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**SCOTTISH
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EDITORIAL: THE SPLENDOUR OF TRUTH

If one compares the pronouncements of prominent churchmen that have captured the headlines in recent months, one might have little hesitation in awarding the prize for theological service to the kingdom of God to the Bishop of Rome, John Paul II. Not that the competition has been particularly strong. One thinks of the last utterances as Bishop of Durham of David Jenkins, as slickly tailored for the media's sound-bite as ever, or of the more surprising – and surprised – burst onto the news-stands of James Weatherhead, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland's last General Assembly. In a rich mix of metaphors he dared 'the media vultures' to 'sharpen their poison pencils' – and so they did, as he declared the virginal conception of Christ the Son of God 'a profound theological fiction', or a symbolic statement, like 'The Lord is my shepherd'.

By comparison, I say, even the editorial of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* warmly embraces the solidity and good sense of the latest papal encyclical, so impressively entitled *Veritatis Splendor* (Catholic Truth Society, London, 1993; 183pp., £4.50; ISBN 0 85183 899 5). It is addressed to all the Catholic bishops 'regarding certain fundamental questions of the Church's moral teaching'. It will prove a highly disappointing read to those misled by extensive pre-publication 'revelations' into expecting an onslaught on contemporary sexual licentiousness. Such will search hard to find a reaffirmation that certain forms of behaviour (the second Vatican Council listed many of them) are 'intrinsically evil acts', 'because they radically contradict the good of the person made in [God's] image.... They are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.'

The Splendour of Truth is a searching and stretching discussion – especially to readers unversed in the terms of Roman Catholic moral theology – of the relationship between human freedom and God's truth. It was provoked in good part by the dissonance between the teaching given in some Catholic seminaries and theological faculties and the declared faith of the Catholic Church. It conveys a sharp reminder that

By its very nature and procedures, authentic theology can flourish and develop only through a committed and responsible participation in and 'belonging' to the Church as a 'community of faith'.

No evangelical Christian will be able to endorse everything in *Veritatis Splendor*. Even its appeal to natural law sounds a fusty note. Yet, *mutatis mutandis*, much of it could with profit be transposed into a Reformation key, including the health warning addressed to free-ranging Catholic theologians. One cannot but envy a Church which can still talk seriously about its responsibility for its theological institutions and even about disciplining theologians. This section of the encyclical is undergirded by the *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1990 (Catholic Truth Society, London; 28pp., £2.50; ISBN 0 85183 814 6). How does the Church of Scotland exercise effective oversight of what it still likes fondly to call its 'Church colleges'? This issue will become ever more urgent as the universities to which they also, and much more significantly, belong, follow society's descent into secularism.

Finally, I must set the record straight. The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken with uncommon courage on Sudan, and the first pronouncement of the new Bishop of Durham brought a lift to many hearts. Former Moderator Professor T.F. Torrance in this issue makes a profound contribution to the debate about the virgin birth of Christ. We likewise welcome the energising solidity of his *Preaching Christ Today* (Handsel Press, Musselburgh, 1994; 30pp., £1.50; ISBN 1 871828 05 8). It is lovely to find a world-famous theologian rejoicing in the 'direct and blunt way' in which Billy Graham simply directed people to Christ and to Christ alone as Lord and Saviour.

A DECLARATION FOR FAITH AND LIFE

Many readers of this *Bulletin* will have some knowledge of the sharp debates within the Presbyterian Church (USA) on matters of sexual ethics. The controversy continues, and the 'Declaration' that is reprinted below is a significant contribution to it that deserves a hearing far beyond the bounds of that Church. It was signed at a meeting in January 1994 by leaders of eleven evangelical and renewal organizations in the Church, including, for example, Presbyterian Elders in Prayer, the PC USA Evangelical Pastors' Fellowship, the Presbyterian Lay Committee and the Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies.

The form of the 'Declaration' parallels that of the 'Barmen Declaration' of 1934 (which is a part of the *Book of Confessions* of the PC USA). Barmen was the response of the Confessing Church, drawn from Reformed and Lutheran traditions, to the synthesis of Nazism and Christianity promoted by the 'German Christians' who supported Hitler. It is widely regarded as one of the noblest of modern confessional statements. Its text can be found in J.H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond, VA, 21973), W. Niesel, *Reformed Symbolics* (Edinburgh, 1962), and A.C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London, 1966).

The drafters and subscribers of this 'Declaration' are not alone in discerning parallels to the German Christians' perversion of Christianity in the widespread tendency today to allow contemporary secular and pagan values to influence Christian ethics. Against such insidious trends this 'Declaration' sounds an essential protest.

D.F.W.

A Declaration for Faith and Life

I

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are our only authority for faith and practice. The written Word of Scripture mediates to us the living Word, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who always speaks and works in congruence with the written Word. Handed down to us by the communion of the saints, summarized in our confessions of faith, studied and opened to us by teachers and preachers in the community of the Church, the Scriptures are ever trustworthy as we daily live by their truth. All that is necessary for faith and for life is either explicitly stated in Scripture or may be deduced from it, and we affirm that it provides its own interpretation. Because it is God's revelation, it is not bound by culture or by time. The Bible is thus the authority we are called to obey in every circumstance.

Therefore, we reject these false doctrines:

- that the meaning of Scripture is solely a matter of individual interpretation, separated from its interpretation of its own words, its historical context, or apart from the apostolic faith and the confessions of the Church universal;
- that because of historical, cultural, and scientific distance from our time the biblical Word is no longer applicable;
- that the Holy Spirit of the Triune God speaks contrary to Jesus Christ as he is mediated to us through the Word written in the Bible;
- that human conscience, feeling, wisdom, scientific inquiry, or medical, psychological and sociological knowledge are sufficient in themselves, apart from – or even contrary to – the Bible, to discern the will of God.

II

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body (I Corinthians 6:19-20 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments teach that we belong – body and soul, in life and

death – not to ourselves but to God. God is the eternal Word by whom we were created. Jesus Christ is that Word made flesh, by whose sacrifice we are redeemed, and is the living Word who manifests the new humanity in his own life and ours. Though he was celibate, he lacked nothing necessary for full communion with God and with humanity. It is by the power of his Holy Spirit that we are enabled to follow him as obedient disciples, rejecting the passions of our sinful nature and choosing instead to live holy lives in our conduct. This Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is sovereign over all the circumstances of our lives, and only in communion with this God can we be made whole.

Therefore we reject the false doctrines:

- that we can claim autonomy and dominion over our own bodies;
- that sexual intercourse is necessary for whole personhood or full communion between persons;
- that it is not possible to control and discipline the expression of our sexual desires;
- that we can be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ apart from his Spirit's transforming power that enables us to follow his pattern of obedience to God.

III

[Jesus] answered, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Matthew 19:4-6 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments plainly tell us that God in his love for us created us male and female, and that he pronounced his creation 'good'. Scripture tells us that God intended from the beginning, as he intends today, in spite of our sin and the fall of the whole creation, that our sexual desires be fulfilled solely within the context of the marriage of one woman and

one man in a faithful and joyful union of one flesh. Scripture tells us that the marriage of husband and wife is for the purpose of their mutual help, for the safeguarding, undergirding and development of their moral and spiritual character, and for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Furthermore, God has expressly condemned sexual intercourse outside of the marriage covenant. This prohibition applies to married persons committing adultery, to sexual relationship between unmarried men and women, and, because God's order intends the sexual relationship to be between male and female, to homosexual practice, a perversion of God's created order.

Therefore we reject the false doctrines:

- that the body, the sexual desires of male and female for one another, and the institutions of marriage and family are extraneous to God's created order; that they are matters of indifference in our new life in Jesus Christ; and that we are entitled to alter or redefine them arbitrarily as suits our social circumstances or personal desires;
- that sexual relationships only require mutual consent, without regard to the scriptural bonds of marriage;
- that God intends for persons to engage in adulterous or homosexual or other non-marital sexual intercourse, and that God pronounces such intercourse to be a 'good gift'.
- that Christian compassion and justice require the Church to condone adulterous and homosexual and other non-marital sexual relationships among its members, and to regard those who engage in such practices as living a manner of life that demonstrates the Christian gospel and fits them for ordination as elders, deacons, or ministers of the Word and sacrament.

IV

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him [Jesus Christ]. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for

what has been done in the body, whether good or evil (II Corinthians 5:9-10 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments testify that we are all made in the image of God, responsible to him, that God is not mocked, and he holds all of us accountable to his will revealed to us in his Word. The Bible warns us that God brings his judgment, both present and future, upon those who defy him, but Scripture also promises that God forgives and transforms all who turn to him in repentance and trust.

Therefore we reject the false doctrines:

- that persistent, unrepentant sexual activity that is forbidden by Scripture is acceptable to God and free from his present and future judgment;
- that some practices, though they be contrary to Scripture, are so rooted in personhood that their expressions are inevitable and cannot be changed by the power of God.

We invite all those who affirm the truths and reject the errors put forth in this Declaration and who acknowledge these clear and consistent teachings of God's Word, to recall these teachings as they proclaim the gospel and live out their relationships in community. Let our purpose be that God's people may be instructed, warned and corrected, that they may grow into maturity of faith, and that they may live holy and blameless lives before our Lord in love.

Thanks be to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself up for us all, so that by grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are saved by faith.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (I Thessalonians 5:24 NIV).

THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH¹

THOMAS F. TORRANCE, EDINBURGH

The person who is justified by grace, by faith in Christ, is the only one who really knows that he is a lost sinner, apart from Christ, but the person who has not received Christ's forgiveness and the verdict it entails upon his humanity is one who regards himself as able to justify himself. Similarly the person who has come to know the mystery of Christ as true God and true man is the only one who really knows that he himself is in ignorance, that by himself, by his own capacities, he cannot know, but the person who has not received Jesus Christ, who has avoided the mystery and therefore has not come to know it, is the one who thinks he can understand how God and man can come together. Both the sinner who is forgiven by Christ and the person who has come to see the face of God in the face of Christ know that they can never master or dominate the mystery of Christ in their hearts, but can only acknowledge it gladly with wonder and thankfulness, and seek to understand the mystery of Christ out of itself, that is, seek to let it declare itself to him, seek to let himself be told by the mystery what it is. He will acknowledge that this is a mystery that is not conceivable in our ordinary human thought – that it is a miracle. And if he knows something of this miracle he will know that even his knowing of it is a very wonderful thing, that is, an act of God. He knows the mystery by faith, in the power of the Spirit, but not by himself alone. It is a gift of God. That belongs to the very content of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus and its significance for our knowing of Christ. To that we now turn.

The Biblical Witness

Matthew and Luke both bear witness to the Virgin Birth of Jesus, *i.e.* the only Gospels which speak of the human origin of Jesus, of his birth and of his childhood, give us definite accounts of the Virgin Birth. The genealogies of their accounts of Jesus differ and certainly present literary

¹ Note especially Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, sect. 15; and Douglas Edwards, *The Virgin Birth in History and Faith* (London, 1943).

problems, but the word *egennesen* is not necessarily biological. It is actually used of fathers in these same genealogies with the meaning 'begot' where no natural begetting is involved: that is good Jewish usage. Jesus is, according to Matthew, son of Joseph by an express direction of God assigning Jesus to Joseph the son of David. He is ingrafted into the house of David. Thus while Matthew and Luke both speak of the birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary, they are also ready to speak of Jesus as the son of Joseph. That is no embarrassment to them – and so in both Gospels the genealogies end with Joseph, not Mary, although they do not assert that Jesus is the bodily son of Joseph (Matt. 1:13; Luke 3:23). Nevertheless, while Joseph is mentioned by Matthew and Luke, it is Mary who is mentioned prominently and persistently. Joseph is not significant. It is also worth noting that after Matthew and Luke have completed their accounts of the birth of Jesus, they do not mention the Virgin Birth again, and Luke who paid so much attention to it in his Gospel does not deem it appropriate to put it into the accounts of the early preaching in the Acts of the Apostles in the same way as the passion and resurrection.

Mark does not speak of the human birth and childhood of Jesus. In his Gospel the narrative of the ministry and passion follows the same line as that of Matthew and Luke in its silence about the Virgin Birth. But while Matthew and Luke are ready to speak of Jesus as the son of Joseph, Mark never does. He makes no reference at all to Joseph, but persistently mentions Mary, as in the incident at Nazareth recorded in Mark 6:3 (cf. Matt. 13:55, Luke 4:22). There is no mention of Joseph in Mark, although there is of the brethren of Jesus. The people in the synagogue ask: 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' In Matthew the question is: 'Is this not Joseph's son?' Matthew and Luke can speak in this way without misunderstanding because they have already pointed out that Jesus is not strictly the son of Joseph, but only the son of Mary. But Mark could not have spoken in this way without being misunderstood, or without a long digression to explain why he was not really Joseph's son. Yet Mark's expression on the lips of the people of Nazareth, 'Mary's son', is most un-Jewish. To call a man by naming his mother is extremely strange in Jewish speech. All the evidence points to an

intentional way of putting it, that is, to a deliberate avoidance of 'Joseph'.

We may note one other passage in Mark, 12:5-7, where Jesus says of the Messiah, 'David himself calls him Lord. Whence then is he his son?' How can Jesus be both Lord and Son of David, that is, how can a divine Christ be born of human stock? Matthew's 'What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?' (22:42) is somewhat different. In both of these passages Mark's language fits in remarkably well with the Virgin Birth of Jesus, better than the language used by Matthew and Mark at the same points.

What is the significance of all this? Mark makes no explicit reference to the Virgin Birth, but then neither do Matthew and Luke from the same point in their narrative where Mark begins. But far from providing evidence against the Virgin Birth by silence, Mark's language definitely leans the other way, toward a witness to the Virgin Birth, and in stronger ways than Matthew or Luke at those points. There are, I feel, distinct allusions to Jesus' supernatural birth.

John has a passage, not often enough recognised, where explicit mention is made of the Virgin Birth of Jesus: 'But to as many as believed him he gave the right to become sons of God, even to those who believed on his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (1:12-13). If 'who were born' is plural, there is a difficult connection in the Greek, but even so there is clearly an extended reference to the Virgin Birth: 'born not of *bloods*, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of an *husband*, but of God'. The word wrongly translated in AV as 'man' here is not *anthropou*, but *andros* (cf. REB: 'born not of human stock, by the physical desire of a human father, but of God').

What about the manuscript evidence? All the main MSS give the plural reading except the Verona Old Latin which gives the singular (and is significantly of Ephesian origin). These are all fifth-century MSS. But there is considerable patristic evidence going back to the second and third centuries: Tertullian, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, the *Epistle of the Apostles*, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria – that is, all the early patristic evidence has John 1:13 in the singular. Nowhere to my knowledge is there evidence at that date for the plural (see below for the Valentinians). Evidence for the singular is also given by Ambrose and Augustine, and

ambiguously by Leo the Great (who uses the plural as well as the singular), and by many other codices. It is worth noting that most of these sources have at least a connection with the Ephesian text.

Tertullian, however, gives explicit comments upon the text of John at this point (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 19, 24). He remarks that the Valentinians had corrupted their text making the singular into a plural (they did not like the idea of the Virgin Birth), whereas all the other texts were in the singular. That is a most impressive weight of evidence for the singular reading, all twice as old as the oldest of our main codices. According to Harnack² the singular is the true text, a judgment which is being increasingly followed by scholars, and which seems to be undoubtedly demanded. If the text is to be read in the singular then we have here quite explicit reference to the Virgin Birth of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. It must be in line with this too that the Johannine 'only begotten Son' is to be understood, as well as the reference in John 3:37 to being 'born from above', which has primary objective reference to Christ himself. This was certainly the way in which Irenaeus understood it.³

Now let us take in 1 John 5:18: 'We know that whosoever has been born of God does not sin, but he that was born of God keeps him.' Here John uses the perfect tense of the Christian, but the one spoken of as he who was born of God in the aorist tense is certainly Christ himself, the one whom the Fourth Gospel called 'the only begotten (*monogenes*)' of the Father. It is upon Christ's unique birth once for all that our birth depends, and it is in his birth that we are given to share. That again strengthens our understanding of the relation of John 3 (the only begotten who is born from above and descends from above) to John 1 (the only begotten, 'who was born not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of an husband, but of God').

John 1:13 is significant for the Johannine doctrine of baptism. Christ's birth was the unique event, our birth in Christ is a participation in his birth, the result or derivative of

² *Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (London, 1911), p. 148.

³ See my essay 'Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre' in *Evangelische Theologie* 10-11 (1956), pp. 433-57, 481-92.

his. That is the very heart of Christian baptism. In Christian baptism we are born from above because in baptism we are incorporated into the One who was born of the Spirit from above, whose birth was marked by miracle as the new start for humankind. St Paul says: when Christ died, I died, and when Christ rose again, I rose again. St John also says: when Christ was born of the Spirit, I was born of the Spirit. Baptism thus reposes upon the Virgin Birth of Christ as well as upon his death and resurrection. That is precisely the way in which it is expounded by Irenaeus who uses John 1:13 in the singular, when he gives us the earliest doctrinal understanding of infant baptism. This relation of our baptism to the baptism of Christ, our new birth to Christ's birth from above, was indeed the conviction of all the great Fathers in the first five centuries, even when the text in John 1:13 began to become plural (sometimes with a singular verb, and sometimes with a singular subject and a plural verb!). Thus even Augustine and Leo the Great (where we find John 1:13 cited in both plural and singular forms) nevertheless continue to expound baptism as our sharing in Christ's Virgin Birth and constantly cite this very passage in support.⁴

St Paul has much the same teaching. His thought runs thus. Christ is the last Adam. Adam owed his origin to a creative act of God, and he was the type of Christ (Rom. 5:14). Christ as the new Adam comes likewise from God. His likeness to Adam was not in sin, but in coming into existence. The first Adam was not born of human parentage, not humanly generated. He came into existence at the hands of God – and the LXX here uses *genesthai* (Gen. 2:7; cf. Luke who speaks of Adam as the son of God, Luke 3:38, and Matthew who speaks of the *genesis* of Jesus Christ, Matt. 1:18). The normal word for human birth in the New Testament, *gennan*, is not used of Adam, and Paul never uses it of Christ. Paul never says that Jesus was generated, only that he came into existence like Adam. But whereas the first

⁴ The singular reading of John 1:13-14 has been argued at length by Peter Hofrichter, *Nicht aus Blut, sondern monogen aus Gott geboren. Textkritische, dogmengeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchungen zu Joh 1, 13-14 (Forschung zur Bibel 31; Würzburg, 1978)*, and *Im Anfang war der "Johannesprolog". Das urchristliche Logosbekenntnis... (Biblische Untersuchungen 17; Regensburg, 1986)*.

Adam came into existence from the earth, was earthly, this last Adam came into existence from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47) – sent from God he came into existence of woman, but as a heavenly man. That does not mean that Jesus descended in his humanity from heaven, or that his humanity was pre-existent. But what could be more explicit in speech about the Virgin Birth? Christ came down from heaven, the new Adam. That falls into line with the Pauline doctrine of the descent and ascent of Christ.

In Galatians 4, three times Paul uses the verb *gennan* of human generation (23, 24, 29), but when in that very context he speaks of Jesus he avoids *gennan* and uses *genesthai*. In other words, in reference to Jesus' birth he refuses to use the only word the New Testament employs of human generation. Every time Paul speaks of human birth he uses *gennan*, but not once when he speaks of Jesus. Every time Paul wants to refer to the earthly origin of Jesus he uses *genesthai* (Rom. 1:3, Phil. 2:7, Gal. 4:4). This is the strongest disavowal of birth by ordinary human generation in regard to Jesus: 'God sent his Son, made *genomenon* of a woman, made *genomenon* under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons', with reference back to Galatians 3:27, 'for as many as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ,' etc. This is to say, it is because Christ came into existence under the law that he can redeem those who are under the law. Those who are baptised into Christ and put on Christ are given the Spirit of Christ and like him cry 'Abba, Father'. To be incorporated by baptism into Christ is to partake of his Spirit of Sonship, which he is able to bestow on men and women because of his coming into existence of a woman, as a real man. Paul can also say, then, like John: when Christ was born I was born a son of God, for in baptism I partake of Christ and his Spirit of Sonship.

Thus St Paul's theology is not only consonant with the Virgin Birth of Christ, but, like John's theology, implies it, in his doctrine of sonship and baptism. But Paul's allusions to the Virgin Birth are as strong as Mark's, and are quite explicit of Jesus' heavenly origin. The new Adam comes from heaven. That is precisely the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. In St John and St Paul it is evident that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is woven into the very texture of their theology, which shows its inner importance: but that is just what we would

expect. For us to know Jesus Christ truly means that our way of knowing him corresponds to his way of coming into being. That is important, for only if we see the inner truth of the Virgin Birth in the texture of saving doctrine and its proper place in the doctrine of Christ, can we understand the biblical evidence and evaluate it properly. That will be the deciding factor.

The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth: Preliminary Observations

In a profound sense the incarnation begins with Israel as it is brought into covenantal union with the Word of God. It is only in Jesus Christ, however, that the Word or Son really becomes flesh, but in becoming flesh of our flesh he entered into our Adamic existence as a man made of a woman, made under the law. Within that continuity of Adamic existence he is nevertheless true man, and true Son of God in union with the Father. In his truth and obedience Jesus Christ breaks through the continuity of Adamic existence and opens up a new continuity in a new Adam, in a new humanity. As such Jesus Christ is the first-born of the new creation, the head of the new race in perfect union with God. He was therefore both in continuity and in discontinuity with our fallen humanity. For the first time he is true humanity in the midst of our inhumanity. In and through him, therefore, humanity which has been dehumanised through sin, finds its true being and true human nature in union with God. In Jesus fallen dehumanised humanity becomes humanised and sanctified. Jesus Christ is not only the mediator between God and humanity, but as such he opens up a new way from the old humanity into the new. It is in that light that we must approach a doctrinal account of the Virgin Birth.

The Virgin Birth must not be understood as a theory explaining how the Son of God became human. It is rather an indication of what happened within humanity when the Son of God became human. That becoming man was a transcendent act in the freedom of divine grace involving a miraculous creative act within our human existence, but in the nature of the case, that is apprehensible by us only at its extreme edges where the creative act in its overlap with the creation we already know is an event with two sides to it, an outward visible act in nature and another invisible supernatural act:

'born of the Virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit'. In understanding any act in nature we have to ask two questions, 'What is it?' and 'How is it?' These two questions belong together. But here in answer to the question 'What?' we are confronted with an answer which has no natural 'How?' attached to it, but rather a 'How?' that transcends the natural event altogether. That transcendent 'How?' is described as an act of the Spirit, as a creative act from above which breaks into our humanity and into our nature. It assumes form and process within our humanity, and therefore its 'What?' can be spoken of, but its 'How?' recedes into the divine nature of the Son of God and is beyond our observation and understanding.

In other words, in the Virgin Birth the incarnation has taken a meaningful form which tells us that here in the midst of our nature and humanity God is recreating our humanity, God is at work in an act of pure grace. It is an act within our humanity and its creaturely continuity, for he who is no creature became creature, he came breaking freely into our creaturely continuity and partook of it though he was not a product of it. Therefore the Virgin Birth cannot be understood biologically. If you ask biological questions of the Virgin Birth you will only get biological answers, and to ask biological questions only is to presuppose from the start that there is nothing more here than normal biological process. Biological questions are all questions about the what and the how within the observable processes of nature. But even apart from the fact that here we are confronted with a 'How?' which is beyond biological process, what about the other questions we must ask: 'Why?' and 'Whence?' To these questions we can only answer that here God acts as Creator. God begins with himself alone as Creator working this time not out of nothing but within our human existence. Of that act in which God begins with himself alone, the Virgin Birth is the outward sign, that here in the midst of our humanity which is true and normal humanity God is creatively at work in a new way – the sign, in fact, that he who is born of Mary is the Creator himself.

The Virgin Birth cannot be understood in abstraction from the whole mystery of Christ, from the union of divine and human nature in the one Person of Jesus Christ. The Virgin Birth is the outward sign, the signitive form in humanity

which the creative entry of the Son of God takes, when he assumes our human nature into union with his divine nature. The sign points to the mystery of Christ and bears witness to it, but the sign is not itself the reality. The reality is the hypostatic union of true God and true humanity. But if the Virgin Birth is a true and appropriate sign, the outward sign and the inward reality belong together as form and content of the incarnation. The outward sign has in it something of which it signifies; it is the analogical form of the thing signified. Thus the Virgin Birth must correspond as sign to the nature of what it signifies, it must correspond to the nature of the mystery of Christ. Thus the mystery of the birth and the mystery of the Person of Christ cannot be separated, and the mystery of the birth has to be understood in the light of the mystery of his Person, the sign in the light of the thing signified, not the thing signified in the light of the sign. And yet, although we cannot understand the mystery of Christ out of his birth, the mystery of his birth does have much to tell us about the way that the mystery of his Person has taken in its insertion into our fallen human existence at the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus.

The Virgin Birth cannot be understood in abstraction from the triumphant consummation of Christ's life in his resurrection, for it is there that the mystery of his Person is revealed. In fact the birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary and the resurrection of Jesus from the virgin tomb (wherein no human being had ever been laid) are the twin signs which mark out the mystery of Christ, testifying to the continuity and the discontinuity between Jesus Christ and our fallen humanity. Just because the incarnation is not only a once and for all act of assumption of our flesh, but the continuous personal union of divine and human nature in the one Person of the incarnate Son which he carried through our estranged estate under bondage into the freedom and triumph of the resurrection, it is in the resurrection that we see the real meaning of the Virgin Birth, while the Virgin Birth has much to tell us about the resurrection. These are then the twin signs testifying to the miraculous life of the Son of God within our humanity, the one at the beginning and the other at the consummation of the earthly life of Jesus. Both these acts are sovereign creative acts of God's grace in and upon and out of our fallen humanity, and in the full sense they are one continuous act

that includes the whole historical life and work of the incarnate Son. Both these miraculous signs tell us that here within our fallen existence God has acted creatively and redemptively in such continuity with us that we may share in it, but in such discontinuity with our fallen humanity that we may all through sharing in it be liberated from our bondage and decay and corruption and sin to a new life in a new humanity. The birth of Jesus tells us that God acts in Jesus Christ in such a way that the birth does not fall under human power, under the arbitrary forces of human history, or under the causal determinisms of this world, but that in his birth God the Son freely, sovereignly and redemptively enters into them from without. The resurrection tells us that the life and Person of Jesus are not held under the tyrant forces of this world, that though he was born of woman and made under the law, Jesus Christ was not dominated and mastered by our fallen flesh and its judgment, but is triumphant over it all, in achieving his redeeming purpose of reconciling our humanity to fellowship with God.

We can look at it another way. The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ points to the mystery of God's self-revelation, that God reveals himself within our fallen life, that in his revelation or self-unveiling God veils himself in our humanity. At the birth of Jesus the mystery of Christ as true God and true Man is inserted into our existence and is necessarily veiled, veiled because inserted into 'the flesh of sin', as St Paul called it (Rom. 8:3). The resurrection of Christ points to the fact that God unveils himself, reveals himself within human life. Here the mystery of God is resurrected out of our flesh of sin, out of our death and corruption and is unveiled in its glory as true God and true Man in perfect union. The empty tomb points to the revelation of the secret of Christ and as such is the authentication of the Virgin Birth; it is the unveiling of what was veiled, the resurrection out of our mortality of what was inserted into it and recreated within it. But such a resurrection of true Man and true God points back to the Virgin Birth of Jesus as a union of true God and true Man. The humiliation of Jesus began at Bethlehem and reached its climax on the cross, just before his glorification in resurrection. The new life began at Bethlehem and reached its unveiling in the resurrection. Thus the mystery of the Virgin Birth is the basis of the mystery of

the resurrection. By the mystery of the resurrection the mystery of the Virgin Birth becomes effective and understandable. Here we have a closed circle; to deny the Virgin Birth involves a denial of the resurrection, and vice versa.

The Positive Message of the Virgin Birth

The Virgin Birth tells us that Jesus was really and genuinely the son of a human mother, that he was born as other human beings are, of woman, and yet in a unique way which corresponds to his unique Person as the Son of the eternal God who has entered into our humanity. That Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit means that the Son of God took his earthly origin in the womb of Mary through a special act of the Holy Spirit in accordance with his nature as the Son of God become human. It means that the secret and origin of Jesus lie wholly in God and in his sovereign will and grace alone; it means that the life of Jesus from its very beginning within our human existence was one which was consonant upon the entry of the Son of God into our creaturely flesh in a creative way. Thus the incarnation of the Son in our humanity has its source in the hidden act of God, but it also assumes a form in the entry of the Son into our humanity which is appropriate to and is required by the nature of the incarnate Son as Creator as well as creature. The birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary through the creative operation of the Spirit corresponds to the whole secret of his Person and life and work, for it reveals in the most remarkable manner the way which the saving grace of God takes with our fallen humanity, as God the Creator and Redeemer actually with us in our estranged human existence, and as God bringing out of our flesh and sinful existence a new humanity that is holy and perfect. Let us now elucidate this in a number of paragraphs.

That Jesus was born from the womb of the Virgin Mary means that he was a genuine human being, that his humanity was not Docetic. The witness of the Scripture is that Jesus was really born of Mary, born through all the embryonic processes of the womb as other human beings. And yet while the flesh of Jesus was the same as our flesh, he was born not as others are of the will of the flesh, or of a human will, or of the will of an earthly father. In the history of the Church the Virgin Birth was first denied by Cerinthus, the heretic and gnostic

who held a Docetic view of the humanity of Christ – and the doctrine was inserted into the Creed in order to combat Docetism. That is very clear from the way in which it is used by Ignatius, for example. But the Virgin Birth equally excludes Ebionitism, that is, the idea that the Son of God united himself with one who was already a human being, or that a human being, either as an embryo or as already born, was at some point adopted to be the Son of God. The Virgin Birth also excludes the idea that God and humanity are coequal partners – that is why the Virgin Birth repudiates all synergism. What took place in the birth of Jesus is an act under the sovereign will of God, in which God alone is Lord and master, so that the birth was grounded in the will of God alone. But that does not mean that the birth of Jesus was an act of God without humanity. On the contrary, humanity is the predicate, not the subject, not the lord of the event.

The birth of Jesus was a real advent, an act of God's grace, a coming into humanity and as such it carries with it a disqualification of human capabilities and powers as rendering possible a human approach to God. The Virgin Birth is the doctrine that the statement that the Son of God became man is irreversible. It is a coming into the realm of human powers and capabilities, and real advent to man, into humanity's existence with all his rational powers, capabilities, decisions and processes, but it is an advent that is grounded in God himself and not in human powers, capabilities, and processes. And so the birth of the Virgin Mary carries with it a real disqualification of human powers as capable of producing Jesus. Christ Jesus is not in any sense, even in a co-operative sense, a product of human activity – the initiative, and the sovereignty of the act are entirely in God's hands. To put that otherwise: Jesus is in no sense the product of the causal-historical process of this world. God entered into humanity and assumed flesh and took it to be one with himself in the Person of Jesus Christ – as such it was a real entry of eternity into time. Can eternity enter into time in any other way except in a unique way, analogous both to eternity and to time? Does not the fact that eternity acts here mean that the birth of Jesus is a supernatural event, one that is grounded in the eternal, and unconditioned by anything outside of it such as a human father? That it is essentially a matter of pure unconditional grace?

The Virgin Birth of Jesus means not that this was an entirely new act of creation on the part of God, but rather a recreation within our human existence, a recreation that involves our human existence again in the creative action of God. The Virgin Birth is thus a creating in Mary by the Creator Spirit. It is as Creator himself, not as Mary's partner, that Jesus is born of her. This creation then was not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but a *creatio ex Virgine*, presupposing the first creation and beginning the new creation. That is a large part of the doctrine of the incarnation: that Christ really comes to us, to our human flesh and assumes it out of our fallen condition in order to redeem and sanctify it. It is of the utmost importance to assert therefore the reality of the humanity of Jesus, and the solidarity of his humanity with our humanity, and that is done very clearly by the Virgin Birth, although it does it in such a way as to show clearly too that this is an event that breaks into our human processes and is not the product of them.

The Virgin Birth represents a break in the sinful autonomy of humanity. That does not imply any stigma on marriage or our natural birth, but on the contrary a sanctification of our humanity and of the way in which we come into the world. We cannot but acknowledge that all our human life is involved in sin, and that our very existence is involved in original sin – but the birth of Jesus was a birth of the holy Son of God into that condition which, far from acquiescing in that sin, resists it, and sanctifies that which sin had defiled and corrupted, uniting it again to the purity of God. The Virgin Birth does not mean that Mary was herself immaculately conceived and on that ground could be immaculately a mother, but it does mean that out of Mary a sinner, by the pure act of God Jesus is born, the holy Son of God, and that his very birth sanctifies Mary, for it is through her Son that she is redeemed and given to share in the purity and holiness of God. Pure act of God, however, means that sinful human autonomy, the sinful act of human assertion in self-will, is set aside and excluded. In his own sovereignty and autonomy humanity is not free for God or for his Word; the act of man as father, the *kyrios*, the head, epitomises humanity's autonomy and sovereignty. It is this very sovereignty and assertion that is set aside here where God acts alone in such a way as to set aside the assertion of human will. That is the significant thing about the fact that in

the birth of Jesus, humanity in the person of Joseph is set aside – he has no say in this matter – he exercises no act of self-will or of the flesh or of blood in order to bring about this act of God.

In the Virgin Birth we are given at the very beginning of Christ's life a revelatory sign which tells us what the divine act of grace is. Grace takes a form in the birth of Jesus which we may take as a norm for all our understanding of grace. Here God takes the initiative and approaches Mary through the Word of his angelic messenger – the Word proclaimed to Mary is the Word of election and grace: she is chosen and told of God's choice. She has nothing to do in this matter except under the operation of the Spirit. What Mary does is simply to receive the Word, to believe, which she does not in her own strength, but in the strength given her by the Lord, and she is blessed because of that, not because of her virginity. John of Damascus remarked that Mary conceived through the ear: she heard the Word and the Word spoken by the Spirit in her ear begot himself in her and through her, and so the Word which Mary heard and received and obeyed became flesh of her flesh. That is the normative pattern for the believer in his attitude toward the Word announced to him in the gospel, which tells him of the divine act of grace and decision taken already on his behalf in Christ. Mary's attitude is beautifully expressed in the words: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.' It is an act of glad and thankful and humble submission and surrender to the will of God. And within her there takes place the incomprehensible act of God, the birth of the Son of God in human form.

By that we are guided to think and are given to understand something of our own salvation and recreation. In the annunciation of the Word, Christ himself the Word now made flesh, we surrender to him in like manner and there takes place in us the birth of Jesus, or rather we are given to share in his birth and to share in the new creation in him. That is the Christian message – the Christmas message. It is not of our self-will or of our free-will that we are saved and born anew from above. 'To as many as believed him he gave the power to become sons of God.' Here there is a 'become' dependent on the 'become' of 'the Word became flesh', grounded in it and derivative from it. What happened once for all in utter

uniqueness in Jesus Christ, happens in every instance of rebirth into Christ, when Christ enters into our hearts and recreates us. Just as he was born from above of the Holy Spirit, so we are born from above of the Holy Spirit through sharing in his birth. Just as in the birth of Jesus there was no foregoing action on the part of our human co-operation, such as the co-operation between a human father and a human mother, as there is no human *a priori*, so in our knowledge of God there is no *a priori*, no human presupposition, no Pelagian or synergistic activity.

Our salvation is from first to last salvation by grace – even our faith is not of ourselves for it is a gift of God – a salvation of human beings among and within humanity, but a salvation grounded on the immediate act of God himself, and not of both God and humanity. We are saved by faith, but faith is the empty vessel (as Calvin called it) that receives Christ, faith the empty womb through which Christ comes to dwell in our hearts. Faith as our reception of Christ, our capacity for Christ is itself a gift of grace. It is not a creation out of nothing, however, but a creation out of humanity in the sphere of his human choices and decisions, his human capacities and possibilities; it is out of man's full humanity but a creation – and therefore faith is something that is far beyond all human possibilities and capacities. It is grounded beyond itself in the act of God. In faith humanity is opened up from above and given to receive what he himself is incapable of receiving in himself. Faith is not therefore the product of our human capacities or insights or abilities.

The relation between faith and Christ received by faith is the Holy Spirit: 'conceived of the Holy Spirit'. Just as Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, so we cannot say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. It is by the operation of the Holy Spirit that we receive the Word of God which is ingrafted into our souls, and, as it were, we conceive the Truth in our hearts and minds. We do not bring Christ in by our own power, by our own decision or choice, nor do we make Christ real to ourselves or in ourselves. How could we do that? That is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Our part in being addressed by the Word is to hear the gracious decision that God has already taken, that God has set his love and favour upon us, although we do not in the least deserve it, and have done nothing and can do nothing to bring it about, but when

he works in us what he has been pleased to do, it is ours to work it out in obedient living and faith.

We cannot offer any independent demonstration of the Virgin Birth – that is to say, we cannot offer any demonstration of it in ways that are not appropriate to the nature of the Virgin Birth. We cannot demonstrate it by appealing to anything outside of it, to any external evidence, to any criterion or norm beyond it. That cannot be done with regard to any Christian doctrine. In the very nature of the case the only demonstration is a demonstration of the Spirit, for the demonstration of the truth must be analogical to the nature of the truth itself. The same is true of the resurrection, the twin miraculous event with which the Virgin Birth is so closely bound. The resurrection by its very nature as real event breaking into the framework of our historical constructions in the fallen world is not demonstrable by the canons of credibility which we bring to it in the course of our normal scientific historiography. We are concerned with evidence offered by historical witnesses, but that evidence is taken together with the fact of the resurrection as creative event, for the two are inseparable as historical and bodily sign and the reality of which it is the meaningful sign. So with the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It has to be investigated in terms of the nature of the One who is born, and of the nature of the activity of the One who is born, that is of the activity of the Spirit, and only in a way that corresponds to that nature can an appropriate demonstration be offered. If the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is true, then that can be demonstrated only by the Spirit, through what St Paul called 'the demonstration of the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:4). Under the action of the Holy Spirit, and within the demonstration of the Holy Spirit, all we can do is to expound the doctrine in its own light, to set forth its intrinsic significance in Christ, and to set forth its integration with the whole doctrine of Christ, and with all the doctrines which cohere round Christology and as the core of dogmatics. It is as we let the doctrine shine in its own light, in its own true significance, in the coherence of the whole truth of the gospel, that by the demonstration of the Spirit its authentication as truth is acknowledged.

Here, then, we see the Virgin Birth as an act of God grounded in himself alone, and in an act of grace which becomes as such the archetype of all other acts of grace. We

cannot treat it lightly or give it a place of only minor importance in our dogmatic theology. It is precisely by setting forth its importance, its archetypal importance in and for other doctrines that its truth comes home to us. The Virgin Birth thus becomes more than a sign – it is a determinative act of God. That does not mean that we think of Christ as the Son of God because he was born of a Virgin: it was because he was the Son of God and was very God that he was born of a Virgin in this world. But here we cannot separate the sign from the reality, or the sign from the act, or the sign from the Word. Here the Word comes into the world as deed, the thing signified is embodied in the sign – so that the very form of Christ's birth, the sign of the Virgin Birth, proclaims Christ in the very mode of his entry into our world, and proclaims that this is the mode of his entry into all who believe in him. The Virgin Birth is thus the form and fashion which the true humanity of the Son of God once for all took in our sinful world for our salvation, and therefore is the form and fashion of his continuous coming to us within the same world.

It is just because of this close and inseparable association of sign and thing signified in the Virgin Birth that we can show in the history of theology its necessity for true faith in Christ. Can we conceive the resurrection of Jesus apart from the empty tomb? Can we hold the incarnation as the union of true God and true humanity apart from the Virgin Birth? Certainly the history of theology shows that where the outward sign or form of either the resurrection or the Virgin Birth has been repudiated or allegedly 'demythologised', the inner content has inevitably gone with it. Thus the Virgin Birth as an article of credal faith has played a very important role in the history of the Church in rebutting Docetism and Ebionitism, Eutychianism, Sabellianism and Nestorianism, but here too we have a powerful force keeping the Church to the basic doctrine of salvation and justification by the grace of God alone. It proclaims that in Christ there is created in our humanity the possibility of salvation which does not arise from humanity, a possibility which is yet anchored on the side of God. In Christ who is true man and true God we have the one mediator and reconciler in whom God and humanity are not simply brought near each other, but in whom God and humanity become one for all eternity. It is in him that we are

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given to share as members of his body, and in him we frail human beings are thus enfolded in the life of God.

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND THE DISRUPTION OF 1863

II: The Long Decline (1900-Present)

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It is not likely that the onset of decline in the Reformed Presbyterian (RP) Church was all that evident at the time, or had any impact on the morale of the people in the churches. The Glasgow North mission work closed in 1909 and the Edinburgh congregation, which had been an independent Seceder Church until 1903, seceded back to independence in 1910.¹ But the core congregations continued much as before. Membership losses were still largely from the fringe. Only during and after the First World War did it become evident that the trend was down. In 1915 there were 913 members, and by 1922 832.² Then some established congregations began to close – Thurso, always very weak, in 1928, Penpont in the 1930s, Paisley in 1940 and J.P. Struthers' once flourishing Greenock in 1954.³ By 1963, the centenary of the RP Disruption, membership was 548, in five congregations and with five ministers. These five congregations remain today, but numerical decline has continued and membership stood at 269 in 1983,⁴ while a report issued in November 1987 estimated an effective membership of around 150.⁵

¹ The remnant of this congregation continued to meet, until their dissolution some time in the 1970s, on alternate Sunday afternoons in a room at The Scottish Reformation Society, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh. They sang psalms and listened to the reading of one of the late Henry Paton's sermons.

² Manuscript statistical returns for these years, in the possession of the author.

³ The building is now used by a Pentecostal Church. The Free Church is back-to-back on the same block. About a block away is the old 2nd Greenock RP Church (Majority Synod), now used by a Free Presbyterian congregation.

⁴ *Minutes of Synod 1984*, p. 18. Of the 271 communicants, 129 were in the Stranraer congregation which, however, recorded an

Assessing specific reasons for such a pattern of decline is hazardous. It is difficult enough to analyse the present spiritual condition of a church of which we may have considerable personal knowledge and experience. How much more problematic it is to arrive at an accurate evaluation of the spiritual climate of churches and people long ago and far away. What can be done is to weigh the effects of the general trends and tone of the denomination as a whole, especially as these emerge from the activities of the leadership and its interaction with the membership at large. We know what absorbed the energies of the decision-makers and what issues most exercised them in the courts of the Church. And now and again we are afforded glimpses of the life of the body as a whole. Together these provide materials for some conclusions why things happened as they did.

1. Membership: the 1932 Terms of Communion

When the 1930s dawned, the RP Church's distinctive doctrinal standard, the *Testimony*,⁶ had been out of print for a half of a century. It is a volume of some 450 pages, carefully and clearly expounding the doctrine and history of the Church. The 1930 Synod did not reprint it, but decided that a summary statement of 'the matter of the Testimony ... sufficient for young people and others joining the Church as a presentation of the Creed and Principles of our Church' would better serve the needs of the church.⁷ This *Summary of Testimony* is a concise, if undistinguished, resumé of the basic contours of RP teaching. It affirms the 'political dissent' doctrine of the Minority of 1863, including the continuing

average attendance at morning worship of only 40, an indication of serious nominalism among the membership!

⁵ *Statistical Report from Session to [of? G.J.K.] Special Meeting of Synod on 21st November 1987* (in the possession of the author). See Appendix.

⁶ The Doctrinal Part of the *Testimony* (166pp.) was approved in 1837 and published in 1838. The Historical Part (268pp.) was approved in 1838 and published in 1839. It was last reprinted c. 1878.

⁷ *Summary of the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1932), p.6. This 68pp. summary was prepared by the Revd. J.T. Potts (1862-1923), minister in Glasgow.

obligation of the Covenants and the practice of declining to 'give their vote to Parliamentary candidates who accept [the British] Constitution.'⁸ The 1931 *Summary* was clearly designed to be a popular presentation and re-affirmation of the historic Covenanting position. It was not a substitute for the full *Testimony* of 1837-8 and accordingly did not need to be sent down on overture to the Sessions in the required manner for ratification of doctrinal standards.

This was not the case, however, for the 'Terms of Communion' which were adopted on the same day as the *Summary*. These were sent down in overture and 'duly approved by Session', to be formally adopted by the 1932 Synod. The importance of this is that it represents changes in the way the *Testimony* was now to be held by the members, even though the *Testimony* itself remained unchanged. A comparison of the old and new Terms reveals several significant changes (see figure 1). Three of the four new Terms continued the emphases of the past upon the claims of the Word of God and evangelical faith of the gospel of Christ. Term 1 is virtually identical in affirming that the Word of God is 'the only infallible rule of faith and conduct'. The wording of the new Term is less precise than the older one, for instead of identifying the Scriptures 'to be' the Word of God, it only says the Word of God is 'contained in' the Scriptures. There is no evidence of any intent to weaken the RP Church's view of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, as if to suggest that only certain parts of the Bible are the Word of God. It appears to have been more a case of careless imprecision.⁹

8 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

9 Compare, for example, the first query of the Covenant of Church membership of the RP Church of North America; 'Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments *to be* the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life?' [my emphasis]. The problem with the 1932 formulation was not lost on the 1976 Scottish Synod's Code Revision Committee, which rectified the problem in new Terms of Communion which were approved in 1978. The new Term 1 is as follows: '1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the infallible Word of God and the supreme rule of faith and practice?' (*Minutes of Synod, 1978*, p. 6). The 1978 Terms are five in number. They cover the same ground as the 1932 Terms, but with consistently clearer and more felicitous language. The 1978 Synod also

Term II was altogether new. In keeping with the second-person-singular personal address of the new Terms, it called for a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Term IV, a commitment to living the Christian life, is a simple re-phrasing of old Term VI as a question.

Term III, however, represents a significant change. This replaced old Terms II-V. Instead of an explicit commitment to the entire corpus of RP doctrine and distinctive principles (the Westminster Standards [II], *jus divinum* Presbyterian church government [III], the perpetual obligation of the Covenants [IV] and the Testimony of the RP Church [V]), members would henceforth only acknowledge 'the views of truth and duty' set forth in the *Testimony* 'as far as [their] knowledge extends'. What this meant was that membership of the Church was no longer based on a credible profession of faith in Christ and an explicit commitment to the entire credal position of the Church – a so-called *confessional*, or *credal*, membership – but was henceforth to be on the basis of a credible profession of faith in Christ and an open, teachable spirit towards the Church's doctrine – a *confessing* membership. In terms of the relationship of members to the Church's creed, this brought the RP Church into line with the other orthodox Scottish churches, which required commitment to the confessional standards only by their office-bearers – ministers, elders and deacons. On particular teachings of the Church, it allowed for a range of dissent, which had hitherto always been denied.

confirmed the action of the 1965 Synod admitting non RPs to the Lord's Supper, by allowing them to do so on the basis of those Terms of Communion (1-4) which did not involve an explicit commitment to the distinctive doctrines of the RP Church. This confirmed the 1965 relaxation of the historic practice of 'Close Communion', which had permitted only RPs to Communion in RP Churches. By the 1980s, the present writer – then a ministerial member of the Free Church of Scotland – was warmly accepted as Residents Supply in Wishaw and Glasgow RP congregations, with the privilege of administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Figure 1. Comparison of the Terms of Communions

Testimony (1856 ed.)	Summary (1932)
<p>I The acknowledgement of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God; and the alone infallible rule of faith and practice.</p> <p>II The acknowledgement of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, to be founded upon, and agreeable to the Word of God.</p>	<p>I Do you believe that the Word of God which is contained in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and conduct?</p> <p>II Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner and therefore in need of salvation; do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer of man; and do you accept and trust Him as your Saviour and your Lord?</p>
<p>III The owning of the Divine right, and original, of Presbyterian Church-government.</p>	<p>III Do you, as far as your knowledge extends, accept the views of truth and duty set forth in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland?</p>
<p>IV The acknowledgement of the perpetual obligation of our Covenants, National and Solemn League. And in consistency with this, the duty of a minority adhering to these Vows, when the nation has cast them off; and under the impression of Solemn Covenant obligations, following our worthy ancestors, in endeavouring faithfully to maintain and diffuse the principle of the Reformation.</p>	
<p>V The owning of all the Scriptural Testimonies and earnest contentings of Christ's faithful witnesses; whether martyrs, under the late persecution, or such as have succeeded them, in maintaining the same cause; and especially of the Judicial Act, Declaration and Testimony, emitted by the Reformed Synod.</p>	
<p>VI Practically adorning the doctrine of God, our saviour, by walking in all his commandments and ordinances, blamelessly.</p>	<p>IV Do you promise that by the help of God you will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour by walking in His commandments and ordinances blamelessly?</p>

The significance of this change could not be greater for a Covenanting church. The essential point of the act of covenanting was for *all* of the members to uphold the *whole Testimony* of the body. Covenanting, to be covenanting at all, demands complete solidarity across the terms of the bond of that covenant. For Reformed Presbyterianism, this was not simply an agreement with the seventeenth-century Covenants (National and Solemn League), but with the *Testimony* as the definition and vehicle of what it meant to uphold and apply the Covenants faithfully. Historical Reformed Presbyterianism required a confessional, covenanted membership, because her concept of testimony-bearing was itself confessionally holistic – that is, it rested upon the distinctive principles, as of essential significance. The fact is that the 1932 Term III was the end of ‘covenanting’ as it had hitherto been understood and applied in the RP movement. Instead of embracing the *Testimony* explicitly, whole-heartedly and without mental reservations, new members were now simply required to be Christians, who generally approved of the RP positions, as far as they knew them.¹⁰ The Church still formally held to the Covenants and to political dissent as set forth in the *Testimony*, but she had abandoned the essential condition for a covenanted testimony, namely a covenanted membership. This represented a fundamental departure from the stance of the minority of 1863.

2. Voting: the franchise question

We have already noted that *abstention from voting* was the practical linchpin of the RP Church’s distinctive position of political dissent after the Reform Act of 1832. We have also

¹⁰ The same transition took place in the RP Church of North America in 1980, when, in the revised *Testimony* approved that year, the Synod ceased to require members of the church to ‘believe’ the Standards of the church. Two years earlier, the perpetual obligation of the covenants had been struck down by action of Synod. This writer recalls a senior member of the Synod declaring, on the floor, that this was the end of the Covenanter Church in which he had taken his vows as a minister. Any judicious assessment of the significance of these changes cannot but confirm the accuracy of that venerable brother’s judgment. It was indeed the abandonment of the historic *raison d’être* of the Covenanting movement.

seen that it was the defence of this position in 1863 that decided the continued existence of the RP denomination in Scotland into the twentieth century. The post-Disruption RP Church continued to uphold the position of 1833 that voting was inconsistent with communicant privileges. The practice of the members of the Church, however, was not always consistent with its stated position. This was true even in the days of strict subscriptionism before 1863, and could not but be a reality under the much looser subscription to the *Testimony* of the 1932 Terms of Communion.¹¹ It is therefore not surprising to find that by the 1950s, the very matter which had divided the church in 1863 was again under discussion.

In 1960, Synod adopted the recommendations of the Franchise Committee, which had been charged with resolving the question. The main recommendation was 'that in the case of Church members exercising the elective Franchise, ordinary disciplinary measures as commonly understood, such as suspension from Church privileges, be held in abeyance'.¹² The Committee affirmed the continuing validity of 'the principle of the Headship of Christ over the nation', but argued that 'the New Testament' did not give 'specific guidance on the duty of Christians where the Franchise is concerned', although we do have 'broad principles' upon which to base our action.¹³ For the second time, the 1833 rule against voting had been struck down by an RP Synod, only this time it was by the very body which owed its existence to its opposition to the original action in 1863! After nearly a century of continued testimony as a Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Synod in effect denied the very distinctive which had given her birth.

At the same time, it was still asserted by the Synod that 'voting' was integral to the 'approval of the system' (*i.e.* the body politic).¹⁴ This point had been denied by the majority in

11 *R.P. Witness* 86, p. 106. The Synod of 1964 admitted the inconsistent practice in the church while quoting a pastoral address of the Joint Presbyteries issued in Glasgow on October 6, 1868, to show that this position had been the practical reason for their continued existence as a denomination.

12 *R.P. Witness* 80 (August, 1960), p. 122 (*cf.* 102).

13 *Ibid.* 79 (1959), p. 135 (Minutes of Synod).

14 *Ibid.*

1863. In fact, they lifted the ban on voting, on the ground that voting did *not* imply approving of the system. So the 1960 position went beyond the 1863 decision, in that it, in effect, admitted that ‘approval of the system’ was no more censurable than the exercise of the franchise. ‘Political dissent’ itself had been rendered a matter of opinion and had gone the way of the covenanted membership – a principle that could be taught, but not insisted upon. The second recommendation adopted in 1960 seems to sum up the drift into vagueness which had all but obliterated the sharp distinctiveness with which the RP Church had formerly approached her political theology:

that Church members be reminded of the Scriptural order of things for their guidance: 1st., the glory of God: 2nd., the peace and well-being of the Church: 3rd., the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of our fellow men, as well as ourselves, and to act with these guiding principles in mind:

GOD FIRST: OTHERS SECOND: OURSELVES LAST.¹⁵

In other words, it was a matter of individual conscience what one did about political dissent. The Disruption of 1863 had been undone. The minority had, in the end, joined the majority.

3. Church Union: still not ‘absorbed’

The Minority RP Synod’s rigorous insistence upon the political dissent position after 1863 never inhibited the pursuit of talks on church union with other Scottish Presbyterian churches. The main exception had always been the established Church of Scotland, which was historically viewed by the Covenanters as an Erastian hireling.¹⁶

The ‘ends of the Solemn League and Covenant’ – 1871-8. As early as 1871, James Kerr encouraged negotiations with the Original Secession Church and reminded the Synod of her ‘duty of seeking union in the Churches in fulfilment of the engagements of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to promote the ends of the Solemn League and Covenant.’¹⁷ This uncompromising basis for union would have aborted talks with any other church, but the Seceders

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 80 (August 1960), p. 122. The emphasis is in the original report.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 7 (1879), pp. 166ff.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 6 (1871), p. 147.

shared the Covenanter commitment to the descending obligation of the Covenants. Talks went on for no less than seven years, but came to nothing. 'INCORPORATING UNION', said the RP Committee in 1878, '... could not prove a blessing, but an injury, to both Churches.'¹⁸ The process foundered, not on the Solemn League, but on the question of voting. The RP Church held that casting a vote was an *act* of incorporation with the nation, whereas the Seceders regarded voting as a *fruit* of incorporation.¹⁹ For the latter, voting was therefore a duty, analogous to a shareholder's right to vote in his company's annual meeting. When a man (women still had no vote) bought five pounds' worth of crown land, he qualified for the franchise. For Seceders, voting was no different from, and no more sinful than, buying property. Covenanters could buy property and thus gain the vote, but the RP theory of the relationship of voting to approval of the Constitution forbade their exercising that right. Once again the 1833 rule against voting proved to be the doctrinal *Schwerpunkt* of the RP dissent from the rest of both the world and the church.²⁰ The RP Church was for union, but only if others joined her.

So near and yet so far? – 1930-2. The issue did not arise again until 1930. In the aftermath of the 1929 union between the large, increasingly modernistic Established and United Free Churches, three of the smaller confessionally orthodox churches – the Free Church, the Original Secession and the Reformed Presbyterian – went to the conference table.²¹ By 1932, a 'Preamble to a Declaration and Act of Union' had been formulated, but the RP Church withdrew, apparently because this excluded any specific reference to their

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 6 (1878), p. 152.

¹⁹ The RP position is made clear in a pamphlet, *Answers by The Union Committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, to the Questions and Propositions proposed by the Joint Committee of the U.O.S. and R.P. Churches* (Glasgow, 1875), p. 7. This asserts that 'voters are necessarily identified with their representatives, and responsible for their official acts'.

²⁰ Talks resumed in 1888 but foundered in 1890 with the conclusion that 'points of difference ... must prevent union' (see *R.P. Witness* 12 (1887-8), p. 435; 13 (1889-90), p. 446).

²¹ *R.P. Witness* 49 (1930), p. 158.

Testimony.²² The RP Committee remained in being, however, and in 1934 became involved in discussions with the same churches, designed to 'make united witness and protest on all matters affecting the Reformed Faith'.²³ These matters rested for a further thirty years – thoroughly justifying Samuel Kennedy's confidence, already quoted, that there was little likelihood of the RP Church of Scotland losing her identity through absorption into larger churches.²⁴ This was, however, arguably the closest to church union that the RP Church had come since 1863, even if, in the end, there was really no readiness to concede her distinctive principles.

To '**survive and ...be worthy of the past**' – 1961 to the present. In 1957, the Original Secession united with the Church of Scotland and the church of the Erskines disappeared from Scottish history after a witness of some 224 years, that had been sadly punctuated by an excess of division and dissension.²⁵ Thereafter RP inter-church relations were actively promoted with the Free Church as the principal focus. There is, however, little sense of enthusiasm for anything more than vague 'co-operation'.²⁶ In 1964, Synod asserted that her 'priority in considerations' was the application of distinctive principles, namely, her view of 'the Headship of Christ as related to the elective franchise issue'.²⁷ Nevertheless, the RP Church approached the Free Church in 1966 to talk about the relations between the churches. After the first meetings of their delegations in 1967, the RP Synod acknowledged that the 'two principal matters' separating the RP and Free Churches, namely, the ban on voting and closed

22 *Ibid.* 51 (1932), p. 160.

23 *Ibid.* 53 (1934), p. 166.

24 *Ibid.* 51 (1932), p. 135.

25 The last seceder congregation in Scotland to retain its own organization was the Kilwinning congregation, which stayed out of the union and joined the Free Church in 1959. Almost coincidentally, the last Seceder churches in North America united with the RP Church of North America in 1969. These remain active in 1992 and are in Washington (Iowa), Minneola (Kansas), Rimersburg and Beaver (both in Pennsylvania).

26 *R.P. Witness* 79 (1961), p. 100.

27 *Ibid.* 85 (1964), p. 107.

Communion, were 'no longer such causes of separation as they once were'.²⁸

The decline of 'distinctives'. The reality was that by 1967 there was no more of a *doctrinal* cause of separation between the RP and Free Churches than there had been between the majority RP Synod and the Free Church in 1876. With respect to distinctive principles, RPs stood on the same ground as the majority they had so vigorously opposed a century before. They no longer exercised discipline for voting, or insisted upon a covenanted confessional membership, as they had in former days. They no longer practised closed Communion. On the other side of the equation, both churches held an unmodified commitment to the Bible and the Westminster Standards. Both sang the Psalms of the Bible in the public worship of God, and without instrumental accompaniment. Both held the Scottish Covenants as part of their subordinate standards. We cannot escape the conclusion that doctrine *per se* was not the primary barrier to union with the Free Church. Arguably, the real barriers were those of size, practice, identity and ethnicity. Too much can be made of points like these, to be sure, for they are more often matters of perception than of substance. But it is important to reckon with the reality that doctrinal agreement is *in practice* rarely enough to make churches embrace organic union. For RPs, union would mean the final extinction of 'the Covenanting cause'. It would mean absorption – 250 people added to a body of more than 20,000. A people's sense of identity is a powerful force in their thinking. The mere thought that it might disappear gives pause and requires, at the very least, the triumph of faith over the pull of present attachments and long-standing sentiments. It also requires a vision of future possibilities sufficient to overcome any doubts and fears over what will be lost in the changes that must take place. The 1876 union occurred because *in practice* the Majority Synod RPs and the Free Kirkers of the time knew one another and found themselves to

²⁸ *Minutes of Synod, 1967*, p. 10. Closed Communion was the practice of admitting only Reformed Presbyterians to the Lord's Table. This had been relaxed in 1965, by allowing members of other churches to commune on the basis of an acceptance of Numbers I, II and IV of the Terms of Communion (1932).

be so much of like mind, that they were persuaded that the union was right and desirable. Both were strong in the Lowlands. They overlapped in every community where RP churches were to be found. At every level, they were at ease with one another. And doctrinal hindrances had been removed. They therefore worked hard – for fourteen years – to make the union happen.

For the Minority of 1863, of course, the doctrinal differences were absolutely essential. Any practical or cultural differences were irrelevant, if they existed at all. In the 1990s the reverse is true. The doctrinal divide of 1863 no longer exists, for the Minority, as we have seen, now stands very close to where the Majority did by 1876. It is other factors which have held back the modern RP Church from following the Majority into the modern Free Church. And what is different is the modern Free Church. It is no longer strong in the Lowlands, but a largely Highland, Gaelic-culture church, with her roots in a community that is distant and distinct from Lowland Scottish ethos and history. For this reason, union is difficult to contemplate, even though the former doctrinal hindrances have largely evaporated and even though personal relationships between ministers and members in both bodies are characterised by warmth and mutual respect. Yet the Scriptural demands of unity in Christ always transcend the personal and lay claim to the corporate. Consequently, many RPs have keenly felt the tension between the harmony in Reformed doctrine and gospel witness, which binds them spiritually to their brethren in other communions, and the fact of existing ecclesiastical separation. This tension is surely at the heart of the on-off nature of RP inter-church union talks since 1871.

The Irish RP connection. If the force of ‘distinctive principles’ has diminished as a basis for separate RP denominational existence, it has been balanced by a countervailing influence that has become stronger with the years – namely the ‘special relationship’ that exists between the Scottish and Irish RP Churches. We have already noted that by the second quarter of the twentieth century, the Scottish RP Church was beginning to become a *de facto* presbytery of her Irish sister Church. This was a function of available ministerial manpower and denominational size. A 1974 Synod report acknowledged that the steady stream of

ministers from Ireland, and even from North America,²⁹ is 'largely' the reason 'the RP Church still exists in Scotland'.³⁰ Only two Scotsmen have been ordained and inducted to Scottish RP pastorates in the twentieth century, and neither was a child of the RP Church.³¹ The predominantly Irish make-up of the ministry has proved decisive in charting the direction of the Scottish Synod. It kept the Church going, to be sure, but it transformed her into an appendage of the Irish Church. And since the Irish Church and her ministers still adhered with some vigour to the distinctive principles of Covenanting and political dissent, their tendency was to retard any movement toward union with other churches. Secure in their Covenanting heritage, they had not come to Scotland to preside over the extinction of the cause in the motherland. Another, deeper and more personal, factor binding the two Churches are those bonds of Christian fellowship and affection that are shared by so many RPs on both sides of the Irish Sea. This sense of belonging to the same church family, reaching back through many generations, is a powerful force for maintaining an international Reformed Presbyterianism.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the closer the Scottish Church drew toward the Free Church, the more the Irish connection weighed in with encouragement and assistance in the interest of preserving and reviving the RP witness in Scotland. 'Friendly contact' was maintained with 'the Free Church *ad hoc* committee' until 1969,³² but the Inter-Church Relations Committee, now under Irish conveners,³³ had, by

29 J. Boyd Tweed (Glasgow, 1938-40) and Paul E. Copeland (Wishaw, 1979-82) from the USA; and Raymond E. Morton (Airdrie, 1975-89) from Canada.

30 *Minutes of Synod, 1974*, p.9.

31 A. Sinclair Horne, Loanhead, 1955; and James Clark, Glasgow, 1991.

32 *Minutes of Synod, 1970*, p. 9.

33 When Sinclair Horne, a native Scot, was convener in the late 1960s, the primary focus was on the Free Church. From 1970-5, under Marcus McCullough and Archibald Guthrie, both Ulstermen, the Free Church receded from view and the idea of a global RP denomination was proposed. By 1976, when Horne was again Convener, the Report of that year gives more than a hint of disagreement with the drift to an exclusively RP focus (see *Minutes of Synod, 1976*, p. 12. 'Inter Church relations is a

1971, shifted the focus toward 'greater co-operation with RP Churches'. By 1974 an 'Ad Hoc Committee of Relationships between Irish and Scottish RP Churches' said the key to the Church's future was 'expansion' so as 'to survive' and be 'worthy of the past and heritage of truth handed down to her'.³⁴ To this end, the idea of incorporating the Synods of Scotland, Ireland and North America in one General Assembly was suggested, with the understanding that this 'Assembly would be responsible for the provision of manpower'. This would not be a 'take-over bid', the convener reassured the Synod. After all, they – the Scottish Church – made the 'request for fuller co-operation'. What was 'absolutely essential to success' was the 'definite commitment on the part of our people here in Scotland that they will retain their identity with the Reformed Presbyterian Church'.³⁵

This is the theme which has guided the RP Church of Scotland ever since. A 1977 poll of the responses of the Sessions to the 1974 Ad Hoc Report showed wide-spread discouragement over continuing decline, but the majority did not favour becoming a presbytery of the Irish Church.³⁶ Even so, discussions continued along that line, issuing in a Consultative Assembly in Edinburgh and Airdrie in 1979 with delegates from Ireland and North America, which adopted a number of co-operative measures for mission policy, theological education, a new psalter and mutual eligibility of personnel. At the heart of it, however, was the agreement that 'the first call and commitment' was the maintenance of 'the unity of the Spirit and Faith' within 'our own Reformed Presbyterian Churches'.³⁷ That same year, the Inter-Church Relations Committee was abolished and the responsibilities for contact with other churches placed in the hands of the Business of Synod Committee, a clear signal that the future,

complex issue today and determining our position in relation to other bodies is not easy even within a Committee where different viewpoints can be expressed.')

34 *Minutes of Synod, 1974*, p. 9.

35 *Ibid.*, 10.

36 *Minutes of Synod, 1977*, pp. 19-22. Airdrie, Loanhead and Stranraer were against; Glasgow and Wishaw in favour.

37 *Minutes of Synod, 1980*, p. 4 (Report of the Ad Hoc Committee for Consultative Assembly, June 1979).

for weal or woe, rested with international Reformed Presbyterianism.³⁸

The last flicker of the century-plus flirtation with the idea of church union within Scotland came in 1985, when a petition calling for union talks with the Free Church was dismissed. The RP Church of Ireland, on learning of the petition, had written to the Scottish Church urging them to take no action without consulting them. An opposing petition from Stranraer urging closer relations with the Church in Ireland was received and resulted in a Committee being appointed to discuss the matter with the Irish Synod in 1986.³⁹ The Church Union question, which had chased the history of the RP Church down the years since 1863, had finally been buried. The future was now ineluctably linked to the brethren in Ireland.

4. Retrospect and prospect

The most tangible legacy of 1863 is, of course, the *very existence* in modern Scotland of an RP Church. But for the steadfast conviction of William Anderson and his colleagues, and those who adhered to them, the Covenanting church would have passed into history long ago. Their ruggedly independent spirit, their readiness to be a small minority upholding unpopular positions and their attachment to the heritage of their Covenanting forefathers, have kept their particular emphasis on the headship of Christ over the nation before at least a goodly section of the Christian community in Scotland for over a century, when otherwise there might have been silence.⁴⁰

Somewhat less enduring have been the *distinctive principles* which had given birth to Reformed Presbyterianism. We have

38 *Minutes of Synod, 1980*, p. 1.

39 *Minutes of Synod, 1985*, pp.1, 4.

40 It is appropriate that it should have fallen to a Reformed Presbyterian, A. Sinclair Horne, to head up the ministry of the Scottish Reformation Society, a society dedicated to proclaiming the Lordship of Christ over men and nations. Horne is the author of *Torchbearers of the Truth* (Edinburgh, 1966) and, with J.B. Hardie, of *In the Steps of the Covenanters* (Edinburgh, 1974). He is the editor of *The Bulwark*, the magazine of the Scottish Reformation Society.

seen how the Church has modified her stance on several points that are central to being a *covenanted* body: membership ceased to be confessionally bound in 1932; voting became a matter of individual conscience in 1960 and closed Communion was relaxed in 1965. The RP Church has not altered her 1837-8 *Testimony* and so officially holds the doctrine of the perpetual obligation of the Covenants as part of her creed. Nevertheless, like the Majority Synod of 1876, she has effectively rendered this a matter of individual conscience for her people and embraced the very position which the men of 1863 so resolutely rejected. She is a Church without any solid doctrinal reason for her separate existence from other confessionally Reformed churches in Scotland.⁴¹ The RP Church of Scotland today is, in practice, a generally Reformed Church with an unmodified commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith, within the shell of her Covenanting tradition.

How enduring the RP Church will be, as we approach the year 2000 AD, remains to be seen. That the Synod is aware of the challenge is vividly attested by her own deliverances over the last two decades.⁴² In 1985, Synod published a pastoral letter entitled *Crisis in the Church*, which sought to assess the spiritual dimensions of the problem. This paints a bleak picture of a Church in which nearly half the members did not attend public worship, where a whole generation of young people had been lost, and where giving did not remotely approach the biblical principle of tithing. Quoting 1 Peter 4:17 – ‘it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God’ – the letter called upon the membership to commit themselves to prayer, discipleship, evangelism, faithful attendance at

41 There are four confessionally orthodox Presbyterian denominations in Scotland, all of them committed to the Bible as the infallible Word of God, the doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith and practising the very same pattern of worship (Psalms only, without instrumental music). These are the RP Church, Free Church, the Free Presbyterian Church and, since 1989, the Associated Presbyterian Churches. They are separated, not so much by fundamental doctrines, but by particular perspectives and practices of their own, or even perceptions of the practices of one another.

42 *Minutes of Synod, 1974*, pp. 8-10.

worship and biblical stewardship.⁴³ This theme continued in 1987 when Synod frankly debated the question of the 'dissolution of the denomination while it can still be done with dignity'.⁴⁴ This resulted, however, not in dissolution, but in a renewed emphasis on the revitalization of the congregations. With the financial support of the RP Church of Ireland, evangelistic ministries have been initiated in Wishaw, Glasgow and Airdrie.

Time will tell what the future holds for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Since 1863, the Church has significantly modified her distinctive principles and practices and, of course, she is much reduced numerically. Yet the determined commitment to continue to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only saviour of sinners and the Lord of mankind and nations still lives in the hearts of these descendants of the martyrs, as they work and pray for the renewal of the church of the Covenanters for the twenty-first century. This may prove to be the most enduring legacy of the Disruption of 1863.

APPENDIX

Communicant membership in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

CONGREGATIONS	1876	1915	1963	1983
1. Glasgow	397	254	80	21
2. Airdrie	109	141	170	78
3. Wishaw	100	60	60	27
4. Loanhead	100	88	59	14
5. Greenock	165	200	(cl.1954)	-
6. Paisley	68	49	(cl.1940)	-
7. Penpont	84	?	(cl. 1937)	-
8. Thurso	?	?	(cl.1928)	-
9. Wick	?	(cl. 1893)	-	-

⁴³ *Crisis in the Church* (March 1985), was published by action of the RP Synod, 20 October, 1984, under the signature of A. Sinclair Horne. It uncompromisingly demonstrates that the health of a Church is a function of the commitment of her people, as opposed to the glory of her heritage or the purity of her creed.

⁴⁴ *Statistical Report from Session to [of? G.J.K.] Special Meeting of Synod on 21st November 1987 in response to the Petition submitted from the Session of the Stranraer RP Church* (in the possession of the author).

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

10. Lorn	15	(cl. 1893)	–	–
11. Girvan	?	(cl. 1886)	–	–
12. Rothesay (1876)	?	(cl.1881)	–	–
13. Whithorn (1878)	–	(cl. 1899)	–	–
14. Douglas Water (1880)	–	(cl. 1885)	–	–
15. Stranraer (1887)	–	121	179	129
16. Glasgow North (1899)	–	(cl. 1909)	–	–
17. Edinburgh (1903)	–	(left 1910)	–	–
TOTAL				
MEMBERSHIP	1,038	913	548	269
MINISTERS	7	9	5	5

Note: 1. In 1863, the undivided RP Church of Scotland consisted of 46 congregations with slightly more than 6,900 communicants. There were five congregations in Glasgow; First RP Church in Great Hamilton Street had been pastored by William Symington (1795-1862), widely known as the author of *Atonement and Intercession* and *Messiah the Prince*. With 929 members, this was the largest congregation in the denomination. RP Churches – many of a good size – were concentrated in the south and west of Scotland, the traditional Covenanting areas.

2. In addition to the above congregations, there were ‘mission stations’ in Darvel, Dundee and Lochgilphead. These were conservative remnants from Majority Synod churches. There is no record of the membership of these groups.

HUMAN RELIGION IN GOD'S EYES: A STUDY OF ROMANS 1:18-32 J.H. BAVINCK¹

One of the most important questions all missionaries have to face when they approach their work is how to regard the non-Christian religions they will encounter. From time to time they will be asked 'What do you think of our religion?', and they will ask themselves whether it is possible to use elements in another religion as stepping-stones or as points of contact in evangelism. In many countries, especially in Eastern Asia, they will meet people who think that all religions are in the deepest sense identical. When I was in Java, a taxi-driver, a serious Muslim, expressed himself in just this way: 'Well, Sir, there are various cars in the world, very small ones and big American ones, Volkswagens and Cadillacs and others. All of them can take you where you want to go, but some are much more comfortable than others!' And he always added: 'Your religion is not very comfortable.' That was his conviction. It is clearly a very important problem of great significance for our whole approach to the presentation of the gospel.

In the first chapter of Romans, St Paul goes very deeply into this whole problem and says things of the greatest value for every missionary. We may start at verse 19:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became

¹ Professor Bavinck, who died in 1963, was from 1955 Professor of Practical Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. His earlier career was spent largely as a missionary and Professor in Java and as Professor of Missions at Kampen. He wrote numerous books, among them *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. This article is reprinted from *Themelios* 2:2 (1964), by kind permission of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions... And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.

First Paul stresses the fact that there exists a more or less general revelation: 'what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.' In this revelation God is speaking to every individual, to every people in the world.

From there Paul reaches the conclusion that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. The New English Bible rendering is worth noting: 'For we see divine retribution revealed from heaven and falling upon all the godless wickedness of men. In their wickedness they are stifling the truth.' Several points deserve our attention. In the first place Paul clearly says that God is already dealing in judgment with men and women in this world and that he returns their wickedness on their own heads. He returns to this point several times later on. It is quite astonishing that in this chapter he says as many as three times 'God gave them up ... God gave them up... God gave them up.' To what? To their own desires, to their own sinful trains of thought and course of life. That is the divine retribution. Sin punishes itself, as it were.

Repressing the Truth

The second point concerns the apostle's words on the struggle of men with the truth of God. St Paul uses the word, *katecho*, literally, 'to keep down'. The RSV renders it 'suppress' and the New English Bible 'stifle'. We could well translate it by the word 'repress'. I deliberately choose a word which has a technical meaning in the literature of psychology. Psychologists describe the activity of repression as follows: 'Repression is the process by which unacceptable desires or impulses are excluded from consciousness and thus, being

denied direct satisfaction, are left to operate in the unconscious.' What Paul is speaking of here can thus be easily translated by that word 'repression'. Of course this word has a much wider meaning than it usually carries in modern psychology. Freudian psychology applies it specially to 'unconscious desires having a more or less sexual nature'. In more recent psychology it also refers to desires and impulses of a very different nature. The impulses or impressions which are repressed may be very valuable ones; anything contrary to the pattern of life or the dominating tendencies of thinking or speaking may be repressed in the human soul. Usually this happens unconsciously. The individual himself does not know that he is doing it. But it happens with surprising strength and consequences. We may justifiably interpret Paul's words here in terms of this powerful activity brought to light by the psychology of our day. He says that human beings always repress God's truth because it is contrary to the whole pattern of their life. Human wickedness prevents this truth really reaching them; it has no chance to reach them, it is automatically repressed into the background of their consciousness.

In v. 19 Paul goes on to say that 'what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them'. The words 'plain to them' cannot mean that they *really* see and understand. In the New English Bible these words are rendered 'lies plain before their eyes'. That seems more correct. A person's actual seeing is another story. As Paul goes on to make clear, we always resist and repress what is before our eyes.

In v. 20 what was summed up in v. 19 as 'what can be known about God' is defined as 'his eternal power and deity' (or 'Godhead' – so the AV). These two words are of great importance. In the history of human religion some very remarkable tendencies are always discernible. One is the belief that God is the far-away God, sitting upon his heavenly throne but too far removed for us to come into contact with him. That is what is meant when we speak of 'high' gods. There are many high gods in the world, gods which are acknowledged as such by various peoples, but which have no real place in their religious life. They are too distant, and therefore these people prefer to pray to other powers, to souls and ghosts. God is the creator, he has made the world and all

that is in it, but he is not the object of adoration or of prayer. Such gods are regarded as more or less distant beings, powerless in actual life. God does not come to us, he cannot do anything for us.

The Power and the Godhead

Another tendency revealed in the history of religions is to regard God as an impersonal power, as mere power. He is not an 'I' but an 'it'. Human religion is always inclined to leave out one of the two: either it sees God only as a far-away God, and leaves out his power in human life, or else it regards God solely as impersonal power but does not see that God is God, a personal Lord. These two central tendencies are clearly discernible in the history of human religion.

It is therefore highly instructive that Paul here mentions these two very things – the power and the Godhead. It seems as if he wants to preclude any attempt to reduce God to mere impersonal power, and at the same time to exclude every possibility of making God a high God, far away in unreachable regions without any impact on daily life. St Paul says that through all the centuries the two notions that God is both the person to whom we can pray and are responsible, and at the same time everlasting power, press themselves naturally upon human beings. These two attributes of God are clearly seen, being understood by (AV) or perceived in (RSV) the things that have been made. Both these renderings are preferable to the New English Bible's 'have been visible to the eye of reason'. The Greek *nooumena*, literally 'being intelligently observed', emphasizes that seeing with the eye is not intended in this verse; but at the same time it does not mean that seeing God's everlasting power and Godhead is attained by a process of reasoning. It is reached not as a logical conclusion, but in a moment of vision. It comes suddenly upon a person; it overwhelms him. But still it does not lead to real knowledge. The man or woman escapes God's clasp, represses the truth and so is without excuse.

Nevertheless in v. 21 we read that the human being must in fact be regarded as one who knows: 'although they knew God they did not honour him as God'. In the great lawsuit between God and humankind, the latter cannot plead that they did not know God. They know God but they never come to real knowledge because they are always busy resisting this

knowledge in the subtlest of ways. They cling to their own egocentric pattern of life with desperate tenacity. As a result humanity has gone further and further astray. All his thinking has ended in futility and his misguided mind is plunged in darkness. In this connexion the apostle thinks of the pagan religions as he has seen them himself, with their statues, their superstitions and all their infatuation. He does not mean to say that these people have consciously and deliberately rejected the truth of God. It normally takes place unconsciously and unintentionally, but it happens nevertheless and humanity is guilty. The aerial of their hearts can no longer receive the wavelength of God's voice although his voice surrounds them on all sides. In his innermost being, every person has turned away from God and now God has vanished out of sight.

Substitution

The next verses show us the result of this attitude. It is remarkable that three times in this passage Paul uses the verb 'exchange'. In doing so he once again touches upon one of those very remarkable phenomena which take place in human souls. It has been discovered that the repressed impulses, of which we spoke earlier and which are left to operate in our unconscious, are not dead. They are still strong and try repeatedly in all kinds of ways to come into play. True, they have no part in conscious life, but they succeed occasionally in showing that they still exist, like the school-boy sent out of the class room who keeps on throwing stones against its windows to show that he is still there. Freud has particularly highlighted this phenomenon and inaugurated its study. He has shown that these impulses which pass their exile in the unconscious reveal themselves in errors we make, in slips of the tongue, but most especially in dreams. It is then that they get a chance to come to the surface. This does not mean that they appear openly in dreams; a sort of censorship remains which causes them to appear only, or at least preferably, in disguise. Here the process of exchange or substitution comes into the picture. Repressed impulses come to the surface but are now changed; they have another form, another shape. Other figures are substituted for them. Psychologists are inclined to think that what we see in our dreams is a translated, transformed expression of repressed elements in our subconscious.

It seems to me that the process of exchanging the truth of God of which Paul is speaking here is an illustration of that same idea of substitution which is found in modern psychology. Elements of the truth of God are exiled to the unconscious, to the crypts of human existence. They have not vanished altogether; they are still active and reveal themselves again and again. But they cannot become openly conscious; they appear in disguise. Something else is exchanged or substituted for them. As Calvin said, the human spirit is a factory of idols. Humans begin to create ideas, myths and stories about God of every kind; not by intentional deceit – it happens without their knowing it, as it were.

These images come from a person's inmost being and hold him in their spell. He cannot get rid of them. He has his religion, he is busy with God, he serves his God, but he does not see that the God he serves is not God himself. An exchange has taken place, a perilous exchange. Some essential quality of God has been pushed into the background because it does not fit in with the human pattern of life. The image humanity has of God is no longer true. Divine revelation indeed lies at the root of it but because it is not accepted in human thought it is repressed. In the image a person has of God he can recognize the image of himself.

We have seen already that the result of all this, thrice-repeated, is: 'God gave them up.' God gave them up to the vileness of their own desires and the consequent degradation of their bodies (v. 24). He gave them up to shameful passions (v. 26). And he gave them up to their own depraved reason (v. 28). A man or woman can no longer resist the powers in him which carry him along. St Paul no doubt had in his own day seen abundant proof in the degenerate way of life of the Roman Empire of what human beings come to when God abandons them to their own desires. He had also seen that human religion has no defence against this degeneration. And from all this he has learned what may happen when humans exchange the true image of God for any kind of myth. The ethical force of religion is weakened, because we let our inclinations join consciously or unconsciously in forming an idol fashioned according to our own thoughts.

General Revelation

If we have understood Paul correctly so far, there are a few further points which we must consider. First, it is clear that the existence of a general revelation is undeniably taught here. Hendrik Kraemer has called the phrase 'general revelation' a misleading term. He claims that the 'whole concept is, in its ordinary use, tainted by all kinds of notions contrary to the way the Bible speaks about revelation'. There is certainly some truth in this claim. A concept of general revelation has been used too much in the philosophical sphere. It has been taken for granted that autonomous reason could lead human beings to a certain body of natural theology. But the revelation of which Paul speaks here is entirely different. The conclusions of philosophic reasoning are not under discussion at all. In this context the Bible accentuates God's everlasting concern for all men and women. 'He left not himself without witness.' Time and again humankind is confronted with the certainty that God exists and actually encounters him. But each time he resists these impressions and escapes them. Yet God still concerns himself fully and personally with human beings. It is not easy to explain how God does it, but it happens.

General revelation is a very important factor in world history. God meets humanity in many ways and humanity is aware of it too, although he continually tries to resist it. If we want to use the term 'general revelation', we must not use it as if one can conclude the existence of God from the revelation by logical reasoning. This may be possible but it only leads to a philosophic notion of God as first cause. Such is not the biblical conception of general revelation, for in the Bible this has a much more personal nature. It is divine concern for the totality of humankind and for each individual. His everlasting powers are plain to us; they overwhelm us; they strike us suddenly, in moments when we thought they were far away they creep up on us; they do not let go of us, even though we do our best to escape. Escaping, repressing is the human answer to God's revelation, an answer that becomes visible in the history of human religion.

We are here given an understanding of the phenomena of human religion. The heathen who believes in gods and spirits and bows down before his idol, shows that he is touched by God and that God has in some sense sought him. But at the

same time he reveals that he has himself been busy repressing what is absolutely necessary if one wants to come to God. His image of God is distorted. Something essential is eliminated. He may not have done this intentionally, but all the same he is without excuse. He has received an image of God from his parents, has grown up with the religion to which he adheres. But his religious life contains something very personal, something belonging only to him. While seeking God intimately, he at the same time tries to escape him. His religion is always ambiguous, full of hesitation and discrepancies. We can apply this in the case of the Buddha. He gained great new insight concerning the world and human life. God touched him and struggled with him. God existed in that moment. Buddha answered to it in his way. In this answer the hand of God is still visible, but so too is the result of human repression and substitution. The case is the same when we think of Mohammed. In the night in which Mohammed received his first revelation, the night on which the Koran says that the angels descended, God concerned himself with him and touched him. God struggled with him on that night. And God's hand is still visible in the answer of the prophet, but so is the result of human repression and human substitution.

Divine-Human Encounters

The history of religion contains a dramatic element. It includes divine approach and human rejection, rejection hidden by the appearance of human concern with God. But the god whom human beings seek is different from the true God because the uncanny process of repression and exchange has been at work. If this is true, various kinds of distinctions can be made. We are always ready to repress and to exchange, but are we always successful in these two things? God can at times stop, as it were, the noiseless engines of repression and substitution and overwhelm a person to such a degree that he is for the moment powerless. We must also take account of the work of the Holy Spirit within a person, even if he constantly resists it. The way in which Isaiah speaks of Cyrus, the anointed king, who was called by name and girded by God, indicates that the Bible certainly leaves us with the possibility that God may anoint with his Spirit and gird to a task to which he calls them those who do not really know

him. This is evidence that there are gradations in the history of human religion. I am not now speaking of religions as systems, but of individuals regarded as adherents of those religions. In my own missionary service I more than once met Muslims and Hindus who we felt were not very far from the kingdom of God. Their whole approach to the problem of religion was remarkably true, remarkably serious. In such cases, we may come to the conclusion that God has been very active, also outside the boundaries of his church.

The history of religion is a very remarkable thing; its main theme is that holy work of God in his general revelation to which humans are always reacting. Because the hand of God is still visible in some way, that gives us room to go into individual lives and to approach them with the important question how they personally have reacted to what God has been doing with them. When we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not begin the discussion; our listeners already have history behind them, there has already been a certain discussion with God. As we preach the gospel, the drama between God and humankind starts a new period. Now it becomes more dangerous but also more hopeful; Christ now appears to a person in a new form. He was already present in human seeking and because he did not leave himself without a witness, Christ was already wrestling to gain the person although he did not know it. The profound words of St John describe this when he speaks of 'the true light that enlightens everyone'; 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'. In the preaching of the gospel this same Christ once again appears to a person, but in much more concrete and visible form. He awakes him from his long disastrous dream. The repression and the exchange are done with at last, but only believing surrender.

It has always been my experience that the men and women with whom we come into contact in missionary work in the course of serious discussion begin to acknowledge that they have already had an experience of God, and begin to become aware of the fact that they have already acted upon revelation. I always felt that we could preach the gospel of Christ to them in the certainty that they themselves would come to acknowledge that they recognized what we were speaking of and began to feel it had a bearing on what they had done already, but that a new chapter of their life was now opened.

REVIEWS

Directory of Women's Organisations and Groups

Lavinia J. Byrne (ed.)

Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, London, 1992;
104pp., £4.94; ISBN 0 851692 28 1

This book is a very useful guide to women's organisations and groups in churches and ecumenical bodies in Britain and Ireland. Here we see the wealth of women's contributions to church life and to social outreach gathered together for the first time since the first women's organisation, the YWCA, was founded in 1855. From the list a definite story emerges of women first of all getting together on a denominational basis, with newer groups gathering on an ecumenical or even political basis, and men nowadays being included as members of some of the more radical groups.

Each organisation lists its objectives, membership and publications as well as supplying contact addresses and telephone numbers. The Directory has been edited by Lavinia Byrne, Associate Secretary for the Community of Women and Men at CCBI. For me this will be much thumbed both as a resource book for tracing women's history as well as from the church history point of view.

Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College

The Bush Still Burns: The Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia, 1788-1988

Rowland S. Ward

Privately, 1989 (available from Author at 358 Mountain Highway, Wantirna, Victoria, 3152, Australia); 566pp., A\$25; ISBN 0 949670 05 7

Rowland Ward may not be well known in Scotland, but in Australia he is well published, having produced studies ranging from *Spiritual Gifts in the Apostolic Church* (1972) to his modernised edition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism with notes entitled *Learning the Christian Faith* (1981). He has the reputation of producing material carefully, even painstakingly researched. This present study will prove no exception.

The links with Scotland are clear. The author works through such topics as the ministers who transferred to Australia, the heritage of the Australian churches, and the Scots Presbyterians who began arriving in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, like a golden thread running throughout the whole book is the theme of the constant interaction, especially in the early years, between the churches in Scotland and Australia. Like his study, the author too has his own links with Scotland. He was born in Melbourne, but trained for the ministry in

the Free Church College in Edinburgh. He now lives in the Melbourne suburbs, and pastors Knox Church in Wantirna.

This is a notable publication that should be of great value to students of both Australian and Scottish church history, especially to ministers and members of the small, conservative denomination Ward particularly deals with, namely the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, but also to any interested in Australian Presbyterianism, especially when one remembers that some 10% of the Australian population have a Presbyterian heritage.

Ward has given the book a wider appeal by the way he has set the history of the PCEA in the setting of the Reformed faith in Australia as a whole. The book can be read as a history of the expansion of the Reformed church in Australia since the late eighteenth century. It resulted from a commission given to Ward from the Synod of the PCEA. With this fully-detailed doctrinal and theological historical study, he has clearly filled a gap in Australian church history. For apart from State histories, which in most cases are very dated, no study of Australian Presbyterianism has in fact been published. It would be a shame if it becomes little more than a historical source book used by PCEA.

The author has been researching and writing in this field for more than a decade. At times it is heavy-going. Ward works minutely through the numerous doctrinal debates that occupied the church in Australia for many of the last 200 years. He includes quotations from contemporary sources, reproductions of the text of several important documents, and brief biographical and other details of 300 Presbyterian ministers who served in Australia prior to 1865, much of which has been carefully tabulated. All is helpfully illustrated by over sixty pictures, drawings and photographs. The thirty or so pages of contextual material concerning the Scottish Presbyterian roots were found useful, well-placed and helpfully succinct. There are also substantial bibliographies and indexes.

Michael D. McMullen, Aberdeen

The Work of Christ

Robert Letham

IVP, Leicester, 1993; 284pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 85110891 7

This book ought to be required reading for all church leaders. The book is the first in a series called 'Contours of Christian Theology', which aims 'not merely to answer current objections to evangelical Christianity, but also to rework the orthodox evangelical position in a fresh and compelling way'. I found that this volume both fired my heart and inspired my mind, and the rest of the series should be worth waiting for – particularly as it is in the creative and capable hands of Gerald Bray as series editor.

My first thought was that the title was rather well-worn and found wanting. Letham takes this up on his first page: "The Work of Christ",

limp as the phrase sounds, actually stands for the most significant realities we can ever face.' What follows is a review of and reflection upon the development of the doctrine (especially pages 24-37), and an exposition of biblical material (under the three-fold office of Prophet, Priest and King). Throughout, Letham does not fail to engage issues of contemporary relevance. In discussing the kingdom of God, he states: 'The work of God in our salvation extends to the renewal of society and the cosmos.' He is positive and balanced in his assessment of liberation theology (especially pages 62-66) and the work of Jürgen Moltmann. He is cautious in his estimation of recent attempts at rapprochement between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The discussion of different theories of the nature of the atonement is helpful. On penal substitution, Letham writes that 'problems arise when the atonement is analysed in detachment from the frame of reference that the Bible gives it'. This theory is about the essence of the atonement but does not exhaust its meaning.

I felt that the author was at his weakest in too often dismissing theological arguments in short space, and wished that he had developed the problem of structural sin. In making telling criticism of liberation theologians, Letham confesses that 'corporate and social sin is a major factor that the church has too long neglected'. If the sin that Christ died to put away is more than personal morality and the careless use of Christ's environment, how do we expect to see transformation of the social and political arenas?

There is an excellent appendix on the intent of the atonement. He attempts to resolve the problem of the extent and efficacy of the cross with the analogy of the wave and particle theories of light. 'No single system can be both comprehensive and consistent', and 'we can expect loose ends to exist in any human belief system.'

The book contains 18 pages of notes, 3 pages of suggestions for further reading and indexes for biblical references, subjects and names. I suspect that this will enhance its overall value as a reference book, but hope that many will buy it for the text, which is both conservative and creative, and for the most part convincing.

Robert Calvert, St Mark's Church of Scotland, Drumchapel

The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought

David A. Weir

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990; 244pp., £27.50; ISBN 0 19 826690 1

The study of the history of post-Reformation dogmatics is an interpretive battleground these days. and David Weir has entered into this fray with *The Origins of the Federal Theology*. Many serious questions have been asked on the subject of the 'innovations' of the scholastic descendants of

Genevan theology, one sub-plot of which is the development of covenant or federal theology – a story which is interesting and important in its own right. Exactly what constitutes a fully-developed covenant theology? What are its distinguishing marks? Why did it evolve? In what sense, if at all, can Calvin be called a covenant theologian? Was the first covenant theologian Cocceius, or did federal theology originate in Zurich with Bullinger? Is covenant theology a reaction to or the invention of ‘high Calvinism’ (or both!)? Is covenant theology the creation of the Puritans? Is it an improvement on Calvin’s theology or an ‘Arminianising’ regression? Weir does not answer all these questions (nor does he attempt to), but his presentation has clarity, specificity, and plausibility which is lacking in the proposals of many of his forerunners.

The central thesis of this book is that ‘the prelapsarian “covenant of works” or “covenant of nature” is the key identifying feature of the federal theology’, and that the origins of this federal theology are to be found in the Palatinate during 1560-90 in two stages: first, through the suggestion of Ursinus (in response to controversy around the sovereignty of God and Adam’s Fall), and then through the writings of Olevianus, Cartwright, Fenner, and Junius during 1584-90. Hence, the origins of federal theology are to be located in Heidelberg, not Geneva.

Weir’s contribution to the historiography of covenant theology is to be welcomed on a number of counts. First, despite the extensive treatment given to the subject in journal articles, there have been few attempts to provide an overview of the development of the covenant theology in a monograph. Second, in spite of the attention devoted to the subject, many myths still abound in scholarly circles concerning the rise of covenant divinity; Professor Weir will lay some of them to rest. Third, many of Weir’s assertions will provoke new discussion of the role of federal theology in the Reformed tradition, for they are by no means beyond dispute. Apart from any other considerations, these commend this work to Reformation and post-Reformation scholars for serious analysis.

Nevertheless, there are deficiencies in the work which limit its usefulness. Weir often makes important claims without argument (e.g. ‘we have established the fact that the identifying feature of the federal theology is the prelapsarian covenant of works’; he has in fact only asserted it). Perhaps this is due to the brevity of this work (only 159 pages of text, minus appendix and index). He also assumes conventional views of post-Reformation theological development (Armstrong, Kendall, Rolston, J.B. Torrance) without adequately interacting with the more recent criticisms of these interpretations by Muller, Woolsey and others. Furthermore, his over-emphasis on the distinguishing role of the prelapsarian covenant and his recourse to the covenantal conditionality/unconditionality theme are misleading, and will divert attention from important Calvinian contributions to the development of federal theology.

Weir's treatment of this enormous (and still largely unexplored subject) is terse, and hence sometimes cryptic (the reader frequently wishes that he would expand his discussion). Clearly, this is reading for specialists, but his introduction will quickly brief the student on the current literature and arguments surrounding the development of federal theology. The appendix includes a bibliography of works (primary and secondary) important for the history of covenant theology, arranged in chronological order from 1690 to 1989. However, the list is not exhaustive and omits some significant literature. It will provide a good starting point for those just beginning their studies in this field. Scholars desiring a more comprehensive inventory may consult Andrew A. Woolsey's superb bibliography in *Unity and Continuity in Covenant Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1988).

Whatever the weaknesses of the work, Weir argues with a restraint, precision and persuasiveness that have eluded many authors on this subject, and he has given the scholarly community a proposal worth arguing about. We look forward with anticipation to the series which the author has forecast on this same subject.

J. Ligon Duncan III, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS

The Genetic Revolution: Today's Dream... Tomorrow's Nightmare?

Patrick Dixon

Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, 1993; 253pp., £6.99; ISBN 0 86065 871 6

Patrick Dixon is the founder and medical director of the leading national and international AIDS agency ACET. In the course of his work he has closely followed the progress in gene technology made over the last few years. *The Genetic Revolution* aims to provide an introduction to such technology so that the reader can begin to face the 'urgent ethical dilemmas' raised by the recent advances.

Dixon appears to address his book to the reasonably well-informed non-Christian or Christian reader. However, in the first two chapters of the book he gives an introduction to the subject for those unfamiliar with the science of genetics. Dixon then looks at the facts, first of all as a doctor, and secondly as a church leader with a biblical perspective. Subjects covered include human cloning; genetically altered foods; gene technology and medicine; the risks and benefits, and the rights and wrongs of genetic engineering. In the final chapter he sets out a 'Ten-Point Gene Charter', as a starting-point for 'consumers, theologians, commercial and political leaders' to discuss the implications of what he calls, 'the most powerful scientific revolution in the history of human discovery, with the power to change every aspect of our lives and even to change irreversibly the nature of human life itself'. Dixon ends his book

with a call for urgent public debate, followed by effective international regulation to ensure that 'we take control of advancing gene technology before it takes control of us'.

The Genetic Revolution provides a comprehensive guide to the progress in, and possibilities of, the recent advances in gene technology. Dixon has read extensively and provides over 400 footnotes quoting relevant scientific papers and press reports. Also included in the appendices are a list of useful addresses, a glossary of terms, further reading, plus an extract from the submission to the British Medical Association by the Christian Medical Fellowship on genetic engineering.

On the whole this is a readable and extremely thought-provoking book, though for the lay person with no prior knowledge of genetics, it could prove to be a little inaccessible. Dixon's treatment of the subject is very thorough, sometimes too thorough, even for someone like myself with a background in genetics. Perhaps if a little more space had been given to the discussion of the ethical issues and implications and a little less to the technical details of current advances, *The Genetic Revolution* would prove to be a more effective resource for the average reader than in its current form.

Christine Gore, All Souls Church, London

The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on Five Governments from the 16th Through 18th Centuries

Douglas F. Kelly

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1992; 156pp., n.p.;
ISBN 0 87552 297 1

Throughout his ministry Calvin showed a very real concern for political issues on both a theoretical and practical level. The theology developed by Calvin and its implications and varied outworkings have played a major role in shaping the Western world. Kelly examines church-state relations in five different localities over a three-century period to show the impact and development of Calvin's thought on civil government.

Calvin's Geneva, Huguenot France, Knox's Scotland, Puritan England and Colonial America provide the historical localities for the development of this area of thought. Apart from its usefulness as a work examining questions still important to us today, this book also provides a helpful example of how a doctrine grows, develops and adapts according to differing social and cultural influences. Kelly moves from Calvin, who is rightly described as Constantinian and medieval, all the way through to the American revolutionaries who established a nation where church and state are constitutionally separated. Within a relatively small compass we are provided with an overview which opens avenues of further thought and study. All the names are here, from Hotman to Witherspoon, with

the shifts in understanding chronicled accurately. As a description of theological development Kelly makes a very useful contribution to our studies of this subject.

A more in-depth analysis, however, would not have gone astray. The importance of covenant within the Scottish theological and political understanding is correctly emphasised and Knox is seen as an important stage on the road from Calvin to Buchanan and Althusius. Unfortunately there is little to explain the move from the covenant concept to that of political rights theorists. Likewise we have here chronicled, but not explained, the shift from Calvin's natural law theory to the Puritan 'Calvinist' rejection of natural law theology.

There are points where Kelly's analysis is open to discussion. Too much stress is placed upon the formation of presbyteries in the colonies as entities from which power flowed upwards; historical necessity is not the same as philosophical design. The Congregationalists' 'civil contract' was a much greater influence on colonial political thought. Despite these mild strictures this book is to be recommended as a primer for those interested in Calvinist political theory.

There are seeds planted for further thought as we come to examine our present society in the light of what has happened. We may happily have rid ourselves of the Stuarts, but how are we to understand and react to 'the crown in Parliament', which in the English tradition holds an almost unchallenged power? Religious liberty is seen as a mainstay of personal civil liberty; what does this have to say to us who live in an increasingly pluralistic society?

Campbell Campbell-Jack, Munloch, Ross-shire

Judgement and Promise. An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah

J.G. McConville

Apollos, Leicester; Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN, 1993; 208pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 85111 431 8

McConville distinguishes between two approaches to the study of the book of Jeremiah. The first one begins with fragments, phrases and words in the text. It proceeds to relate them somehow and so to construct an understanding of the book. He believes that this approach characterises some of the recent commentaries on the book, such as those of Carroll and McKane. McConville favours an alternative approach to the book in which he proposes to examine the major sections of the book in sequence and to discover general themes which can be traced through the book.

McConville divides the book into three parts. Chapters 1-24 trace Jeremiah's abandonment of the hope that God's judgement against Israel can be averted. Thus the city and temple will be destroyed and the nation will be deported. Chapters 25-45 describe a hope based on God's gracious act of redemption which will follow the judgement. The people of God

will continue to exist beyond the exile. Chapters 46 to the end explain how the divine redemption of God's people also brings judgement for those who oppose them, even judgement upon the great city of Babylon.

An important part of McConville's analysis is the way in which he demonstrates the distinctive nature of Jeremiah, its unique contribution to the theology of the Bible. He does this in two ways. First, he separates this book of Jeremiah from what scholars refer to as the Deuteronomistic history. The Deuteronomistic history includes much of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. It is characterised by a distinctive vocabulary and theological emphasis. The latter is concerned to explain how the destruction of Jerusalem came about as a result of God's judgement upon the nation and its leadership for their sin. Scholars have linked the Deuteronomistic history with the book of Jeremiah, where they claim to find similar vocabulary and theology. McConville argues that Jeremiah is best distinguished from the Deuteronomistic history. He notes important differences between the two: Josiah is hardly mentioned in Jeremiah and his concern for cult centralisation in Jerusalem receives no mention by the prophet; Jeremiah is nowhere mentioned in the Deuteronomistic history; and the Deuteronomistic history does not look to the coming redemption, but ends with God's judgement in the exile, while Jeremiah emphasises a future redemption.

Having separated Jeremiah from the Deuteronomistic history, McConville then focuses on the relationship of the book to earlier prophets. In particular he studies Hosea and finds there similar themes of repentance and of a return from the exile after God's judgement. Both Hosea and the book of Jeremiah focus on the return as an act of God's grace.

McConville succeeds in identifying important themes which tie the book together. On this basis alone he can rightly argue his case for a Jeremiah distinct from the Deuteronomistic history. A book of this size cannot deal with the detailed linguistic data which have been used to argue for the relationship. Nor can it cover all the important theological issues such as the apologetic nature of Jeremiah's confessions or the struggle of Jeremiah to demonstrate that he is a true prophet. These need to be addressed before the arguments of post-exilic Deuteronomistic redactions can be laid to rest. However, students, teachers and preachers of Jeremiah will find here an appreciation of the prophet's life and message which is both theologically perceptive and holistic.

Richard S. Hess, Glasgow Bible College

Articles on Calvin and Calvinism, vol. 7: The Organizational Structure of Calvin's Theology
Articles on Calvin and Calvinism, vol. 11: Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State

Edited by R.C. Gamble

Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1992; 385pp. and 247pp., \$57 and \$48; ISBN 0 8153 1084 X and 0 8153 1052 8

These two volumes form part of a series of fourteen books produced under the auspices of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, to gather together a significant quantity of English-language articles on Calvin. Placed end to end, the series will no doubt prove a tremendous source of help to those whose libraries do not possess the relevant journals and could not otherwise hope to rectify this deficiency.

The topics covered in these two books focus on Calvin's approach to the problematic relationship of reason and revelation in the theological task and upon various social and cultural problems encountered during his reforming career. These include not only discussion of Calvin's teaching on church and state, but also the implications of his teaching for subjects such as social action and aesthetics. As the editorial policy has been to gather articles for their thematic content rather than their particular interpretation of Calvin, the reader should not expect to find the views expressed to be mutually compatible. Indeed, it is one of the delights of books such as these that radically differing opinions are juxtaposed, forcing the reader to think through the issues and making it painfully obvious that the interpretation of Calvin is likely to remain a highly contentious area of debate.

One good example of this is provided by the classic problem of the knowledge of God. In volume 7, the reader is treated to a number of contradictory interpretations of this aspect of Calvin's thought, from those of Gerald Postema, who does not appear to this reviewer to make a sufficiently clear distinction between natural theology and general revelation, to those of T.F. Torrance who reads Calvin through the spectacles of Barth. Which side, if any, wins is for the reader to decide.

In such an eclectic collection, it is difficult to single out one article as being of particular merit. However, Nicholas Wolterstorff's article in volume 11, 'The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice', was, for me, a particularly stimulating piece. In this article, the author, an eminent philosopher of religion, attempts to use Calvin's theology of man as the image of God as a basis for uniting aesthetics and social ethics. The result is both intellectually interesting and practically

challenging as an example of making the biblical, Reformed tradition relevant to the needs of the world today.

It is certain that many will find these books an excellent source of scholarly thinking about Calvin, and that the material they contain will continue to fuel interest in the Reformed tradition in general.

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Pilgrim Theology: Taking the Path of Theological Discovery

Michael Bauman

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992; 232pp., \$12.99; ISBN 0 310 58531 7

Written by that rare creature, a theologian who is not afraid of letting it be obvious that he enjoys doing theology, this book is of use not just to the student about to begin studies but also to those of us who have grown settled in our theological patterns. Bauman attempts to point out the difference between a fortress theology and a pilgrim theology, and in doing so makes a plea for continual theological education rather than theological indoctrination.

Fortress theology is that which sees its function as the defence of a particular settled doctrinal understanding, be it that of denomination or theological party. Such theologians are dangerous, especially when they wear the garb of the truly Reformed and evangelical. A careful reading of this enjoyable book will help us to recognise and resist nonsense in all its forms, especially when pronounced by our own theological gurus. Throughout the book Bauman follows the admirable, and safe, principle of 'No names, no pack drill'. This however gives the added enjoyment of trying to identify the targets of his shafts, that is until we realise the book is as much a mirror as a spotlight.

Bauman defines the proper work of theology in the following manner, 'Theologizing is faith and understanding coming to grips with reality in order to produce a Christian mind (and character) that knows the truth about things, and because it knows the truth about things is liberated from the shackles of error and sham.' Pilgrim theology, or theology which is always exploring, testing, journeying onward, is marked by intense biblicism, methodological suspicion, and theological tolerance.

The book is split into four sections. Theological method; Theology proper, Christology and Spirituality; Hermeneutics; and Political Theology; with additional chapters on ethics, history and eschatology. It will be a rare reader who finds him or herself in agreement with Bauman throughout, but he is a writer who encourages and stimulates to fresh thought. The reader is instructed, challenged and even provoked, but never, never bored.

As well as making a valuable point which should be accepted by all who are serious about doing theology, Bauman does sterling service by

reminding us that theology is not just important and serious but also exciting, intriguing and even fun. Theological systems should be kept humble, they provide a foundation from which we can explore and upon which we can build. This call to theological dynamism is worth giving to every student who leaves our congregations to study theology. It is worth reading by all of us who face the danger of intellectual hubris within the safety of settled and unchallenged presuppositions.

Campbell Campbell-Jack, Munloch, Ross-shire

A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature

David Lyle Jeffrey (ed.)

William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992; xxxii + 960pp., £55; ISBN 08028 3634 8

In one sense we have always known how deeply the literature of our islands has been steeped in the Bible. Yet it is only in the last half-century, coinciding with a new scholarly awareness of the complex internal literary tradition within the Bible itself, that there has been much systematic exploration of that biblical tradition in English. This book is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to summarise that work with any degree of comprehensiveness, and, just as important, to place it alongside a history of biblical interpretation, so that the reader can cross-reference from, say, Milton, to the theory and practice of his seventeenth-century contemporaries to see how the Bible was being read and understood by them.

Even a cursory skim through the list of contents will confirm how selective has been the use of biblical themes by English-language writers. As one would expect, Genesis, the four Gospels and Revelation top the bill, with Acts, the Old Testament histories and major prophets following some way behind. If the Pauline Epistles have lacked a good story-line, they have always had some powerful rhetoric to make up for it – at least in the Authorized Version. Minor prophets and books of the law bring up the rear. The exception, of course, is Jonah, which has a strong claim to be considered one of the world's earliest comic novels – and has always had a good following among later writers. Three-and-a-half columns is perhaps a little on the mean side for him.

Yet even if many of the entries in the main dictionary section are predictable enough, there are also some surprises. That the Devil should get six-and-a-half columns is presumably only his due, but that Cana wine, for instance, should get nearly as much may not be so obvious to those (like myself) unaware of what a popular trope it was in medieval and Renaissance writings. The more generalized theme of madness still gets five-and-a-half. Some particularly rich topics are broken down into smaller units. Thus Elijah gets three-and-a-half columns, but the 'Still

Small Voice' gets another column on its own (where your reviewer is delighted to find he has achieved immortality in a footnote). It is good to see also that there has been some attempt to exclude a specifically Christian bias to the interpretation of the Old Testament. Jewish traditions are contrasted with the various Christian ones so that the reader is given a sense not merely of the richness and variety of the biblical literary heritage, but also its controversialness and plurality over the centuries. Nor, in spite of the book's title, have the compilers confined themselves to English literature: no discussion of the story of Joseph, for instance, would be complete without reference to Thomas Mann's magnificent *Joseph and his Brothers* – and sure enough, he gets honourable mention in the Joseph section.

Nevertheless, such a comparative survey would not be complete without reminding us how culturally variable any such undertaking as this is going to be. The size of the entries is not just dictated by the wealth of literary reference available: there is always a cultural perspective to any such selection, and we should always be aware of how different Victorian or seventeenth-century priorities would have been. By way of illustration, in the bibliographical section at the end (itself over a hundred pages long) are sections on 'Historical Studies in Hermeneutics', 'Biblical Commentaries Available to English Authors', 'Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Commentaries', and books on the use of the Bible by specific authors.

Weighing over two kilograms and with almost a thousand pages, this is not a book to tackle all at once, but one to treasure and explore at leisure. If we were to follow the unit pricing now practised by the better supermarkets, the £55 price tag is not, in fact, outrageous: it works out at about 0.5p per page, but given most people's budgets it is more likely to remain a book consulted in libraries than to be found on the general reader's shelves.

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Calvin's Wisdom: An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically

Graham Miller

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1992; 391pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85151578 9

Graham Miller, a former missionary and minister of the Presbyterian Church in Australasia, and sometime Principal of the Melbourne Bible Institute, has presented this book as a welcome gift to the church at large. It is a fruit of his lifelong devotion to the study of Calvin, which included a disciplined reading of all fifty-five volumes of his commentaries and tracts inherited from his father. He offers us what he claims to be an anthology, but the writer of the blurb wisely qualifies the

work as something more than that. 'It is virtually a dictionary of his thought, almost an encyclopaedia of his theology.' It is not an anthology in the sense of selected chapters and passages to be found in John Dillenberger's *John Calvin* or Samuel Dunn's compilation of quite lengthy passages from his commentaries and sermons, nor yet again a choice from Calvin's familiar style of connecting subject-related units of Bible texts, as are found in the *Library of Christian Classics* series, volume 23, *Calvin's Commentaries*. In *Calvin's Wisdom* we have something quite different.

Miller has presented us with 391 pages of quotable quotes, sandwiched between a short autobiographical prologue and a half-page epilogue. Each quotation is normally two or three lines long, sometimes stretching to a short paragraph. They cover the entire range of Calvin's writings, relating to what surely must be every conceivable issue to which Calvin addressed himself. They are arranged in alphabetical order, with subjects of greater significance – the Bible, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Predestination *etc.* – broken down into sub-divisions. In all, 226 topics are dealt with. What we have, then, is something of a concise dictionary of his thinking on all these matters, portholes looking into his vast knowledge of biblical and ecclesiastical theology. If sometimes the arrangement of quotations appears to lack coherence, the reader very quickly gains insight into Calvin's understanding of the subject to hand. Almost every one, even the shortest, whatever the starting point, refers without ado to God himself. For example: 'Those who arrogate the least fraction of strength to themselves apart from God only ruin themselves through their own pride' (Ps. 11; 409); 'The endurance of the cross is the gift of God... even the sufferings themselves are evidence of the grace of God' (Phil. -Col.; 48); 'Whatever God promises belongs to his elect... not... to all' (Jer.; 128).

In the prologue, Mr Miller tells us that when he was a young man, Calvin's writings were in limbo. Even so, he was infected by his father's devotion to the Reformer. In recent years there has been a very considerable resurgence of interest in Calvin and many works have been written on both Calvin himself and many aspects of his theology. Alas, there is no shortage of those which deservedly earn the poor assessment which Miller has given to one of the earliest examples – 'spiritless compared with Calvin himself'! At least, Miller learned one lesson from this somewhat arid work, which he passes on to all would-be students of Calvin: 'To know Calvin, we must first *read* Calvin.' Clearly, this is what he wants us to do for ourselves, and accordingly has presented us with a casket of jewels from the immense treasure of Calvin's writing. The book is then both an introduction to those who have not yet discovered Calvin, and a quick reference to any aspect of his teaching for those who have reached a degree of maturity as a student of the doyen of all Bible expositors.

Peter Cook, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme

Concise Dictionary of Religion

Irving Hexham

Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, 1993; 245pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 8308 1404 3 (USA), 0 85110 645 5 (UK)

This short reference work is intended to meet the needs of undergraduates when they are first introduced to the field of religious studies. Irving Hexham has recognised that most courses are essentially Christian in orientation and so there are relatively more entries dealing with Western tradition than with other religions. Realising that there can be great difficulty in obtaining information about more obscure figures, each item has been addressed not according to an evaluation of its overall importance, but according to the difficulty students will have in finding information. Thus, greater space has been accorded, for instance, to Abraham Kuyper than Thomas Aquinas. There is material on African and other neglected religious traditions as well as new religious movements known as cults, in addition to items related to major traditional and world religions.

Hexham believes that there is an overemphasis on certain narrowly defined academic traditions in religious studies to the neglect of studies dealing with religion in the world and this is apparent in the selection of material. Others might disagree with this view. A new undergraduate, whilst finding this a useful volume, would perhaps feel a certain frustration in that it does not deal comprehensively with all his/her needs in this area, although it is relatively inexpensive. In addition, the cross-referencing system could be confusing for new students.

Janet Watson, Glasgow Bible College

Out of the Rut, into Revival: Dealing with Spiritual Stagnation

A.W. Tozer

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993; 178pp., £3.99; ISBN 0 340 59565 5

This book of collected sermons from the well-known Christian author comes with a warning from its publishers. It asks the reader to be prepared for reading material that was originally spoken and warns seasoned Tozer readers that the experience might be painful! This is a warning well worth giving because throughout the book there are many indications of a sermonic rather than written form. There are many repetitions of phrases and ideas, some of the ideas introduced are not followed through and many of the arguments lack precision.

The aim of the sermons is to speak to a general Christian audience, so that one is not looking for detailed argument. However, my immediate response to the book was to wonder whether the publishers were doing a service to Tozer's ministry by publishing material in this form. It does not reflect the more measured and considered approach of his other work. Bald statements such as 'if you do not have reformation you cannot have regeneration' are at best unhelpful and at worst unbiblical. On certain other occasions I simply could not see the point of his illustrations.

The only valid reason I can find for publishing such material is that it reflects one man's deep concern for the route Evangelicalism has taken. Although the sermons come from over thirty years ago many of his concerns still ring true. He spoke the words in this book partly in opposition to an Evangelicalism that is essentially conversionism or 'easy-believism'. He nails that particular distortion on a number of occasions throughout the book most helpfully when he challenges those who use manipulative techniques to secure 'decisions'. He also has some penetrating insights into Evangelicalism and its attachment to activism. He criticises the establishing of committees as the panacea for our spiritual ills and has sharp words for the social activities of the church when they divert us from our proper aims. Positively he presents his vision for the local church in, what was for me, the best chapter in the book. Rather than the conciseness of the arguments or the power of the analysis the main thrust which comes across in the sermons is Tozer's heartfelt concern that the evangelical church avoid complacency, apathy and accommodation to worldly methods and thinking. One cannot help but be challenged and moved by the depth of that concern, which he communicates on virtually every page.

Tozer is perceptive and penetrating. My concern is that his message is not presented here in the best format in which to harness the power of his insight.

Andrew Bathgate, U.C.C.F, Edinburgh

Lord of the Saved: Getting to the Heart of the Lordship Debate

God's Law in the Modern World: The Continuing Relevance of Old Testament Law

K.L. Gentry, Jr.

Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1992 and 1993; 104pp. and 81pp. n.p.; ISBN 0 87552 265 3 and 0 87552 296 3

These two small books deal with two closely related issues: the role of Christ as Lord in the believer's life, and the role of the law for the Christian. *Lord of the Saved* is set against the background of American dispensationalism and seeks to assert the classic Reformed position that

one cannot divide Christ and possess him as righteousness without also possessing him as Lord. As such, the focus is primarily upon individual salvation and the sanctification of the believer. The book is readable and presents a clear and concise summary of the issues involved. As such, it might well be suitable as preliminary reading matter for someone troubled by these issues.

God's Law seeks to broaden the scope of these arguments and asserts a form of what has come to be known as 'theonomy' or 'Christian reconstruction'. The movements to which these two terms refer are generally characterised by a belief that the Old Testament law is still normative for all societies and for all members of those societies. It is tempting to interpret Gentry's zeal for this idea as an over-reaction against his dispensationalist roots, but the rejection of one unbalanced system for another scarcely qualifies as an improvement.

The problem with a book such as this is that it deals with issues to which there are no easy answers in a way which implies that the answers are virtually self-evident. In a world beset by moral relativism, there is a great temptation to look for such easy answers to the problems we face, but Gentry's brevity raises far more questions than it solves. For example, if the law is still applicable in the all-embracing way that is argued for here, one must face countless problems of interpretation in making laws for ancient Israel relevant to issues raised by today's world. Gentry is aware of this, and hedges his argument with phrases which claim that the Law is to be applied 'taking into account the full significance, purpose, and situation of the original intent of the various laws individually considered'. Exactly what this means is not made clear, and yet, if one is a sabbath-breaker, homosexual, or even an insolent child, the need for precise criteria in this matter could mean the difference between life and death (or at least the difference between ways of execution!). Other theonomists have worked in detail on these problematic issues, but Gentry's over-simplification of the subject could well prove dangerous in the wrong hands.

At times, Gentry's argument bears a striking resemblance to classic prosperity-doctrine. In the conclusion to the book he makes the following statement:

Christianity has given birth to the greatest possible prosperity, stability and liberty known in history. To the extent that the Christian view is also the biblical view...we may expect God's objective blessings upon that people whose God is the Lord, as evidenced in their law code.

Such a passage presupposes a close formal identification of old and new covenants, an identification for which Gentry does not offer arguments of sufficient sophistication. It also points towards a crudely mechanistic, even legalistic, understanding of God's providence: despite claims to the contrary, Gentry's view of God seems to allow little scope for evangelical grace and mercy.

Gentry also passes over three other presuppositions of the theonomic system: paedobaptism, as everyone in society must be within the covenant and thus under covenant obligations; the Presbyterian concept of church-state link, as theology clearly functions as a potent political ideology; and postmillennial eschatology, as nobody can be so naïve as to think that a theonomic government will come to power in a liberal democracy without a voting majority who adhere firmly to Christianity. These issues, central to theonomy's plausibility, are scarcely touched upon, as is the same with all of the other prickly questions which the system raises.

All Christians must surely feel sympathy with Gentry's desire to see a world which honours God, but the fact remains that his particular vision is neither as simple as he makes it appear, nor consistent with the teaching of the one whose kingdom is not of this world. *God's Law* is a classic example of an attempt to bring important issues to the attention of a wide audience which results in oversimplification and paints a picture which is just too black and white. While theology should not be the preserve of an intellectual elite, there are some subjects which cannot be dealt with on a simple level. Theonomy's implications are too far-reaching, and, one may add, too sinister, for it to be reduced to the level of the 'sound bite'.

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Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work

Eugene H. Peterson

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, rp. 1992 (1980); 241pp., £7.95;
ISBN 085244 221 1

Working the Angles

Eugene H. Peterson

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, rp. 1991 (1987); 131pp., £6.95;
ISBN 08020 0265 6

The author is the Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, having served as the pastor of Christ our King Presbyterian Church, Bel Air, Maryland for twenty-nine years. Peterson's thought-provoking books are intended to call the attention of fellow pastors to the need to return to the 'old resources' of Bible, prayer and spiritual direction as the basis for all pastoral ministry. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* shows how five Old Testament books produce a solid foundation for much of what a pastor does under five headings: the pastoral work of prayer-directing: Song of Songs, of story-making: Ruth, of pain-sharing: Lamentations, of nay-saying: Ecclesiastes, and of community-building: Esther.

Peterson accepts Karl Barth's exegetical foundation for using the Song of Songs in pastoral work. In his exegesis of Genesis 2 he examines the

sexual nature of humanity, 'created male and female', and demonstrates that the human being is created in such a way that a covenantal relationship can be engaged and developed. Pastoral conversations, the author holds, involve a quest for intimacy. The language of sexual love in the Song is used to describe the dynamics of all who seek to experience the personal realities of living out whole, healthy and fulfilled relationships. Such intimacy is a difficult task, says Peterson, for a large percentage of persons who are in the care of a pastor are burdened with feelings of inadequacy and are without conscious self-worth. The best way for the pastor to reassure them is through prayer, that is to say the urgent, expectant prayer that requires the compelling quality of God's invitations and promises to be perpetuated in others.

In some ways, this first study was the most penetrating, although helpful insights are given in each of the other four. For example, Peterson uses the book of Ruth to remind the pastor in house-visitation of the need to be a companion to persons in pilgrimage, rather than a public-relations agent for the congregation. In the Lamentations study on pain-sharing the author helpfully differentiates between the catharsis experienced through modern psychological techniques and true spiritual healing. Ecclesiastes is used creatively to help the pastor deal decisively with people's false expectations. In the study on Esther, Peterson reminds American pastors, in particular, of the requirement to exercise pastoral work within the context of building communities. 'The American is a person without a community – part of a crowd, not of a group.'

In *Working the Angles*, Peterson calls the attention of his fellow pastors to three basic acts – prayer, reading the Scriptures and giving spiritual direction – that are so critical to the pastoral ministry, in that they determine the shape of everything else. Only by being attentive to these three acts, says Peterson, can pastors fulfil their prime responsibility of keeping the religious community attentive to God. The reviewer found this smaller paperback to be a much more incisive treatment of the pastoral task than the first book. The introduction is dynamite! For example, 'It doesn't take many years in this business to realise that we can conduct a fairly respectable pastoral ministry without giving much more than ceremonial attention to God.' Then this: 'I don't know of any other profession in which it is quite as easy to fake it as in ours.' He then expands that statement. Readers who are pastors will cringe! Peterson has, at times, a brilliant poetic turn of phrase. Of much pastoral praying, he says 'these so-called prayers are often cut-flowers words arranged in little vases for table decoration.' The most helpful chapter for this reviewer was the one in the general section on Scripture, entitled, 'Turning eyes into ears'. Much stimulating material, exegetical as well as applicatory, is given by Peterson to develop his main thesis that 'reading Scripture is not the same as listening to God'.

Eugene Peterson's style of writing is extremely ornate and poetic. After a time, the vague, almost mystical strain and lack of precision can

be frustrating and even irritating. He comes across as eccentric at times. Maybe all authentic theology should have an eccentric dimension, in as much as it should be penetratingly 'off centre' in the world's terms. For those readers prepared to put up with the idiosyncrasies and flowery euphemisms, there will be a rich reward in studying these books. Peterson has much to say to the modern pastor seeking to be faithful to Scripture and authentic in the face of human need.

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The Celtic Way

Ian Bradley

Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1993; 134pp., £7.45;
ISBN 0 232 52001 1

The question arose early in the reviewer's mind, 'Why review in an evangelical journal a book which is not especially confined to evangelical interest, and by an author who shows no apparent or particular evangelical sympathies?' Further consideration, however, convinced him that the book provides two very important spheres of interest, of just as much significance for the furtherance of Evangelicalism in the next century and millennium as for the Christian church at large. The first sphere is concerned with opening up the relatively unknown world of Celtic Christianity, which in turn prepares the way for the second, which is that if Christianity is to survive and advance in future ages, it must return to something of the Celtic way.

As we draw towards the end of the twentieth century, we find the Western institutional church, whatever its modern denominational guise, burning up much of its resources in merely trying to survive. At the same time, there is a 'new' brand of Christianity which is alive, well, in good heart and making headway, especially amongst young people. It sits loose to denominational structures and is not formally defined. It ranges from green theology to Spring Harvest. The establishment dare not dismiss it as sectarian or take Bishop Butler's attitude towards it as merely enthusiasm, which for him was 'a very horrid thing'. Its own survival may well depend on it; the key to the future of British Christianity could be more readily found in *its* lap. Yet this 'new Christianity' which resists being (over) institutionalised, is charismatic in zeal and holistic in outlook – just like the Celtic church of old!

Ian Bradley, a minister and lecturer at Aberdeen University, points to a revival of interest in Celtic Christianity in recent years. Indeed 'it is now very much the vogue', he maintains. Universities are encouraging Celtic studies, anthologies of Celtic poetry and prayers are regularly among the best sellers. Even more important, 'Experts in areas as diverse as pastoral care, spiritual guidance, green theology and missionary outreach are finding much to commend in the doctrines and practices of the early

Celtic church and are holding it up as a model to be followed by contemporary Christians.'

Having traced the immigration of the Celts across Europe from the Black Sea, driven by a wanderlust which was later to make Celtic Christians superb missionaries, he depicts them as a rural people who lived very close to nature with a very strong sense of the immanence of God, which made the transition to Christianity relatively smooth. Celtic religion was founded on a theology of creation. The Celtic Christians were great lovers of the Psalms. Their emphasis in the atonement was on *Christus Victor*. For them, God is always present to hand, and Christ their ever-willing protector. The well-loved St Patrick's Breastplate (to which Bradley devotes an entire chapter) gives expression to their faith at its best. But that religion was not the highly structured Christianity of the Western church to which it had to succumb at the Synod of Whitby in 664. It was a religion of the hermit, or the individual and his walk with God, centred on autonomous religious communities far less regulated than the communities of the later Roman order yet nonetheless cradles of scholarship and sanctity and bases for missionary endeavour. Celtic Christian culture was more akin to that of the Desert Fathers and modelled on the informal itinerant ministry of Christ and his disciples in the Gospels and Acts.

Now that the institutionalised church of St Augustine and his forty missionaries from Rome finds itself under grave threat and may well collapse in the next millennium, Bradley argues, it may well be that the Celtic way is the alternative 'way forward now for Christians in the so-called developed world, and that the third millennium will see a return to those localised and provisional communities which flourished in the first one, leaving the highly structured institutions and elaborate church buildings, with which we have been familiar for the last thousand years, looking increasingly like ecclesiastical dinosaurs.' Both of these symptoms are already to be found at the other end of the channel tunnel!

Peter Cook, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme

Reason and Reality

John Polkinghorne

SPCK, London, 1991; 119pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 281 04487 2

John Polkinghorne is President of Queen's College, Cambridge and was a Cambridge Professor of Mathematical Physics prior to being ordained as an Anglican priest. In this book he explores the relationship between science and theology. His thesis is that theology is to religious experience as scientific theory is to ordinary experience, that revelation in theology is akin to discovery in science: 'Both science and theology involve the acceptance of a broad interpretive framework which is neither impervious to experience nor vulnerable to ready falsification by it.'

Polkinghorne describes himself as a 'critical realist' who, in both science and theology, is involved in a 'search for increasing verisimilitude in our understanding of reality'. For him, understanding undergirds beliefs which lead to further understanding. Yet he believes that the scientific enterprise is easier to undertake than the theological, as it is limited (or should be) to concern with certain impersonal and largely repeatable phenomena. The most successful exploratory schemes in science are found in subjects with the least degree of complexity. He is critical of physicists such as Stephen Hawking who hope to discover a 'theory of everything' and to explain why the universe exists in terms of mathematics alone. He believes that there is more to the mind of God than the physicist can ever discover. The hubris of Hawking and his ilk belies the fact that theology is the attempt to reflect upon encounter with the divine, and not ungrounded speculation, suggests Polkinghorne.

From the point of view of evangelical theology the key issue here is the assertion that revelation, the account of that divine encounter, is to be compared with discovery in science. We must welcome Polkinghorne's defence of the rationality of the theological process and his affirmation of the debt owed to Christian thinking by modern scientific method. He recognises that, on the basis of a biblical worldview of an orderly and uniform creation, which is grounded in the being of a rational Person who had created freely so that empirical investigation was required, science must engage in an open-minded investigation of phenomena with, as far as is possible, no constraint from our prejudices and expectations.

What does Polkinghorne mean by 'revelation'? 'I do not mean a divinely guaranteed set of propositions, made available to us by their being written on tablets of stone, or whispered into the mental ear of the human writers of scripture... Religion depends upon those revelatory moments of divine disclosure which cannot be brought about by human will alone, but which come as a gracious gift.' For Polkinghorne, God has revealed himself through the life of the man Jesus Christ. 'The Word of God is not a proposition but a person. Its eternal utterance is not the foreclosing of rational inquiry but an invitation to personal encounter.' He does not deny that God could have revealed himself through propositions, but asserts that full personal knowledge must be open and involve taking the risk of encounter, which may include ambiguity.

How, then, does Polkinghorne view scientific discovery? Science is not an entirely objective, impersonal process which might well be conducted by a computer. He follows Michael Polanyi's account of science as involving 'personal knowledge'. 'By that he meant that tacit skills are called for which imply that the task could never be delegated to a computer, however cleverly programmed.' Yet he rejects the notion 'that the scientific world view is just a paradigm socially agreed by the scientific community'. In other words, science is done by persons who 'know more than they can tell' (Polanyi) and who bring to their observations ways of knowing which are not entirely explicable in terms

of empiricism. Scientists follow hunches and trends. They operate within a community which influences the choices they make about methods and whether to accept results if they are novel or contradictory.

How can we compare discovery to revelation? Is not discovery about 'I-it' rather than 'I-thou' (Buber)? Polkinghorne quotes with approval John Barton: 'the Biblical text mediates not information or opinion but encounter'. There seems to be a degree of confusion in Polkinghorne's thinking about the relationship between revelation and discovery, which he wants to present as analogous.

First, we must ask whether scientific discovery leads to the reporting (in journals and books) not of information or opinion but encounter. It may be that the flash of insight which constitutes the moment of discovery for the scientist cannot be explained purely in rational terms, but that insight must be tested and verified by experimentation. It must be presented to the scientific community for corroboration. Its effects must be repeatable. The critical realist believes that the scientist is indeed encountering aspects of reality in the setting-up and observation involved. But he or she brings to the experimentation prior commitments which involve information and opinions. Presuppositions are brought to bear on the study in question, and the results must be expressed in relation to them, in a way that is acceptable to the scientific community, who expect that claims to discovery will indeed be backed up by information and opinions. Without that, the idea of discovery is meaningless.

Secondly, Polkinghorne accepts Barton's notion of revelation uncritically. Nowhere does he attempt to demonstrate the validity of his assertion. In fact such a demonstration is impossible. For no philosopher of religion would deny the possibility that a Supreme Being could, having created humankind with the ability to communicate to each other by means of information and opinions, then inspire humans (without needing to use mechanical means) to pass on divine information and opinions which could not be gleaned otherwise. In addition, the biblical notion that mankind is made in the image of God strongly suggests that such a feat is not only possible, but probable.

Thirdly, Polkinghorne seems to confuse the doctrine of inspiration with what Calvin called the 'internal testimony of the Holy Spirit'. Calvin held that the words of Scripture were the result of a mysterious working of the Holy Spirit who guided the writers to communicate information and opinions from God to people, so that Paul could claim 'All Scripture is God-breathed' (2 Tim. 3:16), *i.e.* the origin of Scripture is in God's Spirit. But he also emphasised that the message of Scripture had to be impressed upon the mind and conscience of the believer so that the truth had effect in people's lives. In that sense the Bible had to *become* the Word of God – its truth had to be revealed existentially to the believer who had to make it his own. That phenomenon is much more like the idea of discovery which Polkinghorne has – the encounter with a given reality which initiates a response and an explanation.

The study of science and theology continues to develop, and this book is a useful introduction to the issues, given the criticisms outlined above. Here is an area where evangelical theology has much to contribute, as the work of T.F. Torrance demonstrates, but which requires a re-visioning in terms of biblical theology to counterbalance an over-emphasis on certain insights from the philosophy of science.

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The Lion Book of Christian Thought

Tony Lane

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Lion have made a wise move in re-issuing Tony Lane's most helpful guide to distinguished Christian thinkers over two millennia, first published in 1984. In a way, 'The Lion Book of Christian Thinkers' might have been a better title. Indeed, if just two more distinguished names could have been found, the title could have read 'A Hundred Best Thinkers!' There are no indictable omissions. All the great names of the patristic, medieval, Reformation and modern periods receive careful and sustained treatment. Several names appear which even graduates in theology may know only vaguely or not at all (Ephrem the Syrian, Simeon the New Theologian, Thomas Bradwardine and Philip Jakob Spener). In addition we encounter the key confessions and creeds from Nicaea to the Barmen Declaration. The list of theologians includes non-western contributions. In addition, a very useful background sketch precedes each major epoch of Christian thought.

In the areas familiar to this reviewer there is a very obvious accuracy and carefulness, an impression sustained throughout. Treatment of difficult ideas and writers is superbly clear and jargon-free. However in the handling of some theologians this is achieved by skirting more difficult concepts. The treatment of Karl Rahner, for instance, majors on the now famous 'anonymous Christianity' and avoids his more difficult Christological and Trinitarian writing. Similarly nine columns on Barth do not refer to his doctrine of the Trinity even though Barth saw the Trinity as the root of all Christian doctrine.

All the same, the packing of so much in such an accessible way into such a small space is a great achievement (and suggests the author would be useful to have around during a house-move!). A reading of the book (as opposed to simply using it for reference) would put any intelligent reader in possession of the main questions that have confronted Christian belief. It would be an excellent place to begin reading in Christian doctrine. The treatment throughout is strongly historical. Thus can reduce the precious space available for analysing a writer's thought and lead to imbalance of treatment, but it also has its advantages. It gives each account a human interest, relevance and attractiveness. To know, for

instance, that Schleiermacher came from a pietistic tradition explains a lot.

Although the general approach makes the book accessible, an index together with brief section bibliographies, would greatly increase its usefulness and harness the interest likely to be aroused. All in all, very good value for money, scholarly, very readable and highly commended. And watch out for some welcome humour, as for example on the condemnation of Pope Honorius as a heretic: 'This only goes to prove that if you want to be infallible you cannot be too careful about what you say.'

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