa, have classified Psalms according to their functions in an African context. Psalms 5, 6, 7, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 83, and 109 are classified as "protective" Psalms.

These Psalms, in the Western classifications, are "individual", and "community lament" Psalms, where the individual, or the community, address Yahweh, then followed by a lament, the confession of trust, the petition, and the vow of praise.[20] In

[19] B. W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, p. 3.

[20] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, K. R. Crim, and Richard N. Soulen, trans, Atlanta GA: John Knox Press, 1981, pp. 52 and 64.

the case of the "individual lament", most of the time, the assurance of being heard, another petition, and praise of God, are added.[21]

These Psalms, in Africa, are called "protective" Psalms, because they are capable of protecting the Christian, who reads them in the form of prayers (according to prescription), or who writes them on parchment, and wears them, or puts them under their pillow. In other words, they are Psalms, used to protect people. Solomon Ademiluka calls the use of Psalms in this way as an imprecatory use of Psalms.[22] This method of using Psalms may involve reading them simultaneously, with prayer and fasting. They may have to be read a certain number of times, in a specific, prescribed place, at certain time of the day, or night. For example, according to J. A. Bolarinwa, Ps 35 is used for protection against witches.

To make it effective, the reading of this Psalm must be done between the hours of midnight and three o'clock in the morning, in an open place, and, while the reader is naked.[23] Ps 109 is said to be used against one's enemy. It must be read, by calling out certain holy names of God, with the burning of candles and incense, and mentioning the name of one's enemy. Prophet J. O. Ogunfuye prescribes the above Psalm against an enemy, as follows:

> You can go to an open field in the night, or by one o'clock in the afternoon. You should have three candles lighted: one in the north, one in the east, and one in the west, while you stand in the middle. As you read the Psalm, have the holy name Eel in mind, as well as the name of your enemy, and that of his mother. Then pray as follows: "Almighty God, (name your enemy), the son or daughter of (name his/her mother), is after me to destroy me. Oh, Lord of hosts, I beseech, in Thy mercy . . . to help me. Arise, for my defence. . . . Let his/her wicked deeds come back to her evil designs. Put him/her to shame. . . ."[24]

Another way of using Psalms, for protection against an enemy, is the preparation of specific Psalms into amulets, and putting them under a pillow. Prophet J. O. Ogunfuye specialises on this. According to him, Ps 7 should be written on "a pure parchment, and put in a special consecrated bag, and kept under one's pillow",

---

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[22] "The Use of Psalms in African Context", unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Ilorin, 1990. Mr Ademiluka went around to interview the members of African Independent churches in Nigeria, as to how they use Psalms.

[23] J. A. Bolarinwa, *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms*, Ibadan Nigeria: Oluseyi Press, nd, pp. 29, 36.

[24] J. Ogunfuye, *The Secrets of the Uses of Psalms*, Ibadan Nigeria: Jasmog, nd, p. 66.

for protection against evil people.[25] Ps 52 and 83 can be done in a similar way, according to Ogunfuye:

> On a pure parchment, with the holy name, *Jah*, and tied up with white thread, and then put in a bag of white cloth, specifically made for this preparation (or amulet), can be carried about wherever one goes.[26]

Psalms are not only used for protection against enemies, they are also used for prevention of accidents, air crashes, and derailments. For example, Ps 2, which can be classified as a royal Psalm, in the West, is prescribed for that, according to Ogunfuye.

> Immediately a traveller boards a car, train, ship, or aeroplane, he should read the Psalm at least once. Whenever the Psalm occurs to him again, as the journey progresses, he should read it again. It is the guardian angel that is reminding him to read it. In case any turbulent storm arises during a voyage, the traveller should read the Psalm, praying in the holy name *Shaddai*.[27]

Ps 60 can also be used for the protection of soldiers, and policemen, when they carry arms. This Psalm must be read, with the holy name, Jah, for effectiveness.[28]

Therapeutic Psalms

The following Psalms are classified as therapeutic Psalms, in the African context: 1, 3, 9, 41, 103, 107, 119, 126, and 147. These are classified as therapeutic Psalms, because Africans believe that there are healing powers in the words of these Psalms.

The above Psalms, in the Western context, belong to the "lament" and "thanksgiving" categories. However, African Independent churches look at these Psalms very differently, as having curative power, because of the content of these Psalms. These people believe that virtually all illnesses are curable by using one of these therapeutic Psalms, as prescribed. The methods used for these Psalms to be effective involve reading Psalms into water, or into olive oil, for bathing or rubbing on the body. Sometimes, it may be for drinking.

---

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 52.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[28] Bolarinwa, *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms*, p. 8.

When Solomon Ademiluka interviewed Prophet J. Abiodum, of Christ Saviour church, Kaduna, Nigeria, he prescribed Ps 9 for a sick person. Such a person should read Ps 9 nine times into olive oil for drinking or rubbing on the body, for healing.[29] Prophet Ogunfuye usually prescribed Ps 143 for general illnesses and diseases, with this instruction:

> Put some water in a pot, and then put some young palm leaves in water. Add some olive oil to the water. Then read Ps 143 into water seven times. Repeat this process for three days. Then allow the patient to bathe with the consecrated water. . . . His health will be restored.[30]

J. A. Bolarinwa sees Ps 3 as efficacious for toothaches, headache, and backache. He says:

> In order to cure toothache, prepare a tumblerful of lukewarm water, read the Psalm into it three times, and rinse out your mouth until the tumbler is emptied. Repeat the process from time to time, until pain is over.[31]

The above treatment should be followed by the name of *Jehovah-Rophai*. Using the same instruction, Ps 6, 119:17-32 can be used to cure eye trouble, such as, cataract and glaucoma. Prophet J. O. Ogunfuye, prescribes Ps 119:49-56 as a Psalm that would cure brain damage, if good instruction is followed. According to him, the portion of this Psalm "should be written on a small parchment, with the holy name Raphael, bind the parchment upon the patient, and make a suitable prayer for such patient".[32] The above Psalm can also be used to cure sores, injured arms, and nose.[33] So also, Ps 1 and 126 can be used to cure miscarriages, and infant mortality, respectively. According to Bolarinwa, immediately a woman is aware that she is pregnant, she should read Ps 1, always, both in the mornings, and in the evenings, with prayer, mentioning the name *Eli-Ishaddi*.[34] A woman, who has past experience in infant mortality, should read Ps 126, whenever she gets pregnant. This Psalm should be read into water for drinking and bathing throughout her pregnancy period. After the birth of the baby, the woman should continue the same process for the baby until he is fully grown.[35]

---

[29] "The Use of Psalms in African Context"; p. 77.
[30] *The Secrets of the Uses of Psalms*, p. 94.
[31] *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms*, p. 9.
[32] *The Secrets of the Uses of Psalms*, pp. 75-76.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms*, p. 7.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Success Psalms

African Independent churches classified some Psalms as success Psalms. This is because these Psalms are capable of making any person, who reads it, accordingly, be successful in business, in examination, and in securing a job. An example of this Psalm is Ps 119:9-16. According to Ogunfuye, there is a special method of using this Psalm. He gives the methods:

> Boil an egg, and remove the shell, deftly and cleanly, so that the inside can remain uninjured. Read on it the eight verses, as well as Deut 33 (Moses' blessing on the tribes of Israel), and Josh 1:8 ("this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth"); write Shrewniel and Mopiel. . . . Then write on the egg: Chosniel, "cover me with the spirit of wisdom and knowledge", Shrewniel, "convert me into a better man".[36]

According to our investigation, there are many categories, and use of Psalms, which are yet to be mentioned. This writer believes that further researches will probably uncover these forms of Psalms, in an African context.

Critical Evaluation of the Classification and the Use of Psalms in Africa

The temptation, one faces in reading this paper, is the condemnation of the above classifications and usages of Psalms as unbiblical, syncretistic, or even paganistic. However, with a critical look at the situations, in which Africans found themselves one will understand the African religio-cultural and biblical justification for the classification and usages.

Before the coming of Christianity, Africans had some special ways of dealing with enemies, and evil forces. They attacked evil forces and enemies by consulting the medicine man (*bablawo*), who prescribed medicine, and the incantation to be recited. Sometimes, charms were prepared, to be tied on the neck, or around the waist. It could also be put under a pillow. However, at the coming of Christianity, the majority of the early missionaries condemned all local practices as paganistic, satanic, and, therefore, incompatible with Christianity. African Christians had to worship the Western way. They even had to dress in the Western way, to show that they are Christians. In worship services, the hymns, though translated into the African languages, were still sung with the Western tune and phraseology.

[36] *The Secrets of the Uses of Psalms*, pp. 72-73.

As a result, Christianity appeared alien to the African people. Many African Christians still secretly go to the medicine man for charms, and incantations, and when trouble comes. This is because the Western style of Christianity did not reach the deepest souls of the Africans. There was still a vacuum to be filled.

African Christians have to find their own unique way to make Christianity more relevant to them. They had to make Christianity authentically African. They, therefore, turned to the same Bible, and their culture, for the answer. The classifications, and the use, of Psalms, in African context, are some of the ways to meet the existential need of the African Christians. As they read the Bible, particularly the book of Psalms, they discovered that some of the words, and contents, resemble the words and content of their incantations they used to get rid of enemies and evil forces. As they search further, to their amazement, they found that water, oil, and herbs were used in the same Bible to attack enemies, to anoint, and to protect. They also found that the prayers in the Bible resemble prayers in African traditional religion. These classifications and uses of Psalms have a basis in the African religio-cultural traditions, the Bible, and the ancient Near East, as will be demonstrated below.

The African Religio-Cultural Basis

The use of the Psalms of laments, for protection against enemies, has, no doubt, been influenced by African use of prayers and incantations against their enemies and evil forces. For example, the reciting of Ps 109 a certain number of times, with candles, and calling the names of angels, and enemies, to make evil fall upon such enemies, resembles a Yoruba incantation against sorcerers, to make them lose their senses.

Igbagbe se Oro ko lewe (3 times)
Igbagbe se Afomo ko legbo (3 times)
Igbagbe se Olodumare ko ranti la ese pepeye (3 times)
Nijo ti pepeye ba daran egba igbe hobo ni imu bo'nu
Ki igbagbie se lagbaja omo labgaja ko maa wobgo to,
Tori todo ba nsan ki iwo ehin mo . . .[37]

Translation:

[37] Ademiluka, "The Use of Psalms in African Context", p. 105.

Due to forgetfulness, the *Oro* plant has no leaves (3 times)
Due to forgetfulness, the *Afomo* plant has no roots (3 times)
Due to forgetfulness, God did not remember to separate the toes of the duck (3 times)
When the duck is beaten it cries "hoho"

May forgetfulness come upon (name the enemy), the son/daughter of (name the mother); that is, may he lose his senses. The (he/she) may enter into bush because a flowing river does not look back (and so on).

This incantation should be repeated, either two or three times. Our close examination of the above incantation shows that it resembles the reading of Psalms a certain number of times, and mentioning the name of the enemy.

African traditional prayers, in content and structure, closely resemble that of the Psalms used against an enemy. Below, is an example of African traditional prayer from Duala, of Cameroun:

God, be propitious to me!
Here is the new Moon:
Keep every harmful sickness far from me
Stop the wicked man, who is contemplating my misfortune
Let his wicked plans fall on himself
God, be propitious to me!
Desert me not in my need . . .[38]

The use of Psalms as charms for protection definitely has its background in Yoruba traditional practices against enemies. Charms, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, are common, and are used for different purposes. Some, for protection against witches and evil spirits from entering a house. Others are used for driving enemies away. For example, seven leaves of certain plants and seven seeds of alligator pepper can be prepared into a charm, and tied above the door frame of one's house. Other charms could be tied around one's neck, for protection against enemies. Alligator peppers, blood of a cock, and some white kola nuts, should be burnt, and tied around one's neck. It may be wrapped with animal skin, or pieces of white cloth, tied with white and black threads.[39]

[38] Aylward Shorter, *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa*, New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 104.
[39] Ademiluka, "The Use of Psalms", pp. 71-72.

The therapeutic use of Psalms (e.g., Ps 103 and 107) does not escape African traditional practices. It is a practice, which has its root in African religio-cultural practices. Before the advent of Christianity, African priests were the traditional healers. They believe that the cause of sickness is not only physical, but also spiritual. Whenever anyone is sick, and cannot be cured by himself, using herbs, the first thing to do is to consult a priest, who will, first of all, find the cause of the sickness, and prescribe a treatment, either in the form of concoctions, and/or performance of sacrifices, and in incantations, depending on the cause. Among the Yoruba society, the use of concoctions involves the boiling, or burning, of the bark of certain trees, leaves, parts of an animal, to be mixed together with palm-kernel oil, honey, water, or palm oil, to be drunk, or rubbed on the body. It may even be used for bathing (*Agbo*).[40] Incantation for healings is an integral part of Yoruba traditional healing practices. An example of therapeutic incantation involves "chewing seven seeds of alligator pepper", and placing one's mouth on that patient's navel, and then recite: "*Oorun lode la'laamu wonu; Oorun si kuju alaamu jade*" (seven times). This is to say, in English, "When the sun is hot the female lizard disappears; when the sun softens, the female lizard appears" (seven times). This writer remembers, at his own village (Irunda-Isanlu), that, when he was having frequent headaches, my mother invited the chief priest of the village (*Olori-awo*), who chewed some alligator seeds, spat them on my forehead, and began to recite some incantations. This traditional practice, no doubt, influenced the recitation of Psalms several times, with a combination of some herbs for healing purposes. What this writer has been trying to demonstrate is that the classifications, and the use, of Psalms, in an African context, have been greatly influenced by African traditional practices. The recognition of the power of words and nature, as demonstrated, in the use of incantations and herbs, before the coming of Christianity, has been transferred to Christianity.

The Biblical Basis

From the research this writer has done, he is convinced that the classifications, and the uses, of Psalms, in an African context, do not only have their basis in African religio-cultural practices, before the advent of Christianity, they also have their basis in the Bible.

One important example of the biblical basis for the classifications, and uses, of Psalms, in an African context, is the actual content of Psalms themselves. The classification of Psalms as protective Psalms, and using them as protection against

[40] *Ibid.*

enemies, by Africans, is justified by the content of Ps 5:10 and 6:10. The Psalmist, who recognises the power of prayers and words, prays that his enemies will be destroyed, and be put to shame.

> Destroy Thou them, O Lord;
> Let them fall by their own counsels;
> Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions;
> for they have rebelled against Thee.
> Let all my enemies be ashamed and sore vexed:
> let them return and be ashamed suddenly (Ps 5:10, 6:10, KJV).

Other passages invoked death on their enemies.

> Let death seize upon them
> and let them go down quick into hell:
> for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.
> But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction:
> bloody and deceitful men shall not live half their days;
> but I will trust in Thee (Ps 55:15, 23, KJV).

Since missionaries condemned African incantation as incompatible with the Christian faith, when African Christians discovered the resemblance of some of the Psalms with African incantations, used against enemies, they changed to the Bible, as a substitute, believing that the words of the Bible are equally effective.

The use of Bible passages, or the power of the "Word of God", to deal with enemies and Satan, was demonstrated in the Christian scriptures. When Satan tempted Jesus Christ, several times He quoted the Bible to overcome him. Christ said during his first temptation. "It is written, 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' " (Matt 4:4, KJV).

During the second temptation, Jesus also used the Bible, saying, "It is written again, "thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God' " (Matt 4:7, KJV).

During the third temptation, Jesus continued to use the "word", "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve' " (Matt 4:8, KJV). There are several other passages, where Jesus used the "word" to cast out demons.

Paul, the apostle, also used words to rebuke, and blind, an enemy, a sorcerer, and a "child of the devil" (Acts 13:9-11), when he was obstructing him.

The use of medicine and words to heal, in the Bible, justifies the African classifications, and the therapeutic use of Psalms. The Old and New Testaments are full of examples of the use of medicine, in conjunction with words or prayers, and the holy names of God and Jesus Christ, as the Africans use Ps 41, 103, 107, and 143.[41]

In 2 Kings 4, the prophet Elisha[42] healed the Shunammite's boy with words of prayer. He also healed those who ate poisonous herbs (2 Kings 4:38-41) by casting a "meal" into the pot to be eaten. Elisha prescribed water from the Jordan for Naaman. After Naaman dipped himself into the water seven times, he was healed (2 Kings 5:14). Isaiah prescribed "a lump of figs for Hezekiah". After Hezekiah's words of prayers, he laid the "lump of figs" on his boil, and he was healed (2 Kings 20: 1-11). Fifteen years was added to his life after his "sickness unto death".

In the New Testament, Jesus healed a leper with the pronouncement of the words "be thou clean", and with a touch (Matt 8:3). He healed those possessed with devils with the mere word, "Go". Jesus healed the blind man with His saliva, clay, water, and words. According to John 9:6-7, he spat on the ground, anointed the eyes of the blind man with clay, and commanded him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam", and he was healed.

Paul, the apostle, also demonstrates the power of words of prayers to heal. He healed Publius, who was sick of fever, and "bloody flux" (Acts 28:8). Peter also healed Aeneas, by the use of words, and the name of Jesus (Acts 9:34).

Ancient Near-Eastern Basis

African classifications, and uses, of Psalms, as protective and therapeutic Psalms, not only have a basis in an African religio-cultural, and biblical background, but also the ancient Near Eastern cultural background. The Egyptian Execration text is one example. The name, or names, of the enemy, or enemies, and what should happen to them, were written on the back of a pot. The names of the enemies, and what should happen to them, would be recited as one breaks the pot. There is evidence of a medical prescription of a raisin plaster to heal a horse, in an Ugaritic

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Some Western biblical scholars may doubt the historicity of Elisha, and other miraculous events in the Bible, most African Christians take them seriously, for their resemblance with their experiences.

text, discovered at Ras Shamra.[43] Thus the use of medicine in the ancient Near East is not a strange phenomenon.

Conclusion

The above research should not, in anyway, be misunderstood as saying that all African culture is good, and, therefore, be adopted. This is, in no way, a call to return to African traditional religion, but, what this writer has done, in this paper, is an attempt to examine the African contribution to biblical Christianity in Africa. The classification, and the use, of Psalms, in an African context, is, indeed, a perfect example of the contextualisation of Christianity in Africa, in order to make Christianity more relevant to African people. This is because God's revelation, at all times, has not failed to take the culture of the people very seriously, in order to convey His message. In the Old Testament, the Near-Eastern culture was taken seriously, as a medium of communication. During the Greco-Roman period, the Greco-Roman culture was used. So also, the Christian revelation (Bible) must take African religio-cultural tradition very seriously, in communicating Christianity to Africans, since the aim of the Christian mission is not to make Africans into Western Christians, but into authentic African Christians. Zablon Nthamburi is certainly right, when he emphasised:

> The gospel must be made to speak to the life and thought of the people, in languages and images that are comprehensible. . . . It must be able to make sense of African religiosity, its customs, traditions, arts, metaphors, and images.[44]

This brings into the open, not only contextualisation at work, but also affirmation by African Christians of the belief in the "power of words", as affirmed by the Bible. By the spoken word, the world was created (Gen 1-2). By the spoken words of Jesus, of the prophets, and of the apostles, many miracles were performed.

This method of using the Bible is also legitimate, not merely for the sake of contextualisation, but because of the fact that African religio-cultural tradition is closer to the biblical, and ancient Near Eastern culture, than Western culture. D. B. Barrett convincingly affirms this:

---

[43] J. Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 194.
[44] "Making the Gospel Relevant Within the African Context and Culture", in *African Ecclesial Review*, 25:3 (1983), p. 194.

> Africanism is not only good in itself, but is also a culture, closer than the European, to the biblical way of life, and, therefore, more suitable for building a Christian society.[45]

The result of this method of using the Bible, particularly Psalms, legitimises it. The African Independent churches, which are using the Bible this way, are growing at a geometrical rate, compared with the mainline, missionary churches. Ironically, while the authorities of the mainline, missionary churches condemn this method as paganistic, many of their members join the African Independent churches. In fact, other outstanding church members of the missionary churches, who prefer to keep their membership intact, do frequently visit the pastors and prophets of the African Independent churches, who use the Bible this way, to meet the everyday needs of their members. Above all, there are several testimonies as to the effectiveness of the use of the Bible, especially Psalms, to heal and drive away enemies and evil forces.[46]

Admittedly, care must be taken, so that African Christians would not conclude that all African religio-cultural traditions are good, and, therefore, must be used, in making Christianity relevant to Africans.

This work is preliminary, therefore, there is a need for further research along this line.

---

[45] *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 166.

[46] This writer witnessed Professor Adegboye of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ilorin. Nigeria, giving a testimony at the university chapel (Chapel of the Light), on how he used Bible passages to drive away enemies and evil forces. Several prophets and pastors, whom we interviewed, also gave the same testimonies.

Contributors

Revd Dr Michael Hough is Principal of Newton College.

Marilyn Rowsome formerly taught at the Christian Leaders' Training College.

Br Silas is a member of the Anglican Society of St Francis, who is working at Nambaiyufa, in the Siane area.

Revd Peter Yeats lectures at Newton College.

Mark Brimblecombe lectures at the Christian Leaders' Training College.

Professor David Thursday Adamo is professor at the Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.