

allows each to be given its proper due, in an approach characterized neither by closed-minded humanism on the one hand nor blinkered fundamentalism on the other hand.

Bibliography

D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery (eds.), *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville, 2001); R. A. Harrisville and W. Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, 2002); S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville, 1999); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, 1992).

A. BILLINGTON

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

A word for all of life

The passionate discussion of the concept of 'biblical inspiration' that has permeated the Christian, and particularly evangelical, community in the last half-century has created an opportunity for reflection on precisely how the Bible functions in the life of the believing community. The desire of evangelical Christians to link biblical inspiration with the authority of the Scriptures for all of life is profoundly biblical. Various passages in the OT assert the comprehensive nature of the words which God has spoken to the Israelites. Central to these is Deut. 6:6-10: 'These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands, and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.' The text is clear. Every moment of every day is supposed to be filled with *torah*, with the story of who God is and what God has done. This story is inside your very being, your imagination, and you should not be able to help talking about this story to everyone, your children at home and everyone you meet, no matter where you are. When you are awake you tell this story, you even dream in its symbols and metaphors. This story is on your

hand so that you see it enacted in all that you do, and on your forehead so that others see this story in all that you think and say. Even your homes and your life in the public square, in the academy, in scientific endeavour and in historical report are to be shaped by this story.

Although this text applies only to *torah*, 2 Tim. 3:16-17 makes a similarly comprehensive claim in relation to all of what is now our OT. As a result, some have argued that this text is not helpful for a discussion of biblical inspiration because it does not refer to the entire body of Christian Scripture. It is clear, however, that as the writings of the NT were accorded a status similar to that of the OT by the early church, this text was applied by the community to those writings as well. Hence, a dynamic reading of this text in the context of Christian tradition applies it to all those writings that the church confesses to be Scripture.

Paul roots the importance of Scripture for our lives precisely in the inspired, or 'God-breathed', character of Scripture: 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

A living word

By describing the Scriptures as 'God-breathed' Paul echoes various OT texts where the breath of God caused life to be present. God breathed the breath of life into the earth-creature in Eden, and Adam became a living being (Gen. 2:7). After describing in rich detail the intricacy of the world that God has created, the psalmist confesses, 'When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth' (Ps. 104:30). God's Spirit creates life and renews life. (One needs to note that in Hebrew the word for spirit and breath are the same, *ruah*.) And, of course, in Ezek. 37 it is only when the Spirit of God is breathed into the dry bones of Israel that they live; the breath of God is the Spirit of resurrection.

What this means at the very least is that the Scriptures, being God-breathed, are a living word, a word that brings life, a word that participates in the renewal of creation (see also Isa. 55:10-11; Heb. 4:12). It is worth noting that Paul spends no time trying to describe the process by which the Scriptures are God-breathed or inspired. His focus is rather on the role that such God-breathed texts have

in the community. The implications are clear. No matter what we confess about the meaning of inspiration, if the Scriptures are not functioning in our communities in the ways that Paul describes, then our lives deny our confession and the Bible is stifled.

The function of inspiration

So how are the Scriptures to function in our midst, according to 2 Tim. 3:16-17? Paul lists four roles that Scripture plays: teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. The first three of these suggest that the living word of Scripture gives us a new word, it shakes us up, teaching us things we had not dreamed or imagined, reproving us when we have acted in death-dealing ways contrary to its living word, and correcting us when we have allowed our imaginations to become captive to the spirits of our age. This means that the Spirit of God works continually through this text to challenge and transform our communities (cf. Heb. 4:12).

Training in righteousness

Such challenge, moreover, is for the purpose of training us in righteousness. Paul could hardly have chosen a term more laden with meaning. Such meaning becomes even more evident when we acknowledge that *dikaïosynē* (usually translated 'righteousness') can be just as accurately translated 'justice'. Throughout the OT the righteousness of God is concerned precisely with such issues of justice. When God comes in righteousness the captives will be set free, the oppressed will be liberated and the poor will be lifted up. The prophets continually call for the community to cease their idolatrous oppression of the poor and practise righteousness; and Paul describes the gospel in terms of the righteousness or justice of God, in sharp contrast to the righteousness and justice of the Roman empire (Rom. 1:17).

*Jesus explicitly links the anointing of the Spirit with the practice of such justice or righteousness at his baptism, where he tells John that his baptism is necessary to fulfil all righteousness. Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit of God descends on Jesus like a dove (Matt. 3:14-16). Jesus himself explains the connection between the Spirit and righteousness in Luke 4:18-19, where he says, 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the

prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Not only is Jesus quoting Isa. 61:1-2 here; he is also alluding to texts, such as Isa. 11:1-5, which describe the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests as the one who will judge the poor with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, because righteousness, or justice, is the belt around his waist.

The Christian community, which claims to have received this same Spirit at Pentecost, must allow the Scriptures to train it in the practice of such justice, or it denies the presence of the Spirit in both the text and the community. Paul reiterates this point in the next verse: the people of God must be equipped for good work in everything. The Greek word *pan* is comprehensive and calls the Christian community to the practice of discipleship in every area of life. This means that the inspired nature of the Bible in relation to geography, science, history, education, business and the arts demands the practice of righteousness in how we plan our life together, in the houses we build and in the shape of our cities; in our scientific endeavours and the purposes for which we do our scientific research; in the way we interpret our history as the story of the privileged and victorious or as the story of 'the least of these'; in the way we educate our children, and whether we allow them to be enculturated by the militaristic consumerism of our culture; in our business, and where we position profits in relation to the call for justice; in our artistic life and how we offer symbols of hope in the midst of the pain of our culture.

Because the Scriptures are Spirit-inspired, they are one way that the Spirit works in our midst. If the Spirit animates creation, brings life to the dead, enables the proclamation of justice, comforts the oppressed, and reconciles us with God through all of this, then the God-breathed Scriptures function in the same way in our communities: animating our created life, bringing life out of the hopeless death of sin, proclaiming justice and bringing comfort in the face of oppression, and in so doing instructing us for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

A prophetic word

Such a view of inspiration reflects the prophetic nature of inspired Scripture. Like the prophets, Scripture calls the community back from unfaithfulness and injustice into a life of justice

in relationship with a living and righteous God. In this sense, biblical inspiration is always dynamic, for the Spirit has worked not only through the oral recollection and compilation of the Bible, but also through Scripture's ongoing life in a community that itself has the Spirit living in its midst.

Bibliography

P. J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Peabody, 1999); J. Begbie, 'Who is This God? Biblical Inspiration Revisited', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 43.2 (1992), pp. 259–282; W. Brueggemann, W. C. Placher and B. K. Blount, *Struggling with Scripture* (Louisville, 2002); C. Gunton, 'All Scripture is Inspired ...?' *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 14.3 (1993), pp. 240–253; S. Hauerwas, *Unleashing Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, 1993); R. C. Hill, 'Psalm 45: A Locus Classicus for Patristic Thinking on Inspiration', *Studia Patristica*, 23 (1993), pp. 95–100; I. H. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, 1982); J. Muddiman, 'The Holy Spirit and Inspiration', in R. Morgan (ed.), *The Religion of the Incarnation* (Bristol, 1989); J. Perry, 'Discovering the Inerrancy Debate: How Modern Philosophy Shaped the Evangelical View of Scripture', *Journal for Christian Theological Research*, 6.3 (2001); B. Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia, 1972); B. J. Walsh, 'Reimaging Biblical Authority', *Christian Scholar's Review*, 26.2 (1996), pp. 206–220; N. T. Wright, 'How Can the Bible be Authoritative?', *Vox Evangelica*, 21 (1991), pp. 7–32.

S. C. KEESMAAT

BIG BANG, see COSMOLOGY

BIOETHICS

Visitors leaving the UK pavilion of the international EXPO 2000 exhibition in Hanover were faced with a photo of Dolly the cloned sheep, symbolizing British achievement. Her creation in 1996 by scientists at the Roslin Institute not only marked a watershed in biology but also created a secular icon for our times. She represents at once the promise and the threat of the rapid developments in biotechnology, both unimagined possibilities

and awesome dilemmas. She also reflects the globalization of bioethics in an age of instant worldwide communication. There was an immediate and trans-cultural reaction that reproductive cloning was a technical road from which humanity should refrain on ethical grounds. To go one step further in applying asexual reproduction to humans would violate a moral norm. This and several recent developments in the biological *sciences are posing a deep irony for postmodern culture set on rejecting all universal claims. The popular use of terms like 'playing God' reveal a need to appeal to an absolute in order to express the intuition that we are going too far, too riskily or too fast. Biotechnological advances are raising far-reaching questions about the nature of life which postmodernity is finding itself ill-equipped to deal with.

What is a human being? What limits are there to human genetic capacities in terms of aging and organ replacement? Having overridden previous boundaries in reproduction, against what ethical norms do we decide what to do with the new possibilities? As we probe further into the human genome, who has control of genetic information and who should have access to it – wider family members, insurance and drugs companies or employers? Should we select embryos to avoid inherited propensities to terrible diseases or seek to eliminate the diseases by genetically engineering the germline? Should we allow people to enhance human genetic traits? How far should we intervene in nature and into the genetics of other organisms, and for what purposes? Should we allow genetically modified crops or animals? What distinctions ought we to draw among species? Are humans fundamentally different from animals?

Bioethics is providing some of the most significant apologetic opportunities of our times, in two ways. First, people are asking fundamental metaphysical questions with little or no framework around which to form answers. The immediate role of bioethics is to give an informed, sensitive Christian voice in the market place of ideas in which these issues are being debated. It is a place, however, where dogmatic statements of belief are apt to be met by hostility, where we have to earn the right to speak, subtly and not by presuming upon our position. Indeed, the context we speak within may reject any idea of principles and seek to reduce all discourse to matters of efficacy or

cost-risk-benefit. In such a debate, the apologist's first task may be to reveal the unspoken principles of the major players in order to clear the ground for proper debate. The second and deeper role of bioethics is for Christians to point beyond the particular issues to the deeper questions of belief and world-view, highlighting some of the drawbacks of contemporary alternative philosophies which these questions reveal.

For example, the ethical imperative of medical research to address human suffering is generally accepted, but its justification is not absolute. It may imply a need to examine deeper issues. Thus, research into embryonic stem cells is justified by prospects of treatments by cell replacement for diabetes, heart failure and Alzheimer's. The projected consequences were argued to override principled ethical concerns about the status of the embryo. Proposals to use pig hearts for human transplant presumed that overcoming organ 'shortages' was more important than other considerations like human-animal interventions. The emerging field of pharmacogenomics – designing *drugs specific to the patient's genetics – epitomizes a trend away from classical medicine as care for the sick in a wider context of life to medicine as a technical fix. In such examples, the justification of novel techniques should not be automatic and unbounded, but needs setting in a wider moral framework. A positivistic, success orientation of biomedical research, especially in the USA, can become dangerously myopic. We should point out that not all diseases will be cured nor all patients. Suffering will always be part of the human condition. No matter how many spare organs or treatments are available, we will all eventually die. Medicine thus needs to recover a proper theology of suffering and of eternity, which presents a vital opportunity for a Christian apologetic.

A second belief is in human progress driven by scientific advance. Through much of the twentieth century this figured as an idol making supreme truth-claims, but as the century closed, it was seen to have feet of clay, after a series of technological and environmental failures and a penetrating postmodern sociological critique. Issues like cloning, sex selection or post-menopausal fertility reveal the inability of the rationale of science to do more than point to the next experiment. In themselves, the biosciences know nothing of

ethical limits nor how to set their discoveries in their wider human context, and often make unspoken value assumptions about progress that Christians would challenge.

The prospect of genetic enhancement of human physical or mental attributes is remote, but it highlights several such issues. To attempt to correct a genetic mutation in the individual patient which causes a severe medical condition like cystic fibrosis is normally viewed as an ethical extension of existing medicine, but what of engineering merely for personal preference? The me-centred ethic of the materialist consumer might ask 'Why not?' But a personal desire to 'hard-wire' whatever genetic advantages I choose into myself or my child would be a luxury only for the rich, which would cut across wider concerns for social responsibility and *justice, equity and love for neighbour. More profoundly it would not improve our human lot if it is based on a false view of humanity and misses the dimension of human moral fallenness. Whatever technical enhancements we might imagine engineering into ourselves, it is an illusion that we have improved humanity while, as Jesus declared, it is what is in our hearts which defiles us. The intrinsic faultline of sin runs through all such human 'improvements'. Even the best repair is only temporary. Deliverance 'from this body of death' requires 'a new heavens and a new earth', the resurrection of the dead, not merely progressive technical improvements. Ideas of improvement are also subverted by the biblical picture of Christ, the perfection of humanity, as the man of sorrows, the shepherd king who though in the form of God became like a servant and was 'made perfect through suffering'. Our calling, man and woman alike, to emulate him 'that Christ may be formed in me' is something very different from changing our genetics.

The controversy over genetically modified food reveals fundamental issues about how far we should intervene in God's creation and shows two prominent and opposing philosophical views. One is unfettered human intervention, treating God's creation as a mere resource and seeing living systems only in terms of their functions for human use, without relation to God, fellow humans or respect for the rest of God's creation. The other is the elevation of nature to an autonomous or quasi-divine status like the earth mother goddess Gaia, which we alter at our peril lest 'she'