

WILLIAM KELLY AND THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Anne-Louise Critchlow

William Kelly (1821–1906) belonged to the second generation of Brethren which came after that of the founders, but he had a pivotal place as a teacher and theologian in the movement. In particular he edited in thirty-four volumes the works of J.N. Darby (1800–1882) and those of J.G. Bellett (1795–1864) and produced expositions on every book of the Bible.¹ He also edited between 1857 and his death in 1906 the magazine *The Bible Treasury* which included numerous book reviews and responses to contemporary theological controversies. Whereas Darby was a pioneer church planter, evangelist and visionary, Kelly was primarily a scholar and Bible teacher who spent the first part of his career in Guernsey (1842–1871)² and the second part in Blackheath, London (1871–1906).³ He was familiar with the works of the deists, the German school of higher criticism and the Broad Church Anglican theologians. In confronting many of their arguments, he demonstrated his own conviction in the inspiration of the scriptures. In this article I will endeavour to analyse exactly how he interpreted the much debated question of inspiration and will attempt to show that his position was more complex than at first appears.

In order to understand Kelly's theology, it is vital to understand the ways in which he interpreted scripture. If he stands at the beginning of the fundamentalist tradition, as has been claimed for Darby and the millennialists,⁴ then his views on the authority of

1. Edwin Cross, *The Irish Saint and Scholar: A biography of William Kelly 1821-1906* (London, 2004), pp.114–5.

2. *Ibid.*, p.23.

3. *Ibid.*, p.47.

4. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London, 1977), p.195; Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago,

scripture must be of importance. In this paper I argue that he does much more than give a literalist interpretation of scripture, which is normally associated with fundamentalism, and that his basis of interpretation is a much wider one. Therefore, rather than being in a prescribed fundamentalist school, defined narrowly by writers such as James Barr as having ‘a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible... [and] a strong hostility to modern theology’,⁵ he is rather in the forefront of the conservative intellectual movement of biblical scholars, by which I mean, professional theologians with orthodox Christian beliefs who believe in the inspiration of the scriptures and who use their academic knowledge to defend their theological position. I will refer in this paper to his use of *The Bible Treasury* as well as his printed Bible expositions to explore the inspiration of scripture and debate with others. That Kelly made references in his work to writers other than Brethren ones, including those from the Broad Church position and those who did not see themselves as believers, shows how willing he was to debate and that he was intellectually capable of answering a broad spectrum of views. During the 1890s, when the debate over the infallibility of scripture was becoming more familiar to the Christian public, partly through the publication of *Lux Mundi* (1890),⁶ the collection of essays in which Charles Gore controversially showed his acceptance of the new critical views, Kelly’s own references in *The Bible Treasury* to more contentious works became more frequent. The question of the basis of biblical authority was a particularly important one because it underpinned the whole of his theology.

Kelly and biblical inspiration

As an acknowledged lower, or textual, critic of some distinction, Kelly knew the importance of accuracy in linguistic knowledge, but he also recognised that the point of view of the translator was

1970), also saw the start of fundamentalism in the millenarian views of Darby and other Brethren teachers.

5. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, p.1.

6. Charles Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: The inspiration of the Holy Spirit* (London, 1890).

important too. This was especially so when deciphering key verses which gave the scriptural understanding of inspiration, such as 1 Timothy 3:16 and 17. He disagreed with the recently published Revised Version (1881-5) in its translation of these verses.⁷ Kelly argued for ‘every scripture is inspired by God’, rather than, ‘every scripture, inspired by God, is profitable for teaching.’ He explained, referring to Henry Alford’s preparatory work which had preceded the new translation: ‘None of the constructions within or without the New Testament cited by Dean Alford approaches the one before us.’⁸ He revealed that he was aware of different strengths of different translations and cited Origen to support his own. ‘The RV, whether intentionally or not, is ambiguous,’ he concluded.⁹ In his essay Kelly also discusses an unidentified ‘learned dignitary’ who writes of the phrase ‘God inspired’ as not comprehending any verbal errors or possible historical inaccuracies, as well as problems of transcription and transmission. The last were always a matter of concern for Kelly, as a lower critic. However, concerning the other potential errors he stated: ‘Compromise is unworthy of faith... The imputation really leaves God out, as every measure of scepticism does.’¹⁰

Nevertheless, as I shall explore more fully in the next section on Kelly’s understanding of literary techniques, he did not see plenary inspiration as being inconsistent with the different purposes and forms of the text. When he discussed the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew he wrote, it ‘need not be considered historically, as one continuous discourse, but may have been divided into different parts.’¹¹ He noted that this understanding gave ‘a key to the

7. William Kelly, *God’s Inspiration of the Scriptures* (1903), Scripture Truth Publications edn (Morpeth, Northumberland, 2007), p.38.

8. *Ibid.*, p.37.

9. It is interesting to note that the recent NRSV gives Kelly’s translation for the text, and puts the other one as a possibility in a footnote: *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford, 1989), p.210.

10. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, pp.39-40.

11. William Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew* (London & Glasgow, 1868), p.70.

difficulties in the gospel',¹² thus showing himself to be in the tradition of the conservative intellectual, the continuum of which has extended into the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹³ Kelly paralleled the literary moulding of the Sermon on the Mount, with a similar grouping of the miracles of Christ, even though the miracles might have been divided by space and time.¹⁴ Therefore his position as a literalist was always tempered by his understanding of literary crafting.

In the same Bible exposition he spoke out against conscious inspiration as the writers knew all that was in the mind of God.¹⁵ He stated that the writers were unknowingly moved to give different accounts, for example, of the transfiguration, by the Holy Spirit. He refused to call these mistakes, as did those critics whom he described as 'infidel'—a pejorative term much misused by Kelly because it always implied disagreement with him; instead he argued that the Christian must look at it differently. He argued;

How came it to pass that the man who wrote the first gospel gave this scene the most fully? If he had written after the others, I could conceive his remembering and registering what the others had forgotten... Such criticism [of the infidel], therefore, is not merely pride of heart, but it is the folly of spoilt children against the word of God... Let us believe that what God says is perfect... and that in the very differences there is a divine object.¹⁶

Of course this view does not take into consideration modern estimations on the relative dating and source material of the gospels—he clearly gives the Gospel of Matthew primacy—but it illustrates Kelly grappling with some of the problems of diverse Gospel accounts and shows how he used his theology to answer some of the problems raised.

12. *Ibid.*, p.71.

13. With biblical scholars, such as Karl Barth, F.F. Bruce and N.T. Wright. In citing these scholars I refer to the definition of 'conservative biblical scholars' above, p.38.

14. Kelly, *Gospel of Matthew*, p.72.

15. *Ibid.*, p.269.

16. *Ibid.*

Despite his abilities as a lower critic, Kelly always justified his textual views theologically. For example, when he examined the verse in Malachi, 'Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated' (Malachi 1: 2-3), he did not look at Hebrew linguistic conventions, but chose to examine the biblical ideas of predestination and choice.¹⁷ At the same time he used minute analysis of language to support his points. When writing of God's promise to Jacob, he noted that it included the sand, not the stars of heaven, because Jacob is the type of the 'earthly' Jew.¹⁸ He saw here a choice of language which upheld his theology. He added the comment, 'He was the object of grace, but in no way established in grace.'¹⁹

In interpreting scripture, Kelly advocated acceptance of the text as it was, but also allowed for the investigation of textual and historical issues concerning scripture. He had in many ways a straightforward reading of Genesis, which he appreciated as unique in all ancient literature, and he believed that there was no comparison between other pre-historic books and the Bible.²⁰ Genesis was exceptional, he felt, because it started with facts rather than notions and ideas and there was no attempt to explain who God was. Interpretation of Genesis was a key factor for him because he declared that creation was the most important doctrine after redemption.²¹ He demanded of its readers either unqualified acceptance or rejection. He wrote: 'Its first words are necessarily either a revelation or an imposture.'²² The act of God resting after creation in Genesis 2:3 he also saw as very significant because only God could have revealed it. He believed that theologians should not follow scientists and condemned S.R. Driver and A.F. Kirkpatrick for doing this in their *The Higher Criticism* (1905), which he

17. William Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Pentateuch* (London, 1871), p.20

18. *Ibid.*, pp.94-96.

19. *Ibid.*

20. William Kelly (ed), *The Bible Treasury* [hereafter *BT*], vol.18 (July 1890), p.112.

21. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.3.

22. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p.21.

answered in an article in the 1906 edition of *The Bible Treasury*. Kelly was always far more critical of contemporary theologians than he was of scientists, partly because he saw theologians as having responsibility towards God which could be abused. However, he was humble in accepting that he did not always understand, such as in his commentary on the story of the sun standing still at Gilgal.²³ In such matters he advised trust.²⁴ He also believed that Scripture was open to investigation, something he accepted, for example, in his comments on the first two verses of Genesis.

One refreshing feature of Kelly's doctrine of scripture is that, while being a biblical literalist, he always had a large conception of the nature of God. God was beyond the word of God (a position often taken by contemporary theologians against 'fundamentalists'). Kelly wrote: 'The word of God, blessed as it is, is not everything. We need the God of the word as well as the word of God. What weakness if God Himself be not with us!'²⁵ Kelly was also aware that it was easy to turn from God to rely on ourselves for interpretation.²⁶ Although he used his magazine to review books on the subject of inspiration with which he did not agree such as Gladstone's *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* (1890),²⁷ he felt that the Brethren should be willing to listen to accusations of not following the scriptures, even when those accusations came from a non-Brethren source, thus showing his open-mindedness.²⁸

Kelly was never a 'literalist' in the plodding sense; therefore he was able to evade the problems which surfaced in Bishop Colenso's controversial views on the authorship of the Pentateuch. Theological understanding as a whole was important in interpreting the Bible. He sought to look behind the text and understand the scheme of theological thinking which undergirded it. When looking at

23. William Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Earlier Historical Books of the Old Testament* (London, 1874), p.77.

24. *Ibid.*, p.150.

25. *BT*, vol.4 (January 1st 1863), p.56.

26. Kelly, *Earlier Historical Books*, 'Joshua', p.63.

27. *BT*, vol.18 (July 1890), p.110.

28. *Ibid.*, p.207.

genealogies, for example, he did not just look at possible errors and difficulties, nor did he ignore them. He used them to expose the purpose and viewpoint of the writer. For example, on the subject of genealogies in Genesis 46, he was able to write (with an ironic use of litotes):

It may be worth while to observe in this and other genealogies not often the object of infidel attack, that the differences between Genesis, Numbers, and Chronicles in their form are due to the motive for their introduction in each particular connexion; that the difficulties clearly spring from the design, in no way from error in the writer, but in fact, because of ignorance in such readers as misapprehend them; and that both the differences and the difficulties are the strongest evidence of their truth and inspired character, for nothing would have been easier than to have assimilated their various forms and to have eliminated that which sounds strange to western ears.²⁹

Kelly believed that there was danger in any falsehood being taught because 'it will work evil in various ways.'³⁰ For him unity of truth was important and he made no distinction between the essential and the apparently circumstantial. This helps us to understand why the whole Brethren system of biblical interpretation was important. Kelly shows this all-embracing understanding in many places in his work, including, for example his interpretation of the numbers two and seven in Genesis 7 in the description of the Flood.³¹ Luther's idea of a canon within the canon had no persuasive power for the Brethren. All scripture became part of their paradigm of understanding.

Kelly's own definition of infallibility was nuanced. In October 1863 he published an article 'On Inspiration'. He used the word 'infallible' of the scriptures to mean them 'having all the infallible certainty of what God says.'³² But he contrasted the infallible

29. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, 118n. Immediately after this passage he goes on to examine why Stephen quotes the LXX version in Acts and argues against the scepticism of contemporary Biblical critics.

30. Kelly, *Earlier Historical Books*, p.393.

31. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.42.

32. *BT*, vol.4 (October 1863), p.350.

movement of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures with the fallibility of the writers, such as the apostles. He also maintained that in what they wrote they were 'conformed to the state of the dispensation'. Clearly Kelly felt that there was greater truth implicit in the writing than what the limited consciousness of the writer knew. He wrote of the Holy Spirit working on 'the affections' rather 'the intelligence' of the writer. Therefore he saw his task as interpreter was to reveal the full intentions of the biblical discourse in the light of the whole Bible.

Although, as I noted earlier, he did not accept the idea of the canon within the canon, he explored the Jewish tripartite division of scripture into the '*gradus Mosaicus*... and the *gradus propheticus* and *Bath-Kol*',³³ and seemed to approve of the distinction in the varied character and purpose of the different sacred writings. 'This did not touch the authority but the character of the writings,' he explained. He proceeded to argue that omniscience was not necessary on the part of the scriptural writers but explained their task by an analogy: 'The spout which gives a form to the current that flows from it may transmit the water as pure as it flows in.'³⁴

He also wrote against the Broad Church position of Benjamin Jowett with his intention in *Essays and Reviews* (1860) of treating the Bible 'like any other book',³⁵ and rejected the idea of a multiple authorship of the Pentateuch. He clearly came near to bibliolatry, which was a common accusation of Driver and other Anglican theologians against literalists.³⁶ On the other hand his conception of authors not being conscious of the implications of what they wrote, but succeeding generations being capable of interpretations not available to the original writers, concurs with the ideas of

33. *Ibid.*, p.351.

34. *Ibid.*, p.352.

35. Benjamin Jowett, 'On the interpretation of scripture', in Victor Shea and William Whitla (eds), *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 text and its reading* (Charlottesville and London, 2000), pp.482, 503, 504, 507; cf. *ibid.*, 'The Broad Church compromise', p.122.

36. S. R. Driver and A. K. Kirkpatrick, *Three Papers on the Higher Criticism* (London, 1905).

postmodern literary criticism. Concerning Matthew's account of the transfiguration he wrote, 'I do not pretend to say how far the inspired writers knew all the mind of God in such a thing: they wrote as moved by the Holy Ghost.'³⁷ In his *God's Inspiration of the Scriptures* (1903), he was quite clear that scepticism about the scriptures was a precursor of the full apostasy to come, so that their faithful interpretation was very important to him. Although he did not gainsay the Established Church's creeds, he thought it was more important to go back to the word of God, than to refer to the creeds.³⁸

Kelly was convinced that doubters could not interpret the Bible correctly, thus placing him firmly in the continuum of fundamentalist theologians. The faith of the interpreter was the most important factor in an authoritative reading of the scriptures. He noted: 'Since it is the essence of rationalism to deny God's authority and mind in Scripture as a whole, not one of them can rightly estimate any of its parts.'³⁹ Instead he affirmed that understanding of Genesis 3 was by faith alone and that it was not easy to meet objections.⁴⁰ He advised, 'the great point, my brethren, is to hold fast the truth.' This shows us Kelly's objectives in his own writings and his sense that other members of the Brethren movement, learned or unlearned, who had access to the scriptures, were on an equal footing with himself. While maintaining his own authority as a teacher, this attitude preserved him from arrogance.

Kelly and literary techniques

Kelly's writing shows that he was aware of literary techniques employed by biblical writers. In the later nineteenth century general knowledge of literary techniques and schools of literary criticism were developing in the area of classical studies and the newly recognised discipline of English Literature. For Kelly, verbal inspiration, although significant, was not the most important criterion

37. Kelly, *Gospel of Matthew*, p.269.

38. Kelly, *Earlier Historical Books*, p.391.

39. *BT*, n.s., vol.5 (1905), p.482.

40. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.21.

for interpreting the Bible correctly. Knowledge of the unity of the Bible, a 'right' theological understanding and a fruitful spiritual life were the most important means of understanding the scriptures. Frequently using the tools of literary criticism, Kelly showed his deeper understanding of the text, which was far from a straightforward literalist reading. My aim in this section is to demonstrate this understanding.

An essential key for interpreting the Bible was an understanding of its unity of revelation. Eisegesis, therefore, which was a frequent practice of Kelly's, was entirely justified,⁴¹ because it contributed to his understanding of the unity of the Bible. 'There is a profound design', he wrote, 'which runs through the works of God and more especially through His word.'⁴² There was also a key mixture of intellectual exploration, fundamentalist theology and mysticism in Kelly's writings which made them unique. For example in his writing about the early books of the Bible he traced the way man's evil drew out the love and knowledge of God.⁴³ Like many Brethren and Victorian evangelicals, he was interested in prophecy but he saw its limitations. He wrote: 'Prophecy, admirable as it is, is always short of the fullness of grace and truth which is in Christ... it neither looks up at the heights of God's glory, nor again does it in any way go down into the depths of His grace.'⁴⁴

In his comments on Genesis 15 he accepted that a literary account was organized in a certain way to present a truth.⁴⁵ He gave as an example why Abram was justified after he had been called out and had worshipped acceptably. This sequence was given, he said, 'in order to form our souls according to His own mind.'⁴⁶ It was Kelly's role as interpreter and teacher to acknowledge the theological significance of that order. He always used literary interpretation to allow himself to stress the importance of the position of in 'the

41. *Ibid.*, p.5.

42. William Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Daniel*, 2nd edn (London, 1881), p.25.

43. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.265.

44. *Ibid.*, pp.66-7.

45. *Ibid.*, p.62.

46. *Ibid.*, p.64.

heavenlies' to the Church and in his Christology. Therefore, in teaching about Joshua's entrance into the promised land, he mixed comments on the historical, symbolic and present day experience of the believer.⁴⁷ He explained that Joshua was like the Christian going into 'the heavenlies' with Christ; at the same time, while Moses was a type of Messiah, Joshua stood for much more than this. This also allowed him to develop his Christology, by discussing the eternal Sonship of Jesus and his pre-incarnational existence and possible epiphanies in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews, with its interpretation of the Old Testament had great significance for the Brethren. Discussing the book of Numbers chapters 28 and 29, Kelly wrote, alluding to the concept of 'rest' in Hebrews, about the Christian's whole rest under the Messiah, not just the believer's rest through salvation in Christ.⁴⁸ He asserted that this was the true meaning of Hebrews chapter 4. The New Testament, for Kelly, was a hermeneutical commentary on the Old.

For him Christ was always the focus of the Old Testament. In his comments in *God's Inspiration of the Scriptures* on God rejecting David as the builder of the Temple in 2 Samuel, Kelly wrote that God had turned to David's son, who was Jehovah's son, not to Solomon.⁴⁹ This was certainly not a literalist reading of the text. When discussing the character of Rebecca, Kelly gave very little exploration of the text, but he treated her as a type of the Bride of Christ.⁵⁰ This was a continuation of Darby's theology and minimised the more practical effect of an incarnational theology, because it emphasised the ideal. This use of typology was a key literary technique which was elaborated in Kelly's writings. He did this to a large extent with the character of Joshua, for example, who represented the intermediary action of Jesus in the heavenlies in the face of the enemy. Kelly linked Joshua with the book of Ephesians.⁵¹

47. *Ibid.*, p.405.

48. *Ibid.*, p.407.

49. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p.157.

50. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, pp.85-6.

51. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p.146.

According to him, both Puritan and Catholic commentators missed this point. If the Red Sea stood for Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of the believer, then Jordan was 'our death and resurrection with Christ.' At the same time Kelly acknowledged the limitations of typology, because it was always a pointer to the fullness which came in Christ.

Another important way for Kelly to teach the Bible was through understanding and explaining its symbolism. Whatever he taught, he would link the symbolism of the passage to other parts of the Bible, as for example in Daniel, tracing the symbols of the tree and the vine to Psalm 80, Jeremiah 2 and Ezekiel 15.⁵² When writing about Exodus, he gave a detailed interpretation of the rod of Moses as meaning 'power' and the serpent (construed as some sort of creature which was satanic), and, in so doing, made careful cross references to Genesis.⁵³ Another symbolic element which also came to have great significance for him was the use of numbers in scripture. Their intended meaning was far more important than the literalist understanding. Therefore, in the course of writing of the sacrifice of thirteen young bullocks—short of the perfect number created by 7+7—he posed the question: 'Was this not intended to exercise our spiritual thought as to the truth of God? Are we not to infer that it is the all but fullest expression of Christ known on the earth...?' Thus thirteen was a reference to the millennium which was 'not perfection, but definitely near it.'⁵⁴ Symbolism, for Kelly, was a more important way of interpreting the Bible than literalism. Leprosy even in the Old Testament stood for sin as defilement,⁵⁵ and palsy meant paralysis and the weakness to which sin reduces someone. Therefore he saw the symbolic worth of the words as more important than the literal reading. He took biblical interpretation out of the historical and into the conceptual. Symbolism was explained so that

52. Kelly, *Book of Daniel*, p.76.

53. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.142.

54. *Ibid.*, p.409.

55. *Ibid.*, p.143.

there could be a depth of understanding in reading the Bible. In writing about the Passover meal, he commented:

Leaven represents iniquity in its tendency to extend itself by assimilating what was exposed to its action... The flesh of the lamb was to be eaten not raw or sodden, but roast with fire, the strong and evident sign of fierce unsparing divine judgement. It must and ought to be so; for herein Christ's death met our sins and God's judgment.⁵⁶

Often, within his own sentences, there was a mixture of historical comment and symbolic Christian interpretation. In writing about the deliverance from the Red Sea, he affirmed that historically the Passover started in Egypt because 'they could not have been delivered across the Red Sea without the blood of the Lamb first. The death of Christ is the necessary and only possible foundation for any blessing from God.'⁵⁷ He linked, both implicitly and explicitly, the symbolism of the Old Testament and the New. Thus, the Feast of Tabernacles after Pentecost, took place that 'the liberty of glory shall arrive',⁵⁸ not just the liberty of grace like Pentecost. The harvest of corn was seen as being akin to the final judgment and therefore, implicitly, linked to the symbolism which Jesus used in his parables about the last times.

Symbolism for Kelly was more important than either dispensationalism or prophecy. Therefore circumcision was not just seen as an act within a dispensation, because it existed before the giving of the law. When discussing the Pentateuch, he also examined its symbolism too, as representing the mortification of the flesh for the Christian. In addition he stressed that with eschatology it is very easy to enter into 'the bias of our own minds'. 'Making it pre-eminently our study never does really deepen our souls in the ways of God,' he wrote, 'but rather leads them on in lower lines and earthly principles.'⁵⁹ Prophecy was only useful if it had a spiritual

56. *Ibid.*, p159.

57. *Ibid.*, p.341.

58. *Ibid.*, p.471.

59. *Ibid.*, p.70.

effect on our lives, as in the biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Kelly not only interpreted symbols as he found them in the text but read the meaning of the symbol into other narratives. In his reply to a correspondent designated by the initials GHJ he discussed the language of Daniel, and maintained that as for himself, he

cannot for a moment allow that to deny symbols in the prophecies is a help to understanding them... The truth is, that in almost all the prophets there is a mixture of figures with ordinary language... The source of mistake as to scripture lies in the truths communicated, far more than in the words which convey them.

And he went to plead for an understanding of symbolism:

A symbol, if clearly and certainly understood, is quite as determinate as any other mode of expression... those who profess to be literal interpreters exhibit a very large amount of conflict and inconsistencies in their schemes.⁶⁰

There were a variety of other literary techniques which Kelly recognised and found in the text which gave a sense of it being crafted. I have already shown that he 'read' Daniel through symbolism rather than literalism. Words also worked as signifiers of change and age in documents. Thus, in Genesis 15, the phrase 'after these things' was recognised as an indicator of another age.⁶¹ He 'read' a passage through historical clues, textual nuances, symbolic associations, Christological inferences and spiritual application. He was able to acknowledge genre and purposes, for example, writing of Job as a poetical book and distinguishing it from the previous historical books. He saw a different purpose in the genealogy of 1 Chronicles than the other Old Testament lists of names—it gave the natural first followed by the spiritual.⁶² Within the whole canon he recognised literary parallels: for instance, the order of Daniel is paralleled with the order of the parables in Matthew 13.⁶³ He also saw literary continuity throughout the Bible, so that Babylon, for

60. *BT*, vol.3 (February 1st 1861), p.223.

61. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.61.

62. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p.163.

63. Kelly, *Book of Daniel*, p.24.

example, was a continuous type of religious corruption.⁶⁴ He also acknowledged a writer's understanding of human psychology. Writing of Moses' first attempt to mediate a quarrel between the Hebrews, he commented, 'There may be, I grant you, the mingling of that which is of nature along with faith... The great work of which he [Moses] had a certain anticipation no doubt vague and dark, in his soul.'⁶⁵ In this sentence Kelly was 'reaching in' to the human motivation of the narrative.

In Kelly's work on the Gospels there was a strong literary sense of the overriding purpose of each Gospel account. In his studies on Matthew in relation to the other Gospels, there was a marked understanding of literary crafting, very different from a literalist reading. This work was written in 1868 and he was able to write of the 'alienation of the Jews from such a Messiah as their own scriptures portray.'⁶⁶ Far from being mere copying from sources, he discussed the dispensational purpose of Matthew and the moral purpose of Luke.⁶⁷ The question of eye-witnesses of the life of Christ was considered and the reasons why John would choose not to give the Olivet discourse, although all the other Gospel writers placed John as being there. Change in form for a purpose was accepted by Kelly. Geographical placing was not just literalist but had a purpose to it, so he discussed the post-resurrection appearances placed by Matthew in Galilee and Luke in Jerusalem. Matthew's account was in accordance with the geographical location when Jesus was rejected by the Jews.⁶⁸ The later Gospel of John was connected with Jesus in glory. Understanding of different time schemes was carefully explained. He wrote: 'In Matthew, the mere order of history is here neglected and the facts are brought together that took place months apart.'⁶⁹

64. *Ibid.*, p.100.

65. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.130.

66. Kelly, *Gospel of Matthew*, p.v.

67. *Ibid.*, p.vii.

68. *Ibid.*, p.134.

69. *Ibid.*, p.133.

Kelly's reading of Genesis is a particularly interesting example of his hermeneutic in operation. Although Kelly rejected the documentary and fragmentary hypothesis and argued about dating schemes for the Pentateuch, he acknowledged the use of literary skills in the text, even, on occasions, referring to possible redactionary ones. Although Kelly recognised the Old Testament as being 'fact', his hermeneutical reflections were constant in his writings about Genesis. Because it was central to his understanding of the whole Bible, he felt that it was important to understand the purpose of the book. His readings of it (except when he was defending the historical foundations which he saw as attacked by Victorian scholars) were less literalist than of any other book and were used as the basis of Brethren mysticism. Of Enoch, for example, he noted: 'Enoch is the type of the portion of those who look to be with the Lord above.'⁷⁰ In the same passage the geographical movements of Abram became highly symbolic for the modern-day Christian. He also had a Jewish reading of the text, for example, contrasting the destiny of Enoch and Noah. The combined Jewish and Gentile interpretation of the text also was related to his eschatology and dispensationalism. Once he embarked on this type of interpretation, however, he could unfortunately reach the point of absurdity: for example in his exposition on his idea that Israel's rejection of Christ's death was the anti-type of Sarah's death. In laying so much emphasis on the death and future resurrection of Sarah, Kelly was indeed embarking on his own system of interpretation, rather than anything obviously justified by the text.

Conclusion

There are some key principles which come out of Kelly's literary interpretation, and they are crucial for our understanding of Kelly as a Brethren theologian. Verbal inspiration in a purely literalist sense was not the most important criterion for understanding the biblical text. He is not in this sense a purely fundamentalist theologian, although as we have seen he did put a high value on the inspiration

70. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.39.

of the scripture and was hostile to the emerging views of the Bible. He used the Old Testament text as a hermeneutic principle for the New, not just the other way round. For example, Joshua's deception by the Gibeonites was paralleled to Peter's deception at the Council of Jerusalem, while Paul standing up for what was right on that occasion was identified with the ordinary men of Israel being suspicious of the Gibeonites.⁷¹ Therefore we are led to another important principle of Kelly's theology—his exaltation of Paul over Peter as a Church teacher. Kelly also saw significance in the idea of the 'secret or hidden things' belonging to God,⁷² and consequently Kelly and other authoritative Brethren teachers took on the role of being able to reveal them. This role both confirmed Kelly's authority and gave a sense of significance to this ministry which came from the despised members of the Brethren. The combination of humility and authority is important in our understanding of Kelly's paradigm. He was equipped to take on the role of authoritative interpreter and communicator of God's truth. Through Kelly's writings, the Bible was established as a discourse of authority at a time when it was being questioned by the wider Christian public. Therefore his work establishes Kelly as a significant Bible teacher for Victorian times, and as a proto-fundamentalist, for the succeeding period. The principle of obedience was stressed in his teaching. This demand for submission to Kelly's authoritative interpretation simultaneously allowed him to judge fallible authority, as exemplified by the Church of England, which was becoming less confident of its position, and the elevation of the Brethren interpretation of the Bible. For Kelly, in an allusion his perception of the contemporary era in the Church dispensation, 'in a state of ruin the one saving principle is obedience.'⁷³ Nevertheless, his position, while not being of the Broad Church or High Church schools, was much more than an easily stereotyped literalist position, and, as such, engages our interest and admiration. Kelly's writing, forged in the debate with

71. Kelly, *Earlier Historical Books*, p.69.

72. Kelly, *Inspiration of the Scripture*, p.143.

73. Kelly, *Study of the Pentateuch*, p.426.

radical nineteenth-century theologians, certainly looks forward to the hardening lines of fundamentalism, but it also looks back to pre-modern models of thought both from the Church Fathers and the Medieval mystic writers and makes him an interesting model for Biblical scholars of our own postmodern age.