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# DIVINE PASSIBILITY AND IMPASSIBILITY IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY AMERICAN CONFSSIONAL PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGIANS.

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Determining the precise position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* on the topic of divine impassibility depends not only on the definition and connotations of this concept, but upon one's interpretation of the opening section of the *Confession's* second chapter which reads: 'There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, *without body, parts, or passions*, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty...'. The *Confession* is unambiguous, here and elsewhere, in its affirmation of God's eternity, immutability, infinity and incorporeality.<sup>1</sup> Philosophically speaking, it is possible to deduce from each of these characteristics a doctrine of divine impassibility. But of greater importance to ascertaining the *Confession's* opinion on this subject is the determination of the meaning of the phrase 'without body, parts, or passions' and particularly that of the word 'passions' in this context.

Chapter two of the *Confession* represents a comprehensive revision and expansion of the first of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1562-3), the initial sentence of which reads: 'There is but one living and true God, everlasting, *without body, parts, or passions*; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the Maker, and the preserver of all things both visible and invisible.' Hence, the crucial phrase 'without body, parts, or passions' was directly borrowed by the Assembly of Divines from the earlier document and resituated in a longer list of attributes. Older commentators on the *Thirty-Nine Articles* uniformly argued that this phrase meant that God was without emotions and incapable

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<sup>1</sup> See also Larger Catechism Question 7 and Shorter Catechism Question 4.

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of suffering. For instance, William Beveridge vehemently asserted that God is:

not subject to, nor capable of love, hatred, joy, grief, anger, and the like, as they daily arise in us imperfect creatures; but he is always the same immovable, unchangeable, impassible God: and therefore in all our contemplations of the Divine essence, we are not to conceive him as one passionately rejoicing, or grieving for any thing, as we do, but as a pure and perfect essence, without body, parts, and passions too....<sup>2</sup>

Beveridge's contemporary, Gilbert Burnet, concurred in this opinion, though his language is more temperate. He explained that 'Passion is an agitation that supposes a succession of thoughts, together with a trouble for what is past, and a fear of missing what is aimed at. It arises out of a heat of mind, and produces a vehemence of action. Now all these are such manifest imperfections, that it does plainly appear they cannot consist with infinite perfection.'<sup>3</sup> Burnet goes on to say that the anthropopathic language of Scripture is to be understood as reflecting the divine volition not divine affections, emotions or passions.

Some commentators on the *Westminster Confession* have taken this line too. For example Robert Shaw suggested that the language of Scripture which ascribes to God human passions is, in fact, only being employed 'in accommodation to our capacities.'<sup>4</sup> He then goes on to quote Burnet approvingly as to the reason for and significance of the anthropopathisms of Scripture. More recently, the American philosopher and theologian Gordon H. Clark, in his popular exposition of the *Westminster Confession* entitled *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*, has argued for his own version of divine impassibility based on divine immutability. According to Clark, the critical phrase 'without body, parts, or passions' indicates (among other things) that God is not emotional. He questions: 'Do we ordinarily consider it a compliment when we call a man emotional? Can we trust a person who has violent ups and downs? Is it not

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<sup>2</sup> William Beveridge, *The Doctrine of the Church of England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1840), pp. 34-35. An incomplete edition of Beveridge's commentary appeared in 1716, eight years after his death. The edition quoted here gives no publication information concerning the older printing.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1831), p. 34. Burnet's work first appeared in 1699. This edition provides no information on previous printings.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Shaw, *The Confession of Faith* (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London: Blackie and Son, n.d.), pp. 24-25.

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unwise to act on the spur of the moment? Would then an emotional God be dependable? How could God have emotions, if he is immutable?'<sup>5</sup> For Clark, the term 'passions' as employed by the Assembly of Divines was synonymous with emotion or affections. He quotes from Bradwardine that 'God is not irascible and appeasable, liable to emotions of joy or sorrow, or in any respect passive,' and goes on to add the words of Toplady:

When love is predicated of God, we do not mean that he is possessed of it as a passion or affection. In us it is such... but if, considered in that sense, it should be ascribed to the Deity, it would be utterly subversive of the simplicity, perfection, and independency of his being. Love, therefore, when attributed to him, signifies... his eternal benevolence, *i.e.*, his everlasting will, purpose and determination to deliver, bless, and save his people.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Clark understands the Scriptures' application of human affections to God to be accommodation, indicative *not* of divine affections but of divine volition.

However, many of Clark's fellow Presbyterians fail to share his views on the divine affections or his exegesis of the *Confession's* statement on God's being without body, parts, or passions. A look at various other commentators on the *Confession of Faith* will reveal differing opinions on the precise significance of the word 'passions' and more restrained estimations of what it means for God to be without them.<sup>7</sup> If, for example, we turn to the Presbyterian theologians of nineteenth-century America we will find a fair range of sentiment concerning the relation of the divine affections to the idea of divine impassibility. This should not be construed as resulting from indifference to the theology of the *Confession*, for if we take a representative selection of confessionally-committed theologians we would still find a variety of emphases. In the north-eastern states, for instance, we may look to the older and younger Hodges of Princeton, that bastion of Presbyterian orthodoxy. Charles Hodge and his son A.A. Hodge argued for strong confessional fidelity throughout their careers and wrote numerous articles in an effort to foster the same among the ministers and professors of the

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1965) p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards: An Exposition* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896), p. 54; A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1870), pp. 48-49; and Edward D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Symbols* (Columbus, Ohio, 1900), pp. 140-142.

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Presbyterian Church.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, we may consider W.G.T. Shedd, defender of the Westminster Standards in the midst of the New School Presbyterianism of Union Theological Seminary in New York. Shedd declared war on proposals for confessional revision with the publication of his little book *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*.<sup>9</sup> If we turn to the South, we find at Union Seminary in Richmond, Robert Lewis Dabney, perhaps the best-known of the southern systematicians. Dabney was zealously committed to the doctrine of the Confession and his final address to the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church contained a call for comprehensive subscription to the Westminster Standards.<sup>10</sup>

Yet as we survey the writings of these men on the subject of the divine affections and divine impassibility, we will find a diversity of emphases despite their common confessional commitment. In our review of these nineteenth-century American confessional Presbyterians we will seek to contribute to the general debate of divine passibility and impassibility via the considered reflections of four great theologians; to ascertain the main issues of discussion in their day concerning divine impassibility; and to assist in the evaluation of the ideas of passibility and impassibility from a confessional perspective.

### Charles Hodge

Among these nineteenth century theologians there were two prime concerns in treating the issue of impassibility. The first was to define the concept of 'passions,' and the second to relate the denial of divine passion to the idea of divine affections. In the course of attending to this second task, the Bible's ascription of various affections to God had to be explained as well. We have already noted in this regard that Gordon Clark, in his informal commentary of the *Confession*, denies that God has emotions and suggests that the language of Scripture which speaks of God in terms of human passions is reflective of divine volition *not* divine affections. There could hardly be a more striking contrast to this than the view of Charles Hodge. In his

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<sup>8</sup> For instance see Charles Hodge's discussion of subscription in 'Reunion,' *Princeton Review* 34 (1867): 493-522.

<sup>9</sup> W.G.T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed – A Defence of the Westminster Standards* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893).

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Dabney, 'The Doctrinal Contents of the Confession: Its Fundamental and Regulative Ideas, and the Necessity and Value of Creeds' in *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly* ed. Francis R. Beattie (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1897).

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*Systematic Theology*, amidst his consideration of the attributes of God, Hodge addresses the assertion of the scholastic theologians that 'God cannot be subject to passivity in any form.'<sup>11</sup> Hodge says:

Love in us includes complacency and delight in its object, with the desire of possession and communion. The schoolmen, and often the philosophical theologians, tell us that there is no feeling in God. This, they say, would imply passivity, or susceptibility of impression from without, which it is assumed is incompatible with the nature of God.<sup>12</sup>

After criticizing philosophical definitions of God's love – that love in God is 'that which secures the development of the rational universe' or that by which God engages in self-communication – Hodge clearly sets forth his own position:

If love in God is only a name for that which accounts for the rational universe; if God is love, simply because he develops himself in thinking and conscious beings, then the word has for us no definite meaning; it reveals to us nothing concerning the real nature of God. Here again we have to choose between a mere philosophical speculation and the clear testimony of the Bible, and of our own moral and religious nature. Love of necessity involves feeling and if there be no feeling in God, there can be no love.<sup>13</sup>

Hodge is no less lucid in setting out his view of the anthropopathic language of the Bible:

We must adhere to the truth in its scriptural form, or we lose it altogether. We must believe that God is love in the sense in which that word comes home to every human heart. The Scriptures do not mock us when they say, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' (Ps. 103:13) He meant what He said when He proclaimed Himself as 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.' (Ex. 34:6) ... God is love; and love in him is, in all that is essential to its nature, what love is in us.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, in contrast to Clark's exclusion of the idea of divine affections and emphasis on divine mental activity and volition, Hodge says: '(God) ceases to be God in the sense of the Bible, and in the sense in which we need a God, unless He can love as well as know

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribners, 1871), 1:428.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:428.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:428-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.



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and act.<sup>15</sup> For Hodge mind, will, and affections are three necessary components in human personality, and they are no less essential to the divine essence.

Hodge's concern in arguing for the emotional aspect of God's love is at once to refute the philosophical abstractions of Bruch and Schleiermacher on the subject, and to affirm the importance of taking seriously the Bible's imagery concerning the love of God for his people. Whether or not one shares Hodge's commitment to Scottish Realism (and the language of 'Common Sense' is certainly patent in these passages), his insistence on the point of contact between human and divine emotional life is compelling, particularly in the day of Moltmann.

### A.A. Hodge

While Charles Hodge does not engage in any discussion of the phrase 'without body, parts, or passions,' his son and successor at Princeton, A.A. Hodge, takes up this issue both in his commentary *The Confession of Faith* and in his *Outlines of Theology*. He understands the *Confession's* phrase that God is 'a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions' to stress the incorporeality of God. He says:

When we say God is a Spirit we mean – First, Negatively, that he does not possess bodily parts or passions; that he is composed of no material elements; that he is not subject to any of the limiting conditions of material existence; and consequently, that he is not to be apprehended as the object of any of our bodily senses.<sup>16</sup>

He confirms this view in his commentary on the *Confession*, where he says:

We deny that the properties of matter, such as bodily parts or passions, belong to him. We make this denial – a) because there is no evidence that he does possess any such properties; and b) because, from the very nature of matter and its affections, it is inconsistent with those infinite and absolute perfections which are of his essence, such as simplicity, unchangeableness, unity, omnipresence, etc.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>16</sup> A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1883), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1870), p. 49.

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Hodge seems to intend to restrict the idea of 'passions' to '*material* passions' by his subtle alteration of the phrase 'body, parts, or passions' to '*bodily parts or passions*' – a phrase which he repeats no fewer than four times. This is further confirmed by the emphasis of the above quote in which he denies God's corporeality on the basis that matter and *material affections* are inconsistent with the perfections of God. He certainly does not think that this sort of impassibility rules out divine affections, for in elucidating the phrase God is 'a most pure spirit' he contends that 'By Spirit we mean the subject to which the attributes of intelligence, *feeling*, and will belong, as active principles' (emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup> Here Hodge is following on his father's view that the divine personality possesses knowledge, will, and affections: while qualifying this affirmation with the phrase 'as *active* principles.' Even so, Hodge elsewhere explains the anthropopathisms of Scripture as mere imagery:

When (the Scriptures) speak of (God) repenting, of his being grieved, or jealous, they use metaphorical language also, teaching us that he acts toward us as a man would when agitated by such passions. Such metaphors are characteristic rather of the Old than of the New Testament, and occur for the most part in highly rhetorical passages of the poetical and prophetic books.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that Hodge omits reference to God's love, joy, pity and the like in this explanation of the anthropopathic language of Scripture. Charles Hodge had been concerned to stress the human-like emotional quality of God's love but A.A. Hodge is most interested in warning against imputing to God unworthy human passions. Here, as elsewhere, A.A. Hodge manages to avoid contradicting his father's statements on the divine affections while conveying a different impression in his own formulations.

### **W.G.T. Shedd**

W.G.T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology*, has a quite extensive discussion of the significance of the phrase 'without body, parts or passions.' In the first place, he understands it to assert the incorporeality of God.

In saying that God, as a pure spirit, is 'without body, parts or passions,' a definite conception is conveyed by which spirit and matter are sharply distinguished. Matter may have bodily form, be divisible, and capable of passions: that is, of being wrought upon by other pieces of ponderable

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

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matter. None of these characteristics can belong to God, or to any spirit whatever.<sup>20</sup>

Next, Shedd explains the word 'passions' and argues for God's impassibility.

In defining God to be 'a most pure spirit without passions,' it must be remembered that the term 'passion' is used etymologically. It is derived from *patior*, to suffer. Passion implies passivity. It is the effect of an impression from without. ...God has no passions. He stands in no passive or organic relations to that which is not himself. He cannot be wrought upon, and impressed, by the universe of matter and mind which he has created from nothing.<sup>21</sup>

Then, having affirmed divine impassibility, Shedd relates it to the concept of divine affections.

It is important to remember this signification of the term 'passion,' and the intention in employing it. Sometimes it has been understood to be synonymous with feeling or emotion, and the erroneous and demoralizing inference has been drawn, that the Divine nature is destitute of feeling altogether.<sup>22</sup>

And so Shedd is concerned to stress that his acceptance of the doctrine of divine impassibility is not to be understood as a denial of feeling in God. In this connection Shedd comments on the passages in the Bible which ascribe emotion to God. The challenge is to affirm that they speak of a real divine emotional life without attributing to God affections which are seemingly inconsistent with his divine character as described in other portions of Scripture. Shedd approaches this problem in a distinctive way by setting up a standard by which one can determine whether an anthropathism is to be taken figuratively or literally. He says: 'The Scriptures attribute feeling to God, and nearly all forms of feeling common to man. That all of these are not intended to be understood as belonging to the Divine nature is plain, because some of them are as incompatible with the idea of an infinite and perfect being as are the material instruments of hands and feet attributed to him in Scripture.'<sup>23</sup> Shedd continues:

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<sup>20</sup> W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891-4), 1:165.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:170-1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:172.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:173-4.

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The criterion for determining which form of feeling is literally, and which is metaphorically attributable to God, is the divine *blessedness*. God cannot be the subject of any emotion that is intrinsically and necessarily an unhappy one. If he literally feared his foes, or were literally jealous of a rival, he would so far forth be miserable. Literal fear and literal jealousy cannot therefore be attributed to him. Tried by this test, it will be found that there are only two fundamental forms of feeling that are literally attributable to the Divine essence. These are love (agape) and wrath (orge). Hatred is a phase of displeasure or wrath. These two emotions are real and essential in God; the one wakened by righteousness, and the other by sin.<sup>24</sup>

In this line of argumentation Shedd is, as we have noted, quite distinctive, but his conclusion to the discussion does not materially differ from A.A. Hodge's. Shedd says: 'While therefore God as a most pure spirit has no passions, he has feelings and emotions. He is not passively wrought upon by the objective universe, so that he experiences physical impressions and organic appetities, as the creature does, but he is self-moved in all his feelings.'<sup>25</sup>

### R.L. Dabney

In his discussion of divine immutability, Robert Lewis Dabney takes up the question of the relation of God's affections to the doctrine of impassibility and comments: 'Our Confession says, that God hath neither parts nor passions. That He has something analogous to what are called in man active principles, is manifest, for He wills and acts; therefore he must feel. But these active principles must not be conceived of as emotions in the sense of ebbing and flowing accesses of feeling.'<sup>26</sup> Dabney's concern here is to affirm the completeness of personality in God without leaving him open to the charge of inconstancy. As for Scripture which attributes human agitations to God, Dabney says:

When, therefore, the Scriptures speak of God as becoming wroth, as repenting, as indulging His fury against His adversaries, in connection with some particular event occurring in time, we must understand them anthropopathically. What is meant is, that the outward manifestations of His active principles were as though these feelings then arose.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:174.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:178.

<sup>26</sup> Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

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Dabney's brief treatment of impassibility in his *Systematic Theology* concentrates on deflecting misunderstandings about the divine emotional life rather than making a strong affirmation of it. However, he balances this emphasis in a fuller consideration of the subject in an article on the free offer of the gospel entitled 'God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy.' Dabney reminds us that:

the Confession declares God to be 'without passions.' So the theologians tell us that we must ascribe to him no 'passive powers'; for then he would not be immutable. He acts on everything; but is acted on by none. He is the source, but not the recipient of effects. This is indisputable. But we should not so overstrain the truth as to reject two other truths. One is, that while God has no passions, while he has no mere susceptibility such that his creature can cause an effect upon it irrespective of God's own will and freedom, yet he has active principles. These are not passions, in the sense of fluctuations or agitations, but none the less are they affections of his will, actively distinguished from the cognitions in his intelligence. They are truly optative functions of the divine Spirit. However anthropopathic may be the statements made concerning God's repentings, wrath, pity, pleasure, love, jealousy, hatred, in the Scriptures, we should do violence to them if we denied that he here meant to ascribe to himself active affections in some mode suitable to his nature. ...The other truth is, that objective beings and events are the real occasions, though not efficient causes, of action both of the divine affections and will. Are not many divines so much afraid of ascribing to God any 'passive powers,' or any phase of dependence on the creature, that they hesitate even to admit that scriptural fact? ...'God is angry with the wicked every day' (Ps. 7:11); 'But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord;' 'My delight is in her' (Is. 62:4); 'In these things I delight, saith the Lord' (Jer. 9:24). Is all this so anthropopathic as not even to mean that God's active principles here have an objective? Why not let the Scriptures mean what they so plainly strive to declare? But some seem so afraid of recognizing in God any susceptibility of a passive nature that they virtually set Scripture aside, and paint a God whose whole activities of intelligence and will are so exclusively from himself that even the relation of objective occasion to him is made unreal, and no other is allowed than a species of coincidence or preestablished harmony. They are chary of conceding (what the Bible seems so plainly to say) that God is *angry because* men sin; and would go no farther than to admit that somehow he is angry *when* men sin, yet, because absolutely independent, angry only of himself.<sup>28</sup>

In this long paragraph Dabney both vigorously affirms the reality of the divine affections and cautions against inferring too much from

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<sup>28</sup> Robert L. Dabney, 'God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy,' in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, ed. C.R. Vaughan (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 1:291-2.

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the idea of divine unsusceptibility. It is also apparent from this passage that Dabney understands the *Confession's* statement on God being without passions to have reference to the broader question of divine susceptibility (which Shedd called 'passivity'), of which the issue of divine affections is but a part. However, perhaps Dabney's greatest contribution to this discussion of divine impassibility is his relating of the question of the divine affections to the incarnation. Neither of the Hodges nor Shedd ventured to address the issue of the passibility or impassibility of the Saviour. The problem raised by the embodiment of the Word for the idea of divine impassibility is obvious. Christ was the suffering servant, living and dying in sorrow. If God is impassible and Christ is the God-man, then how could Christ have suffered? In response to this dilemma, some have suggested that only the human nature of Christ wept and grieved and suffered. Dabney considered that solution extreme and in the above-mentioned article sets forth his own view. Dabney is arguing for the compatibility of the free offer of the gospel to all humanity with the divine election of only some. While affirming the divine effectual call, he appeals to the many scriptural passages which speak of the universal, indiscriminate compassion of God for the sinner as proper grounds for a genuine, comprehensive gospel offer. It is in this context that he touches on the relation of Christ's human and divine natures in his emotional life.

The yet more explicit passage in Luke 19:41,42, has given our extremists still more trouble. We are told that Christ wept over the very men whose doom of reprobation he then pronounced. Again, the question is raised by them, if Christ felt this tender compassion for them, why did he not exert his omnipotence for their effectual calling? And their best answer seems to be, that here it was not the divine nature in Jesus that wept, but the humanity only. Now, it will readily be conceded that the divine nature was incapable of the *pain* of sympathetic passion and of the *agitation* of grief; but we are loath to believe that this precious incident is no manifestation of the passionless, unchangeable, yet infinitely benevolent pity of the divine nature. For, first, it would impress the common Christian mind with a most painful feeling to be thus seemingly taught that holy humanity is more generous and tender than God. The humble and simple reader of the gospels had been taught by them that there was no excellence in the humanity which was not the effect and effluence of the corresponding ineffable perfections of the divinity. Second, when we hear our Lord speaking of gathering Jerusalem's children as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and then announcing the final doom of the rejected, we seem to hear the divine nature in him, at least as much as the human. And third, such interpretations, implying some degree of dissent between the two natures, are perilous, in that they obscure that vital truth, Christ the manifestation to us of the divine nature. ...It is our happiness to believe that when we see Jesus weeping over lost Jerusalem, we 'have seen the

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Father,' we have received an insight into the divine benevolence and pity.<sup>29</sup>

In this passage Dabney acknowledges not only a divine emotional life for both the Son and the Father, but also that this emotional life entails grief, sorrow, pity, and compassion. His concept of 'passionless yet infinitely benevolent pity' is his attempt to come to grips with the scriptural testimony to both God's sovereignty and his divine compassion. With all Dabney's concessions and qualifications, this statement still constitutes the most forceful affirmation of passive or complacent affections in God of the four theologians we have reviewed. Furthermore, his stress on the compassion of the Father and on the incarnate Son's revelation of the Father's affections evidence Dabney's unique contribution to the discussion on divine impassibility among nineteenth-century American Presbyterians. Nevertheless, Dabney does not address the most difficult question in regard to the relation of impassibility to the incarnation, that of the divine passibility in the immolation and dereliction of the beloved Son. In fairness to Dabney, however, we may be reminded that his Presbyterian contemporaries either fail to comment on this issue or assert that only the human nature of Christ suffered in his humiliation and crucifixion.<sup>30</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

Having briefly reviewed the main statements of these theologians on divine impassibility and the divine affections, we may now offer a few comments on the similarities and differences in their treatments of the subject.

1) Of the three theologians who addressed the *Confession's* language 'without passions,' each affirmed a doctrine of divine impassibility. Only Charles Hodge does not acknowledge this explicitly. This may be because he treats the subject of the divine

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:308.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Hodge is nonplussed in regard to this matter and says: 'Into the relation between his divine and human nature as revealed in these experiences, it is in vain for us to inquire.' *Systematic Theology*, 2:615. A.A. Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd, and Dabney's southern contemporary, John L. Girardeau, all assert that *only* the human nature suffered. See Hodge, *Outlines in Theology*, p. 406; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:425; and Girardeau, 'The Person of Christ,' in *Discussions of Theological Questions*, ed. George A. Blackburn (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1905), pp. 408-9.

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affections under the heading of the goodness of God (whereas Shedd and Dabney take up the topic in their sections on immutability), and because he is arguing against opinions which he feels compromise the personality of God by denying the divine affections. There is no evidence that he would have any quarrel with the others' general approval of the idea of divine impassibility.

2) There are, however, slight differences among the other three in their definition of the word 'passions.' A.A. Hodge seems to understand 'passions' to refer to '*bodily* passions.' Shedd is concerned to distinguish 'passions' from 'emotions' or 'feelings.' For Shedd, the confessional term 'passions' refers to the idea of passivity (the state of standing in passive relation to anything outside oneself). Dabney also views 'passions' as having reference to passivity. But he adds that, though 'passions' are not emotions, emotions come into consideration in the *Confession's* phrase 'without... passions' because emotions can be a form of passivity.

3) With regard to the meaning of the phrase 'without body, parts or passions,' A.A. Hodge argues that these words are intended to stress the incorporeality of God. W.G.T. Shedd is in full agreement, for he says the phrase is meant to help distinguish matter and spirit. Hence, they both take the clause to be an assertion of the immateriality of God. Dabney concentrates more on 'passions' and in his *Systematic Theology* reads the phrase as a whole to be a denial of human-like emotions in God (though not a denial of active principles in God which correspond to human active principles). However, Dabney makes it clear elsewhere that the phrase 'without body, parts or passions' is primarily a denial of the susceptibility of God, meaning that God is not the subject of any physical passions or involuntarily open to other sorts of external agency.

4) Concerning the divine affections in relation to impassibility, there are a range of emphases in each author. Charles Hodge seems not to be interested in asserting divine impassivity nor in addressing the difficulties concomitant with holding to a position of potential divine passivity, but is more concerned to affirm the inclusion of feeling, and especially the emotional aspect of love, in the divine essence. Furthermore, he is the boldest of the four in arguing for the similarity between God's love and our love. A.A. Hodge also asserts that the attributes of intelligence, *feeling*, and will belong to God as spirit but does not emphasize the point like his father. Shedd states that God has no passions, but that he does have emotions. These emotions, according to Shedd, are self-moving. Additionally, Shedd is anxious to say that these feelings are compatible with and necessary to the divine essence. Dabney, on the other hand, is reticent about the ascription of emotions to God, because it seems to imply ebb and flow. However, Dabney allows and even stresses that there is



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something analogous to human feeling in God, and further states that these 'active principles' in God, which are analogous to human emotions, are the springs of the divine volition.

5) Each of the four theologians, not surprisingly, acknowledges that the anthropomorphic language of Scripture, if taken literally, is not consistent with the spirituality of God. However, in regard to anthropopathisms, their opinions vary. The older Hodge stands out among them when he argues that the anthropopathic language of Scripture concerning God's goodness and love must not be explained away but adhered to in its scriptural form. Simultaneously, however, he says that references to God as repenting are to be classed with anthropomorphisms. Unfortunately he does not address the language of Scripture which ascribes to God 'negative' affections such as grief, sorrow, anger, and so on. A.A. Hodge, in distinction from his father, suggests that the anthropopathisms of Scripture such as grief and jealousy are metaphorical and reflective rather of the divine actions than the affections. It is interesting to note again, however, that he does not mention anthropopathisms which represent the goodness of God and hence, does not necessarily come into conflict with his father's position. Shedd offers yet another opinion. He says that as Scripture attributes a whole range of human feeling to God, many of these must be understood figuratively. However, there are two fundamental forms of feeling that are literally attributable to God, love and wrath. Finally, Dabney is similar to the younger Hodge, when he asserts that scriptural language describing God as wroth or repenting is to be understood as illustrative, not of the divine affections themselves, but of the outward manifestation of God's active principles. Nevertheless, Dabney is also careful to warn against any view which ascribes a 'hyper-impassibility' to the divine essence, and counsels (in a manner similar to Charles Hodge) that we should not recoil from the simple statements of the Word.

If we interpret the Westminster Divines' statement that God is 'without body, parts, or passions' in the light of the commentaries of these four theologians, then we may suggest that the *Confession* intends by this phrase to expand on its assertion of the spirituality of God by stressing his incorporeality and unsusceptibility. This view is confirmed by the fact that in the *Confession* the phrase 'without body, parts, or passions' follows the declaration that God is 'a most pure spirit' which the Assembly then seems to qualify with its next three statements: first, this spiritual God is invisible; second, he has no body or bodily parts; third, along with the second point, he is not susceptible to physical pain or involuntarily subject to external influence. Hence, the *Confession* asserts a doctrine of divine impassibility but not a doctrine of impassivity.

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The discussion of passibility and impassibility in nineteenth century Presbyterian theology is an humble one when compared to the one surrounding the theology of Jurgen Moltmann. Indeed, Hodge's, Shedd's and Dabney's freshest emphases and insights seem like minor adjustments when compared to Moltmann's assault on impassibility. Nevertheless, the work of these men, and particularly their criticism of older scholastic teaching on divine impassibility, does not fail to show the way forward in a confessional approach to this important issue in modern theology.

# THE PROTESTANT DOGMATICIANS AND THE LATE PRINCETON SCHOOL ON THE STATUS OF THE SACRED APOGRAPHA

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## I. DEFINITIONS

### A. Protestant Dogmaticians

By Protestant dogmaticians I mean those much maligned heirs of Luther and Calvin from the post-Reformation era of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> They have been discounted since the Enlightenment for two reasons: 1) they resorted to system building beyond what is considered the dynamic genius of the sixteenth century Reformers. This, in turn, prompted the formulation of creeds and confessions, considered by most today to reflect a propensity for over-definition. 2) They resorted to the Aristotelian method of the medieval schoolmen in their post-Tridentine battles with Rome. 2

What we sometimes fail to realize is that their era demanded such response. Theirs, after all, was a different age requiring a different response to the freshly articulated Romanism of Trent, rather than that of the medieval schoolmen with whom Erasmus, Luther and Calvin had to contend. It was the special burden of the seventeenth century Protestants to make certain the Reformation experiment of the sixteenth century continued to thrive within the new context of a now militant counter-Reformation age.

Most of the Protestant theology written at this time, along with the confessions and creeds, was prefigured by the systematic challenges presented to them by counter-Reformation theologians

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<sup>1</sup> The best treatment of the Lutheran dogmaticians on Scripture is Preus (1957). For Reformed scholasticism in general the most recent treatment is Muller (1987).

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of recent literature on this as well as a fresh assessment of Protestant scholasticism see Muller (1986).

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fighting for the very life's breath of the Latin Church.<sup>3</sup> If we fail to sympathize with what Frederic Farrar characterized in his Bampton Lectures in 1885 as,

a period in which liberty was exchanged for bondage; universal principles for beggarly elements; truth for dogmatism; independence for tradition; religion for system... (Farrar 1886:358)

perhaps it is because we need to reacquaint ourselves with *their* age and its peculiar demands.

### B. Late Princeton School

By late Princeton School, I have in mind specifically the legacy of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921). Warfield taught at Princeton Seminary from 1887 until his death in 1921. I focus directly on Warfield because it is my belief, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> that he marks a distinct departure from the earlier Princetonian tradition of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge by introducing German N.T. criticism at Princeton.

### C. The Sacred *Απογραφα*

By sacred apografa I mean the final referent of Biblical authority in the opinion of the Protestant dogmaticians—both Lutheran and Reformed. These are the faithful copies of the originally inspired *αυτογραφα*. The latter word is derived from the Greek noun *αυτογραφα*, original manuscripts written with one's own hand; the former word is derived from the Greek noun *απογραφα*, meaning transcripts, copies from an original manuscript. By sacred *απογραφα* I mean those copies the Protestant dogmaticians regarded

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the Lutherans, Preus maintains, 'It is worth remembering that scholastic method was to some extent thrust upon the Lutheran dogmaticians of the seventeenth century. Tholuck has pointed out that a scholastic method was first used by the Wittenberg theologians in an effort to fight the Jesuits with their own weapons' (Preus:xvi). Muller remarks regarding the Reformed, 'Note also that many of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century systems devote considerable energy to developing a theology technically capable of refuting Bellarmine' (Muller 1986:194, n.6).

<sup>4</sup> 'B.B. Warfield's Common-Sense Philosophy and New Testament Text Criticism,' a paper delivered before the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, December 9, 1987. (The author is not a member of this society.)

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as faithful and authoritative copies of the original as opposed to corrupted or unauthentic copies.<sup>5</sup>

It is not my intention to address to what extent the dogmaticians fairly reflect the position of the Reformers since that is quite another issue, though an important one.

I will begin with the Lutheran dogmaticians. I will then treat the Calvinists, establishing that on the point of the sacred *απογραφα* we have one more rare category that finds near complete agreement in both families of the Reformation. I will then move briefly to the early Princetonians, establishing a line of continuity. Finally, I will conclude with Warfield, showing a significant break with the earlier consensus.

## II. THE LUTHERAN DOGMATICIANS

If the first generation of Lutheran reformers could be called 'ink theologians,' to use Eck's words (Preus:207), because they believed all Christian doctrine should be derived from Scripture alone, the Lutheran dogmaticians must be seen as those who appended a Protestant '*traditio*' onto *sola Scriptura*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For an excellent definition of these terms see R. Muller (1985) under *autographa*. *Apographa* does not pertain to translations. Translations were regarded as inspired to the extent they reflected faithfully the content of the sacred *apographa*. Because, however, only Scripture in the original languages can be the norm for theology, the Lutheran Quenstedt argues, 'Versions of the Bible are the Word of God in content and words, but the apographa are the Word of God in content, words and very idiom.' (Preus:138). The Reformed Turretin says, 'Although they are of great value for the instruction of believers, no other version can or should be regarded as on par with the original, much less as superior. Because no other version has any weight which the Hebrew or Greek source does not possess more fully, since in the sources (*apographa*) not only the content (*res et sententiae*), but also the very words, were directly spoken (*dictata*) by the Holy Spirit, which cannot be said of any version.... Although a given translation made by human beings subject to error is not to be regarded as divine and infallible verbally, it can be properly so regarded in substance if it faithfully renders the divine truth of the sources (*apographa*)' (Turretin:152;154).

<sup>6</sup> Ladd has observed, 'Protestantism thus came very near to adopting substantially the same false principles of hermeneutics, and of the nature of scriptural authority, as the Roman Catholics themselves. To a large extent in theory, and to a yet larger extent in practice, the

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The most valuable study of the Lutheran dogmaticians on Scripture is still probably Robert Preus's, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*.<sup>7</sup> The first to respond to the Council of Trent, however, and so begin Protestant scholastic tendencies, was Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) who is not treated by Preus. This is because for Preus, the dogmaticians do not emerge in their fullest expression until the seventeenth century. Therefore, we will return to Preus's study after a look at Chemnitz.

### A. Chemnitz (1522-1586)

Chemnitz's statement on Scripture is critical, appearing in his exhaustive four volume *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, which appeared during the years 1565-1573.<sup>8</sup> As a tribute to the importance of this work it is said in Lutheran circles, 'if the second Martin (Chemnitz)

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Protestant theologians set up the tradition of dogma in the place of the fictitious tradition of unwritten apostolic doctrine, as a supreme authority through its influence upon the interpretation of the Bible' (Ladd 1883 vol.2:180-181). The key words here are *very near*.

Regarding the Lutheran dogmaticians Preus is careful to note, 'Only Scripture in the original languages is the *norma normans* of theology' (Preus:138). The important parallel between Rome and the Protestants, however, is found in their both making *ecclesiastical* determinations as to the exact locus of Biblical authority. Specific ecclesiastical recensions of the Biblical texts were sanctioned. The Reformed did this by way of their confessions, e.g. the Westminster Confession (1646), The Savoy Declaration (1658), The Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), as did Rome in The Decrees of Trent (1564). The Lutherans, however, made such determinations in the persons of their dogmaticians and their published statements on the texts of Scripture. On this see the accompanying chart. As with the canon of Scripture, however, Protestants maintained that they were recognizing God's providence working in and through the Church, while Roman Catholics maintained it was the Church's authority itself which gave the texts their authority and sanction.

<sup>7</sup> This was a Ph.D. dissertation, *The Inspiration of Scripture as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*, 1952, written under the direction of Professor Thomas Torrance at New College, the University of Edinburgh. It was then published in Edinburgh in 1955. A second edition appeared in 1957 and this was reprinted by the Concordia Heritage Series, St. Louis, 1981 and is still in print, so far as I know.

<sup>8</sup> I will be referring to the English translation, (Kramer 1971).

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had not come, the first Martin (Luther) would scarcely have endured' (Kramer 1971:24).<sup>9</sup>

In Chemnitz's treatment of the Decrees of Trent, he recorded the Council's statement on a given tenet and then responded accordingly. On Scripture, Trent set forth its case in the First and Second Decrees of the Fourth Session, on April 5, 1546. In the Second Decree, the *Vulgata Latina* was asserted to be the only authoritative edition of Scripture. The newly restored Greek text of Erasmus was officially put on the index of forbidden books even though the first edition had been dedicated to Pope Leo X and was commended by him.

Chemnitz spent most of his effort refuting the claims of Trent regarding the Roman Catholic Church's prerogative to be the sole interpreter of Scripture. This also included the claim that the Church had a fuller body of authoritative teaching beyond Scripture alone, as found in the on-going oral tradition. Hence, for Chemnitz, the issue at stake is still the Reformation tenet of *sola Scriptura*.

In section seven, however, he begins to address the issue of translations and their relationship to the original language texts:

But what if that common edition [the *Vulgata Latina*] has not rendered what is in the sources, whether it be Hebrew or Greek, correctly, suitably, and adequately.... Will one be allowed to prefer the fountainheads to the brooks (Chemnitz:201)?

The answer that Chemnitz derives from the Decree of Trent is 'no,' to which he replies:

Truly, this must not be tolerated in the church, that in place of the things which the Holy Spirit wrote in Hebrew and Greek sources something should be foisted onto us as authentic which has been badly rendered... and that in such a way that one may not reject them even after he has examined the sources (Chemnitz: 202).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A good monograph treating Chemnitz's view of Scripture as compared with Luther's is Klug (1971). Klus sums up their relationship on Scripture as follows: 'Chemnitz stands between Luther and the theologians who followed after him as a true bridge over which Luther's theology, especially of the Word, was carefully carried, and not as an evolutionary rung in the ladder that led to a structuring of a theology of the Word quite different from that of the Reformer.... There is no real advance or development, other than a sharpening of thought and formulation.' (247)

<sup>10</sup> There has been much controversy over the years as to just what the Council of Trent meant by, 'precisely the ancient and widely current (*vulgata*) edition that had been approved by long use within the Church for so many centuries ... should be held as *authentic*'(emphasis mine). There can be little doubt that the

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Chemnitz then refers to the findings of the Renaissance humanists, Erasmus and Valla, on the many problems with the Vulgate. He lists examples of distortions in the Vulgate that seem to support various distinctives in the belief and practice of the Roman Church.

Up to this point it looked as though the Protestants had everything their way. This was short lived. A very important shift was precipitated by a new debate concerning the pointing of the Hebrew text. I will not go into detail on this controversy, but allow me to sum up what was at stake. <sup>11</sup>

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Protestant dogmaticians understood the post-Tridentine theologians' interpretation of *authentica* as referring to the Vulgate as superior to extant Greek and Hebrew texts when these sources differed. In September of 1943, however, Pope Pius XII released an encyclical, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, defining 'authentic' as applying 'only to the Latin Church and to its public uses of the Scripture; that it diminished in no way the authority and value of the original texts, Hebrew and Greek; that the decree in effect affirmed that the Vulgate was free from any error whatever in matters of faith and morals and so could be quoted with complete authority in disputations, lectures, and preaching — that, in short, the term had been used primarily in a juridical rather than a critical sense; and that there had been no intention to prohibit the making of vernacular versions from the original texts rather than from the Vulgate.' (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* s.v. 'Bible,' :454) Nevertheless, the first Roman Catholic English translation, the Rhemes New Testament, 1582 (Old Testament translated at Rhemes but published at Douay, 1609), reads on the title page, *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin... diligently conferred with the Greeke and other editions in divers languages*. This would have left the impression that priority was given to the *Vulgata Latina* over the Greek. Furthermore, even Bellarmine did not originally possess the clarity on just what *authentica* meant, as finally provided by the later encyclical (Brodrick:47). This all seems to indicate development on the interpretation of Trent's decree as found in the later papal encyclical, not unlike Warfield's *reinterpretation* of the Westminster Confession (on this last point see below under the heading **Late Princeton and B.B.Warfield**). Both Warfield and the Pius XII's 1943 Encyclical appealed to Providence for an explanation for this development.

<sup>11</sup> On this debate see Ladd (189-191); Bruce (1970:154-62); Freiday (1979:9-11;89-95); Bowman (1948); Gundry (1967); Muller (1980); Letis (1987A:35-70).



**B. The Hebrew Vowel Points.**

Both Luther and Calvin had admitted the pointing in the accepted Hebrew text of their day could be wrong at times and so felt nothing crucial was at stake (Muller 1980:53-54). When once it was suggested, however, that the system of pointing was the result of the Massorettes and not Moses or Ezra; and because of Jewish hostilities towards the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament the pointing had been adversely influenced by the Jews, *sola Scriptura* began to look tenuous. John Bowman has provided a good assessment of the debate:

It would be quite erroneous...to form the opinion that the Protestants and Roman Catholics held opposing views on the points, merely to be consistent in their opposition to one another. The skein is more tangled than that. In claiming the late origin of the vowel-points, the Roman Catholics saw a way of championing the Vulgate translation as more reliable than the present Massoretic Hebrew text, which latter was regarded by Protestants as the very Word of God. Further, if the introduction of the Massoretic points was late, no one could have learned the Scriptures without the oral tradition of the Jewish church. The Protestants were professed antitraditionalists; they refused to accept the tradition of the Church of Rome, yet accepted the results of the tradition of the Jewish church. In this way the Catholics sought to show Protestant inconsistency (Bowman:47).

In fact, John Morinus, a former French Protestant turned Roman Catholic priest argued, 'God gave the Old Testament without vowels because he desired men to follow the church's interpretation, not their own, for the Hebrew tongue without vowels as it was given is a 'very nose of wax'' (Bowman:51-52).

It was the Jesuit Bellarmine who used this argument with the most force. He argued that an earlier, authentic and uncorrupted form of the Hebrew text was employed by Jerome and for that reason only the *Vulgata Latina* can now be trusted (Muller 1980:56).<sup>12</sup> As Richard Muller has recognized, this lifted the issue of the *correct edition* of the original language texts 'to doctrinal status' (Muller 1980:63). For Protestants this was the ecclesiastical recension of the medieval Greek Church; for the Roman Catholics it was a theoretical textual base underlying the medieval Latin recension.

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<sup>12</sup> Bellarmine's biographer assessed Bellarmine as 'only an amateur Hebraist.' (Brodrick 1961:46)

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### C. Gerhard (1582-1637)

In response to this claim of Bellarmine and others, Gerhard argued for the providential preservation of the *απογραφα*:

Divine Providence did not permit those books to be corrupted and perverted; otherwise, the foundation of the church would totter and fall.... Were one to grant that something in Holy Scripture was changed, most of its genuine authority would disappear. On the other hand, however, Christ declares, Matt. 5:18 'Until heaven and earth pass away, not a iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.' Also Luke 16:17: 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.'... Just as Paul testifies that 'the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God,' namely, those described in the books of the Old Testament, Rom. 3.2; so too, we can say in regard to the primitive Christian Church that it is entrusted with the oracles of God described in the books of the New Testament. You see, it has received the autographs from the very evangelists and apostles and has faithfully preserved them in the patriarchal churches so that they could correct the copies [*apografa*] and other versions according to the tenor of the autographs (Gerhard:505; 502).<sup>13</sup>

### D. Quenstedt (1617-1688)

Quenstedt took up the theme of preservation of autographic quality in the *απογραφα* and gave it further specificity:

Our argument runs as follows: every holy Scripture which existed at the time of Paul was *theopneustos* (2 Tim. 3:16) and authentic. Not the autographic (for they had perished long before), but the apographic writings existed at the time of Paul. Therefore the apographic Scripture also is *theopneustos* and authentic.... For although inspiration and divine authority inhered originally in the *αυτογραφα*, these attributes belong

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<sup>13</sup> I believe J.S.K.Reid misses Gerhard's meaning when he argues, 'Gerhard, on the other hand, is rather stricter, holding that only the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are authentic.' Rather, Gerhard quotes with approval Sixtus of Sena who said, 'We say that this Greek codex which we are now reading in the church is the very same one which the Greek Church used at the time of Jerome and all the way back to the days of the apostles; it is true, genuine, faithful and contaminated by no fault of falsehood, as a continual reading of all Greek fathers shows very clearly' (Gerhard:553). It appears Reid has confused the Lutheran dogmatician's arguments in favour of the exclusive authority of the original *language* texts against versions, with an argument for the exclusive authority of the original *autographic* texts, a decidedly later position.

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to the *απογραφα* by virtue of their derivation [radicaliter], since they were faithfully transcribed from them so that not only the sense but also the words were precisely the same (Preus:48).<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere, Quenstedt was even more detailed:

Not only the Canonical books of the sacred volume themselves, but even the letters, points, and words of the original text survive without any corruption, that is, the Hebrew text of the O[ld] T[estament]...and also the Greek text of the N[ew] T[estament]...have been preserved by the divine providence complete and uncorrupted (Piepkorn 1965:589).

### E. Baier (1647-1695) and Musaeus (1613-1681)

Preus records of these two,

Baier, following Musaeus, maintains that the *απογραφα* can rightly be called inspired since they possess the same *forma*, or content, as the autographic Scriptures. All the *απογραφα* have been either mediately or immediately copied from the *αυτογραφα*. Hence to day, in spite of the many codices extant with their many material variations, the meaning or the inspired sense of the *αυτογραφα* is with us (Preus:48).

### F. Hollaz (1648-1713)

Hollaz 'seems to go further. He asserts that the very words as well as the content of the autographic texts are today in the *απογραφα*. A good copy of an inspired writing is inspired like the original writing' (Preus:48).

### G. The Status of the *Αυτογραφα*

Preus notes that the decisive issue for Lutherans in this debate with Rome never centred around the nature of the theoretical

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<sup>14</sup> Reid also misses Quenstedt's meaning, asserting, 'Quenstedt holds ... inspiration applies to original manuscripts or autographa, not properly to the apographa' (Reid 1957:88). Yet a few lines later he admits that for Quenstedt, 'a good copy is inspired like the original writing' (?) (89). G.W. Bromiley agrees with Preus and myself: 'Quenstedt, however, took the even more difficult position that the apographs are fully inspired because the words as well as the content of the autographs are substantially retained in them' (Bromiley 1978:320).

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autographic text; <sup>15</sup> this would grant precious ground to the Roman theologians:

Most Catholic teachers would have granted that the ancient Greek and Hebrew *αυτογραφα* were authentic. They argued that the MSS which we have today, however, cannot be regarded as authentic because, after many years of copying, they have become corrupt and impure. This thought naturally led back to a discussion regarding the integrity of the contemporary text...Bellarmine contended that the Vulgate could not err because it enjoyed the approbation of the Church (Preus:139).

One of the major criticisms directed at Erasmus by Roman Catholic dogmaticians was that he was returning to the corrupted Bible of the schismatic Greek Church. Rome's theologians believed, based on the unerring authority of the Papal Church, that the *Vulgata Latina* alone preserved the original content of the autographic texts. In response to this clear-cut position of Rome Quenstedt offered the definitive Protestant response, aptly capturing both the Lutheran and Reformed sentiment in the seventeenth century:

We believe, as is our duty, that the providential care of God has always watched over the original and primitive texts of the canonical Scriptures in such a way that we can be certain that the sacred codices *which we now have in our hands* are those which existed at the time of Jerome and Augustine, nay at the time of Christ Himself and his apostles [emphasis mine]<sup>16</sup> (Preus:48).

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<sup>15</sup> 'Dannhauer says that it is as needless and foolish to suppose that we must have the autographa today as to think that we need the cup from which Christ drank before the eucharist can be rightly celebrated' (Preus:49).

<sup>16</sup> There were minority positions. Preus mentions that Huelsemann relegated inspiration 'properly spoken of only in reference to the original manuscripts' (Preus:48). Also, in the Reformed camp Curcellaeus, Cappelus, and Usher argued that while we could not always be certain of the integrity of the apographic text, no fundamental tenet of the Christian faith was disturbed by textual variants. Curcellaeus seems to be the author of this perspective (although most attribute it to Bentley in his response to Anthony Collins) that would eventually undermine the position of the Protestant dogmaticians. Bentley again takes up the position in England, Bengel does so in eighteenth century Germany and Tregelles employs it again in England in the mid nineteenth century. By the time of Westcott and Hort it has become a moot point.

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To this, Preus adds, after surveying eighteen of the most important Lutheran dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, 'This was the Lutheran position in a nutshell.'<sup>17</sup>

However, because the Lutheran dogmaticians also shared the seventeenth century with a developing, independent, philological tradition—the seeds of which were in Erasmus—the argument that 'the text of the Bible has gone through essentially the same changes which belong to all other ancient writings,' (Ladd:188) began to take its toll. G. T. Ladd argued that with the arrival of John Gottlob Carpzov, 'The necessity...for transferring the quality of verbal infallibility from any extant manuscript or manuscripts to an ideal non-existent text, became more and more apparent.'

### III. THE REFORMED DOGMATICIANS

#### A. John Owen (1616-1683)

The publishing of Brian Walton's London Polyglot (1657) provided the occasion for the most systematic defense of the *απογραφα* by a Reformed dogmatician. John Owen, the leading Puritan theologian at the time of the publishing of the Polyglot was distressed at Walton's naked display of every variant to the N.T. text—sometimes with a significant degree of redundancy—known at

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<sup>17</sup> Preus is understandably a bit apologetic about the dogmatician's arguments for the absolute authority of the apographic texts: 'He (Quenstedt) would hardly have considered the apographa of his time in the same category as those which Paul and Timothy used. However, his statement indicates that he is not alive to the significance of the fact of variant readings' (Preus;49). I believe, however, that this position of the dogmaticians was in fact fashioned as a specific response to textual variants — those textual differences between the *Vulgata Latina*, which Roman Catholic theologians claimed came from superior editions of the original Hebrew and Greek texts, and the apographic texts employed by the Protestants and given to them by the Greek Church. Someone as early as Gerhard (d.1637) spends time treating these and other textual variants raised by Bellarmine (Gerhard:555-564). Furthermore, from Erasmus, Grotius and the London Polyglot, Quenstedt knew of an entire plethora of textual variants. I believe the arguments in favour of the absolute quality of the *apographa* were arguments in favour of ecclesiastical *traditio* (the Greek Church) preserving the correct recension of the Greek text (Erasmus also believed this but perhaps not with the same specificity as the dogmaticians) in deliberate response to textual variants.

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that time. Owen bemoaned Walton's list of textual variants that took up as many pages in Walton's Polyglot as did his entire N.T. text. To Owen, this constituted both a crisis and a scandal: a crisis because this left the impression that the very wording of the N.T. was greatly in doubt, a scandal because Walton had so indiscriminately published this for the world to see. Owen responded to Walton in his essay, *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scriptures*, 1659. In this work, Owen argued the Polyglot gave material support to the Roman Catholic position by leaving the impression,

the original [language] copies of the Old and New Testament are so corrupted ('ex oro tuo, serve nequam') that they are not a certain standard and measure of all doctrines, or the touchstone of all translations.... Of all the inventions of Satan to draw off the minds of men from the Word of God, this *decrying the authority of the originals* [the ἀπογραφή] seems to me the most pernicious (Owen 1850-53:285).

Owen clearly understood the implications for Protestant authority in this threat from the Polyglot:

Besides the injury done hereby to the providence of God towards His Church, and care of His Word, it will not be found so easy a matter, upon a supposition of such corruption in the originals as is pleaded for, to evince unquestionably that the whole saving doctrine itself, at first given out from God, continues entire and incorrupt [sic] (Owen:302).<sup>18</sup>

In response to the claims of the editors employed in the Polyglot, that certain translations had greater authority at times than did the common Greek and Hebrew texts, Owen defended the ἀπογραφή:

Let it be remembered that the vulgar copy we use was the public possession of many generations that upon the invention of printing it was in actual authority throughout the world with them that used and understood that

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<sup>18</sup> Here Owen is addressing the more moderate position of Capellus, Usher, *et al.* which is while the traditional apographic text is not a near perfect replication of the *autographa*, no doctrine is at stake. Ladd notes correctly, however, the rationale of the dogmatists who argued contrariwise, 'the Bible is throughout the infallible Word of God, and that, if its text do (*sic*) not lie before us in autographic integrity, it cannot be the medium for this infallible Word.... It was urged...that, if a single concession were once made to the critics, they would not stop in their discoveries and demands until they had captured the entire field' (Ladd:188).

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language, as far as any thing appears to the contrary; let that, then, pass for the standard, which is confessedly its right and due, and we shall, God assisting, quickly see how little reason there is to pretend such varieties of readings as we are now surprised withal (Owen:366).<sup>19</sup>

Against the claim that there is a superior original language text underlying certain translations, Owen argues for,

the purity of the *present original copies* of the Scripture, or rather copies [*απογραφα*] in the original languages, which the Church of God doth *now* and hath for many ages enjoyed as her chiefest treasure (Owen:353). [emphasis mine]

### B. Francis Turretin (1623-1687)

Moving to the Continent, a contemporary of Owen's, Francis Turretin, was making the same point in his *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (1688). From his post as Professor of Theology at the University of Geneva, where he was appointed in 1653, Turretin argued in his chapter 'The Purity of the Original Text,'

This question is forced upon us by the Roman Catholics, who raise doubts concerning the purity of the sources in order more readily to establish the authority of their Vulgate and lead us to the tribunal of the church (Turretin 1981:113).

Like Owen, Turretin refers to the 'original texts' as a *terminus technicus*:

By 'original texts' we do not mean the very autographs from the hands of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, which are known to be nonexistent. We mean copies (*απογραφα*), which have come in their name [*αυτογραφα*] because they record for us that Word of God in the same words into which the sacred writers committed it under the immediate inspiration<sup>20</sup> of the Holy Spirit.... Faithful and accurate copies, not less

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<sup>19</sup> Note the parallel in language between Owen's appeal to the common tradition of the Greek Church and that of the Council of Trent's appeal to the common Latin tradition in the Western Church: 'precisely the ancient and widely current (*vulgata*) edition that had been approved by long use within the Church for so many centuries...should be held as authentic.'

<sup>20</sup> The words 'immediately inspired' are important for Warfield in his reinterpretation of the Westminster Confession. It is his argument that by this the authors of the WCF meant only the autographs were inspired and authoritative. Whereas, while Turretin

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than autographs, are norms for all other copies...and for translations (Turretin:113; 128).

### C. Reformed Confessions

While the Lutherans never codified this position on the sacred *απογραφα* in a confessional statement, the Reformed did. Thirteen years before Owen published his response to Walton, the Westminster Confession was drafted (1646) affirming,

The Old Testament in Hebrew...and New Testament in Greek...being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical. Chapter one, Section eight (Leith 1973:196).

Note that by using the word *authentical*, the Westminster Divines were sanctioning the Greek Church's recension of the New Testament and the common Jewish, Massoretic text in response to Trent which referred to the *Vulgata Latina* as *authentica*.

Later, in 1675, Turretin of Geneva, Lucas Gernler of Basel and John Henry Heidegger of Zurich, composed the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, which stated:

God, the supreme Judge, not only took care to have His Word, which is the 'power of God unto Salvation to everyone that believeth' (Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a 'sure word of prophecy' and 'holy Scriptures' (2 Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, 'one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass' (Matt. 5:18). Chapter one (Leith:309-10).

Since the late nineteenth century there has been considerable debate about the authorial intent of the Westminster Confession on this

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uses the same language as the WCF, for him the *apographa* also share this quality. Thus Turretin stands in direct opposition to Warfield's reinterpretation of the meaning of these words as they are used by the authors of the WCF. Furthermore, John Owen, like Turretin, also affirmed explicitly the inspiration and authority of the *apographa* and so recognized no distinction in the language in the WCF between immediate inspiration and the providentially preserved copies when adopting this exact language in his own Savoy Declaration. I am indebted to Doug Madden for bringing the point of the Savoy Declaration to my attention.



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point.<sup>21</sup> However, we know for certain that the *Formula*, just quoted, was directed against developments at the University of Saumur regarding the authority of the Hebrew vowel points. Moreover, considering all the previous testimony surveyed thus far it must be evident that the Westminster Confession is but reflecting what was in the theological air at that historical moment, within both confessional Lutheranism as well as confessional Calvinism. Ladd well summed up the Protestant dogmaticians and their confessions on the status of the sacred *απογραφα*:

No relief was allowed to the dreadful pressure of the post-Reformation dogma by way of attaching the quality of infallibility only to the original text; for, to maintain the dogma in its efficiency, it was further claimed that the biblical text had been supernaturally preserved in infallible form (Ladd:182).

Why the Westminster Confession was subject to a new and different interpretation brings us to the Princeton Seminary of the late nineteenth century.

### IV. THE PRINCETON SCHOOL

The Lutheran, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, in an essay written in 1965 treating the history of the recent use of the word 'inerrancy' in reference to Scripture, said of the position held by the Lutheran dogmaticians outlined above, 'This is a position which modern textual criticism renders untenable. As this has become more and more apparent, the claim of inerrancy has increasingly been posited only of the originals [*αυτογραφα*]' (Piepkorn 1965:589). B.B. Warfield provided the fundamental paradigm for this shift in Reformed circles and by the mid-twentieth century his influence began to make its impact on Lutherans as well.

#### A. Early Princeton

##### 1. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851)

When the dogmaticians encountered a difficulty in the text occasionally they would ascribe this to an error in transcription. Because, however, for them the sacred *απογραφα* were authoritative, more commonly such problems, tended to be brushed aside. Verbal peculiarities and the well-known discrepancies

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<sup>21</sup> On this see Rogers (1966).

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continued to be ascribed to the accommodation of the Holy Spirit (Vawter 1972:81).<sup>22</sup>

This reflected the feeling that all the phenomena found in the sacred *απογραφα* had to be taken seriously. Archibald Alexander, the first instructor at Princeton Seminary (1812), and heir of the dogmatic tradition of Francis Turretin, goes so far as to admit that minor errors in the text may have arisen not from scribal transmission but at the original time of composition, since the amanuenses of the apostles did not compose by inspiration. (Loetscher 1983:228)<sup>23</sup>

### 2. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Regarding Charles Hodge, I agree completely with the judgement of Ernest Sandeen in an earlier treatment of the Princeton theology when he highlighted a controversial passage in Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (1872-73). Here, Hodge admits to small, unimportant errors in Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Again, this reflects an attempt to take

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<sup>22</sup> On this score Ladd cites the following example: 'The difference of readings, for instance, between 2 Sam.xxii and Ps.xviii was explained by assuming a double purpose of the Holy Spirit: differences in the spelling of proper names showed the freedom of the same Spirit'(Ladd:188). Preus also points out that Pfeiffer responded by saying contradictions 'simply do not exist. If Scripture seems to contradict itself we must confess our ignorance and say, 'Thus it has pleased the Lord to say much which seems wrong and impossible.'(Preus:85).

<sup>23</sup> Preus notes that, 'Some theologians at the time of the orthodox period had maintained a distinction between errors of the inspired writers themselves and occasional slips of the pen on the part of their secretaries, opposing the possibility of the former while granting the possibility of the latter, but to the dogmaticians neither possibility could be conceded' (Preus:78).

<sup>24</sup> The passage reads as follows: 'The errors in matters of fact which skeptics search out bear no proportion to the whole. No sane man would deny that the Parthenon was built of marble, even if here and there a speck of sandstone should be detected in its structure. Not less unreasonable is it to deny the inspiration of such a book as the Bible, because one sacred writer says that on a given occasion twenty-four thousand, and another says that twenty-three thousand men were slain. Surely a Christian may be allowed to tread such objections under his feet.... The universe teems with evidence of design, so manifold, so diverse, so wonderful, as to overwhelm the mind with

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seriously all the phenomena of the *απογραφα* as a final and authoritative expression of the Word of God.

### B. Late Princeton and B.B. Warfield (1851-1921)

On October 20, 1880, A.A. Hodge wrote B.B. Warfield, then professor at Western Theological Seminary (today it is Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). Hodge pleaded with Warfield to co-author an essay with him in the young *Presbyterian Review* on the Princeton doctrine of inspiration in light of modern scholarship. Hodge confessed,

I can after a fashion restate the old orthodoxy *common*-place as to inspiration and fence it somewhat on the *a-priori* or metaphysical side, but I can do nothing on the side of stating or answering the positions of the hostile criticism, as to the alleged contradictions of detail (Hodge 1880A).

Hodge directed Warfield specifically to address 'the state of actual facts (as to the *New Testament*) in regard to the asserted inaccuracies—or contradictions' (Hodge).

In November of that same year Hodge posed the problem as he saw it with an explicit reference to his father's controversial statement in the first volume of the *Systematic Theology*. This is a particularly important letter because it provides us with A.A. Hodge's exegesis of his father's statement:

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the conviction that it has had an intelligent author. Yet here and there isolated cases of monstrosity appear. It is irrational, because we cannot account for such cases, to deny that the universe is the product of intelligence.' By his metaphor it is obvious that Hodge allows for the presence of unexplainable phenomena in the apographic text which at one point he calls 'errors' (although he does seem to hold out the possibility that these may be resolved in the future). Since no other ideal universe (*autographa*) which is without such *monstrosities*, is referred to in his argument, unlike Warfield he thus concedes this element as part of the phenomena of Scripture itself since it is part of the sacred *apographa*. E.D. Morris came to the same conclusion in his major study of the Confession: 'Still it may be necessary, after all such explanatory processes, to admit that there may remain in the Scriptures as we now possess them what has been well described, (Hodge, Syst. Theol.) as here or there a speck of sand-stone showing itself in the marble of the Parthenon — an occasional variation, difference or even discrepancy of statement which, so far as we can see, may have been in the original text as written by holy men moved by the Holy Ghost.' *Theology of the Westminster Symbols* (Columbus: n.p., 1900):88.

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But the question remains was this book [the Bible] with its (1) human (2) oriental & (3) Hebrew characteristics *intended to stand the test of microscopic criticism as to its accuracy in matters of indifferent detail?* It appears that my father [Charles Hodge] was speaking of the possibility of infinitesimal inaccuracies of no importance relating to the end designed, in *Systematic Theology* Vol. I, p. 170. I say so too—very heartily. But the question remains what degree of minute accuracy do the facts prove that God designed to effect? That is for you critics and exegetes to determine (Hodge 1880B).<sup>25</sup>

This invitation and challenge to Warfield placed an immense burden of responsibility on his shoulders. When Sandeen judges that 'Princeton Theology, especially in its latter days, continually fell victim to this besetting sin of pride, unable to make any distinction between Paul and Princeton' (Sandeen 1962:313), I am tempted to alter his words. They seemed not to be able to make out the difference between the Westminster Divines and the Protestant scholastic tradition they represented, and B.B. Warfield.

In order to answer this call to come to the rescue of Princeton, Warfield found it necessary to demythologise the Westminster Confession of Faith. Furthermore, when he accomplished his mission he looked back over his shoulder to discover he single-handedly converted to his perspective most of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1893. (Rogers: 396).

In the process, however, he destroyed forever the dogmatician's view of the sacred *απογραφα*. For Warfield, the Westminster Confession no longer taught providential *preservation* of the text

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<sup>25</sup> A.A.Hodge's instincts as reflected in this assessment seemed to be quite good. Were it not for Warfield's influence he may have carried on the Old Princeton tradition with but slight modification as opposed to Warfield's radical new agenda. Sandeen noted that A.A.Hodge made no reference to original autographs in his first (1860) edition of his *Outlines of Theology*, but added these words to his 1879 edition. (Sandeen:316) Whether this was a result of Warfield's influence, or that of Francis Patton, who argued in a similar vein (1869:112-115), I have not yet been able to determine. Patton differed from Warfield, however, in acknowledging that the *apographa* were inspired to the extent that they reflected autographic content. Furthermore, he did not feel the common text needed to be replaced with an earlier recension, as did Warfield. For Patton, the common text represented 'an infallible autograph' that 'has been perpetuated by the industry of transcribers, and has been changed only in some unimportant details through the mistakes of copyists.' (115)

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but rather its providential *restoration* in the latter part of the nineteenth century. <sup>26</sup>

In his treatise on inspiration, co-authored by A.A. Hodge, he felt himself completely in keeping with the authentic teaching of the Confession when he argued,

We do not assert that the common text, [απογραφα] but only that original autographic text was inspired. No 'error' can be asserted, therefore, which cannot be proved to have been aboriginal in the text (Warfield/Hodge 1881:238).

With this strategy, Warfield won the battle but he may have lost the war that seemed so critical to the Protestant dogmaticians. As perhaps the leading American authority on the state of New Testament text critical matters in the late nineteenth century, he thought it necessary to then go on a crusade against the uninspired *απογραφα*.

On December 2, 1882, he demonstrated how serious he was about his agenda. In the lay publication, *Sunday School Times*, he asserted to the reading Christian public that Mark's long ending was 'no part of God's word.' Therefore, 'we are not then to ascribe to these verses the authority due to God's Word' (Warfield 1882:755-56). No Princetonian prior to this had ever doubted the canonical authority of these verses. This is all the more provocative in light of Bruce Metzger's recent judgement on these verses in his monograph treating the canon. Here, Metzger accords the long ending canonical status, even though it is not Markan (Metzger 1987:269-270). <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> He did so by arguing, 'In the sense of the Westminster Confession, therefore, the multiplication of the copies of the Scriptures, the several early efforts towards the revision of the text, the raising up of scholars in our own day to collect and collate MSS., and to reform the text on scientific principles — of our Tischendorfs, and Tregelleses, and Westcotts and Hort — are all parts of God's singular care and providence in preserving (=restoring) His inspired Word pure' (Warfield 1931:239).

<sup>27</sup> 'Already in the second century, for example, the so-called long ending of Mark was known to Justin Martyr and to Tatian, who incorporated it into his *Diatesseron*. There seems to be good reason, therefore, to conclude that, though external and internal evidence is conclusive against the authenticity of the last twelve verses as coming from the same pen as the rest of the gospel, the passage ought to be accepted as part of the canonical text of Mark.'

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However, all was not gloom and doom. Warfield held out hope, promising,

The inerrant autographs were a fact once; they may possibly be a fact again, when textual criticism has said its last word on the Bible text. In proportion as they are approached in the processes of textual criticism, do we have an ever better and better Bible than the one we have now (Warfield 1892:557).<sup>28</sup>

Warfield's new proposal did not go unanswered.

### C. Some Responses to Warfield

#### 1. Preserved Smith (1847-1927)

The American church historian, Preserved Smith, protested Warfield's reinterpretation of the Westminster Confession in the following terms:

Warfield in an article in the *Presbyterian Review* stated the doctrine [inerrancy] is not concerned with the accuracy of our present Bible, but interests itself in affirming a perfection of the original autographs which has in some cases at least been lost in transmission.... None the less does the new theory depart widely from the confessional doctrine. That the Word of God as we now have it in Scripture is infallible...this is the affirmation of the Confession. Its interest is in the present Bible for present purposes, and those purposes are practical purposes. That an inerrant autograph once existed is a speculative assertion, interested in establishing a supposed perfection which no longer exists, and which may conceivably (and even probably) never be recovered (Smith 1893:144).

#### 2. Thomas Lindsay (1843-1914)

The Scotchman, Thomas Lindsay, was even less forgiving:

But when all is said they are bound to admit [Warfield and his advocates] that the attribute of formal inerrancy does not belong to the Scriptures which we now have, but to what they call...the original autographs of Scripture.... It follows that the Scriptures as we now have them are neither infallible nor inspired in their use of these words. This is not an inference drawn from their writings by a hostile critic. It is frankly and courageously said by themselves, 'We do not assert that the common text, but only that the original autographic text was inspired.' The statement is deliberately made by Dr.Hodge and Dr. Warfield. This is a very grave assertion, and shows to what lengths the School are driven to maintain their theory, and it is one which cannot fail, if seriously believed and thoroughly acted upon, to lead to sad conclusions both in the theological doctrine of Scripture and

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<sup>28</sup> Note by contrast Dannhauer's remark from the seventeenth century in footnote fifteen.

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in the practical work of the Church.... Where are we to get our errorless Scripture? In the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs? Who are to recover these for us? I suppose the band of experts in textual criticism who are year by year giving us the materials for a more perfect text. Are they to be created by-and-by when their labours are ended into an authority doing for Protestants what the 'Church' does for Roman Catholics? Are they to guarantee for us the inspired and infallible Word of God, or are we to say that the unknown autographs are unknowable, and that we can never get to this Scripture, which is the only Scripture inspired and infallible in the strictly formal sense of those words as used by the Princeton School? I have a great respect for textual and historical Biblical critics, and have done my share in a humble way to obtain a recognition of their work, but I for one shall never consent to erect the scholars whom I esteem into an authority for that text of Scripture which is alone inspired and infallible. That, however, is what this formalist theory is driving us to if we submit to it. I maintain, with all the Reformers, and with all the Reformed Creeds, that the Scriptures, as we now have them, are the inspired and infallible Word of God, and that all textual criticism, while it is to be welcomed in so far as it brings our present text nearer the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs, will not make the Scriptures one whit more inspired or more infallible in the true Scriptural and religious meanings of those words than they are now (Lindsay 1895:291-293).

### 3. Henry Grey Graham (1874-1959)

I conclude my account of some responses to Warfield with a statement by an early twentieth century Roman Catholic bishop. While the bishop's remarks are not directed at Warfield specifically, they offer a cogent testimony to the fact that Warfield's appeal to the *αυτογραφα* brought the Protestant view of Scripture, as Lindsay argued, closer to the Roman Catholic view. The following quotation is all the more important because it came from the pen of a former Church of Scotland minister who holds the distinction of being the only convert to the Roman communion from the Scottish Presbyterian Church ever to be made a bishop.<sup>29</sup> The Rt. Rev. Henry Grey Graham wrote the following in his popular essay on *Where We Got the Bible* (1911):

Pious Protestants may hold up their hands in horror and cry out, 'there are no mistakes in the Bible! it is all inspired! it is God's own book?' Quite true, *if you get God's own book*, the originals as they came from the hand of the Apostle, Prophet, and Evangelist. These, and these men only, were inspired and protected from making mistakes.... The original Scripture is free from error, because it has God for its author; *so teaches the Catholic*

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<sup>29</sup> For a brief treatment of Graham see my forth-coming entry on him as it will appear in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*.

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*Church*;...but that does not alter the fact that there are scores, nay thousands, of differences in the old manuscripts...and I should like any enquiring Protestants to ponder over this fact and see how they can possibly reconcile it with their principle that the Bible alone is the all-sufficient guide to salvation. Which Bible? Are you sure you have got the right Bible?... You know perfectly well that you must trust to some authority outside of yourself to give you the Bible.... We Catholics, on the other hand, glory in having some third party to come between us and God, because God Himself has given it to us, namely, the Catholic Church, to teach us and lead us to Him (Graham 1924:64-65).

### V. CONCLUSION

There was a general consensus among the Protestant dogmaticians of the seventeenth century that the *απογραφα* were inspired and authoritative. This position was a deliberate response to the Council of Trent and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation theologians.

While the dogmaticians held to a verbal view of inspiration and regarded the *απογραφα* as infallible<sup>30</sup> this view was generally held in tension with all the phenomena in the *απογραφα* exhibiting a conflict with this notion. To appeal to a superior autographic text would have meant playing into the hands of the defenders of the Vulgate who argued that it was based on superior original language texts, closer to the original text.

In order to rescue Princeton, at the invitation of A.A. Hodge, Warfield shifted authority from the *απογραφα* to the *αυτογραφα*. To do this he demythologized the Westminster Confession, arguing that it taught the *αυτογραφα* alone were inspired and authoritative. In so doing, he made an important departure from not only the position of the Westminster Divines but from the paradigm of Biblical authority advanced by nearly all the

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<sup>30</sup> Modern day advocates who have attempted to prove Warfield's thesis regarding the meaning of the confession on the Biblical texts have run into a brick wall when resorting to history to make their point: they have been forced to admit, 'It is true that in the seventeenth century a good number of Christians esteemed that the Bibles they had in their hands were infallible' (Woodbridge/Balmer 1983:405, n.106); 'Some Englishmen apparently did think that their Bibles perfectly reflected the originals' (Woodbridge 1982: 187, n.64).

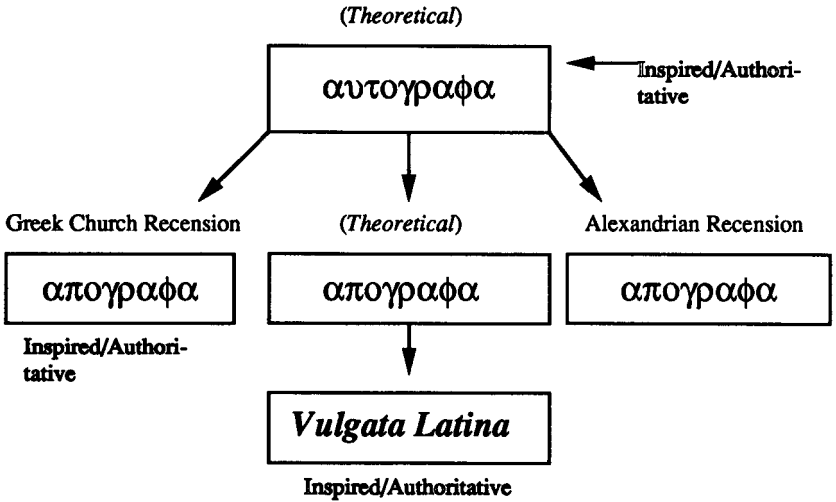


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 major seventeenth century Protestant dogmaticians in response to  
 Tridentine Roman Catholicism. 31

Protestant Dogmaticians

Roman Catholics

B.B. Warfield



Based on:  
 Providential  
 Preservation

Based on:  
 Ecclesiastical  
 Authentication

Based on:  
 Providential  
 Restoration

Latin Vulgate  
 corrupt

απογραφα  
 generally  
 corrupt

Latin Vulgate  
 and  
 απογραφα  
 corrupt

31 One of the historical ironies of this development is the inescapable loss of awe and reverence for the existential Bible as sacred text in confessing communities and in the culture at large. David E. Timmer, in an editorial in the *Reformed Journal* treating the NIV's paraphrase of Genesis 2:8;19 took this occasion to note, 'The principle of inerrancy, so often invoked to preserve Scripture from disrespect, has in this case led to flagrant disrespect for what Scripture actually is and says' (Timmer 1984:2-3).

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# PLACING REASON ON THE STOOL OF WONDERMENT

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The title of this paper comes from a passage in Kierkegaard's book, *Philosophical Fragments*.

This is a passage in which Kierkegaard discusses the tension which arises when human reason encounters God (whom Kierkegaard here describes as The Paradox). The tension is inevitable because, in this encounter with God, reason runs up against the limits of its powers. 'The offended consciousness,' Kierkegaard says, 'holds aloof from the Paradox and what wonder, since the Paradox is the Miracle! This discovery was not made by the Reason; it was the Paradox that placed the reason on the stool of wonderment....'<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard is often accused of being totally opposed to reason, of wishing to banish it from the scene. As the perceived opponent of reason, Kierkegaard is seen to be responsible for many modern ills, from the errors of Don Cupitt to the excesses of the charismatics.

The view that Kierkegaard is totally opposed to reason goes along with the view that he has no interest in what is objectively the case, that he is exclusively interested in the feeling of the individual. It has to be said that those who interpret Kierkegaard in this way do not have great difficulty in finding apparent support for their views from his writings. On page 115 of the *Postscript*<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard writes 'every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated'. On page 201 he says, 'objectively, there is no truth'. Specifically in relation to Christianity Kierkegaard maintains, on page 116, that 'Christianity protests every form of objectivity... objectively Christianity has absolutely no existence'. Again, Kierkegaard includes a whole chapter in the *Postscript* which has in its title the statement, 'Truth is subjectivity'.

In defence of Kierkegaard, it has to be said that he felt called to attack a philosophical tradition in which he saw reason being given a place of excessive importance. Kierkegaard attacked Descartes as following this line, and also Kant but he reserved his most persistent attacks for Hegel. In Kierkegaard's view of Hegel, Reason was working everything out, Reason was well on its way to a

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<sup>1</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton, 1967, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton, 1968.

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comprehensive account of everything, Reason was banishing all mysteries. Particularly offensive to Kierkegaard was the way in which, as he interpreted Hegel, Christianity itself was to be granted a place, not because it came to us by the sovereign grace of God, but because a flat headed German philosopher had found a place for it in his philosophical system.

No doubt Kierkegaard was at times unfair to Hegel, but in order for us to interpret Kierkegaard fairly we have to appreciate that phrases like 'objective truth' have a very specialised sense in Kierkegaard's writings. They represent something which Kierkegaard perceived to arise from within the overall view which Hegel and others were promoting. Thus, when Kierkegaard rejects what he refers to as 'objective truth', he is signalling his rejection of a whole package. He is not stepping outside the ongoing philosophical debate and saying to us plainly that all that matters is the feeling of the individual.

He is not saying to us that he is unconcerned about what is objectively the case. When Kierkegaard says, 'objectively, there is no truth' he is saying that the way of access to what is objectively the case does not for us lie through the philosophical system which Hegel represented. He is saying that Hegel's system, which claimed to hold the key to everything, for us actually leads nowhere. The kind of rarefied knowledge which it offers us is not actually available to us at all.

Robert Bretall, in his Introduction to *A Kierkegaard Anthology*,<sup>3</sup> deals with these points as follows: 'The advent of Christianity posed a new problem for philosophy, a solution of which was reached in the medieval synthesis of St Thomas Aquinas: faith and reason were harmonised by carefully delineating their respective spheres. This synthesis was broken up by the centrifugal and individualistic forces of the Renaissance, with the result that reason (in one form or another, patently or disguised) tended to gain the upper hand. This was true of the English Empiricists almost as much as of the great continental Rationalists, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz; only in the radical scepticism of David Hume does the element of "belief" (very much secularised in form) come to assert itself once more. Kant put an end to the pretensions of the older rationalism, but with his doctrine of the thing-in-itself and the Transcendental Ego paved the way for a new and bolder rationalism – that of Hegel. It was against this that Kierkegaard reacted so violently, and for this very reason he sometimes swings to the opposite extreme and appears to be a fideist who would cut himself off completely from the intellect and its

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<sup>3</sup> *A Kierkegaard Anthology* ed. Robert Bretall, Princeton, 1973.

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claims. Here as elsewhere he was a "corrective" providing the emphasis which was needed at the time; but his considered view point was not fideistic. He himself was capable of the most abstract thinking: in the *Journals* he speaks of using the understanding in order to believe *against* the understanding, and this was precisely his aim...'.<sup>4</sup>

I am not saying that Kierkegaard made this as clear as he could have done, but he did care about what is objectively the case. It is, after all, the objective Paradox which places Reason on the stool of wonderment. From an overall view of his life and writings it is clear that Kierkegaard personally took the facts of gospel history with absolute seriousness, from the time of his conversion on 19 May 1838 to the time of his death on 11 November 1855.

That Kierkegaard did give a place to the understanding is clear from the following quotations scattered throughout the *Postscript*; 'the subjective thinker is dialectical enough to interpenetrate (his life) with thought' (page 413). 'The dialectical is combined with the pathetic to create new pathos' (page 493). The point of being a Christian 'cannot be to reflect upon Christianity, but only by reflection to intensify the pathos with which one continues to be a Christian' (page 537).

All this does not add up to a picture in which reason is banished from the scene, having no role to play.

Obviously it is not possible here to discuss this in detail. But I would like in a limited way to explore whether or not Kierkegaard's reference to reason being placed on the stool of wonderment has a message for us, both in relation to the philosophical tradition of which Kierkegaard was so critical, and to some ways in which that tradition may have affected the thought and life of the church.

In the last chapter of his book *The Problems of Philosophy*,<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Russell has a paragraph which I would like to read here in slightly edited form. 'The value of philosophy is to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects raise no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophise, on the contrary, we find that even the most every day things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though

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<sup>4</sup> Oxford Univ, 1967



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unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raised, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.' <sup>5</sup>

If one were to judge only on the basis of this paragraph, one would think that there was a lot in common between Russell and Kierkegaard. Russell is here acknowledging that, when our capacity to philosophise serves us well, we see one aspect of a thing but also other aspects which may appear to be in conflict with the first. This is a perplexing but a liberating experience, which enlarges our vision and enriches our minds. Here, reason is serving us, not ruling over us, requiring that everything brought to its notice be reduced to conformity with a closed, rationalistic system.

I am afraid, however, that Russell does not keep to the spirit of that paragraph throughout the book. I am thinking of his account of how we know.

Russell refers to two types of knowledge – knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Knowledge by acquaintance is the kind of direct knowledge we have, for example, of the sense data through which we have an impression of an external object. Knowledge by description involves knowledge of truths and the application of this knowledge to the objects of which we have knowledge by acquaintance. It seems to me that, in so far as Russell's account of these two types of knowledge is to be accepted, we should take the view that knowledge of any kind is in fact impossible without a coming together of elements represented by knowledge by acquaintance on the one hand and knowledge by description on the other. I would further suggest that it is through such a combination and interaction that our minds are kept open and that the sense of wonder of which Russell speaks is kept alive.

But this is where Russell's book proved a disappointment for me. Instead of allowing that knowledge comes from a dynamic interchange between the two types of knowledge which he describes, Russell insists that 'All our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation.' <sup>6</sup>

Because it is so relevant to this age-old search for a systematic account of how we know, and because it forms part of the immediate

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<sup>5</sup> *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 91

<sup>6</sup> *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 26

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background to Kierkegaard's work, I would like to read the following quotation from Rodger Scruton's book on *Kant*: 'Leibniz belonged to the school of thought now generally labelled rationalist, and Hume to the school of empiricism which is commonly contrasted with it. Kant, believing that both philosophies were wrong in their conclusion, attempted to give an account of philosophical method which incorporated the truths, and avoided the errors of both. Rationalism derives all knowledge from the exercise of reason, and purports to give an absolute description of the world, uncontaminated by the experience of any observer. Empiricism argues that knowledge comes through experience alone; there is therefore no possibility of separating knowledge from the subjective condition of the knower. Kant wished to give an answer to the question of objective knowledge which was neither as absolute as Leibniz's nor as subjective as Hume's.' Later on in the same chapter, Scruton outlines how Kant came to correlate elements from both the rationalist and empiricist positions: 'Neither experience nor reason are alone able to provide knowledge. The first provides content without form, the second form without content. Only in their synthesis is knowledge possible; hence there is no knowledge that does not bear the marks of reason and of experience together. Such knowledge is, however, genuine and objective. It transcends the point of view of the man who possesses it, and makes legitimate claims upon an independent world.'<sup>7</sup>

This may look hopeful. In the view of Kierkegaard, however, Kant's effort to combine the insights of rationalism and empiricism proved a failure. On page 292 of the *Postscript* he speaks disparagingly of 'Kant's misleading reflection which brings reality into connection with thought'. As indicated earlier, Kierkegaard's position is not that there is a complete divorce between reality and thought. What he is objecting to in Kant is his claim to give a complete account of how we know, a systematic and potentially exhaustive correlation of reality and thought. Kant makes this claim in the preface of the first edition of the *Critique*: 'In this enquiry I have made completeness my aim, and I venture to assert that there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied.' In terms of the title of this talk, what did Kant do? At one stage, it looked as if he had Reason under control. However, he allowed her to slip off the stool of wonderment and to usurp the throne. From there, she required the banishment of all mysteries as she did, too, in Russell's case, though in a different way.

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<sup>7</sup> *Kant*, Oxford, 1982, pp.14, 17

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What, then, is Kierkegaard's own attitude towards theories of knowledge? Is he actually a sceptic? Kierkegaard is not a sceptic, but he is sceptical about epistemological theories which claim to explain to us how we know. Kierkegaard felt called to hold up before us how little we understand about how we know. This difficulty in understanding how we understand comes over clearly from the following quotations from the *Postscript*: 'To abstract from existence is to remove the difficulty. To remain in existence so as to understand one thing in one moment and another thing in another moment is not to understand oneself. But to understand the greatest oppositions together, and to understand oneself existing in them, is very difficult' (page 316).

On page 134 he speaks about 'the dialectic involved in every conflict between the ideal and the empirical, a dialectic which threatens every moment to prevent a beginning, and after a beginning has been made threatens every moment a revolt against this beginning.'

I may to some extent be importing my own thinking into what Kierkegaard says, but it seems to me from these and other extracts that Kierkegaard's account of what goes on when an existing individual thinks is as follows: the existing individual realises that there are two aspects to his situation. He can reach out to the realm of reason on the one hand, and on the other hand he can reach out to what is in the world around him – things which are accidental and subject to change. As these two realms meet in the individual, they set up a tension and the natural desire is to seek relief from this tension in some way or other. Though it would be somewhat anachronistic to express the view in this way, I believe there is basis in Kierkegaard's writing for saying that he would view foundationalism, whether of a rationalist or an empiricist kind, as a sophisticated effort to eliminate this tension. But the individual who faces himself honestly does not seek escape in either of these directions. He knows that a system which concentrates either on the realm of reason or the realm of experience, to the neglect of the other, will fail to reflect his situation as it is. He knows that, in order to retain whatever knowledge he has, he requires to wait on at his lonely post between these two realms. As he does so, he increasingly awakens to a sense of his existence as an individual who stands out from his surroundings and from all others. He is also sensitive to the limitations of his powers and of his situation, a sensitivity which constantly threatens to intensify to the point of crippling any further effort towards progress.

Kierkegaard's constant emphasis is that man is a synthesis of finite and infinite, of the temporal and the eternal. Man is like the driver of a wagon which has two horses to pull it, the one a Pegasus and the other a worn out jade: 'eternity is the winged horse, infinitely fast,

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and time is the worn out jade' (*Postscript*, page 296). Kierkegaard is not suggesting that, whereas both rationalist and empiricist systems are flawed, he is trying to produce a system in which these flaws will not appear. In fact, instead of trying to produce a system in an attempt to account adequately for all the facts, Kierkegaard delights to linger around those areas where it can be most powerfully felt that no existential system is possible.

In his book *Escape from Reason*, Frances Schaeffer writes, 'The man who follows Hegel, Kierkegaard, is the real modern man because he accepted what Leonardo and other men had rejected, he put away the hope of a unified field of knowledge.'<sup>8</sup>

When Schaeffer uses the phrase 'real modern man,' I take it he is referring to the man who is perhaps a sceptic in epistemology, a relativist in ethics, and an agnostic or an atheist in religion – a man who despairs of discovering any objective purpose in life. There would be differences of opinion about the degree to which Kierkegaard is responsible for producing that particular modern man. But the point I would take up, in response to Schaeffer's comment, relates to a modern man of a different type, who seems to me to be very much alive, to be exercising a controlling influence on the education given to our children and young people. This is the kind of modern man who has practically substituted science for religion, who believes that, if there is any explanation of why we are here, we must look to science for that explanation. This is the kind of modern man whose advent Kierkegaard foresaw. Kierkegaard lived in a time when science and technology were already advancing rapidly. He foresaw the boost which man's pride in his powers of reason would receive by these and future advances. As he attempted to provide an antidote to this nascent arrogance Kierkegaard sought, to use Schaeffer's phrase, 'to put away the hope of a unified field of knowledge.' By this I mean that, as the expectation was gaining strength around him that human reason, or 'science' as it might be called, was soon to be able to extend itself over the various areas of knowledge available to us, and explain the interconnections between everything, Kierkegaard fought against this tendency practically to bow down and worship human reason. 'Even the act of eating' he wrote, 'is more reasonable than speculating with a microscope upon the functions of digestion... A dreadful sophistry spreads microscopically and telescopically into tomes, and yet in the last resort produces nothing qualitatively understood, though it does, to be sure, cheat men out of the simple

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<sup>8</sup> *Escape from Reason*, 1968, p. 42

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profound and passionate wonder which gives impetus to the ethical – the only thing certain is the ethical – religious.’<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps it was partly in recognition of what Kierkegaard tried to do here that Wittgenstein said of him ‘Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint.’<sup>10</sup>

Following in the spirit of much of Kierkegaard’s work, Wittgenstein said once about Hegel, ‘Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.’<sup>11</sup>

Again, Wittgenstein is very much in sympathy with the spirit of Kierkegaard’s work when he says, ‘the whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena. Thus people today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Faith were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and both wrong: though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained.’<sup>12</sup>

Schaeffer laments Kierkegaard’s putting away the hope of a unified field of knowledge. But, in the preface to his *Philosophical Investigations*, written in 1945,<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein says that he had hoped to produce a book in which the results of his investigations would be welded together into a whole, in which his thoughts would ‘proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks’. However he goes on, ‘After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realised that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against the natural inclination. And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss cross in every direction. The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings.’

Are Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard not sticking with things as they are, whereas Schaeffer is dealing with things as he would like them

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<sup>9</sup> *The Journals*, quoted in *The Postscript*, Editor’s introduction, page XV

<sup>10</sup> *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed Rush Rhees, Oxford, 1984, p. 87

<sup>11</sup> *Recollections*, Introduction p. XV

<sup>12</sup> *Recollections*, p. 88

<sup>13</sup> Oxford, 1958

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to be? In fact, is Schaeffer not describing them as many philosophers and theologians have wished them to be? They perceive tensions and contradictions, and their philosophical or theological project is an attempt to produce a system in which these conflicts and tensions will not appear. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein either did not attempt, or renounced attempts to produce such a system, perceiving any system to be an illusion.

In the second part of this paper, I would like to bring some of the questions raised in the first part to bear on some areas of theology and the life of the church.

Are there any areas where there is evidence of conflict, where we have tended to eliminate that conflict by forcing through a system which emphasises one aspect of things at the cost of another? I would think that this is a question which could be put in relation to the long standing debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. It seems clear that there are many passages of Scripture which highlight the fact that God knows all things and controls all things, in creation and redemption.<sup>14</sup> But there are other passages which pick up the human perspective and which press home our responsibility with vigour and without qualification.<sup>15</sup> I think I would be right in saying that, instead of leaving these conflicting emphases in balance, some Calvinists have tended to bring considerations from the realm of divine foreordination to bear in the realm of human choice and responsibility. The same point can be made about some Arminians. They have brought considerations from the realm of human responsibility to bear in the realm of divine foreordination. Both have felt the need to produce a unified system. To achieve this, they have been prepared to give undue prominence to the element they favour and virtually to sacrifice the other. Both have arrived at these positions, not through patient submission to the apparent conflict presented in Scripture, but by forcing through a system of their own in order to eliminate that apparent conflict.

Does tension not also arise in the area of worship – a tension between word and spirit? Is it not possible that extreme applications of the Regulative Principle represent an attempt to legislate this tension away, in favour of the word? On the other hand, does the charismatic movement spring from a gut rejection of systems, of whatever colour, which are perceived to have ruled the life of the church for a very long time? And is this movement an attempt to force a redressing of the balance in favour of the spirit? And could it represent a correct perception of a lack in the church, though offering

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<sup>14</sup> e.g. Ephesians 1:4-6, 11

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

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a remedy which is flawed and which tends towards the opposite extreme?

Perhaps something of the same point could be made in regard to experience, though I will do nothing more than to quote from the paper by Derek Tidball in the book *Christian Experience in Theology and Life*: 'We desperately need to consider the theology of experience. Our heritage from the Reformation onwards, through the Enlightenment and into the twentieth century has lead us to emphasise the word, doctrine, right belief, and the cerebral aspects of the faith. Little attention has been paid to the theology of experience except by those such as Harvey Cox or Morton Kelsey who do not have an evangelical concern for Biblical truths. Indeed Kelsey shows how little attention is paid to the whole question of experience generally by theologians of whatever colour. It may be that our rejection of Schleiermacher and our fears about the woolliness of Otto have reinforced our negative approach to the area. But these surely are precisely the reasons why an evangelical theology of experience ought to be constructed.' <sup>16</sup>

Following on Derek Tidball's comment, and looking back over the whole of this paper, I find it interesting that Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones thought it necessary to give an entire address at the close of the Puritan Conference in 1960 on the words of First Corinthians, Chapter 8: 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.' Dr Lloyd-Jones felt it necessary to say, 'There can be no question at all, it seems to me, that the peculiar danger that threatens those of us who meet annually at this conference is the danger of pride of intellect and pride of knowledge.' <sup>17</sup>

What Paul opposed, and what Lloyd-Jones perceived to be a great danger at a time of revived interest in the Puritans, was a growth in knowledge of detail which lacked the balance of a pervasive sense of how little we know. This is what I take Kierkegaard to have expressed in his own way on page 182 of the *Postscript*: 'When subjectivity is the truth, the conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis of objectivity, a memento of the fork in the road where the way swings off.'

Does Scripture provide anything corresponding to what Kierkegaard describes as 'the antithesis of objectivity'? Is there anything in Scripture which may provide an antidote to that disease of which Dr Lloyd-Jones said he saw the first signs in 1960?

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<sup>16</sup> Ed. I. Howard Marshall, Edinburgh, 1988

<sup>17</sup> *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, Edinburgh, 1987, p. 25

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I would suggest that Scripture as a whole does indicate an antidote, in that the revelation of God's will is contained in the unit which is made up of the Old and the New Testaments. This means that what comes to us today is something in which are combined both what was given and retained for centuries (the O.T.), and what represents a lively investigative response to what God had given (the N.T.). Both these elements seem to me to be spelt out for us in Hebrews chapter eleven, where the example of Old Testament believers is introduced to illustrate the more explicit teaching of the New Testament on faith. In verse one of chapter eleven, faith is described as the *hupostasis* of things hoped for, the *elenchos* of things not seen.

*Hupostasis* literally means foundation, but (following Guthrie's commentary) <sup>18</sup> it has been used already in the Epistle in two senses. In 1:3 it has the sense of 'nature' or 'essence', but in 3:14 it has the sense of conviction. I wonder if one could draw on both senses here, giving the following picture. Something of the essence of the things of God is present in faith itself, and because of this the person who has faith has strong conviction about the things to which they relate. What about the second key term? *Elenchos* seems to refer to the process of subjecting claims to rigorous examination, exposing what is false and confirming what is true. From this background it derives both the sense of proof or demonstration and that of being sure as a result of having gone through a process of proof. (This term was used by Plato to describe the dialectal methods practised by Socrates, and it is at least possible that the term was used in Hebrews with an awareness of this background.)

Both these aspects seem to me to form part of the scriptural account of faith and of the knowledge of God which faith involves. *Hupostasis* points to that aspect of faith in which it is most clearly seen that the basis for believing is supplied by God. *Elenchos* points to that aspect of faith in which we subject God's revelation to the closest scrutiny, we ask questions about its nature and implications. Both *hupostasis* and *elenchos* take in the fact that faith involves a being sure, though they point to different factors involved in our coming to be sure.

It is very difficult to see how these two elements in faith combine. It is difficult, in fact, to the point that it looks as if these two aspects of faith are in conflict. I wonder if there is an analogy between the two factors involved in faith and the two types of knowledge which Russell speaks of. Is there some correlation between the *hupostasis* element in faith and Russell's knowledge by acquaintance, and between the *elenchos* element in faith and Russell's

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<sup>18</sup> *The Letter to the Hebrews: Introduction and Commentary*, Leicester, 1983, p.225



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knowledge by description? In both cases, there is the element of the given in relation to which we must to some extent be passive. But there is also the active aspect of knowledge and of faith, in which we analyse what we have been given in order to come to a personal appreciation of it.

And there is another element in this description of faith which I feel to be very important. *Hupostasis* is presented in relation to 'things hoped for' and *elenchos* in relation to 'things not seen'. There is more than a suggestion here that faith is not something complete in itself and finished. On the contrary, it seems to be part of the nature of faith that it reaches out beyond itself.

In Lloyd-Jones's paper, one of the signs of false knowledge which he picks out is a lack of balance. In terms of this discussion, the situation described by Lloyd-Jones comes about when an imbalance is introduced in favour of the *elenchos* aspect of faith. When believers are in this state of imbalance there is an appearance of great cognitive activity. It may seem that great progress is being made in understanding the faith, but there may be little progress in reality. The cognitive side of faith has taken precedence, and most of the activity is directed towards reducing the revelation already received to a coherent system. This process involves little ongoing interaction between the church and God's revelation. It is carried out by forcing through to their logical conclusion those principles that have been lifted from revelation and adopted as the guiding principles of theology.

How do we prevent such an imbalance, or even an imbalance of a contrasting kind, from arising? I cannot offer any formula. But if we remember that the just shall live by faith, and if we give due place to the conflicting factors which are in the nature of faith, and if we resist the temptation to adopt a system by which the tensions essential to the life of faith are resolved, will we not be living nearer to the Spirit from whom our spiritual life derives? And we will have succeeded in keeping Reason off the throne, and on the stool of wonderment.

## REVIEWS

### **Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age**

Sallie McFague

SCM Press, London, 1987; 224pp., £8.50 paperback; ISBN 0 334 01039 X

Sallie McFague is Professor of Theology in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. Her previous book, *Metaphorical Theology*, established her as one of America's leading feminist theologians through its assault on the allegedly patriarchal character of traditional Christian images for speaking of God. The present work is not, strictly speaking, an example of feminist theology; it has a broader concern – the fate of the earth, threatened as it is by destruction through pollution and/or nuclear holocaust.

The question being addressed is this: which metaphors for speaking of the relation of God and the world are most likely to provide a stimulus for human beings to take the responsibility for the fate of the earth? According to McFague, traditional images for the God-world relation view God as king, sovereign or lord and the world as his realm or property. Such 'triumphalist' images are not only unhelpful, but actually harmful because they lead either to attitudes of domination or to escapism. They lead to domination and exploitation if the one using them sees his/her relation to the world as in some way mirroring or sharing in God's power to dominate the earth. Alternatively, they lead to passivity or escapism if one is inclined to believe that the sovereign God alone is responsible for the future of the world, while human beings can do little or nothing to affect the outcome. Either way, the traditional triumphalist images for God are opposed to life, its continuation and fulfilment, and therefore must be replaced. McFague's book is at one and the same time a critique of traditional images and a search for alternatives – alternatives which she finds in speaking of God as 'mother,' 'lover,' and 'friend'.

It is important to point out however that McFague is *not* saying that 'mother,' 'lover,' and 'friend' are more accurate *descriptions* or *definitions* of the God-world relation than those they would replace. It is a complete misunderstanding of metaphor to think that it has the capacity to define or describe reality. Metaphors do not describe reality; they create it in the sense that they are productive of certain ways of being in the world. 'How the metaphor refers we do not know – or indeed even if it does. At most one wagers it does and lives as if it does, which means that the main criterion for a "true" theology is pragmatic, preferring those models of God that are helpful in the praxis of bringing about fulfilment for living beings' (p. 196). In other words, for McFague, the language we use to speak of God may or may not actually refer to something or someone, but we cannot know whether it does or not. The adequacy of a given metaphor cannot be tested by how well it corresponds to God. McFague is ultimately quite agnostic as to what God is *really* like.

Does this mean that to speak of God as 'mother,' 'lover,' and 'friend' is a completely arbitrary act? No, says McFague; some metaphors are indeed

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'better' than others but they show themselves to be 'better' not by referring to God more accurately but by 'imaging' God in such a way that those who hear this image will respond to it with actions that are in the service of peace, justice, and a holistic understanding of the interdependence of all life on our planet. Metaphors thus have an 'as if' quality to them. They invite us to act as if they were true, to live within them for a while and see what kind of life they promote.

Given her pragmatic conception of truth, it is not surprising that McFague says there are many other sources of 'appropriate' metaphors than the Bible. Its metaphors were appropriate for expressing the Christian myth in that age but we cannot simply continue using those metaphors as if there were something sacred about them. In any case, the metaphors of 'king,' 'sovereign' and 'lord' had their place in a mythology that saw '... Jesus as "fully God and fully man," the substitutionary sacrifice who atoned for the sins of the world two thousand years ago and who now reigns triumphant along with all who loyally accept his kingly, gracious forgiveness of their sins' (p. 54). Such a myth is no longer credible. If we continue to hang on to it 'we not only accept a salvation we do not need but weaken if not destroy our ability to understand and accept the salvation we do need'. The idea that salvation comes through one representative individual is contrary to the view of salvation that is needed in our time, *viz.* the de-stabilizing of all patterns of relating in our world that divide us (rich/poor, Jew/Gentile, male/female, white/coloured, straight/gay, Christian/non-Christian, *etc.*). Salvation is not something achieved by one individual two thousand years ago but something we must do in our day. Metaphors like 'mother,' 'lover,' and 'friend' are no more sacrosanct than those they replace but they have the advantage of being more conducive to promoting this view of salvation.

It would be only to state the obvious to say that, from a biblical-Reformational standpoint, there is little in McFague's position that is specifically Christian. In any case, it would scarcely come to Dr McFague as a chastisement. She regards the biblical-Reformational outlook in theology as anachronistic.

More fruitful would be a discussion of which theology (McFague's or the more traditional one) is more conducive of a Christian existence characterized by effective opposition to oppression and exploitation in our world. McFague is right on one point: conservative Christians have all too often taken the escapist position of assuming that only the Lord's return will cure the problems which confront us and thus have opted out of active engagement against the principalities and powers that oppress and divide us. But is escapism (or worse, open participation in powers of domination) really promoted by traditional Christianity? Is it not rather a misunderstanding by Christians of the demands placed upon them by the gospel?

Careful attention must be given too to McFague's 'pragmatic' conception of truth. She argues that her choice of metaphors is not arbitrary because there is a criterion which governs their selection. That criterion is their capacity for promoting the ends she values as 'good' and 'right.' But this is only to push the problem of arbitrariness back one step. McFague is frankly utilitarian in justifying her means (new metaphors for God) by her ends. But she is completely incapable of offering a justification for the values with which she

then justifies her means. The values are themselves arbitrarily selected. She would like to believe that the universe is neither indifferent nor malevolent, but that there is a power which is on the side of life and its fulfilment (p. 195), and *if* this were the case, it might arguably provide some grounding for her choice of goals. But she herself regards belief in this power as a wager, a 'shy ontological claim' (p. 197). She claims not to *know* whether such a thing exists at all. The most she can say is that the notion that 'God' is on the side of life and its fulfilment is a necessary 'initial assumption.' On close inspection, however, this assumption is not made necessary by any supporting evidence but only by its necessity for promoting her ends. This is of course to justify her values by appeal to the assumption that God is on the side of life and at the same time, to justify the assumption by the values. McFague recognizes the circularity here but is unwilling to consider any other option (p. 192). The arbitrariness of this procedure is unrelenting.

It is difficult to believe that liberating existence will be promoted on such transparently shaky grounds. If the choice of goals is arbitrary, then the choice to oppress has every bit as much legitimacy as the choice for liberating solidarity with the oppressed; the decision to exploit the earth as much legitimacy as the decision to respect and conserve it. The ecological crisis and the threat of nuclear destruction are all too real but we will hardly find theological resources for effective political action here.

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### **Priesthood & Ministry in Crisis**

Terence Card

SCM Press Ltd., London, 1988; 128pp., £6.95, paperback; ISBN 0 334 00277 X

This book addresses the crisis to be found in understandings of the (ordained) priesthood and ministry. Its main characteristic, however, is a philosophically existentialist viewpoint. Though aimed at a wide readership, the popular manner in which it is introduced belies this philosophical content.

Formally, it is helpfully laid out. It begins by pointing to the fact that this is a time of change. It then diagnoses the different problems which are afflicting the ordained ministry, especially, but not only, in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. The main body of the book is made up of an appreciation of three important recent books on the ministry: R.C. Moberly's *Ministerial Priesthood*, written in 1897, but reissued in 1969; Yves Congar's *Lay People in the Church*, written in 1951 and published in English in 1957; and Edward Schillebeeckx' *The Church with a Human Face*, published in 1985. An existentialist critique is then made of some of the presuppositions behind past views of the ordained ministry. Finally, Card attempts to contribute to the new image of ministry which he feels is being discovered.

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The whole is informed by a basically existentialist outlook. One advantage of this is that it sensitises Card to the Idealist emphases of Moberly and Congar, for whom the ordained are the essential Holy Church and the laity are the objects, not the subjects, of ministry. Another advantage is that it enables Card to look at modern problems in the ministry in a pragmatic, contextual and flexible way.

On the other hand, this existentialist outlook leads Card to disparage those who seek to apply biblical norms to the ministry and those who want to learn from church tradition (p. 5). Also, in reacting against an overemphasis on the transcendent, Card almost loses it completely. The worst aspect of this is that it is difficult to see any absolutes, or any place for absolutes, in Card's view of the church or of the ministry.

An interesting book in that it illustrates and clarifies the trends of modern Christian existentialist thinking regarding the ministry, the helpfulness of its constructive thinking is increasingly questionable, the more one holds to absolute norms for the church and the ministry as being divinely ordained and revealed in Scripture.

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### **Believing in Baptism**

Gordon Kuhrt

Mowbray, London & Oxford, 1987; 186pp., £5.95, paperback ; ISBN 0 264 67088 4.

Subtitled more informatively 'Christian Baptism – its theology and practice', this book is an account of baptism which takes the Bible with the utmost seriousness. The author is an Anglican parish minister and experienced lecturer, and not surprisingly argues the case for infant baptism – 'Christian family baptism', as he likes to call it. But he is intolerant of attempts, such as he finds in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, to rely on the witness of tradition, claiming instead that the practice is a 'legitimate inference' from three biblical principles – of the covenant, the family and the sacraments.

At the same time, discrimination in baptismal administration is strongly advocated, and some sensitivity is evident, on this and other issues, to baptist convictions. Canon Kuhrt seems to favour the dual-practice baptismal policy of the United Reformed Church and an increasing number of other churches. Yet he is steadfastly opposed to re-baptism, while accepting that some 'untidiness' is probably inescapable in an imperfect world and church.

Throughout the book a concern to be balanced and fair is evident, as also an endeavour to encompass infant and 'adult' baptism within a single baptismal theology. One could fault its interpretations or reasoning at this or that point (e.g. the use of Ephesians 4:5, and the exaggeration of the parallelism between old and new covenants), but it will prove a useful resource

resource for those involved in teaching about and preparing others for baptism.

Ironically enough for a book of this title, I found the treatment of faith's relation to baptism a particularly disappointing feature, seen, for example, in the short shrift given to the baptist position and also in the repeated use of the vague phrase 'in the context of faith', which a baptist might fairly view as a blurring of biblical evidence.

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*University of Edinburgh.*

### **Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians**

Frances Young and David F. Ford

SPCK, London, 1987; 289pp, £10.95; ISBN 0 281 04317 5

The third in the 'Biblical Foundations in Theology' series, edited by James Dunn and James Mackey, is both a study of Paul's letter from various angles, and a more general exercise in the science of hermeneutics. It is not a detailed analysis of the text, nor a book about the theology of 2 Corinthians, yet aspects of both are covered. It is a stimulating and in many places exciting book to grapple with, and serves both as a study of the Epistle and as a fairly detailed example of the state of the art of biblical interpretation.

The letter is understood as a self-defence by Paul, giving in his absence an apology for his mission. The main theme is the glory of God and the reputation of Paul (neatly summed up by the single Greek word *doxa*), the letter is regarded as a unity (a view persuasively argued), and less attention is paid to Paul's opponents and to the change of circumstances between 1 and 2 Corinthians than is often the case in commentaries. While arguing each point, general comments are made on the value (or not) of 'background' material, authorship and integrity. A balanced position is given.

As well as other ancient material, the OT is explored for sources of Paul's ideas, and regarded as the most important. Psalms (especially 110-118), prophets (particularly Jeremiah) and wisdom are found to have been an influence, though Moses is Paul's main model. A more detailed exposition of 4:7 - 5:10 is given as a sample of detailed exegesis. Context and background are treated seriously, and an objective rather than subjective analysis is given. Some of the views expressed are refreshingly thought-provoking; *e.g.* that it was Paul and not the opponents who began to make claims about divine revelations, and when this backfired he turned to death and resurrection as the sign of an apostle; also, that 'the God of this world' is not, as convention has it, Satan - but God himself.

The second section of the book (by Ford) underpins the work by considering the theory of hermeneutics. Drawing chiefly (though not uncritically) on Gadamer and Ricoeur, we are presented with a 'hermeneutics of retrieval'. The 'economy of God' is explored as a metaphor - quite fascinatingly, though at times it is a little difficult to see how the ideas are linked together. An excellent social analysis is given, which connects Corinthian society with the themes of reputation and boasting in the letter. It is a first-rate example of

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how 'background' (as well as the recent trends in sociological analysis) can illuminate a text.

The book ends, after a rather disappointing chapter on the authority of Paul, with the theme 'the glory of God' (in the face of Jesus Christ), which is seen as the focus of the whole epistle.

2 Corinthians has been a neglected book (with the outstanding exceptions of the works of Georgi and Barrett). Often seen as difficult to understand, Young and Ford bring an exciting perspective to it. Personally, the first section (by Young) was the more illuminating, but the book as a whole cannot be too highly praised. This is biblical scholarship at its best and most positive. I am glad that the last chapter is the authors' own translation of the text, since the book left me with a great desire simply to read 2 Corinthians. That should be the effect of any book about the Bible. Hopefully, my reading of the text will now be more illuminated.

Let us hope that the chapter omitted due to lack of space, on Paul's theology in 2 Corinthians and Romans, appears elsewhere as a book in its own right. We could benefit from more work of this calibre.

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### **Youth in the City**

Peter Stow with Mike Fearon

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1987; 208pp., £2.50, paperback;  
ISBN 0 340 41047 7

*Youth in the City* is an informative and challenging book written by Peter Stow, a youth worker based in Hackney, East London, and Mike Fearon, a freelance writer also living in the East End. Their aim is to show how the love and compassion of Christ can be demonstrated in situations such as the East End of London.

The book is essentially in two parts. In the first Peter Stow offers an autobiographical account of his own childhood and adolescence in East London. He tells movingly of his own conversion to Christ through the friendship and concern of Christians at a time of crisis in his life and through the power of Christian worship at a funeral service. On becoming a Christian he trained to befriend and influence others in youth work; and he tells the vivid, tragic stories of many of the young people he has met both in open youth work on the streets and in the church-based St Paul's Club where he now works. Practical insights in youth club leadership in the urban setting are also given and useful advice about the importance of developing a personal and family life in the midst of what so easily could be an overwhelming situation.

The second part contains helpful sections on how issues such as 'Education and Home Environment' and 'Violence and Crime' affect young people in the inner city areas; and then in the concluding two chapters he offers three

challenges to the church: first, to inner city churches the challenge to use social action as a stepping stone to evangelism; secondly, to suburban and rural churches the challenge to be involved not just through prayer but also through releasing people for service in the inner city – leading from ‘behind the scenes’ as part of a team; and thirdly, to all churches the challenge to pioneer radically transformed modes of Christian worship relevant to people – particularly the younger generation.

*Youth in the City* has a message for all readers. To those involved in Christian youth work in the urban setting there is much practical advice offered from years of experience; to those outwith it offers an understanding of the powerlessness and hopelessness of so many young people in our inner cities and it offers a challenge to involvement in Christ’s Name.

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St Columba Church of Scotland  
Kilmalcolm.

### **The Unacceptable Face: The Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian**

John Kent

SCM Press, London, 1987; vii + 251 pp., £12.50, paperback; ISBN 0 334 01712 2.

The newly retired Professor of Theology at the University of Bristol has written a critical guide to the literature on the history of the church since the Reformation. It is an expansion and updating of the survey included in the second volume of the *Pelican Guide to Modern Theology*, published in 1969. Most of the items included are in English, and, though some are in French, none is in German or other languages. Certain books receive no more than a sentence; others are appraised over several pages. There are chapters on general accounts of church history, on the early modern period for the continent and for England, on subsequent English Protestantism, on later continental and American developments, on Catholic Modernism, on Christian missions and on the ecumenical movement.

Professor Kent specialises in trenchant comments. The ‘rise and fall of Calvinism’, we read on page 1, was ‘disastrous’. There was no national spiritual renewal at the time of the Evangelical Revival ‘unless that is what one means by Regency’ (p. 232). In our day ‘the religiously-minded’ can grapple only with ‘impersonal theism ... religion in a valid Buddhist style’ (p. 220). It will already have become apparent that the author does not share the convictions held by most readers of this journal.

It is assumed that ‘the historian’ of the title will regard religion as ‘a matter of the satisfaction of subjective, psychological needs’ (p. 33). That is because history has been secularised since the eighteenth century as part of the deChristianisation that the author sees as unidirectional and inexorable. Historians tend to be evaluated according to whether or not they are ‘uncommitted’ rather than ‘committed’. Those who point out unChristian motives or inhumane attitudes in the churches receive the loudest praise. But



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there is room for doubt about the author's approved perspectives. Should missions, for instance, be seen as attempted compensation for the loss of domestic influence?

Professor Kent's wide-ranging survey will undoubtedly point most of its readers to previously unknown recent books. Yet there are strange omissions, including Patrick Collinson on Puritanism and David Hempton on Methodism. The coverage is in fact highly selective. There are also oddities of organisation, as when works on the Netherlands and France appear in an English chapter (p. 65). The bibliography will no doubt help the undergraduates, candidates for the ministry and practising ministers for whom the book must be primarily designed. They are likely to find it not only informative, but also provocative.

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### **Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14**

D.A. Carson

Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1987; 229pp., £10.95, paperback;  
ISBN 0 8010 2521 4

Professor Donald Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, is one of evangelicalism's most prolific writers of recent years. In this book, he deals with one of the most controversial areas of contemporary Christian theology and personal experience; the challenge of the charismatic movement. Aware of the polarization which has taken place in many situations, Carson is concerned to look beyond the caricatures drawn by both charismatics and non-charismatics of those who do not share their views on the Holy Spirit. He believes that we need to study, in depth, the three chapters in 1 Corinthians which are at the heart of the matter, and offers a theological exposition which is not only New Testament exegesis of the quality we have come to expect from the writer, but an attempt to relate the exegesis to other doctrinal matters, and to linguistic, social, historical, practical, and popular issues relevant to the contemporary debate.

The material is dealt with in five chapters, four containing the detailed exposition, and the last reflections on various theological issues which arise from exegetical work, including the nature of the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Acts, second-blessing theology, the nature of revelation, and the normativity of historical precedent for doctrine and experience. He concludes with thoughts on the charismatic renewal in general and offers specifically pastoral advice as to how to deal with potentially divisive issues if and when they arise. This he does from his own pastoral experience prior to engaging in full-time academic work.

The treatment of the subject is scholarly and thorough, and assumes a serious intent on the part of the reader. Yet reference is made to popular as

well as academic literature, and the argument may be followed and appreciated without too much reference to the extensive footnotes which demonstrate Professor Carson's encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject, having researched English, German, French, and other language sources.

The result is a work which commands our attention as convincing, wise, balanced, stimulating, and practical. Here is no magnanimous attempt to embrace every shade of opinion to persuade us that there is really no controversy at all. Yet there is a willingness to 'take flak' from both sides of the debate if need be. Here is a snippet:

In short, I see biblical support for the thesis that although all true believers have received the Holy Spirit and have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the Holy Spirit is not necessarily poured out on each individual Christian in precisely equivalent quantities (if I may use the language of quantity inherent in the metaphor of 'filling').... Although I find no support for a second-blessing theology, I do find support for a second-, third-, fourth-, or fifth-blessing theology. Although I find no *charisma* biblically established as the criterion of a second enduement of the Spirit, I do find that there are degrees of unction, blessing, service, and holy joy, along with some more currently celebrated gifts, associated with those whose hearts have been specially touched by the sovereign God. Although I think it extremely dangerous to pursue a second blessing attested by tongues, I think it no less dangerous not to pant after God at all, and thus be satisfied with a merely creedal Christianity that is kosher but complacent, orthodox but ossified, sound but sound asleep. (p. 160)

We are indebted to Professor Carson, once again, for providing us with honest help with real problems of exegesis and ecclesiology. The concerned reader will find much to help and instruct; the serious student will discover a quarry from which he may dig deeply with great profit.

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### **Eternal God: A Study of God without Time**

Paul Helm

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988; 230pp., £25, hardback; ISBN 0 19 824478 9.

One of the more exciting developments in religious publishing is the spate of philosophical studies about God which have appeared in recent years. Not so long ago, philosophers were generally dismissing 'God-talk' as meaningless and avoiding theological questions as much as possible. But in the 1980's the pendulum has swung very much the other way. The names of Swinburne, Ward, Wolterstorff, Plantinga, Pike and of course, Helm, testify to the change of climate in which scholars no longer debate God's existence, but rather examine his character instead.

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This change has produced both lively debate and a new consensus of sorts on certain thorny problems. One of these is the question of God's dwelling outside time, a concept which has been rejected by the majority of modern theists on the grounds that it is incoherent in itself and incompatible with other things we want to affirm both about God and about man. In this book Paul Helm challenges the current consensus, seeking to demonstrate that the notion of a timeless God is fully compatible with everything else we know or might want to say about him.

As in many books of this type, there is a large amount of space given to anecdotal argument, a useful device for making abstract ideas intelligible to the general reader. However, it may be necessary to take these passages rather slowly, so as not to lose the point of the discussion! Helm argues that the need to posit divine spacelessness involves an equal need to posit divine timelessness, and then goes on to point out that the objections raised against God's omniscience and omnipotence cannot be satisfactorily resolved if God is thought to exist only within time. The idea that a timeless being cannot relate to a time-conditioned universe is refuted in great detail, and considerable attention is paid to the meaning of the term 'present' in relation to the past and to the future.

Whether Helm's arguments will carry conviction in philosophical circles remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that his case is well-made and deserves to be taken seriously. It is also interesting, and encouraging, to note that he remains faithful to the Westminster Confession as his standard of theology. From the theologian's point of view, it may be regretted that he did not make more use of traditional theological terminology, which might have helped his argument at certain key points. For example, he could have made good use of the distinction between God's persons (*hypostaseis*) and his substance (*ousia*) to explain how God could be both timeless in himself and still relate to his creation. It is particularly interesting to note that Helm recognises the difficulties which the term 'person' causes a philosopher (p. 57) and so doubly disappointing that he does not make use of theological concepts at this point. He could also have employed the traditional distinction between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God to get across the point he is trying to make in the last chapter, since that seems to be what he is talking about.

However, these are minor points in the context of the whole, and readers will be stimulated and challenged by this book to think through the meaning of theism for believers today.

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**Theology and Sociology: A Reader**

Edited by Robin Gill

Geoffrey Chapman, London/Paulist Press, New York, 1987; 424pp., no price; paperback; ISBN 0225 66522 0.

For more than a century, theology and sociology have experienced mutual attraction as well as hostility, a love-hate relationship which has provoked a whole gamut of responses. In this reader, Gill wisely avoids trying to survey the whole range and chooses instead to work around a particular understanding of the two disciplines. Theology is 'the written and critical explication of the *sequelae* of individual religious beliefs and of the correlations and interactions between religious beliefs in general' (p. 12). There is no corresponding attempt to define 'sociology', only a declaration of affinity with Max Weber's understanding of the mutual interaction between belief systems and social structure (rather confusingly labelled 'interactionist', considering that this term is most often applied to a school which emphasises the interpersonal basis of social order). The book strongly reflects Gill's personal commitment to both disciplines and the distinctive contribution of his previous work on the social context of theology. It is therefore neither a reader in the sociology of religion nor a purely abstract survey of the problems of theory and method which are of mutual interest to the two disciplines. Instead, it displays the results of 'conversations' between theology and sociology from the classic contributions of Weber, Troeltsch, Durkheim and Mannheim (Section One) up to the present day, with a view to providing the basic vocabulary and understanding for a theology which is fully cognizant of its own context and prepared to face up to its actual or potential effects on society. The sections on 'Implications for Theological Studies' and 'Implications for Biblical Studies' will be of particular interest to students working in these areas. Section Four tackles the difficult issue of how the interaction between the two disciplines can inform practical or pastoral theology and Christian ethics.

The 28 readings, generally critical and exploratory in nature, each have a brief introduction and the book opens with a brief general introduction which explains the logic of the selection. The layout and the numbering of the paragraphs (which some may find too obtrusive) make this, like Gill's *Textbook of Christian Ethics*, an easy book to use for teaching, albeit one which is quite demanding in content. It is likely that the majority of readers will come from the discipline of theology rather than sociology for the simple reason that issues of religion and belief are unfortunately not in the mainstream of sociological theory and analysis at the present time. It should, however, stimulate more self-awareness in the use of sociology in theological education, where courses on modern society, social problems and sociology of religion are often tacked on to the 'core' subjects without a proper consideration of the implications of using a mode of thought which is inherently critical, empirical and reflexive.

The range of articles in this collection is broad in terms of both theological and sociological perspectives. Where there are apparent omissions (for example, Marxist sociology and liberation theology) there is reasonable justification. It is an interesting comment on the state of British sociology and not a fault of the book that, with the obvious exception of David Martin,

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there are scarcely any British contributors who represent the flow of ideas from sociology to theology rather than the other way round. This book is an important demonstration of how much both disciplines have to gain from this process.

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### **Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation**

*(Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, Vol 3),*

Tremper Longman III, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1987; 164 pp., paperback, \$12.95; ISBN 0 310 40941 1.

This short book is a clear account of modern approaches to biblical interpretation which are concerned with its character as literature and which help the reader to understand it better in the light of its literary aspects. This type of approach has come to the fore in recent years, sometimes in opposition to the older type of study of the historical context of the writings, and in some quarters it has generated an alarming amount of opaque jargon.

In the first part of his book Longman emphasises that the Bible is a collection of literary texts and offers a helpful guide to the various types of current approach. Approaches like 'New Criticism', 'Structuralism' and 'Deconstruction' are helpfully – but rather too briefly – summarised. Their origins in secular literary criticism and their application to biblical studies are both laid out. Their weaknesses and strengths are listed. The author's own approach is by way of examination of the author, the text, and the readers, and he notes that biblical texts can have a variety of functions, including entertainment.

In the second part of the book the author turns to application of literary methods. He discusses the characteristics of Hebrew narrative and the different ways in which narratives 'work' and illustrates them from two representative samples. Then he examines the nature of Hebrew poetry – considering the use of parallelism and imagery and noting current scepticism regarding the presence of metre.

This is an easily read introductory discussion which whets the appetite. Its weaknesses are two. First, it does merely whet the appetite; its discussions of modern methods are rather tantalisingly brief. Second, when it comes to 'application', we get very little illustration of the modern methods described in the 'theoretical' section.

The author writes from an evangelical standpoint, and he rightly criticises those critics who would argue that the historical basis of the literature is irrelevant and that the text has a life of its own irrespective of its relation to history. But he also affirms that literary methods are appropriate and fruitful for biblical study, and he shows how there is much value for biblical students

in recognising the literary qualities of the Bible. It is much to be hoped that this and other works in the same series may become available in this country – and at prices that students can afford!

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**Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology**

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1987; 398 pp. hardback ISBN 0 89870 133 3

The popular press portrays Ratzinger as the head of some new Inquisition, but if this book represents his true mind, he comes through clearly as a humble though formidable Catholic dogmatic theologian offering building bricks for Christendom to create a fresh fundamental theology. To this task he brings an immense erudition, a command of the history of doctrine, and an extensive reading of both secular thought and literature, combining this powerful intellectual equipment with a deep faith and genuine spirituality, all devoted to a concern for the church and its message for the world expressed in biblical and evangelical terms.

In Part One – a Catholic view of the formal principles of Christianity, he gives a masterly, learned and irenic treatment of the key ideas of faith, in relation to church and sacraments, as well as in its biblical content and meaning. In this section he analyses the meaning of Scripture in relation to tradition, and makes a powerful plea for a fresh emphasis and understanding of the significance of patristic study, with less emphasis on *aggiornamento*. He stresses the importance of the dogmatic concerns and victories of the great Fathers in their formulation of the creeds, and offers some refreshing views on the role of modern short formulae of faith. In this section he has some splendid chapters on salvation-history in relation to metaphysics and eschatology. The whole section is an effective explanation of fidelity to 'the faith once delivered to the saints', as he champions Catholic orthodoxy. It is both powerful and persuasive.

Part Two turns to the ecumenical debate in which he discusses Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism. He distinguishes the differences, and relates all three to our contemporary situation. He is keenly sensitive to past errors of ecumenical practice, its current difficulties, and to inter-church relationships, and humbly prays for a prophetic break-through (of God, not man), to a community seeking the truth in love and not claiming it in pride. The modest realism of this section is most encouraging.

He continually draws attention to the actual text of Vatican II, now often over-looked, and stresses the importance of its documents for the whole of Christendom. He has an excellent chapter on the ministry and the priesthood, followed by an exposition of the doctrine of the church, again reminding us of the thinking of Vatican II.

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A few misunderstandings of Luther are betrayed, e.g. that Luther considered himself an authority equal to Paul (p. 221); on Luther's doctrine of the church (throughout); on Luther's doctrine of justification by faith (throughout), though there are times when he understands Luther better than some Lutherans.

He concludes his book with a section on theological method. Here he makes the striking thesis that Scripture alone is theology because it has God as its subject: it does not speak of God, it lets God speak. He may or may not know it, but here he is echoing Luther.

A noteworthy feature of this weighty book is that it combines a brilliant exposition of Catholic theology with a deep concern that it be understood and directed to the pastoral problems of the church today. The author gives a learned account of the true foundation of Catholic theology and the continual need of the ever-expanding expression of its substance. He analyses acutely and concernedly the ecumenical problem of the present generation. He relates faith to the understanding of it expressed in history, not least alongside the development of philosophical thinking. The whole work has a refreshing evangelical thrust, the true mark of a sound Catholic theologian. He seems to see himself as on a quixotic quest for the foolishness of truth.

The book is heavy going, typical of German scholarship and makes demanding reading: it is a scholar's text. Nevertheless, it is handling profound and intractable themes, and constitutes no greater challenge than Christ's simpler words, 'Follow me!'

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### **God & Evolution: Creation, Evolution and the Bible**

R.J. Berry

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1988; 189pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 340 34249 8

This book is an expanded and updated rewriting of an earlier book by Professor Berry entitled *Adam and the Ape*. The book opens by considering the relevance of the evolution-creation controversy – with which Berry has a clear disenchantment (ch. 1). He then reviews the idea of evolution from Plato to Darwin (ch. 2), before considering the biblical account (chs 3-4). Chapter 5 considers evolution and science in this century. Chapters 6 and 7 are essentially an attack on 'creationism'. The book ends with an affirmation of what Professor Berry believes.

The purpose of this book is a pastoral one – to rescue young people from the false teaching of 'creationism'. The basic thesis of Berry is that neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory is a fact which cannot be scientifically disputed. He writes: 'There may be disagreement about interaction or relative importance of particular mechanisms, but there is no viable scientific alternative to Darwinian evolution for understanding nature.' Although he

concedes that: 'Microevolution is a fact, macroevolution is not, in the same sense.'

Berry expounds the idea that God took over a pre-man who became the first Adam. When Adam fell this involved a spiritual death which had no biological consequences as the image of God is spiritual and non-biological.

The book has a polemical tone readily seen in passages such as the following: 'I have no wish or evidence to impugn the integrity of "creationists", but they are enthusiasts and skilled in debating, whereas most scientists are not interested in or practised in debate.' The implication seems to be that creationists cannot be scientists! Berry sweepingly claims that there is now no 'scientific' attack on the neo-Darwinian position as it has developed over the years. He discards the opposition thus: 'The fear that has "creationism" as one of its symptoms produces stunted Christians, unable or unwilling to "leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity", and which encourages a ghetto mentality.'

This book is stimulating yet unsatisfying. Professor Berry falls into a faith-rationality dichotomy. 'God is apprehended through faith, not rational understanding.' Faith seems to be denuded of reason. We see this dichotomy in further statements such as: 'The evidence for evolution comes from science; the evidence for creation comes from faith.' This is inadequate both scientifically and theologically. It ignores the role of faith in scientific activity, and shuts faith up into the gaps left over by science!

Perhaps the greatest problem is his discussion on death. Berry sees the curse of the Fall as affecting man spiritually – but not biologically. Such distinction divides man up in a nature/grace dichotomy. This diminishes the biblical understanding of death as a consequence of the Fall. Certainly there is a primary spiritual consequence. But surely the great litany of Genesis 5 'and he died' is testimony to the physical consequence of the Fall.

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### **Dilemmas: A Christian Approach to Moral Decision-Making**

Richard Higginson

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1988; 238pp., £7.95;

ISBN 0 340 41061 2

'Quandary ethics' are frowned on these days; so the title of this book, which inaugurates a new series on Christian Ethics, seems to want to burke a trend. And so it does. Richard Higginson considers the objections currently abroad to discussing dilemmas, and is unimpressed by them. Whatever else may properly be treated by moralists in the course of their duties, dilemmas arise. They are part of our moral experience, and we should discuss them too. But does the author have it in mind to follow a yet more reactionary path, and organise a



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*comprehensive* introduction to ethics around the subject of dilemmas? Of that I cannot be sure.

After an introductory stage-setting exercise Richard Higginson states his main theme in terms of the opposition between an ethic of consequences and an ethic of obligation, surveying these alternatives first in their most representative modern philosophical guises, and then by asking to which, if either, elements of biblical ethics and Christian tradition conform. Three central chapters then introduce a sub-theme: the difference between public and private moral decisions and whether there is ever no right thing to be done. The final section returns to the initial antithesis, and commutes it into forms which the author thinks more serviceable: the dialectic of love and justice and the ordering of principles in the light of priorities. There are features in this conceptual transformation which I find elusive, and it is tempting to wonder whether the initial problematic of consequences and obligations arose not from the ostensible subject of the book but from the need to give the untutored reader a general orientation to modern ethical theory.

But, after all, how do you write a book simply about 'dilemmas'? If you try to write only about what all dilemmas have in common, you write a very abstract book, while if you write first about this kind of dilemma and then about that, you sacrifice the intellectual unity of the undertaking. In the end, one can only be impressed by the way in which Richard Higginson has balanced the demands of cohesion and concreteness, to produce a book which, intended so or not, will in fact provide a very satisfactory introduction to ethics.

His introductions to major literature are stimulating. Especially useful is the well-judged discussion of Helmut Thielicke on 'sinning boldly'. His display of examples is varied: some hardy perennials (such as poor Mrs Bergmeier, who deserves a rest after all these years), the usual hothouse blooms culled from bioethics and just-war theory, but also some engaging wild flowers, such as what to tell the children about sex and how the news media ought to refer to Colonel Gadaffi. Occasionally one has a sense of things wrapped up too quickly, as in the brief treatment of environmental decisions at the end. But on the whole the chief pleasure of the book lies in the manner in which Higginson proceeds: pleasantly reasonable, judicious, fair to all sides, accessible to any thoughtful reader but without slumming. May we have something more specialised from the same pen?

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*Christ Church*  
*Oxford.*

**Sexual Integrity: The Answer to AIDS**

Jack Dominionian

Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987; 149pp., £4.95; ISBN 0 232 51750 9

The author of this book is a Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at the Central Middlesex Hospital in London, well-known for his work and writings in marriage counselling. He writes as a psychiatrist and makes use of contemporary psychological insights into sexuality which he regards as congruent with the Christian revelation (p. 136).

The author's response to the problem of AIDS is summed up as 'sexual integrity', which he describes as 'a principle which governs human conduct from the time of conception to death' (p. 149). He avoids the word 'chastity' because of its negative associations. The Press release on the book claimed that he had formulated 'a whole new sexual ethic' with which he hoped to establish the Christian Church as 'a champion of loving sex'.

The book discusses sexual behaviour in the past twenty-five years and the present government AIDS campaign which Dominionian regards as fundamentally misconceived. He makes several statements which are disquieting from a Christian point of view. Having noted his claim to be a dissenting Roman Catholic, we are not surprised to find him rejecting his Church's attitude to contraception. We are, however, surprised to find him arguing that there are circumstances in which premarital intercourse is acceptable (p. 70). He also argues for the permissibility of homosexual genital activity on the basis of natural law and Scripture. He maintains that scriptural guidance is uncertain because we must interpret the relevant texts in terms of their time and culture, which is different from our own today (p. 24).

Dominian concludes on a two-fold note: first, that we can ultimately understand the mystery of sexuality in God himself by realising that the purpose of sexual intercourse is to promote the bonding of two partners rather than procreation. Second, that AIDS is to be regarded as an episode in the long history of dialogue between God and man aimed at promoting a new basis for sexual morality, namely, sexual integrity.

We must agree with the author that those who indulge in unnatural and unethical sexual practices need the compassion and help of Christians. We can agree also that the answer to AIDS is to be found in the adequate preparation of young people for their sexual responsibilities by their training in Christian morality from an early age by their parents, their church and school. We doubt, however, whether the degree of permissiveness accepted in this book forms any part of the answer to AIDS. What is allowed here is much more likely to spread HIV infection than to prevent it.

The book contains no notes and no index.

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### **The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World**

Sinclair B. Ferguson

The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1987, 171pp, £2.50 ISBN 0 85151 5193

In his introduction, the author promises us a 'popular' exposition, non-technical, rather like an *hors d'oeuvre*. The book fulfils the promise. The sermon is seen as a description of the lifestyle of those in the kingdom of God, and we are given a brief commentary on it, section by section. For anyone who has studied Matthew 5-7 in even moderate depth, this book will offer few new insights. It is a starter only.

The book lacks literary considerations and does not engage with the critical questions which the sermon poses. It is accepted as the text of a sermon actually preached by Jesus (p. 149), and the parallel passages are not discussed. Only very occasionally are concessions made to criticism, e.g. where the ending of the Lord's Prayer is described as the early church's own doxology (p. 132).

Typological exegesis is used in places (e.g. p. 15, dealing with Abraham and Christ); some themes such as 'righteousness' are interpreted through Pauline material (p. 28); but above all, we are given a spiritualised treatment of the text: 'those who mourn' is taken to refer to grief over one's sins (p. 18), 'peacemakers' are really people engaged in evangelism and who seek ecclesiastical harmony (p. 38f). See also the comments on 'daily bread'. The rewards promised in the beatitudes are explained as the future kingdom felt now, and little is made of the eschatological aspect.

The commentary lacks a practical or social dimension, and tends to be personal, spiritual and introspective. If this was indeed the text of a sermon which Jesus preached, then he does not appear to have been a man of his time. One other shortcoming is the caricature of Pharisaism (p. 112-116), which is out of touch with modern scholarship on the subject. The Pharisees are seen as the archetypal hypocrites, trying to gain salvation by works. The most useful and stimulating part of the book is the section on Jesus, the law, and the Christian (p. 67-77), which is well worth reading.

Biblical references are numerous, and cross-references are often used to interpret a text. Unfortunately, no index of references is given.

An *hors d'oeuvre* should whet the appetite for the main course. This one does, though if that is all that is served, one is left feeling hungry rather than satisfied.

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