# THE DETERMINATION OF GOD'S ACTION IN HISTORY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

by

STEPHEN FOURIE

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# SUMMARY


## Chapter I.

The question of the determination of God's action in history is introduced. It represents something of a problem, for we wish to assert, on the one hand, that God is active in history, and on the other, that his action is not directly discernible in history. Butterfield's 'solution' to this problem is considered. He indicates that there are three levels of analysis in history. The last of these makes it possible to speak of God's action in history without asserting that his action is directly discernible. It is noted that Butterfield's third level of analysis is in fact a call for a philosophy of history. Butterfield's work, it is suggested, would have been enhanced if at this stage he had spoken of the role of faith in determining the action of God. The role of faith is considered; faith does not add anything to history but supplies the necessary principle of interpretation. The question of the relation between faith and events in history is discussed by reference to some aspects of the history of the concept of revelation. The understanding of revelation in the work of the 19th-century theologians, Barth, Bultmann, and Pannenberg is briefly discussed. It is concluded that faith is related to events in history in that it is based on an understanding of the past events of history, and it enables us to understand that God is present in the present events of history. It also enables us to understand that he will be present in future events. In conclusion, it is noted that it is acceptable for Butterfield to assert that it is through our 'final interpretation of history' that we are able to see God's

action in history.

Chapters II to IV describe and criticise Butterfield's precise understanding of how God is present in history.

Chapter II

The importance of persons as having a unique status among God's creatures is discussed. While this status may indicate that God's action is in some respects to be found in the action of men, it is noted that Butterfield's primary word on the subject is one of warning, for he indicates that history shows that all men are sinners. Butterfield's discussion of history and human nature is outlined. He notes and discusses the primacy of persons; the generality of human wickedness; and the prevalence of the sin of self-righteousness in history. It is argued that this indicates that Butterfield understands God to be at work in history holding human cupidity in check, and working through the power of his love. It is suggested that, while Butterfield's discussion is a good one, it does not go far enough. By considering some aspects of the New Testament teaching (the Pauline conception of the 'new man', and his teaching on δικαιοσύνη) and Niebuhr's discussion of 'the paradox of grace', it is indicated that Butterfield ignores a whole theatre of God's action in history, namely, his work in creating a 'new humanity'.

Chapter III

It is suggested that a moral deity would not call a morally neutral order of creation into existence. It is noted that But-

terfield discusses the matter of morality in history from two angles. Firstly, he discusses the question of moral judgements in history. He indicates that they exist; that they exist because of the defects in human nature; and that, while judgement is always upon people, the sentence falls upon the schematised patterns into which human life ranges itself. He indicates that these judgements are the judgements of God. It is noted that the assertion that moral judgements indicate the action of God is problematic because, if it is not carefully discussed and limited, it may indicate that God's action is arbitrary. It is noted, however, that the possibility of this arbitrariness is avoided if moral judgements are seen to operate as a law in history. It is further noted that, because Butterfield is forced to qualify his understanding of God's action through moral judgements (by stating that the judgements are to be understood as self-judgements, and that moral judgements are alien to the realm of scientific history), the notion of moral judgements in history is only of limited value in determining the action of God in history. Secondly, Butterfield discusses the problem of suffering. He states that the Suffering Servant concept indicates that some forms of suffering are to be seen as vicarious suffering. The chapter is concluded by comparing Butterfield's conclusions regarding suffering with those of John Hick. This comparison indicates that the idea that God is active in the creative outcome of cataclysm and tragic conflict is also only of limited use in determining the action of God, for not all suffering leads to a heightening of personality.

Chapter IV

The chapter indicates that the idea of providence in history is given adequate treatment if it is asserted that God is active in history, and that he is not the only genuine actor. It is indicated that Butterfield recognises the need for both of these requirements. He gives the first one adequate attention, especially in his discussion of how history goes on over our heads. Although he indicates that he does not see God as the only actor in history, he takes this too far for he fails to give sufficient attention to the understanding that God is at work guiding the course of history. He fails here because he does not treat providence eschatologically. In order to show that it is necessary to treat providence eschatologically, the development of the doctrine of providence in recent years is outlined. Schleiermacher, Ritschl, dialectical theology, Niebuhr and Gilkey are all mentioned in this outline. It is shown that Butterfield's position is clearly against the liberal theologians and that, like Niebuhr's understanding, it has some affinities with dialectical theology. Finally, it is argued that Gilkey's understanding whereby providence is understood eschatologically is a more accurate one than that of Butterfield. It is stated that God must be understood to be bringing history to a culmination.

Chapter V

This chapter sets out the two conclusions of the thesis. The first is that God's acts are discernible only by the eye of faith. It is shown that this understanding is to be found in

Butterfield's work. It is also argued that this understanding is true to the New Testament view. Two objections to this conclusion are considered: The first is that of Pannenberg who states that history ought to influence theology. It is shown that this is not true, not even of Pannenberg's own theology. The second objection is that this makes the whole matter of understanding God's action too subjective, but it is shown that this approach is as objective as that of history itself. Up to this point the conclusions are in agreement with Butterfield's understanding, but it is argued that his method, and thus his understanding require development. The second conclusion is that in attempting to discover God's action in history, we must begin with a theological inquiry before proceeding to a historical one. It is shown that Butterfield does in fact begin with theology rather than history. Finally it is argued that, because Butterfield's work illustrates that he would have had a far better and deeper understanding of God's action in history had he started with a much more thorough theological inquiry, our theological inquiry must be as thorough as possible. It is indicated that Gilkey, who set out on this path, does not go far enough. Thus, Butterfield's work provides a valuable starting point, and points the way forward, for a full understanding of God's action in history.

# CHAPTER I

## THE DETERMINATION OF GOD'S ACTION IN HISTORY

Either God is present in history or he is not. Christians believe that he is.[1] A.A. Hoekema states this belief in clear and concise terms: "God is working out his plan in history. Individuals may rebel against God and try to frustrate his plan. Others will try to do his will and live for the advancement of his kingdom. In either case God remains in control."[2] This view, which is the usual Christian understanding of history,[3] is not shared by all modern thinkers,[4] and nor is it a typical ancient belief,[5] but it is a necessary belief for Jews and Christians who understand history to be primarily a history of salvation.[6] This understanding of God's presence in the world is the primary contribution of the Heilsgeschichte school to the fund of theological knowledge. As Alan Richardson puts it: "The

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1. In his fifth discourse on religion Schleiermacher asserted that history as a totality is God's revelation, and so did Schelling. Hegel believed universal history to be an indirect revelation of God. (W. Pannenberg, Revelation as History, p. 16f.) The Heilsgeschichte school and the process theologians are among many who today hold the view that God is present in history.
2. A.A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, p.25.
3. This conclusion is not held today in quite the same way as it was before the revolution in historical thinking, but it is nevertheless asserted that our life and history is in God's hands. Cf. W. Pannenberg, Faith and Reality, chap.1 and A. Richardson, The Bible in the Age of Science, chap.2.
4. For example, it is not shared by Burkhardt since he does not believe that a historian may deal with "ultimate ends". (K. Löwith, Meaning in History, p.20ff.)
5. For example, Löwith argues that the ancient Greeks did not attempt to discover the ultimate meaning of the world, but concentrated their attention on the cosmic law of growth and decay. (Löwith. op. cit., p.4)
6. See K. Löwith, ibid., p.5.

factuality of God's action in the events to which the Bible testifies is the central affirmation of the Heilsgeschichte school, but it is not a new emphasis which that school has made for the first time in the twentieth century; it is the historic Christian faith."[7] It is important to note that Heilsgeschichte is not simply concerned with the events recorded in the Bible, but may also be broadened to include the present events of history.[8] There is therefore a substantial amount of support within the theological world for people like Hoekema who say:[9]

> "...'sacred history' is indeed revelatory of God and his purposes. Since, however, 'sacred history' is the key to the meaning of all history (because it is at the center of God's dealings with man), and since all of history is under God's control and direction, we may say that all of history is a revelation of God. This is not to say that history is always crystal-clear in its message. Truth is often on the scaffold, and wrong is often on the throne. While historical events are happening, it is often quite difficult, if not impossible, to discern what God is saying to us through them. ...Nevertheless, it must be maintained that history -particularly redemptive history- reveals God and his purposes."

But, as soon as we say "all of history is under God's control", we beg the questions: How? and How do you know? In other words, we raise the question of the determination of God's action in history. The determination of God's action in history is the crucial question for any theological understanding of history,

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7. A. Richardson, op. cit., p.141.
8. While not all scholars may agree that Heilsgeschichte may be used this way, Peter John Olivi understood history itself to be Heilsgeschichte (R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, p.162) And today, Pannenberg speaks of the broadening of Heilsgeschichte into a universal history. (W. Pannenberg, Revelation as History, p.133)
9. A.A. Hoekema, op. cit., p.26.

for God's action is not directly discernible in history. If we assert that God is active in history, or that history is moving towards a divinely ordained goal, without at the same time, attempting to say how or where God is active, our assertion will resemble mere superstition.

But it is not easy to say how or where God is active in history. The reason for this is that God cannot be recognised directly. Alan Richardson gives the conclusion of this line of reasoning: "No human science can investigate God or his action in history."[10] But this does not mean that the question of the determination of God's action in history must be set aside, for, as Karl Löwith says, "It is the privilege of theology and philosophy, as contrasted with the sciences, to ask questions that cannot be answered on the basis of empirical knowledge".[11]

Kierkegaard's explanation of our inability to discover the action of God in a direct way (that is, in contrast to a belief that his action may be discovered through intermediate agencies) is an important one. Kierkegaard believed that "direct recognizableness is paganism".[12] He arrived at this conclusion because his whole outlook was governed by the notion that God is 'other'.[13] The result is that in Kierkegaard's understanding "God is not to

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10. Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, p.11.
11. K. Löwith, op. cit., p.3. We may add that in some respects this is not true only of philosophy and theology but also of history. The objectivity of history is discussed in chapter 5.
12. Cit. ap., Colin Brown, History, Criticism & Faith, p.151.
13. See Brown, ibid., p.149.

be identified with anything in history even when he is present. For since God is other, he remains incognito."[14] Having introduced the subject of this thesis in the form of a problem, we may now proceed directly to Herbert Butterfield's 'solution'.

Butterfield is convinced that God is active in history. The thought of a God who is outside life and history is quickly dismissed:[15]

> "Of all the factors which have operated to the disadvantage of religion and the undermining of religious sense in recent centuries, the most damaging has been the notion of an absentee God who might be supposed to have created the universe in the first place, but who is then assumed to have left it to run as a piece of clockwork, so that he is outside our lives, outside history itself, unable to affect the course of things and hidden away from us by an impenatrable screen."

God is not absent, he is present. He is "working at every moment, visible in every event".[16] Butterfield's explanation of how God is visible in every event is of critical importance for the subject of this thesis. He explains that there are three ways of looking at the events of history and nature. Each way is valid and all three are true at the same time. He also refers to these three 'ways' as three different levels, or three different kinds of analysis. He argues that on the first level of analysis men's actions make history. He calls this the biographical way of looking at events, for the important point at this level is that we have to do with men acting "with a certain amount of freedom so that they can be held responsible for the

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14. Ibid., p.152.
15. H. Butterfield, "God in History", in C.T. McIntire (ed.), God, History, and Historians, p. 193.
16. Ibid., p.194.

decisions they make."[17] On the second level he finds that history represents a realm of law. At this level, which he calls the historical way of looking at events, the events of history "are in a certain sense reducible to laws" for "however unpredictable history may be before it has happened it is capable of rational explanation once it has happened."[18] Butterfield maintains that in a sense history, at this level, goes on over Men's heads, for here we have to deal with, for example, deep forces and tendencies such as those which led to the 1914 - 1918 war; "deep forces and tendencies which were working in fact for generations to help make the twentieth century an era of colossal warfare."[19] At the third level of analysis we find the Providence of God. Butterfield argues that we should not picture God as interfering with nature or history but rather as the one who in his Providence continues the original work of creation and continually maintains the world. He argues that this view is one of two views that can be held about life or about history. The other is that everything must be traced back to pure chance. He is convinced, however, that one or other of the views must be held, for while scientific laws can explain why events occur, they cannot explain the conjuncture of events, and it is the conjuncture of events that is important in history. It is by means of this third level of analysis that we may speak of God's action in history. Butterfield mentions that "in a sense" this level includes the other two levels.[20] The following pass-

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17. Ibid., p.199.
18. Ibid., p.195.
19. Ibid., p.199.
20. Ibid., p.196.

age indicates how the third level may include the others, as well as the danger of treating them in connection with the first:

> "We may believe in some form of providence that guides the destiny of men and we may if we like read this into our history; but what our history brings to us is not proof of providence but rather the realisation of how mysterious are its ways... Our assumptions do not matter if we are conscious that they are assumptions, but the most fallacious thing in the world is to organise our historical knowledge upon an assumption without realising what we are doing, and then to make inferences from that organisation and claim that these are the voice of history."[21]

It is because of his understanding of the third way of looking at history that he is able to speak quite directly of God's action in history. For example, he writes:[22]

> "The Providence of God is at work in the downfall of Nazism, in the judgements that come on the British Empire for its own sins, in the present prosperity of the United States, and in our own individual daily experiences. That is what we see with the higher and more royal parts of our minds, when we make our highest judgements about life - our real valuations about events. And that is what we ought to say when we have our national joys, or our national victories or our national problems or our national dangers. We have to say: Providence has put us in this predicament - what can it mean? what moral good can we get out of it? what does God intend us to do when he puts this problem before us? what sins did we commit as a nation to merit this response from God and from history?

Butterfield believes that when we ask these kinds of questions we are adopting the biblical interpretation of history. He points out that the "fate and vicissitudes" of the Old Testament people "were uncommonly like those of most other states - even modern ones"[23] but where they differed was in seeing God as the God of history and in interpreting their history in the

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21. H. Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History, p.23.
22. H. Butterfield, "God in History", in C.T. McIntire (ed.) God, History, and Historians, p.197.
23. Ibid., p.201.

light of that fact.

As we have just seen, it is by means of this distinction of levels in history that Butterfield is able to speak about God's action in history. He does not pretend that the action of God can be seen in what he calls 'scientific history'. Scientific history is the study of history undertaken by the historians. It is a study that ought to produce the same results for all scholars irrespective of the political or theological views that they may hold. Butterfield believes that it is in this sense that it is scientific; it has to do with those things which are equally true for a Christian or an Athiest.[24] At this level, talk of the action of God would be out of place, for, says Butterfield:[25]

> "Historians, limited by the kind of apparatus they use and the concrete evidence on which they must rely, restrict their realm to what we might almost call the mechanism of historical processes: the tangible factors involved in an episode, the displacements produced in human affairs by an observed event or a specific influence, even the kind of movements that can be recorded in statistics."

Because of this restriction, historians are not able to develop a self-explanatory system.[26] This in turn means that our relationship to the "human drama... is a matter not of scholarship,

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24. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.16-24. Butterfield's certainty of the objectivity of 'scientific history' is not shared by scholars such as Gilkey who, as we shall see in the last chapter, stresses the role of the historian's presuppositions in even determining 'facts'. Though, what Butterfield says here must be balanced with his assertion: "We go to the past to discover not facts only significances". (In The Whig Interpretation of History, p.93.)
25. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.19.
26. Ibid., p.22.

but of religion."[27] Thus for Butterfield, our "final interpretation of history"[28] cannot be settled by those engaged upon the task of scientific history. This interpretation has to do with our understanding of the third level in history. His understanding of the difference between interpretation (the third level) and historical study is indicated in the following passage, where, speaking of the middle ages, he says:[29]

> "(The) belief that God or the stars were responsible for an outbreak of plague did not necessarily forbid all study of natural processes that might be involved; any more than the belief that God chastises a nation with war need stop a historical study of the intermediate human agencies which might have provoked a given conflict."

In Christianity and History, where Butterfield does not mention the three ways of looking at history, he makes the following statement:[30]

> "Those who believe that God is in history, and those who say that there is no God in history can hardly help offering what are really concealed arguments in a circle whenever they talk about the subject."

We may take this to be his understanding of what happens when one attempts to discuss the contents appropriate to the third way of looking at history, in connection with either of the first two levels.

Does Butterfield's three-fold way of looking at the events of history and nature solve the problem of the determination of God's action in history that we raised earlier in the chapter? We said that the problem is that God's action is not directly

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27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p.25.
29. H. Butterfield, The Statecraft of Machiavelli, p.63.
30. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.128.

discernible in history because human science cannot investigate God or his action. It seems that Butterfield does provide a solution to this problem for, while believing that when we adopt the biblical interpretation of history we are able to see the action of God in history, he does not expect us to see God directly, and nor does he expect scientific history to discern God's action. His writings make it absolutely clear that he does not understand God's action to be directly discernible in history. Two illustrations of this will suffice. First, in Christianity and History[31] he records being completely baffled by a candidate for a viva voce examination in Oxford who "ascribed everything to the direct interposition of the Almighty and therefore felt himself excused from the discussion of any intermediate agencies." And second, Butterfield spells out his own view in some detail in "God in History":[32]

> "Of course it is possible to read history and study the course of centuries without seeing God in the story at all; just as it is possible for men to live their lives in the present day without seeing that God has any part to play. I could not go to people and say that if they studied nearly two thousand years of European history this would be bound to make them Christian; I could not say that such a stretch of history would prove to any impartial person that Providence underlies the whole human drama."

If God is only seen through intermediate agencies, how do we discern God's action in history? Butterfield's answer is that that depends on our interpretation of history. The reason for this is clear. If God's action is not directly discernible in

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31. Ibid., p.20.
32. H. Butterfield, "God in History", in C.T. McIntire (ed.), God, History, and Historians, p.200

history we cannot turn to scientific history to discover that action. As Butterfield puts it:[33]

> "When we seek to know how God is revealed in history we do not make a chart or diagram of all the centuries and try to show what the future great world-empires are tending or to what end great human organizations are moving."

On the positive side he says:[34]

> "If we wish to know how God works in history we shall not find it by looking at the charts of all the centuries - we have to begin by seeing how God works in our individual lives and then we expand this on to the scale of the nation, we project it on to the scale of mankind. Only those who have brought God home to themselves in this way will be able to see him at work in history, and without this we might be tempted to see history as a tale told by an idiot, a product of blind Chance."

When Butterfield talks about "the fulness of our commentary on the drama of human life in time"[35] he makes it clear that history alone cannot provide this fulness. The fulness, which fills the story with power and significance, is to be found in a combination of history and religion. He points out[36] that this combination is found in a Christian interpretation of history, in the Marxian system, or even in H.G. Wells' History of the World. What Butterfield is saying here is that scientific history is not sufficient for determining the meaning of the human drama, but that a philosophy of history is also necessary. In addition to this, he argues that each person has to choose his own philosophy of history in order to make sense of what happens. He writes:[37]

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33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p.201.
35. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.23.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p.25.

> "Our final interpretation of history is the most sovereign decision we can take, and it is clear that everyone of us, as standing alone in the universe, has to take it for himself. It is our decision about religion, about our total attitude to things, and about the way we will appropriate life. And it is inseparable from our decision about the rôle we are going to play ourselves in that very drama of history."

Our discussion above leads us to conclude that Butterfield's third level of analysis is merely a call for an appropriate philosophy of history. He tends to reduce the possibilities to two:[38] either one believes in Providence, or one believes in Chance. He, of course, chooses to believe that God is at work in history. Butterfield's work would have been enhanced if at this point he had discussed the role of faith in determining God's action. It is by speaking of faith that most writers are able to discuss God's presence in history. For example, in his discussion of the biblical view of history, Karl Löwith says:[39] "The Christian understanding of history and time is not a matter of theoretical demonstration but a concern of faith..." But, while Butterfield does not speak directly of faith, he seems to assume the role of faith in the believer. His threefold schema therefore has the advantage of allowing the role of faith to play its essential part in the determination of God's action. The role of faith is not that it adds something new to what exists. It is rather a new way of interpreting what is already before us.[40] It is this interpretative aspect of faith that enables us to 'see' the action of God in history. The

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38. H. Butterfield, "God in History", in C.T. McIntire (ed.) God, History, and Historians, p.200.
39. K. Löwith, op. cit., p.186.
40. See C. Brown, op. cit., p.195.

words St Augustine was fond of using are appropriate in this connection: nisi credideritus, non intelligtis.[41] The quotation of these words at this stage of our discussion could be seen as what someone (I think it was Tillich) once described as the tendency to fill an intellectual gap with devotional material. But it is not. In the first place, it is an attempt to make sense of Richardson's accurate observation that even in the unlikely event of a Christian and a non-Christian historian being in substantial agreement concerning the facts of biblical history, they would differ so widely in their interpretation of the facts, that they would arrive at quite dissimilar conclusions when they came to write their respective histories.[42] Their interpretation would, of course, differ because they do not share the same faith. Secondly, we may, from our discussion above, agree with Kierkegaard that belief in the understanding that the eternal is revealed in history is a paradox.[43] We may also agree with him that "faith is the acceptance of paradox in all its absurdity"[44] for the use of paradox is merely an attempt to talk about God in such a way that we avoid the over-literalness which leads to an attitude of idolatry.[45] In the third place, faith may be seen as a principle of interpretation, and it is common sense that every interpretation of history, whether Christian or not, must have a principle of interpretation. Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out that the various principles of interpretation current

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41. Cit. ap., Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, p.19.
42. A. Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p.92.
43. See A. Richardson, The Bible in an Age of Science, p.51.
44. Ibid., p.52.
45. See John Macquarrie, God-Talk, p.228.

in modern culture, which claim to be the result of a scientific analysis of the course of events, are all principles of interpretation introduced by faith.[46]

Now, however, we must put an important question. How is faith related to events in history? That is, does faith only depend on religious consciousness, or is it also somehow based on historical events? In answer to this question, we may briefly consider some aspects of the history of the concept of revelation. It is appropriate that we begin our survey with 19th-century theology. Karl Barth, whose own contribution to the debate about the nature of revelation is an extremely important one, has this to say of 19th-century theology:[47]

> "Mindful of its origins in Herder and the Romanticists, 19th-century theology has given new emphasis and recognition to the essentially historical nature of the Christian faith which sets Christianity apart from other religions. This is the merit and achievement of this theology. Christian faith is shaped by its relationship to the history which finds its central meaning in the name of Jesus Christ."

Barth points out that the spokesmen of 19th-century theology saw the Christian faith as a series of historical phenomena, and that Jesus had therefore to be apprehended historically according to the historical-critical method prevailing at that time.[48] The 19th-century theologians had to "approach the person and the life of Jesus on the basis of the New Testament record, but they also had to distinguish His own religion from that of His witnesses and their environment."[49] This led to the so-called 'quest for the historical Jesus'. The results of this development have

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46. See Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p.99.
47. K. Barth, The Humanity of God, p.27.
48. Ibid., p.28.
49. Ibid.

been described[50] as first leading to the liberal Jesus "who enunciated nineteenth century platitudes about the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man",[51] then to A Schweitzer and the 'consistent eschatology' school, and finally, to the Form-critics' view that the theology of the New Testament Church stands between us and a reliable knowledge of the life and teaching of the Jesus of history. In Alan Richardson's view,[52] the combined impact of Barth and Bultmann led to the virtual abandonment by scholars of the Liberal quest for the historical Jesus.

Bultmann set about demythologizing the Bible. He explained that to demythologize the passages of the Bible which "bear the stamp of mythological expressions" does not mean that they are eliminated but that they are made understandable to modern thought.[53] The implications of his programme for our understanding of revelation and history are seen, for example, in his treatment of the resurrection. His conclusion is that: "The resurrection itself is not an event of past history. All that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection."[54] On the positive side he says: "...the resurrection is an article of faith because it is far more than the resuscitation of a corpse - it is the

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50. By Alan Richardson, The Bible in the Age of Science, p.123.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p.125.
53. Rudolf Bultmann, in E.J. Tinsley (ed.), Modern Theology 2 Rudolf Bultmann, p.64.
54. Ibid., p.77.

eschatological event."[55] How do we arrive at this faith? Bultmann answers: "Christ meets us in the preaching as the one crucified and nowhere else."[56]

Barth also divorces revelation from history in this sort of way. His basic reason for severing the links between revelation and history on the one hand, and revelation and faith (the link that existed for the 19th-century theologians) on the other, is that there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and man[57] so that God can only be known through God. God is hidden even in his revelation, and is thus known only through his Word. The Word of God has a threefold form, namely, Jesus Christ, the revealed Word of God; Scripture, the written Word of God; and the proclaimed Word of God. In speaking of Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, Colin Brown concludes: "...Barth preserved the otherness of God and the dynamic character of revelation, while at the same time showing that revelation has an objective, knowable content."[58]

However, in recent years scholars like Wolfhart Pannenberg have attempted to restore the link between revelation and history. Pannenberg argues that the self-revelation of God is indirect and is thus brought about by means of the historical acts of God.[59] This revelation is not comprehended completely in the beginning,

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55. Ibid., p.75.
56. Ibid., p.76.
57. See William Nicholls, Systematic and Philosophical Theology, p. 94.
58. C. Brown, op. cit., p.188.
59. In Revelation as History, p.125ff.

but at the end of revealing history. This placing of revelation at the close of history is grounded in the indirectness of revelation. Further, the historical revelation has a universal character. The universal revelation of God is realized in Jesus of Nazereth insofar as the end of all events is anticipated in his fate. Pannenberg's discussion of the universal character of historical revelation is important for our present discussion. He argues against any understanding that puts revelation in contrast to, or conflict with, 'natural knowledge'.[60] As far as he is concerned, the historical revelation is open to anyone who has eyes to see. This means that faith is not the basis for finding the revelation of God in the history of Israel and of Jesus Christ.[61] Rather, the knowledge of God's revelation in the history demonstrating his deity is the basis of faith.[62] Pannenberg acknowledges that "history is not composed of raw or so-called brute facts"[63] but that the events of history are understandable only in the context of the traditions and expectations in which they occur. For this reason, he retains the concept of the Word of God saying: "The Word relates itself to revelation as foretelling, forthtelling and report."[64]

How then is faith related to events in history? It is related in two ways. On the one hand, it is based on the events of past history, namely the revelatory events of the history of

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60. Ibid., p.135.
61. Ibid., p.137.
62. Ibid., p.138.
63. Ibid., p.152.
64. Ibid.

Israel and of Jesus Christ. However, in the last chapter we shall see how the understanding that God was at work in these past events is itself based on faith. It was by faith that the people of the time were able to discern the action of God, and it is by faith, or, more correctly, it is by our interpretation based on faith that we are able to acknowledge that God was at work in the events to which the Bible attests. And on the other hand, faith is related to events in history in that our faith enables us to understand that God is present in the current events of history, and that he will be present in the future events of history. This assurance of the present and future acts of God has its basis in the knowledge given us through the Word of God.[65] We will need to return to this discussion in the last chapter, but now we may simply note that it is perfectly acceptable for Butterfield to assert that it is through our 'final interpretation of history' (though we would prefer 'through faith, believing that faith is the appropriate principle of interpretation for a Christian) that we are able to see God's action in history.

We have seen, then, that Butterfield, while acknowledging that to speak about God in history is simply to present "concealed arguments in a circle", allows this very type of conversation by alluding to a higher level of analysis of what happens in history. His analysis leads him to conclude: "...I think that

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65. Here I use 'Word of God' meaning primarily proclamation understood as the announcement and interpretation of God's acts in special revelation.

the general course of history is so shaped that a Christian is in the right relation with it."[66] In the subsequent chapters we shall examine his views that lead to this conclusion, for they spell out his precise understanding of how God is active in history.

66. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.130.

## CHAPTER II

## HISTORY AND HUMAN NATURE

The Christian faith is generally understood to emphasise the importance of persons as having a unique status among God's creatures. Man is the greatest of all God's creatures in that he, and he alone, is created in the image of God. The biblical conception of the "image of God" has been understood in various ways during the centuries. The earlier views were more optimistic than the later ones, mainly because of the influence of the scientific revolution. Ian Barbour understands the seventeenth century to have been a century in which a crucial and rapid change in outlook took place,[1] and in which man's "changing status was traced from 'The Center of the Cosmic Drama' to 'The Demoted Spectator' and 'The Rational mind'."[2] By "The Center of the Cosmic Drama" he has in mind the early views in which man was understood to be radically different from all other creatures, while by "The Demoted Spectator" he means that, as a result of Galileo's evidence supporting the Copernican theory, "man was demoted from the center of the universe to a spinning. peripheral planet",[3] with the resultant endangering of the notion of man's uniqueness and the idea of God's particular concern for him. Barbour identifies the third stage during this period as one in which man's reason is understood to guarantee his unique status in creation.[4] His discussion of the changing status of man during, and since, the seventeenth century does not discount the

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1. Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, p.15.
2. Ibid., p.54.
3. Ibid., p.33.
4. Ibid., p.43.

notion of man's unique position in creation, for he concludes by pointing out that biologists now understand man's distinctiveness to lie in his rational powers, his capacity for symbolic communication, his freedom of choice, and his cultural evolution.[5] Just as Barbour indicates that the distinctiveness of man is demonstrated by the natural sciences, so Reinhold Niebuhr does from the perspective of Christian thought. He indicates that:[6]

> "...the Biblical conception of 'image of God' has influenced Christian thought, particularly since Augustine (when not under a too strong Platonic or Aristotelian influence), to interpret human nature in terms which include his rational faculties but which suggests something beyond them."

By speaking of something beyond rational faculties he has in mind "the idea of 'transcendence', namely that man is something which reaches beyond itself - that he is more than a rational creature."[7] Man is self determining "in the sense that he transcends himself in such a way that he must choose his total end".[8] He must find his "true norm" in the character of God but without aspiring to be God.[9]

Thus man has a unique status among God's creatures. The words of the psalmist express this belief as an act of praise; "...You made him inferior only to yourself; you crowned him with glory and honour".[10] Given this view of the nature and importance of man, it is perhaps to be expected that we should assume that

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5. Ibid., p.113.
6. R. Niehuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol.I, p.161.
7. Ibid., p.162.
8. Ibid., p.163.
9. Ibid.
10. Psalm 8:5 (GNB)

God's action is in some respects to be found in the actions of men. But Butterfield's primary word on this subject is one of warning. Like Reinhold Niebuhr,[11] Butterfield warns that the sinfulness of human nature should be taken seriously. His warning is expressed in strong words: "It is essential not to have faith in human nature. Such faith is a recent heresy and a very disastrous one."[12] In arriving at this view Butterfield hints at his understanding of God's action in history. Here we will trace his argument by focusing on key sentences from his chapter on the subject in Christianity and History.

But first, we must notice the boundary of his discussion of human nature in history. His is not a theological discussion of human nature. Rather, he is concerned to state, and discuss, the insights which the study of history throws on this subject. His conclusion, which leads to his warning noted above, is that "what history does is... to uncover man's universal sin."[13] He believes that once this is stated the historian cannot justifiably say anymore about human nature.[14] For example, the historian may not proceed to decide which people are better or worse than others "in the eyes of eternity".[15] The reson for this is that conditioning circumstances play a great role in determining the actions of human beings.[16] He says: "I can condemn myself after self-examination, but in the case of others I can never

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11. R. Niebuhr op.cit., p.178ff.
12. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.47.
13. Ibid., p.45.
14. Ibid., p.43.
15. Ibid., p.45. See also International Conflict in the Twentieth Century, p.26ff.

know what allowance has to be made for conditions..."[17]

The first sentence that we wish to consider is: "Personalities are the crowning blossom of creation."[18] This is the starting point of Butterfield's discussion of human nature in history. He notes that history deals with the human story "as the affair of individual personalities"[19] and that because of this, history cannot discuss historical events without reference to the motives and feelings of the people involved.[20] History therefore envisages "a world of human relations", one which stands over against nature.[21] Butterfield states that our respect for personality has grown with the growth of civilisation.[22] Insofar as the determination of God's action in history is concerned, we cannot overestimate the importance of the conception of respect for personality. Later in this chapter we will consider whether Butterfield pays sufficient attention to this matter, but at this point we need simply to note the importance of persons and their growth, and the fact that Butterfield links this with the goal of history: "...the end of human history is the manufacture and education of human souls. History is the business of making personalities."[23] Before we can say how this is done, we must recognise a basic fact regarding human nature, and this is the next step of Butterfield's argument.

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17. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.45.
18. Ibid., p.28.
19. Ibid., p.26.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p.28.
22. Ibid., p.29.
23. Ibid., p.76.

This step of his argument has three inter-related stages. The first is drawn together by his statement: "I accept Acton's thesis in regard to the generality of human wickedness".[24] He believes that history endorses the biblical view that all men are sinners. This is illustrated by what he believes to be a significant fact which is discovered by the study of history, namely:[25]

> "The plain truth is that if you were to remove certain subtle safeguards in society many men who had been respectable all their lives would be transformed by the discovery of the things which it was now possible to do with impunity; weak men would apparently take to crime who had previously been kept on the rails by a certain balance existing in society; and you can produce a certain condition of affairs in which people go plundering and stealing though hitherto throughout their lives it had never occurred to them even to want to steal. A great and prolonged police strike, the existence of a revolutionary situation in a capital city, and the exhilaration of conquest in an enemy country are likely to show up a seamy side of human nature amongst people who, cushioned and guided by the influences of normal social life, have hitherto presented a respectable figure to the world."

The existence of these safeguards, rather than human nature which remains the same in each case, determines the difference between civilisation and barbarism.[26] The majority of people are neither criminals nor saints[27] and Butterfield believes that their conduct is largely dependant on the existence or absence of the safeguards to which he refers above. He identifies the fact that human conduct is so subject to conditions as an aspect of the Fall.[28]

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24. Ibid., p.30.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p.31.
27. H. Butterfield, Christianity, Diplomacy and War, p.46.
28. Ibid.

The second stage of his argument underlines the extent of the human wickedness mentioned in the first. He states: "We regard the element of cupidity... as being universal in the sense that all are touched with it".[29] The opposite view is that only some people, "only a few very bad people",[30] as Butterfield puts it, are to blame for the imperfections in the drama of human life. Butterfield rejects this view as being out of line with the evidence of historical study. For instance, in the case of the industrial revolution, history shows that it was "a general process in society, the result of no man's plan, but rather the total effect of all men's cupidity, all men playing their little parts as they try to better themselves or to escape the difficulties created by their competitors..."[31] In further support of this view Butterfield mentions Thomas Carlyle's belief that every man in France was responsible for the horrors of the French Revolution.[32] Therefore, history demonstrates that it is possible that a civilisation may be destroyed "without any spectacular crimes or criminals but by constant petty breaches of faith and minor complicities on the part of men generally considered very nice people".[33] Butterfield describes the effect of all this as "a gravitational pull in history itself" [34] which "draws the highest things downwards, mixes them with earth, and taints them with human cupidity."[35]

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29. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.36.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p.37.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p.38.
35. Ibid., p.39.

The third stage of his argument identifies the sin which "observable historical happenings" show to be the primary one.[36] He writes: "In the kind of world that I see in history there is one sin that locks people up in all their other sins, ... namely the sin of self-righteousness".[37] The way in which this sin is shown up in history is that allowance is not made by people for the sins which they themselves would commit if they were in the other person's place.[38] The effect of this is that in a conflict "each side feels that its own severities are not vicious at all, but simply punitive acts and laudable measures of judgement."[39] The sin of self-righteousness, which is also illustrated by the lack of "the tolerances and urbanities and self-discipline which we associate with a civilized world",[40] is identified by Butterfield as a consequence of a phenomenon which he calls "modern barbarism".[41] The result of the evil of modern barbarism is "contempt for the other man's personality, the belief that the enemy 'deserves' killing".[42] Butterfield sees the suffering of the thousands of innocent people at Hiroshima as an example of this.[43]

Now, if history shows that the major learning about human nature is that all men have sinned, where is God's action to be found?

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36. Ibid., p.40.
37. Ibid. (See also, for example, International Conflict in the Twentieth Century, p.98.)
38. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.42.
39. Ibid., p.43.
40. Ibid., p.49.
41. H. Butterfield, Christianity, Diplomacy and War, p.48. (And many other places. E.g. Christianity and History, p.31.)
42. Ibid., p.50.
43. Ibid.

Butterfield's discussion of human nature in history indicates that God is to be found at work in the forces which hold human cupidity in check. He says:[44]

> "...Providence produces a world in which men can live and gradually improve their external conditions, in spite of sin - in other words it does the best that human beings have left possible for it at any time".

This means two things. Firstly, that the very existence of the forces which hold human cupidity in check is to be attributed to God. In Butterfield's view these forces are the social institutions. His point is that the ordering of society, through the social institutions which are the gift of God, controls and curbs human sinfulness. He puts it like this:[45]

> "By organising our cupidities society tames them, exacts its toll from them, curbs them and even conceals a considerable part of their operation; though it is always possible to desire better adjustments in the social system, so that checks on self-aggrandisement may be tightened in one way or another."

His illustrations of these controls and curbs include, on the one hand, a thing as basic as the rule of the road, and, on the other, such institutions as government, property, and even slavery.[46] It is important to notice however that he does not identify God's action too closely with these institutions (as the quotation above with its reference to the possible desire for better adjustments in the social system indicates). He points out that the Christian tradition has regarded these institutions as either necessary evils or, and he favours this

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44. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.34.
45. Ibid., p.35.
46. Ibid., p.34.

second view, as a second-best gift from God.[47]

Secondly, God holds human cupidity in check through the power of his love. Butterfield puts it like this:[48]

> "Here is the last safety-valve that Providence offers within human history itself, when the forces of evil seem to have sealed up the outlet to any other hope. When power is at its most implacable and self-righteousness is at its stiffest there is an extreme point where only Love can still fight and it can only fight with the weapons of non-resistance."

This love is seen at work in the lives of Christians provided they remain faithful to God.[49] Because the object of God's love is human personalities, it actually brings a heightening of personality.[50] This happens through the witness and action of Christians in that their view is that all men should be judged to be sinners but treated as born for eternity.[51] Regarding themselves, Christians acknowledge that they share man's universal sinfulness and therefore confess themselves to be sinners.[52] Because they have this understanding, Butterfield believes that Christians have a safety-valve against the kinds of hardness of heart that are characteristic of modern barbarism.[53] He warns though that, while "the role of Christianity in history has been most impressive when it has followed this pattern",[54] "the corruption of the best becomes worse than anything else"[55] as is the case when Christianity reverts to

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47. Ibid.
48. H. Butterfield, History and Human Relations, p.53.
49. Ibid., p.53.
50. Ibid., p.50.
51. Ibid., p.55.
52. Ibid., p.56.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p.54.
55. Ibid., p.61.

legalism or Pharisaism. An example that Butterfield gives in more than one place of God's love as expressed in Christian teaching, holding human cupidity in check is that of the conflict between the Whigs and the Tories after 1688.[56] He points out that it was seen as a conflict of Right versus Wrong which could have gone on indefinitely as the severities of the party in the ascendant were prompted by moral indignation, but these severities provoked in turn the desire for reprisal in the other party when the situation was reversed. The cycle was broken by William III who, after the revolution of 1688, insisted on "what we might almost call forgiveness of sins."[57] Butterfield concludes:[58]

> "England is indeed the hapiest of all the illustrations of the fact that civilisation itself requires the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. And the pattern of this doctrine reproduces itself in incredible manifoldness in the very cells that go to make the fabric of an urbane and tolerant world."

Having outlined Butterfield's discussion of human nature in history, and having considered the implications of this for an understanding of God's action in history, we must now ask if his treatment of the subject is adequate. By briefly discussing some aspects of the New Testament understanding of human nature, the argument below will indicate that Butterfield's discussion of human nature in history falls short of a full understanding of God's action in history. But before proceeding

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56. Ibid., p.59f. and Christianity, Diplomacy, and War, p.51.
57. Ibid., p.60.
58. Christianity, Diplomacy, and War, p.51.

to these aspects of the biblical understanding of human nature we need to justify this step in the argument. This must be done in order to do justice to Butterfield's position, for it was pointed out above that his discussion of human nature is not a theological one but merely an attempt to identify and discuss the insights which the study of history throws on the subject. Our criticism is that insofar as Butterfield's work indicates the action of God, this is a weakness. By confining his discussion largely to those things which may be seen by the 'technical historian' (as Butterfield would put it) he has placed severe limitations upon his understanding of human nature. He needs to go beyond 'technical history', as he is prepared to do elswhere. For instance, he acknowledges that if one wants a full "commentary of the drama of human life" one must go beyond the technical historian,[59] and, as the passage quoted below indicates, he acknowledges that <u>any</u> talk of God's action in history depends on one's interpretation of history:[60]

> "I am unable to see how a man can find the hand of God in secular history, unless he has first found that he has an assurance of it in his personal experience. If it is objected that God is revealed in history through Christ, I cannot think that this can be true for the mere external observer, who puts on the thinking-cap of the ordinary historical student. It only becomes effective for those who have carried the narrative to intimate regions inside themselves, where certain of the issues are brought home to human beings. In this sense our interpretation of the human drama throughout the ages rests finally upon our interpretation of our most private experience of life, and stands as merely an extension to it."

Therefore Butterfield's talk of God holding human cupidity in

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59. H. Butterfield, <u>Christianity and History</u>, see p.19ff.
60. Ibid., p.107.

check is an interpretation of what happens. "Technical history" can do no more than possibly suggest that human cupidity is held in check. And, when we acknowledge the need for a Christian interpretation of history, we must surely acknowledge that the Bible is one of the primary sources for such an interpretation. In explanation we may point to Butterfield's belief that the key to understanding God's action in history is one's personal experience and, in this connection, note Niebuhr's observation that "all common human experience requires more than the immediate experience to define the character of the object of the experience."[61] And, as Niebuhr points out, "If the reality touched is something more than a mere 'object' but is itself subject, that is, if its character cannot be fully revealed to us, except as it takes the initiative, the principle of interpretation must be something more than merely the general principles of knowledge which illumine a particular experience. The principle of interpretation must be a 'revelation'."[62] While we cannot simply equate the Bible with the revelation of God,[63] it is the inspired[64] record of God's revelation of himself, and, therefore, its insights into human nature need to be considered.

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61. R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol.1, p.129.
62. Ibid.
63. Cf. J. Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought, Chap. 6.
64. There isn't the space, and nor is it a necessary part of this discussion, to discuss the meaning of 'inspiration', but I agree with Baillie that, while "the witness itself is a human activity and as such infallible", the Holy Spirit must have assisted the writers "to convey the message of salvation to those whom their words would reach." Ibid., p.111.

Our concern here is not with everything that the New Testament has to say about human nature but simply with those aspects of the picture which Butterfield neglects. While Butterfield concentrates on the Old Testament insights, particularly those of the prophets, and on some of the New Testament ones, such as the teaching that all men have sinned, he neglects the teaching of the change which takes place when a man is 'in Christ'. The whole of the Pauline conception of the 'new man' is neglected, as is his teaching on δικαιοσυνη. A key passage apropos the 'new man' concept is II Corinthians 5:17 : "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (RSV) C.K. Barrett prefers "there is a new act of creation"[65] to the translation "he is a new creation", but this does not alter the understanding that believers are part of the new creation of God which is radically different to the old creation. Hoekema describes the implication of this verse:[66]

> "Since believers now belong to Christ's new creation, we are to see ourselves as new creatures in Christ, not just as depraved sinners. To be sure, apart from Christ we are sinners, but we are no longer apart from Christ. In Christ we are now justified sinners, sinners who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within, sinners who are progressively renewed. Our way of looking at ourselves must not deny this newness but affirm it."

Alan Richardson makes a similar point:[67]

> "Though in their baptism this putting on of the new humanity has taken place eschatologically, Christians still need exhorting to be what (eschatologi-

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65. C.K. Barrett, II Epistle to the Corinthians, p.173.
66. A.A. Hoekema, The Christian Looks at Himself, p.55.
67. A. Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, p.242.

> cally or by faith) they already are: 'Put away... the old man, which waxeth corrupt... be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.'"

Richardson's observation that the conception of the 'new man' is to be understood eschatologically is shared by Barrett who believes that the concept 'in Christ' is to be understood eschatologically.[68] This kind of connection between present and future that we have seen in the two quotations above is found in Paul's treatment of δικαιοσυνη, particularly where δικαιοσυνη is treated as the 'Objects of Hope'.[69] The article on δικαιοσυνη in Kittel puts it like this:[70]

> "The present salvation carries with it a future salvation. For justification is a grace which implies the dawn of the new aeon and thus bridges time. Hence in the light of the νυνι δε , which has the content of fulfilment, all that happens prior to the end has an interim character. This is the great inversion entailed in justifying faith. In Judaism justification is uncertain and must wait until the day of judgement. Here it is already present and active. It is declared in the light of history and grasped by faith as a present reality. But since the promise of δικαιοσυνη transcends time, and points to the consummation, it gives rise to hope, and at this vital point faith in justification overcomes the hesitation of Jewish eschatology."

It is also important to notice that Paul understands δικαιοσυνη to be the power of the new life.[71] δικαιοσυνη in the life of the believer has a teleological purpose, for it leads to the reign of grace: ἱνα ἡ χαρις βασιλευση δια δικαιοσυνης εἰς ζωην αἰωνιον.[72] (Romans 5:21) And, "this righteousness as the

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68. C.K. Barrett, op. cit., p.173 and Romans, p.127.
69. See G. Kittel (ed.) Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, p.207f.
70. Ibid.
71. See ibid. p.209f.
72. Ibid. p.209.

power which engages the whole life is what overcomes ἀδικια and ἁμαρτια.[73]

The paragraph above indicates that there is an area of God's action in history, namely his creation of a new humanity, which Butterfield ignores. This may be illustrated further by reference to what Niebuhr calls "the paradox of grace".[74] He describes the paradox in these terms:[75]

> "Every facet of the Christian revelation, whether of the relation of God to history, or of the relation of man to the eternal, points to the impossibility of man fulfilling the true meaning of his life and reveals sin to be primarily derived from his abortive efforts to do so. The Christian gospel nevertheless enters the world with the proclamation that in Christ both 'wisdom' and 'power' are available to man; which is to say that not only has the true meaning of life been disclosed but also that resources have been made available to fulfill that meaning."

In support of the second assertion he refers to I Corinthians 4:19 "The Kingdom of God is not in word but in power". Put another way, the paradox of grace is that grace is, on the one hand, the power of God over man, while on the other, it is the power of God in man.[76] Both facets of the paradox are fully expressed in Pauline doctrine[77] without contradiction for Paul distinguishes, argues Niebuhr,[78] between a life governed by the principle of self-centredness and one governed by the principle of devotion and obedience to God, and even in his injunctions to the sinless to sin no more, Paul indicates that he understands

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73. Ibid.
74. See R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol.II, p.98 to 212.
75. Ibid., p.98.
76. Ibid., p.99.
77. Ibid., p.100.
78. Ibid., p.102.

the possibility of sinning for those who have broken with sin in principle. But if sin is broken in principle, is it true that it is never broken in fact in the new life of which Paul speaks? Niebuhr's answer to this problem is of critical importance for our present discussion. He says:[79]

> "The real question is not whether we are able to achieve absolute perfection in history; for even the most consistent perfectionist sects do not deny that human life remains in process. The question is whether in the development of the new life some contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose remains. The issue is whether the basic character of human history, as it is apprehended in the Christian faith, is overcome in the lives of those who have thus apprehended it."

And he indicates that the question can be answered in two ways, either in terms of logic or in terms of experience. He maintains that it is logical to assume that once one has become aware of the character of one's self-love and of its incompatibility with the divine will this awareness should break the power of sin in one's life. "Furthermore", he says,[80] "this logic is at least partially validated by experience. Repentance does initiate a new life." On the other hand, the experience of the Christian Church refutes those who follow this logic without qualification. In other words, we are dealing here with a genuine paradox. Niebuhr traces the development of the one side of this paradox in the emphasis on sanctification in Catholicism and the Renaissance understanding of the power of human capacities, and the development of the other side in the Reformation recognition of the persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed. His under-

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79. Ibid., p.121.
80. Ibid., p.122.

standing is close to that of Butterfield when he attempts a synthesis of the Reformation, Renaissance and Catholic views and argues that the primary contribution of the Reformation to this synthesis is its refutation of any pretentions of fulfilling life and history either by grace or by natural capacities inhering in human nature or in the historical process.[81] But, whereas Niebuhr recognises both sides of the paradox of grace, Butterfield seems to see just one.

Though it is possible that Butterfield hints at the creation of a new humanity in some places,[82] we are suggesting that it needs a much fuller treatment if it is to approximate an adequate discussion of God's action in history.[83] It is, of course, extremely difficult to illustrate the power of God in man, though accounts such as the conversion of Zacchaeus, and especially its effect ("I give half my possessions to charity; and if I have cheated anyone I am ready to repay him four times over"),[84] must surely count as evidence. Butterfield would point out here that the historian's "apparatus and science" do not enable him to pronounce an "absolute judgement of value" on incidents such as this one.[85] This brings us back to the essential point that the second side of the paradox of grace

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81. Ibid., p.211.
82. E.g. possibly in what he says about the operation of love creating a heightening of personality (History and Human Relations, p.50.) though it is not at all clear that Butterfield would see this as an example of God's creation of a new humanity.
83. Again, in fairness to Butterfield, it must be pointed out that he never discusses the question of the 'determination of God's action in history' as such though it is treated by implication.
84. Luke 19:8 NEB
85. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.27.

is known only by faith. We have already noted Butterfield's reticience to speak of faith in determining God's action in history, so we may conclude by simply asserting that it is no more absurd (logically or phenominologically) to maintain that God is at work in history creating a new humanity than it is to assert, as Butterfield does, that there is a constant battle between good and evil, and that "in reality the essential strategies in the war of good against evil are conducted within the intimate interior of personalities."[86]

86. Ibid., p.91.

## CHAPTER III

## HISTORY AND MORALITY

"It is impossible to conceive of a moral deity who has called a morally neutral order of creation into existence."[1] If this assertion is correct, and if it is possible to detect moral principles operating in history, then this is an area in which the action of God is to be determined. Butterfield indicates that he believes that it is possible to detect moral principles in history, and he considers the matter of morality from two angles. First, he discusses the notion of moral judgements in history, and, second, he considers the challenge of the existence of adversity, suffering and catastrophic events to the belief that morality may be connected with history.

Butterfield begins his discussion of moral judgements in history on a positive note by stating emphatically that there are moral judgements that lie in the very nature of history.[2] An example of such a judgement is the way in which the story of Napoleon shows that "inordinate pride and ungovernable power are brought in the course of time to their appointed doom."[3] But the most important example that he gives, one which he calls "a specimen case of the operation of the moral factor in history",[4] is that of the judgement passed on the excessive militarism of Prussia.[5] The moral factor in history is illustrated in that judgement ensued because the militarism was excessive and it went unchecked.

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1. E.W. Ives, God in History, p.58.
2. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.49.
3. Ibid., p.48.
4. Ibid., p.50.
5. Ibid., p.48f.

History does not illustrate that there is an inevitable judgement on all conquerors - some deal with the effects of their violence in such a way that the evil they have done is turned into later good and they thereby escape judgement.[6] The example also indicates that the moral judgements in history can be long-term affairs,[7] for in this case the judgement was delayed by the "prudence and virtue" of Frederick the Great, and by Bismark who "called a halt to a career of conquest".[8] Butterfield concludes:[9]

> "And how happy might Germany not have been today - how many errors might she not have saved herself - if even in 1918 she could have at least have taken the verdict as the judgement of God and set out to discover what it was that she had done to offend heaven."

Butterfield did not, of course, originate the idea of moral judgements in history,[10] and his view that they exist is shared by many scholars.[11] One reason for this is, as we shall see presently, that it arises out of the Biblical (especially the prophetic) understanding of God's action in history. But it is not necessary to import this Biblical understanding into the arena of historical enquiry for it is possible to argue for the existence of moral judgements from the evidence available to the historian. For example, E.W. Ives argues that it is an

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6. Ibid., p.50.
7. Ibid., p.49.
8. Ibid., p.49.
9. Ibid., p.50.
10. He says that the notion of judgements is older than Christianity (Christianity and History, p.57.)
11. E.g. E.W. Ives, Reinhold Niebuhr, Langdon Gilkey, David Jenkins, E.H. Harbisin.

historical truism to state that a society has to bear the consequences of its own actions.[12] And, as he sees it, to believe that judgement operates in history is simply an acceptance of the fact that human affairs are the consequences of human actions.[13] To believe, therefore, that judgement operates in history is "to stand on the nature of history itself".[14] Judgements merely represent "the evident conclusions and probabilities of history".[15]

It is important that we understand the basic reason for the existence of the moral judgements in history. Butterfield's essential point is that they exist because of the defects in human nature. This means at least two things. First, that where judgement occurs, that is, where disaster occurs, the occasion ought to be recognised as one for self-questioning.[16] And second, that although it may not be experienced as such at the time, judgement may be a good thing. For example, Butterfield records some of the changes that have occured in the ordering of society (such as the Greek city-state, the Roman Empire, the medieval idea of the Church's relation to the state, etc.) and concludes:[17]

> "... the river of time is littered with the ruins of these various systems, and we can hardly understand why those who lived under them should have even wished them to go on forever or valued them so much."

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12. E.W. Ives, God in History, p.79
13. Ibid., p.80.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p.79.
16. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.53.
17. Ibid., p.55.

And, it is no doubt because the question of judgement has to do with the sinfulness of human nature, that Butterfield believes that judgement falls heaviest on those who "ape providence". He writes:[18]

> "Judgement in history falls heaviest on those who come to think themselves gods, who fly in the face of Providence and history, who put their trust in man-made systems and worship the work of their own hands, and who say the strength of their own right arm gave them victory."

But, while the judgement is always upon people, or, more specifically, upon man's universal sin, the sentence falls on the system as a whole and not simply upon individuals.[19] The systems mentioned here are the nations, civilizations, institutions and "the schematised patterns into which human life ranges itself in various periods".[20] These systems are the things which collapse under judgement for, as he puts it, "in the course of time it is human nature which finds out the holes in the structure, and turns a good thing into an abuse."[21]

It is clear from the above that Butterfield understands history to be concerned, as least in some respects, with morality. But, as the present chapter seeks to show, this assertion is a problematic one. Insofar as moral judgements in history are concerned, one of the problems of asserting that they are indicative of the presence of a moral factor in history is that God's action could appear to be arbitary for it is not always apparent that judgement is meted out. Ives indicates that he believes

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18. Ibid., p.60.
19. Ibid., p.55 and 64.
20. Ibid., p.64.
21. Ibid., p.55.

that we should assume that "the principle that wrong is punished is generally operative, not occasionally invoked."[22] His concern is that the insights gained through the debate between science and theology, namely, that God does not upset normal procedures by arbitary behaviour, should be carried into our understanding of God's involvement in human affairs.[23] He does not believe that this view places God's sovereignity into a "mechanistic straight-jacket" because, while scientific law is the observed regularity in the way the world operates, it is for Christians simply a statement of the way we observe God to work. A second reason that he advances is that to say that actions are regular is not to say they are routine, and thus "every operation of law, scientific or moral, is also God's specific will."[24] Reinhold Niebuhr shares this concern that God's action should not be seen as something arbitary but he is not prepared to equate God's action with scientific law, i.e. with "the laws of nature". He writes:[25]

> "The God who judges and condemns man is not some capricious tyrant whose will and 'law' are irrelevant to the structure of the universe. Yet he is not merely 'natural law'. It is because he transcends the 'laws of nature' in His freedom that He can set a law for man, who in his limited way transcends the 'laws of nature' and cannot be bound by them."

The way Niebuhr uses the term "laws of nature" is not very helpful for it seems to indicate too great a distance between God and his creation. To be sure, God is not to be confused with

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22. E.W. Ives op.cit. p.78.
23. Ibid., p.77.
24. Ibid., p.78.
25. R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1, p.141.

his creation, but the so-called laws of nature must surely be descriptive of God's will. Here we are following Barbour in assuming that, while the laws of nature are "abstractions from the complex fabric of events", they are nevertheless "intended to express patterns in nature".[26] In other words, the laws of nature are not mere human constructs but do in some ways (i.e. not fully) describe what is real. Given this understanding, we must assume that the patterns in nature represent God's will, and if this is the case, it is nonsensical to state that God transcends the laws of nature. But, where Niebuhr is correct is in stressing God's freedom. God must be understood to be free in relation to his creation or he is not the "Almighty" of the creeds. It is, however, possible to speak of God's freedom even within his operation through the laws of nature. In this connection, the sphere of nature is possibly more problematic than that of history[27] for it is far easier to conceive God's freedom in relation to the on-going human drama than in relation to the apparently closed system of cause and effect of blind matter. However, the notion of atomic indeterminacy makes it possible to speak of God's freedom within the laws of nature,[28] and in that sense only may it be imagined that God transcends these laws. It is clearer, and more accurate theologically, from the point of view of God's immanence, and of the doctrine

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26. I.G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, p.456. This is against, for instance, the view that laws of nature are "an order imposed on events by man's mind"(Barbour ibid.) for if this were the case it would indeed make sense to say that God transcends these laws.
27. However, in putting the matter this way I do not wish to create the impression that I understand 'nature' and 'history' to be two distinct, totally unrelated spheres.
28. cf. Barbour, p.428.

of creatio continuata, to assert that God works through the laws of nature. In terms of God's action through the moral judgements in history, the charge of God's action being arbitary is best countered by an understanding which sees the judgements as a law operating in history. Implicit in the understanding of this law will be the notion that all wrong is punished. It may be objected that this last point is not verified by history and that, in fact, there is much evidence to the contrary, but it must be remembered that judgements are, as we have seen in Butterfield's treatment of the subject, long-term affairs, and that systems rather than individuals bear the consequences of the judgements. When the notion of judgement is described in these terms it is not at variance with the evidence of historical study. And, if it is asserted that not all wrong is punished, it seems that the only way of avoiding the belief that God's action through moral judgements is arbitrary is to adopt a similar stance to that of Augustine and Calvin who had to explain why, given their views on election, God's action is not arbitrary. Their answer was to the effect that God's providential will is secret and unfathomable.[29] Ives, as we have seen, understands judgement to be a generally operative principle, and, using the sphere of private ethics as an analogy, he seeks to explain how judgement operates as "a kind of law":[30]

> "The penalty is inherent in the sin. The penalty for selfishness is being a selfish person; the punishment for materialism is to drown in possessions; the reward of lechery is the coarsening of sexual response."

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29. cf. Dictionary of Theology, p.269.
30. E.W. Ives, op. cit., p.79.

The problem with this analogy is that it does not do justice to the depth of the Old Testament understanding of God's judgement for, as Langdon Gilkey explains, the Old Testament understanding begins at this point but develops "in strange and fruitful ways". Relying heavily on the work of Von Rad, Gilkey mentions four steps in the development.[31] The starting point is that evil deeds have evil consequences as part of their essence. Von Rad uses the word "recompense" to describe the effects of the sin.[32] The recompense is not a subsequent forensic event originating with God but merely "the radiation of the evil which now continues on".[33] Basic to the understanding is the view that "it is Jahweh who 'brings the evil man's conduct upon his own head'".[34] But, because "sin was also a social category",[35] the consequences of an individual's sin may also fall on the community. The next step is that, as the seriousness of sin before God is realised, it is discovered that the consequences of an evil deed are the action of God himself.[36] The penultimate step is the identification by the prophets of the fate, i.e. the results of the sinful deeds, with Yahweh.[37] Gilkey points out that Hosea says that Yahweh is "the ulcer, the enemy, the raging lion with whom Israel in sin has to deal."[38] And finally, Jeremiah and Exekiel recognize that the sin of Israel is so great that it brings God's judgement which is "an historically located and historically mediated judgement through the destruction of the social institu-

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31. L. Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind, p.262.
32. G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1, p.265.
33. Ibid., p.265.
34. Ibid., p.265.
35. Ibid., p.264.
36. Gilkey, op. cit., p.262.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.

tions Yahweh has created".[39] This brief outline of the development of the idea of judgement in the Old Testament indicates that if we are to hold that moral judgements are "a kind of law" then we must hold, as Ives does, that the operation of every law is God's specific will.

God is at work in history in the moral judgements which, in response to the sinfulness of human nature which corrupts good, bring about the collapse of the schematised patterns of society. However, after his positive start in which he states so emphatically that judgements in history cannot be denied, Butterfield is forced to qualify his position in two very important ways. These qualifications indicate that the notion of moral judgement in history is only of limited value in determining the action of God. The qualification arises out of the view that: "There is a sense in which all that we may say on this subject and all the moral verdicts that we pass pass on human history are only valid in their application as self-judgements."[40] This is true in relation to both individuals and the schematised patterns of society. Butterfield returns time and again to the notion that history indicates that all men are sinners. It is because of the sin of all men that God is present in the judgements of history. But, as Butterfield points out, the moment that we say that God is present in this way we must acknowledge that everyone, "the whole of our existing order and the very fabric of our civilisation",[41] is under judgement. We may never assume that those who

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39. Ibid.
40. H. Butterfield, op. cit., p.62.
41. Ibid., p.52.

suffer disaster are more sinful than others,[42] just as we may not assume that if we are used in the exercise of God's judgement (as England may have been in her victory against Germany) we have greater virtues than others.[43] Both of these views are corollaries of the view that all men are sinners. Butterfield is of the opinion that, because "good fortune or adverse conditions play a great but still unmeasured part in the development of human beings"[44], the difference between the wickedness and responsibility of one man and those of another cannot be discussed. He puts it like this:[45]

> "Indeed, since human responsibility is so subtle a substance ... it is impossible to think one man essentially more wicked than another save as one might say: 'All men are sinners and I am the chief of them'. It follows from this that moral judgements of actual people cannot defensibly or usefully exist in concrete cases save in the form of self-judgements."

Butterfield uses his example of the judgement against the militarism of Prussia to indicate that even in the area of judgement against the schematised patterns of society, judgement is really a self-judgement. He states simply that while he may believe that the nation was judged for its militarism, he has no right to say so.[46]

The second way in which he qualifies his position has to do with his understanding of the nature of "scientific history" (or, as he sometimes puts it, "technical history"). He states: "Moral

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42. Ibid., p.62.
43. Ibid., p.52.
44. H. Butterfield, History and Human Relations, p.108.
45. Ibid.
46. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.63.

judgements on human beings are by their nature ... alien to the intellectual realm of scientific history".[47] He indicates that the first problem that an historian has in determining moral judgements in history is to decide on the moments at which to raise the moral question.[48] Because of this problem, he believes that the moral judgements to which historians point are more likely to be political judgements in disguise.[49] It is not important that he believes that it is impossible for a technical historian to pass moral judgements on individuals for we have seen that the moral judgements of God in history are against the schematised patterns of society, the systems, rather than against individuals. We have also noticed that if judgements apply to individuals we have no way of avoiding the conclusion that God's action is arbitrary. But it is a different matter when he indicates that the technical historian cannot assert "that Germany has come under judgement for what people call her Prussianism".[50] It means that the most we can say about moral judgements in history is this: First, that there are moral judgements in history.[51] Second, that historians are not able to identify these judgements with certainty. Third, that Christians, who, by means of their interpretation of history, identify these judgements with the judgements of God, cannot be absolutely sure that they have determined the action of God except insofar as the judgements are self-judgements. The notion of moral judgements in history provides, therefore, only limited assistance in

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47. H. Butterfield, History and Human Relations, p.103.
48. Ibid., p.104.
49. Ibid.
50. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.63.
51. see ibid., p.57: "That this form of judgement exists in history is a thing which I believe can hardly be denied."

determining the action of God in history.

As noted earlier in the chapter, Butterfield sees the notion of judgement in history to be merely an introduction to the study of the moral element in history.[52] In his second discussion, indicating his belief that there is morality in the processes and the course of history, Butterfield attempts to explain the existence of adversity, suffering and catastrophe, not in terms of the consequences of the sinfulness of man (which is the point of his discussion of the moral judgements in history) but as a necessary part of the "Divine Plan".[53]

Butterfield begins his argument by pointing out that because the chanciness and terrible cataclysms of this century may lead people to a feeling of the total meaninglessness of everything,[54] the problems of the present time "are still moral-historical ones as in the Old Testament times".[55] Because the Old Testament writers found themselves living in a time of terrible cataclysmic history, they had to reflect on their history[56] and in so doing discovered the hand of God in events. For this reason Butterfield examines their thinking in order to draw parallels for understanding our own experience of tragic history. He sees the kind of reflection on history that the Hebrews did so well to be necessary because, although some of the catastrophic events

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52. Ibid., p.51.
53. Ibid., p.84.
54. Ibid., p.68f.
55. Ibid.,p.69.
56. Butterfield points out that what was unique about the ancient Hebrews was their historiography rather than their history. Ibid., p.73.

in history seem to have been advances (for example, the fall of the Roman Empire or the Norman Conquest of England), not all are like this. This means that the question of suffering is raised, and often in such a way that it is clear that the solution is not to be found in the notion of moral judgements.

It may be of help to turn directly to Butterfield's conclusion at this stage. It is this:[57]

> "If the end of history lies in personalities, which represent the highest things we know in the mundane realm, then we must face the fact that the purpose of history is not something that lies a thousand years ahead of us... the end of human history is the manufacture and education of human souls. History is the business of making personalities, even so to speak by putting them through the mill; and, though it fails us if we expect it to hand us happiness on a spoon, its very vicissitudes bring personality itself to a finer texture."

Butterfield traces the development of this view within the thinking of the Hebrews. The first stage was in their coming to see that God was not simply interested in the welfare of their nation but also in individuals.[58] The next stage is the discovery that the idea of judgement was superimposed on the idea of history as Promise.[59] This meant that no matter how severe the judgements in their history were, the Hebrews always held the belief that their history was one of hope. Before the final stage in which they came to grips with the problem of suffering, there was a stage of "messianic expectation".[60] Butterfield dismisses this stage, at least in its

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57. Ibid., p.76.
58. Ibid., p.78.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.

prevalent form, namely, "a hankering after a political deliverer,"[61] as "a simple and facile kind of wishful thinking".[62] It is in the final stage, which Butterfield calls the "ultra-messianic" stage,[63] that the Hebrews tackled the problem of undeserved catastrophe. The major problem was the discovery that the idea of judgement could not account for the incidence of suffering. In response to this problem the Hebrew prophets found new patterns in history. Butterfield refers to these patterns as "myths".[64] Examples of these myths are the simile of the leaven that leavens the whole lump, or the Remnant of Israel,[65] but the most important of all is that of the Suffering Servant. He says of this myth: "...here at any rate is a pattern or representation of something which is essential, something which lies at the roots of history."[66] The notion of the Suffering Servant concept allows one to consider catastrophe without seeing it as a mark of God's special anger against its victims.[67] On the contrary, this view allowed Israel to see her sufferings as a necessary part of God's plan.[68] Seen like this, suffering "has its place in the scheme of things"[69] and "it provides the nearest thing to a clue for those who wish to make anything out of the human drama."[70] But, once again, Butterfield is forced to concede that this view is not self-

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61. Ibid., p.79.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p.80.
64. Ibid., p.81.
65. Ibid., p.82.
66. Ibid., p.83.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., p.84.
69. Ibid., p.85.
70. Ibid.

evident for, speaking of vicarious suffering, he has to say that "nobody has the right to tell anybody else to see his sufferings in that way".[71] With the concept of the Suffering Servant, "the interpretation of the human drama is thrown back into the intimate recesses of our personal experience".[72] But this is not to deny the force or reality of the concept, for, as Butterfield puts it:[73]

> "...though it might be a remarkable thing to find an example of the Suffering Servant existing in its absolute purity - though there may have been only one perfect example of it in history - it is impossible to deny this picture its place as the pattern or the working-model of ideas which do in fact operate throughout the ages, helping to reconcile man with his destiny."

Finally, Butterfield acknowledges that this concept does not resolve all the paradoxes of history, and nor does it give a completely satisfactory interpretation of the human drama, but he does not illustrate or discuss either of these observations.[74]

We noticed above that Butterfield believes that the end of history is the "manufacture and education of human souls". He also speaks of history as "a pilgrimage of all mankind".[75] On this pilgrimage there is a constant conflict between good and evil. But, warns Butterfield, although we are right if we want to see history in moral terms,[76] we are not allowed, for instance, to turn our account of the wars between nations into a

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71. Ibid., p.86.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., p.87.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., p.91.
76. Ibid.

conflict between good and evil. The reason for this is that "in reality the essential strategies in the war of good against evil are conducted within the intimate interior of personalities."[77]

It is clear that Butterfield's second discussion of morality in history has to do with the problem of suffering. His concern is to deal with the kind of suffering that is not a consequence of sin. In order to evaluate his discussion we must recognise how he approaches the problem. That is to say, we must notice that he does not adopt the usual philosophical approach of treating suffering and evil as part of an inconsistent triad. In other words, he does not consider the logical problem involved in holding concurrently the three propositions: (i) God is good, (ii) God is omnipotent, and (iii) evil (and suffering which is part of evil) exists. And nor does he discuss the philosophical and theological problem of the origin of evil. This neglect is not necessarily a weakness, for, as some writers acknowledge,[78] there is no real solution to the problem of evil. Butterfield's approach, however, begins with the acceptance of the presence and reality of suffering. In doing this he is exhibiting what E. Harris Harbison calls one of the marks of the Christian historian, namely, that the Christian historian "will not blink the fact of evil in history".[79] Butterfield

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77. Ibid.
78. For instance, Hans Küng: "With intellectual arguments man gets no further than Job's friends. Suffering imposes a limit to all reasoning. On Being a Christian, p.431.
79. E.H. Harbison, "The Marks of the Christian Historian", in C.T. McIntire, (ed.), God, History and Historians, p.354.

continues by turning to the Old Testament understanding of God's presence during a time of cataclysmic history.

There are remarkable similarities between Butterfield's conclusion regarding the problem of suffering and that of John Hick, though the reason for this is undoubtedly their dependence on the Bible for thier respective solutions. Hick demonstrates that there are "two attitudes to evil within the Bible, one based upon the dualistic view of evil as the irreconcilable enemy of God and man, and the other upon a profound sense of the sole ultimate sovereignity and responsibility of God."[80] And he demands that we retain both of these perspectives by insisting "that evil is really evil and that God has really willed for a good purpose a world in which evil, with its demonic quality, arises".[81] Both of these strands are to be found in Butterfield's 'solution' to the problem of suffering. The dualistic strand is found in his suggestion that history is a "pilgrimage of all mankind" on which there is a constant conflict between good and evil. And the instrumental view of evil, as Hick calls it, is found in Butterfield's belief that suffering and catastrophe are necessary parts of the "Divine Plan".[82] His suggestion that "history is the business of making personalities, even so to speak by putting them through the mill"[83] is a similar idea to Hick's one that suffering is "a necessary feature of a world that is to be the

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80. John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p.393.
81. Ibid., p.398f.
82. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.84.
83. Ibid., p.76.

scene of a process of soul-making."[84] Butterfield does not, of course, develop the close-knit argument and carefully constructed system that Hick does, and there are obvious differences. Hick's idea is that we suffer in order to facilitate our own growth, while the suffering servant concept is one of vicarious suffering. Hick recognises the problem with asserting that suffering is necessary for soul-making. This problem is that while suffering does sometimes enable strength of character, unselfishness, patience and moral steadfastness etc., it can sometimes lead to "resentment, fear, grasping selfishness, and tragic disintegration of character".[85] Hick therefore concludes: "...this type of theodicy, which finds its clue to the meaning of evil in God's eventual decisive bringing of good out of it, is driven to look beyond this world and to take seriously the Christian hope of eternal life."[86] Butterfield fails to recognise that while some people benefit by seeing their suffering as vicarious suffering, others do not, and therein lies the greatest weakness of his belief that suffering leads to a heightening of personality.

Referring back to the first paragraph of this chapter we may say that the moral deity has indeed called into being an order of creation which has a moral bias. The moral principles that may be detected are to be found in the judgements which bring about the collapse of the schematised patterns and systems of

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84. J. Hick, op. cit., p.389 and 369ff.
85. J. Hick, Christianity at the Centre, p.90.
86. Ibid.

society because of human sinfulness, and in the creative outcome of cataclysm and tragic conflict resulting as it often does in a heightening of personality. We have demonstrated, however, that these two areas in which we claim to see the operation of the moral factor in history are not without their ambiguities, and indeed the operation of the moral factor is not even immediately apparent, so we ought perhaps to be somewhat more cautious than Butterfield in assuming that in specific instances of judgement or suffering we have determined the action of God in history.

# CHAPTER IV

## HISTORY AND PROVIDENCE

When used of God, the word 'providence' means that he foresees the future and expresses his care for his creation by providing for its needs and guiding the course it takes.[1] T.H.L. Parker makes the point that so far as history is concerned this means two things.[2] On the one hand it means that God must be seen as continually present and active in history, but on the other, God must not be seen as the "only genuine actor in history" for this would negate the idea of man's freedom and suggest that he is a mere puppet without choice or the power to act.[3] These two requirements are met in Butterfield's treatment of providence, and they provide a handy framework within which to describe and evaluate his treatment of the subject.

As has already been established in previous chapters, Butterfield is absolutely sure of God's presence in history. We have seen how he is present in the moral judgements of history; how his presence is indicated by the tragic nature of much history; and how God constantly produces the best possible world given the fact of human cupidity. When he speaks directly of providence, Butterfield deepens his understanding of a God who is always present. His most telling analogy is that of God being like a composer.[4] He sees the human story as analogous to a

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1. T.H.L. Parker, "Providence", in A. Richardson (ed.), A Dictionary of Christian Theology, p.280.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.94.

piece of orchestral music that we are playing over for the first time. Each person is, so to speak, only able to see the part for the instrument that he plays, and he is not able to see ahead to what is coming. The player only finds out what the piece is like as the whole orchestra play together. While a player may be sure that he understands which note he ought to play next, he is never sure of the implications of it as he is unable to tell what the others will be playing at the same time. To this basic picture Butterfield adds the thought that the composer is only composing the piece bit by bit as the orchestra is playing it. In doing this the composer allows himself the freedom to change his mind regarding the music he wished to write in order to straighten out the wrong notes played by the orchestra. This analogy indicates that there is, as Butterfield sees it, "an intelligence moving over the story".[5] The intelligence makes decisions in response to the things that people do, as people can see if they look back over the events of their lives. Butterfield sums it up like this:[6]

> "There is no symbolic presentation that will do justice to history save the composer I have already mentioned, who composes the music as we go along, and, when we slip into aberrations, switches his course in order to make the best of everything. History is like the work of a person in that its course... is so unpredictable; while yet there is some fixidity in it too, and even when the unpredictable has happened we cna go back and account for it retrospectively, we can show that there was organisation in it all the same."

Butterfield knows of at least one compelling reason for believ-

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5. Ibid., p.109.
6. Ibid.

ing that there is this organisation which indicates the presence of a provident God in the processes of history. He speaks of this reason as the way in which history "goes on over our heads".[7] By this he means that although all of us are involved in the business of making history, history is not simply the product of any individual's will. Rather, history is made up of the compounding of the effects of all individual wills[8] and by a number of other factors which have the effect of "now deflecting the result of our actions, now taking our purposes out of our hands, and now turning our endeavours to ends not realised."[9] Butterfield believes that this is what Ranke discovered, and to which he referred when he spoke of something remaining in history that is unexplained and which he sometimes felt to be an occult force at work.

One of the factors referred to above is the existence of a "Providence that we must regard as lying in the very constitution of things."[10] By this Butterfield means that we are bound to acknowledge that we are born into a providential order.[11] He believes that the existence of this providential order must be apparent to everyone, whether Christian or not. One indication of the providential order is the idea of progress. Butterfield is careful to guard against any understanding that Providence is progress and that progress is the raison de' être of history because of his notion that some of our orders

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7. Ibid., p.94.
8. Ibid., p.93.
9. Ibid., p.94.
10. Ibid., p.95.
11. Ibid., p.96.

and systems, particularly those in which the progress implies a one-sided development, are judged.[12] But although he avoids the extreme view, he says:[13]

> "But I think that I may differ from some people in feeling that progress all the same is itself the work of Providence, and is part of that providential order, part of that history-making which goes on almost, so to speak, above our heads."

Progress is only discovered by postrationalism and it is in that sense that it goes on above our heads. Progress operates, for instance, by the process of the accumulation of knowledge which permits a new generation to continue its advance from the point where the previous generation left off. This kind of progress is not achieved through merit, and nor does it imply a necessary improvement in our personalities.[14] This latter point is made clearly and forcefully by Langdon Gilkey in his discussion of the problems involved in the notion of a progressive history. He indicates that while the norms under which our freedom operates can rise, i.e. progress, "the relation of our freedom to these ascending norms does not itself develop, and so our use of these new instruments, this new self-consciousness and of these new social structures does not also itself progress".[15] Butterfield illustrates his understanding of this form of progress by pointing to the development towards larger organisations as seen in the development from city-state and inter-municipal trade, to the nation-state

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12. Ibid., p.97.
13. Ibid., p.96.
14. Ibid., p.97.
15. L. Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind, p.275.

and inter-national trade, and then to the vast imperial systems and a world economy.[16] Insofar as they are caught up in this form of progress, Butterfield says that men are "agents of deeper processes than those of which they are aware, instruments of a providence that combines their labours and works them into a larger pattern."[17]

One of the other factors which contribute to the impression that history goes on over our heads is what Butterfield calls "another kind of Providence which it may be permissible to call human."[18] The essential feature of this kind of providence is the collective wisdom of the human race,[19] and Butterfield describes the effect of this feature like this:[20]

> "It is as though, once the history has happened, with all its accidents and tragedies, it is further worked upon by the reflecting activity of an ordaining and reconciling mind; or as though, once a handful of chance notes have been struck together on the piano, some person refuses to let the matter lie there and sets out to resolve the discord."

He believes that the function of this kind of providence is that of creating good out of evil.[21] He gives numerous illustrations of this; for instance, the wars of Protestants and Catholics after the Reformation which brought about a new order characterised by toleration. He points out that while neither party wanted toleration, nor even thought of it as an ideal,

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16. H. Butterfield, op. cit., p.97.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p.98.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid. This is an idea which he noticed in Acton's work. See H. Butterfield, Lord Acton, p.5.

they dsicovered after it had been established that it was not merely the best thing that Providence could arrange in a world of religious differences but that it was so good an arrangement that "they actually came to rejoice in it."[22] The operation of this kind of providence is also detected in the way in which people learn to profit by experience as they reflect on the disasters of a given generation. Butterfield feels that through such a "process of after-reflection" these disasters are "somewhat redeemed".[23] Because he believes that providence lies in the very constitution of things, he believes that it is futile to attempt to achieve our own purposes in history. Rather, we ought to co-operate with Providence.[24]

It is obvious from the above discussion that Butterfield sees God as continually present and active in history. The second of T.H.L. Parker's requirements for an adequate understanding of God's providence in history is that God should not be seen as the only genuine actor in history. Butterfield certainly does not see God as the only genuine actor in history. This is made quite clear by a statement such as: "...history is always a story in which Providence is countered by human aberration."[25] And we noted in an earlier chapter[26] that providence does the best that human beings have left possible for it at any time.

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22. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.99. For further illustrations of this see The Whig Interpretation of History, p.88, and The Englishman and His History, p.116.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p.106.
26. Chapter II, p.26.

Butterfield actually suggests that when we think of the action of God in history, we should not think of "a heavy hand interposed to interfere with the working of a heavy piece of machinery".[27] He adds:[28]

> "Perhaps a better picture of our situation would be that of a child who played her piece very badly when she was alone, but when the music-teacher sat at her side played it passably well, though the music-teacher never touched her, never said anything, but operated by pure sympathetic attraction and by just being there."

He also says: "Perhaps history is a thing that would stop happening if God held His breath, or could be imagined as turning away to think of something else."[29] While these analogies indicate that Butterfield recognises the freedom and power to act which human beings possess, they are misleading in that God is not to be imagined as simply enabling, or willing, the continuation of human history, for it is essential that we understand him to be actively involved in guiding its course. If this is not asserted, God's sovereignty is hopelessly compromised in that man, rather than God, will ultimately determine the goal of history, and, what is more important, we will fail to take account of the eschatological elements which "bulk large in both Old and New Testaments".[30] The existence of these elements is one of the reasons which leads Gilkey to believe that we should interpret providence eschatologically.[31] Butterfield does not agree, but we cannot discuss this difference until we have located his thought within the development of the doctrine of

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27. H. Butterfield, loc. cit., p.111.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. L. Gilkey, op.cit., p.273.
31. Ibid., p.274.

providence in recent years.

Butterfield's thought was influenced by the nature of the crisis of his time. The crisis arose out of the existence of the "general chanciness and terrible cataclysms of the twentieth century".[32] The experience of the crisis and its resultant influence on the theology of the time was remarkably different to that of the preceeding century. Nineteenth century liberal theology was itself greatly influenced by the spirit of its age. Development in two areas 'fed' this spirit of the age, namely the development of historical science and the development of natural science.[33] Regarding the development of historical science, Reinhold Niebuhr believes that "it was the genuine achievement of modern historical science to discover that human cluture is subject to indeterminate development."[34] This, he believes, resulted in the final demise of the cyclical interpretation of history and also of the static conception of history which characterized the Middle Ages.[35] It further resulted in the belief that historical development is a redemptive process.[36] The development of natural science, which in the nineteenth century indicated that nature itself is subject to growth,[37] added to the general sense of optimism of the age. The key problem for theology in the nineteenth century arose, as Karl Barth puts it, "from the conviction that the guiding

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32. H. Butterfield, loc. cit., p.68.
33. R. Niebuhr, Faith and History, p.2.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.

principle of theology must be confrontation with the contemporary age and its various conceptions, self-understandings, and self-evidences, its genuine and less genuine 'movements', its supposed or real progress".[38] The result was that the notion of progress was central in liberal theology. Gilkey illustrates this with reference to Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl.[39] Schleiermacher's understanding of God's action in history is that God is at work in and through the laws of the natural processes of temporal development rather than by either initially setting up a closed, self-sufficient system as understood by the deists, or by intervening miraculously in history.[40] As he sees it, causal law and providence "entirely coincide".[41] Further, Gilkey interprets his understanding of divine causality to be progressive in its fundamental character.[42] Gilkey concludes that for Schleiermacher the creative and redemptive development over time of the levels of human self-consciousness culminate in an intrahistorical redemptive goal.[43] Ritschl had a similar view, namely, that in history God's providence realized man's full humanity as a moral personality,[44] though he sees it happening in quite a different way to that described by Schleiermacher. Gilkey sums up by stating that both of these theologians, while quite diverse, interpreted Christianity "as centered on the providential activity of God in and through the natural, creaturely forces of history"[45], and, that in their

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38. K. Barth, The Humanity of God, p.16.
39. L. Gilkey, op.cit., p.210-216.
40. Ibid., p.210.
41. Ibid., p.211.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p.231.
45. Ibid., p.216.

thinking history is "unequivocally a sequence illustrating a progressive development; and God's work of salvation is unequivocally a work achieved in and through that development".[46] This understanding which equates providence with progress was possible before the twentieth century experience of the risky, cataclysmic character of history to which Butterfield refers. But, before considering how his experience of history led him to modify the understanding of providence we have considered above, we need to consider the response of the so-called dialectical, or Krisis, theology in order that we may determine the difference between his response and that of his contemporaries.

There is a radical change in thinking from the liberal theology of the nineteenth century to the dialectical theology of this century. Karl Barth describes how in reaction to discovering that almost all his theological teachers supported the war policy of Wilhelm II he came to the realization that he could not support their theology any longer:[47]

> "... I suddenly realized that I could no longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th century theology no longer held any future."

Although the Barth of The Epistle to the Romans has a far stronger antihistorical emphasis than the Barth of Church Dogmatics III:3,[48] his understanding of history and providence in each case is, like that of the other dialectical theologians,

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46. Ibid., p.215.
47. K. Barth, op.cit., p.13.
48. cf. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.218 and J. Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought, p.321.

radically different to that of the liberal theologians. Gilkey mentions at least five points which illustrate the 'new' (in relation to the 19th century) understanding of the dialectical theologians[49] and its results. Firstly, God is understood to work in history "only inwardly through his Word of judgement and of grace in creating inner repentance, faith, decision, and obedience; he does not work 'outwardly' at all directing nature and social history to the fulfilment of their own intrinsic goal or goals."[50] Secondly, the dialectical theologians set up a kind of dualism between God and history. This dualism "preserved both the autonomy of creatures and the goodness of God, but it was one which made it difficult if not impossible for dialectical theology to explicate how God is sovereignly at work in and through the autonomy of mankind."[51] The dualism was virtually inevitable given, for instance, Brunner's insistence that the lordship of God is to be interpreted as a lordship of love which calls for a personal decision,[52] for this is to accord human freedom absolute freedom in relation to God's grace. Thirdly, as a result of the deep consciousness of evil in twentieth century historical life, the dialectical theologians came to believe that if there is meaning in history it must either transcend historical developments or it must be "inward in existential appropriation where alone meaning could be found".[53] There was thus a sense of the moral and religious meaninglessness of history. Fourthly, the view of providence

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49. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.222-226.
50. Ibid., p.222f.
51. Ibid., p.225.
52. Ibid., p.403 n.78.
53. Ibid., p.224.

as active in natural history was difficult for them because of their "omnipresent (if unadmitted) 'naturalism'",[54] i.e. their understanding that the laws of nature are explanatory of all natural events. Ancilliary to this belief was the view that evil is to be explained in terms of these laws of nature and not by reference to God's will. Fifthly, because all that we know of God is known in and through the personal encounter of faith, providence can only be an artical of faith in the sense of an abstract artical of faith. For instance, this is made clear by Bultmann who believes that there is no concept of providence in the New Testament, only the belief that nothing happens apart from the will of God.[55] And Barth, who in Church Dogmatics III:3 discusses providence at length, asserts that belief in providence is faith in the sense that "this means first that it is a hearing and receiving of the Word of God."[56] To assert that God rules is a confession "which is possible only as the confession of faith or not at all".[57] It is clear therefore that while the liberal theologians made providence one of the corner-stones of their theology, the dialectical theologians were only able to speak of providence with difficulty.

Now that we have considered the two major and yet radically opposite views of providence in the theology of the last two centuries we may return to Butterfield's treatment of the subject. How has Butterfield avoided the problems associated with

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54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p.404 N.84.
56. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics Vol. III:3, p.15.
57. Ibid.

these positions? And, has he managed to capitalise on the important and positive points? Butterfield's position is in some ways like that of Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr is counted among the dialectical theologians by Gilkey[58], and Macquarrie, who discusses Niebuhr's work in his chapter on "Post-liberal Theology in the English-speaking Countries" rather than in the chapter on "The Theology of the Word", points out that the differences between Niebuhr and continental dialectical theology should not blind us to the affinities between them.[59] He suggests that a reason for this is that the same kinds of influences were at work shaping their theologies.[60] Yet, a major difference between Niebuhr and the dialectical theologians was that the interpretation of history was a central concern of Niebuhr's theology.[61] Niebuhr shared the concern of these theologians that the optimistic, progressive view of history of the liberal theologians could not be squared with the experience of catastrophe and evil of the twentieth century, but, like Butterfield, he did not attempt to solve the problem by removing God from the general processes of history.[62]

As we have seen, Butterfield is clearly against the liberal theo-

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58. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.225.
59. J. Macquarrie, op. cit., p.345.
60. Ibid.
61. cf. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.400 n.42.
62. It could be argued that some of the dialectical theologians do not remove God from the general processes of history. For instance, Barth asserts God's sovereignty over all histotical events in Church Dogmatics III:3. Yet, as Gilkey points out, he still subordinates general history to sacred history and implies that general history has no meaning of its own. Gilkey, op. cit., p.220.

logians in that he does not believe that the general meaning of life can be based on the idea of progress.[63] The judgement that he speaks of, and which forms part of his understanding of the providence of God, negates the notion of a progressive understanding of history. But this understanding also indicates his disagreement with dialectical theology for it indicates that God is very much at work in the general processes of history and not only in those which are to be associated with sacred, or salvation, history. For instance, his understanding of God's action in history is radically different to that of Rudolf Bultmann, who, in the Theology of the New Testament, virtually excludes providence from the processes of history by indicating that the world is ruled by demonic powers and that the Christian places his trust in the eschatological event of Christ rather than in the divine sovereignity over history.[64] Butterfield, however, does agree with some of the basic understandings of the dialectical theologians. For example, he says that every instant is eschatological.[65] To this we must link his understanding of God working to enhance personality and especially his emphasis on this happening in "ultra-historical realms".[66] By this he means that "the interpretation of the human drama is thrown back into the intimate recesses of our personal experience."[67] His belief that moral judgements in history are essentially self-judgements[68] is an illustration of this, as is

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63. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.96.
64. See L. Gilkey, op. cit., p404 n.84.
65. H. Butterfield, lo. cit., p.121.
66. Ibid., p.86.
67. Ibid.
68. H. Butterfield, History and Human Relations, p.106.

his assertion that "in reality the essential strategies in the war of good against evil are conducted within the intimate interior of personalities."[69] His notion of God working in the "intimate recesses of our personal experience" is similar to the emphasis of dialectical theology on God working in history inwardly through his Word of judgement and of grace in creating inner repentance, faith, decision and obedience.[70] It is because God is at work in the intimate recesses of our personal experience that each moment is for Butterfield eschatological. Bultmann agrees with the assertion that every instant is eschatological though he indicates that he would have preferred Butterfield to say: "Every instant has the possibility of being an eschatological instant and in Christian faith this possibility is realised".[71] Butterfield never hints at an ultimate fulfilment of God's purposes within history, and that more than anything indicates his affinity to dialectical theology rather than liberal theology. It is apparent, therefore, that Butterfield avoids the serious errors of both liberal theology and dialectical theology. That is to say, he does not equate providence with progress, and nor does he locate God's action solely in "ultra-historical realms".

The reference above to Butterfield's view that every instant is eschatological brings us back to the difference between his understanding and that of Langdon Gilkey. When Gilkey says that we ought to interpret providence eschatologically he means that

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69. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.91.
70. See Page 54 (just after ref. 49) of thesis.
71. R. Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p.154.

we should interpret it with reference to the end of history understood in the sense of including a fulfilment in the temporal future. We have already noticed that Butterfield understands that each moment can supply all the meaning that is required to make sense of history, and we said that this is one of the similarities of his thought with dialectical theology. Gilkey however moves beyond dialectical theology.[72] He believes that a picture of history as a rather grim and pointless cycle of creativity and destruction is reflected in dialectical theology. He puts it like this:[73]

> "(Dialectical theologians) took the continuing ambiguity of history with intense seriousness, and thus understood general history in terms exclusively of this cyclical drama of creation, sin, forgiveness and possible renewal, but the continuation of sin within the renewal. For them, therefore, the course of history never approaches the kingdom; or to put this point another way, the eschatological end is equidistant from every point in history."

He has two objections to this view. First, the eschatological elements in both the Old and the New Testaments point to newness for history and not just for individuals.[74] And, secondly, because human beings are "social, historical beings as well as individual, inward, private beings", the basic human relation to the future is not merely to an individual future but also to a social one.[75] His solution is to treat providence and eschatology together - hence his suggestion that providence should

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72. Gilkey also discusses the eschatological theologies of Pannenberg, Moltmann, et.al. and proceeds to construct a theology of God's action in history based on a synthesis of the categories of providence and eschatology which reflect the positive elements of the dialectical and eschatological theologies.
73. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.273.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.

be treated eschatologically. He believes that if history is understood providentially without eschatology then providence is viewed statically and the ambiguity of the present is seen as the final word of God for history.[76] Gilkey's major contribution, therefore, is the suggestion that providence be related to the future as well as the present and past. Thus providence is partly "the creative source of new possibilities in each situation"[77] and these possibilities are defined by the ultimate goal of God.[78] The present is not neglected for our certainty for the future is based on our present Christian experience.[79] Gilkey is acutely aware of the "dilemma between an incredible final social goal of history with history's individuals, or an abstractive transhistorical haven for individuals without history's social achievements and without even the real ontological context for those individuals".[80] He believes though that he escapes this dilemma by following Gustav Aulen in interpreting theological symbols - in this case providence and eschatology - through an understanding of God rather than just by and through the symbols alone.[81] Thus, in providence God is not experienced merely as "the source of our continuing being" and "the ground of the possibilities which our freedom can actualize", but also as "the initiator of our reconciliation with him, with our own authentic selves and with our fellows".[82] He concludes:[83]

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76. Ibid., p.293.
77. Ibid., p.264.
78. Ibid., p.290.
79. Ibid., p.295.
80. Ibid., p.296.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., p.297.
83. Ibid.

> "The divine life thus represents an ultimate being from which autonomous beings flow into process and continue in being, a creative logos in which autonomous beings are in turn creative under the divine guidance of new possibilities, and a divine love through which these creatures are brought back into relation with one another and into the divine life. This reunion of individuals with one another and of each with their divine ground begins here and is the basis of the new reality and quality of life experienced everywhere that the redemptive forces of history are experienced. It is not experienced in fullness here, but it points both in promise and in its own intentionality beyond this life to a final completion".

In conclusion, we have noticed in this chapter that if we are to determine the action of God in history, he must be understood to do three things. Firstly, he must be active in the processes of history. In other words, his sovereignty over history must be asserted. He must be understood to be actively ruling history. Secondly, he must act in such a way that he does not negate human freedom. As it was put in the first paragraph, he must not be understood to be the only genuine actor in history. History is 'open', as it is sometimes put. And, thirdly, part of his activity must be aimed at bringing history to a culmination. This, too, is an expression of God's sovereignty over history. We have discovered that Butterfield's treatment of providence accords sufficient attention to the first two of these but not to the third.

# CHAPTER V

## FAITH AND GOD WHO ACTS

The first chapter of this thesis introduced both the problem of the determination of God's action in history, and Butterfield's approach to solving it. The next three chapters were concerned with a detailed exposition of Butterfield's understanding of God's action in history and a critique thereof. We have now reached the stage where it is necessary to state our conclusions. As it will be seen, the two conclusions drawn in this chapter do not contradict Butterfield's general thesis, but seek to focus and develop it.

How may God's action in history be determined? Our first conclusion may be put in the words of David Bosch: "That God acts in the world is something discernible only by the eye of faith".[1] This conclusion returns us to our discussion of the first chapter in which we noticed that Butterfield is reluctant to use the word 'faith' in describing the Christian interpretation of history. But, as the subsequent chapters have demonstrated, while Butterfield seldom uses the word 'faith', the concept of faith is present in nearly all that he has to say about God's action in history. One of the clearest illustrations of this was found in the second chapter where we indicated that Butterfield acknowledges the need for discovering God in one's own experience be-

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1. David Bosch, Witness to the World, p.232.
Because the word 'faith' will be used a great deal in this chapter, I should like to indicate that while I understand faith to include the element of belief (understood as 'seeing' and 'understanding' rather than 'doctrine'), I understand it to mean primarily trust which leads to obedience.

fore one is able to see him at work in secular history.[2] We have noticed how he returns to this understanding at almost every stage of his argument. For instance, he argues that there are moral judgements in history but he cannot claim that it is apparent to everyone that these judgements are the judgements of God.[3] Or, he can assert that the Old Testament concept of the Suffering Servant makes sense of some forms of suffering today, but he is forced to concede that with this concept too, the interpretation of secular history is forced into "the intimate recesses of personal experience".[4] He often speaks of the need for "a religious view of life"[5] which will colour our interpretation of history and the way in which he uses the phrase indicates that he has in mind what we have referred to as faith. It is clear then, that Butterfield would find no problem with the statement that it is only by the eye of faith that one is able to discern the action of God in history.

The fact that history is so ambiguous, so full of both good and bad influences, so inconclusive in its results, and so slow to indicate a clear direction or course, seems to indicate that our understanding, namely that it is necessary to start with faith rather than history in attempting to determine God's action in history, makes better sense of the available data than the view that God's action can be seen without reference to faith. Bosch indicates that he feels that the character of history is such

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2. Thesis page 29.
3. Thesis page 47.
4. Thesis page 51.
5. For instance, in Christianity and History, p.35 and p.116.

that even the believer is not always clear about God's action in history:[6]

> "The believer's interpretation of God's acts in history nevertheless remains an ambivalent matter. God's activities cannot be derived directly from history. History is full of contradictions, gaps, discontinuities, puzzles, surprises, mysteries, temptations, and confusions. ... God's activities in history are therefore for the eye of faith simultaneously revealed and hidden."

Karl Löwith is even more harsh in his judgement in that he excludes any possibility of meaning in history whatsoever.[7] As far as he is concerned, man's historical experience is one of steady failure and this fact defeats every attempt to arrive at a philosophy of history.

It is simply not clear that God's action in history can be seen without faith, and to assert that it can be seen is contrary to the evidence of the New Testament. In an interesting discussion, James M. Robinson argues that the terms 'faith' and 'understanding' are closely associated in Mark.[8] In the Markan usage 'understanding' does not fall outside the scope of the term 'faith'. Mark does not associate the problem of understanding with intellectual clarification but with the problem of 'hardness of heart', and, as his discussion of understanding the parables shows, there are two levels of understanding. At the one level the 'seeing' and 'hearing' "is exemplified by those who 'hear' the word but then fall away".[9] This kind of seeing and hearing is equivalent to the hardness of heart from which the opponents of Jesus suffer.

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6. D. Bosch, op. cit., p.233.
7. K. Löwith, Meaning in History, p.191ff.
8. James M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, p.73-78.
9. Ibid., p.77.

The second level, called 'knowing' and 'understanding' is exemplified by those who hear the word, receive it, and bear fruit. The important point for our present discussion is that the second level is given by God. Robinson draws attention to Mark 4:11 and points out that the passive form implies God as the agent.[10] If God's activity is discerned through an understanding which is itself God's gift to some, it is not true that his activity in history is generally apparent.

There are, however, two serious objections to the view that God's acts can be discerned only by faith. The first of these is the objection raised by Pannenberg and which we noticed in the first chapter in our survey of recent developments in the doctrine of revelation. At that stage we did not attempt to deal with the problem, but we must do so now. Briefly, the problem is this: Pannenberg argues that historical revelation is open to anyone who has eyes to see, that is, faith is not the basis for determining God's action. He says, for example, "What Jahweh accomplished in history cannot be written off as the imagination of the pious soul, for its inherent meaning of revealing the deity of Jahweh is impressed on everyone".[11] While this quotation makes Pannenberg's position appear radically different to that of, say, the dialectical theologians, it is not as different as it is sometimes assumed. Charles Villa-Vicencio argues correctly that because of his emphasis upon the history of the transmission of tradition, Pannenberg does not maintain that there is a reve-

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10. Ibid., p.77 n.1.
11. W. Pannenberg, Revelation as History, p.136.

lation in historical fact apart from the context of traditions and interpretations in which it took place.[12] Villa-Vicencio concludes: "This results in the demarcation between Pannenberg and such theologians as Barth and Bultmann to be less obvious than Pannengerg's polemic at times leads one to believe".[13] In the context of our present discussion we would say that the traditions and interpretations referred to above are to be seen as part and parcel of the faith understanding of the community or of the individual. Villa-Vicencio also indicates that it is not all that apparent that Pannenberg's historical judgements are not influenced by his theology. If this is the case, then his own theological enterprise indicates that he is wrong in assuming that history ought to influence faith, rather than that faith should influence our understanding of history. Villa-Vicencio's criticism is based on what he understands to be Pannenberg's failure to support from empirical evidence his argument that it is possible to show historically that Jesus was raised from the dead.[14] In seeking to verify the truth of his claims by reference to the apocalyptic conceptual world Pannenberg's argument is, argues Villa-Vicencio, either anthropological or theological but not historical.[15] Langdon Gilkey also believes that Pannenberg's theology influences his history. He stresses that the uniqueness of the resurrection cannot be seen on the basis of historical inquiry alone, and so he also accuses Pannenberg of applying a "faith judgement" in his understanding

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12. Charles Villa-Vicencio, "The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg", in Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, No.16., p.30.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p.35.
15. Ibid.

of the resurrection. Gilkey's reason is that we can only "'have' an event", as he puts it, by means of the canons of historical inquiry (i.e. the canons of homogeneity and analogy), and so, the resurrection must be accepted as 'there' on other grounds.[16]

This brings us to the second major problem with asserting that God's action in history is discernible only by the eye of faith. By stating that we ought to start with faith rather than history are we not saying that what is required is "faith-filled subjectivity?"[17] In other words, if we start with faith, is our understanding of God's action in history ever objective, or is it always a mere personal interpretation? While this may appear to be a serious problem at first glance, it is soon apparent that all historical inquiry has to face this question. If we are forced to conclude that it is impossible to begin our attempts to determine the action of God in history with faith because this makes our findings too subjective, then we must assume that, for the same reasons, the historian's task is futile. Langdon Gilkey writes that "if we confine the term objectivity alone to those inquiries which are completely free ab initio of any presupposed theory ... then history cannot be called objective."[18] He gives four reasons for his view that history is not free of any presupposed theory. (i) The historian does not start with given and solid 'facts' or 'events' but with documents, records, reports,

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16. L. Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind, p.361 n.35.
17. It seems that the term "faith-filled subjectivity" is that of M. Kähler who suggested that if a two-level ontological concept of reality is descarded it must be replaced by a two-level epistemological view of history in which the same event can be looked at from two different points of view. See, Robert J. Blaikie, Secular Christianity and God who acts, p.160.
18. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.102.

etc. from which he must construct what he regards as the 'facts' or 'events'.[19] This means that "the same interpretive principles that guide the formation of his conclusions direct his logically prior reconstruction of the facts which his conclusions seek to make intelligible".[20] (ii) The 'wholes', or 'universals', by which the historian seeks to explain his reconstructed facts are mental constructs.[21] And, because everything in history is "situation-dependent", periodization is essential to all historical inquiry. But the role of presupposed theory is illustrated in that while the period must be conceived on the basis of the data so that the data can in turn be made into 'facts' which are set within an intelligible whole, the formation of the period is "guided by the historian's most elusive yet crucial feelings of qualitative similarity and dissimilarity, of continuities and changes, by his or her assessments of attitudes, goals and norms, and by his judgements of what is or is not significant in historical change".[22] (iii) The process of selection is an indispensible part of the historian's task. And, as Gilkey puts it, "selection, like reconstruction, is grounded in the historian's 'ontological beliefs'".[23] (iv) There are no important historical judgements without moral assessments.[24] Gilkey concludes that this means that historical inquiry presupposes, both for the construction of 'facts' and 'events', and for the construction

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19. Ibid., p.99.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid. Examples of these 'universals' are: the barbarian invasions, Norman conquest, Industrial Revolution, colonial expansion, French Revolution, etc.
22. Ibid., p.100.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.

of the contexts within which these are intelligible, "a perspective on the part of the historian that can be called an implicit philosophy of history."[25]

To sum up our discussion, it is evident that to assert that God's action in the world is something discernible only by the eye of faith is not to superimpose something upon history, but has merely to do with the choice of the philosophy of history by which we seek to interpret the data available to the historian. We have noticed also that this conclusion is inescapable, for even Pannenberg, who attempts to do theology from the diametrically opposite starting point, can be accused of in fact beginning with faith because of his understanding that "historical inquiry always takes place from an already given context of meaning".[26] It is apparent also that Butterfield is only able to 'discover' God's action in history by faith. As noted in the first chapter, we believe that Butterfield's talk of the third kind of analysis of the events of history is in effect a plea for a Christian philosophy of history, or, in other words, a plea for a Christian principle of interpretation. So far then we are in agreement with Butterfield's understanding. However, his method, and thus his understanding, need development and it is to this task that we now turn.

Our second conclusion is very similar to the first in that it is

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25. Ibid., p.101. The question of whether Butterfield, with his emphasis on 'technical history', would agree with this does not concern us, for we are primarily interested in this thesis with his 'third level of analysis'.
26. W. Pannenberg, Jesus, God and Man, p.109.

simply a development of it. Because God's action in history is discernible only by the eye of faith, any attempt to discern his action in history must begin with a theological inquiry rather than a historical one. Thus while our first conclusion is concerned with the possibility of determining God's action, our second conclusion is concerned with the method of doing so. We are not stating that God's action in history can be determined without reference to historical inquiry, but that it would be wrong to start there. Also, the quality, or accuracy, of our findings depends upon the throughness of our theological research.

A statement by Pannenberg may be used to introduce our argument:[27] "Historical inquiry always takes place from an already given context of meaning, out of a preunderstanding of the object of inquiry, which, however, is modified and corrected in the process of research on the basis of the phenomena examined". The words that are particularly relevant are "out of a preunderstanding of the object of inquiry".[28] These words are true of every scientific method,[29] from the natural sciences to history and theology. The way in which this notion applies to our discussion is that in theology the basic source for understanding who God is and how he is active in history is revelation. However, history is not the only vehicle of revelation. As John Macquarrie puts it:

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27. Ibid.
28. This understanding of Pannenberg's could also be used to argue that in fact his theology begins with faith. Pannenberg has in mind here his notion that there is no revelation in historical fact apart from the context of traditions and interpretations in which it took place. The words are used here as a spring-board for my discussion, i.e. I do not pretend to use them as Pannenberg would.
29. There is no one scientific method, but many. See Ian Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, p.138.

"It would seem that almost anything in the world can be an occasion for revelation."[30] The point is, that while history is an important means whereby God discloses himself, and one which is on a "more sophisticated level" than nature, to use Macquarrie's words, it is not the only means whereby God discloses himself. Personal relationships are also important vehicles of revelation, and the revelatory experience may even be "entirely interiorized" so that God is encountered "in the depths of the human mind".[31] It is clear that there are no pure facts in history. And, for this reason if meaning is to be found in history, or if history is to reveal God's presence and action, it must be understood according to the content of the traditions and interpretations in which it took place, as Pannenberg would have it, or, it must be interpreted by the eye of faith, as we wish to assert. But what we have discovered now is that Macquarrie's observation regarding the diversity of the phenomena which may become bearers of revelation indicates that history alone cannot provide sufficient data for the determination of God's action. If we are to determine God's action in history we must first begin with theology so that when we begin our historical inquiry[32] we will have sufficient pointers to indicate where we ought to look for God's action. This method is illustrated in Butterfield's work.

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30. J. Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, p.6.
31. Ibid.
32. By speaking of a "historical inquiry" I do not mean the sort of inquiry that Butterfield undertakes in The Reconstruction of a Historical Episode : The History of the Enquiry into the origins of the Seven Year's War (for, as we have seen, God's action cannot be discerned by means of such an inquiry), but simply the task of applying the 'findings' of the theological inquiry to the 'human drama'.

Perhaps the best illustration is Butterfield's discussion of cataclysm and tragic conflict in history. His approach is to go back to the Old Testament to discover how the Hebrews dealt with the moral-historical problems of their times. As we noticed in chapter three, Butterfield's most important point is that we should see that in the picture of the Suffering Servant there is "the nearest thing to a clue for those who wish to make anything out of the human drama."[33] His hope is that the problems of the present day will be seen to be similar to those of the Hebrews so that the Hebrew understanding may indicate how God is active today. It is clear therefore that Butterfield brings to history a wealth of theological meaning in order to discern God's action.

Butterfield's work also indicates how an understanding of God's action is limited if the theological inquiry which preceeds the historical one is inadequate. It is this that we discovered in the second chapter when we noticed that, because of his failure to recognize what, in following Reinhold Niebuhr, we called the second side of the paradox of grace, he failed to recognize a whole thratre of God's action in history. Had Butterfield paid more attention to the theological doctrine of salvation he would have discovered that God is at work in history creating a new humanity. Butterfield's assertion that history indicates the sinfulness of human nature does not rule out the possibility of God's work in creating a new humanity. It indicates rather the wisdom of Pannenberg's observation quoted above. The preunderstanding of the object of inquiry is modified and corrected in

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33. H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p.85.

the process of research on the basis of the phenomena examined, says Pannenberg. In this case it means, for example, that our understanding of justification and sanctification must take account of the continuance of sin in the life of the believer. Luther's phrase simul justus et peccator must surely count as such an attempt. Butterfield's work indicates therefore that the quality of the theological research preceeding the historical inquiry determines to a large extent the success of the attempt to determine the action of God in history.

Langdom Gilkey has attempted to base his interpretation of history (and thus his understanding of God's action in history) on a sound theological footing. His attempt is to base his understanding on a correlative understanding of providence and eschatology.[34] Christology also plays an important part in his work. He says:[35]

> "The principle of meaning in history, ... has several different but related levels: a level of creative providence, a level of redemptive grace and a level of eschatological fulfilment. These 'multi-leveled' redemptive forces of history which give meaning to history despite its ambiguity leading to destruction are universal. But the character and goal of all three levels of the divine activity in history are known most fully in Jesus, and thus the possibility of our certainty about them and of our inward acceptance of and participation in them is fullest there."

Gilkey's emphasis on a three leveled basis for discovering meaning in history is important. The emphasis on christology is essential for it is in Jesus that revelation receives its clearest focus. Also, without providence God's action appears to have little

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34. See L. Gilkey, op. cit., chap. II.
35. Ibid., p.284.

to do with the present and it is thus hard to discern his action with any clarity. Without the emphasis on eschatology, on the other hand, the ambiguity of the present events makes the notion of providence problematic (because, as we noticed in the fourth chapter, the problem of suffering and evil, especially the suffering which leads to a hardening of character because it is not accompanied by an understanding of the vicarious nature of suffering is raised) and this in turn complicates the determination of God's action in history.

We have noticed that the throughness of the preliminary theological inquiry dictates to a large extent our ability to determine with accuracy God's action in history. For this reason, we need as wide a survey as possible, and so, while Gilkey may be accurate in indicating the three major divisions of the theological task (i.e. creative providence, redemptive grace and eschatological fulfilment), a fuller treatment of doctrine than he undertakes is necessary. Because of space and the limitations of this thesis the task cannot, of course, be undertaken here. All that we may do is call for as wide a survey as possible. For instance, even a doctrine such as angelology can be of assistance in determining God's action, for, as Karl Barth writes, "... God selects and sends His messengers, the angels, who precede the revelation and doing of His will on earth as objective and authentic witnesses ..."[36]

The doctrine of the person and work of the Holy Spirit deserves

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36. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.III:3, p.369.

special mention. It is a doctrine that is often neglected in discussions of the meaning of history and of God's action in history.[37] Yet it is a doctrine which ought to be given a prominent place in the discussion of God's action for, in many ways, the action of God can be summarized in an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. G.S. Hendry has written that a "provisional definition" of the Holy Spirit may be: "... the Holy Spirit means the living action of God in the world."[38] John V. Taylor has discussed the work of the Holy Spirit in a particularly illuminating way in his book The Go-Between God. In the first chapter of this thesis we noticed that it is by the interpretative aspect of faith that we "see" the action of God in history. Taylor goes to great lengths to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as that of enabling communication and awareness.[39] He says:[40]

> "The Holy Spirit is the invisible third party who stands between me and the other, making us mutually aware. Supremely and primarily he opens my eyes to Christ. But he also opens my eyes to the brother in Christ, or the fellow-man, or the point of need, or the heart-breaking brutality and the equally heart-breaking beauty of the world. He is the giver of that vision without which the people perish."

He describes the Holy Spirit as "that unceasing, dynamic communicator and Go-Between operating upon every element and every process of the material universe, the immanent and anonymous presence of God".[41]

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37. For example, "Holy Spirit" is not even listed in Gilkey's index of subjects. Butterfield hardly ever speaks of the Spirit.
38. Cit. ap. Blaikie, op. cit., p.25.
39. See John V. Taylor, The Go-Between God, chapter I, especially p.17.
40. Ibid., p.19.
41. Ibid., p.64.

In the fourth chapter we examined God's action in history in terms of an understanding of providence which sees God as, following Gilkey, "the ground of self-actualizing freedom and as the creative source of new possibilities in each situation".[42] Taylor has a similar understanding of the work of God, which, however, he describes in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit. He says: "At every point in the story the Creator Spirit presents the opportunity for advance by creating the occasion for choice ..."[43] The importance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for an understanding of God's action is further illustrated by the universal scope of the Spirit's work. Our discussion so far has indicated that God is at work in all the processes of history for he is the sovereign Lord of history. Taylor's observation that "many of the causes (the Holy Spirit) initiates are being better served by men of other allegiances than by Christians" [44] relates our understanding to an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Taylor also says:[45]

> "... it is essential for our doctrine of the Holy Spirit to recognize that so much can be said about him which is universal. Just as he works anonymously through all the processes of creation, so to all men of all beliefs at all times he gives the unexpected opening of eyes, the deep awareness of that 'other' - God or creature - the overwhelming gusts of power, the double vision of what is and what might be, the call to sacrifice, the gifts of prophecy and prayer and healing and ecstasy. The more we learn to recognize his actions the more we shall find him in the life of the world everywhere."

Taylor does not, of course, restrict the work of the Holy Spirit to this 'universal' activity. Since pentecost Jesus gives the

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42. L. Gilkey, op. cit., p.264 and see thesis p.72.
43. J.V. Taylor, op. cit., p.75.
44. Ibid., p.103.
45. Ibid., p.83.

gift of the Spirit in "a new and unique way" to those who have faith in him.[46] So, through the work of the Spirit, God is actively creating the new humanity that we discussed in our second chapter, for as Taylor says, "Life 'in the Spirit' is identical with life 'in Christ'."[47]

In conclusion, Butterfield is successful in pointing to God's action in history because he brings to his history his faith understanding. We have argued though, that his success would have been even greater had he started with a thorough theological inquiry. In any case, Butterfield's work provides a valuable starting point, and points the way forward, for a full understanding of God's action in history.

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46. Ibid., p. 106.
47. Ibid., p.110.

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