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## SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The scope of the *Bulletin* is broadly defined as theology, especially Scottish and Reformed, whether biblical, systematic-dogmatic, historical or practical, and Scottish church history. Articles submitted for publication should be sent to the Editor, books for review to Rutherford House (see below).

Contributors are free to express their own views within the broad parameters of historic evangelicalism. The opinions of contributors may not be assumed to be those of Rutherford House or the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.

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## EDITORIAL

In this editorial I wish to draw *SBET* readers' attention to two recent publications which have considerable significance for the life and witness of the church in our global context.

Firstly, Dr Christopher J. H. Wright, the International Director of Langham Partnership International, has published an important book entitled, *The Mission of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2006). In this substantial book, Wright challenges the notion that 'mission' or 'missions' is given a 'biblical basis' by a select number of isolated texts such as Matthew 28:16-20. Rather, he claims, 'Mission is what the Bible is all about; we could as meaningfully talk of the missional basis of the Bible as of the biblical basis of mission' (p. 29). Drawing on a qualified use of the established missiological phrase, *missio Dei*, Wright argues that the Bible is about God with a mission. That is, God has a distinct purpose and he has chosen to reveal himself and that purpose in the Bible. To limit our understanding of mission to the texts which speak of cross-cultural mission is to focus, he says, on what 'we do'. Once we see the Bible's 'grand narrative' as God with a mission, however, we can also see humanity with a mission, Israel with a mission, Jesus with a mission and the church with a mission (pp. 62-8). Thus a missional reading of the Bible does not do away with the need for cross-cultural mission; rather, these efforts are given greater significance as they are seen within the context of an overarching narrative of God's mission. We are called to participate in God's mission.

Devoting careful attention to this book may have the effect of broadening our concept of mission and thus highlighting the fact that all of the Lord's people are called to be involved in God's mission. Purchasing this book will have another positive benefit. All the royalties from the sale of this book have been assigned to Langham Literature, a ministry designed to provide books for students, pastors and teachers in the majority world. Thus, when you purchase this book, you are contributing to the task of providing more adequate resources for those who seek to preach God's word with only minimal library resources. This is a serious book and it is not an afternoon's read (581 pages), but it is written with clarity and should be accessible to most serious readers. It is well worth the effort.

The second publication is the *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi/Grand Rapids: Word Alive/Zondervan, 2005). This major publication represents the fruit of the work of the Langham Partnership International and others who have sought to foster biblical scholarship in the majority world. This one-volume commentary is distinctive in that it is written entirely by African scholars and reads the text ‘contextually’, that is with open recognition that the social context of the African scholars has a notable impact on the questions they ask the text and their interpretation of the text. The commentary is based on serious scholarship, but it is not an academic commentary and the comments fall somewhere along the continuum from exegesis to exposition, depending on the particular author. This book provides preachers and pastors in Africa with much-needed help in preaching and applying the Bible appropriately for their context.

Perhaps some *SBET* readers will ask, ‘Why should I be interested in this volume? I am not an African and I do not live or minister in Africa.’ Let me suggest two reasons why churches and individuals in the UK or the USA or other ‘Western’ nations should consider purchasing and reading this commentary. First of all, reading this commentary will help to remind us that we are part of a single worldwide church and that we have much to learn from each other. Seldom will a British preacher think that he has nothing to learn from an author simply because he or she is American. Why, then, would we adopt such an attitude with respect to African authors? We can expect to gain new insights into the meaning and significance of the text of Scripture by listening to African interpreters whom God has raised up to teach his church (not just the African bit!). Secondly, reading this book, and particularly some of the short thematic studies, will highlight some of the pressing issues which Christians in Africa face. Of course, some of these issues are similar to issues faced by Christians around the globe (though sometimes with distinctive nuances) but others are specific to the particular African countries out of which the authors write. The more we understand the challenges our brothers and sisters face, the more effectively we can pray for them.

Literature has the potential to open our minds and our hearts to issues and people and places we have never considered before. Let me encourage you to read these volumes and to dare to see what God will bring about in your life through them.

*In this number*

I am pleased to offer five articles for *SBET* readers to engage with in this issue.

The first article comes from Dr Geoff Grogan who has been a central figure in the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society for many years and who has been having a particularly productive ministry in writing in his 'retirement'. One of his projects has been a theological commentary on the Psalms and, while we await with anticipation its publication, we can benefit from Geoff's reflections on the task of writing a commentary. This will be useful, not only as an insight into the issues that motivated Geoff in his writing, but also as a means of reflecting on the task of commentary writing in general. It is a real pleasure to open this issue with a contribution by a fine scholar, a longtime friend of *SBET*, and a faithful servant of Jesus Christ and his church.

The second article builds nicely on the first by reflecting on the use of the Psalms in the opening chapters of Acts as a test case for the whole task of biblical theology. The author, Dr Jamie Grant of the Highland Theological College in Dingwall, draws on his research on the canonical shaping of the Psalms and also his strong interest in the fruitful resurgence of the discipline of biblical theology to provide a stimulating study which will aid reflection on the manner in which the early Christian community read the Psalms in particular and the Old Testament in general.

In the third article, David Gibson, a doctoral student at the University of Aberdeen, provides a careful exegetical study of the footwashing incident recorded in John 13 with a view to reconsidering the extent to which John seeks to present a theology of the death of Jesus.

The fourth article is also by a doctoral student, this time from the University of Edinburgh. William Schweitzer draws on his research on Jonathan Edwards in this lively paper which was originally presented to the Theological Society of the Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh. Schweitzer not only reflects on Edwards' challenge to the historical issue of Deism, but also suggests that there are aspects of the debate which demand attention in the twenty-first century church.

Finally, we have a biographical study of Claudius Buchanan by Dr John Ross, Minister of Greyfriars Free Church in Inverness, Scotland, and formerly General Secretary of Christian Witness to Israel. Ross highlights the significant role played by Buchanan in the development of modern Jewish missionary activity and agencies.

I hope that you will enjoy these essays and benefit richly from the work of our authors, to whom we are very grateful.

*Alistair I. Wilson*

# WRITING A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY: METHODOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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For nearly three years recently my main writing task, a demanding but immensely rewarding one, was the writing of a theological commentary on the Book of Psalms.<sup>1</sup> During this period I gave a lot of thought to the issues of methodology and hermeneutics involved in doing such a work and I am grateful to the editor for giving me the opportunity of sharing something of this with the readers of this journal.

## I. A SUCCESSION OF IMPORTANT TASKS

What is involved in constructing the theology of a Bible book? It is a many-sided task.

Basic, of course, is exegesis, in which there is a focus on the historical, cultural and religious context of the text and its first readers, and a multitude of linguistic issues.

Next comes a detailed survey of the book to find its main theme or themes. If there are several, it is important to identify their relationship, how less central themes relate to them and what gives the book its unity. In this way a theology of the book is constructed. In the case of the Psalter, we need to ask if this is affected by its multiple authorship.

Then there is the contribution it makes to biblical theology. Do its distinctive features serve to complement or supplement or even challenge what other books say? What contribution does it make to our understanding of Christ, the climax of the divine revelation?

A further task awaits us. Our interest in Scripture is neither purely historical nor purely academic. We are concerned with its relevance to the Christian life and to the church's witness in the world, so we need to consider the book's relevance to today's issues, including those that are

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<sup>1</sup> This is due to be published early in 2008 in the Eerdmans *Two Horizons* series.

theological, philosophical, ethical and pastoral. This task is never-ending and ever-changing, but it must be undertaken in a commentary intended to be of practical value in the church's work.

Is a theology of the Psalter really possible? At first sight, the difficulties may seem insuperable. Here is a body of literature, written over hundreds of years by various authors on many diverse themes, with considerable differences of mood and approach. Seybold shows that there is definite theological intention behind some psalms, instancing hymns like 8, 19, 33, 90, 104 and 136, Wisdom Psalms like 1, 49 and 73, historical psalms such as 78, 105, 106, 135 and 136.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, however, when considering the Book of Psalms comprehensively, he says that 'a theology of the Psalter would be a most confused affair'.<sup>3</sup> There are however two important considerations to bear in mind.

First of all, if a theology of the Psalter is either impossible or valueless, the same must be true of an Old Testament theology and by the same token a biblical theology, yet many such have been written. It is true that there has been much criticism of biblical theology as an enterprise, notably by James Barr. P. Balla explains and seeks to counter these criticisms, while accepting that the practitioners of the discipline can learn from its critics.<sup>4</sup> An important factor is the ever-increasing conviction of Old Testament scholars that the Psalter's present structure reveals clear theological intent, so that one mind or a group of minds working with common convictions is behind it. This approach to the Psalter shows no sign of abating, and it has important theological implications.

Even if one mind or a united group of minds is behind the Psalter as now structured, could there be thematic conflicts within the book? The analogy of scientific research has some lessons for us here. Apparent antinomies have not deterred scientists from seeking ways of demonstrating the ultimate harmony of the phenomena with which they deal, but have simply spurred them to greater endeavour.

If such disharmonies do exist, did the final redactor fail to see them or were they left unresolved quite deliberately? Unhappily, some biblical criticism seems to suggest that the biblical writers were not perceptive enough to notice what the modern scholar sees so clearly! Why not at least test out the possibility that the redactor knew what he was doing?

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<sup>2</sup> K. Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), pp. 152-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> P. Balla, 'Challenges to Biblical Theology' (*NDBT*), pp. 20-7.

If there was a deliberate motive behind such apparent conflict, what was it? Perhaps a reader going through the Psalter consecutively was meant to notice it and so to be provoked to deep thought before finding the book ultimately presenting a resolution. I think this approach best fits the facts, for it accounts for the location of certain important psalms.

If you read through Books 1 and 2 after meditating deeply on the two introductory psalms, you may well ask how such confident assertions about God's blessing on the righteous and his firm establishment of Zion's king can be reconciled with David's many afflictions and, in Book 2, those also of other godly people. Psalms 42 and 43, with their reiterated questions (42:5, 11; 43:5), open Book 2, but each time the questions are followed by the self-exhortation, 'Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.' The questions do not extinguish faith or hope.

As Book 2 closes, 72 strongly confirms the truth of both introductory psalms and then, at the start of Book 3, 73 addresses problems by indicating the eschatological perspective afforded by worship in God's house. In Book 3 problems re-emerge intensely, and 89, closing it, although confidently asserting Yahweh's covenant faithfulness, expresses great puzzlement at the apparent demise of David's dynasty. Then comes 90 at the start of Book 4, encouraging readers to take a Mosaic perspective: to remember that God's revealed purposes long preceded the Davidic covenant, that they are eternal; and getting them also to ponder the role of God's wrath against sin in recent events.

Psalm 106, closing Book 4, shows from history both the constant faithfulness of Yahweh and his people's endemic unfaithfulness. If this book found its place within the developing Psalter during the Exile, the reader would know that this story, with its dual themes, continued right up to that sad event. This psalmist confesses, 'We have sinned, even as our fathers did' (106:6), and the psalm concludes with a plea to the Lord to save them and gather them from the nations (106:47). At the start of Book 5, 107 gladly declares that this has now happened and gives praise to the Lord. Laments do not disappear altogether, especially in the final Davidic group (138-144), but they are greatly outnumbered by psalms of praise and the whole collection ends, very fitly, with a series of psalms that overflow with praise.

So then we can see that a psalm of resolution opens each book, dealing with issues raised in the preceding book. We might compare the Psalter with Job and Ecclesiastes. In each case, the main body of the book compels us to think deeply, but in each the end shows the chief tensions resolved so that we can discern its overall positive message. It may be



objected that Job is no parallel, because we are 'let into the secret' in the opening two chapters, but this also happens in the placing of Psalms 1 and 2 at the start of the Psalter.<sup>5</sup> In all three books faith is beset by problems and, despite them, refuses to give up.

A further objection to a theology of the psalms may be raised from their poetic nature. Poetry is by its very nature allusive, open to more than one interpretation. In fact, Max Turner identifies psalms, along with proverbs and wisdom-speech, as 'designed for all to use in different ways' and as 'interpreter-open'.<sup>6</sup> Certainly Christian believers, facing quite different situations, have often found a relevant message from God in the same psalms. In 77, for instance, the psalmist's trouble is never specified, but the way it is handled can provide a model for believers with all kinds of problems.

Yet there must be limits to this interpretative openness, as Jesus indicated when confronted with a distorted interpretation of 91:11, 12 (Matt. 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12). Satan's interpretation is ruled out, for the promise of protection is made to one who makes the Lord his dwelling (v. 9) and who loves God (v. 14). Moreover this psalm occurs within a Psalter that begins with 1, in which the righteous are commended and the wicked condemned.

If Psalms 1 and 2 are truly introductory, establishing major non-negotiables, then psalm interpretation must observe the moral limits imposed by 1 (for a promise abstracted from this moral context is bound to be null and void), and also the regal limits, both divine and human, set by 2. The moral nature of God and his faithfulness to the Davidic covenant promises may at times be difficult to reconcile with some experience of the psalmists, but these foundational truths cannot be abandoned and replaced by a different theology. Their assertions are vindicated before the book is finished.

What about the psalm superscriptions? After Brevard Childs, biblical theologians have normally engaged with the final form of the text, the form we have in our Bibles. Without doubt then these headings must be

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<sup>5</sup> Note also how the Servant Songs, which have an ever-deepening note of suffering, commence by affirming God's delight in his servant (Isa. 42:1), with his vindication promised not only at the end of the fourth Song (Isa. 53:12) but also at its beginning (Isa. 52:13-15)

<sup>6</sup> M. Turner, 'Scripture and Theology', in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 56.

included. If they are interpretative, they should be taken seriously within a theology of the psalms.

It is ideas that we are looking for, ideas expressed in words, but never to be confined to what may be found through a concordance. After the fashion of James Barr, whose work on semantics so strongly emphasised this,<sup>7</sup> Robert Davidson reminds us that 'theology can never be cribbed or confined within one set of words', and he illustrates this from the similarity of structure, experience and theology (trusting in God's faithful love) between 56 and 57, despite the fact that, of the two, 56 alone speaks of trust and 57 alone of God's faithful love.<sup>8</sup>

The theology of the Psalter is not, for Christians, theologically complete. Some psalms raise questions rather than give answers, sometimes not answered in the whole Psalter, nor even in the whole Old Testament, but, as we shall see, only in Christ. It is a true theology, but not final.

The nature of biblical theology has been long debated, and this debate has many facets. How does biblical theology relate to exegesis? What grounds are there for confining it to a particular canonical list of books? How does it relate to Old and New Testament theology? Is it by nature an historical or a normative discipline? If historical, how does it differ from a history of Israel's religion? If normative, how does it differ from systematic theology?

Many of these questions are not in fact new. For instance, when S. Pickard calls for theologians humbly to seek general truths from patient exegesis, he does so in a comment on John Locke's contention that there should be straightforward focus on biblical exegesis rather than on systematic theology. Pickard is really arguing for good biblical theology.<sup>9</sup>

These questions cannot here be addressed as they deserve to be. Helpful discussions may be found in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.<sup>10</sup> The teaching faculty of Moore College, Australia, has laid special

<sup>7</sup> J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>8</sup> R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: a Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1998), p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> S. Pickard, "'Unable to see the Wood for the Trees", John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology', in Pfitzner and Regan (eds), *The Task of Theology Today: Doctrines and Dogma* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 105-37.

<sup>10</sup> *NDBT*, especially Part 1, 3-112; see also R. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method and Message* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), pp. 15-93.

emphasis on biblical theology. Graeme Goldsworthy, for instance, has written a number of simple and non-technical but by no means simplistic books, such as *Gospel and Kingdom* and *According to Plan*, the latter intended as an introduction to biblical theology.<sup>11</sup>

Dealing with the text's final form does not mean historical and other issues are unimportant, but it does recognise biblical theology as a task of *Christian* scholarship. It is the final biblical text which meets Christians with divine authority in every age of the church.

The principle promoted by Childs has proved germinal, stimulating other scholars. C. Seitz, for instance, remarks that 'a fresh intellectual horizon for Old Testament studies is the rediscovery of the complex network of intertextuality that binds all texts together, not only in their canonical shape in the Old Testament, but more especially as this intertextuality is taken up and filled to fullest capacity in the New'.<sup>12</sup>

This is certainly true, is heartening, and is already showing valuable results, as Seitz's own book demonstrates. Although his book is about Deuteronomy, he comments also on the relationship between the Psalter and so-called 'Deutero-Isaiah'. He questions Westermann's view that in Isaiah 55:3 the dominion promised in the covenant between God and David is transferred from the king to the people.<sup>13</sup> He says, 'One must seriously ask whether such an answer, bold or surprising, would ever be a satisfactory answer to the lament of Psalm 89'.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible writers operate with presuppositions. We allow for this in the New Testament, assuming a background of Old Testament theology, but it must also be true of the Psalter. When for instance the Exodus is mentioned, the psalmist will know more details than appear in his text. So Turner argues that 'it is engagement between the writer's utterance and the implied presuppositional pool that establishes the determinate... authorial discourse meaning, otherwise called "communicative intention"'.<sup>15</sup> So

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<sup>11</sup> See G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) and *According to Plan* (Leicester: IVP, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> C. R. Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars interpret 148:14 in harmony with this understanding of Isaiah 55.

<sup>14</sup> Seitz, *Word without End*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>15</sup> M. Turner, 'Scripture and Theology', p. 49. See also S. E. Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture', in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons*, pp. 71-87, who follows Mark Brett.

then, semantics plus context plus presuppositions determines meaning. We will therefore at times need to ask questions about these assumptions.

Suppose we sometimes find the theology of the psalms difficult to reconcile with other aspects of Old Testament and of biblical theology? We must be completely faithful to the meaning of the text, not trying to effect reconciliation by artificially contrived interpretation, but we will ask if the apparent antinomies are complementary rather than contradictory. If so, this will give us a nuanced interpretation with much potential for enriched understanding and praxis. John Goldingay's monograph on Old Testament theological diversity is of value in this respect.<sup>16</sup> We have already suggested this approach to the apparent antinomies within the Book of Psalms itself.

In seeking for a common mind both in the Psalter and in the whole Bible we are in line with the historic convictions of the Christian church, as well as those of the Jewish synagogue, in believing the ultimate author of all Scriptures to be the Spirit of God and that it is not just human minds we encounter there but his.

We must now consider systematic theology. This expounds and justifies the beliefs of the Christian church or a section of it, and normally involves engaging with wider contemporary concerns. So, although its main convictions will be unaltered from one generation to another, their expression will reflect something of the changing intellectual environment. If a systematic theology expresses the beliefs of a section of the church, this will mean facing challenges posed by the differing doctrinal positions of others. Inevitably too, systematic theology will engage with the philosophical concerns of the day. Here it will face both opportunities and dangers, for dialogue may produce confrontation or compromise or else a mixture of the two. Inevitably, through its engagement with philosophers and others who hold positions which deny its beliefs, systematic theology will pass over into apologetics, the defence of the faith.

Most systematic theologians seek to demonstrate the biblical basis of the beliefs they expound. The Psalter's importance for this task is considerable, for it touches so many theological topics. Here is a wealth of material about God, about human beings, about the godly community, about the purposes of God for his people and his wider purposes in the world, and so on, all concerns of systematic theology.

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<sup>16</sup> J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

Can we stop there? No, for Christian doctrine is truth for living. Stephen Motyer has well asked,

What role in biblical theology do our contemporary interests play? We wrestle with issues of power and powerlessness, poverty and injustice, wealth and paternalism, and questions of gender, race and culture, religious and ideological pluralism, sexual morality, globalism, consumerism, individualism – to name but a few! These are all issues not specifically (or only tangentially) addressed by the biblical “history” of salvation in the Bible.

He asks whether theology can help us with such issues.<sup>17</sup> It must or else it will risk losing all credibility. It is remarkable how many of these issues are touched on in the psalms.

Inevitably then our treatment of the psalms needs to be very broad, taking in not only systematics but such related studies as Christian ethics and *pastoralia*, both founded on it, just as applied science and technology are founded on pure science. Christian ethics and *pastoralia* bear witness to the fact that Christian theology is for real people faced daily with real decisions about how to live their lives in a real world.

## 2. SOME SEARCHING QUESTIONS

We will consider first of all the relationship of theology to other disciplines.

We have already identified exegesis and systematic theology as major scholarly disciplines bearing on the Christian church’s theological task, the one concerned with the biblical documents in their original setting and the other with those same documents in the setting of today’s church and world. Does this mean we may still recognise the distinction between what the text meant and what it means? This has been widely questioned by philosophers of language. Certainly there are real difficulties in this distinction, but we cannot dispense with it entirely. The worlds of the Old Testament and of today are obviously very different, just as biblical Israel and the Christian church today are two different religious societies, even though in both cases the later emerged out of the earlier and still bears some marks of that emergence. Deeper questions put by philosophers of language, especially those posed by Deconstruction, will be considered later.

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<sup>17</sup> S. Motyer, ‘Two Testaments, One Biblical Theology’, in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons*, p. 153.

Many different disciplines have been employed by scholars to aid their elucidation of Scripture's meaning. If however the Bible is hermeneutically self-sufficient so that it contains everything needed for its own interpretation, and if we accept the Reformation principle that, following the Holy Spirit's own method of giving us knowledge of God, Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, how can any other studies be permissible, let alone valuable or even essential, in its exegesis and exposition?<sup>18</sup>

It is abundantly clear that one subject cannot be ignored, and that is linguistics. The Bible comes to us in words, and words in their contexts have meanings. An intimate knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is obviously of real value in the study of Scripture, for the Bible's inspiration applies specifically to its original documents, written in Hebrew (with Aramaic) and Greek.

We must then ask questions about the text, bringing into play principles of textual criticism, for the Bible's importance means we should try to secure as pure a text as possible. Textual scholars tend to be in wide although not always total agreement on the principles to be employed in deciding between variant readings.

The Bible is ancient literature, so literary and historical studies play their part, raising questions about the approach to literature and historical writing at the time the Bible was written. Then there are also studies like anthropology and the history of religions, plus such matters as approaches to science.

If we accept the inspiration of Scripture and regard it as literature with divine authority, how legitimate are such studies? We need to do some clear thinking here.

Without doubt all studies affecting exegesis are important and in some cases, such as language and textual study, essential, but biblical scholars need to examine their own presuppositions and those of other scholars carefully. For instance, historical comments sometimes assume that miracles do not happen or that they are to be viewed as subjective impressions rather than objective facts.

Interpreting literature raises epistemological issues and also questions about worldviews, and here we need special care, for Scripture has its own

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<sup>18</sup> See A. N. S. Lane, 'Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan', in P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright (eds), *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 297-327. See also G. W. Grogan, 'Is the Bible Hermeneutically Self-sufficient?' in A. N. S. Lane (ed.), *Interpreting the Bible: Historical and Theological Studies in Honour of David Wright* (Leicester: IVP, 1997), pp. 205-21.

worldview. A scholar holding a high doctrine of Scripture will seek to operate with the biblical worldview and this will inform his or her approach to the various disciplines employed. The importance of so doing can hardly be exaggerated. We also remember, of course, that all truth is God's truth,<sup>19</sup> and that the world of nature is often employed in Scripture to illustrate that special realm of grace that meets us in Christ.

Systematic theologies from different cultures and various periods of Christian history will have some relatively fixed elements, reflecting the wide measure of agreement between official church statements of doctrine, and also some that are peculiar to each. Credal statements like the Apostles' Creed and the Westminster Confession of Faith are historically conditioned yet are widely recognised as valid expressions of Christian truth. On the other hand, there are issues peculiar to particular Christian groups and these too need to be addressed.

We have noted that various disciplines are employed in exegesis. This is also true in systematic theology. Even Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*, which is biblical rather than systematic theology, is replete with footnotes relating it to many other modern disciplines, especially linguistic philosophy and the social sciences.<sup>20</sup> In systematic theology, the theologian engages with these disciplines not so much in connection with the meaning of the text at the time of its writing, but rather with its significance for us today.

A student once delighted me by saying a very simple thing: 'everything's theology'. She had grasped a fundamental truth: theology touches every aspect of life. This is certainly true of the theology to be found in the Psalter, which is related to the extremely varied experiences of the psalmists.

The task we are discussing here, although valuable and fascinating, is not easy. Mays, writing of the language-world of the psalms, stresses the way their language clashes with our thinking today. He says, 'It is traditional, not contemporary. It works with poetry and metaphor instead of science and technique. It unites rather than compartmentalizes. It sees the world as a project in creation rather than a problem of physics. It centers on a sovereign god [sic] instead of a sovereign self.' He goes on to say that we should view this dissonance not simply as a problem but as

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<sup>19</sup> See A. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

confronting us with the language of faith.<sup>21</sup> It is important for us to see it this way if the psalms are to perform for us their divinely-given purpose as Holy Scripture, God's word for living.

*Questions about subjectivity and biblical authority*

A biblical commentary is concerned with understanding the text. This raises important questions about the interpreter if the work is not just a free meditation but a serious exercise in understanding and explanation and also in application. To what extent is the commentator – any commentator – likely to be objective? Can any make a credible claim to objectivity?

This is particularly important if this is the word of God meeting the reader as authoritative for her or his life. The psalms are quoted as God's word in the New Testament and recent biblical research has identified the Psalter as a book with an overall message. Many scholars reckon those responsible for its final structure saw it not only as a book to be used for praise but also as Scripture for study, meditation and practical implementation. Psalms of the *Torah*, like 1, 19 and 119 emphasise written instruction. A further feature is the way the psalmists, faced with problems, find assurance by reflecting on great past acts of God, themselves recorded in written form.

But is it right to base so much on what is written? This kind of question faces the Bible reader who is aware of wider currents of thought, and it has done so more and more acutely over a period of two hundred years or so.

The influence of philosophy on theology has been profound ever since biblical truth entered the non-Judaic world, especially the world of Greek philosophy. At Alexandria for instance Philo and other Jewish thinkers sought to demonstrate that Moses and Plato spoke with one voice, the latter copying the former. Then came the evangelistic thrust among thinking Greeks which took place in the early Christian centuries.

Many changes in Christian theology over the years have reflected changes in the prevailing philosophy. This is very marked in nineteenth-century theology, which went through a number of phases as it came to be influenced successively by Romanticism, Hegelianism, Kantianism<sup>22</sup> and Evolutionary philosophy. The twentieth century has seen it influenced chiefly by Existentialism, Marxism and various forms of the philosophy

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<sup>21</sup> J. L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Although Kant's dates are earlier than Hegel's, his main influence on theology was later.



of language. The peak of existentialist influence has passed, but the other two still confront us. We will look first of all at the philosophy of language.

Descartes divided reality into the mind and the external world, and the Enlightenment promoted the importance of rational thinking. Kant, however, argued that there are severe limits to what reason can establish. He distinguished between *phenomena* and *noumena*, that is between things in the external world as they appear to be and as they actually are. He argued that we cannot gain noumenal certainty from *phenomena*, or, to put it another way, that reason cannot establish metaphysical conclusions by sense-perception. Kant's influence has been enormous, and since his day problems in epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge, have largely dominated philosophical discussion.

Kant's general outlook began to affect theology when theological judgements came to be treated as similar to metaphysical ones. So for instance the influential Ritschlian school in the latter part of the nineteenth century declared that we can discover what value the early Christians placed upon Jesus Christ, but we cannot say whether or not they were right in so doing, as this would be to make metaphysical judgements.

Of course, the classic Christian theological position would seriously question making theological judgements a mere subset of metaphysical ones. Theological judgements are not speculative, at least in intent, but grounded on divine revelation accepted as authoritative. The Ritschlians, by taking the contrary position, surrendered the possibility of any theological certainty.

During the twentieth century there was a major development of interest in the philosophy of language. This is because our thinking, whether about the external world or about ourselves, tends to be carried on by the use of words. Philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Russell and Ayer examined the relationship between the world we encounter and the words we use to describe it. They had mathematical and scientific interests as well. It is not surprising then, that Ayer argued that the only statements that make any sense are tautologies, like the equations of mathematics, or that are, at least in principle, scientifically verifiable. So then, according to his philosophy, not only are theologians banned from making affirmations about a reality behind the world of phenomena, but such affirmations do not even make sense!

The theologian might feel that under such 'persecution' it would be best to retreat to the biblical text. Here, at any rate, there might be something objective to study. Even here however theologians found

themselves under attack from later developments in the philosophy of language, especially from deconstruction.

The period since the Second World War has seen the emergence of the varied approaches of structuralism, transformational grammar, reader-response criticism, speech-act theory, and deconstruction. The relationship between the author, the text and the reader is of concern in all these approaches, with the focus particularly on the part played by a person's mind in reading books and listening to speech. In their turn these approaches raise issues in psychology and sociology, and, in some cases, psychiatry and biology. Even general literary and historical studies raise questions as to the relationship between a text and its interpreters.<sup>23</sup> The relevance of such movements of thought to understanding Scripture is obvious.

The structuralists and proponents of transformational grammar are interested in the deep structures of human communication, the psychological patterns common to all human thinking and communication, while reader-response criticism is concerned with the fact that a person's understanding of literature tells us as much about the person concerned as about the literature itself. Speech-act theory views speech as a form of action and considers what it is that the text is designed to do, whether this be to inform, to indoctrinate, to challenge, to infuriate, and so on. Some of these approaches can be of value to biblical interpreters; for instance in making them aware of the subjective factor in their own reading.<sup>24</sup>

Derrida's post-modern philosophy of language, known as Deconstruction, however, goes much further. It is the view that a text is anything but a stable reality as we confront it in our external world. There is no objective meaning in either speech or literature but rather a multiplicity of meanings reflecting the multiplicity of hearers or readers. All who read a book, for instance, bring to it different minds, different

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<sup>23</sup> For general introductions to the modern philosophy of language as it affects biblical studies and theology, see A. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) and *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); K. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998) and F. Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> A study by R. J. Berry (ed.), *Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), provides a reader-response approach.

experiences, different prejudices, so that no two readers will find in it precisely the same message. It is pointless asking what is the author's intention in writing, and he or she has no control over the text once it has gone out into the world of readers. The text sets sail on uncharted seas without either compass or the possibility of putting down an anchor. For this reason, we can never say, 'the text means this and it does not mean that'. If Deconstruction is right, there can be no authoritative literature, for everything depends on the reader's interpretation, not the writer's intention.

It goes without saying that the issue raised here is of great importance for it questions not only the objectivity of the contemporary theologian but that of the biblical writers themselves. If there can be no objective meaning in literature, there can be no path leading from the biblical text to theological certainty.

This deeply sceptical outlook must of course affect not only religion but law. It is a basic presupposition of law that a legal text should be understood in the sense intended by its formulators and that those in society who are subject to it may be brought to book for transgressing it. Not only so, but if no communication, either written or spoken, can have objective meaning this surely means the end of all rational communication in words and even ultimately the end of human civilisation as we know it.

Biblical assurance contrasts very strongly with the uncertainty which has dominated modern philosophy for so long, and which seems to have reached its nadir in Deconstruction. What should be our reaction to its challenge, in relation to the biblical literature in general and the Book of Psalms in particular?

Some writers advocate extreme subjectivism. A. M. Cooper, for instance, says, 'The meaning of the psalm is nothing more or less than the way we, as readers, appropriate the text and *make* it meaningful' (emphasis his).<sup>25</sup> There is little wrong with this if a psalm is simply a poem, but if it is also the word of God we would expect it to have objective meaning which we need to hear and respond to.

C. H. Bullock takes a completely different point of view when he says, 'Because there are so many human paths down which we may walk as we read the Psalms, the temptation is to assume that we can make our own paths and thus require the Psalms to authorise our ways. But the Psalms cannot mean all things to all people, despite their assorted thoughts and

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<sup>25</sup> A. M. Cooper, 'The Life and Times of King David According to the Book of Psalms' in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *The Poet and Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism*, Harvard Semitic Studies 26, (Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 1983), p. 131.

emotions. The historical element remains the control.<sup>26</sup> His last statement runs counter to the deconstructionist outlook.

These comments are all the more interesting in view of the fact that Bullock himself, in a fascinating chapter, seeks to read the psalms successively through the experience of the psalmists themselves, of the editors, the readers, the apostles, the literary critics and finally students.<sup>27</sup> Even this may not be completely exhaustive, for there may well have been several editors at different stages and we can detect particular groups of psalms, such as the Songs of Ascents, which were presumably put together by somebody for a special purpose at some stage. To see the relevance of literature from the past to my present situation is however quite different from giving that literature a meaning foreign to the author's intention.

This philosophy's total scepticism needs to be resisted at least at the historical level. A Bible book often makes reference, for example, to people and events from a past time. Even if we do not accept the way the past is being interpreted (or the way we interpret how it was interpreted!), we cannot treat the book as a modern product. Even this deep level of scepticism must surely recognise a difference between the past and the present. As Vanhoozer says, 'Meaning is historical. What one does with language depends on the particular language, the state of that language, and the linguistic and literary resources one has at a given time and place.'<sup>28</sup> Knapp and Michaels, in incisive criticism of Derrida and those who think like him, argue that meaning and the author's intention are not simply related but identical.<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult too to avoid noting the theological and moral nature of the biblical writings. This feature shows up sometimes even in narrative, for instance when we encounter 2 Kings 17 in reading the Books of Kings. Can we really justify a use of this literature which runs counter to the theological and moral intention of the writer? Of course, we may feel free to do so, but it would be unethical for us to say that our way of handling the text is in any sense proper interpretation. As Vanhoozer says,

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<sup>26</sup> C. H. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001, ), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-56.

<sup>28</sup> K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 234.

<sup>29</sup> See S. Knapp and W. B. Michaels, 'Against Theory', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 11-30; S. Knapp and W. B. Michaels, 'Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction', in *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1987-1988), pp. 49-68.

'Hermeneutic non-realism, for which meaning is made rather than discovered, is unethical; non-realist interpretation may provide interesting reading, but it is ultimately unreliable as testimony, for it cannot point to what is other than itself.'<sup>30</sup> So then exegesis has not only its proper sphere but also its proper discipline, for its task is limited to seeking and explaining the meaning of the text.

If the Psalter is the word of God, we must go on to apply it to the people of our contemporary world, but we must be sensitive to both horizons (to use Thiselton's word), both the horizon of the psalmists and our own. This is particularly important in preaching if we are to communicate the eternal word to the people of our place and time. In this interaction between two horizons, however, the two are not equal, for it is the Bible that acts as the authority. There must therefore be some positive relationship between our contemporary application and the meaning of the text. Not only so, but the contemporary interpreter needs to be able to demonstrate that relationship or be convicted of unethical misuse of the text.

Yet despite what has been said, the Bible reader believing in Scripture's authority can learn a positive lesson from Deconstruction. We cannot claim absolute objectivity, still less final authority, for our own reading of the biblical text. We need to come to the text with due humility and in a spirit of willingness for self-criticism. If others view the meaning of the text differently, we must at least give them the opportunity of telling us how they understand it and be prepared to learn from them.

By a strange turn in the history of ideas, there are some ways in which the gulf between the world of the psalms and post-modernity is not as great as that between post-modernity and modernity. The modern thinker is confident in the interpretative and ordering abilities of human reason, while the post-modern strongly questions this. The psalms are full of questions and psalmists sometimes say, in effect, about the world of their own experience, 'It does not make sense!'

Yet on the crucially important issue of the objectivity of divine revelation the psalms diverge sharply from post-modernity.<sup>31</sup> Many psalms that ask questions also contain expressions of confidence in God's ultimate control. The post-modern has no certainties to fall back on. She or he may

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<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 440.

<sup>31</sup> For a description of post-modernity, see P. Sampson, V. Samuel, C. Sugden (eds), *Faith and Modernity* (Oxford: Regnum Books/Lynx Communications, 1994), several chapters in which indicate points of continuity and discontinuity between modernism and post-modernism.

be interested in 'spirituality', but is there any way of evaluating the various spiritualities available in the religious supermarket? For the psalmists there is a clear distinction between the truth of Yahweh's revelation and the untruth of paganism and its associated idolatry.

Not only so, but the post-modern knows no metanarrative, no 'big story' within which his or her own little story finds its place, while for the psalmists there is the great story of God's historical dealings with his people forming the context for their individual stories. It is what God has revealed through this story that saves bewilderment from becoming despair.

The works of Anthony Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer are particularly valuable in addressing issues raised by the philosophers of language.<sup>32</sup>

Another question arises: if in any discipline the scholar's mind brings organizing principles to the subject matter, can the resulting system have any objective value? To what extent does the theologian's already formed outlook affect his or her interpretation of Scripture? It was a merit of Cornelius Van Til that he raised the general presuppositional issue very strongly, even if there may be some dispute concerning his approach to some particular issues.<sup>33</sup> Such questions even concern Bible translation. R. L. Thomas, in an appendix to his book, *How to Choose a Bible Version*,<sup>34</sup> argues that theological bias is bound to come into play if a translator chooses dynamic equivalence over verbal equivalence as his or her translation method. In all this, the interpreter faced with Scripture, just like the scientist contemplating the natural world, should be concerned humbly to seek its internal logic and then to display this.

The hermeneutics of suspicion is very much in vogue. At the popular level, many people regularly apply it to politicians, advertisers, journalists, in fact to any they suspect of having a hidden agenda behind their assertions. Some newspapers specialise in applying it to the pronouncements of the government of the day, while some of their readers apply it to those papers themselves! Taken to extremes, it can lead to a totally cynical view of society.

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<sup>32</sup> A. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons and New Horizons in Hermeneutics*; K. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*

<sup>33</sup> Both aspects may be found in his small monograph, *The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel* (London: Tyndale, 1950). See also G. L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> R. L. Thomas, *How to Choose a Bible Version: Making sense of the proliferation of Bible translations* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), pp. 163-91.

The philosophical form of such scepticism has its modern roots in Marx and Freud amongst others.<sup>35</sup> These two came at the idea from different angles. Marxists with their class-war outlook maintain that stories like those of Dickens, apparently showing real social concern, actually promote the interests of the wealthier classes because they solve problems of poverty not by radical social change but by largesse. So the rich retain their wealth and power and add to it self-congratulation. Marx held too that the motive of supporting the ruling classes is a major one in religion and so in religious literature. Julia Kristeva sought to show that this happens at the intertextual level too, so that a text is appropriated by another writer to serve his or her personal agendas, often, she thought, a male dominance agenda. Freud saw hidden agendas as often hidden even from the writers and speakers themselves and as arising from the Unconscious, where unacceptable feelings, largely sexual, are repressed.

There is some value in this approach too for biblical interpreters. We may have hidden agendas ourselves, probably hoping to find our own theology in the text. Perhaps there are darling ideas or projects we want to pursue and promote and which we hope Holy Scripture will sanction. C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape* wanted Wormwood, in tempting his Christian 'patient', to get him to view Christianity as valuable simply for providing good arguments for patriotism or pacifism.<sup>36</sup>

It is possible too to misuse the Bible's theological terms. A glance at the contents page of *The Christian Faith* by Schleiermacher<sup>37</sup> may suggest it is traditional Christian theology, while reading it discloses that it is a kind of theological Romanticism employing biblical terms. Even while we criticise him, we must remember that we too are not only fallible humans but sinners to boot. Remembering both facts when reading the Bible is salutary and in fact aligns us with the outlook of the great Reformers.

Self-criticism is important because we often do not realise we are bringing agendas to the text. John Goldingay rightly says that sometimes the use of scriptural terms by theologians 'may obscure the fact that their framework of thinking is that of another culture'.<sup>38</sup> It may in fact obscure it even from themselves.

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<sup>35</sup> The phrase 'masters of suspicion' was coined by Paul Ricoeur, who applied it to Freud, Marx and Nietzsche in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 32-6.

<sup>36</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), pp. 39-43.

<sup>37</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, (ET, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928).

<sup>38</sup> J. Goldingay, 'Biblical Narrative and Systematic Theology', in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons*, p. 128.

It is naive to think we can approach the Bible without theological presuppositions. Let me say, quite frankly, that I approach biblical theology as a conservative evangelical. As a theological conservative, I regard Scripture as divinely authoritative and so the right approach to it to be a humble one, the outlook of one desiring to be taught, and moreover to be taught by God through the text itself. I am not only conservative, but a conservative evangelical, which means I seek to interpret the Old Testament in terms of the New Testament gospel, because it seems to me that this is the way the New Testament itself operates. So then my conservatism means respect for the Old Testament material, which must be understood first of all in terms of its Old Testament context, and my evangelicalism means respect for the New Testament's understanding of it.

I would not, of course, maintain that only conservative evangelicals can or do take the text of Scripture with due seriousness. This would be to espouse an extremely arrogant position. My own stance, however, does mean that, whatever may be true of others, I am forced, *by my own theological outlook*, to treat the Book of Psalms, both in its Old Testament and in its full biblical setting, very seriously.

This is of course no absolute guarantee of objectivity, for there can be no such guarantee in any approach to literature, but it does at least mean that my presuppositions require me to seek objectivity and to do so self-critically. It is occasionally alleged that the trouble with conservative evangelicals is not that they are too biblical but that they are not biblical enough! We need to prove this wrong by good theological practice.

What about the Scriptures themselves? Do their writers also have hidden agendas? Are they in fact, whether knowingly or unknowingly, promoting the interests of the ruling classes? Some authors think this true at least about some aspects of Old Testament teaching. We need, however, to ask what presuppositions these writers themselves bring to the biblical literature when they so understand it. For example, there are Marxist presuppositions in Norman Gottwald's influential study *The Tribes of Yahweh*<sup>39</sup> and they have clearly affected the thought of Walter Brueggemann, a major contemporary interpreter of the Book of Psalms. Commenting approvingly on Gottwald's standpoint, he says that 'as issues of power, interest and ideology are operative in the text, so they are also operative in interpretive work. That is, various readings of the text are also informed and driven by the class location of the reader. What emerges... is

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<sup>39</sup> N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979).



that as there are no innocent texts, so there are no innocent readers.<sup>40</sup> If this is so, of course, we may legitimately ask if this is also true of readers such as Gottwald and Brueggemann.

Marxism emerged out of Hegelian thought, and Brueggemann's classification of psalms as those of orientation, disorientation and reorientation, very useful in some ways, sounds distinctly Hegelian.<sup>41</sup> It gets nearer Marxism if the orientation is seen to be related to a social establishment. Brueggemann sees a significant aspect of the importance of the psalms of disorientation because they express dissatisfaction with the prevailing social order.<sup>42</sup>

Other groups not strictly, or at least not necessarily, social classes have felt at times to be disadvantaged, such as racial groups and women. Some feminist interpreters of Scripture, for instance, see hidden agendas behind the writings of some of the biblical authors whom they see as chauvinists seeking to maintain male dominance in society.

Space does not permit detailed consideration of such allegations, but a point made by Oliver O'Donovan is highly relevant. He remarks that almost the whole vocabulary of salvation in the New Testament has a political pre-history. He refers to salvation, justification, peace, faithfulness, faith and, above all, the Kingdom of God,<sup>43</sup> and he points out that these came into the New Testament from the Old. Undoubtedly this kind of language is very much part of the Book of Psalms.

Of course much of the language of religion and of theology is based on analogy. This might seem to foster the hermeneutics of suspicion still more, until we recall that the Old Testament and the Psalter present God's rule as not only authoritative but benevolent, with a great concern for the oppressed. O'Donovan says, 'That Yahweh, as king, exercises royal judgement in the causes of individual worshippers who call upon him is the very heart of the personal soteriology of the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 9:4).'<sup>44</sup>

Not only so, but Christian theology must never forget that this divine revelation comes to its ultimate manifestation in Christ. N. T. Wright

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<sup>40</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> This classification provides the main structure for his book, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> W. Brueggemann, *O T Theology, Essays*, pp. 1-21.

<sup>43</sup> O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

points out that the Christian story, the Christian metanarrative, as Paul tells it, is like no other, for it is about a death and resurrection effecting release from power-enslavement.<sup>45</sup> 'We need a powerful Figure to save us; a compassionate Figure to will our salvation. In Christ the supreme Authority Figure suffers and dies out of profound love and grace, in so doing securing his rule over hitherto rebellious sinners. If the alternatives really are a hermeneutics of suspicion or of assent, then assent too must be given its opportunity, and knowing such deep, costly love from such an authority Figure is a powerful means of moving the will to assent.'<sup>46</sup>

### 3. A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION

Deconstruction and the hermeneutics of suspicion, taken together, can produce very deep scepticism. Vanhoozer sums up the post-modern attitude thus: 'Every attempt to describe "what it meant" is in fact only an assertion of *what it means to me*, or worse, *what we will it to mean*' [italics his].<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting though that these two attitudes are not really compatible. If deconstruction is rigorously pursued, it will undermine even the hermeneutics of suspicion because this is concerned to expose the hidden motives of the writer which, according to deconstruction, is a pointless exercise.

A number of substantial thinkers, some but not all of them Christian philosophers or theologians, while accepting Kant's idea that data from external sources are given structure by the mind, emphasize the role played by a radical change of outlook. Kuhn, the philosopher of science, for instance, recognizes that a paradigm shift may occur in the mind, giving a new outlook and new focus for understanding,<sup>48</sup> something Kant never appears to have recognized. Dooyeweerd and Polanyi place importance on what Dooyeweerd calls 'the religious root', the fundamental viewpoint which represents a person's deepest convictions.<sup>49</sup> Lesslie Newbigin's

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<sup>45</sup> N. T. Wright, 'The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology', in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons*, p. 222.

<sup>46</sup> Seitz, *Word without End*, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> K. J. Vanhoozer, 'Exegesis and Hermeneutics', *NDBT*, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>49</sup> H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 volumes (Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed; 1969); M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

chapter in *Faith and Modernity* argues, following Polanyi, that every system of thought must rest on an indemonstrable faith-basis, which can be publicly examined.<sup>50</sup>

Dooyeweerd maintains that a distinctively Christian religious root is implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God at the new birth, enabling the believer to recognise Scripture as the word of God. Here, in a twentieth-century writer, is John Calvin's doctrine of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit to biblical authority. If there is a 'hermeneutical circle', we need some point of entry to it, and God's Spirit secures this. It is he too who enables me to recognise the application of God's word to my life. Regeneration changes my religious root but does not of course make me sinlessly perfect, so I can still get things wrong and only imperfectly adjust my life to God's will. Then after beginning with the Spirit (Gal. 3:3), I need to continue to study Scripture in humble dependence on him.

Is this a retreat to a special type of subjectivism? No, for what is given in regeneration also accords with what Scripture actually teaches. For instance, Paul says to the Thessalonians, 'we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe' (1 Thess. 2:13). The regenerative work of the Spirit in the heart and the objective testimony of the Spirit in Holy Scripture confirm each other.

This means there is a distinctively Christian approach to biblical authority. It does not mean there is no place for reason but it recognises that reason must always have a starting-point. Even Descartes, with whom modern approaches to philosophical questions are often reckoned to have begun, had to find such and he found it in his rational faculty. The Christian finds a personal starting-point in faith. Whatever basis of understanding a person may have had before conversion to Christ, at that point a new one is given in the Holy Spirit's decisive act of regeneration. The new life brings with it a fundamentally new mindset, a starting-point for reason, which is now set free to 'think God's thoughts after him'.

This does not mean the Christian never faces difficulties which pose baffling theological problems, but it does mean he or she has fundamental convictions about God given in regeneration and confirmed in Scripture, at the same time acknowledging a personal need for humility. Here then is

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<sup>50</sup> L. Newbigin, 'Truth and authority in modernity', in C. Sugden, P. Sampson, V. Samuel (eds), *Faith and Modernity*, pp. 60-88.

what Vanhoozer calls 'a hermeneutics of humility and conviction', which must be held together in creative tension.<sup>51</sup>

If the Book of Psalms is part of an authoritative theological document, the word of God, it is important for us to recognise two things. The first is the value of each psalm considered in itself. After all, these existed as separate entities at first and were presumably valued as such by those who first encountered them. So then we cannot put any of them aside or, in the case of some of the psalms of orientation, see them as teaching 'the common theology' of the Near Eastern world.<sup>52</sup> They, no less than the psalms of disorientation, contain divine revelation. We also recognize of course that they show the marks of the world of their conception and birth, for they use its terminology which was familiar to those who first read them. When they attack ideas and practices found in that world but alien to their own, they sometimes use its own weapons.

So let us immerse ourselves in this great book of the Bible, allowing its truths and those of the rest of Scripture so to control our thinking that, as someone has put it, our blood becomes bibline, and let us humbly and in dependence on the Holy Spirit, seek to apply its principles in our daily lives in the world.

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<sup>51</sup> K. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 466.

<sup>52</sup> The point of view of Brueggemann, *OT Theology, Essays*, pp. 1-44.

# SINGING THE COVER VERSIONS: PSALMS, REINTERPRETATION AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN ACTS 1-4

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, I heard my ten year old daughter singing a song under her breath as she was setting the table. ‘Oh, “The Bangles,”’ I said, pleased to have dredged from the depths of my memory the name of the 1980s band that I had listened to in my youth. She stared at me blankly and said, ‘No, “Atomic Kitten.”’ My heart sank as I recalled having similar conversations with my parents, not so very long ago! Later I heard the song being played on the radio – the same words, the same basic melody but with a much more contemporary feel to it. The words of the song still ‘spoke’ to a new generation of music lovers, but it had been ‘reinterpreted’ for that new community.

We can observe a similar phenomenon with regard to the psalms and their use within the biblical canon. The Psalter is the most quoted OT book in the NT,<sup>1</sup> yet even a quick and cursory analysis of the NT authors’ appropriation of verses from the Psalter shows quite clearly that they have reinterpreted these poems around the Christ-event for the benefit of their own generation, the first Christian community.<sup>2</sup> This general observation gives rise to several questions that strike me as relevant to the task of

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Gillingham comments that ‘the Psalter is used more than any other book for a prophetic purpose (Isaiah, Deuteronomy and Exodus are also used frequently, but well over a third of the 360 OT references are from the Psalms)’, (*The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible*, [Oxford: OUP, 1994], 264).

<sup>2</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley, for example, speaking of the use of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-28, comments, ‘This is an illustration of the way in which isolated passages [from the Psalms] are interpreted in an arbitrary manner without taking the context into consideration, and thereby entirely missing the meaning of the passage. Other instances occur of a similar character’, (*The Psalms: Translated with Text-Critical and Exegetical Notes* [London: SPCK, 1959], 96).

biblical theology, especially with regard to the creation of models for biblical theological praxis.

The questions that spring to mind include: Why is the Psalter most often adopted to illustrate the teaching ends of the NT writers? Is there something inherent to psalmody that permits the (obviously) christological reappropriation adopted by the NT authors? Is this reinterpretation hermeneutically 'legitimate' or is it, as is often claimed, another example of text-twisting to meet the ideological ends of a new body of readers? Also, just how representative is the Psalter as a text when it comes to christological reinterpretation of the type observable in the NT's use of the psalms? Are there principles at work that can be applied to a Christian interpretation of other OT texts? Or is the Psalter sufficiently unique to invalidate it as a paradigm for biblical theology?

Obviously, the task of biblical theology goes far beyond the singular issue of the NT's use of the Old, however, this issue is central to the practice of biblical theology.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is important for us to examine the interpretative principles that are at work in the NT writers' appropriation of the Psalms and to inquire as to how these may shape our own approaches to biblical theology. Obviously, to examine the use of the Psalms in the whole of the NT would go far beyond the reasonable scope of a single article, therefore, our analysis shall focus on a more manageable

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<sup>3</sup> Childs is absolutely right when he suggests that, '[T]he modern Christian theologian shares a different canonical context from the early church. The first Christian writers had one testament, the modern Christian has two', (B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology: A Proposal* [Facets Series; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 53). However, analogy drawn from the NT writers' use of the OT should probably play a significant role in our discussions of biblical theological method. Childs goes on to note that, 'there is an obvious analogy between the early church's reinterpretation of the Jewish scripture in the light of the Gospel and the modern church's use of two authoritative testaments', (53). Longenecker comments, 'The New Testament's use of the Old Testament is a subject of perennial interest and vast dimensions. It involves a number of important theological issues... [T]he subject is a vitally important one', (R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Era* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 1). Whilst the NT writers' interpretation of the Old is not *the same as* biblical theology, it is undoubtedly worthwhile asking whether their treatment of a single authoritative witness – as part of a developing second, canonical witness – can inform our understanding of how these two (now closed) *corpora* relate to each other.

passage (Acts 1–4) as a paradigm in order to see what conclusions it may yield.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE PSALMS

The first question that we need to address is why the Psalter provided such rich pickings for the NT writers in their intertestamental deliberations? Each of these authors, to varying degrees – no doubt reflecting the composition of their diverse audiences – sought to present the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as fulfilment of OT messianic promise. Eschatological hope in a future Davidic king who would restore the fortunes of Israel was widespread in first-century Palestine and was grounded in the OT itself and heightened by the teachings of the intertestamental period.<sup>4</sup>

Even a cursory reading of the NT citations from the psalms makes it clear that the NT writers adopt verses from the Psalter to a decidedly christological end. This appropriation of the psalms around the figure of Christ follows three distinct strands: first, the evangelists present Jesus adopting the psalms as his own prayers; secondly, the psalmic references to YHWH, and his works, are presented as being equally applicable to Jesus himself; and thirdly, the psalms are presented as having a prophetic role, predicting especially the trials and sufferings of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Each of these three aspects of the NT appropriation of the psalms is interesting in its own right, but it is probably the ‘prophetic’ aspect that sheds most light on the

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, opinions differ with regard to the nature and extent of messianic expectation around the time of the writing of the NT. Some suggest that there is, in fact, only limited and isolated indication of messianic anticipation, whilst others would say that messianism was rife at this time, although it does seem that the latter view has gained the ascendancy in recent years. The diachronic debate is not of great relevance to this article. The NT authors present in their writings a historical milieu of messianic expectation and use the psalms as a vehicle to establish that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah that they saw alluded to in the OT. The question that we seek to answer in this article is why they chose the psalms to meet this particular end? (See *Eschatology, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [eds C. A. Evans and P. W. Flint; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997] for fuller discussion of the messianic themes prominent in the Qumran scrolls.)

<sup>5</sup> K. Möller, ‘Proclaiming the Reign of Christ the Lord: The Psalms in the New Testament’, *Praying by the Book: Reading the Psalms* (eds C. Bartholomew and A. West; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 149.

issue of christological readings, NT interpretation of the Old, and biblical theology.

What becomes immediately obvious is that the NT writers reread texts which originally applied to the Davidic king as referring to Jesus. A few examples from our sample passage in the early chapters of Acts will suffice to make the point here. Peter, during his foundational Pentecost sermon, cites Psalm 16:8-11 (a 'Davidic' psalm)<sup>6</sup> as being ultimately fulfilled not in the life of the historical king but in the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25-36). Later in the same pericope, Peter adopts another 'David' psalm (Ps. 110:1) to indicate that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not the end of the story, but is a stepping-stone on the way towards his current heavenly reign (Acts 2:34-35). This passage is followed by the account of the healing of the lame man by the Temple's Beautiful Gate, the arrest of Peter and John and their release from custody in Acts 3-4. It is interesting that in their communal response to the threat of persecution, the early Christian community again turns to the Psalter (Ps. 2:1) for a 'prophetic' explanation of current events (Acts 4:23-31, esp. vv. 25-26). It is striking that within these first four chapters of the Book of Acts, Luke makes two further references to the Psalms in order to make a particular point regarding the ministry of Christ and his people. The apostles quote Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 in order to establish that Judas should be replaced

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<sup>6</sup> For many years Psalms scholars simply ignored the superscriptions entirely as being late, midrashic and unimportant. However, in recent years an increased awareness of their significance has come to the fore. The preposition used in many of the Davidic superscriptions (the Hebrew *le* preposition, i.e. *ledavid*) is notoriously difficult to translate. It may be an authorship designation (i.e. 'by David'), or an indication that the psalm was written as some sort of tribute to the king (i.e. 'to/for David'), or it may simply be an indication of type (i.e. 'of David,' a David-type psalm). The real significance of the superscriptions is not so much with regard to questions of authorship, but in terms of the canonical shaping of the Psalter. It appears that superscriptions were used subtly by the Psalter's editors to indicate groupings of psalms that should be read together, each in the context of the others (see Gerald Wilson's helpful work for further discussion, e.g. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [SBLDS 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985] or 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms', *Int* 46/2 [April 1992], 129-41). However, the significant factor from our perspective is that Davidic superscriptions – even if not taken as indications of authorship – imply some sort of association with the Davidic monarchic line (see J. L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994], 87-98, for helpful discussion of the association between 'David' and psalmody).



by another, and Peter – in his defence before the Sanhedrin – cites Psalm 118:22 to point out that Jesus is the cornerstone rejected by the builders (Acts 2:11).<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the first and most apparent observation to be made with regard to the adoption of verses from the psalms in the Book of Acts is that the psalms cited do not seem to be ‘about’ the points that Luke is making.<sup>8</sup> In Psalm 16 the writer speaks of the ‘eternal life’ that is secured for him in relationship with YHWH in a spiritual sense<sup>9</sup> and, whilst the historical setting of the psalm most cited in the NT is notoriously difficult and controversial, in all likelihood Psalm 110:1 is the psalmist’s prophetic declaration regarding the Davidic king of his day.<sup>10</sup> Psalm 16 is not immediately referring to bodily resurrection and Psalm 110 would be understood as referring to an historical Davidic king. Writing about messianism in the OT, Longman highlights this interpretative tension:

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, there are many further uses of the psalms throughout the NT, but the Lukan usage in the early chapters of Acts can be treated as representative of the christological type of interpretation that is apparent throughout the writings of the various NT authors and genres – each seems to adopt the psalms in the same ‘prophetic’ sense, somehow pointing towards the Christ event. The high density of citations from the psalms seems to indicate two relevant considerations: (1) That the psalms, amongst all of the OT canonical texts available to them, played a prominent role within the life of the first Christian community; (2) That the psalms provided rich pickings for the NT writers to make their point that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, the promised Messiah.

<sup>8</sup> This would be true of psalmic citations in other parts of the NT and their appropriation by other NT authors, so Luke should not be considered idiosyncratic in his interpretative techniques. Similar examples may be drawn from the Pauline (Eph. 4:8) or Johannine (John 19:24) *corpora*.

<sup>9</sup> ‘As the beloved of Yahweh, he will never see the lower depths of the underworld. He knows that love, which attaches him to God, will not be ruptured by death. On account of the Presence, the prospect of annihilation in the underworld has vanished’, S. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 178-9.

<sup>10</sup> Opinions regarding the details of the original historical setting of this psalm vary greatly, however, most commentators see the words of this psalm being voiced by the psalmist and addressed towards the king as Israel’s ‘anointed one’. See, for example, Oesterley, *Psalms*, 461; Terrien, *Psalms*, 752 and L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150, Revised Edition* (WBC 21; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 111–14 for discussion of the various possible backgrounds and settings.

If we restrict our focus to passages in the Torah and the Writings, we come to the following observations. In the Torah the word is almost exclusively used of an anointed priest and in the Writings of an anointed king. However, in both cases... the word is used to refer to a present not a future priest or king. The term's [*masiah*] occurrences do not in and of themselves justify the expectation of an eschatological figure, either priestly or royal and certainly not prophetic.<sup>11</sup>

The psalms adopted by Luke in Acts 1–4 refer to ‘a present not a future’ reality, in Longman’s terms. Psalm 110 is grounded in the reality of the events of *human* kingship and it is not immediately obvious that Psalm 16 is even connected with the *human* king, let alone an eschatological figure.<sup>12</sup> So is there any justification for the Lukan and apostolic use of the psalms or is this a hermeneutical quantum leap of the type that Oesterley bemoans above?<sup>13</sup>

#### PSALMS, INTERPRETATION AND REINTERPRETATION

Part of the problem with regard to our appreciation of what the NT writers do with the OT text is that we compare *protos* and *telos* without asking what processes were at work in between. We contrast origins and end results without asking about any intermediate processes of interpretation that may make the transition less stark. There is a basic dynamic of

<sup>11</sup> T. Longman III, ‘The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings’, as yet unpublished paper (at the time of writing), H. H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament; McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada, June 5th, 2004, 5.

<sup>12</sup> There are, however, indications from the content and context of Psalm 16 that, although not explicitly ‘royal’ in the same way as we would understand Psalm 110 to be a royal psalm, it may well be rooted in a monarchic setting. See J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (2nd ed., SBT, vol. 32; London: SCM Press, 1986), 66-7 for discussion of possible royal indicators in the content of Psalm 16, and P. D. Miller, ‘Kingship, Torah Obedience and Prayer’, *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (eds K. Seybold and E. Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 127-42 for discussion of how the canonical context of this psalm within a pre-existing collection which was later incorporated into Book I of the Psalter further indicates the possibility of a royal background to Psalm 16. See J. A. Grant, ‘The Psalms and the King’, *Studying the Psalms* (eds P. S. Johnston and D. G. Firth; Leicester: Apollos, 2005) for discussion of explicit and anonymous kingship within the Psalter.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 2 above.

psalmody which must be remembered if we are to give Luke (and the other NT writers) a fair hearing over their use of the psalms. The dynamic in question is the process of *reinterpretation* that is inherent to the ahistorical literature of the Writings.

Apart from the superscriptions the psalms are, along with the wisdom literature, the one large block of biblical literature that is not related to any particular period in Israel's history.... The stories of Joshua are rooted in color and content in the beginnings of the nation Israel. Many of the prophets have a universal message, but that is properly cloaked in a particular setting and related to a particular prophet. The looseness of the psalms from all that historical rootage is not a problem but a gain and opens up interpretive possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

The ahistoricity of the psalms is significant when it comes to assessing how they are appropriated in the later biblical literature. This unusual<sup>15</sup> lack of historical setting has a profound influence on the intertextual adoption of the Psalter and, as Miller puts it, this 'is not a problem but a gain [that] opens up interpretive possibilities'. Certainly, this seems to be the attitude of the earliest Christian writers who clearly viewed the Psalms as material that opened up all sorts of hermeneutical possibilities enabling them to make their christological point.

The essence of the issue lies in the long-standing tradition of personal appropriation of the 'typical' human expression of the psalms. Lack of concrete historical setting has, from the earliest days of psalmody, meant that subsequent generations of readers and singers of the psalms have applied the thrust of a given psalm in many different ways. The despair which a psalmist expresses at the opposition of enemies may well originally have been rooted in the king's response to the antagonism of neighbouring nation states;<sup>16</sup> however, such historical insight is not

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<sup>14</sup> P. D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 22-3.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there is much debate about the actual historical setting of many narrative texts, however, even where this is the case there is a canonical self-presentation of historical context – Deuteronomy presents itself as a series of Mosaic sermons delivered on the plains of Moab, the Book of Isaiah is presented as the gathered prophecies of the eighth-century seer, etc. Apart from certain psalmic superscriptions (discussed below), the Psalter lacks this type of implicit historical setting.

<sup>16</sup> There are many psalms where this scenario could have provided the original backdrop, but Psalm 17 would be one example among many (Eaton, *Kingship*, 33-4).

provided for later generations of psalm lovers.<sup>17</sup> Readers given no access to the original context read only of despair due to the enmity of anonymous individuals and so – quite naturally and without massive interpretative leaps – they appropriate the prayers of the psalmist as their own when they face opposition of a very different type in the home or the market-place. The contexts of psalmist and pray-er of the psalms may, in fact, differ vastly, but lack of historical contextualization gives rise to almost infinite possibilities for reappropriation. The emotional and psychological pain of the psalmist seems similar to the current experience of the reader and so his words are adopted as the prayer of a later generation.<sup>18</sup> This generic nature of psalmody inevitably leads to a constant process of reinterpretation with the change of circumstance and context.

This same process of reinterpretation may be applied more broadly within the Psalter. As time passed and daily reality changed, the understanding of the psalms would also change. We have discussed this on an individual level in the preceding paragraph, but the same processes would also apply on a national level. According to Gunkel's classifications, several poems found in the Psalter are best understood as

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<sup>17</sup> The only exception to this principle of ahistoricity is to be found in the thirteen psalms which specifically refer to events from the life of David (e.g. Pss 3:1, 18:1 or 51:1). Ironically, it is questionable whether these superscriptions do actually historicize the text. Brevard Childs, for example, argues that these historical superscriptions merely provide the reader with an example of *the type of setting* in which a psalmic prayer may be voiced and that they in no way limit the appropriation of the text in other settings ('Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis', *JSS* 16/2 [Autumn 1971], 148). Similarly, Gerald Sheppard argues that 'the history-like superscriptions show no interest in the older cultic setting of the psalms but focus instead on the specific personal circumstances that enable these prayers to be "overheard" or similarly reused', ('Theology and the Book of Psalms', *Int* 46/2 [April 1992], 147).

<sup>18</sup> Miller again expresses this well, 'the psalms are not related to a specific person although they are highly and deeply personal. They are not bound to the experiences of one individual and her or his personal history. They are by definition typical, universal. They were composed, sung, prayed, collected, passed on because they have the capacity to articulate and express the words, thoughts, prayers of anyone, though they do not necessarily do that. They speak to and for typical human situations and thus have the capacity to speak to and for us as typical human beings. They have to do with experiences of human existence, not just Israel's existence or that of one human being' (*Interpreting*, 23).

royal psalms (hereafter, RPss).<sup>19</sup> The RPss category is not really a genre classification at all, it is, rather, a grouping dictated by content and not form. Gunkel himself admits as much when he comments that, 'The internal unity of [these] psalms'<sup>20</sup> stems from the fact that they are *concerned entirely with kings*.<sup>21</sup> So we have a group of psalms in the Psalter that are in some way connected with the monarchy of Ancient Israel, especially with the Davidic monarchic line. Some of these psalms seem to find their original *Sitz im Leben* in royal coronation or enthronement ceremonies (e.g. Ps. 2<sup>22</sup> and possibly Ps. 72<sup>23</sup>), some are prayers for the king prior to battle (e.g. Ps. 20<sup>24</sup>) or thanksgiving songs of the king after battle (e.g. Ps. 21<sup>25</sup>) and there is even one poem which finds its origins in a royal wedding (Ps. 45.<sup>26</sup>) The important thing to remember for the purposes of our discussion is that these psalms are closely connected with historical realities of kingship in Israel and Judah.<sup>27</sup>

Why is this historical origin significant to our current discussion? The answer lies with the retention of the RPss in the canonical Psalter. If we imagine the scenario that presented itself to the editors of the Psalter at the time of the formation of the final 'Book of Psalms' as we know it, it is remarkable that we have any RPss in the Psalter at all. Clearly, there were many more psalms in circulation than those that made it into the book's

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<sup>19</sup> H. Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 99-120.

<sup>20</sup> Pss 2, 28, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144:1-11.

<sup>21</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Terrien, *Psalms*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> J. L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 236.

<sup>24</sup> G. H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms—Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 381-2.

<sup>25</sup> F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Die Psalmen 1* (NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 139.

<sup>26</sup> A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, Volume I, Psalms 1-72* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 346.

<sup>27</sup> There is not universal agreement that the RPss were genuinely monarchic. Erhard Gerstenberger, for example, sees the RPss as being the product of post-exilic messianic expectation and having no grounding in the realities of kingship in Israel or Judah. See his discussion of the setting of Psalm 132 (*Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* [FOTL XV; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 369).

final canonical form.<sup>28</sup> Some were accepted as canonical, others were rejected. So, just why were the RPss – psalms grounded in the ceremonies of the Judean monarchy – retained in a book the final redaction of which took place well into the post-exilic period when kingship was nothing more than a distant memory? Assuming that the editors had an entirely free hand to include and exclude whichever psalms they chose,<sup>29</sup> why did they retain the RPss when there was no king in Israel, no royal line to celebrate? Are they retained merely as historical curiosities? Or could there be deeper processes at work in the thoughts of the editors that reflect changes in how the RPss were read?

It seems that the process of reinterpretation applies as much to the RPss as it does to the psalms of the individual. Just as the original setting of the anonymous 'I' psalms is reinterpreted in the light of the experiences of successive generations of readers, so the RPss are reinterpreted in the light of their historical experience of kingship. A royal psalm would not be read in the same way by a faithful Yahwist living under the reign of David as it would by a faithful Yahwist living under the reign of Manasseh. And, indeed, a psalm-lover living in the exile or the post-exilic period would read the same royal psalm differently from both of the above.

Taking Psalm 2 as an example, and bracketing chronological questions for the sake of argument, the Davidic/Solomonic era reader would be able to treat this psalm the most 'literally' of all readers. He or she would most

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<sup>28</sup> The 'Psalms of Solomon' and the variety of extra-canonical psalms found in the Qumran scroll 11QP<sup>s</sup> testify to the fact that psalmody was a fairly common currency in the post-exilic period.

<sup>29</sup> This is an issue which merits further discussion: To what extent were the final editors of biblical books entirely free to include and exclude material? Especially with regard to the Psalter, which seems to be formed via the incremental inclusion of multiple smaller psalm collections (e.g. the Songs of Ascents, etc.) into the ever-expanding 'Psalter,' the question is a pertinent one. It could be that the RPss were retained because of editorial conservatism – these were psalms known to be part of the pre-existing smaller groupings, therefore the editors felt it would be inappropriate to exclude them when that collection was added to the Psalter. This is possible of course, however, it does seem that the Psalter's editors exercised a strong degree of editorial freedom in their arrangement of the book and the choice of psalms that they included or excluded. See Wilson's helpful works for further discussion ('Evidence of Editorial Divisions in the Hebrew Psalter', VT XXXIV/3 [1984], 337-52 and 'Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of the Psalms: Pitfalls and Promise', *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* [JSOTSup 159; ed. J. C. McCann; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 42-51).

likely have a *reasonably* positive view of kingship as an institution and Israel would have been a (fairly) significant player on the political stage of the day. Therefore, whilst the claims of Yahweh's world rule from Zion would have had a hyperbolic ring to them (vv. 6, 10-12), they would not be seen as *entirely* incongruous. The same could not be said for the psalm-reader in the late monarchic period. Our hypothetical reader living under the rule of Manasseh, for example, would have a very different (probably much more jaundiced) view of kingship and the ideas of universal rule from Judah would sound absolutely absurd as they lived in a country far-removed from Ancient Near East superpower status. How much more so would this be the case for the exilic or post-exilic reader, for whom the history of kingship read as testimony to human failure and now was nothing more than a distant memory?

What would a royal psalm mean to such readers in the post-exilic period? Why would they be retained? The RPss remain in the Psalter because they continually underwent a process of reinterpretation in the light of changing historical circumstances. In particular, the accumulating historical testimony of failure to live up to the ideals of kingship expressed in the RPss, led readers of the Psalter to look for fulfilment of these ideas elsewhere... in a 'new David'. As Jacobson writes, 'The messianic reinterpretation of the psalms developed as a response to the failure of the Davidic monarchy.'<sup>30</sup> John Eaton is surely correct in arguing that there was always an eschatological element to the RPss – even the very best of examples of human kingship fell some way short of the ideals found within the RPss (e.g. the universal rule of Psalm 2 or the supreme justice of Psalm 72).<sup>31</sup> However, it is following the failures of the Davidic house that alternative readings of the RPss would come most prominently to the

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<sup>30</sup> D. L. Jacobson, 'The Royal Psalms and Jesus Messiah: Preparing to Preach on a Royal Psalm', *WW 5/2* (Spring 1985), 198. I would want to add the word 'primarily' to Jacobson's pithy statement (i.e., 'developed [primarily] as a response to the failure...'), but the point is well made.

<sup>31</sup> Eaton writes regarding Psalm 2, 'Such royal psalms originally had reference to the monarchy of early Israel and functioned in that setting. But from the outset they had a prophetic character: they included vision and oracle, and the purpose of God which they revealed far transcended the experience of the time', (*Psalms* [TBC; London: SPCK, 1967], 33). Longman echoes this thought, 'There were few time periods when Israel or Judah under the Davidides had vassals who would contemplate throwing off their shackles. Even those times, like that of David himself, when Israel did exercise sovereignty over nearby states do not exactly fit the rather grandiose claims implied by this first stanza' ('Messiah', 7).

fore. The weak reality of kingship when compared to the glorious ideals of the RPss, followed by the complete demise of the kingly line, led the people to look for the fulfilment of that ideal in a future king of Israel.<sup>32</sup>

What we see at work is a constant process of reinterpretation of the RPss throughout the monarchic and post-monarchic history of Israel and Judah. It seems fair to say that the later the historical setting of the reader, the more 'eschatological' their reading of that royal psalm. Is it then any wonder that the NT writers reinterpret the RPss in the light of the person and work of Jesus? For centuries such reinterpretation had taken place against a backdrop of changing historical circumstances, the coming of Jesus the Messiah was *the ultimate* change of historical circumstance as far as the apostles were concerned, so it was entirely *inevitable* that the RPss would be reread in the light of Christ by the early (Hebraic) Christian community. Psalmic reinterpretation was a practice with which they were eminently familiar and such rereadings would be entirely consistent with the normal praxis of the day. The RPss had been read with an idea of future fulfilment for many hundreds of years; in Christ that fulfilment arrived quite naturally and inevitably for the NT authors.

#### BEYOND THE PSALMS: PSALMIC REINTERPRETATION AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

So inherent to psalmody in general is an openness to reinterpretation. The questions that we must now ask are: To what extent is the practice of psalmic reinterpretation typical with regard to NT treatments of the OT; and, secondly, how does this christological reinterpretation inform the practice of biblical theology? Basically, can the psalms provide a model for praxis in biblical theology or does their atypical openness to reinterpretation invalidate them as a paradigm?

The answer to this question seems to be, 'Yes and No'! This should not be read as an example of understated, academic fence-sitting – rather, this is an honest assessment of the applicability of psalmody as a model for biblical theology. As discussed above, there is a sense in which the psalms have a peculiar characteristic which opens them up to reinterpretation based around the Christ-event. It is debatable whether other OT texts lend themselves in the same way to this type of christological reinterpretation.

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<sup>32</sup> 'With the removal of the Davidic monarchy in 586 BC the prophetic aspect of such texts came all the more into prominence. For many centuries, incorporated in Scripture, they served to nourish the messianic hope.' (Eaton, *Psalms*, 33).



Could it be that the psalms' uniqueness in terms of their biblical intertextuality sets them apart and mitigates against their paradigmatic use?

*Ahistoricity* is the unique characteristic of psalmody that lends itself particularly to intertextual reinterpretation.<sup>33</sup> The original context of the psalms is downplayed to allow for reinterpretation in a wide variety of situations and circumstances. It is this interpretative flexibility that allowed for a 'smooth' transition to christological readings of the RPss in the early Christian community. Accordingly, there is a sense in which this unusual flexibility of the Hebrew poetic material sets it apart from the remainder of the OT narrative. Clearly, the Book of Joshua is grounded in a specific historical reality – the conquest of the land; equally, Deuteronomy and the Books of Kings and Isaiah and Haggai and any book of the Law and the Prophets that we would care to mention is also grounded in the self-presentation of a specific historical reality. Therefore, the question must be asked, 'Does the historicity of the rest of the OT abrogate the broader application of christological appropriation and reinterpretation that can be observed regarding the RPss?'

I would suggest that the RPss *are*, indeed, unique in terms of the opportunities that they present for intertextual discussion within the Christian canon. The lack of concrete historical setting aids greatly this type of rereading in a new context. However, although their inherent openness to reinterpretation sets them apart from other OT texts, some helpful parallels may be drawn from the NT use of the psalms and applied to the adoption of other OT texts.

### *The Rule of the Anointed*

One of the central characteristics of the RPss adopted by Luke and/or the apostles in Acts 1–4 is that of the *rule* of the anointed. This is seen in the 'right hand' imagery of Psalms 16 and 110 (see Acts 2:25 and 2:34-35 respectively) and the idea of the 'nations plotting in vain' in Psalm 2 (Acts 4:34-35). In Psalm 16 the psalmist's claim that YHWH is always 'before

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, ahistoricity is not entirely unique to the Psalter, but is also a characteristic of the Wisdom Literature (i.e. Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) and the Song of Songs. The remaining poetic book of the Writings (Lamentations) places its poetry within a firm historical context, namely, the exile and the covenant community's response to it. The ahistoricity of these books has also led to a certain (lesser) degree of christological rereadings throughout the centuries (e.g. the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 has often been interpreted christologically: see R. Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections* [NIB, vol. 5; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997], 96-9).

him and at his right hand' (v. 8) is to be read as an indication of power and certainty regarding the future because of the psalmist's relationship with YHWH.<sup>34</sup> The 'right hand' imagery becomes even more explicit in Acts 2:34-35 with Peter's adoption of Psalm 110 which speaks explicitly about the sovereign rule of the anointed king at the right hand of YHWH, until all enemies are subdued<sup>35</sup> and this tone is further accentuated in the citation from Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26) which celebrates the sovereign rule of YHWH administered via 'his anointed/son/king' whom he has established in Zion. The imagery of divine rule and order via a chosen anointed individual is the clear focus of the RPss adopted by Luke and the apostles<sup>36</sup> and this is, in one sense, typical of the NT's use of the OT. It appears, therefore, that images found in the OT that speak about issues of divine rule via an anointed individual, lend themselves particularly well to the type of christological reinterpretation practised by the NT authors.

### *The Rejection of the Anointed*

Perhaps more subtle in the example passage chosen for this study, but equally apparent in the broader context of christological rereadings of OT texts in the NT, is the idea of the *rejection* of the anointed. In Acts 4:11 we read Luke's account of Peter's defence before the Sanhedrin, and as part of that hearing he adopts Psalm 118:22 to highlight the fact that this Jesus of Nazareth – rejected by the religious rulers of the day – was, in fact, the 'cornerstone' rejected by the builders. The NT authors are keen to explain that, whilst Jesus did not fit the expected mould of messiahship, it was the expectation that was wrong not the Messiah.<sup>37</sup> The first century messianic expectation was of an eschatological king who would fulfil a dynamic function of rule and the exercise of political authority.<sup>38</sup> Jesus did not

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<sup>34</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 87; Wilson, *NIVAC Psalms Volume I*, 311.

<sup>35</sup> Allen, *Psalms*, 118-20.

<sup>36</sup> 'readers cannot fail to notice Luke's emphasis. This speech's structure is found in Acts 2:22-24, 32-33 and 36, a structure which helps readers to identify Joel's "Lord" of Acts 2:21 with the Jesus "whom you crucified"', (P. Doble, 'The Psalms in Luke-Acts', *The Psalms in the New Testament* [eds S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken; London: T&T Clark International, 2004], 93-4).

<sup>37</sup> M. J. Selman, 'Messianic Mysteries', *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (eds P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess and G. J. Wenham; Carlisle/GrandRapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1995), 283-5.

<sup>38</sup> This appears to be what led to the 'messianic hiddenness' throughout the early period of Jesus' life and ministry. It was false expectations of the function that the Messiah would fulfil, that led Jesus to avoid all such

present himself in this light but rather adopted the role of 'suffering servant' in his earthly ministry, and the NT writers used many OT texts to highlight that this monochrome messianic expectation erred from the multifaceted prophetic presentation of the Messiah.<sup>39</sup> Luke is keen to show that this Jesus who died on a cross could indeed be the promised 'anointed one' and he adopts Psalm 118 to this end. In fact, it is possible to trace a subtle theological use of Psalm 118 throughout Luke's writings. Prior to the death and resurrection of Christ, Luke highlights that Jesus is the triumphant representative of the people who 'comes in the name of the Lord' (Ps. 118:26, cf. Luke 13:35; 19:38). However, when it becomes clear in the Lukan narrative that Jesus is going to be rejected by Jerusalem, he switches tack to focus on Psalm 118:22 which assures the reader that the rejected one is in reality the vital 'cornerstone'.<sup>40</sup> So we can see that as well as texts that focus on the rule of the anointed, the NT authors also draw upon those OT texts that highlight the rejection of the Messiah.

### *The (Hi)story of the Anointed*

Another interesting and representative example of NT exegesis of the OT can be found in the initially incongruous use of Psalms 69 and 109 in Acts 1:20. At first glance, the apostolic use of verses from these two psalms seems entirely out of place, especially as these texts are not normally treated as kingship poems.<sup>41</sup> It may well simply be the case that the

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terminology and overtones (e.g. his adoption of the ambiguous 'Son of Man' self-descriptive as opposed to a more obviously messianic descriptive, etc.). See the discussion in Larry Hurtado's article 'Christ', *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (eds J. B. Green, S. McKnight, I. H. Marshall; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 106-17, especially his discussion of Mark's Gospel (109-112) for a helpful summary.

<sup>39</sup> That this was a particular concern of the NT writers is shown, for example, in the multiplicity of citations drawn from Isaiah's 'Servant Songs' (Isa. 40-55) which portray an image of a representative figure suffering on behalf of the people (see 'Index of Quotations' and 'Index of Allusions and Verbal Parallels', *The Greek New Testament* [UBS 4th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 888 and 897 respectively).

<sup>40</sup> See J. Ross Wagner's helpful article 'Psalm 118 in Luke-Acts: Tracing a Narrative Thread', *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (JSNTSup 148 and SSEJC 5; eds Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 154-78.

<sup>41</sup> It should also be pointed out that the plural form in Psalm 69:25 (MT 69:26, *tirtam*) is changed to a singular possessive in Peter's citation. We should note that (if the citation is drawn from the LXX, as seems to be

anonymous godly individual of the psalms is seen 'by Jesus and the early church as typifying the Messiah',<sup>42</sup> but, on the other hand, there may be a slightly more subtle reading at work here which draws us again to the RPss. Richard Longenecker highlights two basic presuppositions observable in inner-biblical exegesis – 'corporate solidarity' and 'correspondences in history'<sup>43</sup> – which bring our attention back to the figure of the king as Messiah in the OT and the fulfilment of that office in the person of Jesus. The first of these presuppositions draws upon the interaction between representative individuals in the community (e.g. king or priest) and the community itself, where the representative may embody the whole group or the group is seen as a collective of individuals. The latter presupposition indicates that:

early Christians were prepared to trace out relations between God's activity in the past and his actions in the present – that is, between events then and events now; between persons then and persons now. Such correspondences were not viewed as being just analogous in nature, or to be used only by way of illustration. For the early Christians, they were incorporated into history by divine intent and so were to be taken typologically. Their presence in the history of a former day was seen as elucidating and furthering the redemptive message of the present.<sup>44</sup>

This is a prime example of reinterpretation/recontextualization: the early Christians saw the David of Psalms 69 and 109 as a representative figure<sup>45</sup>

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Luke's habit [Doble, 'Psalms in Luke-Acts', 117]) this is a simple matter of moving from an *auton* to an *autou* and given the scope for reinterpretation of the psalms discussed above this would not be a great hermeneutical leap either conceptually or linguistically.

<sup>42</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (TNTC; Leicester: IVP, 1980), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 77-8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Again, neither of these psalms would come within Gunkel's category of Royal Psalms, yet there are indications of a possible background in the Davidic court for each composition, thus raising the representative 'corporate solidarity' of the 'David' figure in these poems and making them more amenable to christological reinterpretation. See Eaton, *Kingship*, 51-3, 81 for discussion of the royal milieu to Pss 69 and 109; L. C. Allen, 'David as Exemplar of Spirituality: The Redaction Function of Psalm 19', *Bib* 67/4 (1986), 544-6, for discussion of David as a 'representative figure' in the Psalter; and Doble, 'Psalms in Luke-Acts', 87-90, for discussion of Luke's use of 'the psalmic David' to make his christological point in this passage.

and, therefore, the events that took place in the psalmist's historical reality as 'furthering the redemptive message' of their present day. David's imprecation on his enemies (Ps. 69:25), therefore, can be seen as appropriate explanation of the events surrounding the death of Judas although the two are, *prima facie*, separated by a millennium. Similarly, the prayerful plea that an enemy be removed from his office and replaced by another (Ps. 109:8) was read as divine counsel for the apostles' day and situation despite the separation of time and setting.<sup>46</sup>

The ideas of 'corporate solidarity' and 'correspondence in history' are somewhat strange to the modern mindset, yet these were common interpretative practices in first-century Judaism. As Moyise comments:

we might conclude that there is no logical connection between Psalm 69.25 and finding a replacement for Judas. To us, such exegesis looks 'arbitrary' or even 'gratuitous' and we would not approve of such techniques today. But we should not thereby conclude that it appeared 'arbitrary' or 'gratuitous' to people at the time. Given their experiences and mindset, the connection was probably obvious. In this study, we are interested both in how it might have looked to them and how it appears to us.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Of course the chronological separation between the psalms and the events of the early church may be a great deal less than is suggested by the Davidic superscriptions. Although it is quite likely – given the Chronicler's presentation of David as psalmist, musician and worship coordinator – that at the very least some (if not many) of the canonical psalms were penned by David (see H. N. Wallace, 'What Chronicles Has to Say About Psalms', *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* [JSOTSup 263; eds M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; Sheffield: SAP, 1999], 289), not all of the Davidic psalms can be taken as tenth-century BCE compositions. The origin, dating and function of the superscriptions is much under debate; however, the content (and to a lesser extent the language) of some of the psalms seems to indicate that they should not be read as having been literally penned by David. So the gap between authorship of the psalm and its adoption into the realities of the early church may be less than is suggested by the superscriptions, but it would have been a considerable gap nonetheless. (See J. D. Nogalski, 'From Psalm to Psalms to Psalter', *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and the Psalms: Festschrift Marvin E. Tate* [eds H. W. Ballard and W. D. Tucker; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000], 37-54 for a helpful discussion of the formation of the Psalter and the role of the superscriptions.)

<sup>47</sup> S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction* (London: Continuum; 2001), 7.

If our desire is to hear and understand the intertextuality of the early Christian community, we must be careful not to impose our norms on their reality. Correspondence of history was a reality for the Christian church at the time of the writing of the NT and – if we stop and think for a moment – it is not vastly removed from contemporary interpretative practice with regard to the Psalter. The majority of today's Christian community will readily read their own circumstances into the emotions of the psalmist without asking about his or her historical setting. The psalms (because of their hermeneutical flexibility) 'speak' to *our* setting although it is vastly different from that of the original poet. Is our contemporary practice so very far removed from the apostolic understanding? We allow the generalities of the Psalter to speak across gaps of time and culture, the apostles allowed the specifics of the Psalter to speak across the chronological and contextual divide, but essentially the same process of reinterpretation is at work.

To conclude this section, it appears that – whilst the psalms are unique in terms of their hermeneutical flexibility – their appropriation by Luke (and/or the apostles) in Acts 1–4 provides us with some guidance as to 'fair usage' of the OT in the NT. It is these principles that should inform our practice of biblical theology, especially with regard to 'christological' readings of the Old Testament.

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT, CHRISTOLOGY AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

One of the most intriguing verses of the Gospel accounts is found at the end of Luke's first volume. The account of two devastated disciples on their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus, joined by a mysterious stranger who (having initially appeared ignorant of the cause of their pain) teaches them that the climactic events of those days were not random and disappointing, but rather were necessary and foreseen in the pages of their Scriptures. The mysterious stranger then 'beginning from Moses and from all the Prophets, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things about himself'.<sup>48</sup>

This verse has been a cornerstone of the practice of biblical theology and the Christian interpretation of the OT from the earliest of days.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the idea of christological interpretation of the OT remains a hot

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<sup>48</sup> Luke 24:27, translation mine.

<sup>49</sup> G. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 97-9.

topic in the contemporary academy.<sup>50</sup> Just what does it mean to read the OT ‘christologically’? Clearly, the RPss lent themselves to christological rereading in the eyes of the early church, but how do the principles highlighted above relate to contemporary practice of biblical theology? In particular, how are Christian interpreters in the twenty-first century to understand the concept that the OT Scriptures speak about Christ?

Some confusion reigns in relation to Jesus’ statement in Luke 24:27. Partly, this is due to the nuances of translation and the fact that some of the EVV in their chosen rendering of the text may be read to imply that every passage of the OT canon, *without exception*, speaks about Christ.<sup>51</sup> Inevitably this leads to some fanciful christological renderings of passages from the OT.<sup>52</sup> Such lack of clarity with regard to paradigms for Christian readings of the OT lies at the root of the plea of many a student for more explicit methodological clarity in the way in which biblical theology is carried out. When is it reasonable to draw links between OT and NT texts and when is it beyond reasonable association? This is a real plea from the classroom! Students often read the key texts in the area of biblical theology, which they appreciate greatly, yet they are left unsure as to how to apply the model expressed by the author.

Marshall’s helpful analysis of Luke 24:27 helps to put the idea of christological readings in a more helpful context, and one which informs our understanding of how OT and NT relate in the formation of a biblical

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<sup>50</sup> Note the relatively recent debate between Francis Watson, a key proponent of christological readings of the OT, and Chris Seitz, who advocates a ‘trinitarian’ hermeneutic rather a strictly christological one (C. R. Seitz, ‘Christological Interpretation of Texts and Trinitarian Claims to Truth: An Engagement with Francis Watson’s *Text and Truth*’, *SJT* 52/2 [1999], 209-26; cf. F. Watson, ‘The Old Testament as Christian Scripture: A Response to Professor Seitz’, *SJT* 52/2 [1999], 227-32). One may be excused for thinking that there is not such a great difference between these key players in contemporary biblical theology as may appear to be the case at first sight. Are ‘trinitarian’ and ‘christological’ readings really *at odds* with one another? We shall return to this question below.

<sup>51</sup> The NIV, for example, translates Luke 24:27 as saying ‘he explained to them what was said *in all the Scriptures* concerning himself’. Of course, this translation can be read in a number of ways, but is often read to suggest that the OT Scriptures *in their entirety* somehow speak of Christ.

<sup>52</sup> Some would reply that these are no more fanciful than the apostles’ renderings, yet there were principles *appropriate to the day* that governed the early church’s exegesis of the OT (discussed above); the same should be the case in our day.

theology. He argues that the verb used by Luke to describe the risen Messiah's catechesis (*dierneneuo*, 'to explain or interpret' [BDAG 1977]) implies 'that the speaker chose out those passages which might be regarded as "messianic" and then proceeded to show how they should be understood, so that they could now "speak" to the disciples'.<sup>53</sup> Examining Luke's use of this verb elsewhere, Bock notes that *dierneneuo* implies reference to both texts which are 'directly prophetic' but also to OT texts that are 'typico-prophetic texts [which] reflect patterns that Jesus re-enacts and escalates to show their fulfilment or their eschatological inauguration at a new level'.<sup>54</sup> So this would include, for example, passages which point to Jesus as 'faithful Israel' in contrast with the failings of Israel in the past (e.g. Matthew's presentation of Jesus' faithful response to temptation in the desert contrasted with the failures of Israel in the desert).<sup>55</sup>

Where does this leave the student of biblical theology? I would suggest that our analysis of Luke's use of the Psalms in Acts 1–4 leads us to a basic methodological starting point for discussion of the NT's use of the OT, a starting point which informs our practice of biblical theology. Christological interpretation does not imply that we 'see Christ' in *every detail* of the OT text. We need not waste time seeking the christological significance of the Tabernacle's *tent pegs* in Exodus 25–40, yet there is a christological significance in the *Tabernacle* itself. It speaks of sacrifice and priesthood and access and the presence of God – vital issues of faith continued and transformed by the Christ-event. There is, perhaps, no great christological significance in the named lists of singers found in 1 Chronicles, yet the ideas of worship and holy space are radically renewed by Jesus the Messiah.

What then of methodology? How does this brief study of the use of the Psalms in Acts 1–4, help to inform the student who seeks to *reasonably* trace themes through the whole of the Christian canon? First, we should remind ourselves of the limited scope of this study. The observations drawn out in this article are based in discussion of a limited text in the NT.<sup>56</sup> What is more, the focus has been upon the *psalmic* citations alone

<sup>53</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 897.

<sup>54</sup> D. L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT 3B; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1918.

<sup>55</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 198–210.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 1–4 may be a slightly random choice, however, the aim of this essay is to address how the interpretation of the psalms in the NT speaks to our contemporary practice of biblical theology. This passage was chosen, not



within this limited passage. It is entirely possible that different or complementary conclusions may be drawn from the study of OT prophetic texts cited in Acts 1–4 or, indeed, from the study of psalmic texts adopted elsewhere in the NT. However, even with such a limited scope, the conclusions drawn may be helpful in terms of biblical theology praxis.

## CONCLUSION

What conclusions can we draw from this brief study of canonical intertextuality? In the early church's interaction with the Psalms we see Christians reading the OT text as Christian document – reading it christologically. As we saw above, the RPss lend themselves particularly well to this type of reinterpretation, so they are not entirely typical as a paradigm for Christian interpretation of the OT. Having said that, the three general observations about the type of texts being read in this christocentric fashion, can inform our practice in biblical theology. The task of the (Christian) practitioner of biblical theology is to take into account the overwhelming significance of the Christ-event for interpretation whilst, at the same time, seeking to understand the OT revelation on its own terms, as a 'sensible' theological document in its own right. If we believe that the OT reveals the Creator and Covenant God to the community of his people, and that the contemporary church is the continuance of that community, then surely that revelation still 'speaks' on its own terms just as it once 'spoke' on its own terms. At the same time, the NT makes it clear that aspects of our understanding of that revelation are completely and irrevocably altered by the person, life, work, death, resurrection and hermeneutical practice of Jesus the Messiah. So a tension exists for the Christian reader of Old and New Testaments as Christian Scripture – where should we 'see Christ' in the OT and where should we let the voice of the OT speak simply of YHWH, the God whom the Christian community still worships?

Whilst they in no way provide a complete answer or solution to the tensions that we face, perhaps the three principles observed from the apostolic appropriation of the psalms in Acts 1–4 can inform our discussion helpfully. In seeking those passages of the OT where Jesus 'interpreted for them the things about himself' (Luke 24:27), we should

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because of any inherent structural compulsion, but rather because of the preponderance of psalmic citations within a relatively short passage, and also because the usage of the psalms seen in this passage strikes me as being reasonably representative of citations from the Psalter throughout the NT.

look to the passages that point to his rule, his rejection and his story in the historical development of God's dealings with Israel. Following the example found in Luke's use of the Psalter, we should look to those passages of the OT which speak about YHWH's rule of the universe through a representative individual (be that prophet or king or judge or sage or anonymous follower of YHWH) and we can legitimately read these as being in some way proleptic or typological, pointing the reader towards an ultimate fulfilment in a greater representative individual. Equally, those elements of the OT narrative that direct the reader to a representative individual who suffers rejection on behalf of the community again point the reader towards history's greatest story of rejection. Thirdly, there is an ongoing, organically developing story in the Scriptures of Old and New Testament. The NT writers drew upon the smallest details of that narrative in explication of the climactic events of the story. This was appropriate in their day and according to their literary practice. The contemporary reader should trace the themes of biblical history christologically as well, but in ways appropriate to our day and literary practice. How does the Christ-event relate to the history of YHWH's dealing with the covenant community? Eden, Tabernacle and Temple present notions and realities of divine presence; they do, however, foreshadow a greater reality of divine presence told as part of the history found in Volume 2 (John 1:14).

So what does it mean to read the OT christologically? It does not mean seeing the cross wherever a piece of wood is mentioned in the OT narrative. It does not mean seeing Christ everywhere at the expense of seeing 'God' in the OT. We should look to the passages which can legitimately be interpreted as bearing reference to the Christ – accounts of representative rule, representative suffering and the organically unfolding history of God's relationship with humankind – and read and interpret them in the light of their ultimate expression. (There are *many* such passages.) At the same time, we should let those passages of the OT that speak to us about God do just that... speak to us about God. There is no tension here.

There are no doubt other categories of text in the OT which legitimately draw christological interpretation – a broader study would make that eminently clear. I do not mean to suggest that these are the only ground-rules for christocentric reading of the OT. However, ground-rules there should be and, despite protestations to the contrary, it does not seem unreasonable to draw this guidance from the NT use of the OT.<sup>57</sup> Where

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<sup>57</sup> In drawing these principles from the New Testament writers' use of the Old, we must be aware that their interpretative techniques were appropriate to

the OT speaks figurally or typologically of the coming Messiah, we must let that voice ring out clearly. However, surely the task of biblical theology is to let our *theocentric* readings and our *christocentric* readings speak as and when each is appropriate. Gordon McConville, citing the work of Francis Watson, comments:

a Christian reading of the Old Testament (which understands it as preparing the way for Jesus) is bound to be distinct from a reading of it in abstraction from this *telos*, and that such a reading must even so have a real connection with ‘what the Old Testament texts “originally” or “actually” meant’. This balancing-act aims both to preserve the unity of the testaments in their witness to Christ and to avoid fantastic Christological interpretations. The crucial factor in maintaining the balance is that the Old Testament should be allowed to shape our understanding of the reality revealed by Christ: ‘If the scope of the Christ-event is the whole of reality, then there is no danger that any of the breadth and depth of the experience reflected in the Old Testament will be lost.’<sup>58</sup>

Any biblical theology must inevitably see the revelation of Christ as central to our process of interpretation, but this does not mean that the Old Testament loses its distinctive flavour. Where the OT text speaks in a way that foreshadows the Christ-event, we must read it in that light. Where the OT (or the NT text, for that matter) teaches us about God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we should not impose an unnaturally singular focus. Theocentric and christocentric readings are not at odds – they are two sides of the same coin and we should embrace them both in our study of the relationship between the two parts of our dual (yet singular) canon.

Whilst the psalms are not entirely typical of the challenges faced when assessing the NT’s use of the OT, they do inform our discussion and point us to patterns of usage that might be helpful in our practice of biblical theology. Inevitably, when dealing with a two-volume canon, reinterpretation happens. The Lukan/apostolic usage of these psalms reminds us that it is the same song, just a different version.

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their day, and, in the same way, our practices must be appropriate to our day. However, a conversation may profitably take place between the two.

<sup>58</sup> J. G. McConville, ‘Biblical Theology: Canon and Plain Sense’, *SBET* 19/2 (Autumn 2001), 147.

# THE JOHANNINE FOOTWASHING AND THE DEATH OF JESUS: A DIALOGUE WITH SCHOLARSHIP

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'The properly Johannine theology of salvation does not consider the death of Jesus to be a vicarious and expiatory sacrifice for sin.'<sup>1</sup> This position, defended by Forestell in 1974, arguably still expresses a broad critical consensus on the interpretation of the cross in the Fourth Gospel. Our aim in this article is to engage with this position by providing a detailed study of John 13:1-11, a passage which, we suggest, contributes significant but often overlooked exegetical material to John's portrayal of the death of Jesus. These exegetical issues will attempt to engage with the critical dialogue between methodological and theological questions. We will briefly outline some of the main scholarly viewpoints on the cross in John's Gospel, and seek to provide an initial critique of some of these formulations. In this way our paper has the twofold aim of seeking to raise questions about a dominant methodology used to interpret the cross, and to provide an exegetical study which may contribute to the debate over whether John attaches a theology of salvation to the cross that is not cast exclusively in terms of revelation and glorification.

## CONTENT AND METHOD IN DOMINANT FORMULATIONS OF THE DEATH OF JESUS IN JOHN

The work of Rudolf Bultmann, although extensively modified in different ways by later scholarship, has arguably set the tone for much of the critical consensus on our topic. Bultmann argued that 'In John, Jesus' death has no pre-eminent importance for salvation, but is the accomplishment of the "work" which began with the incarnation.'<sup>2</sup> This reference to the incarnation is instructive in that, for Bultmann, the incarnation is the decisive act of God, both in terms of salvation and revelation; indeed, it is

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<sup>1</sup> J. T. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 2.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (London: SCM Press, 1955), 52.

correct to say that revelation *is* salvation. J. T. Forestell has provided a significant development of Bultmann's thesis in his argument that the death of Jesus does not merely *complete* this revelation but is actually *central* to it as the climactic expression of God's love.<sup>3</sup> At his death Jesus supremely reveals the glory of God and through this is able to draw his followers into communion with himself and the Father. This revelation 'can be considered to be salvific without the necessity of evaluating the cross in terms of a cultic sacrifice or of moral satisfaction for sin'.<sup>4</sup> The importance of Christology in interpreting the cross in John is given its sharpest focus in Ernst Käsemann's study of John 17. For him the cross must be viewed in the light of John's 'naïve docetism' which presents Jesus as God striding on the earth; he is tempted to regard the passion narrative as 'a mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work'.<sup>5</sup> Although Käsemann does view the cross as a 'manifestation of divine self-giving love', the stress falls heavily on Jesus' death as his 'going away' to the Father in 'a victorious return from the alien realm below'.<sup>6</sup> G. Nicholson is critical of the way in which Käsemann seeks to integrate the cross and Christology, but nevertheless locates his own work along the same trajectory. He presents Jesus' death as fundamentally a 'departure' to glory which can only be understood in the light of the Johannine 'descent-ascent schema'.<sup>7</sup>

These formulations of the death of Jesus vary significantly and contain within themselves different methodological assumptions; however, they share a common antipathy to seeing any kind of 'atonement' theology in John, coupled with a prioritisation of Christology as the vital hermeneutical lens for viewing the cross. This emphasis on Christology as the all-determining starting point may, however, actually blur the lens by restricting its focus, and closer examination of some of the above views reveals some methodological problems. For instance, Nicholson's thesis is built on a study of the three *hypsoo* sayings (3:14; 8:28; 12:32ff.). His approach excludes other texts such as the *hyper* sayings (6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50, 51, 52; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14) and he justifies this exclusion by stating that while 'there is an outcropping of such language in the Fourth

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<sup>3</sup> Forestell, *Word*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-3.

<sup>5</sup> E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> G. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

Gospel, the Gospel itself is not determined by categories of sacrifice and atonement'.<sup>8</sup> This approach is problematic on at least two counts. First, 'outcropping' is hardly an adequate term to describe the *hyper* sayings when at the purely statistical level they are more prevalent than the *hypsoo* sayings. Second, it creates a false antithesis, for one does not have to hold that the Gospel is *determined* by categories of sacrifice and atonement to hold that it at least *contains* these categories. Nicholson's method means the evaluation of exegetical particulars in the light of a pre-determined christological framework.

It is not clear how an overall account of the death of Jesus can be confidently asserted on the basis of a selective approach to the exegetical aspect of the problem,<sup>9</sup> and the same holds true for the theological aspect. Nicholson himself rightly questions whether Forestell provides a truly comprehensive presentation, for to hold that the cross saves the believer in a revelatory sense does not answer the important theological question of what it saves the believer *from* or *for*?<sup>10</sup> The criticisms of D. A. Carson seem to carry weight when he suggests that the views of Forestell, Käsemann and Nicholson operate with a 'tyranny of the dominant theme' – Christology is elevated to the level of a controlling matrix against which everything else in the Gospel must be set and this approach inevitably drowns out the 'minor chords'.<sup>11</sup> It can be argued that a broader methodology for interpreting the death of Jesus needs to be adopted, one which encourages a dialogue between christological and soteriological concerns without allowing one to dictate the other. We will attempt to cast

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholson, *Departure*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> M. M. Thompson points out that Käsemann offers no exegetical discussion of the passion narrative, and hardly any exegesis of passages typically understood as referring to Jesus' death. *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholson, *Departure*, 5. See too the criticisms by M. Turner who argues that Forestell's position creates an 'interpretational vacuum' by not explaining *why* or *how* the cross reveals God's love. 'Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John: Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell', *EvQ* 62 (1990), 99-122.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 439. Similarly, M. C. de Boer argues that many of the prevailing interpretations of Jesus' death 'collapse' Johannine terms into each other in the quest for a comprehensive account; he suggests that wider exegetical foundations are needed. *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Kampen: Pharos, 1996), 27-9.

## THE JOHANNINE FOOTWASHING

the exegetical net slightly wider than is often the case by examining John 13:1-11 in detail. Our study will examine the significance of chapter 13 in its context and the way this context both informs, and is informed by, the structure of the opening three verses. We will then move on to consider other exegetical issues in these verses which may provide at least some minor chords in John's interpretation of the cross.

### THE CONTEXT OF CHAPTER 13 AND THE STRUCTURE OF VV. 1-3

All commentators observe how vv. 1-3 of this chapter are laden with theological significance, and their tight syntactical construction means that they deserve to be treated together. Following Bultmann and Boismard, some scholars view them as the first 'overloaded' indicators of at least two disparate sources underlying the whole chapter.<sup>12</sup> Our study proceeds on the basis that, whatever its compositional history, John 13 offers a coherent narrative as it now stands and that to view vv. 1-3 as overloaded runs the risk of misconstruing their function in the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> More satisfactory is W. Grossouw's observation that the verses function as a kind of 'minor prologue' to the second half of the Gospel by introducing its principle themes: love; Jesus' going away to the Father; the power of granting life by dying; Jesus' foreknowledge and control in going to his death; and the work of the devil and his instrument.<sup>14</sup>

This tight concentration of themes both introduces a new section in the Gospel and makes a number of connections with other parts of the Gospel which inform its context. The opening words 'Now before the Feast of the Passover' (*pro de tes heortes tou pascha*) tie the section to what has gone before, both immediately (11:55; 12:1) and earlier (2:13, 23; 6:4), as well as to what will follow (18:28, 39; 19:14). The Passover references in 11:55 and 12:1 form part of the context for the events (12:20-22) which increase the concentration on Jesus' impending death (12:23). Schnackenburg highlights the role that the Passover theme plays in the gradual progress towards the cross: 'in 11:55 it is "drawing near"; the anointing at Bethany took place "six days before" (12:1); the farewell meal

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<sup>12</sup> These are usually understood as a sacramental source (vv. 6-10) and a moralistic/exemplary source (vv. 12-15). Cf. F. Segovia, 'John 13:1-20: The Footwashing in the Johannine Tradition', *ZNW* 73 (1982), 31-51.

<sup>13</sup> See the observations on the redaction criticism of the chapter by C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1955; 2nd ed., 1978), 436-7; Carson, *John*, 458-60.

<sup>14</sup> W. K. Grossouw, 'A Note on John XIII 1-3', *NovT* 8 (1966), 129.

takes place "before the passover"; and the day of condemnation and execution is the "day of rest" of the passover (19:14).<sup>15</sup>

It is beyond our scope to examine the chronological and theological issues in John's treatment of the Passover; here we simply note that it acts as a pointer towards Jesus' death understood as his 'hour' (*hora*). This word forges connections to earlier references (2:4; 7:8, 30; 8:20) with the distinction that from 12:23 onwards the 'hour' has now arrived. It contributes to many of the dominant interpretations of Jesus' death as in 12:23, 27-33 it connects the theme of glory with death, and in 13:1 it appears in the participial phrase 'Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father' (*eidōs ho Iēsous hoti elthen autou he hora hina metabē ek tou kosmou toutou pros ton patera*). In this way the meaning of Jesus' 'hour' is drawn from the context in which the term appears; we will suggest that when its context in v. 1 is combined with a very similar phrase in v. 3, the result is the emergence of another dimension to the cross alongside the glory-departure motifs.

The second participial phrase in v. 1 is extremely significant: 'having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (*agapesas tous idious tous en to kosmo eis telos egapesen autous*). Many scholars point out that *eis telos* is capable of both an adverbial ('to the uttermost') and a temporal ('to the end') meaning, with most suggesting that in customary Johannine fashion both are probably intended.<sup>16</sup> The temporal sense connects strongly with the sense of Jesus' hour which has now arrived. Schnackenburg builds on this to argue that the aorist participle *agapesas* refers to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples up to this point, whereas the finite verb *egapesen* must point to a single action on Jesus' part; combined with the temporal sense of *eis telos* and the reference to Jesus' *hora*, he argues that the referent must be the cross.<sup>17</sup> However, this presentation of a single action on Jesus' part as an act of love must be considered in the light of the way in which vv. 1-3 are structured.

H. Ridderbos argues that 13:1-3 provides a 'double introduction' to the farewell discourse with two parallel sentences which perform different

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<sup>15</sup> R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol. 3 (London: Burns & Oates, 1982), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Barrett, *St John*, 438. Also R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday 1971), 550.

<sup>17</sup> Schnackenburg, *St John*, 16.



functions.<sup>18</sup> The two parallel participial clauses (v. 1 *eidōs ho Iēsous hoti* and v. 3 *eidōs hoti*) are separated by the reference to the supper taking place, and for this reason Ridderbos argues that the import of v. 1 is broader than that of vv. 2f.: the first sentence relates to the whole of 'Jesus' suffering and death, which is about to be described, while "Jesus, knowing..." in vs.3 relates especially to the last meal, referring to it as a symbolic overture to and anticipation of the chain of events announced in vs.1'.<sup>19</sup>

Functioning as the introductory text for the farewell discourse, then, v. 1 colours all of Jesus' actions and words from this point onwards and means that they will function as demonstrations of his love. In this way Schnackenburg suggests that *egapēsen* refers primarily to Jesus' death on the cross without excluding a secondary symbolic reference in the washing of the disciples' feet.<sup>20</sup> The fact that in v. 3 the reference to Jesus 'knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God' (*eidōs hoti panta edōken auto ho pater eis tas cheiras kai hoti apo theou exelthen kai pros ton theon hypagei*) is followed immediately by an act of humble service, arguably suggests that *in this particular context* Jesus' supreme authority and departure to God are both qualified by self-abasing love. Here Ridderbos charges Käsemann with a one-sided presentation of the concept of glory and argues that if the footwashing is taken to be a symbolic overture to the cross, then soteriology is joined with Christology.<sup>21</sup> Similarly Barrett comments on v. 3: 'Jesus was going to his eternal glory with the Father *through* the humiliation of the cross, of which the footwashing was an intended prefigurement.'<sup>22</sup> We now turn to consider other issues in 13:1-11 which bear on the interpretation of Jesus' death.

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<sup>18</sup> H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 451.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 452. Also Carson, *John*, 460.

<sup>20</sup> Schnackenburg, *St John*, 16. So too J. D. G. Dunn, 'The Washing of the Disciples' Feet in John 13:1-20', *ZNW* 61 (1970), 247-52.

<sup>21</sup> Ridderbos, *John*, 453.

<sup>22</sup> Barrett, *St John*, 439 (emphasis added). This builds on his earlier suggestion (14-15) that the crucifixion in chapters 18-19 receives so little theological interpretation precisely because it has been interpreted here and throughout chapters 13-17.

## FURTHER EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DETAILS IN 13:1-11

Verses 2-4 contribute some individual notes to John 13's minor chord. J. C. Thomas argues that 'supper' (*deipnon*) in v. 2 evokes the account of another meal in 12:1-8. This contains parallels to 13:1-11 in its references to Judas and the anointing of feet in association with death. He further suggests that with the use of 'towel' (*lention*) in v. 4 Jesus is attired as a servant and consciously foreshadowing the humiliation he will undergo at the cross.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, some scholars also see symbolic significance in the laying aside of outer garments (*tithemi*) and taking up (*lambano*) the towel. R. B. Edwards argues that both words are unusual as terminology for removing and resuming clothing; she joins Brown and Barrett in suggesting that the terms probably echo Jesus' earlier references to laying down his life and taking it up again (10:11, 15, 17-18).<sup>24</sup> Combined with the mention of Jesus' betrayer and the *diabolos*, a murderer from the beginning (8:44), these details serve to locate the unfolding narrative in the hour of Jesus' death.

Peter's objection to the footwashing in vv. 5-6 prepares the way for the key theological explanations of the event. In v. 7 Jesus responds to Peter's negative reaction: 'what I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand after these things' (*ho ego poio sy ouk oidas arti gnose de meta tauta*). The use of *meta tauta* makes a clear connection to a recurring Johannine distinction between the understanding of the disciples before Jesus' death and resurrection and that which they possess retrospectively (cf. 2:22; 8:28; 12:16; 13:19; 14:29; 20:9). If the death and resurrection of Jesus can be understood as the events which lead to the gift of the Spirit who will testify to the truth about Jesus (7:37-39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13),<sup>25</sup> then texts like 13:7 would seem to suggest that a nexus of events lying ahead will provide the proper understanding of Jesus' words and actions. Jesus' death clarifies the revelation of his identity.<sup>26</sup> This provides an important qualification to Nicholson's acceptance of M. Appold's thesis that Jesus' identity interprets the cross,<sup>27</sup> for there is clearly a sense here in which the cross interprets Jesus or, at the very least, his actions. The

<sup>23</sup> J. C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 82, 87.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Edwards, 'The Christological Basis of the Johannine Footwashing' in J. B. Green and M. Turner (eds), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 372; Barrett, *St John*, 439; Brown, *John*, 551.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, *Humanity*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Nicholson, *Departure*, 8.

narrative progresses on the basis that the true meaning of what is taking place has yet to become clear and this further encourages a symbolic understanding of the footwashing.

Peter, however, ignores the promise of future understanding. In v. 8 he makes an emphatic rejection of Jesus' action (*ou me* with the future indicative, coupled with *eis ton aiona*). Thomas points out how the only other passages in John which contain the formula *ou me* + aorist subjunctive/future indicative + *eis ton aiona* come from Jesus concerning eternal life. He observes: 'In a twist as ironic as Caiaphas's prophecy, Peter uses the very formula Jesus has used to offer life to refuse Jesus' offer.'<sup>28</sup> In his response, Jesus makes it clear to Peter that the footwashing is not optional and has far-reaching consequences:<sup>29</sup> 'unless I wash you, you do not have a share with me' (*ean me nippo se, ouk echeis meros met emou*). We will come to look at the significance of 'wash' (*nippo*) in our discussion of v. 10; here we note the importance of having a 'share' or 'part' (*meros*) with Jesus. In the LXX the word is used with respect to Israelite inheritance in the promised land (Num. 18:20; Deut. 12:12; 14:27) and this sense appears to have been developed so that it came to refer to participation in eschatological blessings.<sup>30</sup> If there is an eschatological sense in v. 8 then importantly it is tied to the 'with me' (*met emou*) and it is right to ask what blessings Jesus bestows on his followers. Commentators note how having a *meros* with Jesus is given some content in 12:26; 14:1-3, 19, 21-23; 17:22, 24 with the main emphasis being that his followers will be able to share in his glory and life.<sup>31</sup>

This connects with at least two issues in our argument. First, it is clear that having a 'part' with Jesus depends directly on the washing; it is the symbol of a necessary action by Jesus. As Brown states succinctly: 'the footwashing is something which makes it possible for the disciples to have eternal life with Jesus. Such emphasis is intelligible if we understand the footwashing as a symbol for Jesus' salvific death.'<sup>32</sup> Second, this in turn challenges views which hold that Jesus' death effects no change either in his relationship to his followers, or in God's relationship to the world. As Thompson argues, Käsemann's thesis that Jesus' death is simply his

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, *Footwashing*, 92 (emphasis his).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *John*, 565-6; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36, (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 233.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Schnackenburg, *St John*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *John*, 566.

return to the Father cannot be substantiated here since, if a symbolic reference is granted to the footwashing, 13:8 suggests that Jesus' death effects a necessary change in his relationship with 'his own'.<sup>33</sup>

This leads us to consider *nipto* and its repetition in v. 10 where it is accompanied by 'bathe' (*louo*). The issue of whether there is any distinction between *nipto* and *louo* is complicated by the thorny problem of v. 10's textual variant, and it is on the basis of the text-critical decision that commentators divide into sacramental and non-sacramental readings. As Thomas notes 'the decision to include or omit *ei me tous podas* ['except the feet'] affects the interpretation of the entire passage'.<sup>34</sup> The omission of the phrase lends weight to the thesis that the footwashing is symbolic of Jesus' death without a sacramental reference. The reading 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash' (*ho leloumenos ouk echei chreian nipsasthai*) allows the interpreter to see the footwashing as symbolic of the *leloumenos* and not an additional cleansing. Dunn explains: 'the *loueiv* refers to the *niptein* of v.8 while the *niptein* of v.10 refers to the further washing requested by Peter in v.9. V.10 is the answer to this request: *ho leloumenos* is the person who has received the footwashing.'<sup>35</sup> If the longer reading is taken, this appears to relegate the footwashing to being something other than a complete 'bath', and as such forces more of a distinction between *louo* and *nipto*. Here the former term is then usually held to point towards baptism and the latter to forgiveness of post-baptismal sins.<sup>36</sup>

We follow Thomas who shows the textual evidence in favour of the longer (and more difficult) reading,<sup>37</sup> but suggest that this does not have to force an acute distinction between *louo* and *nipto*. Carson comments that a distinction is not often maintained by Greek writers and notes John's fondness for synonyms.<sup>38</sup> He traces the narrative dialogue to argue that although the footwashing in vv. 6-8 symbolises the cleansing provided by the cross, Peter's exuberance in v. 9 sees Jesus turn the footwashing to a different application in v. 10: the initial cleansing provided by Jesus is a once-for-all act.<sup>39</sup> On this basis *louo* refers to the initial cleansing while *nipto*, in reference to feet, refers to the ongoing experience of needing to

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, *Humanity*, 103.

<sup>34</sup> J. C. Thomas, 'A Note on the Text of John 13:10', *NovT* 29 (1987), 46.

<sup>35</sup> Dunn, 'Footwashing', 250.

<sup>36</sup> F. J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonour: Reading John 13-21* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, 'Note', 46-52.

<sup>38</sup> Carson, *John*, 465; So too Barrett, *St John*, 441.

<sup>39</sup> Carson, *John*, 465.

have subsequent sins washed away. If it is objected that the longer reading prevents the footwashing from referring to the once-for-all cleansing, Carson points out that this is beside the point: '*In this verse* [v.10] that may be so – but the point is that this verse has launched into a new application of the footwashing.'<sup>40</sup> This view can sit comfortably with coherent explanations of the entire narrative (even those based on the shorter reading). Brown states that the simplest explanation of the footwashing is that Peter's questioning 'enabled Jesus to explain the salvific necessity of his death: it would bring men their heritage with him and cleanse them of sin'.<sup>41</sup>

The cleansing provided by the footwashing in 13:8, 10 is paralleled in 15:3 by a cleansing through Jesus' word. This leads Bultmann to hold that the former is symbolic of the latter.<sup>42</sup> However, Thomas shows the problems this view faces in light of the two very different contexts in chapters 13 and 15. He follows the analysis of C. H. Dodd who draws attention to other paradoxes in John where eternal life comes by eating the Son of Man's flesh and blood and yet also by the words Jesus speaks.<sup>43</sup> This points to a close unity, rather than dichotomy, between the word of Jesus and the service of Jesus, such that the word which Jesus speaks is actually his explanation of himself and his work: the two are inseparable.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We do not suggest that John 13:1-11 provides a comprehensive interpretation of the cross, but rather that it offers some material which would need to be incorporated into an overall presentation. The passage connects with at least two wider issues. First, it has been beyond our scope to explain exactly *how* the cross cleanses and the precise ways in which this might be attached to terminology of sin and atonement. But the washing terminology of chapter 13 may provide hermeneutical contact points for other parts of the Gospel which could shed further light on how Jesus' death cleanses.<sup>45</sup> Second, Barrett wants to stress that although *hyper* carries sacrificial connotations in John, 'no precision about the mode or

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. (emphasis his).

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *John*, 568.

<sup>42</sup> R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 470-2.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Footwashing*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 234; Brown, *John*, 677.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, de Boer explores the possibilities of 19:34 giving content to the cleansing of 13:8, 10. *Perspectives*, 292-302.

significance of the sacrifice can be obtained'.<sup>46</sup> Yet at the same time he asserts: 'the cleansing of the disciples' feet represents their cleansing from sin in the sacrificial blood of Christ'.<sup>47</sup> In our view Barrett has gone further than he intends to in showing how, at the very least, the *hyper* sayings might potentially engage in a dialogue with his interpretation of the footwashing.<sup>48</sup>

Regardless, our discussion has aimed to show that a broader methodological approach to interpreting the cross will not so much completely reject the critical consensus as simply aim to qualify it. John 13:1-11 is one possible indicator that Jesus' death could be interpreted as a glorious return to the Father through the humiliation of the cleansing cross. Such an interpretation has important homiletical consequences. While we may (rightly) not be tempted to preach the importance of copying the physical act of footwashing, it is surely much more common – on the basis of 13:15 – to see in the passage the *purely* exemplary, and to fail to realise that the ongoing mandate to abase ourselves and humbly serve one another is based on the once-for-all 'complete demonstration of Jesus' love, which is symbolized by Jesus' lowering himself to the status of a slave in the footwashing and realized in his vicarious cross-death'.<sup>49</sup> Our acts of humble service may make us *like* Jesus, but it is only Jesus' act of humble service that makes us *belong* to him (13:8).

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<sup>46</sup> Barrett, *St John*, 298.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>48</sup> Turner provides a careful discussion of the theological and linguistic issues related to the *hyper* sayings and the ways in which they might both illumine, and be illumined by, other interpretive ambiguities in John. 'Atonement', 118-22.

<sup>49</sup> A. J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 402.

# RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE: JONATHAN EDWARDS VERSUS THE GOD OF DEISM

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## INTRODUCTION

Of the many possible answers to the question ‘Why should we study Jonathan Edwards?’ the one that matters for us in the context of theological education is that we think he has something distinctively beneficial to say to the contemporary church. If this is not so, then we ought to pursue other priorities. But I think that Edwards *does* have something truly unique to contribute. This appraisal is not only an appreciation of his godliness and genius, which were indeed extraordinary in their own right, but also a product of his location in history. He lived before the divisions between science and religion, philosophy and theology, and church and state became walls. He lived in a time when the prospects for achieving a total synthesis of all human endeavours under Christian auspices still appeared to be close at hand. He was thus able to construct an all-encompassing, unified vision of reality that can seem almost beyond the imagination to contemporary Christians living in our virtual ghettos, consigned as we are to the margins of intellectual, cultural, and political life.

Yet Edwards also lived during the Enlightenment, in a world in which most of modernity’s demons were making their polite *début*. Edwards noticed them. He was in fact highly sensitive to the challenges most of the characteristic Enlightenment thought-forms presented to orthodox Christianity, and nearly all of his output could be understood as an apologetic in response to them.<sup>2</sup> But in so doing Edwards was not acting

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<sup>2</sup> See Stephen J. Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty: the Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003).

as a mere reactionary.<sup>3</sup> He was in some ways himself a child of the Enlightenment, one who welcomed the opportunities afforded by the age and readily accepted many of its intellectual tools.<sup>4</sup> He took them up, however, not to capitulate to the proto-liberalism he deplored, but in order to 'set forth divine and Christian doctrines in a clear light, and unravel the difficulties that attend them, and defend them with great strength and clearness of reason'.<sup>5</sup> In this interpretive/apologetic work of presenting the truth as clearly and persuasively as possible, Edwards was participating in God's own project in creating the universe, which was to communicate himself to his intelligent creatures in ever-increasing streams of noetic, affectional, and ontological self-revelation.<sup>6</sup> And so, in our age that retains a strange deference to a number of key Enlightenment projects while also embracing postmodernism when it suits, Edwards can yet help us. He helps us not only by lending us his formulations, some of which are indeed ripe for wholesale appropriation, but perhaps more so by giving us a paradigm of what it means to apply God's eternal truths to one's own situation in a relevant and compelling way. This is indeed the perennial task given to theologians and ministers of every generation.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Gay saw this slightly differently: 'His mind was the opposite of reactionary or fundamentalist. Yet his history was both. Such apparent contradictions are a sign of something extraordinary; with Jonathan Edwards, they are the mark of tragedy.' (Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966], p. 104.)

<sup>4</sup> 'A son of the Enlightenment who adopted key Enlightenment assumptions, Edwards nevertheless spent his life fighting Enlightenment religion.' (Gerald McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], pp. 3-4.) See also George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 456-8.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 5: Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 303. Edwards was not here applying these words of millennial expectation to himself, but the description would seem to fit his self-understanding. See also Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Volume 18: The "Miscellanies"*, 501-832, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 443. Edwards' Trinitarian doctrine of revelation, in which divine communication entails knowing, loving, and becoming like God, is the subject of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.



So Edwards was well placed, equipped, and inclined to confront Enlightenment ideology. And this ideology manifested itself most radically in the theological realm as deism, the 'Enlightenment philosophy of religion'.<sup>7</sup> Edwards saw deism as an ominous threat, and it was a refutation of this religious manifestation of the *Zeitgeist* that most occupied Edwards throughout his theological career.<sup>8</sup> This paper will argue that, although often described in other terms, the syndrome known as deism still represents a problem for the contemporary Western church; and, that in addition to his larger example of thoughtful and faithful engagement with the corrosive intellectual currents of one's own day, Jonathan Edwards provides us some specific directions to oppose it. First, let me establish briefly the relevant historical context.

### JONATHAN EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was many things: philosopher, scientist, theologian, pastor, evangelist, missionary, university president, not to mention head of a remarkable Christian family.<sup>9</sup> He came to Christian faith not by hearing something new, but in what would become a *motif* in his ministry, by apprehending the sublime beauty of a truth he already knew: God's sovereignty over human destiny.<sup>10</sup> Edwards graduated MA from the young theological college in New Haven, Connecticut, now known as Yale University. Most of his ministry was spent at Northampton, where he served first as assistant minister and then as successor to his esteemed grandfather Solomon Stoddard. There he saw the Great Awakening come and go, and much of his earlier writings were concerned to explain, defend and moderate this challenge to conventional

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, 'Der Deismus' in *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 1925, quoted in Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, reprinted 1985), p. 289.

<sup>8</sup> 'It is also clear from Edward's sermons that he considered deism Reformed Christianity's foremost nemesis... deism could be seen on the New England horizon, if usually only in the form of its underdeveloped cousin Arminianism' (McDermott, *Confronts*, p. 46).

<sup>9</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 1-2; 10; 13-14; Appendix C. See also Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (eds), *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 40-41.

religious life. Edwards was eventually expelled from his pulpit over his decision to depart from Stoddard's practice of admitting unconverted churchgoers to the Lord's Table. He then spent the next seven years as a missionary to the Housatonic Indians of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. There in the frontier of the American wilderness, he wrote his main theological treatises such as *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin*. He died in 1758 from the effects of a faulty smallpox vaccination, mere weeks after being installed as the president of Princeton.<sup>11</sup>

Edwards' theology was standard Calvinist orthodoxy in its essence. The admiring editor of some of his posthumous publications said 'he was a Protestant and a Calvinist in judgment, adhering to the main articles of the reformed religion with an unshaken firmness, and with a fervent zeal'.<sup>12</sup> But his expressions of these articles could not always be described as 'standard'. As we have already noted, his theology was done with a view towards making the old orthodoxy intelligible, and thus defensible, to the Enlightenment milieu in which he lived. And in accordance with this mission, Edwards theologised with a characteristic independence from his predecessors. He seemed sensitive to implications that the Reformed tradition was sliding from *Sola Scriptura* into a wooden deference to Calvin, and felt compelled to distance himself from presumptions that this might be operative in his own theology: 'I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught.'<sup>13</sup> He was highly appreciative of post-Reformation greats Peter van Mastricht and Francis Turretin, but explicit references in his works even to these figures utterly pale in comparison to citations of Scripture.

Edwards' work is also characterized by a willingness to speculate. He was rarely satisfied with overly bare statements of dogma he inherited; he could 'not content himself with anything but an immense theology of universal, eternal scope'.<sup>14</sup> To accomplish this, he sometimes felt at liberty to piece together scant elements of scriptural data and extrapolate. In

<sup>11</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 345-61; 490-94.

<sup>12</sup> Editor's Preface to *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), p. 144 (hereafter *Works in 2 Volumes*).

<sup>13</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1: Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Susan Stahle, 'The Trinitarian Spirit of Jonathan Edwards' Theology', unpublished Ph.D. diss. (Boston University, 1999), p. 13.

a moment of youthful enthusiasm, he even boasted 'I am not afraid to say twenty things about the Trinity which the Scripture never said.'<sup>15</sup> Although this was an entry in a semi-private notebook not repeated in published pronouncements, it is clear that he agreed with the Westminster Confession of Faith's judgment that 'good and necessary consequence[s] may be deduced from Scripture' as well as explicit statements.<sup>16</sup>

But if Edwards was given to speculation, he was also careful not to ignore the definite limits Scripture places on speculation. Peter Gay reports, lamentably from his view, that 'Jonathan Edwards philosophized in a cage', the cage of Puritan fidelity to biblical authority.<sup>17</sup> This was a far cry from the kind of philosophy practised by his Enlightenment contemporaries who revelled in 'free-thinking' they imagined to be controlled only by the dictates of reason. Rather, biblical exegesis held an 'all consuming hold' on Edwards's thought.<sup>18</sup> Herein lies the essence of his great usefulness to the church of his own and succeeding generations: Edwards was a speculative genius of the first rank who also happened to believe that every word of the Old and New Testaments were the very words of the living God.<sup>19</sup>

One final relevant aspect of Edwards' thought would be its aesthetic nature. In Perry Miller's estimation, 'Edwards was infinitely more than a theologian. He was one of America's five or six major artists, who happened to work with ideas instead of poems or novels.'<sup>20</sup> Miller's point was not that Edwards was simply good at communicating his ideas through language, though indeed he certainly did this as well. Miller meant that the ideas themselves were beautiful. To use an analogy from another discipline, Einstein is not typically listed among the artists, yet those who become caught up in his vision of reality are often compelled to use

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<sup>15</sup> Miscellany 94 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 13: The "Miscellanies", a-500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 257.

<sup>16</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith I:4.

<sup>17</sup> 'he sought to express the old religion in new ways. But the results were, as they had to be, pathetic: Jonathan Edwards philosophized in a cage that his fathers had built and that he unwittingly had reinforced... Edwards went right on accepting the testimony of Scriptures as literally true.' Gay, *Loss of Mastery*, pp. 113-14.

<sup>18</sup> Hatch, 'Editor's Introduction' in *Experience*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> See also John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, (Tyndale House, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1949), p. xvi.

aesthetic rather than scientific or mathematic valuations. We might speak of Einstein's description of the universe in terms of being 'breathtaking' and 'beautiful', not merely 'consistent with the evidence' or 'valid'. The same could be said of Edwards. Going a step further, we might say that this comparison bespeaks more than mere analogy. Perhaps we find both Einstein and Edwards aesthetically moving for the same reason: they both provide us with unusually able descriptions of God's infinite artistry.

#### DEISM

Now let us turn again to consider Edwards' antagonist, the god of deism. The term refers to a philosophical abstraction (or alternatively, a construction) arising out of the British Enlightenment of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It was in one sense an abstraction from historic Christianity, and specifically, from Puritan Christianity. If Jensen is right when he says that the Enlightenment was basically a secularisation of Puritanism,<sup>21</sup> then we must understand the characteristic religion of the Enlightenment – Deism – to be a secularisation of Puritan religion. The Puritans wanted to strip the Church of England of every artefact of human invention, using the rule of Scripture as expressed in the regulative principle. So too, the deists wanted to strip Christianity of all that was extraneous, using instead the rule of human reason. All teachings of Christianity that did not accord with reason, such as the Trinity or the incarnation, were to be excised forthwith, and the result was deism.

From another perspective, deism could perhaps also be understood as a construction arising from some of the principal forces of the age; at any rate, such forces certainly fostered its growth. One of these was reflection on the wars of religion following the Reformation. It seemed to many that adherence to dogmatic religion, whether under the absolute authority of the Pope or anything else, led only to irreconcilable disputes and bloodshed. Therefore, a new source of universally accessible authority must be sought in reason. Another force was Europe's increasing interaction with world religions facilitated by the Age of Exploration. On the surface, various world religions seemed to share much with Christianity. Surely, there must be a way to distil that which all religions share, and to affirm this

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<sup>21</sup> 'America has no foundation but the Enlightenment and the Puritanism of which Enlightenment was the secularization.' (Robert W. Jensen, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], p. 195.)

commonality rather than fight over disputable peripheries particular to each group.

The particular force that would give deism its characteristic machine form, however, stemmed from the discoveries of Isaac Newton and the Scientific Revolution. Newton had discovered that the universe operated according to elegant mathematical formulae verifiable by any observer. Newton was not himself a deist, but those looking for an alternative to the Christian God found in his discoveries a likely avenue. Terry Muck puts it vividly: 'The transcendent selves wanted a world they could run so that they could control it. Such a world was provided by the physics of Isaac Newton, a world that ran with machinelike precision.'<sup>22</sup> And the mechanistic character of such a world, and the character of its Designer, was an easily blurred distinction.<sup>23</sup> All of the foregoing, plus the idealist epistemology popularised by John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1695) came together to shape and help disseminate deism in all its manifestations.

What then, did the deists believe? As far as a theology proper, the deists tended to think of the Creator as impersonal and essentially absent. God was theoretically powerful as the original Creator, yet he was now reticent to interfere in human affairs, whether in word or deed.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps most significantly, he was silent, willing to let Muck's 'transcendent selves' get on with their lives.

What then, was the deist creed? In the absence of an authoritative confession, Lord Herbert of Cherbury's five *notitiae communes* (common notions) may serve as a rough guide: 1. God exists; 2. God ought to be worshiped; 3. Moral virtue is man's duty; 4. Moral failures can be expiated by repentance; 5. There is reward and punishment after life and death.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Terry C. Muck, 'After Selfhood: Constructing the Religious Self in a Post-Self Age' in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998), p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> In the words of a contemporary proponent of deism, 'With scripture and revelation removed, all that remains to know God is personal reason and observation of the universe. Essentially, this is getting to know the artist by studying the artwork' (<http://www.deism.org/frames.htm>; accessed 27 Dec. 2005).

<sup>24</sup> 'God does not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily; but leaves those things, that can only be considered as means (and as such are in their own nature mutable) to human discretion, to determine as it thinks most conducing to those things, which are in their own nature obligatory.' (Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation* [London, 1730], p. 115.)

<sup>25</sup> Herbert, *De Veritate*, in Reventlow, *Authority of the Bible*, p. 188.

These notions were taken to be known innately by all, though later deists would modify the list and eliminate its Platonic assumptions.

With this rather bare confession of faith, it is to be expected that the deists would have major problems with a number of Reformed doctrines. Or perhaps the deists' pre-existing objections to Reformed doctrines led them to adopt this rather bare confession of faith. In any case, that which was offensive to deist sensibilities can be categorized under three main headings: God, God's word, and God's dealings with mankind.

1. God
  - a. The Trinity
  - b. The incarnation
  - c. Miracles
  
2. God's word
  - a. The necessity of special revelation
  - b. The nature of special revelation
  - c. The content of special revelation (mystery)
  
3. God's dealings with mankind
  - a. Original sin
  - b. Hell
  - c. The blood atonement
  - d. Sovereignty
  - e. Salvation by faith alone

Such doctrines were offensive to deist thinkers since they were so clearly in violation of their genteel notions of Reason, and were thus to be rejected out of hand. Moreover, they postulated that any book (such as, say, the Bible) that taught such things should also be rejected as a perverse imposture.

#### EDWARDS' RESPONSE

Edwards proposed to disabuse his reason-obsessed generation of its unreasonable objections to God's truth. As a general introduction to his response to the deist mode of thinking, let me quote at length from his conclusion to the *Freedom of the Will*. Edwards is here commenting on the attitude of those who thought, if doctrines such as divine sovereignty were true, then God is unjust and cruel, and guilty of manifest deceit and double-dealing, and the like.

Yea, some have gone so far, as confidently to assert, that if any book which pretends to be Scripture, teaches such doctrines, that alone is sufficient warrant for mankind to reject it, as what cannot be the word of God. Some, who have not gone so far, have said, that if the Scripture seems to teach any such doctrines, so contrary to reason, we are obliged to find out some other interpretation of those texts where such doctrines seem to be exhibited. Others express themselves yet more modestly: they express... themselves as not daring to embrace some doctrines, though they seem to be delivered in Scripture, according to the more obvious and natural construction of the words. But indeed it would show a truer modesty and humility, if they would more entirely rely on God's wisdom and discerning, who knows infinitely better than we what is agreeable to his own perfections, and never intended to leave these matters to the decision of the wisdom and discerning of men: but by his own unerring instruction, to determine for us what the truth is, knowing how little our judgment is to be depended on, and how extremely prone vain and blind men are to err in such matters.<sup>26</sup>

In his response, Edwards clarifies what is prior in his opponents' minds, and discloses what is prior in his own. The deists presupposed that 'Reason', defined in Lockean terms but heavily flavoured by various sentiments of the age such as human autonomy, was the only competent guide to truth. If the deist's inherently anti-supernatural and humanistic presuppositions of what constitutes reason are followed, then the Bible is false almost by definition. Edwards, on the other hand, is happy to confess that he presupposes God and his revealed word to be true, and argues that the alternative is far less plausible. This is his basic epistemological position, one which we today we might associate with presuppositionalism.<sup>27</sup> But throughout most of *Freedom of the Will* and in many other instances, Edwards simply adopts one or more of his opponents' stated or implicit assumptions in order to expose internal inconsistency and/or faulty logic.<sup>28</sup> He did this in response to nearly all of

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<sup>26</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, Conclusion, in *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Proponents of both major camps of apologetics have naturally claimed Edwards as their own; see for example John H. Gerstner, 'Outline of the apologetics of Jonathan Edwards' (four-part essay), *Bibliotheca sacra* 133, no. 529-32 (1976): 3-10; 99-107; 95-201; 91-8 and K. Scott Oliphint, 'Jonathan Edwards: Reformed Apologist', *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 165-86.

<sup>28</sup> Marsden points out that *Freedom of the Will* is less explicitly reliant on Scripture than *Original Sin*, where Edwards made it clear that 'In the last

the points at issue with the deists enumerated above, but for the present purpose, let us focus our discussion on but four of them: miracles, the necessity of special revelation, mystery, and sovereign election.

### 1. *Miracles*

Classical machines are characterized by a lack of initiative or development over time; they follow an established pattern of action according to set rules. Such was the god of deism. God created the universe and set it in motion according to Newton's laws, and then stepped away from it. Just because the creation and its laws are perfect, there is no need for God to intervene in it, or, more to the deists' point, to *interfere* with it. There is thus no room for miracles in the traditional sense of the word.<sup>29</sup> As exceptions to, or rather, transgressions of, the Laws of Nature, miracles would be admissions that the Machine was imperfect or had been overtaken by events not accounted for by its Designer. Such transgressions would be as unworthy of God as if he had broken the moral law.

In a characteristic move, Edwards subsumed the disputed point under a vastly intensified affirmation of the larger truth. This was done through the doctrine of continuous creation. In Edwards' understanding, the original creation was simply the first instance in an infinite series of immediate creative acts that continues even now: 'It [is] most agreeable to the Scripture, to suppose creation to be performed new every moment.'<sup>30</sup> This may sound novel, but it is not essentially at odds with the traditional doctrine of providence, wherein God is constantly influencing all reality for his purposes. Exegetically, Edwards based his thinking on passages such as Amos 5:8, where God's ongoing action in the cycle of day and night is intermingled with his ongoing creation of stars and sea, and passages such as Hebrews 1:3 where Christ 'upholds all things by the word of his

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analysis the argument came down to what Scripture said – and the plain meanings of Scripture were sometimes philosophically difficult.' (*Jonathan Edwards*, p. 457.)

<sup>29</sup> Toland, who was far more moderate in his critique of miracles than later deists, wrote 'whatever is contrary to Reason can be no Miracle, for it has been sufficiently proved already, that contradiction is only another word for impossible or nothing. The miraculous action therefore must be something in itself intelligible and possible, though the manner of doing it be extraordinary.' (*Christianity not Mysterious* [London, 1696], p. 90.)

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, Miscellany 346 in *Works*, Volume 13, p. 418.



power'.<sup>31</sup> Philosophically, Edwards held theories of causality and ontology that precluded even momentary independence from God.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the deists conceived of the Newtonian universe as a set of self-existent entities each having their own momentum, requiring nothing more to explain or sustain their endurance throughout time. If God were to be removed from the scene, the universe would continue on in its self-regulating motions just as it had.<sup>33</sup> But Edwards insisted that there could be only one *a se* entity, and that is God. The planets, the atoms, the universe as a whole, are not self-existent phenomena; their existence is fully contingent upon God, and this is true not only at the time of the original Creation but at every moment since. Nothing exists for an instant outside the will of Christ, and thus, in effect, all things are being continually created. Jensen sums it up: 'That atoms or other masses should be, even if created once upon a time, self-possessing in their being and action denies God. Edwards was one of the first to see this with full clarity.'<sup>34</sup>

Where does this doctrine leave miracles? It upholds them in the strongest possible way. Miracles are no exceptions to the 'Laws of Nature', they are precisely reminders that *there are no Laws of Nature* per se. There is only a sovereign Creator actively upholding his universe at all times according to his own wisdom and good pleasure, the usual outcomes of which are described by Newton. The deists needed a god who would create the universe and then walk away from it, a god who would refrain from intervening in their affairs. Edwards said their very existence at each moment was upheld by God's personal creative activity, which was no less an exertion of God's power than the biblical miracles they so abhorred.

## 2. *Need for Special Revelation*

I remember seeing in a military museum a Soviet air-to-air missile that looked suspiciously like an early version of the United States' AIM-9 'Sidewinder' missile. Apparently, a Sidewinder had been shot at a Chinese MiG-17 during the Taiwan Strait conflict of 1958. The missile became lodged in the aircraft's extended tailpipe without exploding, allowing it to

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<sup>31</sup> Edwards cites Job 9:9; Ps. 65:6; Isa. 40:22, 44:24; and Amos 5:8 in Miscellany 346 (ibid.).

<sup>32</sup> See for example Miscellanies 149, 151 and 177, in *Works, Volume 13*, pp. 295, 326.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, later atheistic science would follow the path indicated by the deists to its logical conclusion.

<sup>34</sup> Jensen, *America's Theologian*, pp. 26-7.

land without further incident. In a paradigmatic case of reverse engineering, Soviet scientists then picked it apart and produced a near-identical replica.<sup>35</sup>

The point is that, given enough careful observation, you can learn all there is to know about a machine and then use the knowledge to mimic its creator. For the deists, everything we need to know about the universe and the god who made it can be learned through the exercise of reason and the scientific method. The inference seems to be, that were humans given sufficient time and resources, we too could reverse-engineer a universe just as good as the original. There is therefore no need for God to send us anything like a spoken word, for everything is plain to the eye of the enlightened observer in the possession of almighty reason. We might even say that ‘the fundamental principle of all deist thought, [is] that a purely rational religion has no place for supernatural revelation, for the content of revelation is either irrational or superfluous’.<sup>36</sup>

In response, Edwards first wanted to say that the picture the deists painted of the sufficiency of human reason was fatally optimistic: ‘The world has had a great deal of experience of the necessity of a revelation; we may see it in all ages, that have been without a revelation. In what gross darkness and brutal stupidity have such places, in these matters, always been overwhelmed!’<sup>37</sup> He notices that native reason does not seem to have been of much benefit to parts of the world wholly untouched by biblical revelation:

all the Gentile world hath run into the grossest theological errors... we cannot help ascribing all the true religion in the world to divine instruction; and all the frightful variety of religious errors to human invention, and to the dark and degenerate nature, by the imaginary light of which, deists suppose the right idea of God may be easily and universally discovered.<sup>38</sup>

For all the deist’s talk of self-evident or universally received notions, there appeared to be strangely few enlightened deists among the heathen benefiting from this ‘imaginary light’.

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<sup>35</sup> See also the Federation of American Scientists website file on the AA-2 Atol (<http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/missile/row/aa-2.htm>, accessed 26 Dec. 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Chamberlain, ‘Editor’s Introduction’ in *Works, Volume 18*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol 2, p. 463.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol 2, p. 477.

As for what might have produced all this error in human religious opinion, Edwards points to the ethical dimensions of original sin. Previous thought on this issue tended to emphasize the finitude of human faculties, and therefore our inability to reach the infinite.<sup>39</sup> Edwards, on the other hand, seemed to think that our rational capacity, though finite, is yet good enough to discern God's truth.<sup>40</sup> The real problem has nothing to do with the intellect; the problem is that fallen people 'choose that which their own reason tells them is unreasonable and vile'.<sup>41</sup> They simply don't *want* to listen to the truth, whether it comes from their own reason or from special revelation, because they don't *like* it. Sin has distorted human inclinations and taste so that however much they *should* be able to know about the creator, they yet end up in idolatrous error.<sup>42</sup> For natural man, this is why, for instance, 'the things of the gospel seem all so tasteless and insipid'.<sup>43</sup> Sin has clouded our *taste* far more than our intelligence, so that whatever is true about the state of our mental capacity, we end up thinking and choosing wrongly.

So human reason, as it stands in post-fall *situ*, is wholly unable to do what the deists want it to without revelation. But Edwards moves on to talk about a larger issue that makes revelation indispensable in an absolute sense, something his opponents have completely missed. The deists framed the debate as if man and God were machines, and the only question was whether or not our systems require a download from God's database. Edwards makes the crucial point that communication is far more than the mere exchange of information. Communication is a natural act between intelligent beings living in community with one another. God has obviously made us with the ability to communicate with one another; would it then make any sense for him not to speak with us? Edwards says:

If man's natural reason were never so perfect, and however little need we had of revelation for the enlightening our darkness and correcting our errors, yet it would be most unreasonable to suppose that there never should be any revelation made to man... God made spirits to have communication; and will he not have any communion with them himself, although they are made for this very end, to meditate on him and to love [him]? How unreasonable is it then to suppose, that God will so abscond himself from

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<sup>39</sup> See McDermott, *Confronts*, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> See Edwards, *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol. 1, pp. 155-9.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol. 2, p. 919.

<sup>42</sup> See Edwards, *Works in 2 Volumes*, Vol. 1, pp. 157-8.

<sup>43</sup> Edwards, Miscellany 123 in *Works*, Volume 13, p. 287.

these his understanding creatures, that were made to be conversant about him!<sup>44</sup>

So the question of whether or not we *need* revelation to provide us with data becomes an entirely secondary issue. The primary issue is that God is a communicative being by nature, and would certainly communicate with us even if we possessed exhaustive notional knowledge.

### 3. *Mystery*

John Toland's monumental work of Enlightenment theology was entitled *Christianity not Mysterious*. The deists saw 'mysteries', doctrines such as the Trinity, etc. as corruptions from some pure original religion, foisted upon a gullible laity by duplicitous and greedy priests.<sup>45</sup> If God is himself reasonable, they argued, then any words that might come from him would have to be reasonable as well. Moreover, if God's very purpose in giving a revelation was to reveal truth in a clear way, how could his alleged revelation contain mysteries?

In his response, Edwards reminds us that the Bible is not the only place one encounters mystery. Aspects of the physical world are mysterious. Elements of mathematics and philosophy are mysterious. And if we stop to think about the concept of an infinite God communicating things concerning another world to finite beings, we might expect revelation to contain mystery. Edwards says:

'Tis very unreasonable to make it an objection against the Christian revelation, that it contains some things that are very mysterious and difficult to our understandings, and that seem to us impossible. If God will give us a revelation from heaven of the very truth concerning his own nature and acts, counsels and ways, and of the spiritual and invisible world, 'tis unreasonable to expect any other, than that there should be many things in such a revelation that should be utterly beyond our understanding, and seem impossible.... If many of those positions in philosophy, which are now received by the learned world as indubitable truths, had been revealed from heaven to be truths in past ages, they would be looked upon

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<sup>44</sup> Miscellany 204 in *Works, Volume 13*, p. 339.

<sup>45</sup> 'As for charging Church-men with being the Authors and Introducers of the Christian Mysteries, they must be my Enemies for telling the Truth, who are displeas'd at it: for there is no matter of Fact more evident from every Page both of the Civil, and Ecclesiastick Histories.' (Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious*, author's preface.) See also pp. 69-74.

as mysterious and difficult, and would have seemed as impossible as the most mysterious Christian doctrines do now.<sup>46</sup>

So, as analogous with the non-self-evident nature of scientific discoveries ('positions in philosophy') upon their initial disclosure, Edwards thinks we must likewise expect non-self-evident elements in a revelation of divine truth. In a similar vein, he postulates that 'the more persons or beings are in themselves and in their own nature above us, the more are doctrines or truths concerning them mysterious to us, above our comprehension and difficult to our belief'.<sup>47</sup> Far from self-evidence being the sole mark of legitimacy, Edwards implies that if revelation were fully comprehensible in every respect it would thereby prove suspect.

#### 4. Sovereign election

In their interactions with humans, machines do not display an arbitrary will: they deal with one person as they would with any other given comparable circumstances. In the case of a vending machine, one deposits a coin, presses the desired button, and the machine dispenses the candy. It does not withhold it to some and give it to others for reasons only it knows, unless of course it is faulty. When the machine is faulty, and it does behave in such an inconsistent way, we are likely to become angry with it in its failure to adhere to its set program, for apparently displaying a will independent of our own. Similarly, 'The Enlightenment could not brook an arbitrary God. After the intellectual and social violence of the seventeenth century, the Age of Newton felt more secure with a God bounded by laws similar to the gravity that kept the planets from spinning wildly into the cosmos.'<sup>48</sup>

Edwards is very full in his rejoinder to the deists on this issue of divine sovereignty. Although Edwards' masterpiece *Freedom of the Will* was ostensibly written against Arminianism, he reveals in a private letter that the real targets were actually deists such as Chubb. Moreover, as some have noted, Arminianism is in some ways but an 'underdeveloped cousin' of deism.<sup>49</sup> In any case, there is no difference between these schools as to the question, 'Who ultimately determines human decisions?' Both answered, people do. There is no external agency determining the course of events, man is his own master. And thus, each choice is made in the

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<sup>46</sup> Edwards, Miscellany 585 in *Works, Volume 18*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, Miscellany 839 in *Works, Volume 20*, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> McDermott, *Confronts*, p. 218.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

context of total contingency; in other words, the decision is unbounded by any philosophic necessity.

As I intimated, Edwards had a lot to say on this topic, but we have time to consider only one of his lines of argumentation here. Edwards began from something everyone of his day took as given: God knows the future. God therefore knows from all eternity whether one of his creatures will choose to do action (a) or action (b). And God's knowledge is certain; it cannot later prove to be false. Therefore, the things God foreknows are as certain as if they had already happened in the distant past. And therefore, there is no actual possibility that things could be otherwise.

Contingency, as it is held by some, is at the same time contradicted by themselves, if they hold foreknowledge. This is all that follows from an absolute, unconditional, irreversible decree, that it is absolutely impossible but that the things decreed should be. The same exactly follows from foreknowledge, that it is absolutely impossible but that the thing certainly foreknown should precisely come to pass.<sup>50</sup>

One cannot, with consistency, hold to both divine foreknowledge and true contingency. If God knows in advance an event will happen, it will happen, and it is nonsense to speak of the possibility that could have been otherwise in any ultimate sense. By demonstrating this irreconcilable difficulty, Edwards anticipates that attempts to hold on to the traditional Arminian position with rigid philosophic consistency must finally devolve into open theism.<sup>51</sup>

Edwards argues instead for his revised concept of free will, which is simply the freedom to do what we want. Contingency is an illusion. What happens will certainly happen as God ordains; it is a philosophic necessary if we believe in an omniscient deity. But necessity does not imply compulsion, as the Arminians and deists of all ages want to insist. No one forces us to choose as we do; we do what we freely decide, even though God stands ultimately behind our decisions. But as we know, Edwards' reassurances on this compatibility are still not enough for those bent on claiming a piece of autonomy. Perhaps they should be reminded that even if there were 'territories of reality where God is not sovereign, our claim to them remains preposterous; then no one is sovereign there. But just that

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<sup>50</sup> Miscellany 74 in *Works, Volume 13*, p. 243.

<sup>51</sup> The point has not been lost on contemporary respondents to open theism. See, for example, Samuel J. Storms, 'Open Theists in the Hands of an Angry Puritan' in D. G. Hart et al. (eds), *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003).

preposterous human claim to a piece of creation wherein we are autonomous is a main impulse of modern Western history.<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As we might have noticed, Edwards pursued a relentless quest for reality in his war against deism.<sup>53</sup> He unmasked their god for what it really was: a delusional projection of man's nihilistic desire to be free from the living God. Not that this constituted much of an innovation. The deist writer Matthew Tindal was almost correct in his title *Christianity as Old as Creation*: more precisely, deism was as old as the doctrine Satan first preached to Eve in the garden shortly *after* creation: 'you will be like God' (Gen. 3:5). You can become autonomous, capable of existence and moral judgment without reference to God. You can relegate God to the role of clockmaker whence he cannot interfere with your predictable world and your sovereign decisions.

But was this bracing dose of reality enough; did Edwards win this fight? On paper, it seems clear enough that, whether through his work or under its own weight, deism as a self-contained faith was indeed defeated. Effective replies to Edward's polemic never came. And whatever was left of the deist position philosophically was soon finished off by the hugely influential critiques of Hume and Kant. But in a way not unlike American military history in Vietnam and in Iraq, a superior tactical force can yet lose the battle for the hearts and minds of the people. More on that subject presently. But importantly, Edwards' critique was not solely on logical grounds as were Hume's and Kant's. As one who believed that the *sine qua non* of regenerate experience was seeing the *beauty* of God, it was also aesthetic. Edwards showed us that deism was as ugly and impoverished as it was false.

Edwards fought against deism because he saw it as a threat to the church. The question remains as to whether we regard it as such today. It would not seem so, on the face of it. We have already said that deism failed philosophically. And to take the American situation as a rough gauge of the position's popularity, self-proclaimed deists amount to far less than 1% of the population according to a recent survey.<sup>54</sup> The fact is, deism has never flourished as a conventional religious system, and probably never

<sup>52</sup> Jensen, *America's Theologian*, 106-7.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson H. Kimnach, 'Jonathan Edwards's Pursuit of Reality' in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 102-17.

<sup>54</sup> American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS), 2001.

will. But it makes itself felt in other ways. And it is in these other ways that the Christian theologian and minister must be concerned. To make this connection, let us consider a series of representative sentiments to be found on modern deist websites:

[Hell is] an obviously mythical torture chamber fabricated by the early church to spread fear in unbelievers.... The worship of a naked body, grotesquely mutilated, oozing with blood, and displayed on a cross, could only appeal to those with a macabre sense of, or sadistic enjoyment in, the reflection of a horrible death.<sup>55</sup>

[T]hose that are fed-up with 'organized religion' and being told what to think are the ones we seek. In the end it's the individual that must decide and should have the freedom to do so. That doesn't make one wrong or damned if they decide to follow another path, there is no Hell in Deism. Deism has no creed or dogma. [Deists] retain... moral codes, belief in God, etc. but reject obvious nonsense such as Original Sin, damnation, the divinity of Jesus... etc. They accept what is reasonable and reject what is nonsense.... [U]nder Deism the human race is basically good and we strongly reject the doctrines of total depravity, original sin, and predestination nonsense of Christianity.... Deism works best as a philosophy that moderates and influences other faiths. It has forced revealed religion to take a close look at itself and change from the inside.... Mainline Protestant churches are a good example... the influence of both Deism and Arminianism<sup>56</sup> have in many cases moderated their theology.... Applying reason to holy books such as the Bible has left official Christian dogma in ruins.<sup>57</sup>

Notice the familiar themes that emerge from these statements: belief in God and the keeping of a moral code are the only reasonable aspects of religion. Holy books like the Bible should be subjected to reason like anything else. Christian doctrines such as original sin, the divinity of Christ, his crucifixion, hell, and predestination are all repulsive nonsense. Notice also that the appeal throughout is made neither to formal logic nor to any pretended revelation, but merely to our common sense. And finally, it is perhaps significant that the deist does not point to institutions or numbers to chart the progress of his religion, but rather claims that it has

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<sup>55</sup> Leland W. Ruble, 'To Be Saved or Not To Be Saved' in *Think!* ([www.deism.com/thinksam11.htm](http://www.deism.com/thinksam11.htm); accessed 15 Oct. 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Such near interchangeability of terms on the mouth of a professed deist is of course interesting.

<sup>57</sup> [www.sullivan-county.com/deism.htm](http://www.sullivan-county.com/deism.htm); accessed 15 Oct. 2005.



been working insidiously from within mainstream religion, in a way not unlike a guerrilla insurrection.

What if the modern deist happens to be right? What if deist sentiments are actually the predominant religious presuppositions, not only in secular society but also in the church? If deism has 'forced revealed religion to... change from the inside' is it possible that this process is still operating now, even after the downfall of classic liberalism? If so, what might that look like today? In answer to these questions, I merely ask you to think about some of the disputes festering in the Anglo-American evangelical church. Open theism. Annihilationalism. Soteriology derived from the new perspective on Paul. 'Evangelical' exegetes taking critical positions that would make a Socinian blush, while the theologians espouse doctrines of Scripture that are welcome in the academy. And yes, there is the triumph of Arminianism as the *de facto* orthodoxy in so many corners. What are the underlying concerns expressed in these things? Human sovereignty is sacrosanct. Eternal hell is unjust and unreasonable. Salvation by faith alone should be de-emphasized. Holy books like the Bible should be subjected to reason. If these concerns sound a bit familiar, it's because the deist we have forgotten about is nodding here in smug approval. Just because these issues are coming from within the church, deism as broadly conceived still presents a significant threat.

This being the case, deism and its constituent sentiments must be the object of constant and diligent warfare by Christian theologians and ministers. We must be unafraid of the inevitable offence against 'reason' and 'common sense' we will create, and must rather be willing to bring up the very points that are sure to cause the greatest offence. We must take on the liberating task of disabusing people of their tacit belief in the deist machine, a task we do in the name of the only true liberator, Jesus Christ. And finally, in a nod to our title, what is it that drives left-wing political activists such as the 1990s alternative rock band *Rage Against the Machine*? Why do they rage against the 'machine' so loudly and passionately? Is it not because, on some level, they know that the machine model that dominates so much of our world is destructive, ugly and ought to be resisted? And can we, who have a replacement for this machine so much better than any sham alternative they can dream up, be any less activist? We dare not. What the church thus needs today is not reactionaries yearning for a return to the past, but in the mould of Jonathan Edwards, radical activists agitating for an infinitely truer and incomparably more beautiful vision of reality.

# CLAUDIUS BUCHANAN: SCOTLAND'S FIRST MISSIONARY TO THE JEWS

JOHN S. ROSS, GREYFRIARS FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, INVERNESS

## THE REVIVAL BACKGROUND

Jonathan Edwards, the great American Congregationalist theologian, saw revival movements such as the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century as part of a spiritual continuum, dating back to Pentecost, whereby Christian life is, from time to time, renewed and reinvigorated.<sup>1</sup> He held that God's work in the world was advanced not so much by the ordinary work of the Christian ministry, but by the extraordinary work of God's Spirit:

Though there be a more constant influence of God's Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work, always have been by remarkable effusions, at special times of mercy....<sup>2</sup>

In his work *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774) Edwards represented the revivals of the mid-eighteenth century as precursors of yet greater blessing to be experienced throughout the world, culminating in the millennium.<sup>3</sup> This theory empowered by spiritual renewal resulted in evangelistic and missionary commitment. Indeed, during the 1742 Cambuslang revival some people testified that they only found freedom in prayer when they 'ceased to be self-regarding and preoccupied with their own concerns' and prayed for the salvation of the wider world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., J. A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea* (Kampen, 1970), pp. 119-21; I. H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 48-55; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, 1995), p. 277f.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (London, 1974), p. 532 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 604-9.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (London, 1971), p. 211.

*The Concert for Prayer*

When around 1743 the Great Awakening in Massachusetts began to falter, Edwards attributed the slow-down to a lack of faithfulness in prayer. He believed, however, that the lost momentum was only a temporary setback; God would revive his work and it would continue until it had 'subdued the whole earth'.<sup>5</sup> In order to attempt to regain the earlier progress of revival Edwards wrote to the minister of Cambuslang, William M'Culloch, proposing the launching of a Concert for Prayer, a reintroduction on an international basis of an old Scottish practice whereby Christians covenanted to pray for a common cause.

The Concert for Prayer was the result of interaction, correspondence and personal friendship between Jonathan Edwards and four Scottish Christian leaders, John McLaurin of Glasgow, James Robe of Kilsyth and William M'Culloch of Cambuslang.<sup>6</sup> As Andrew Walls points out, this international ecumenical co-operation was symbolised by the way 'a gift from a Scottish Presbyterian to an English Baptist of a book by a New England Congregationalist' led to William Carey's pioneering initiative of 1792.<sup>7</sup> The connection between Edwards, the Concert for Prayer and William Carey's pioneering contribution to the modern missionary movement has become a commonplace in the historiography of Christian missions.<sup>8</sup> Less remarked, but no less clear is the connection between the Concert of Prayer and Jewish missions.

For Edwards, the conversion of the Jews was crucial to his understanding of the international expansion of the Christian church.<sup>9</sup> In *A History of the Work of Redemption* he depicts the restoration of Israel as a part of the fall of Antichrist, immediately preceding the 'Latter-day Glory':

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews... When they shall be called, that ancient people, who alone were God's people for so long a time, shall be his people again, never to be

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. De Jong, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 79; Cf. De Jong, op. cit., pp. 175-81; Fawcett, op. cit., pp. 228-33.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Bosch, op. cit., p. 280; George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, 1972), p. 344; Jim Reapsome, 'Carey, William' in Scott Moreau (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, 2000), ad loc.; J. Verkyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 286.

rejected more. They shall be gathered into one fold together with the Gentiles... Though we do not know the time in which this conversion of Israel will come to pass; yet thus much we may determine from Scripture, that it will be before the glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished; because it is said, that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

His pen not only provided Jewish missions with the stimulus of theological rationale but his biography of David Brainerd, and the publication of Brainerd's Journal, set before the church an inspiring role model of self-sacrificial missionary service.

David Brainerd (1718-1747) was employed by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), which had been established in 1709 and had its roots in an earlier praying society. By 1730 the SSPCK had branched out into missionary work among the indigenous people of Pennsylvania, employing both David and his brother John.<sup>11</sup>

### *The 'Lost Tribes of Israel'*

Bizarre though it may seem from today's perspective, eighteenth-century missions to native Americans had their roots in nascent Jewish evangelism. For many decades there had been keen interest in 'the ten lost tribes of Israel'. The Amsterdam rabbi, Menasseh Ben Israel (1604-1657), who had successfully championed the resettlement of the Jews in England during the rule of Oliver Cromwell, promoted, through his book *The Hope of Israel*, the notion that the lost tribes might prove to be the American Indians.<sup>12</sup> Thomas Thorowgood had expressed the same view in a tract *Jewes in America* (1650) and this was held with certain modifications by orthodox Calvinists including the pioneer missionary John Eliot (1604-1690).<sup>13</sup> Eliot was familiar with the works of Menasseh Ben Israel, and as he worked among the Amerindians he thought he detected elements in their religion and language that were vestiges of Jewish culture.<sup>14</sup> Such reflections led Eliot to consider that 'the conversion of the Indians, of which his labours were a pledge, is but the sign that God is going to break

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 607.

<sup>11</sup> D. E. Meek, 'Scottish SPCK' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), ad loc.

<sup>12</sup> Menasseh Ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel*, ed. Mechoulam and Nahon (London, 1987), p. 115ff.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft, 1965), p. 230ff., De Jong, op. cit., pp. 63-78.

<sup>14</sup> Rooy, op. cit., p. 231.

eastward for the conversion of Israel, the ten tribes as well as the two'.<sup>15</sup> Edwards, who was himself formerly a missionary to the Indians, expected the restoration of Ephraim as 'the remains of the ten tribes, wherever they be' as well as that of the Jews, though he does not seem to have explicitly associated Ephraim with native Americans.<sup>16</sup>

#### AN ANGLICAN CHAPLAIN

The most direct link between the Cambuslang revival and modern missions to the Jews, however, was the work and influence of Claudius Buchanan (1766-1814).<sup>17</sup> Buchanan was baptised by the elderly M'Culloch, then seventy-five years of age, and Arthur Fawcett was surely right to consider that, 'M'Culloch would have rejoiced to see Buchanan, once held in his arms and part of the spiritual fruit of the revival days of 1742, building the kingdom of God in India and seeking to send the good news into China.'<sup>18</sup> Yet it is greatly to be regretted that Fawcett fails to acknowledge Buchanan's significant contribution to Jewish missions, especially in advocating the translation of the New Testament into Hebrew, particularly when it has been demonstrated by J. A. De Jong that Buchanan was the 'leading Anglican apologist for missions among Jews'<sup>19</sup> and that this, not missions to India, was arguably 'the major new emphasis of the period'.<sup>20</sup>

Buchanan's maternal grandfather was Claudius Somers, a convert of the 1742 Cambuslang revival and one of M'Culloch's elders, serving as the congregational treasurer. His family entertained the hope that young Claudius would enter the ministry of the Church of Scotland but he had other ideas and planned to explore the Continent. In fact his plans misfired and he did not get beyond London. There he was greatly influenced by Philip Doddridge's autobiographical *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*,<sup>21</sup> and came under the influence of John Newton, then rector at St Mary, Woolnoth.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Walls, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 607.

<sup>17</sup> Hugh Pearson, *Memoirs of the Life and Writing of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, D.D.* (London, 1834), p. 2. Cf. Fawcett, op. cit., pp. 235-6.

<sup>18</sup> Idem.

<sup>19</sup> De Jong, op. cit., p. 194. Cf. pp. 192, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> Pearson, op. cit., p. 16. Cf. *The Works of John Newton*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 76-8, where Buchanan is styled as 'Mr \*\*\*\*\*'.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 19. Cf. H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London, 1948), p. 112.

Educated at Cambridge under the patronage of Henry Thornton, Buchanan was surrounded by influences compelling him to consider the place of the Jewish people in the divine scheme of things. He became a protégé of Charles Simeon who had immense influence with students and believed passionately in the strategic importance of Jewish evangelism: to him it was simply 'the most important object in the world' and he acted on this conviction by becoming a founder of the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*.<sup>23</sup> Simeon's commitment is illustrated by a famous incident. He was speaking at a meeting of the *London Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews*, when Edward Bickersteth, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, passed him a note asking, 'eight millions of Jews and eight hundred million heathens — which is more important?' Simeon's succinct retort, scribbled on the other side of the note, read, 'If the conversion of the eight is life from the dead to the eight hundred, what then?'<sup>24</sup>

At Cambridge Buchanan also read the works of the Scottish Episcopal Archbishop, Robert Leighton (1611-1684), who also entertained strong convictions concerning the conversion of the Jews and had once commented, 'They forget a main point in the Church's glory, who pray not daily for the conversion of the Jews.'<sup>25</sup>

### *India*

In 1794 John Newton had floated the idea that Buchanan could serve in India. At midsummer 1795, after a brilliant academic career, Buchanan modestly left Cambridge, without formally graduating.<sup>26</sup> Plans were laid for his ecclesiastical examination and ordination, on 20th September, by the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus (1731-1808).<sup>27</sup> After a brief period as Newton's curate at St Mary, Woolnoth, he was appointed as one of five chaplains to the East India Company.<sup>28</sup> Sailing in September for Bengal, he arrived in Calcutta on 10th March 1797, where he was appointed vice-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 29. W. T. Gidney, *The Jews and Their Evangelisation* (London, 1899), p. 273. Cf. Moule, op. cit., pp. 95-6; Simeon's interest in Jewish missions was 'perhaps the warmest interest of his life' (p. 95); and 'Literally to the last the thought of the recovery of Israel to the divine Messiah was on Simeon's heart' (p. 96).

<sup>24</sup> Gidney, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Pearson, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> Idem.

provost of Fort William College.<sup>29</sup> Through his linguistic interests he became an acquaintance of William Carey and a supporter of his work of Bible translation.<sup>30</sup>

In 1803 Henry Martyn (1781-1812) became Simeon's curate, and later, in 1806, departed to follow Buchanan to India as another of Simeon's East India Company chaplains.<sup>31</sup> I. H. Murray correctly draws attention to the fact that Martyn himself had a prayerful interest in the Jewish people.<sup>32</sup> But his interest reached far beyond his prayers, as both his biographers, Sargent and Padwick demonstrate.<sup>33</sup> In his travels through Persia Martyn met with members of the Sephardic Jewish communities in Basra, Isfahan and Shiraz. Some, like the 'Jewish Moollah' Abdulghanee, had been induced to half-heartedly embrace Islam.<sup>34</sup> On his thirty-first birthday, the last before his death, Martyn met with 'two Mussulmen Jews', acquaintances of Abdulghanee, who quizzed him regarding their welfare 'in another world'. Reflecting on their anxiety Martyn was led him to record in his Journal his sympathy for them:

Feelings of pity for God's ancient people, and the awful importance of eternal things impressed on my mind by the seriousness of their enquiries as to what would become of them, relieved me from the pressure of my comparatively insignificant distresses. I, a poor Gentile, blest, honoured, and loved; secured for ever by the everlasting covenant, whilst the children of the Kingdom are still in outward darkness! Well does it become me to be thankful.<sup>35</sup>

In May 1806, as Martyn sailed up the Hoogly river to Calcutta, Buchanan was making his way downriver on his journey to the west coast where he would commence a research mission to ascertain 'the present state and recent history of the eastern Jews', specifically the ancient community of Cochin Jews and the fabled Bene Israel of Bombay (Mumbai).<sup>36</sup> The Bene Israel held to tradition that maintained their ancestors left Galilee subsequent to the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BCE) and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 121ff.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> Constance Padwick, *Henry Martyn Confessor of the Faith* (London, 1953), p. 58f. Cf. Moule, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> Murray, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> John Sargent, *Henry Martyn* (London, 1828); Padwick, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Sargent, op. cit. pp. 353-61; 410-11. Cf. Padwick, *ibid.*, pp. 163, 146.

<sup>35</sup> Sargent, op. cit., p. 411.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4. Cf. Padwick, op. cit., p. 85. Pearson, op. cit., p. 202.

that their ship was wrecked on the Indian coast some twenty-five miles south of Bombay, and that seven men and seven women survived to establish the community.<sup>37</sup>

### *Manuscripts and Moonshes*

When, on his journey up through Madras to Cochin, Buchanan lingered to satisfy his curiosity at the ancient Mar Thoma Syrian churches and the various contemporary mission stations, he suffered a twinge of conscience that he was neglecting the Jewish community: 'The interesting scene of the Christian missions have obliterated from my mind the poor Jews.'<sup>38</sup> Arriving in Cochin in December he established a friendship with Colonel Macaulay, who brought to him 'a copy of certain chapters of the Jewish Scriptures, which he understood I wished to see'.<sup>39</sup> Other important Hebrew manuscripts were purchased and conversations held with Jewish leaders before Buchanan was glad to embark on his ship and 'get out of the throng'.<sup>40</sup>

Returning to Calcutta he corresponded with Macaulay over technicalities of Hebrew texts and anecdotes of literary conversations held with a Jewish friend called Levi.<sup>41</sup> Not only did Buchanan bring back Hebrew manuscripts, which Carey 'beheld with veneration' but also a Hebrew 'moonshes' (secretary or writer) as well as Judah Misrahi, a Cochin Jew and proficient translator.<sup>42</sup> A final visit to Cochin took place in December 1807, when Buchanan was en route to England. Evidently he had established cordial personal relationships with local people at Cochin, for Pearson records his frankly self-congratulatory comment that, 'all my Jews and Christians were in fine health and spirits, and highly gratified at my unexpected arrival'.<sup>43</sup> At this time the community was agitated by questions of the interpretation of biblical prophecy and had called a meeting

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. 'Bene Israel' in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (London, 1972), ad loc.; E. M. Jacob Gadkar, *The Religious and Cultural Heritage of the Bene-Israelis of India*, 2 vols (Bombay, 1984). For Cochin Jews see J. H. Lord, *The Jews in India and the Far East* (London, 1907), and 'Cochin Jews' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ad loc. Menasseh Ben Israel also speaks of the Cochin Jews, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>38</sup> Sargent, op cit., p. 224.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 262-3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>42</sup> Idem.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 291.



to discuss the matter. Buchanan entered into the debate with some enthusiasm, stating in a letter:

The Jews at Cochin are very unsettled in relation to the prophecies. They wonder at the attention paid by the English to these subjects for the first time. You will read in the *Bombay Courier* an account of a ceremony in the synagogue at Cochin, which took place at Christmas last, a few days before I arrived. Some Jews interpret the prophecies aright, and some in another way; but all agree that a great era is at hand.<sup>44</sup>

And again:

I am about to call another Sanhedrin on the subject, before I go. It is a strange event. I am happy I have visited this place a second time. May God direct all these things to his own glory and the good of men! ... Tell H. that the poor Jews, blind, lame, and halt, are come this morning, exclaiming as usual, 'Jehuda Ani' (poor or afflicted Jews). I wish I could impart a better gift than silver or gold.<sup>45</sup>

#### THE LONDON SOCIETY

On 18th August 1808 Buchanan arrived in London and was stunned to learn that John Newton had been buried on 27th December, the day he arrived in Cochin.<sup>46</sup> There then followed a visit to Scotland to see his mother, now 72 years of age but in fine health. The memorisation and interpretation of biblical prophecy was evidently her forte, and three years later Buchanan reported that she astonished and amused his wife 'by her eloquence on the prophecies, which she utters in hard words [Scots], without affecting at all the English language'.<sup>47</sup>

In April the next year he visited Cambridge, depositing in the library his collection of manuscripts, which included a one hundred and fifty year-old Hebrew New Testament, translated by a rabbi from Travancore, who had in the course of his work become a Christian. As Buchanan put it: 'His own work subdued his unbelief.'<sup>48</sup> This version had been transcribed at Buchanan's expense with the intention that it should form the basis of a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *The Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1810), p. 206. Cf. vol. 1, p. 138; *Gidney*, op. cit., p. 113.

translation of the New Testament in the 'pure style of the Hebrew of the Old, for the benefit of Jews, and in aid of the laudable design for this purpose of the London Society for the conversion of that ancient people'.<sup>49</sup> The London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (LSPCJ) had been established just two months earlier on 15th February 1809, evolving from a branch of the non-denominational London Missionary Society, via a 'small and unpretending association' connected with the Jewish Christian, Joseph Samuel Christian Fredrick Frey, and continues today as the Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ).<sup>50</sup>

Buchanan strongly expressed astonishment and disappointment that the newly-established society had made no progress in producing a reliable Hebrew translation and urged them to consider the swift implementation of such a project:

It is with surprise I learn that as yet you have not obtained a version of the New Testament in the Hebrew language, for the use of Jews. It is surely the very first duty of your Society to execute this translation. You are beginning to work without instruments. How can you find fault with a Jew for not believing the New Testament if he has never seen it?

How strange it appears that, during a period of eighteen hundred years, the Christians should never have given the Jews the New Testament in their own language! By a kind of infatuation they have reprobated the unbelief of the Jews, and have never, at the same time, told them what they ought to believe.<sup>51</sup>

Although, as Gidney points out, there were in fact three Hebrew translations then in existence, Hutter's, Robinson's and Cradick's, all were either inadequate, unobtainable or incomplete. Buchanan's reproof was taken to heart and the work was entrusted to a Jewish scholar, Judah d'Allemand and a Gentile colleague. By 1814 Matthew's Gospel was completed with the other books appearing in rapid succession to critical acclaim.<sup>52</sup> Two years later Buchanan contemplated the possibility of a journey to Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia to investigate translation possibilities, the circumstances of the Jews in those regions, and the 'extension of Christianity' among them.<sup>53</sup> Due to ill health these plans were aborted.

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<sup>49</sup> Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>50</sup> Gidney, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> ECI, *op. cit.*, p. 208; Gidney, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>53</sup> Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 352; Cf. ECI, 1811, vol. 2, p. 423.

On 6th December 1814 Buchanan was visited at his home in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, by two men, Mr S. and Mr B., sent by the LSPCJ to recruit him as their secretary. He felt unable to accede to their wishes, not because of any lack of commitment to the cause but because he held 'radical objections to the constitution of that society in its present form, and suggested renovation and improvement'.<sup>54</sup> On the 24th the delegation returned to his home. Mr B. had been replaced by the persuasive Lewis Way, one of the founders, but even he could not prevail as Buchanan more fully explained his disapproval of the current constitution:

I declined, however, pledging myself for its support, further than by offering my best advice. I desired them to communicate their plans and wishes to all good and eminent ministers in the kingdom, to request useful hints and affectionate support, and to do nothing of themselves:— not to call their Society, 'for conversion of the Jews': but a Society for the education of Jewish children; for diffusing the New Testament among the Jews; for corresponding with them concerning the Messiah in all lands; and for the diffusion of Jewish literature. Lastly to connect the Institution with the Church Missionary Society, the end being the same.<sup>55</sup>

Although Buchanan did not take up office in the LSPCJ he was greatly influential in formulating its policy and shaping its strategy. In his view the society would best achieve its aims by renouncing its interdenominational membership and by becoming a voluntary society within the Anglican communion. The implementation of this policy inevitably led to the dissolution of the LSPCJ in its original form as the non-conformists, who were in the main London-based Church of Scotland members, withdrew. In 1842, in the wake of the initial success of the Church of Scotland's own Jewish mission and under the influence of Robert Murray M'Cheyne and his friend William Hamilton, minister of Regent Square Church of Scotland, they founded the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews (BSPGJ), now Christian Witness to Israel (CWI).<sup>56</sup>

Buchanan was now in the last months of his life but his thoughts and prayers still focused on India and its Jews. The plight of two Cochin Jews stranded in London caught his attention and he sought help for them from his old friend Macaulay. He died three weeks later on 9th February aged 49,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 411-12.

<sup>56</sup> F. Exley, *Our Hearts Desire* (London, 1942), p. 13f; cf. *The Jewish Herald* (London, 1846), vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1.

and was buried near his second wife at Ouseburn, between Ripon and York.<sup>57</sup>

Fifteen years later in 1829 Joseph Wolff (1796-1862), the Jewish adventurer and Christian missionary visited the Bene Israel at Pune. Here he was introduced to John Wilson (1804-1875) then of the Scottish Missionary Society whose work with the Bene Israel owed much to the pioneer researches of Buchanan. Wolff commented that it was 'wonderful that Gentiles from Scotland should be the instruments of re-teaching the children of Israel their native language'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>58</sup> Gidney, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

## REVIEWS

### **The Community of the Word: toward an evangelical ecclesiology**

Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (eds)

InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005; 291 pp., £14.99

ISBN-10: 1-84474-082-X; ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-082-6

In a day where there seems to be a lack of any clear consensus within the evangelical church as to what the church should be, I welcomed with eager anticipation the opportunity to read *The Community of the Word: toward an evangelical ecclesiology*. With high hopes I was looking forward to a specific critique of such current issues as the so-called 'emerging church' and the role of the church in an increasingly secular society. However, *The Community of the Word*, while generally interesting in its treatment of certain topical issues, failed to provide the truly biblical kind of basis for an evangelical ecclesiology that I was expecting to find.

Perhaps this failure is due in part to the fact that *The Community of the Word* is a compilation of fourteen essays written by thirteen different academic theologians, mostly North American, who are representative of a broad range of theological backgrounds and ecclesiastical perspectives. I am sure that anyone reading this book would find it very scholarly and stimulating, but, I would have to add, probably more beneficial as an academic study than an immediately practical guide to developing an evangelical ecclesiology within their own particular church setting. It would provide a good read for the theological student wishing to explore the evangelical ecclesiology of the church in terms of its recent history, its view of the sacraments and its moral and missionary role within society generally.

What is helpful is the way in which *The Community of the Word* is divided into five parts, presenting a careful progression in the study of the church beginning with certain historical perspectives, e.g. high-church Protestantism and North American dispensationalism with their respective continuing influences on ecclesiology and eschatology.

In Chapter 3 of Part one, Jonathan Wilson explores the contemporary ecclesiology of four popular authors, including Rick Warren and Brian McLaren. Wilson notes that 'it is difficult to discern any ecclesiology that guides Warren's book [*The Purpose-Driven Life*]'. Of McLaren's ecclesiology he writes, '[it] seems driven by the fear of irrelevance.... But fear of irrelevance is not the foundation of ecclesiology; the fear of the Lord is'. He concludes that what evangelicals really need is 'an evangelical ecclesiology, as an account of the church that holds us accountable to the gospel'.

Part two, 'Locating the Church Dogmatically', builds on this theme and really gets to the meat of the book. It delves into the significance of the church's nature in its mystical union with the risen Christ. There is a welcome and persuasive emphasis on the need for the true church to be characterised by its deference to Holy Scripture; and for Christians to be speakers and doers of the Word, by living lives that are morally distinctive and marked by holiness. The section concludes with mission, and with the necessity of the church to be defined and to act as part of the larger mission of God in the outworking of his love for the whole of creation.

Parts three, four and five were for me heavier going and seemed perhaps more applicable to the individualistic North American context than to our own. They tackled respectively the issues of the church as moral community, the church as sacramental community and locating the church culturally. Some truths are, however, universal as William Abraham states, 'The church is a moral and spiritual community that is constantly beset with its own failings and corruptions.' By way of encouragement he quickly adds that, 'The church is always a community of holiness in the making.' What comes across clearly in these chapters is a welcome emphasis on God's prevenient grace. Craig Carter makes the point that for the church to carry out its mission to be a witness to God's grace it need not be perfect, 'for it [the church] is a community of forgiveness, reconciliation and love.... For this reason the gospel call to enter the church can be heard by those outside as truly good news.'

However in today's multi-faith culture it would have been helpful if some discussion had been included on matters where there is an interface between church and society. For example what practical role should the church play in our state schools or in the administration of government at all levels?

*The Community of the Word* is not the easiest book to read, but it does raise many interesting issues on the nature and mission of the church today. For anyone involved in Christian ministry it will therefore

prove helpful in identifying and confronting issues which threaten to distort or distract the church.

*Iain Cameron, UFM Scottish Secretary, Glasgow*

### **Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine**

R. C. Sproul

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, 2005; 210 pp., £10.95

ISBN-10: 1-59638-010-1; ISBN-13: 978-1-59638-010-3

In 1973 R. C. Sproul, a foremost evangelical leader in America, invited a number of prominent evangelical scholars to present a series of papers on the subject of biblical inerrancy. This took place in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Subsequently a brief statement of faith on the subject of inerrancy was published. The need to strengthen this foundation led to further effort and in 1977 the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy was formed. An outcome of that was the publication in 1978 of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Every issue germane to inerrancy is addressed in this fifteen-page statement. Contained within it are nineteen articles of Affirmation and Denial. This vital document appears at the end of the volume.

The book is presented in two parts. Part one consists of four essays: 1. *Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism*, 2. *The Establishment of Scripture*, 3. *The case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis*, and 4. *The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*.

In Part one there are telling quotations from the Reformation creeds. The claim of Rome that the Scriptures and the Church are both infallible is refuted. J. I. Packer is helpfully cited: 'What Luther thus voiced at Worms shows the essential motivation and concern, theological and religious, of the entire Reformation movement: namely that the Word of God alone must rule, and no Christian man dare do other than allow it to enthrone itself in his conscience and heart' (p. 27).

The heretical teaching of Rudolf Bultmann is explained. G. C. Berkouwer is brought into the frame. He had his defects (he shrank from the notion of verbal inspiration – p. 64). The position of Karl Barth is discussed (pp. 83-4). Calvin's considerable contribution to the subject of the internal witness of Scripture (the Testimonium) is opened up. Neo-orthodox views of the Testimonium (Emil Brunner and Thomas F. Torrance) are analysed (pp. 110-14). The New Testament basis for the Testimonium is discussed (p. 115).

Part two consists of R. C. Sproul's exposition of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, in which he comments on and explains

each of the nineteen articles of affirmation and denial. An example is Article X: The Autographs:

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translation of Scriptures are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

This work, while it stretches the mind, is not just for scholars and pastors but for all Christians. The faith of every Christian rests on Scripture. If inerrancy is rejected 'grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church' ensue (p. 186).

I testify that at the commencement of my Christian life in the mid-1950s I read B. B. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (P&R Publishing, 1948 edition). I found Warfield's exposition of 'all Scripture is God-breathed' (2 Tim. 3:16) compelling. For me the question of inerrancy was settled once and for all and has strengthened my faith ever since. This work by Sproul is a welcome addition. It not only covers all the principal issues but it is also a mini historical theology which portrays the battle lines from the time of Warfield to the present day.

Since Warfield, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner educated an entire generation of scholars, evangelical seminaries have deviated from inerrancy. For instance in the early 1960s the well-known Fuller Theological Seminary abandoned commitment to inerrancy. But the Lord raises up leaders to defend the truth. R. C. Sproul is foremost among these.

Apart from battles that rage within Christianity we are reminded of the relevance of this subject by the challenge of Islam. Muslims believe that the Koran was dictated to Mohammed and is the unmediated word of God. Muslims put their trust in that one man's experience and in the book given through him. Christians follow revelation given progressively over a period of about 1,400 years. This book *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* is about that revelation. Clearly written, well presented, with indices and references. I commend it highly.

*Erroll Hulse, Associate Pastor, Leeds Reformed Baptist Church*



## Evangelicals and Tradition

D. H. Williams

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 192 pp., £9.99

ISBN-10: 0-8010-2713-6; ISBN-13: 978-0-8010-2713-0

D. H. Williams, professor of patristics and historical theology at Baylor University in Texas, has produced this volume as part of a series called 'Evangelical *Ressourcement*; Ancient Sources for the Church's Future'. Dr Williams is the editor of the series, whose stated aim is to address the ways in which the modern church, in its contemporary challenges, may draw upon the thought and life of the early church for assistance. In the Series Preface (p. 9), we are told that the term *ressourcement* was coined by French Roman Catholic writers in the mid-twentieth century, in their conviction that declared Christians must return to the sources of the ancient Christian tradition. Each volume in the series is devoted to a particular theme related to biblical and theological interpretation.

The author begins his book with the observation that the 'great tradition' is now being discussed by pastors and laity within denominations that heretofore have often regarded 'tradition' as being irrelevant or obstructive to Christian piety. He notes that, in the centuries following the Council of Trent, many Protestants tended to regard tradition as something 'other', in competition with the authority of Scripture. Roman Catholic tradition has been seen as something monolithic and unchanging, but the author notes that some Roman Catholic writers are attacking that idea, showing that even their own tradition has been subject to growth and change. Williams shows how Irenaeus is a good example of this: in his writings he often gives the idea of the Christian faith as a homogeneous unity, but in his inter-church politics, he shows himself aware that there were differences *within the tradition*.

The beginning of chapter I of the book gives valuable insights into what it meant to be a Christian in the early years of the faith, set against the pagan religiosity of the Roman Empire. Williams shows what was expected of Christians, and what was available to them in resources. In a Christian society which was largely 'functionally illiterate' (p. 31), the tradition would have assumed great importance and would have loomed large in catechesis. One of the author's strongest points is that the tradition existed before the writings that we call the New Testament had come together in their final form, and that the tradition itself was regarded as canonical. He is aware that some from a strongly Protestant background may disagree with the idea of the tradition being canonical,

and he rightly notes that the 'time lines' (i.e. 'the New Testament period' followed by 'the patristic era', etc.) are largely artificial in their construction, and that they do not allow for the activity of the church during the first few centuries in the canonization of the Scriptures. He spends considerable time in discussion of Irenaeus and Tertullian and their ideas about the *regula fidei*. Williams notes that the 'canonization of Scripture' was a rather untidy affair, but he believes that the conclusions as to what was and was not canonical were accurate.

The author notes that at the outset Scripture and tradition were perceived as compatible. It was only during the later Middle Ages that extrabiblical traditions began to become gigantic and to be placed on a par with the Scripture (p. 88). In the patristic era, the Scriptures and tradition were seen as supporting each other in defense of the true faith. The last part of the book cites various passages from the patristic period, showing how these sources may be of great value even in churches which have not been overly interested in the great tradition.

Dr Williams' book is introductory in nature, not written for the specialist in patristics, but especially for those from what he calls a 'free church' Protestant background, who have taken their stance on the canonical Scriptures. His book endeavours to show that tradition is not the bugbear that it has sometimes been seen to be. He shows that the magisterial Protestant Reformation was unable to jettison the patristic tradition (p. 122), but instead made great use of it, and that traditional Protestantism is more indebted to the patristic writings than has often been realized. The book is essentially irenic in tone and makes a good introduction to the subject. My main criticism of the book is that it is almost *too* irenic; one wonders why a Protestant Reformation was ever necessary, if the faith held by the Protestants was so firmly embedded in the tradition. The problem, of course, lies with later developments in the church and the rise of the extrabiblical traditions mentioned above, but some of these very traditions were seen as an outgrowth of statements in the writers of the patristic period. His book does provide a needed corrective to the artificial 'time lines' that Protestants sometimes impose on the history of the church and of the canonization of the New Testament, and as such it makes a welcome contribution. For those who are beginning to explore this area, Dr Williams' book will be a good introduction.

*Bruce A. McDonald, Texas Wesleyan University, Fort Worth, Texas*

## **The Faith of the Outsider. Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story**

Frank Anthony Spina

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 206 pp., £9.99

ISBN-10: 0-8028-2864-7; ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-2864-4

This scholarly study of the insider and outsider is a necessary contribution to understanding and communicating the gospel in the age of globalization. For the first time since the fifth century, Christianity has become a non-Western religion. The Western world which represents only 13% of the world's population is in the process of giving way to the church in the majority non-white world. We live in an era that promotes inclusiveness, multiculturalism and the popular acceptance of religious diversity as supreme values. The tension between insider and outsider is one that every reader and preacher of the Bible has to engage with.

Evangelical Christians, as much as anyone else, need help to read the Bible from a wider cultural perspective and this is what this volume offers. The one and only God/people of God is a thread that runs through human history and finds its fulfillment in Israel's Messiah and the subsequent reign of God. The very idea of God's chosen people is one that is almost scandalous in an age that tries to be accepting. The same may be said about the biblical claims concerning the uniqueness of Christ. The 'scandal of particularity' in the election of Israel as God's chosen people in the Old Testament and of Jesus Christ in the New is prominent here.

If 'Israel's divinely engendered exclusivity... is part of the Old Testament's warp and woof', how is it possible that the world's peoples can be reconciled through the exclusive election of Israel? How truly inclusive is the gospel mediated through a Jew? The objective behind the exclusive election of Israel was to be inclusive. God's exclusive election of Israel's ancestors had an inclusive purpose: the blessing of all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). We are helped to respond to such questions by this study of six Bible passages. The author respects that in Scripture 'the bottom line is that the story itself and the manner in which it is told are determinative for getting the meaning of the narrative' (p. 11). He is able to interpret what is not being told as much as what is.

Though Esau was an outsider in terms of divine election and promise, he displays as much of grace as any Israelite insider ever did. Tamar was an outsider who is still obscure but we discover how she acted in a manner that was decisive for the future of God's people and God's world. 'Though not one of the elected insiders, she saw to it that the chosen

people's mission stayed on course' (p. 51). Rahab, Naaman and Ruth are described (together with the sailors and Ninevites in the Jonah story) as the most unlikely of outsiders to come to a profound insider's faith.

There is only one story from the New Testament and the focus is on the Gospel of John, where no outsider would have been any more unlikely than the Samaritan woman at the well. The author explains that she not only gives us 'a window into that important Gospel but also helps us understand the roles of insiders and outsiders in the other Gospels as well' (p. 11). The outsider theme is clearly at the core of the New Testament message.

This volume will be a valuable reference guide with a separate section of detailed notes on the biblical passages discussed and three indexes (names and places, subjects, Scripture references). The book is very accessible and refined by the author having preached on these passages in a variety of churches. I highly recommend it to all preachers and students of the Scriptures.

*Robert Calvert, Scots International Church, Rotterdam*

### **Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology**

Michael S. Horton

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2005; 282 pp., £16.99

ISBN-10: 0-664-22863-1; ISBN-13: 978-0-664-22863-7

Michael Horton is Professor of Apologetics and Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Building on his well-received *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama*, this is the second in a three-volume project which takes up key themes in theology and explores them in covenantal and eschatological perspective. The book is in three parts.

Part One, entitled 'Lord', begins with a 'covenantal prolegomenon' in which Horton argues that the covenant of grace is the place where a Stranger really does meet us. He then discusses the character of God, especially as his attributes are seen in action, expressed in the strong verbs of Scripture. In the covenant which this God establishes with his creatures there is real partnership, but the Lord of the covenant always retains his transcendence and so anthropological analogies in the drama must not be read as limitations on Lordship. Horton then turns to reflect on creation, which was by the speech-act of the triune God. In the covenant of creation, nature is affirmed in its integrity, neither divine nor demonic; the other can be completely different *and* good.

In Part Two, 'Servant', he develops a biblical anthropology, suggesting ways in which this might interact with recent perspectives on the postmodern self. He insists on the historicity of Adam and Eve as indispensable to theology, and he defines the image of God in humankind as official, ethical and eschatological. He then looks at the Fall. Adam failed the trial, and covenant solidarity in him now means collective human estrangement. Throughout this section, Horton is concerned that we begin with the biblical story and allow ourselves to be told who we are, rather than beginning with metaphysical questions about human nature.

Part Three, 'Lord and Servant', opens with a systematic-theological treatment of the two natures of Christ and the importance of this for salvation. Jesus is both covenant Lord and Servant, because only Yahweh can save and because the covenant of our creation must be fulfilled in the meritorious human life of the Saviour. Horton then deals with contemporary challenges to sacrificial atonement and defends the view that God bears his sentence himself, the judge and the judged. In his final two chapters he adopts the rubric of the threefold office and develops his argument largely in terms of biblical theology. After a treatment of the Prophet as mediator, messenger and messiah, he turns to the Priest and his active self-offering in life and in death. He concludes with the King, the one who on the cross defeated the powers and who has now taken up his rightful Lordship. One day he will hand the kingdom to the Father, as the faithful representative of his covenant people.

Horton will raise the profile of federal theology with this volume and bring it to a new audience. Along the way important historical debates are revisited and issues in contemporary theology are addressed. Some of this assumes a measure of familiarity with past and present discussion, and those like me who are not well read in recent philosophical and systematic theology will find some of the terminology opaque. Among the many comments which might be made, let me offer just two general and positive ones.

First, Horton shows how much of theology can be organised covenantally. He uses covenant as an architectonic scheme. Like any architectonic structure, covenant does not always need to be visible, so it can underlie and unify much of biblical revelation without its specific vocabulary always explicit on the surface. Scattered through Horton's book, here are some of the themes which covenant unites for him: transcendence and immanence, freedom from the world and for the world, epistemology and ethics, Christology from above and from below, Christology and pneumatology, *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*, the

judicial and the relational, I-experience and we-experience, the personal and the cosmic, the already and the not yet, and so on!

Secondly, the book is refreshingly oriented to Scripture. Horton the systematic theologian engages the sacred text himself, sometimes at length. He also invites mainstream biblical scholars like Walter Brueggemann and N. T. Wright into the discussion. Most significantly, he draws from the riches of his own biblical-theological tradition. There cannot be many scripts where Geerhardus Vos and Meredith Kline are cast alongside Sallie McFague and Jacques Derrida. It is probably not Horton's fault that the shift from one voice to another is not always smooth, as these are people who do not speak one another's languages. If I may suggest that systematic theologians are from Mars and biblical theologians are from Venus, perhaps they can learn to talk to each other on Planet Covenant, a place for strangers to meet.

There is one index combining subjects and names, but no Scripture index and no bibliography. Perhaps these omissions will be made good in the third volume. We look forward to the completion of this project and also to a spin-off book. A footnote here alerts us to a 'labyrinthine' chapter on the Trinity which had to be pulled from the original draft and which will be published separately.

*Alasdair I. Macleod, St Andrews Free Church, St Andrews, Fife*

## **The Greatest is Charity: the life of Andrew Reed, preacher and philanthropist**

Ian J. Shaw

Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2005; 432 pp., £18.95

ISBN-19: 0-85234-593-3; ISBN-13: 978-0-85234-593-1

Andrew Reed (1787-1862) was a congregational minister in the east end of London, in one congregation, from 1811 to 1861. With C. H. Spurgeon's famous ministry beginning in 1854, Shaw asserts, 'As a preacher Andrew Reed stands amongst the front rank of his generation' (p. 380).

His fifty-year ministry was devoted to 'the ordinary means': 'Biblical preaching, consistent prayer, faithful pastoral work and godly living' (p. 220), as his convinced road to the best of blessings. He took in almost 2500 new members, most being converted under his preaching, and there were periods that can be recognised as true 'revivals'. Reed longed for revival and examined the subject very closely, including warnings against revivalist methods (as advanced in that era by Charles Finney).

Pastorally, Reed was often 'limited' to counselling people affected by his own gospel preaching. There were many of them and he was gifted in it. No one was seriously troubled that home visitation was not his regular practice, with so much else to do.

Reed himself viewed gospel preaching as his own priority, but he was probably better recognised publicly for his charitable work. His stature can be seen in the success he made of both.

He saw the gospel constraining him to care for society's neglected. Huge numbers of people were in desperate straits then, especially in London. Reed responded by founding three institutions for the care of orphans, and eventually two others: for the disabled, and for the terminally ill. All three categories were very poorly provided for by the state. He attracted many eminent supporters for each project, including Queen Victoria herself. Each institution was established in cooperation with people from other ecclesiastical persuasions, as he bore no spirit of competition. However, doctrinal differences did eventually arise, resulting in divisions. Shaw does not present Reed as a man without fault, yet his remarkable qualities predominate. He was a superb administrator, with no self-importance.

Some of the establishments he founded are still traceable today, including one, now bearing Reed's name, in Cobham where I live. It tends to be regarded as 'a smart private school', but keeps some provision for needy boys, attuned to its origins as an orphanage.

This book is a skilled telling of a life full of activity. Ian Shaw brings masses of detail together but there is an enjoyable flow to the story. Only when explaining Reed's (to us) unusual funding methods for all five charities did the detail feel slightly repetitive.

Shaw includes chapters devoted to issues of theology or policy that concerned Andrew Reed. This is helpful for our instruction and to appreciate Reed's qualities (his activism was firmly gospel-based).

Although Reed did make some errors of judgement, the lasting impression is of a man with a true heart for God. Shaw's book is a lifelike portrait, not avoiding 'warts', but there are few to be seen. Quotations from Reed's own diaries show a man very sensitive to his own faults in the light of the holiness of his Lord, but diligently setting out to rectify them, in God's grace.

In hardback, with good quality production, a highly readable text, full endnotes for sources, and a useful index, this is an accessible biography, at an ideal standard for the more advanced Christian. It is a story that should also interest some involved in social welfare.

Ian Shaw has done us a service with this book, as have Evangelical Press. Andrew Reed was neither a Scotsman, nor a Presbyterian, but he was clearly a man worthy of anyone's attention. We need to hear more of the many remarkable 'unknown' men of both past and present.

*David D. Miller, Cobham Presbyterian Church*

## **Standing on the Rock: A History of Stirling Baptist Church**

Brian R. Talbot

Stirling Baptist Church, Stirling, 2005; 185 pp., £10; No ISBN

Brian Talbot, whose important study of the making of the Scottish Baptist Denomination *The Search for a Common Identity* (Paternoster, Carlisle, 2003) began as a thesis for the University of Stirling, has put Scottish Baptists and many others further into his debt by this detailed and lively account of a church which has reached its bicentenary. As in many Scottish towns, the origins of the church in Stirling are tangled and sometimes obscure, Scottish and English varieties of polity interweaving in a sometimes bewildering way. Talbot carefully sets the birth of the church in its Scottish ecclesiastical context, and traces what can be discovered of the little Bible-loving but fissiparous bodies that carried the Baptist name in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first outstanding name associated with the churches is that of Malcolm McMillan, pastor of the 'English' church from 1829, whose brothers founded the publishing firm. In 1850 the now mostly united church called James Culross, who remained for 20 years and under whose ministry a strong church was built up, which moved into its own building in Murray Place in 1854. Culross, a friend of Spurgeon, eventually became President of Bristol Baptist College.

The next pastor was George Yuille, who combined a successful ministry with the Secretaryship of the Baptist Union. John Shearer, William Charteris (a distinguished Army Chaplain) and John Rigley continued the succession of activist and evangelistic pastors. Then Talbot tells us the stories of the church under the leadership of well-remembered men, Donald McCallum and James Taylor, culminating in the adventurous move to the renovated former South Church of Scotland in 1989, and the expanding ministries encouraged by the present pastor, Alasdair Black.

But the story of the church cannot be confined to ministers' biographies. Over the two centuries there have been many devoted and talented women and men whose prayers and vision have sustained and



broadened the work of Stirling Baptist Church. The church has a proud missionary record, with a remarkable number of members going to serve in a variety of overseas posts. In 1995-1996 missionary giving accounted for 21% of the annual budget. Daughter churches at Cornton and St Ninian's have been established and sustained in recent years, and the church has played its full part in Baptist life in the county and the nation. There are many examples of co-operation with other churches in the town in evangelistic and sometimes civic matters.

Stirling Church is a growing Baptist church, with its outreach among marginalised people in the Town Centre, and its current staff of four pastors and an administrator, using an imaginatively developed central building and being willing to allow church plants to develop in the suburbs. Talbot tells the story in careful detail, using minutes, press reports and a general background of Scottish and local historical sources. He bravely ventures into accounts of controversies, and he brings the story up to the moment of publication, which entails many references to living persons. That he does this with both honesty and tact increases the value of the book. The portraits of Pastors are the only illustrations and convey a sense of change over the years. The differing fashions of ministerial dress are nicely illustrated, perhaps especially in the rather ethereal photograph of Alasdair Black!

The book is clearly set out and well indexed, but the type is very small and may deter those whose eyesight is not perfect. Despite that, this is a model history of a local church, and will one hopes be read far beyond Scottish Baptist circles.

*Derek B. Murray, Edinburgh*

### **The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement: A Critical Appraisal of Trinitarian Theology and Charismatic Experience from a Scottish Perspective**

Jim Purves

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004; 232 pp., £19.99

ISBN-10: 1-84227-321-3; ISBN-13: 978-1-84227-321-0

In this important reworking of his doctoral dissertation, Jim Purves seeks to refine the Trinitarian model that has traditionally shaped Scottish theology. Purves' thesis is that Scottish theology's Nicean, Calvinistic grid errs by considering God ontologically rather than economically, thus relegating the Holy Spirit to little more than an epistemic agent. While Purves' chronicling of this development (chapters 2-4) and his

exploration of several Scottish responses to it (chapters 5-7) is stimulating, the true value of his work lies in his presentation of a Charismatic corrective to the situation.

The foundation for this corrective is laid in the book's opening chapter, where Purves commendably systematizes and classifies the concepts that guide the Charismatic Renewal movement. Most importantly, Purves details the central emphasis of that movement upon the 'ontic actuality of God', which he describes as '*the becomingness of God towards us in His own Being*' (p. 22, emphasis in original). Although this ontic actuality occurs through the Son, as well, the primary present experience of it is through the Spirit and is 'suprarational', for while it is not a purely rational experience, neither is it irrational or contra-rational. Rather, this suprarational experience of God precedes and enhances the rational revelation of him in Scripture.

In his final chapter, Purves uses these concepts to construct a Trinitarian model that accounts for the experience of Charismatic believers and corrects the mistakes of the Scottish tradition. First, Purves argues for a 'bifocal symmetry' that gives equal attention to the ontic actuality of the Son, seen in the Incarnation, and the ontic actuality of the Spirit, met in Charismatic experience. Second, Purves stipulates that, in his ontic actuality, the Spirit works primarily to draw believers into deeper communion with Christ. Thirdly, Purves details the 'twofold procession of the Spirit' that underlies this model (p. 227). In the first instance, there is a procession of the Spirit from the Father to the Incarnate Son. In the second instance, 'there is a procession of the Spirit from the Father to humanity whereby, in being brought by the Spirit into an increasing degree of proximation to Christ, we are enabled by the Spirit to anticipate Christ's relationship with the Father through the Spirit' (p. 227).

In this Trinitarian model, one glimpses the fundamental difficulty of Purves' work, for therein, Purves rejects the *filioque* position, that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. In explicating his model's twofold procession of the Spirit, Purves speaks of the Spirit received by believers as proceeding only from the Father, which results in a separation between the Son and the Spirit that has manifold implications. Simply stated, is the connection between the apprehension of God through the Spirit and the revelation of Christ in Scripture necessary or only incidental? If believers receive the Spirit only from the Father, than the Triune God can be apprehended by the suprarational work of the Spirit independently of the 'rational' revelation of the Son in Scripture. This possibility is embodied in Purves' own work, which

contains multiple references to interviews with individual believers regarding their personal experience, yet not a single scriptural citation. For Purves, in accordance with his Trinitarian model, apprehension of the Triune God can be pursued without recourse to scriptural reflection.

As Purves concedes, 'This work is not an easy read' (p. xvii). Strangely, although footnotes are given to explain some fairly common expressions, much more complex terms and concepts are used with neither comment nor explanation. The glossary at the conclusion of the work is sparse and many concepts remain unexplained, creating significant barriers to a wide readership profiting from this work.

If one is seeking a cogent presentation of the guiding theological concerns of the Charismatic movement, Purves provides a wonderful and thoughtful resource. If one is seeking greater clarity on the mysteries of the Trinity, other resources would prove more helpful.

*Stephen G. Myers, New College, Edinburgh*

## **The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide**

Rowland S. Ward

New Melbourne Press, Melbourne, 2004; 304 pp., AU\$16

ISBN-10: 0-9586241-8-6; ISBN-13: 978-0-9586241-8-3

The first edition of this book was published in 1992 under the title, *The Westminster Confession for the Church Today*. A second edition, revised and expanded, was published in 1996 under the same title as this third edition, which has also been revised and expanded. For the purpose of his 'analysis and commentary', the author uses his own 'verbal modernisation' of the text of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (henceforth '*Confession*') 'as adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1647'. The author is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

This book is not aimed at an academic audience but at 'Christians who want a balanced understanding of the Christian faith as understood in the Reformed tradition'. Nor is it in any sense an objective, impartial text, seeking to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of the *Confession*. The author's intention is not to subject the *Confession* to critical analysis, or to discuss ways in which the *Confession* might be challenged or improved. Rather, it is a work of advocacy and promotion, unashamedly partisan in its support for the *Confession*. Those who want a volume which will summarise the teaching of the *Confession*, together with a clear and simple explanation of its intended meaning, will find this book to be very helpful.

Each chapter begins with the text of one or more sections from the *Confession*. This is followed by a brief commentary, often providing some historical background as well as explanation of the theological points at issue. Towards the end of each chapter there is a section entitled 'Thoughts from Other Minds', where the subject under discussion is addressed by a quotation from one of the other Reformation Confessions, or from a famous scholar in the Reformed tradition, such as Calvin, Turretin, Ames or Bavinck, or from a modern writer, such as John Murray, Palmer Robertson or Carl Trueman. Finally, there is a series of questions for discussion, intended to ensure that the reader has understood the key points.

Throughout the book there are boxed sections in which the author addresses the theme under discussion, making reference to modern debates and stating his own view on the matter. For example, there are sections of this type on 'The Inerrancy Debate', 'Characteristics of Some English Translations' and 'Election and Reprobation: Some Important Points'. These sections, like some of the main commentary itself, are informative in respect of making clear the author's opinion, although not all of those within the Westminster tradition would agree with his analysis.

The appendices are also useful, including as they do a short summary of the form of subscription to the *Confession* in the various Presbyterian churches, an index of subjects covered by the *Confession* and by the *Larger Catechism*, together with a detailed 'Select Bibliography'.

This book will be useful for those who want an introduction to the *Confession* and its teaching. It will also be useful in the training of office-bearers in the Presbyterian churches. In the view of this reviewer, however, it would have been a stronger book if it had faced up more honestly to some of the difficult issues, without immediately rushing to the defence of the authors of the *Confession*. In other words, if it had given more recognition to the fact that Reformed theology is a developing movement and not a system which was finally codified and finalised in 1647. In a day when so few value our historic Presbyterian *Confession*, there is a natural tendency to leap to its defence at every turn but to admit to some of its weaknesses is not incompatible with a recognition of its value.

A. T. B. McGowan, *Highland Theological College, Dingwall*

## The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology

Mark Ellingsen

Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, KY, 2005; xiv+216 pp., £13.99  
 ISBN-10: 0-664-22618-3; ISBN-13: 978-0-664-22618-3

Mark Ellingsen has produced a fine study of Augustine which will be a benefit to anyone who picks it up. It is not for the faint-hearted, it must be said. This is primarily due to its subject matter: the theology of perhaps the greatest post-apostolic theologian does not make for light reading. It is also a comprehensive treatment of effectively the whole range of theological *loci*. Thus one coming to this study without an awareness of theological topics and some knowledge of church history will find the work slightly daunting. But it is nonetheless very rewarding. Ellingsen does an excellent job of writing on these matters. His prose is clear, and he writes with the authority of one who knows both Augustine and Augustine scholarship well. He also writes as one with a personal interest in the African father, and this comes through in almost every page of the book.

The volume contains twelve chapters. These cover (Introduction) Augustine's place in church history, (1) his African context, (2) his exegetical and theological method, (3) God/Trinity/Christology, (4) creation and providence, (5) sin and atonement, (6) salvation and predestination, (7) the church, (8) sacraments, (9) eschatology, (10) social ethics (the two cities), and a final chapter (Conclusion) which reflects on the ecumenical implications of Augustine. Following these, Ellingsen produces a chart which outlines how Augustine handled various *loci* – Christology, faith and reason, etc. – by offering brief statements summarizing his position on each one and stating the context of its use (for instance, proofs for God's existence would be used in apologetics).

The work is quintessentially one of contextualization. What this means, because of Ellingsen's keen interest to be useful to his readers, is that one not only finds Augustine's theology analyzed in careful detail with the African's context in mind but also one finds the content of Ellingsen's study set within a twenty-first century context. Thus, for instance, we find him discussing as a matter of real significance for ethnicity the question of whether Augustine may have been black. We also discover him treating justification under headings such as 'Justification: Protestant-like Themes' and 'Justification: Catholic and Orthodox-like Themes'. Such an approach will likely bother some – particularly those of a more historical bent who would prefer that the

question of whether Augustine would side with Protestants, Catholics or Orthodox on a given issue be passed over as anachronistic. But, like it or not, it is an indication of Ellingsen's aims and his interest to produce a volume that might be useful to Christians living today.

Context, in fact, is not only characteristic of Ellingsen's approach. He argues that it is characteristic of Augustine's theology as well. Ellingsen holds that a careful examination of Augustine's thought reveals that it can be best understood as contextually patterned. In other words, he emphasized particular ideas in his dealings with particular opponents, even to the point of seeming dialectical. Ellingsen uses this fact to propose, at the end of the volume, ways in which Augustine may be of use to the twenty-first century church, namely, by providing it with a *modus operandi* for doing ministry.

It is important to stress this practical aspect of Ellingsen's study in order to give a clear sense of what the work is. It is not a straight historically-oriented analysis of Augustine's theology. It is, rather, a study which – clearly the work of someone steeped in Augustine's thought – is concerned to produce a practical outcome. Ellingsen wishes to take Augustine and make him useful today. Considered in this light, this reviewer feels he has produced an exceptional study of the great church father.

*Jon Balsarak, University of Birmingham*

## **A Short Course in Christian Doctrine**

George Pattison

SCM Press, London, 2005; 180 pp., £19.99

ISBN-10: 0-334-02978-3; ISBN-13: 978-0-334-02978-6

George Pattison is the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford University. For fourteen years he served as an Anglican parish priest. This book is based on an introductory course in practical theology he taught at Aarhus University, in Denmark. He claims it was written it for those working in the church, not academics. Unfortunately its flawed foundational premise, its assent to contemporary philosophical and theological notions, and its difficult prose leave *A Short Course in Christian Doctrine* vulnerable to critique. Employing a novel definition of 'doctrine', Pattison presents a discourse on Christianity's witness in the modern context, as it relates to a number of salient topics: the concept of doctrine itself, Trinitarian ontology, the sacramental nature of the universe, the significance of incarnation, the church's activity in history, its place within culture and its role in ethics and politics.

Pattison challenges the classic, objective understanding of doctrine as 'the sum of the knowledge that a person has to believe to be true if he or she is to be saved and to enjoy the fellowship of the Church' (p. 4). He uses the term to denote the subjective, existential process of teaching itself. Thus, his discussion of 'Christian doctrine' addresses the manner in which this 'dynamic communicative event or practice' takes place (p. 86). While it sounds commendable, Pattison's approach ignores the objective sense in which doctrine or 'teaching' (*didache, didaskalia*) is spoken of in Scripture (Matt. 7:28, Eph. 4:14, 1 Tim. 4:16, Rev. 2:14), and the fact that traditionally 'doctrine' has included ethical as well as dogmatic, propositional teaching. Conflating doctrine and practice leads him to disparage the traditional view as antiquated and insufficient. While stressing the importance of contextual relevance in ministry, for instance, Pattison insists that 'Doctrine is not defending a set of unchanging and timeless truths' (p. 49).

The author engages robustly with figures like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Georg W. F. Hegel, Sallie McFague and many others. Indeed, his knowledge of modern thought and culture is impressively broad. However, his eagerness to privilege new ideas over traditional, biblical ones should make readers who prize the latter cautious. His view of the cross exemplifies the danger of his method. Like a growing number of Christians, Pattison denigrates a sacrificial understanding of the atonement. He takes cues from historian and philosopher René Girard, who claimed the identification of scapegoats is an unhealthy sociological pattern that perpetuates violence. 'Where the church persists in interpreting the death of Jesus in sacrificial terms', Pattison concludes, 'we may suspect that the lesson has not yet been learned' (p. 98). Never mind that the Fourth Gospel refers to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God', or that Paul affirms he was put forward as a *hilasterion* or 'sacrifice of atonement' (John 1:29, Rom. 3:25). To his credit, Pattison regretfully admits not having a sufficient grasp of biblical studies to bring its perspectives to the questions he addresses (p. 2). Readers should not underestimate the implications of this candid admission.

Aside from these problems, some may find the book's language overly esoteric. For example, Chapter 4 ('The God in Time') contains an involved discussion that wrestles with the ideas of Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Tillich, Søren Kirkegaard and others, and deals with the respective meaning of 'sign', 'sacrament' and 'symbol' as applied to Christ (pp. 83-93). Elsewhere Pattison introduces terms like 'perichoresis', 'structures of destruction' and 'self-presencing' without much definition or explanation. For a project that aspires to serve 'those concerned with the practice of

Christian communicative action rather than its theoretical analysis' (p. 2), this *Short Course* is surprisingly recondite. It holds some intriguing insights and prescriptions, and may benefit more discerning readers who want a sampling of modern trends in theology and philosophy, but those seeking a straightforward survey of historic creeds and doctrines are advised to look elsewhere.

*H. Chris Ross, University of Edinburgh*

## **Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship**

Rekha M. Chennattu

Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2006; 212 pp., £14.63

ISBN-10: 1-56563-668-6; ISBN-13: 978-1-56563-668-2

Rekha Chennattu argues that Johannine scholars have traditionally overlooked the role of covenant in assessments of John's conception of discipleship. Chennattu endeavours to fill 'this lacuna by pursuing a threefold objective: 1) a detailed exegetical analysis of the discipleship narratives and discourses (chs 1, 13–17, 20–21); 2) an investigation of the OT motifs behind the presentation of discipleship; 3) an examination of the function and relevance of the discipleship paradigm for the Johannine community' (p. xv).

Chennattu opens the first chapter with a review of the thirteen most important scholarly works on discipleship in John between the years 1970–2000. The remainder of the chapter is given over to a detailed analysis of John 1:35–51 in which the author argues that 'essential elements of the OT covenant relationship' are reflected in such features as the 'abiding motif', the knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah, the call to witness, the renaming of disciples, and the promissory basis of discipleship. Chennattu concludes, 'the evangelist uses the occasion of the call stories to present a paradigm of discipleship as a covenant relationship' (p. 49).

In chapters 2–4 the author endeavours to bear out this thesis through examination of John 13–17 and 20–21. Chapter 2 devotes fifteen pages to a survey of the dominant features of 'covenant making and covenant relationship' in the Old Testament then argues in the remainder of the chapter that 'chapters 13–17 constitute a covenant renewal ceremony' analogous to those found in Deuteronomy and Joshua 24 (p. 68). After a consideration of how this motif plays out in the Farewell Discourse as well as its role in the broader Gospel narrative, Chennattu turns to a more thorough analysis of John 13–17, in chapter 3. She attempts 'to bring to light that the Johannine presentation of discipleship is a Christian



rereading of the OT metaphor' (p. 88). In the fourth chapter, Chennattu examines John 20-21 arguing that these chapters present the fulfillment of many of the covenant promises made by Jesus in chapters 13-17, such as his return to the Father, the conquest of the world and the coming of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus' resurrection and glorification issue in his gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples to 'reaffirm the permanent presence of the covenant God and Lord' and to empower 'the community for a fruitful accomplishment of its mission' of making God known and loved (p. 177-8).

The fifth and final chapter raises the question of the purpose for which the 'Johannine community' cast Christian discipleship in terms of a covenant relationship. Introducing recent analytical methods from social-scientific criticism, Chennattu argues that the 'Johannine community' appropriated the covenant concept, a central Jewish identity marker in the first century, as a means of redefining the community's identity in the wake of its expulsion from the synagogue in the post-Jamnian period. In other words, the Gospel employs the covenant concept as a way of affirming that Christians, not Jews, are the true people of God.

The investigation of Rekha Chennattu into discipleship in the Fourth Gospel is thorough and persuasive. Her analysis of select contexts in John repeatedly benefits from the considerable attention devoted to the Old Testament background. Regrettably, her final chapter veers into the all-too-common theorizing about a hypothetical 'community' that stands behind the Fourth Gospel. This is unfortunate. Such an otherwise fine study might more profitably and fittingly have been rounded off by a consideration of the import of the covenant-discipleship theme for the church today, perhaps in a particular cultural context.

*Gerry Wheaton, St Andrews*

## **Healing and Suffering: Biblical and Pastoral Reflections**

Keith Warrington

Paternoster/Authentic Media, Milton Keynes, 2005; 219 pp., £8.99  
 ISBN-10: 0-85234-593-8; ISBN-13: 978-0-85234-593-8

Keith Warrington is the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Regent's Theological College, Nantwich. In this interesting book he sets out to answer a broad range of questions about healing and suffering. Our Lord's healing ministry is covered thoughtfully, and put into context; further questions are tackled from Acts, Paul's epistles and James, and the role of the Holy Spirit in human suffering is well summarised. There are good insights and helpful

comments, such as that the use of touch by Jesus in healing was not merely an expression of sympathy, but indicated 'an authority to transform without being tainted' (p. 60) and resonated with Old Testament imagery of God's power at work.

The level of treatment is basically that of a Bible college, and the book's readability suffers from the style being close to that of the lecture, in places too dense ('his healing ministry encapsulated his integrative mission to humanity in its weakness', p. 20) and in others too colloquial ('but it's enough for Jesus', p. 94). The frequent biblical references are indexed, but the five-page contents list is the only guide around the book. However all the questions answered are listed there in full, and it is possible to use the book to deal with a particular question in some depth. This means that a certain amount of repetition is experienced when the book is read sequentially.

This volume carefully avoids some of the obvious difficulties posed by books on healing to those who have faced long-term illness or disability with Christian faith and courage, by stressing the supreme place of the will of God in such matters, and that answers to heart-felt questions may not be given in this life. Yet it is still not an easy book for such people to read, because there is a constant underlying assumption that God does indeed heal today (pp. 10f.). This is proved not so much theologically as by a stream of anecdotal evidence that sometimes strains credulity. The stories are often from Warrington's own ministry, or received by word of mouth; there are no names given, nor dates, nor are there any footnotes allowing access to medical authentication. The reader has to decide whether the marauding lioness really was struck by lightning (pp. 132f.), or the friend supernaturally healed from facial injuries (p. 56), or whether the expensive object purchased actually caused demonic activity (pp. 78f.). We all live post-Hume, and miracles must present their credentials; it is not unbelief but integrity that scrutinises the historical, scientific and indeed linguistic evidence. For instance, *eutheos* ('at once') in John 6:21 could indicate a miracle ('immediately' at the port), or just the sense of relief that with Jesus in the boat, in the ensuing calm, they were soon ('in no time') at their destination. Also more than once Warrington cites 'healing' which led to no continuing faith in Christ (cf. p. 27 with pp. 68, 35), which seems difficult to square with what our Saviour intended (e.g. at Mark 5:34) when he said, 'Be made whole!' Jesus normally granted healing in every sense, of both body and spirit.

A great deal of spadework has gone into this volume, but it is hardly 'an outstanding book' as claimed by R. T. Kendall on the front cover. It

assumes the present continuation of all the charismatic gifts, and is likely to be most consulted within Pentecostal circles.

*John R. de la Haye, Wick, Caithness*

## **The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task and Purpose**

John R. Franke

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 206 pp., £9.99

ISBN-10: 0-8010-2641-5; ISBN-13: 978-0-8010-2641-6

This book is an excellent and stimulating resource (and discussion starter) for anyone interested in the current state and future directions of evangelical theology. Well written, it offers a fresh, constructive, and informed proposal for a distinctively evangelical theology that is grounded in Scripture, follows in the Reformed tradition (while also engaging ecumenically), and is shaped by moderate postmodern thought. Further, it is written to be ‘accessible to beginning theology students... as well as those in the church who are seeking alternative approaches to theology that will better serve the emerging church of the twenty-first century’ (p. 10).

While a subtitle on the book’s cover calls this a ‘Postconservative Evangelical Approach’, a measured response to this label is in order. Franke clearly incorporates some aspects of postmodern thought (the helpfully explained linguistic and non-foundationalist turns), and with this offers evangelicals an approach somewhat parallel to that of post-liberals. Yet Franke is clear that ‘theology is never to be conformed to postmodern or any other type of reason but rather to bear faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ’. Thus he argues for a theology reflecting a ‘non-foundational and contextual approach that promotes an open and flexible construal... that is inherently self-critical and reforming’ (pp. 8-9). Thus ‘postconservative’ means an approach to theology consciously seeking to lead conservative evangelicals through and beyond some of the more problematic aspects of liberal reason; meaning here enlightenment or modern philosophical assumptions which the conservative evangelical theological enterprise has so often incorporated, at times uncritically, into its own agenda. Postconservative thus means a theology which self-consciously emphasizes the central Reformation principle of continually reforming. To Franke, such a postconservative evangelical theology becomes

an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their missional vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated (p. 44).

Reflecting the title, the book's five chapters are: (1) Doing Theology Today, (2) The Subject of Theology, (3) The Nature of Theology, (4) The Task of Theology, and (5) The Purpose of Theology. Yet refreshingly, Franke doesn't just talk to us about theology (theological method). While throughout the book unpacking and explaining his definition, Franke also does theology and therein offers some fresh and promising proposals.

In Chapter 1, along with his definition of theology, Franke explores aspects of the postmodern context that would seem to free evangelical theology to be itself and serve its God-intended purpose. From this he offers a welcome sketch of the current theological landscape, and particularly sharp is his interpretation of current issues, tendencies and debates engaging evangelicals.

Chapter 2 focuses upon the subject of theology, God who is Trinity. Within which, classical two-nature Christology serves as the basis for Franke's insightful and promising discussion of the indirect nature of revelation; that is, as 'hidden' within the ordinary. In Chapter 3 Franke then argues for the contextual and thus ongoing nature of theology, including biblical interpretation. As a helpful case-study he examines Origen.

Chapter 4 directs the theological task to the service of the church, and shows, given the nature of Scripture, how Scripture, cultural context and tradition should be brought together in an ongoing corrective and constructive dialogue. This discussion of Scripture and tradition leads Franke into fresh insights toward redressing the Catholic/Protestant divide. Chapter 5 shows us why theology matters. It demonstrates how theology is intended to assist the church in mission; and herein the concept of community and community-building is central.

Of course, few of the broader programmatic points Franke offers are new. He, Grenz and others have been working on this kind of project for well over a decade. Nevertheless this book does not simply recast older material. Specifically promising to this reviewer are the fresh insights offered on the hiddenness of revelation, and following on, a non-foundationalist construal of the nature of Scripture.

While we may find ourselves disagreeing with Franke on some points, overall this is an important book on theology that deserves to be

read by anyone interested in the church and mission into the twenty-first century.

*Darrell Cosden, International Christian College, Glasgow*

### **Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches**

Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth (eds)

IVP Apollos, Leicester, 2005; 336 pp., £16.99

ISBN-10: 1-84474-077-3; ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-077-2

The Psalms have had a special place in the affections of both Jews and Christians throughout the ages. Read, preached, chanted or sung, they move the heart and stir the soul as well as any other part of Scripture. Full of meaning to the ordinary Christian, they are of course at the centre of debate among scholars today regarding the interpretation of Scripture.

The aim of this book is to bridge the gap between basic introductions to interpreting the Psalms and more specialized literature. However, the problem is that basic introductions satisfy those who want something basic, and specialized literature satisfies those who want something specialized, but the question is how many people are there who really want something pitched between the two? This volume is really too specialized to be popular, but too basic to be of real value to the serious scholar.

Nevertheless, the editors of this book are both serious Old Testament scholars. Johnston is Old Testament Tutor and Director of Studies at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (Anglican), and Firth is Old Testament Tutor and BA Course Leader at Cliff College, Sheffield (Methodist). Johnston contributes a chapter on the theme of distress in the Psalter, and Firth a chapter on the importance of teaching in the Psalms. Altogether, some fifteen chapters are grouped into four sections.

The first part attempts to set Psalms interpretation in context, both of current study and of Ancient Near Eastern prayer genres, and the second part explores certain key themes within the Psalter, such as distress, praise, the King, and the cult. The third group looks at various interpretation issues such as teaching, ethics and body idioms, and the fourth group considers different interpretative traditions in relation to matters such as the structure of the Psalter, the Qumran, the evangelists and the Targum Psalms.

Like many books containing numerous contributions from various people, this volume is far from uniform. The chapters are of a similar depth, but are of very variable quality and worth. Probably the most helpful chapter is that written by Jamie Grant, Lecturer in Biblical

Studies at Highland Theological College, Dingwall, on the tremendously important theme of the King in the Psalter. Grant deals with such issues as genre and kingship, anonymous kingship, canonical kingship, continuing kingship and Psalmic kingship in a very clear and most refreshing style, and concludes that when we read the royal psalms christologically, we see a picture of Jesus the King as both our representative and example. Seeing the significance of kingship in the Psalter gives us a fuller understanding of the humanity of our Messiah and a fuller awareness of the piety that should typify our lives day by day.

Taken as representative of current Psalms scholarship, this book is a readable synopsis of what is going on. However, taken as a thermometer of current evangelical scholarship, it is a reminder of how much things have changed during recent decades. The fundamental problem with this volume is that, again and again, it betrays a very low view of Scripture and the modern approach that studies the Bible as if it was an ordinary book, and fails to recognize its many distinctive qualities as the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God.

In short, this book is a fair summary of contemporary Psalms scholarship, but of little use to most readers.

*R. Jeremy Brooks, Salem Baptist Church, Ramsey, Cambs*

## **Contours of Christology in the New Testament**

Richard N. Longenecker (ed.)

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; xiv+345 pp., £16.99

ISBN-10: 0-8028-1014-4; ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-1014-4

This volume is a survey of the basic features of New Testament Christology. Chapter 1, 'Jewish Messianism and Early Christology' by William Horbury, tackles the question of pre-Christian Jewish messianic expectations in relation to New Testament christology.

Chapter 2, 'Jesus as the Alpha and Omega of New Testament Thought' by Ben Witherington, asserts that Jesus is both the basis for and focus of New Testament theology. Witherington attempts to establish this point by exploring the narratological shape of Paul's christology.

Chapter 3, 'Christological Materials in the Early Christian Community' by Richard N. Longenecker, explores primitive christological material embedded in the New Testament. Longenecker analyzes the passion narratives, eschatological traditions, the sayings source Q, and early confessional material.

Chapter 4, “Who Can This Be?” The Christology of Mark’s Gospel’ by Morna D. Hooker, examines material in Mark’s Gospel including the prologue, the kingdom, Mark’s story, and Mark’s purpose.

Chapter 5, ‘The Vindicated Son: A Narrative Approach to Matthean Christology’ by Terence Donaldson, employs a narrative-critical approach to explicating the christology of Matthew’s Gospel. According to Donaldson, the benefit of a narrative methodology over a study of titles is that it allows us to find christological significance in non-titular material. Overall the Matthean narrative is about the tested and triumphant Son of God.

Chapter 6, ‘The Christology of Luke’s Gospel and Acts’ by I. Howard Marshall, examines the array of images of Jesus in Luke-Acts. Marshall discusses four important questions about Luke including: subordination, inactivity of the exalted Christ, a two-stage christology, and the language of divinity. He concludes that Luke’s christology has two main foci of ‘Christship’ and ‘Lordship’.

Chapter 7, ‘Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John’ by Richard Bauckham, situates the christology of the fourth Gospel in relation to Jewish monotheism. In Bauckham’s view, John’s christology is that of ‘divine identity’ or that Jesus participates in the identity of God. According to Bauckham, John does not compromise Jewish monotheism, but he radically redefines it in light of Jesus the Son’s relationship with the Father.

Chapter 8, ‘The Christology of the Early Pauline Letters’ by Douglas J. Moo, embarks on a brief analysis of the early Pauline letters (Galatians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, and Romans). Moo rejects a chronological method, using Romans as a template, a study of the titles of Jesus, and narrative approaches. Instead, he prefers a threefold method of salvation-history, stages in Jesus’ life, and titles used to describe Jesus.

Chapter 9, ‘The Christology of the Prison Epistles’ by Ralph P. Martin, discusses Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians. Martin discusses the Christ Hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 that turns cosmic christology into a moral exhortation. Passages such as Colossians 1:15-20, 2:13-15 are given a solid treatment. He finds in Philemon *koinonia* as ‘life in Christ’. And Martin expounds the majestic blend of christology and ecclesiology in Ephesians.

Chapter 10, ‘Christology in the Letters to Timothy and Titus’ by Philip H. Towner, reviews christological material in the pastoral epistles. Towner sees the centre of the epistles as being the use of ‘saviour’ and the ‘epiphany’ motif. He concludes that 1 Timothy emphasizes the

humanity of Christ, 2 Timothy emphasizes the promise of resurrection and vindication, and Titus emphasizes Jesus' co-equal status with God.

Chapter 11, 'The Son of God as Unique High Priest: The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews' by Donald A. Hagner, combs through an assortment of themes in Hebrews including the deity and humanity of Christ. According to Hagner, the christology of Hebrews is a source of encouragement for Christians in dire circumstances.

Chapter 12, 'Catholic Christologies in the Catholic Epistles' by J. Ramsey Michaels, outlines the teachings of James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, and 1-3 John. Michaels find in these epistles an emphasis on the Lordship of Jesus.

Chapter 13, 'Stories of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John' by David E. Aune, looks over the images of Christ in the Revelation of John. Attention is paid to the literary and narrative features of Revelation. Aune detects two main depictions of Jesus as the Son of Man and the Divine Warrior, both of which provide descriptions normally reserved for God.

Some essays are better than others (e.g. Donaldson, Bauckham, and Marshall). Overall this is a helpful volume and ideal as an introduction to Christology.

*Michael F. Bird, Highland Theological College, Dingwall*

## **A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics**

David Jasper

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2004; xii+148 pp., £12.99; ISBN-10: 0-664-22751-1; ISBN-13: 978-0-664-22751-7

This book is clearly a revised form of lecturer's notes, as indicated in the introduction. However the substance and presentation of the book is good, and very useful for both students and those wishing to refresh or develop their understanding.

On a wider stage it is a tribute to the fact that the study of literature which once was the *handmaid* to biblical studies has now become the totality. This is a problem in the training for ministry given by the universities, highlighted in a recent debate in the General Assembly regarding the alterations to the content of the Bible Examination in the training of ministers.

From an examination of the website of Glasgow University I note that the author has been described as a post-postmodern thinker. Such a definition will annoy some, confuse others and cause consternation amongst those who understand the concept. These ideas are borne out by



his areas of research and signs of his own understanding appear in this volume, e.g. his appreciation of Heidegger, etc.

The summaries of each chapter are helpful as are the questions and the full bibliographies.

However I am concerned that there is little on the hermeneutics of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, especially since one of Jasper's areas of research was Anthony of Egypt. Also there is no review or survey of the Christian Fundamentalist position. Unless one accepts Barth as emblematic of the Reformed position, there is little on that tradition either, especially in its modern incarnation.

A more global view would aid this work, but if its aim is to be sold to students at Glasgow and anyone else interested, it works. There is comment on the idea that the West is in a post-colonial stage but there is little to reflect the theology of Africa and Asia, apart from the usual references to Liberation theology (guaranteed to raise a groan in some!)

In Jasper's favour he is very keen on Thistleton, and he clearly writes with integrity and clarity. To reiterate: this book will be a great help to anyone seeking an introduction to the subject. The author does what he sets out to do.

*Robert Pickles, Parish of Orwell and Portmoak*

## **The Water and the Wine: A Contribution to the Debate on Children and Holy Communion**

Roger Beckwith and Andrew Daunton-Fear

The Latimer Trust, London, 2005; 77 pp., £3.50

ISBN-10: 0-946307-54-7; ISBN-13: 978-0-946307-54-8

The authors of this work are to be congratulated for providing, with such economy of space, a clear review of the landscape against which the issue of the admission of children to communion can be considered. The Old Testament and Jewish background, the New Testament teaching and the practice of the church from earliest times to the Reformation are all given some space within the 77 pages of the book. The text is generally well supplied with bibliographic references and notes and would provide a start to more serious, in-depth reading of the subject. The book is clearly expressive of the authors' intentions and is easily readable.

The book argues for a particular practice: that of infant baptism with the admission to communion after confirmation at adolescence. While admitting that the New Testament witness would support alternative practices and that the church has exhibited these in various times and places, the authors argue for a return to, or maintenance of, the position

adopted by the Anglican Church at the Reformation. This rests on the components of baptism, namely, water, repentance, believing and the Holy Spirit, all being necessary and only fully represented in baptism taken together with confirmation. Various New Testament texts and patristic writings are adduced to support this position, which is predicated upon a definition which is not argued in the book but taken axiomatically, that an infant cannot be a believer because he cannot hold his faith intellectually nor affirm it verbally. On this basis, infant baptism is, in itself, incomplete until the intellectual and verbal components are provided via confirmation.

At this point, the authors are limited by their otherwise admirable brevity. It would help the reader to be guided through some of the philosophical difficulties which the book's position raises. If the baptism of infants is only completed at confirmation, for perhaps 12-14 years of the child's life, the sacrament of baptism cannot be complete. What theological grounds and precedents are there for incomplete sacraments or a sacrament which takes years to administer? Is the candidate only partially baptised? If so what are the authorities for such a view? Regrettably, the authors do not adequately address these important questions.

Related to this is the issue the book raises about the status of children. Because the authors place such great emphasis on individual repentance and confession of faith, which they say infants lack, junior members of the church occupy some sort of reduced status which should make them incommunicate. They also do not necessarily behave well at communion: 'small children sometimes spitting out the consecrated elements and older ones larking about...' (p. 38). The suggestion in the book that this is equivalent to the adult misbehaviour at Corinth which is reproved by St Paul, seems to this reviewer somewhat doubtful.

The argument in the book does tend to drift. In Chapter 3, it is argued that infant initiation is incomplete because it lacks the elements of repentance and faith. By the end of Chapter 5, the requirement of learning the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments before confirmation is endorsed. By Chapter 6, the reader is told that the eucharist 'is not intended for all churchgoers, but is a privilege of the committed'. How committed the adults must be and whether a child could be sufficiently committed, the authors do not say.

All in all, however, the book is a useful map of the landscape over which the authors chart a course which turns out to be over quite difficult terrain.

*Kevin Scott, St James Episcopal Church, Inverleith, Edinburgh*

## **Jesus' Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth**

Damon W. K. So

Paternoster Theological Monographs, Carlisle, 2006; 348pp., £24.99  
 ISBN-10: 1-84227-323-X; ISBN-13: 978-1-84227-323-4

This book explores the doctrine of the Trinity by combining scriptural investigation and doctrinal analysis. Damon So argues that this work 'attempts to draw out the theological significance of Jesus' birth, baptism, ministry, death and resurrection as given by Matthew's narratives in a study of Jesus' revelation of his Father, his Lordship and the Trinity'. He succeeds in clearly articulating the theological importance of the events of Jesus' life as they relate to the concept of revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity.

The introductory chapter discusses the recent interest in the doctrine of the Trinity, and So's methodology (which seeks to explore the Trinity through a narrative study of Jesus' revelation of the Father in history). Chapter two examines both the divinity and humanity of the person of Jesus Christ, and primarily draws upon the work of Karl Barth to elaborate the revelation of God the Father as witnessed in the unity and communion of Jesus with the Father as described in Matthew 11:25-30. This revelation of God is expounded by So with an analysis of Jesus' revelation of his Father through his words (in chapter 3) and Jesus' revelation of his Father through his actions (in chapter 4).

Although the first chapters specifically discuss the revelation of God through the person and actions of Jesus Christ, in chapter 5 So addresses the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The following chapter explores Christology and Pneumatology with reference to the writings of James Dunn, Geoffrey Lampe, Edward Irving and Karl Barth. The book ends with an analysis of the humanity, divinity, and authority of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible, by discussing the Incarnation and articulating the notion of *person*. So's understanding of revelation based on the gospel narrative and his trinitarian articulation of Christology leads to 'a refined Christology with a paradigmatic shift beyond Chalcedon' as his understanding 'seeks refinement via a shift in *methodology* and *conceptualisation*'. He argues that his use of the biblical narratives to ground Christology and the exploration of the Trinity is a methodological shift away from the current division between biblical studies and doctrinal theology found in academic study. With regard to the shift in conceptualisation So argues that his articulation of the category of spirit and the concept of conformity in spirit, in relation

to the discussion concerning divinity and humanity of Jesus, offers a novel approach to Christology.

This book (based on a Ph.D. thesis) attempts to discuss and answer two questions. First, how does Jesus Christ reveal God the Father? Second, what is the content of Jesus Christ's revelation of God based on the concrete words and actions of Jesus as presented in the Bible? Detailed biblical study combined with rigorous doctrinal investigation provides clear answers to both of these questions. The primary strength of this book is So's impressive biblical and doctrinal research that is intelligibly analysed and articulated; though brief summaries at the beginning of each chapter, as well as a Scripture index, an author index and a subject index, are also helpful. This book is a valuable resource for laity, pastors and students who seek to explore the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ through biblical and doctrinal investigation.

*Heather Paige McDivitt, Wingate University, North Carolina*

### **Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena**

Herman Bavinck (trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt)

Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003; 685 pp., £25.50

ISBN-10: 0-8010-2632-6; ISBN-13: 978-0-8010-2632-4

There are a select number of books whose release requires more of an announcement than a review. The translation of Bavinck's magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* is just such a work. Bavinck (1854-1921) stands as one of the most influential theologians in the Dutch Reformed tradition and this work is his *magnum opus*. Bavinck is best known as standing, along with Abraham Kuyper, whom he succeeded at the Free University in Amsterdam, at the headwaters of the neo-Calvinist movement. This re-emergence of orthodox Calvinism came with an emphasis on the engagement with culture, from politics and social work to philosophy and the modern sciences. Neo-Calvinism has borne immense fruit and there are reasons to believe that its influence is only increasing (one might note some of the fruit of the tradition in the 'Reformed epistemologists' Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff).

Bavinck's *Prolegomena* is in many ways a standard Reformed treatment of the subject, with the sole structural novelty of a brief history of Western dogmatics. Bavinck begins the volume by defining dogmatics as a scientific study of 'the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him' (38). Then follows the examination of the method of dogmatics, and the excursion into its history. Bavinck then examines the *principia*

or foundations of dogmatic theology. Still following the Reformed orthodox pattern, he divides this into an external principle (*principium externum*), which is God revealing himself in nature and (especially) Scripture, and an internal principle (*principium internum*) which is faith brought about by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Bavinck's greatness is not his theological novelty – his answers are not significantly different from the earlier work of Polanus, Maccovius or John Owen – but in his unsurpassed ability to engage with honesty the intellectual currents of his time as a representative of orthodox Reformed thought. Bavinck is in constant dialogue with Kant, Hegel and Leibniz on the one hand, and Harnack, Troeltsch, Schleiermacher and Ritschl on the other. The seamlessness of this engagement is due in large part to the governing principle of *per fidem ad intellectum*: understanding comes through faith. Thus he defines dogmatics as a 'science', but then redefines all science to stress its necessary subjectivity (*contra* positivism), so that all knowledge begins with elements of faith. He denies the Cartesian notion of innate ideas, positing that all knowledge is entirely dependent from outside of us (*principium externum*); acknowledging at the same time with Kant that all our knowledge is subjective. This does not lead to pure subjectivity, however, due to the *principium internum*: faith brought about and sustained by the Holy Spirit. We are at no point left to ourselves and so Bavinck leads us away from the dominant models of modernist philosophy and its theological fruit – the same fruit, incidentally, we are still reaping.

There are certainly moments Bavinck appears a man of his time – offering lengthy discourses on now obscure theologians, and the absence of interaction with the watershed that emerged with Barth's writings. Yet his text remains in many ways fresh and, translated into eminently readable prose, is a strong statement of the adequacy of evangelical teaching – and Reformed theology in particular – in the light of the philosophical pressures of that day. Today, as idealism has been succeeded by phenomenology and her children, positivism by pluralism, and the 'linguistic turn' dominates analytic philosophy, Bavinck provides a model of listening to and learning from the challenges that are always pressing the theologian and biblical scholar, emerging with the confidence attached to old answers made new.

*Joshua Moon, University of St Andrews*

## **Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ**

Edmund J. Rybarczyk

Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes, 2004; 353pp., £24.99

ISBN-10: 1-84227-144-X; ISBN-13: 978-1-84227-144-5

'Despite their historical and cultural differences, Eastern Orthodox Christians and Classical Pentecostals share some surprising similarities.' This back cover first line captures the thesis of this book.

One of the Paternoster Theological Monographs, this is a bold attempt to find significant common ground between two groups seemingly miles apart in the Christian spectrum – one ancient, one recent. It is certainly a bold undertaking, yet the writer is well qualified. He is a minister with the Assemblies of God and he has a strong Eastern Orthodox heritage (as his name might suggest). Moreover, his research is meticulous.

Whilst forms of worship are obviously very different between the two groups, is the heartbeat essentially the same? The author reckons it is and sets out to prove it.

His introductory chapter sets the scene: 'similarities and suspicions'. He wishes to deconstruct the suspicions and demonstrate the considerable (and surprising) similarities between the two traditions. Moreover, his 'study is written with the conviction that both Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism have a great deal to learn from each other' (p. 20). He entertains a view that John Wesley provides a historical bridge from Pentecostalism to Orthodoxy, yet concludes that Wesley alone cannot account for the 'remarkable similarities' between the two traditions.

There follows an examination of Eastern Orthodoxy from chapters two to five, beginning with historical roots in Athanasius and Palamas, then working through anthropology and Christology, with the focal point being at all times the key Orthodox concept of 'theosis' – becoming like God, the goal for every Christian believer, indeed every human being (made in God's image). 'Orthodox anthropology is suffused with ontological dimensions. Human beings cannot rightly be understood apart from their ontological makeup as reflections of God's own Trinitarian identity' (p. 77). Discussions of the image of God and iconography are closely connected.

Rybarczyk goes on to examine Pentecostalism from chapters six to nine. He begins with the doctrinal and historical roots and moves to a discussion of Pentecostalism's anthropology followed by its theology of sanctification. He discovers in Pentecostalism, as in Orthodoxy, a

'communion with God' centre. Pentecostalism moves beyond justification and forgiveness to focus on sanctification and transformation. In Christ and by the Spirit, God effects real ontological change in humans, just as in Orthodoxy, to become progressively like Christ, like God.

And thus the writer discovers significant theological and, perhaps particularly spiritual, points of contact between two Christian traditions that seem on the surface to be miles apart.

His conclusion in chapter ten roots the fundamental similarity in anthropology, since such need for communion with God is, of course, based on the nature of humanity as God created it. Indeed, Rybarczyk finds an 'anti-intellectual character' (p. 316) in both traditions, for in both there is an 'ardent hunger for God's presence. Both groups have exhibited an incredible desire to involve the entirety of their beings in communion with God. One cannot so desire this communion and limit one's Christian experience to thinking or doing' (p. 311).

In terms of evaluation, I have to agree with the reviewer who wrote: 'an exceptionally well done piece of analysis'. The writer spent eight years working on this project (his wife receives special thanks!). It is thorough and he writes as someone with a deep working knowledge of both traditions. The book is, moreover, readable, particularly in the section on Pentecostalism where one finds a variety of 'inspirational' spiritual anecdotes. Rybarczyk also conveys a sense of spiritual passion, infused by the traditions themselves.

In terms of value to the church, this is self-evident. Furthermore, Rybarczyk also puts forward the suggestion that Pentecostalism may serve as a 'via media between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, especially along experiential lines' (p. 329).

Questions that will occur naturally to readers include: Can we really envisage such disparate groups working together at local level? Do these points of contact exist only (or largely) where the theology of both is at its best, evangelically speaking, truest to classical form? In liberalized forms, do these contacts begin to evaporate? Indeed, even in their classical forms, are there not still some fairly significant 'gaps' between them? (For example, Orthodoxy's Christology is incarnation-centred, whilst Pentecostalism's is cross-centred.)

And what about the other Christian traditions? Does Rybarczyk somewhat caricature 'Protestantism' in general as based on an essentially legal model? (The author might be surprised, and interested, to know that Calvin referred to prayer as an 'intimate conversation' with God). How do

other Christian traditions resonate with the 'communion with God' core of these traditions?

Finally, on a personal level, I must add that I have found the book inspiring me to a deeper communion with God – perhaps worth the purchase for that alone.

*Oliver Rice, Bow Baptist Church, London*

### **Land, Faith and the Crofting Community: Christianity and Social Criticism in the Highlands of Scotland, 1843-1893**

Allan W. MacColl

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006; 240pp., £45

ISBN-10: 0-7486-2382-5; ISBN-13: 978-0-7486-2382-2

*Land, Faith and the Crofting Community* is the fruit of Allan MacColl's doctoral work at Cambridge University and represents an immensely significant reappraisal of the role evangelical Christianity played in the years of destitution, eviction, emigration and agitation in the Scottish Highlands.

MacColl is responding to the received caricature of Highland Calvinism as a repressive force, which, in this context, led the clergy to side with the landed interests and encouraged passivity amongst the oppressed poor. This view has been taken for granted by subsequent historians who have sought to interpret it rather than challenge it. Donald Smith, for example, advanced the view that it was the Calvinistic doctrine of Providence that led the clergy to preach acquiescence to the injustices perpetrated by the landlords. Hilton Boyd identified classical Calvinism with a theology of atonement. This theological concept, he claimed, became so strong in the 1850s that it led to the notion that societal improvement could come only through embracing suffering. Social concern would require the more incarnational emphases of liberal theology.

MacColl has done a thorough job of refuting the consensus. His careful research acknowledges both the presence of differences of opinion in all the churches and a development in the evangelical response to the land question.

Whilst Providence was acknowledged in bringing famine and hardship, the clergy in the main confessed ignorance as to the reasons. Nor did belief in Providence inevitably encourage passivity, for the church was active in famine relief and in advancing proposals for land reform.



At a basic level, the faith of the people provided an intellectual framework for critiquing the actions of the landowners. Liberationist rhetoric alluding to freedom from bondage in Egypt and a call to possess a proper land was common.

More subtly, evangelicalism was so pervasive in the nineteenth-century Highlands that it helped to shape a distinct sense of Highland identity. For men like John Kennedy of Dingwall the Highlanders' allegiance to Calvinism set them apart from the rest of the nation and even the southern section of the Free Church. Alongside this sense of being a 'peculiar people' there developed communitarian beliefs regarding the people's right to the land of their fathers which arose from the Bible.

MacColl traces a growing willingness of the Free Church (in most cases the *de facto* 'parish' church) to engage in the political process. He demonstrates that the increased willingness of ministers to be spokesmen on behalf of their people was highly significant during the 'The Crofters' War' of the 1880s.

None of this new confidence to champion justice for their people derived from liberalism. It was the most conservative part of the Free Church led by men such as Gustavus Aird that was most committed to reform and eventually pressed for action on land redistribution that went beyond the Crofters' Acts.

Whereas previous studies have focussed almost exclusively on the clergy, *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community* breaks new ground in assessing the contribution of elders and Christian poets. There is also a review of the involvement of non-Presbyterian churches with smaller followings in the region such as Roman Catholic, Baptist and Congregational churches.

MacColl has provided us with a scholarly work that is of huge benefit to all with an interest in the Highlands and the land issue. However, its relevance extends beyond that particular area of interest. He has unearthed a rich seam of experience to be mined by all who are interested in the ethics of Christian social action. Here were Calvinists increasingly persuaded that they had a calling to be a prophetic voice speaking out against the landed classes of the day. They were, however, no less persuaded that they must honour Romans 13:1: 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established.' The experience of Christian leaders seeking to be faithful within this tension is of lasting value.

MacColl as a student for the ministry in the Free Presbyterian Church was always running the risk of being too close to his subject to retain objectivity. However, the tone throughout is balanced and scholarly and

his verdicts, in the main, judicious. *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community* is a most readable work written by an able scholar, sympathetic to his subject matter. It deserves to become widely read and used.

*Ivor MacDonald, Kilmuir and Stenscholl Church of Scotland, Isle of Skye*

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