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**SCOTTISH
BULLETIN
OF
EVANGELICAL
THEOLOGY**

Volume 14 Number 1 Spring 1996

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EDITORIAL

SCOTLAND: GOSPEL AND CULTURE

The four papers presented in this issue of the *Bulletin* were first given at a day conference of the Aberdeen School of Christian Studies in May 1994 under the title 'Scotland: Gospel and Culture'. Chairing the conference was Dr. William Storrar, Lecturer in Practical Theology in the University of Aberdeen and himself a vigorous contributor to national discussion of the conference theme, not least through his book *Scottish Identity: a Christian Vision* (Handsell Press, Edinburgh, 1990).

Setting the agenda in the conference programme were a string of questions:

Are national history and national identity relevant to the progress and nature of the Christian cause in Scotland? What impact has Evangelical Christianity had on the development of Scottish society, and how has Christianity in Scotland been influenced by its cultural environment? What is the present importance of distinctively Scottish culture for Christians in Scotland? How have Gaelic language and culture interacted with Christian experience, and how do they now interact? What is the importance of such factors as language, geography, national institutions (legal, social, political and ecclesiastical) and church history in determining our *Christian* identity and character?

SBET is pleased to be able to offer to a wider readership the four papers that addressed these questions in Aberdeen. For they are posed at a time of critical transition in Scottish life.

Gallopings social and cultural change is the order of the day. To judge by the big cities, the Scottish sabbath is dead and buried. Regions in the north and west where it still commands some respect are nevertheless not immune to lottery-mania and playground drug abuse. In traditionally Presbyterian Scotland, the only mainline denomination to be growing, according to the recent census, is the Scottish Episcopal Church, while the Church of Scotland is declining so fast that, in terms of church attendance, it will soon be clearly second to the Roman Catholic Church. The latter in turn is grappling with a grave dearth of vocations to the priesthood.

Whether Scotland is experiencing secularization or paganization, the Christian church is slipping irredeemably from its commanding height in its corporate life. Media-driven conversion to a predominantly 'pop' culture – reflected so patently even in those quality newspapers that protest their Scottishness most loudly – seems to breed an intelligentsia no longer Scottish enough to take Christianity seriously. 'Calvinism' is

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a favourite whipping-boy for all manner of ills (and pity the *Scotsman* that cannot even spell 'Calvanism' correctly).

By contrast, if there is one area of national life where the language of rebirth might still carry conviction, it is politics – or better, government. If any forecast is safe a year or less ahead of a general election, Scotland will have its own parliament again within a few years – for the first time for almost three centuries. What might this momentous development mean for the Christian good of the Scottish people? Will it free the national church – and in particular its bureaucracy and General Assembly – from its self-assigned role as guardian of the nation's political virility – and free it to re-centre its heart and mind on the great commission to make Christ's disciples of all Scots people? Will a parliament in Edinburgh serve to defend and promote Gaelic-language culture?

Another set of questions suggests itself. How ready will Scottish Evangelicals be to seize the challenges and opportunities of such epochal constitutional reform? To serve among a new generation of home-based Scottish parliamentarians? To lobby and brief and prime as effectively as a group of London-based organizations have been doing for the cause of evangelical politics and values? To instruct Christian people in the art and craft of bearing faithful witness amid a sceptical or apathetic or hostile only-lately-ex-Christian majority? To bolster Christians to plead the Christian cause without benefit of establishment or inherited privilege?

Scottish Evangelicals have a great deal of catching up to do in these reaches of cultural and social responsibility. In good part what we have to catch up with is our Reformed identity, for in grappling with the unnerving present and the daunting future we dare not be anchorless. Not that nostalgia will serve us well, whether for the heady era of revivals or the years of Tell Scotland, or even for a selectively skewed repristination of Celtic spirituality. By God's design, church history goes forward. Past centuries may furnish a rich menu of admonitions, but they cannot prescribe. There is no substitute for the hard graft of working out a distinctive Scottish evangelical Christian vocation at a time when so little of the country's Christian past can any longer be taken for granted. In this task these Aberdeen lectures will prove a rich resource.

SAINTS AND SCARECROWS: THE CHURCHES AND GAELIC CULTURE IN THE HIGHLANDS SINCE 1560

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This is a very wide topic – potentially the subject of a book, or even several books, rather than an appropriate theme for one paper.¹ Because of restrictions of space, I will need to be very careful that I do not misrepresent the complexity of the topic. Compression can force one to make generalisations, and generalisations may create unfortunate stereotypes which do not always relate to the totality of the field, though they may relate to part of it. In fact, I wish to devote the first half of my paper to the theme of generalisation, before moving to explore briefly, in the second half, the relationship between popular perception and hard fact in what is a highly emotive field. I will begin with modern views on the

¹ The title of the paper as originally given on 7th May 1994 at the one-day conference of the Aberdeen School of Christian Studies was 'Gaelic and the Gospel: Christianity and Culture in the Scottish Highlands since 1560'. I hope to produce a book on this theme, and I have therefore altered the title of the present article. Remarkably, there are only a few articles (and, so far, no books) specifically devoted to the attitudes of the Protestant Churches to Gaelic culture; see John MacInnes 'Religion in Gaelic Society', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 52 (1980-82), pp. 221-42, for important reminders of the wider dimensions of the subject. In other works by Gaelic scholars, the churches are given, at worst, only a couple of sentences, or, at best, perhaps as much as a couple of paragraphs, in broader conspectuses of the state of the Gaelic language. The churches are more generously treated in recent works by non-Gaelic historians, notably Victor E. Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), and Charles W.J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh, 1984). The problem of non-native involvement lies in the churches' own failure to produce any sustained scholarly engagement with the issues of language and culture; the most significant recent contributions in this area came from the late Revd Dr Thomas M. Murchison, of the Church of Scotland; see his Gaelic article, 'An Eaglais anns a' Ghàidhealtachd anns an Ochdamh Linn Deug' ('The Church in the Highlands in the Eighteenth Century'), in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow*, 5 (1958). Murchison contributed articles to D.S. Thomson, *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford, 1983), which gives space to several dimensions of the churches' Gaelic involvement. See also contributions by Kenneth D. MacDonald and Donald E. Meek in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, David F. Wright *et al.* (eds), *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), henceforward referred to as *DSCHT*.

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relationship between Christianity and culture in the Highlands, and then consider some specific themes.

Images of Highland Religion

'Highland religion' (so-called) has generated a number of images, negative and positive. I think it is probably true to say that many people tend to view Highland history in terms of mental images. The very mention of the present theme will have brought images to your mind. Some may see positive images, but most folk, I suspect, will see negative images, especially of very solemn and serious Highland ministers, or Highland elders, pronouncing their anathemas on levity of all kinds, fulminating against the sinful excesses of their wayward people, and standing against secular indulgence in any shape or form.

This is the first, indeed the primary, image which I wish to consider. A version of it forms the core of a modern Gaelic poem, composed by one of our leading Scottish poets, Ruaraidh MacThòmais, otherwise Professor Derick Thomson:²

Am Bodach-ròcais

An oidhch' ud
thàinig am bodach-ròcais dhan taigh-chèilidh:
fear caol ard dubh
is aodach dubh air.
Shuidh e air an t-sèis
is thuit na cairtean as ar làmhan.
Bha fear a siud
ag innse sgeulachd air Conall Gulban
is reodh na faclan air a bhilean.
Bha boireannach 'na suidh' air stòl
ag òran, 's thug e 'n toradh as a' cheòl.
Ach cha do dh'fhàg e falamh sinn:
thug e òran nuadh dhuinn,
is sgeulachdan na h-àird an Ear,
is sprùilleach de dh'fheallsanachd Geneva,
is sguab e 'n teine à meadhon an làir,
's chuir e 'n tùrlach loisgeach nar broillichean.

The Scarecrow

That night
the scarecrow came into the cèilidh-house:
a tall, thin black-haired man
wearing black clothes.
He sat on the bench

² Ruaraidh MacThòmais, *Creachadh na Clàrsaich* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 140-1.

and the cards fell from our hands.

One man

was telling a folktale about Conall Gulban
and the words froze on his lips.

A woman was sitting on a stool,
singing songs, and he took the goodness out of the music.

But he did not leave us empty-handed:

he gave us a new song,

and tales from the Middle East,

and fragments of the philosophy of Geneva,

and he swept the fire from the centre of the floor

and set a searing bonfire in our breasts.

This poem, which might well be subtitled 'Calvin comes to the cèilidh-house', is a picture of the evangelical Calvinist minister in Lewis, the island of MacThòmais' boyhood. Although no date is given, it is reasonable to assume that the poet is thinking of the early or middle years of the nineteenth century, when Evangelicalism emerged in power in Lewis. MacThòmais is contemptuous of the scarecrow: the image itself suggests lack of humanity, fear and terror, self-protection and individualism, instead of the collective solidarity of a Gaelic community. The scarecrow displaces that solidarity, symbolised by the fire; he kills off what is good within the culture, and substitutes one set of stories and songs for another ('he gave us a new song' ironically echoes Psalm 40: 'he put a new song in my mouth'). Culture is given a new orientation; in fact, an alien culture is brought in from Geneva and the Middle East. More ominously, the scarecrow destroys the collective conscience of the community, and puts the weight of responsibility on the individual conscience; the fire, once a focal point of warmth, assumes a destructive, rather than a constructive, role.

MacThòmais is not alone in presenting a less than sympathetic picture of the impact of Evangelicalism on Gaelic culture. It is fair to say that the picture of the Protestant church in the Highlands, and of the evangelical movement in particular, offered by other twentieth-century modern poets like Sorley MacLean, Donald MacAulay and Iain Crichton Smith, is a fairly negative one; it is seen as being, on the whole, insensitive to the culture, blind to social needs, and restrictive, if not dictatorial, in its demands.³ Given that the church is not self-critical, the

³ Representative poems by these poets can be accessed easily in the bilingual anthology edited by Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh, *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh, 1976); see especially MacLean's 'Ban-Ghàidheal' ('Highland Woman'), pp. 104-7, which condemns the Church for its failure to alleviate physical suffering; MacAulay's 'Soisgeul 1955' ('Gospel 1955'), pp. 192-5, which, while sympathetic to the cultural

perspectives offered by such poets are very important, and cannot be lightly dismissed.

Prose writers too can give vent to antagonistic feelings. Thus Alexander Nicolson, in his *History of Skye*, writes:

As a result of the revivals that took place in many parts of Skye in the early years of the nineteenth century, two facts emerge. In the first place, the preachers of the new evangelism waged war persistently against such popular recreations as secular music, the ancient tales and the traditional barderie, with the result that much of the native culture, developed during the course of the ages, has been irretrievably lost.⁴

Nicolson, who goes on to describe the second fact as 'a decided change in the conduct of the people, so far as their attitude to temperance was concerned', illustrates this second point effectively. He does not produce evidence in clear support of his first point, but nevertheless leaves the strong impression that Evangelicalism was the principal cause of the decay of secular culture in Skye.⁵

Evangelical Hagiography

Of course, modern secular Gaelic poets and historians are not the only image-makers. Evangelical composers and writers make images too, and a great deal of modern evangelical writing, in the Highland and Gaelic context, has promoted another potent image, obviously more favourable towards Evangelicals. Much of this image – which has achieved the status of an indelible stereotype – was created in the nineteenth century, chiefly in the second half of that century, and twentieth-century writings have been but a poor shadow of this. You will find the archetype of this kind of image-making in John Kennedy's volume, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, which has been an influential work in constructing a picture of 'highland religion'. Kennedy, a Free Church minister who opposed the methods of the American evangelist, D.L. Moody,⁶ provides a picture of the 'good old days' in Ross-shire – a region filled with solemn ministers, men and the occasional woman, who are intensely spiritual beings, with their minds firmly set on heavenly things, and spurning the things of earth. The work is rather

fusion achieved in Gaelic psalm-singing, emphasises the terror created by 'fashionable' hell-fire preaching in a cottage-meeting; and Smith's 'A' Chailleach' ('The Old Woman') pp. 172-5, which portrays the barren and dangerous formality of a world-view shaped strictly by the Bible.

4 Alexander Nicolson, *History of Skye: A Record of the Families, the Social Conditions and the Literature of the Island*, second edn. (Skye, 1994), p. 255.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3.

6 J. Kennedy, *Hyper-Evangelism: 'Another Gospel', though a Mighty Power* (Edinburgh, 1874).

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romantic and uncritical, a point illustrated by the portrayal of Kennedy's own father. This is a prime example of evangelical hagiography; Kennedy is doing for the ministers of Ross-shire what hagiographers did for the saints of the Middle Ages. His character-sketches are like the flip-side of MacThòmais' 'Scarecrow'. Here is his description of the Revd Dr Angus MacIntosh of Tain (1764-1831):

His personal appearance was remarkable. Tall and of a massive figure, a dark complexion, a face full of expression, and a bearing particularly solemn and dignified, he attracted at once the eyes of a stranger, and never failed to command his respect.... There was a gloom of awe on his countenance, as if the very shadow of Sinai were darkening it, when his heart was charged with a message of terror; and the softened cast of his features, and the gleam of light in his eye, at other times, encouraged the broken-hearted to expect a message of encouragement and comfort.⁷

Those who may not know the literary conventions of evangelical hagiography of this kind might think that this was the picture of a fear-inducing ogre. One man's scarecrow is another man's saint. Kennedy's saints, we should note, are drawn in sharp contrast to the 'worldly' ministers who were found in some Highland parishes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – the much maligned Moderates of the Established Church, whose addiction to earthly pursuits became another stereotype which was lampooned in Gaelic – by Evangelicals, of course. It is the Moderates who are generally perceived more sympathetically by academics as the promoters of Gaelic culture.⁸ As we will see, this perception can be sustained to some extent, but, on closer investigation, at least one allegedly culture-friendly 'Moderate' turns out to be warmly evangelical in his theology!⁹

Kennedy's book has little interest in Gaelic culture, since this was not his primary concern. However, he does mention Gaelic preaching – and we must recognise that his world did function very much in terms of the Gaelic language. Evangelicals like Kennedy were able to accept the Gaelic language. They had to do so, since it was vital to the communication of the gospel. Gaelic was a means to an end, but this did not apply to most other aspects of Gaelic culture. These could be overlooked or rejected – but some could be absorbed into the evangelical bloodstream without being noticed. This, I think, is a most important

⁷ J. Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (Inverness, 1979 edn.), p. 69.

⁸ A very helpful discussion of the Moderates is provided by Roderick Macleod, 'Ministearan an Arain? A Profile of Nineteenth Century Hebridean Moderates', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 52 (1980-82), pp. 243-69.

⁹ See my comments on Ewen MacDiarmid below.

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point: the churches in the Highlands absorbed unconsciously far more of Gaelic culture than they have ever cared to admit.

The image of renunciation, however, has become increasingly popular among some Evangelicals, as a means of underlining their heavenly-mindedness. It is transmitted quite bluntly and directly in the present century by at least one evangelical body in the Highlands, namely the Free Presbyterian Church. In the recent history of the Free Presbyterians, *One Hundred Years of Witness*, the Revd John MacLeod of the F.P. Church in Stornoway tells the remarkable story of how the Free Presbyterians gained a fortune and lost an opportunity to help the Gaelic language:

In 1979, the Church's determination to keep to the old paths and remain aloof from worldly practices and organisations was, in the Lord's mysterious providence, to bring its own reward. This came in the form of the Forsyth Legacy. Initially Mr Forsyth's legal agent phoned our General Treasurer with the information that his client desired to donate a substantial sum of money to the Church to help in the preservation of the Gaelic language. It was, however, to be used for that purpose in co-operation with An Comunn Gaidhealach – the body responsible for organising mods and other worldly activities in which the Church could not possibly involve itself but rather was duty bound to condemn. The offer was thus courteously declined. But instead of that being the end of the matter, as was thought, it proved to be only the beginning! Mr Forsyth, on being told that the money had been refused on a matter of principle, was so impressed by the fact that he, there and then, decided to leave the entire residue of his estate to the Church. This eventually turned out to be around two and a half million pounds.¹⁰

Such statements serve only to strengthen the opinions of those who would see Highland Evangelicalism and Protestantism generally as unsupportive of Gaelic culture. Lack of action on behalf of the language offers further ammunition: the Free Presbyterians have not supported Gaelic through the Forsyth legacy; they have not launched a new Gaelic religious periodical, nor have they established a scheme to ensure that Gaelic-speaking ministers are trained for Highland charges – both wholly laudable aims which could surely proceed without An Comunn Gaidhealach. In fact, some within the same denomination have recently claimed that the Lord's favour no longer rests on Gaelic, since the number of Free Presbyterian ministers capable of preaching in the language is in such serious decline.¹¹ It therefore appears that

¹⁰ *One Hundred Years of Witness*, with a Preface by Duncan R. MacSween (Glasgow, 1993), p. 135.

¹¹ Kenneth MacKinnon, 'Scottish Gaelic Today: Social History and Contemporary Status', in Martin J. Bail (ed.), *The Celtic Languages*

renunciation of Gaelic culture, among some religious groups in the Highlands, is now in danger of extending to the language itself. However, I must stress that this observation applies only to one denomination, and to the view of a minority within it. I have no evidence that the view is widely shared within that denomination or beyond.

Gathering these points together, I would say that, in a curious way, the image provided by the secular poets, such as Ruaraidh MacThòmais, coincides closely with certain aspects of evangelical self-definition. On the one hand, the perspective is born of antipathy towards the Protestant Church and especially its evangelical wing; on the other, the desire of certain religious bodies to emphasise their great spiritual purity, and their separation from the world, leads to a playing down, or even a renunciation, of involvement with the cultural heritage. Given such an overwhelmingly negative impression, it is perhaps quite futile to attempt an evaluation of the overall position in the hope of redressing the balance. Neither side will want to believe me!

I will need to restrict myself to a few key themes, mainly (1) Secular customs, (2) Language, (3) Literature, and (4) Song and music. These coincide with the broader thematic concerns of Thomson's 'Scarecrow', and we will use the poem as a frame for the discussion. In so doing we must recognise its literary nature as a close-up snapshot, rather than a full picture, and we must also recognise that it applies to nineteenth-century Lewis in the first instance.

Secular Customs

In MacThòmais' poem, the scarecrow comes into the cèilidh-house, which was the centre of the Gaelic culture of a Highland community. The picture is one of direct intrusion into a traditional culture-centre. My own view is that this is probably overstated in the interests of the form of the poem.¹² For one thing, traditional cèilidhs (and the aspects of cultural activity which underpinned them) remained a feature of most parts of the Highlands and Islands until the late nineteenth century. Their demise was not caused solely by the hostility of the church; they declined and died out, not through the intrusion of the clerical scarecrow, but

(London, 1993), pp. 518-9. MacKinnon notes that the island congregations of the F.P. Church are 'probably the most strongly and ethnically Gaelic of all the local churches'.

¹² It is, however, known that ministers have entered places of entertainment directly to proclaim their message while events were in progress. This occurred in Lewis during the 1949-53 revival, when a minister went to a dance-hall: the circumstances are described on the cassette, *Lewis: Land of Revival*, Ambassador Productions Ltd. (Belfast, 1983).

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through progressive social change and the influence of the more subtly pervasive world of the mass media and the decay of the corporate life of the Gaelic communities. It is noticeable that those who blame the Protestant church for the loss of Gaelic culture seldom assess simultaneously the impact of social processes such as clearance, famine, emigration, out-migration, immigration and English-language media-intrusion.¹³

If the Protestant church cannot take sole responsibility for the decline of the cèilidh-house, did it nevertheless take an active role in suppressing secular customs more generally? The Protestant church in the Highlands, in its most militant mood, undoubtedly did take a stand against certain customs, which are noted fairly comprehensively by John MacInnes in his important book on *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland*. These often included customs, or in its view, abuses, associated with excessive consumption of alcohol: baptisms, marriages, wakes, and funerals were particularly strictly controlled from the seventeenth century onwards, though with varying degrees of success.¹⁴

However we must note here that this sort of intervention was not peculiar to the Protestant church in the Highlands, nor was it directed solely at Gaelic-based culture. Protestantism, especially in its evangelical form, aimed at moral improvement, and similar interventions or moral stricture can be found in other non-Gaelic contexts – for example, within the seventeenth-century Puritan disciplines of England or even New England.¹⁵

It is also evident that the Protestant church was able to find a new purpose for some of the secular customs of the Gaelic communities. Thus, the custom of the wake, in the home of the deceased, was transformed into a small-scale religious service, held on the evening prior to burial. Again, it is possible that the cèilidh-house was one of the pre-existing models for fellowship meetings, of the kind that became common when Evangelicalism took firm root in the Highlands. The ‘conversion of the cèilidh-house’ may have aided the development of cottage-meetings. I know of at least one cèilidh-house in Tiree which later became a focus for cottage-meetings. Though it might not care to acknowledge the debt, Protestantism in the Highlands may have owed much to the secular institutions of the area.¹⁶

¹³ A study of this theme remains to be undertaken. In the meantime, we have to rely on general impressions rather than firm facts.

¹⁴ John MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1688 to 1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), pp. 50-60.

¹⁵ For a general account of the Puritan ethos, see Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1969 edn.).

¹⁶ This theme also remains unexplored. For a study which deals only with Baptist patterns, see Donald E. Meek, ‘Baptists and Highland Culture’,

Language

MacThòmais' scarecrow appears to have spoken Gaelic in his assault on the customs of the cèilidh-house. If language is the most distinctive marker of cultural identity, it can be said that the Protestant churches in the Highlands strongly embraced Gaelic as a medium of spiritual communication and instruction. I say this notwithstanding the fact that the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), established in 1709, pursued a vigorous anti-Gaelic policy until the mid-eighteenth century. The SSPCK was an ancillary agent which worked alongside the Presbyterian church, and operated through the establishment of charity schools. The SSPCK could attempt to erode Gaelic by its educational strategy, but the church had to communicate the gospel from its pulpits to mature audiences beyond the reach of the SSPCK. From the mid-eighteenth century, however, the SSPCK supported the use of Gaelic as a means of religious instruction.¹⁷

Yet, if we argue that the Protestant church was broadly supportive of the use of Gaelic in worship and spiritual communication, we must note carefully that 'the use of Gaelic' is not the same thing as 'Gaelic culture'. The church could 'use Gaelic' (and indeed continues to do so) without supporting Gaelic culture. In addition, the Protestant church chose to use a particular type of Gaelic for its foundational attempts at a Reformed ministry in the Highlands – and this was not the Gaelic of the ordinary people. It was high-brow, professional Gaelic. The first Gaelic book ever published was John Carswell's translation of John Knox's *Book of Common Order*, published in 1567. John Carswell was a former priest in the Roman Catholic church; he was trained at St Andrews University, and he was also trained in a bardic school, in either the Scottish Highlands or Ireland.¹⁸ In that bardic school he learned to read and write Classical Gaelic – that is, the sort of Gaelic which would have been used by the poets and prose-writers of the Middle Ages in the Gaelic world, embracing Ireland and Scotland. Because Classical Gaelic was the *lingua franca* of the learned class in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, it is sometimes called 'Classical Common Gaelic' – common to both countries. It was not 'common' in the sense that it was the language of the 'common' people. The Scottish Gaelic vernacular – the language spoken every day by the people themselves – was not the same entity as Classical Common Gaelic.

Baptist Quarterly 33:4 (1989), pp. 155-73.

17 For the SSPCK, see MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, pp. 236-52.

18 Donald E. Meek and James Kirk, 'John Carswell, Superintendent of Argyll: a reassessment', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 19 (1975), pp. 1-22; R.L. Thomson (ed.), *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh* (Glasgow, 1970).

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Carswell, then, chose the Gaelic of the so-called learned classes, rather than the Gaelic of the 'ordinary' people, for his translation of the *Book of Common Order*. Why did he do that? Presumably, it would have been, in the first instance, a natural choice, since Classical Gaelic was the standard written form of the language in the Middle Ages; there was no other model. Furthermore, Carswell would have seen his own peers as the readers of his book, and it would have been very important for him to have their support for the Reformed religion. The ministers would have been expected to lead the people. Again, Carswell was well aware of the culture shared, through Classical Gaelic, by the literary class in Ireland and Scotland, and he may have had his sights on Ireland too. A Protestant literary class, potentially embracing the Gaelic-speaking mandarins of both countries, would have been a major triumph for the new faith.¹⁹

If Carswell did have a vision of pan-Gaelic Protestantism of this nature, the formal structures of Gaelic high culture which encouraged a close relationship between Ireland and Scotland, and which might have led to its fulfilment, had begun to disintegrate by the end of the sixteenth century. In Scotland, the bardic schools did not survive beyond 1700, and the older class of men of letters, who would have upheld Classical Gaelic, gave way progressively to composers, and transmitters, of verse and prose in vernacular Gaelic. Ireland and Scotland went their separate ways.

Nevertheless, the shape of Gaelic religious language had been set by Carswell's book, and the Protestant church in the Highlands became the direct heir of the literary legacy of the Gaelic medieval learned classes. From 1567 onwards, Gaelic religious language was to be different from ordinary, spoken Gaelic. Of course, adjustments were made with time, and the vernacular language influenced the religious language, but Protestantism in the Highlands was married early to a conservative literary dialect which has been its hallmark ever since. The type of Gaelic which emerged for worship and formal devotion had its roots firmly in the old medieval classical tradition, while reflecting Gaelic vernacular speech in important syntactic and morphological areas. At the risk of some telescoping, it can be said that the pre-eminence of this type of Scottish Gaelic was reinforced by the publication of the Metrical Psalters and some catechisms in the seventeenth century, the Scottish Gaelic New

¹⁹ Carswell addressed the 'men of Scotland and Ireland' in his Epistle to the Reader (Thomson, *Foirm*, p.10); this may be no more than an acknowledgement of the common Gaelic culture of Ireland and Scotland, but it could be of some significance in hinting at the overall aim of his work.

Testament in 1767, and the entire text of the Bible, made available from 1801.²⁰

'Ecclesiastical Gaelic' therefore was, and is, different from 'workaday Gaelic'. The conservative theology and tenor of the Highland churches have tended to check any marked shift towards a more obviously modern vernacular style of worship. Of course, it must be noted that the lines of linguistic demarcation were not entirely rigid. Sermons and prayers, which would have been largely extemporary in the evangelical context, encouraged an extraordinarily rich and powerful blend of Gaelic registers, both vernacular and classical (such as one finds in the fine sermons of the Revd Ewen MacDiarmid, published in 1804),²¹ but the existence of written texts maintained the primacy of the classical style, especially within regular worship. It was not until 1980 that the Gospel of Mark was translated afresh into a form of Gaelic significantly closer to modern speech.²²

In terms of their language of worship, the Protestant bodies in the Highlands have shown very effectively how culture can give a particular shape to religious expression. The medieval Classical inheritance is preserved to this day in the language of the Protestant churches. Historically, this has undoubtedly helped Gaelic by providing a form of the language skilfully honed and developed for use within what sociolinguists call the 'higher domains'. Nevertheless, in recent years such linguistic distinctiveness has become a problem, and the effective maintenance of this argot is one of the challenges currently facing the churches in the Highlands. There are many young people today who, through the decline of regular church-going, simply do not understand the Gaelic of religious discourse, and Gaelic religious vocabulary is being lost.²³ As vernacular Gaelic gains more space in the media, especially on television, a sharp contrast of style and content is emerging between religious activities and their secular counterparts.

²⁰ For discussion of the style of the Scottish Gaelic Bible relative to earlier works, see Donald E. Meek, 'Language and Style in the Scottish Gaelic Bible (1767-1807)', *Scottish Language* 9 (Winter, 1990), pp. 1-16.

²¹ *Searmona le Mr. Eobhann Mac Diarmaid* (Edinburgh, 1804). I am very grateful to Mr Sandy Munroe, Ballater, for allowing me to use his great-grandfather's copy of this book.

²² *An Deagh Sgeul aig Marcus* (Edinburgh, 1980).

²³ Students in my 'Ecclesiastical Gaelic' course at the University of Aberdeen (first offered in September 1994) have provided many illuminating perspectives on the difficulties encountered by young people in understanding the Gaelic of the churches. I am particularly grateful to Mr John MacLeod, Northton, Harris, for his account of his own experience.

Literature and Oral Narrative

MacThòmais' scarecrow caused a 'folktale about Conall Gulban' (a medieval Gaelic hero) to freeze on the lips of the reciter. What seems to be implied here is that the evangelical movement caused active oral transmission of Gaelic folktales to become passive. I think we have to admit that the pre-eminence of the Gaelic Scriptures as 'The Truth' has indeed militated against the emergence of 'untruthful' fiction and may even have retarded the cultivation of the folktale.

In fact, one finds the earliest example of this view in the work of John Carswell in 1567. In his Epistle to the Reader at the beginning of his translation, he directed some criticism against those members of the learned classes, who, for worldly gain, devoted themselves to the creation of 'lying, hurtful' tales about mythological figures and the secular heroes. The first book produced by Protestantism in the Highlands thus set its face against the cultivation of secular literature rather than the development of sacred literature. This tendency is therefore much earlier than the nineteenth century, and indeed the opposition between sacred truth and secular fiction is earlier than the Reformation. Nor is it peculiarly a Gaelic or Highland phenomenon; it has existed in many guises and in many places across the centuries.²⁴

To balance this rather negative picture, moreover, we should be aware that ministers of the churches were among the foremost recorders and editors of Gaelic folklore in the Highlands prior to the establishment of institutions such as the School of Scottish Studies in 1951. The list of such men includes both Moderates and Evangelicals, the former being more active in the collection of the material, especially the tales, and the latter being rather more prominent in their analysis of texts.²⁵ Nevertheless, the creation of too firm a distinction between Moderates and Evangelicals in this area can be seriously misleading. This is evident in the work of Ewen MacDiarmid (d. 1801), who was the minister of the Gaelic Chapel in Glasgow (1772-80) and whose splendid Gaelic sermons show him to have been an unashamed Evangelical.²⁶ He was also the

²⁴ Thomson, *Foirm*, p. 11; MacInnes, 'Religion in Highland Society', pp. 234-5.

²⁵ The reasons for the Evangelicals' rather greater interest in textual analysis are not clear, but may be related to their concern with the exposition of biblical texts and the fact that texts could be analysed without the 'compromise with the world' involved in field-work. However, there was no ardent enthusiasm for this work among Evangelicals; Free Church scholars like the Revd Thomas McLaughlan (before 1900) and the Revd Professor Donald Maclean (after 1900), editor of the hymns of Dugald Buchanan and the writer of major studies of Gaelic literature, were, in many respects, exceptional.

²⁶ See note 21 above.

compiler of a very important collection of secular songs, on the strength of which he has been assigned a place among the Moderates!²⁷

Yet we must be aware of claiming too much for the gentlemen of the cloth. In the later nineteenth century, there may have been a growing sense of alienation between Evangelicals and Gaelic secular culture, although the line cannot be drawn entirely exclusively. It would seem that the activities of ministerial scholars who concerned themselves with secular culture tended to be maintained most consistently within the 'broader' denominations. As a rule, it appears that the more evangelically focused a denomination was, the less likely it was to support Gaelic scholarship, particularly of the secular type. It is noticeable that Gaelic scholars within the Free Church before 1900 (a notable example being Thomas McLauchlan, the first editor of material from the sixteenth-century manuscript, the Book of the Dean of Lismore) were inclined to support the case for union with the United Presbyterians.²⁸ After 1900 such scholarship was maintained (briefly) within the Free and United Free Churches, and (more consistently) the Church of Scotland, although it has declined markedly in the latter in recent years.²⁹ Baptists, a strongly evangelical denomination that once needed to employ Gaelic-speaking missionaries in the Highlands and had a Gaelic-preaching ministry (in Tiree) until 1965, have contributed little of note to Gaelic scholarship.³⁰ These observations apply to the contributions of ministers, and not to those of individual scholars who are, or have been, identified with these denominations as lay members.³¹

²⁷ Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *The MacDiarmid MS Anthology* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 22.

²⁸ On Thomas McLauchlan, see Maurice Grant, *Free St Columba's: A History of Congregation and Church* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 17-23.

²⁹ The decay of Gaelic scholarship in the churches is related to a number of factors, including: (1) the decline in numbers of students for the Gaelic ministry, (2) decline in students' understanding of the language, (3) more specialised courses in Divinity (rather than Arts) for ministerial candidates, (4) lack of encouragement to pursue Gaelic scholarship, and (within Evangelicalism generally) a suspicion of scholarly pursuits, both for the potential misuse of time and the danger of being exposed to new ideas or even to some degree of criticism by 'thinkers'. In the Highlands, strict adherence to confessions has probably left little room for any fresh interpretations of theology or history.

³⁰ The training of Baptist pastors for the Highlands was not normally academic, and this may have had some bearing on their lack of scholarly involvement. They were also evangelical activists, devoted to evangelism rather than study.

³¹ It is evident that the major Highland denominations are now increasingly dependent on the laity rather than ordained ministers for the execution of major literary tasks in Gaelic, e.g. the recent (1992)

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The scarecrow, in MacThòmais' poem, 'did not leave us empty-handed'; he gave the community a range of substitutes for the stories which he had suppressed. This seems faint praise, but it may contain more than a grain of truth. The Protestant church, through its ministers and schoolmasters, began the task of providing a printed Gaelic literature, and was the only institution to do so for some three hundred years. Unfortunately, however, what was produced was predominantly a translated literature ('fragments of the philosophy of Geneva?'), using models already in existence, rather than encouraging genuinely creative production. This trend began with Carswell's work, but, in reality, took off in the mid-eighteenth century with the publication of a translation of Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* (1750). By the nineteenth century, John Bunyan was probably the most popular writer in the Highlands, and Gaelic people would have regarded him as one of themselves. He is one of the few 'early' writers to have been re-translated into Gaelic in the twentieth century.³²

The points that I wish to make about such activity are, first, that, while it undoubtedly strengthened the role of Gaelic as a religious language, it discouraged the growth of a lively Gaelic style; translations tended, on the whole, to follow their originals, though not always slavishly; second, the tendency to choose models external to the culture was predisposed to retard, if not to prevent, the emergence of a genuinely Gaelic religious prose literature.³³

Attempts to produce an indigenous Gaelic religious prose literature were nevertheless made, but this did not happen until the first half of the nineteenth century. Pride of place in this must go to the labours of the Revd Dr Norman MacLeod (1783-1862), who produced two periodicals which aimed to counteract the wooden style and narrow subject-matter of the translated works.³⁴ There were other writers such as the Revd Alexander MacGregor (1808-81), whose prodigious literary labours are only now being appreciated.³⁵ Both men, who belonged to the

revision of the Gaelic Bible, which was done by a Baptist layman (the author of this article! *Ed.*).

32 For a general account, see D.E. Meek, 'Gaelic, Protestant prose publications in', in *DSCHT*, pp. 347-9.

33 The Scottish churches were not alone in laying the foundation of Gaelic religious prose by means of translation. A similar approach is found in Wales, but it is evident that there was a stronger and much more creative process of indigenisation in Wales than in Gaelic Scotland. Wales does not appear to have been subjected to the same degree of strict Calvinistic confessionalism as the Scottish Highlands.

34 K.D. MacDonald, 'MacLeod, Norman', in *DSCHT*, p. 532.

35 *Biographies of Highland Clergyman*, reprinted from the 'Inverness Courier' (Inverness, 1889), pp. 71-81. MacGregor's prose writing is being researched by Miss Sheila Kidd, Department of Celtic, University

Established Church, tackled a wide range of topics, sacred and secular, from volcanoes and politics, to second sight and popular superstition. MacGregor's writing on superstitions is, in fact, a good example of the ambivalence which ministers could show in their approach to Gaelic culture. In the twentieth century, these men had few successors, but one was the Revd Donald Lamont (1874-1958), whose delightful sketches and satires in the Gaelic Supplement of *Life and Work* enjoyed great popularity in the first half of this century. Lamont, who set some of his work in the Gaelic equivalent of 'Barchester Towers', was not afraid to deride the top-heavy pomposity of certain aspects of the Church to which he belonged – but he remains unique in this respect.³⁶

My main point, however, is that the tendency towards imitation has been one of the factors which has greatly impoverished the potential range of Gaelic religious literature. Such was the significance and status attached to 'imported' works that indigenous writing was apparently restricted. Even the number of printed volumes of original Gaelic sermons is remarkably low. Beyond homiletic material, we have only a couple of rather poor items of church history, we have no commentaries, no theological dictionaries, and little or no original contributions to wider theological debate. Religious writing for children is in short supply, and it is probably significant that the recently published *Bioball na Cloinne* (Children's Bible) is itself a translation.³⁷ The Highland churches, still embracing upper registers of Gaelic language and indebted to external models of literature, have a long way to go before they will meet the needs of the new era of Gaelic-medium schooling. It is not that the churches oppose the use of Gaelic at this level, but rather that, beyond the publication of foundational works, they have continued to depend rather too much on the retentive memories of predominantly adult hearers. As a consequence, there is an enormous gulf between their way of working and the needs of present-day, literate Gaelic society. It is a supreme irony that a movement which was so singularly committed to the achievement of literacy has produced so little in the way of original Gaelic literature.

Song and Music

MacThòmais' scarecrow 'took the goodness out of the music'. The rejection of particular aspects of Gaelic culture – the cèilidhs, the dances,

of Edinburgh, in what promises to be a very important contribution to our knowledge of nineteenth-century Gaelic prose.

³⁶ T.M. Murchison (ed.), *The Prose Writings of Donald Lamont* (Edinburgh, 1960); see D.E. Meek, 'Lamont, Donald', in *DSCHT*, p. 479-80.

³⁷ Published by Acair, Stornoway, in 1992, this is a translation of Lion Publishing's *Children's Bible*, which has been translated into other Celtic languages, including Irish.

the song and merriment – by converts to the evangelical faith has, in fact, become a leitmotif in the popular view of ‘Highland religion’. The evidence for a new enthusiasm on the part of converts is clear enough, but should we accept that the tradition of secular song and music was, in effect, killed off by Evangelicalism? It is an undeniable fact that certain individuals who have experienced evangelical conversion, and who have adhered to the ‘stricter’ denominations, have sometimes refused to transmit secular songs which they absorbed and enjoyed in their unregenerate days.³⁸ In this way, cultural transmission has been impoverished. Nevertheless, it is not accurate to envisage a total ban on secular song and music, operating within all denominations and at all times.

This latter perception is nonetheless pervasive. The best known image in this context is fiddle-burning which allegedly happened in Skye and other parts of the Highlands when the evangelical movement took effect. But were the fiddles broken or burnt, or could this be another stereotype, introduced to emphasise the culturally destructive force of Evangelicalism, or (on the other side) the world-rejecting spirituality of new converts? It is worth considering a couple of accounts which describe how fiddles were treated when their former players experienced evangelical conversion.

We begin with Donald Munro, the ‘father’ of evangelical Presbyterianism in Skye. Munro was a blind man who served as a catechist in the north end of Skye prior to his conversion through the preaching of the Congregational itinerant evangelist, John Farquharson, about 1806. Roderick MacCowan tells the story in his book, *The Men of Skye*:

He did not, however, relinquish the violin though called to fill such a holy office in the Church. He pursued the incongruous combination of offices – catechist and fiddler – going from township to township attempting to instruct the people in the Bible and Shorter Catechism, and playing his violin to as many as desired to hear... When Donald was converted, he flung the fiddle aside, and no more is heard of it. His music was now of a higher and more spiritual nature.³⁹

It is to be noted that Munro ‘flung the fiddle aside’; according to this version of the story, he did not break it or burn it. If we move southwards to Kintyre, we find a most interesting account from the year 1805, in which the writer, the Congregational itinerant preacher, John Campbell, records in his diary the express denial of one who was popularly believed to have destroyed his fiddle:

We preached near the spot where Mr. Haldane and I landed two years before, when only about three persons came to hear; now we had a

³⁸ I have had direct experience of such sensitivities.

³⁹ Roderick MacCowan, *The Men of Skye* (Glasgow, 1902), p.2.

congregation of upwards of 400 – the effect of Mr. Macallum's labours among them. On leaving them, about a dozen of the people walked on each side of my horse, telling what miserable creatures they were when first I visited their country. One said he then acted as fiddler at all the dancing weddings [*sic*] round about, which he immediately gave up when his eyes were opened. The people said I had broken my fiddle to pieces, *but that was not true*.⁴⁰

This suggests that fiddle-breaking by converts of revival movements was already, by the early years of the nineteenth century, a stereotype well worthy of denial. Despite this, the image has persisted, and appears to have grown to bonfire-status in the course of the century.⁴¹ Broadly the same theme can be found in other contexts. According to this paradigm, following their conversion good pipers laid aside their pipes, the song-makers became silent, the poets burned their manuscripts of secular poetry.

Evidence from the lives of evangelical ministers further supports the view that this was, at times, an exaggeration. One major nineteenth-century evangelical minister, John MacDonald of Ferintosh (1779-1849), who maintained a life-long interest in piping, collected Gaelic heroic ballads in his early days, and allegedly held dances in his manse.⁴²

Besides 'taking the goodness out of the music', MacThòmais's scarecrow gave the people a 'new song' – a reference to the Gaelic Metrical Psalter (translated between 1659 and 1694).⁴³ In due course, these 'new songs' became thoroughly indigenised, and are now the time-honoured 'old songs' associated pre-eminently with the Gaelic worship of the Presbyterian churches. Their tunes – bearing such unGaelic names as 'Martyrdom', 'Torwood', 'Moravia', 'Walsal' *etc.* – have been thoroughly Gaelicised, with appropriate Gaelic musical ornamentation such as grace-notes.

There were, however, other 'new songs', notably Gaelic hymns. Hymnology was perhaps the area of greatest liberty within the Highland religious tradition, and it is certainly the field in which one can observe the most fruitful interaction between sacred and secular dimensions of Gaelic musical culture. Gaelic hymns drew not on the rather restricted repertoire of Lowland Presbyterian worship, but on personal emotions. Tunes were derived from popular songs, an art form which extended

⁴⁰ Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane and of his Brother, James Alexander Haldane*, fifth edn (Glasgow, 1855), p. 267, italics added.

⁴¹ I have been unable to trace a written source for the Skye bonfire story.

⁴² G. Hamilton (ed.), *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman... Reminiscences of Evander MacIver* (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 211. For MacDonald, see R. Macleod, 'MacDonald, John', in *DSCHT*, pp. 510-1.

⁴³ See D.E. Meek, 'Psalms, Psalter (Gaelic)', in *DSCHT*, pp. 683-4.

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throughout the Gaelic community as the principal means of emotional expression. The Gaelic hymn became a major outlet for spontaneous religious feeling, though it found no place in the formal worship of the Presbyterian churches.⁴⁴

A conspicuous harmony was thus achieved between Gaelic hymnology and secular song, especially at times of religious revival when hymns came into their own as vehicles of personal testimony, long before the days of Moody and Sankey. It may be that converts occasionally burnt their fiddles, but they could not destroy the tunes which they had learned and which remained in their heads.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will set out my own thesis, at the risk of major generalisation! My view is that since 1560 the Highland churches – or more strictly the Highland wings of the Scottish Presbyterian churches – have adopted a broadly pragmatic approach to Gaelic language and culture. They have chosen to use those aspects of the culture which have been to their advantage in the furtherance of the gospel, and they have rejected those other aspects which have been perceived as disadvantageous or inimical to spiritual development. They have also imported styles and fashions from English, as the need has arisen, and they have given these a distinctive Gaelic dress. In making choices, individual ministers and members have been, to some extent, able to define their own limits within the churches, and there is therefore an individualistic dimension which must be borne in mind.

An inherent ambivalence thus exists in the overall approach of the Highland churches to Gaelic culture, and the stresses and strains are apparent at many points. That is why it is possible to compose a poem such as 'The Scarecrow', and why it contains, to some extent, a valid perspective. On the other hand, 'The Scarecrow' does not tell the whole story, which was considerably more complex than the portrait which the poem presents.

While we can provide a more positive view of the churches' attitude to Gaelic culture, we need to temper our counter argument with reality, however unpalatable it may be. We have to accept that the main task of the churches was not, and is not, the promotion of Gaelic or Gaelic culture. The churches' major concern is the promotion of the Christian gospel, but, in order to achieve their aim, they have had to communicate with people within the Gaelic cultural area; the gospel in the Highlands, as in many other parts of the world, has had to be presented in a package which was recognisable to the potential audience. It could, in fact, be argued that, far from rejecting Gaelic culture in its totality, the Presbyterian churches (in particular) have so strongly embraced certain

⁴⁴ See K.D. MacDonald, 'Hymnology, Gaelic', in *DSCHT*, pp. 423-5.

parts of it, notably the Gaelic language itself, that they have produced a distinctive brand of culturally conditioned Highland Evangelicalism. Some have gone so far as to call this 'Gaelic Calvinism', at least in its pre-1690 phase.⁴⁵ Whatever we may say for or against such a label, it is undeniable that, in fulfilling their aims, no other public bodies in Scotland have used Gaelic so consistently in the higher domains as the Presbyterian churches. A major by-product of this has been the strengthening of the language and of some (though by no means all) dimensions of the culture.

As a consequence of such inculturation, the churches have not found it easy to make headway in the changing world of the modern, twentieth-century Highlands. If they are now tending to lean away from Gaelic, it is not necessarily because they are inherently hostile to it; it may be because they are encountering language-shift and even culture-shift within their own communities, and this may be leading to problems in the maintenance of their older, Gaelic identity. Evangelicalism is concerned with peoples' souls, and if these souls can be reached more effectively, and in greater numbers, in English than in Gaelic, why should Gaelic preaching be maintained? The question is made all the more urgent by the decreasing number of Gaelic-speaking candidates for the ministry of the various churches. The smaller denominations have already faced this issue, and some, notably the Baptists, have responded by quietly allowing Gaelic preaching to become a thing of the past, 'inevitably' superseded by English.⁴⁶ It may be that the larger churches will have to face this question soon. If they do, it will be interesting to see how they will tackle it, and how they will move: so far, no church has developed a 'theology of language', and no church has an official policy for Gaelic.

As we approach the twenty-first century, the Highland churches are confronting major challenges. They need to look seriously at their commitment to Gaelic culture, but more particularly at the immense debt that they owe to the language as a major vehicle for the Christian gospel. I believe that, in acknowledgement of that debt, they should hammer out a policy for the support of Gaelic, and take a more positive role in its promotion, not least in the recruitment and training of Gaelic ministers who are well tuned to the needs of contemporary society. They cannot opt out on the pretext of their evangelical goals, nor can they with impunity invoke the Almighty's approval of their own failures. Rather, they need to acknowledge that the Gaelic-based ecclesiastical culture which has been created during the last four centuries, and which

⁴⁵ Jane Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland', in Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 231-53.

⁴⁶ Meek, 'Baptists and Highland Culture', pp. 168-9.

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now underpins the language, is largely of their own making. It will then follow logically that they must assume some degree of responsibility for the future development of Gaelic culture, in a manner consistent with the needs of modern Gaelic society. To act otherwise will tarnish and debase the message of the gospel by demonstrating that the churches have embraced the Gaelic language – and the ‘usable’ parts of its culture – on a purely utilitarian basis, as no more than a means to an end.

If I may take up the final image of MacThòmais’s ‘Scarecrow’, the bonfire that the churches lit in the breasts of many Highlanders has not yet been extinguished, and, having used Gaelic in the process of ignition, the churches needs to show the world that the language is, for them, something more than a fire-lighter.

SCOTTISH CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON EVANGELICALISM

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Defining Evangelicalism

My remit is to consider Scottish cultural influences on Evangelicalism. I begin with certain definitions. Evangelicalism I take to be the movement in the various denominations committed to the gospel. But we can go much further than that in specifying what we mean by Evangelicalism as a historical phenomenon. Evangelicalism has consistently displayed four characteristics. We can specify them in turn. First, evangelicals have been conversionist: they have held and practised the conviction that lives have to be transformed by the gospel, that people are not naturally Christians. Since people have to change decisively to become Christians, conversion has been the aim of their preaching and they have theologised about it. To take an example, John Witherspoon, one of the greatest of eighteenth-century evangelical ministers in the Church of Scotland, to whom we shall return, received a B.D. from the University of St Andrews for a book entitled *Regeneration*, published in 1764. 'Regeneration' covers the theology on the divine side of the process of conversion, of how people turn to Christ. It reflects the conversionism of the evangelical movement.

The second characteristic of Evangelicalism has been activism, a corollary of the practice of spreading the gospel. A good instance of this would be Thomas Chalmers, one of the best known evangelical churchmen in Scottish history, who at first was not an Evangelical. He was an adherent of the Moderate section of opinion in the Church of Scotland, which was much less committed to the spread of the gospel than Evangelicals. In his earlier Moderate phase, Chalmers came out with the memorable notion that being in the ministry was a very welcome profession because it allowed him five days of uninterrupted leisure for his favourite occupations. After his conversion to evangelical faith, this man visited the homes of 11,000 people in a single year of his Glasgow ministry. There is an enormous contrast between uninterrupted leisure and activism, a hallmark of Evangelicals.

Thirdly, there has been biblicism. Evangelicals have held that the Bible is the authoritative source of the gospel. Brownlow North, an eminent nineteenth-century Scottish evangelist, is described by his biographer as having an intense veneration and love for the Bible and that is typical of the Evangelical. Many Evangelicals in Scotland have refused to place anything above the Bible in their pile of books. The Bible must be on top. Sometimes, indeed, this esteem for Scripture verges on bibliolatry. Nevertheless, the hard core of this attitude is a respect for

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what the Bible teaches, together with a determination to obey its teachings.

Fourthly, there is the crucicentric (cross-centred) dimension of Evangelicalism. In theology, and in their devotional preoccupations, Evangelicals have made the atonement the focus of the gospel. Witherspoon, the man already referred to, wrote of free forgiveness through the blood of the atonement. Crucicentricity, we may say, has equally been a characteristic of Evangelicals.

All four of these qualities are essential to the evangelical movement. Where all are present, one may say Evangelicalism exists. Where any of them is absent, there Evangelicalism has ceased to exist.

The characteristics which I have just specified have been shown by an historic movement. It emerged in the 1730s across the English-speaking world, taking its rise from earlier Protestant traditions, but having a distinctive revivalistic flavour from its beginning. The usual starting-point taken for the evangelical movement is the revival under Jonathan Edwards at Northampton in Massachusetts in 1734-5. In Scotland, George Whitefield's preaching and the Cambuslang revival of 1742 formed a similar benchmark, although incidents of a revivalistic kind did precede that occasion. From that time, the 1740s, the movement steadily spread in Scotland. John Erskine, minister of Old Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh, was a leader within the Church of Scotland. Many younger revival-oriented ministers spread its spirit through the Established Church. Outside the Church of Scotland, Presbyterian seceders were partly evangelical by conviction, and the Relief Church that began in the 1760s was a wholly evangelical body, again Presbyterian but outside the Established Church. Furthermore, Independents and Baptists, some of them associated with James and Robert Haldane, spread the evangelical message through many parts of the land. In the nineteenth century Evangelicalism touched other denominations and gave rise to completely new denominations: the Brethren (the so-called Plymouth Brethren), in their diverse expressions, and the Salvation Army. We are therefore talking about a multi-faceted movement. It was a movement, however, which dominated Victorian Scotland to a quite extraordinary degree, not just setting the tone of its religion, but also determining the social values prevailing at large. Evangelical religion in Scotland has remained a significant force in the twentieth century. One thinks of epoch-making events like the great rallying of Evangelicals to the Billy Graham crusade in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, in 1955. We may therefore say that evangelical religion has played a major part in the history of Scotland over the last 250 years.

Defining Culture

So much then for Evangelicalism, one part of my title. Let us now look at the word 'culture' in the title of my paper. This too needs definition,

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not least because 'culture' is notoriously a slippery word, a word that has changed its meaning over time. A classic study is Raymond Williams' book, *Culture and Society*, which sees the altering significances of the word 'culture' as one of the best indices of developments in British society. In contemporary usage, I think three different meanings can usefully be distinguished.

Culture may be what is commonly called 'high culture'. It may be an expression of civilisation in literature, art or music. This is the normal usage of the word 'culture' in Britain. People are said to be cultured if they have developed a taste for the fine arts or go to Glyndebourne. In Aberdeen, those who are cultured will go to see the art of William Dyce in the municipal art gallery. Likewise, one should probably regard the novels of Sir Walter Scott as an expression of high art. That has not always been the estimate of them, but I think increasingly that it is the worldwide way of looking at the novelist. Scotland has made its contribution to high culture. This is the first way of interpreting 'culture'.

The second applies the term to 'popular culture'. By that is meant the expression of folk ways – customs, either old or new, that express how people in general want to be creative. This way of using the word 'culture' is much more common in the United States. There is indeed a periodical called the *Journal of Popular Culture* devoted to this subject which is published (perhaps appropriately) by Bowling Green State University in Ohio. The journal concentrates on such things as soap-opera characters and their experience of life. 'Take the High Road' might be one of its Scottish fields of study. Such programmes are features of popular culture.

There is a third meaning of 'culture', however, which constitutes a broader use of this term. In this sense the word refers, not to civilisation, high or low, but to all the attitudes and behaviour of people in a particular group. The word standardly has this significance in anthropology. This is again a usage more common across the Atlantic, but it has become increasingly common in the recent past in phrases such as 'enterprise culture'. In that expression 'culture' does not mean the art of William Dyce, nor does it mean 'Take the High Road'. Rather it means a web of attitudes, the ways in which people look at reality. That anthropological usage is adopted in the Lausanne Covenant, the document emanating from the 1974 international conference that acts as a landmark in recent evangelical history. In the Covenant's section on missionary engagement with culture, the word means this broad web of human thought and activity.

There, then, are three usages. Here, for the most part, I want to adopt the third usage, the anthropological. Because it is so broad, it is a handy portmanteau word that can contain within itself high culture and popular culture as well. So I want to talk about social attitudes and practices in

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their broadest sense, but with more than half an eye to high and popular culture in passing. But what about our issue for today, that is, the relationship of gospel and culture?

Relating Christ and Culture: Richard Niebuhr

Now it is often supposed that just as the gospel is a good thing, so culture is a bad thing. It is held to be worldly, to be humanistic, an expression of human activity over against the divine. Evangelicals commonly believe that culture is precisely that force which debases the gospel when the two come into contact. The best policy for the Christian believer, therefore, is to maintain the pristine purity of the gospel apart from culture and to reserve as sharp a segregation between the two as possible. However, that attitude to the relationship between gospel and culture is by no means the only one that is possible. There is no need to see gospel and culture as intrinsically antagonistic, for in fact there is a very wide range of possible Christian stances on the bearing of the two towards each other. We can most usefully approach the relationship through the analysis in Richard Niebuhr's book, *Christ and Culture*, published in 1951, which systematically covers the various options that the Christian has in relating gospel and culture.

First, Niebuhr isolates the position that he calls 'Christ against culture'. This is the attitude that I have just characterised. It can be seen as a sectarian stance, evident, for example, in the Mennonite tradition stemming from continental Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, in which culture is shunned, as far as possible, as worldly. The aim of this group of Christian believers has often been to create communities distinct from the surrounding culture, like the Amish of the United States. They deliberately sustain distinguishing customs, for example, using horses not motor vehicles. That policy is designed to mark off the Christian group from the surrounding non-Christian society, from contemporary cultural influences. Christ against culture, therefore, is one stance that Niebuhr describes.

The second stance is the so-called 'Christ of culture' approach. On this understanding, Christ is discerned in culture itself. This is the characteristic liberal Protestant attitude expressed for example by Albrecht Ritschl, the German theologian of the late nineteenth century, and his disciples, some of whom were to be found in Scotland in the early twentieth century. This liberal Protestant stance would hold that the advance of civilisation is to be equated with the progress of the cause of Christ. Christianity and civilisation are virtually one and the same thing. It was an identification of Christianity with Western culture. Most people in the later twentieth century have come to doubt that equation, but it has to be recognised that this stance has had among its adherents people of some distinction.

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The third stance is that described as 'Christ above culture'. This is the notion that culture leads to Christ, the creation to its Creator. Here culture is more distinct from Christian truth than on the second view, and yet that culture is understood as leading upwards, as being an avenue to the Father of all. This is a very common Roman Catholic view. It is expressed classically in the thought of Thomas Aquinas who argues for the continuity between nature, which includes the whole world of human cultural endeavour, and grace, the realm of God. Nature and grace are not in any sense antagonistic, according to Aquinas, for nature is the way into grace. An appreciation of the created world embracing the human sphere leads to the knowledge of God.

Fourthly, there is the view of 'Christ as the transformer of culture'. This is the idea that Christian people are to conquer culture, to crusade in order to dominate human creative fields. This view is usually attributed to Calvin, who undoubtedly held that secular activity is a divine vocation so that all spheres in life are to be brought under the authority of Christ. Christian culture on this view is a distinct possibility as human behaviour and attitudes increasingly become dominated by the Spirit of Christ. Christian principles, therefore, can be triumphantly embodied in culture.

The fifth position of Niebuhr is that of 'Christ and culture in paradox'. There is a permanent tension between cultural values and more distinctively Christian values. The classic exemplar here is Luther. According to Luther, Christians and their world are necessarily moulded both by faith and by the society that individuals inhabit. Christians have to engage in cultural activity, but they must do so with fear and trembling. Nothing is wholly from faith and yet Christianity can penetrate society. A paradoxical relationship therefore exists between Christ and culture.

From Niebuhr's five models, we can see that four other possible attitudes apart from the notion of rejecting culture as intrinsically hostile to the gospel are on offer to the believer. What I want to do is to explore Scottish culture and gospel for illumination of all five of these positions. What should be our stance in contemporary Scotland on the relationship of gospel and culture in the light of the past?

We begin the exploration with an examination of the wider context, the relationship between Western civilisation and the gospel. Scots are part of a developed Western country and so share a great deal with other peoples of Western Europe and North America. Scotland is marked by common features of Western civilisation, especially with English-speaking Western civilisation. Therefore we need to look at the way in which Western civilisation has impinged on the gospel in Scotland. We should pay particular attention to three cultural movements.

Impact of the Enlightenment

First, there was the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment consisted essentially in the exaltation of human reason, the notion that by rational enquiry human beings can attain to the truth. There must be investigation of the whole world, according to this point of view, in the manner of Isaac Newton. Much of the Enlightenment can be seen as adopting the techniques of natural science in order to experiment on different areas, including human beings, and so to make fresh discoveries. By means of this empirical method new facts could be firmly established. With greater knowledge, human beings could increasingly banish ignorance and folly. The idea of progress was characteristic of later eighteenth-century thought, not least in Scotland. The Enlightenment is commonly thought to have been anti-religious in essence, and it has to be said that many of its exponents, Voltaire perhaps most famously, did indeed regard religion as an obstacle to human progress. But increasingly in the recent past it has become recognised that the Enlightenment deeply influenced religion itself. This is true throughout Western Europe and North America. Theology exalted reason in this period. That is very evident, for example, in the Moderate party in the Church of Scotland. William Robertson, Principal of the University of Edinburgh, for example, was an extraordinarily able historian who preached very rational sermons.

But it was not just theologians of a liberalising stamp who were deeply influenced by the Enlightenment. It is undoubtedly the case that Evangelicals throughout the English-speaking world were strongly affected by this eighteenth-century movement of thought. In Scotland the instances are very clear. Let us take one or two. The seceders from the Church of Scotland split at the end of the eighteenth century and the two evangelical sects that emerged were called 'New Lights' because they believed in accepting new, eighteenth-century light. Their primary conclusion was that Presbyterians were not bound to the Westminster Confession in every detail. They therefore possessed new light as opposed to the old light embodied in the Westminster Confession.

Another instance is Thomas Chalmers, the nineteenth-century evangelical leader already mentioned. The most popular publication by Chalmers was not a work on theology. It was a book called *Astronomical Discourses* (1817), which contained descriptions of the beauties of the heavens revealed by the telescope. Chalmers believed in scientific technique as a means of discovering more about the Creator's wisdom because he accepted the enlightened notion of rational enquiry. He applied the principle to many other fields including political economy. But here in his astronomical sermons there is no conflict between science and religion, because both are equally wedded to empirical method, and that is of the essence of the Enlightenment legacy. We can therefore conclude that the evangelical movement in Scotland, as

SCOTTISH CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON EVANGELICALISM elsewhere in the Western world, was deeply moulded by the Enlightenment.

Appeal of Romanticism

Secondly there was Romanticism. From the 1790s there was a new mood in Western civilisation that can be given this name. It advanced steadily during the nineteenth century and can properly be seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment. A favourite metaphor of the Romantics for human behaviour was not the machine but the tree. There was an organic conception of human society developing over time. The Romantics stressed feeling and intuition over against reason and understanding. The great names would be Goethe in Germany, Wordsworth and Coleridge in England and Sir Walter Scott in Scotland. Indeed, Scott's sense of history in *Waverley* and so many of his other great novels, full of colour and pageantry, is typical of the Romantic's preoccupation with the past. This world-view necessarily impinged on Evangelicals.

The first Evangelical to be deeply swayed by Romanticism was a Scot, Edward Irving, a Church of Scotland minister in London who in the 1820s went for long walks with Coleridge on Hampstead Heath. Now nobody who went for long walks on Hampstead Heath with Coleridge escaped unscathed! As a result, Irving's view of the world was transformed. His preaching style became entirely different. Instead of ordinary sermons he began to deliver dramatic monologues, sometimes for between three and four hours. So long were they that a Psalm had to be sung in the middle to allow everyone to recover and get second breath. It was not just his technique that was affected. Irving, perhaps more famously, was the first in recent times to discern charismatic experiences in his congregation. In his day he was thought more important for reviving the notion of a premillennial second advent, which had an earlier history, but which had been virtually absent from the evangelical movement up to that point. This is the teaching that Jesus will return personally before the millennium. Irving was seeing fresh things in the Bible, in particular a dramatic intervention by Christ in order to restore all things, because he read the Scriptures with Romantic eyes.

Premillennialism was duly spread in Scotland by Horatius Bonar, now known chiefly as a hymn-writer. Bonar's hymns are notable for almost always having some allusion to the Second Coming. Romantic feelings gradually affected other aspects of Scottish church life as the nineteenth century advanced. It produced, for example, the demand for organs in the late nineteenth century to play dramatic music, replacing the precentor and unaccompanied singing. The first organ in a Scottish Presbyterian church came in 1861. It can be seen as an indication of rising standards of respectability, certainly, but it is also a symptom of the growth of Romantic taste. That was a phenomenon which impinged significantly on the evangelical movement.

Cultural Modernism

Thirdly there was the cultural phase of Modernism. Here I want to distinguish cultural Modernism sharply from theological Modernism, which is not the subject here. Theological Modernism is the notion that doctrine must be brought up-to-date by shedding apparently outdated notions. Cultural Modernism, by contrast, is a movement of opinion at the very start of the twentieth century in various cities of the Western world. The key to understanding it is to recognise that creative artists were beginning to express how they felt rather than how they ought to feel. So all the peculiar mixture of surging emotions that make up human life was suddenly exposed to the public. Surrealism in art with its haphazard dream imagery is a typical expression of Modernism. There is a debt here to the depth-psychology of Freud and Jung with their emphasis on the unconscious. But the greatest debt of cultural Modernism was to Nietzsche.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the late-nineteenth-century German classical scholar and philosopher, argued that there was no objective order in the world because there was no God. If there is no order in human discourse language can be used arbitrarily. That belief is one of the most obvious hallmarks of cultural Modernism. This mood gradually supplanted Romanticism, more amongst creative artists than a wider public at first, but by the 1960s it had spread to a much broader audience. The youth culture of the 1960s was formed, not just by the Mersey beat, but also by Modernism. Since then it has influenced Evangelicalism, most obviously in the free expression in worship commonly associated with charismatic renewal. To raise one's hand in public adoration is almost the sign of a card-carrying charismatic and it is typical of the expressiveness which marks Modernism. It is undoubtedly the case, therefore, that this third cultural phase is influencing Evangelicals in Scotland in our day.

What one can conclude from analysis of these three phases is that Scotland has participated fully in the broad trends of Western civilisation. Western cultural influences constituted important Scottish influences on the gospel. We can go on, however, to narrow the focus to Scotland alone. For surely Scotland is unique. If we need confirmation of that opinion, we have only to go to the French sociologist, Gustave d'Eichthal, writing home in 1828 from Scotland. He said this:

The character of the Scots is quite different from that of the English.

They are not at all starchy, formal and fastidious like their neighbours whose lack of free-and-easiness often makes them very tedious. Here you are allowed to have the knot of your tie awry.

What else, apart from ties being awry, is a hallmark of Scottish culture? What more distinctively Scottish influences have marked the gospel?

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Scottish Calvinism

First, there is Calvinism. It may seem odd to treat Calvinism as a cultural phenomenon. Although it is a theological tradition, Calvinism has often quite properly been treated as a cultural force in Scottish society. After 1690 the Established Church was permanently Presbyterian and with its allegiance to the standards of Calvinism it remained the primary strand of Scottish religion on into the twentieth century. Episcopalians, rarely Calvinists, were a mere 5% of the population in 1800 and a high proportion of them lived in Aberdeenshire. Methodists, who as Arminians were anti-Calvinist, never became very strong in Scotland. Indeed, so weak overall in Scotland were they that Methodism was organised into two synods north of the border. One was Scotland, the other Zetland; virtually half the Methodists, that is to say, lived in those Northern Isles. Therefore the two denominations that might have done most to moderate Calvinism were weak. Consequently, Calvinism has been extraordinarily pervasive. It is sometimes said that the first characteristic of Scottish Christianity has been Calvinism.

How then has Calvinism affected Scottish Evangelicalism? In worship, its influence is obvious. The principle of Calvin that nothing is acceptable for worship unless it has scriptural warrant led, for example, to resistance to human compositions being used in praise and therefore to the strong tradition of Psalm-singing. Calvinism has also influenced behaviour. Sabbath observance would be a good instance. In the 1850s an English Baptist minister came out of church one Sunday on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow, whistling. A burly policeman tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'You munna do that on the Sabbath!' Sabbatarianism as a dimension of Calvinism has undoubtedly been a mark of Scottish evangelical religion. For such reasons Calvinism is often represented as a stern blight on Scotland, causing dourness, ruining its religion and therefore its culture. This is a very common theme in twentieth-century commentators on Scottish life.

It is usually supposed that the quality in Calvinism that has given rise to its blighting power is its fatalism. Its emphasis on predestination is often illustrated from James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a fiction which expresses the rambling notion that because the protagonist is certainly saved he can commit any crime with impunity. It is thought that Hogg represents the predestinarian strand in Scottish cultural life very accurately and therefore that Scottish Evangelicals have been a depressing lot resigned to their fate. This is a gross misrepresentation. For one thing, it ignores the reality that Calvinism has changed over time. Seventeenth-century versions of Calvinism were indeed often fatalistic. Predestination was commonly emphasised in the seventeenth-century more than by Calvin himself. But the evangelical movement arising in the eighteenth century did not accept seventeenth-century versions. Rather, the evangelical movement followed Jonathan

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Edwards, the American theologian, in rejecting the view that humans are physically unable to repent and believe in the gospel, accepting only that human beings suffer from a moral inability and so are culpably opposed to God. Following Edwards, Scottish Evangelicalism was not fatalist. It held that human will does operate. Humans are actually responsible for their attitude to the gospel, having a duty to believe. Consequently, the gospel in Scotland over the last 250 years should not be associated with a dark and repressive creed. Calvinism in an evangelical form enhanced the sense of personal responsibility rather than denying it.

Anti-Catholicism in Scotland

According to many media presentations, the second most important feature of Scottish religion after Calvinism is sectarianism. By that is usually meant the rivalry between Protestants and Catholics that leads to violence at football matches. The point here is that anti-Catholicism, a deep-seated feeling among Evangelicals, has been a distasteful attitude in Scotland. Anti-Catholicism has certainly remained strong, not just in the nineteenth century, but also in the twentieth century; in the 1920s some extraordinary reports to the General Assembly of the Kirk urged racial purity by the deportation of Irish Catholic paupers and criminals from the country.

Although it has to be conceded that Evangelicals have sometimes expressed unpleasant attitudes, prejudice was not universal among Evangelicals. Many supported Roman Catholic emancipation in 1829. Although they disagreed with Roman Catholics theologically, they supported their civil rights. The great upsurge in anti-Catholic feeling amongst Evangelicals came in the 1840s because of the huge Irish immigration following the appalling famine in Ireland of that decade. A lot of it at grass-roots level can be recognised as a symptom of fear about competition for scarce jobs. There was an economic explanation of this prejudice which was at least as strong for many people as the theological. Furthermore, this anti-Catholic feeling has now quite properly been diagnosed by Linda Colley in her notable book *Britons*, as part of the nation-building process whereby British identity was cultivated by Protestantism and war against the French. British nationalism was a strongly anti-Catholic force that could not help but affect Evangelicals. It was not just evangelical Protestantism that was responsible for anti-Catholic attitudes, for they were also encouraged by the secular context and by the state itself. This instance of anti-Catholicism in the ambience of Evangelicalism shows the risk of accepting cultural attitudes because they seem to mesh with evangelical theology. Catholicism appeared to be a bad thing because it was wrong about the way of salvation, and hence many Evangelicals inferred that Catholics were a bad lot. The result of that prejudice has been the virtual impossibility for Protestants to spread the gospel amongst Irish immigrants to Scotland and their

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descendants ever since the 1840s. The Christian faith in Scotland has suffered in consequence.

Scottish Common-Sense Philosophy

A third distinctive cultural influence has been common-sense philosophy. In the late eighteenth century there was a philosophical movement often called the 'Scottish philosophy'. It stemmed from Thomas Reid, whose *Enquiry into the Human Mind* in 1764 was an answer to the scepticism of David Hume. According to Hume we cannot know for certain even whether the sun will rise tomorrow. Reid thought on the contrary that some things are certain because our intuitions are reliable. The concept of cause and effect, for example, is part of our intellectual make-up. Such basic concepts for reasoning need no proof, since they are like basic axioms in mathematics. This Scottish common-sense philosophy became very widespread in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century. It was taken to America by John Witherspoon, who became the President of Princeton University. Witherspoon and other leading advocates were Evangelicals and this school of thought was taken up eagerly as a vehicle for the gospel. Spurgeon's College, for example, one of the major theological seminaries of the late nineteenth century in London, naturally taught Scottish common-sense philosophy.

The problem was that 'common-sense' was a particular phase in the history of philosophy, a set of ideas stemming from the later Enlightenment. As Romanticism advanced following the Enlightenment, it affected philosophy. The Romantic temper nourished a new school of idealist philosophy which began to influence Scotland in the 1860s. This movement denied that common-sense philosophy was truly common sense, a part of the human condition. The idealists taught a wholly new approach, so that Scottish philosophy seemed *passé*. Younger men trained in the universities from the 1860s rejected common-sense philosophy and the evangelical assumptions which seemed to be bound up with it as part of the same package. Liberal thinkers, often beginning within the evangelical movement, standardly moved away from evangelical belief because it seemed incompatible with modern thought. This instance reveals a danger in the interaction of culture and gospel, the risk of too close identification of the gospel with a transient phase in human culture. When the phase passes, so does the appeal of the gospel to people of intellectual stature.

Education

A fourth Scottish factor has been education. Scotland was noted for the extent of its parish school system. The Reformation ideal, largely carried out, meant that by 1800 only ten parishes in the whole of the land lacked a public school. The system was designed to encourage literacy and in turn to promote Bible reading. Associated with it was the belief that all

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ministers should be graduates, a conviction that remained in the Church of Scotland throughout the period we are examining. This intellectual emphasis led to able theology being written from an evangelical perspective, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and especially in the Free Church and United Free Church. Men such as James Denney wrote extraordinarily powerful evangelical works that still stimulate many today.

But a problem arose with this intellectual emphasis in Scottish life. Some began to rate the intellectual higher than the evangelical. There was, for example, an uncritical acceptance of a particular phase in biblical criticism, so that some of the pupils of George Adam Smith, that distinguished Principal of the University of Aberdeen, began to think that criticism of the Bible could be pursued without application to believers' lives. Ministers trained in this way of looking at the Bible became infinitely less effective in the cause of the gospel in the inter-war period and fostered the liberal evangelical trend of that period. This reveals the risk associated even with scholarly endeavour. It can put too much emphasis on the academic to the detriment of the cause of Christ.

Social Philosophy

Fifthly, there was Chalmers' social philosophy. Thomas Chalmers in his *Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, published in 1821, developed social policies for the period. Population increase, industrialisation and urbanisation led him to ask: how can we Christianise and civilise the rising proletariat? The answer was to restrict poor relief to the really needy – the able-bodied should help themselves. There should be an effort to investigate the circumstances of the poor very carefully and to concentrate relief on the deserving alone. This was to be the aim in every parish. The result, in Chalmers' view, would be a godly commonwealth in Scotland, with a sober, industrious workforce, attached to their superiors and church-going. Chalmers' ideal became the entrenched policy of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church alike after the 1843 Disruption. This set of values, predicated on self-help, formed Victorian values more than any other strand of influence, not just in Scotland, but throughout the English-speaking world. Respectability and church-going were bound together.

The results of this development were ambiguous. The ideal was widely accepted by the upper working classes. Respectability became ingrained there, encouraging educational aspirations and many other good things. Amongst the lower working classes, however, it was deeply resented. They received little relief, even when they were really poor, and so Christianity appeared a hypocrisy. This perception contributed much to the twentieth century's growing alienation of the working classes from the churches in Scotland. A social philosophy, which at first for noble and Christian reasons was grafted on to the gospel and in the short term

SCOTTISH CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON EVANGELICALISM did good, was at least partly responsible in the long term for a disaster for Christian witness. This is a practical result of too close an identification of the gospel with an aspect of culture.

Conclusions: Niebuhr's Analysis in Scottish Perspective

There, then, are five case studies of Scottish cultural influence on Evangelicalism. What do they show? Let us try to sum up the gospel-and-culture relationship, returning to Niebuhr's five positions and asking what light the Scottish experience sheds on them.

First, there was the stance of 'Christ against culture'. In Scotland, religion has been deeply embedded in the culture, and the culture deeply influenced by religion. Interaction, it is plain from these examples, has been unavoidable; and that would, of course, be true elsewhere also. Culture may be a vehicle for the gospel or else an obstacle to the gospel, but culture cannot fail to interact with the gospel. Religion cannot be isolated from it. The sectarian response, it seems, is ultimately fruitless.

The second option was 'the Christ of culture'. Education, we have seen, led to a close identification of scholarship with Evangelicalism. It was thought that Christian values would be reinforced through close study of the Bible by the critical method. Not to offer a Christian critique of the techniques of biblical criticism, the intellectual fashion of the times, seems to have been a mistake. There was no sense of potential disharmony between scholarly technique and Christian values, between an aspect of high culture and the standards of Christ. It may be suggested from the Scottish experience that the notion of Christ being visible in cultural progress is very doubtful and certainly not consistently valid.

Thirdly there was the idea of 'Christ above culture'. Common-sense philosophy did lead people to Christ in its period of vogue, but when it ceased to be popular, its association with Evangelicalism dragged the gospel down with it. Culture, therefore, may lead away from Christ as well as towards him. Culture, in fact, is deeply ambiguous, created by human beings who are made in the image of God and yet fallen. Therefore one cannot expect that it will always draw people to Christ. Here then is another position we would not wish to accept.

The fourth stance identified Christ as the 'transformer of culture'. Christian teaching may permeate a culture for good, as did Calvinism in its evangelical form, but it may so conquer one phase of culture that when history moves on, as it has a habit of doing, the gospel can be left behind in a time-warp. This principle is illustrated both by the association of the gospel with common-sense philosophy and by its sanction for Chalmers' social philosophy. There must therefore be a willingness to disengage with culture for the sake of the gospel, just as much as to conquer it in the name of Christ.

Fifthly, there was the view of 'Christ and culture in paradox'. We may in the end decide that there is a permanent tension between gospel and

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culture. There are opportunities in the cultural sphere for the Christian, but equally there are risks, because the relationship is always volatile. The instance of anti-Catholicism constituted an extraordinarily unattractive social force amongst Evangelicals and yet one that was based on jealousy for the honour of the truth of Christ. It was a deeply ambiguous phenomenon. The idea of the ambiguity of the relationship of gospel and culture is essentially Luther's. It is very closely related to his principle that the Christian is *simul justus ac peccator*, that is to say, the believer cannot help continuing to sin, even though he continues to be justified by faith in Christ. All we can hope to do, surely, is to minimise mistakes in cultural endeavour as a result of experience and to maximise the Christian content of our critique of culture.

How then should Christians contribute to cultural enterprise in Scotland in the 1990s and, if it is allowed in the providence of God, in the twenty-first century? They should marry an unselfconsciously creative spirit with extreme wariness. There are immense opportunities and there are major pitfalls. In the cultural sphere, as in so many others, the Christian has to be as innocent as a dove and as wise as a serpent.

**CREATIVE TENSIONS: PERSONAL
REFLECTIONS OF AN EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIAN AND GAELIC POET
FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH
INVERNESS**

‘Creative Tensions’ is the title I have been given. I am a Calvinist and I write mainstream poetry in Scottish Gaelic. I think that may make me a minority of a minority of a minority! However, rather than take you on a self-indulgent anecdotal meander I would much prefer to point you past me to the Bible and to any principles about language (one of my main preoccupations) that we can discover in it. Of course the idiosyncrasies of my biblical exegesis will probably tell you all you need to know about me!

Let There be Light

‘In the beginning was the Word’, says John. ‘All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.’ What are the first recorded words of the Word – the *Logos* – in Scripture, the first quoted direct speech? ‘Let there be Light’. Would it be straining matters to take from this the principle that all language, all speech, every word, should illumine? Let us hold the connection between light and language in our minds. The divine Word names the light ‘day’ and the darkness ‘night’. He names the air ‘sky’ and the land ‘earth’. But he does not name the animals. This job he gives to man. We are told in Genesis 2:19 that God formed all the animals and birds. Then he brought them to man to see what he would call them. We can see in this perhaps the doting parent holding up a cuddly toy before an infant and enquiring, ‘What’s this? Who’s this that’s come to see you?’ And the delight when the child responds with its attempt to identify the object with a word. Again, we can see in it God stimulating scientific and artistic curiosity in man – the impulse to analyse and categorize reality. Man broods on the unknown, and the lightning of insight is followed by the thunder of utterance. The sound of its name envelops the animal, enclosing it in a concept-cage. Man now makes sense of the beast. He formally recognizes its meaning. Conceptually, he ‘controls’ it. Henceforth it will inhabit this sound. Like a TV signal its image will be transmitted from human to human whenever this sound is uttered.

Tower of Babel

The transmission of the modern TV signal requires a broadcasting tower. The first tower mentioned in Scripture is the Tower of Babel, which of course is central to the biblical teaching on language. Before we scan the

passage in Genesis 11, though, let us consider a brief extract from George Orwell's *1984*:

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and very subtle expression to every meaning that a party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as 'This dog is free from lice' or 'This field is free from weeds'. It could not be used in its old sense of 'politically free' or 'intellectually free', since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless. Quite apart from the suppression of definitely heretical words, reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself, and no word that could be dispensed with was allowed to survive. Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum.¹

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they might not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth,

¹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 241-2.

and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:1-9, RSV).

In passing we might note that in the original an interesting literary device is used. Each human quote in the first half of the passage is mirrored by a divine quote in the latter half. In this 'hourglass' structure verses 1-2 are matched by 8-9, and 3-4 by 6-7. Verse 5 is the pivot, the pinch, the constraining intervention by God. Early concrete poetry, maybe?

Curse and Blessing

It seems to me that Christians make a fundamental mistake when they understand the confusion of language at Babel as a curse. The 'Orwellian' totalitarian tyranny of the single language is surely the curse. As already suggested, there is a connection between language and control, between language and *being* controlled. In one of the essays in his book, *Language and Silence*, George Steiner discusses the effects of Nazi manipulation of the German language. He suggests they ruined it for poetry. My burden is that God has delivered humanity from the thralldom of Babel by giving us many languages. The single language was the curse – the multiplicity of languages is the blessing.

God's commission to mankind through Adam was of course 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28). The impulse of Babel was directly counter to that. It was a centripetal rather than a centrifugal force. It promised unity, but it was an impacted *absolute* unity. Freedom is only possible where there is choice.

If we travel from the City of Babel (note that it was not just a tower) to the City of Athens of Acts 17, I think we can get further insight. Paul is preaching on the Areopagus.

And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring' (Acts 17: 26-8, RSV).

Here then in the New Testament we have a clear reiteration of God's Old Testament directive that mankind should inhabit the whole earth. And it is not an aimless wandering which is in view. Both OT and NT make a spiritual commission of this outward odyssey. We are to 'seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him' (NIV). Basically our responsibility is to spread out and look for God. We have to leave no stone unturned until we find him. Science is one way we are to search for him, politics another, art another, music another, language another. We are to 'subdue' each of these realms of life and bring it under the lordship

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of Christ. It is also nicely relevant here that the saying 'In him we live and move and have our being' is actually a quote from a Cretan poet of 600 BC – Epimenides – and the phrase 'We are his offspring' is from two Greek poets of 300 BC called Aratus and Cleanthes. Can we appreciate what has happened here? These men's words have become Holy Writ! The Holy Spirit has quoted pagan poets with approval! What a precedent for preachers! What an endorsement of interest in world(ly?) literature!

Parenthesis: Calvinism

So let us in parenthesis ask the obvious questions here. How many Gaelic-speaking Calvinists could name three mainstream contemporary poets, let alone quote a line or two of their work? Why is it the received wisdom of the Scottish artistic community that the coming of Calvinism to Scotland was some sort of cultural Black Death? How is it that the Gaelic churches – ostensibly the last bastions of Calvinism – can be so fundamentally antipathetic to culture, to the extent of failing to provide the Gaelic-speaking believer with a shred of argument as to why his language is worth preserving from extinction? I heard one Lewis minister on the TV intoning that, since vacant pulpits of Gaelic-speaking charges were not being filled, he could only conclude that God was passing the language by. So is Calvinism just a Christian form of fatalism?

Rookmaaker and Dutch Calvinism

The late Hans Rookmaaker used to say that if the Christian neglects social, cultural and political responsibilities then we should not be surprised if our children or grand-children end up in concentration camps. Because we have capitulated and ceded crucial areas of life to godless systems of thought. Rookmaaker was a Dutch Calvinist thinker whose main interest was the visual arts. In *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, he writes that the high point of Calvinist art in Holland was the seventeenth century. (In Scotland the phrase 'Calvinist Art' is unthinkable. The two words repel each other like the negative poles of two magnets.) This seventeenth century Dutch flowering was short-lived, and Rookmaaker suggests that this was because Calvinist culture became quickly infected with a world-denying mysticism, traceable back through Anabaptists to the Gnostics. The Puritans were not unscathed, in his opinion. Magnificent as they were at best, they had their own quietist, mystical wing. It is perhaps pertinent therefore that, until very recently, practically the only prose literature available in Gaelic was translated from the English Puritans. There are others better qualified than me to judge, but perhaps we have a clue here to what has ailed Highland Christianity.

Rookmaaker was a friend of Francis Schaeffer, who of course had a lot to say on the importance of thinking through contemporary cultural and philosophical issues. It has been these men, and other Calvinist thinkers in the Dutch tradition – Gresham Machen, the early Rushdoony, Abraham

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Kuyper, and supremely Cornelius Van Til and Herman Dooyeweerd – who have provided me with the rationale and the impetus to get involved as a Christian in contemporary culture. A couple of short quotes from Van Til, for example:

The argument between Christians and non-Christians involves every fact in the universe. If it does not involve every fact it does not involve any fact. If one fact can be interpreted correctly on the assumption of human anatomy then all facts can. If the Christian is to be able to show objectively that Christianity is true and that those who reject it do so because they hold to that which is false, this must be done everywhere or else it is not really done anywhere.²

The God of the deposit of faith must be presupposed and the understanding of the relation of God to the world must be to the effect that unless one presupposes this God there is no possibility of reason understanding anything.³

Dooyeweerd is not quite so suited to ‘sound-bite’ extraction, but try this:

The inner restlessness of meaning, as the mode of being of created reality, reveals itself in the whole temporal world. To seek a fixed point in the latter is to seek it in a *fata morgana*, a mirage, a supposed thing-reality, lacking meaning as the mode of being which ever points beyond and above itself. There is indeed nothing in temporal reality in which our heart can rest, because this reality does not rest in itself.⁴

I find in these men, and this tradition, the glorious vision of Christ as Lord of existence, physical and metaphysical. I respond to this. I am persuaded that this brand of Calvinism is the most biblical form of our faith. The *absolute* sovereignty of God is the plank under my feet. What of God’s sovereignty and human suffering, you ask? Innocent suffering is the deepest mystery in human life. All I can say is that to ascribe any ultimacy to chance or to evil is no answer. That is to make what we endure blankly meaningless. Either God is in ultimate charge of every atom and sees every sparrow fall, or there is no God. To say that is not of course to come any closer to squaring belief in a God who is good and almighty with the horrors of life. And anyway, theoretical or theological ‘answers’ to general human suffering run the risk of being offensive, if not obscene; as if the agony of multitudes on TV newscasts is in the least alleviated by what I think. It is only what I *do* that can (sometimes) make a difference. (We are really asking for ‘the new heavens and the new

² Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 171.

³ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 86.

⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia, 1969), vol. 3, p. 108.

earth in which righteousness dwells' to appear right here and now – but preferably skipping the Judgement Day, of course!) On the other hand, if I am the individual who suffers, that suffering gains meaning (or potential meaning) in measure as I can cling to faith in the benign sovereignty of God (Acts 2:23, 24, Eph. 1:11). Because this God is infinite, the meaning (or perhaps better, the *perceived* meaning) of my suffering is limited only by my trust in him. Nobody is saying it is easy. For many of us it is the final frontier of our faith. My position is that the *good* things in life have no meaning without Christ, never mind the *bad* things. And the bad things bite to the bone of our personal credos, so that we can speak only for ourselves. For others we do not offer theories (that was the error of Job's comforters), but solidarity, that is, affection and, where possible, action.

The burden of this talk then is that all truth, and consequently all meaning, comes from Christ. And as I have indicated, I have found almost all my fortification in this matter from Dutch Calvinist thinkers (though I must say that the longstanding friendship of William Storrar has been an added kindness from God). We should be the messengers of meaning. But so often we stay safe in our fox-holes, or lose our way somewhere out there in no-man's land, pinned down by enemy fire. The message does not get through. We really ought to be whooping courageously, laughingly even, into the thickest of the fighting. Because we in point of fact are *not* following a mirage or a dream. The key of reality, the *bayonet* of reality, is in our grasp. Christ *is* true. Christ *only* is true (would that I believed that more consistently myself!). Without him the human enterprise is indeed a catastrophic planetary delusion. 'For from him, and through him, and to him are all things' (Rom. 11:36). All things. All meaning belongs to Christ. All truth. Whether or not it is discovered by Christians! Calvin strongly supports this view:

Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the giver. How then can we deny that truth must have beamed on those ancient lawgivers who arranged civil order and discipline with so much equity? Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skilful description of nature, were blind? Shall we deny the possession of intellect to those who drew up rules of discourse, and taught us to speak in accordance with reason? Shall we say that those who, by the cultivation of the medical art, expended their industry on our behalf were only raving? What shall we say of the mathematical sciences? Shall we deem them to be the dreams of madmen? Nay, we cannot read

the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration; an admiration which their excellence will not allow us to withhold. But shall we deem anything to be noble and praiseworthy, without tracing it to the hand of God? Far from us be such ingratitude; an ingratitude not chargeable even on heathen poets, who acknowledged that philosophy and laws, and all useful arts were the inventions of the gods. Therefore, since it is manifest that men whom the Scriptures term 'carnal' are so acute and clear-sighted in the investigation of inferior things, their example should teach us how many gifts the Lord has left in possession of human nature, notwithstanding its having been despoiled of the true good....

Nor is there any ground for asking what concourse the Spirit can have with the ungodly, who are altogether alienated from God. For what is said as to the Spirit dwelling in believers only, is to be understood of the Spirit of holiness, by which we are consecrated to God as temples. Notwithstanding this, he fills, moves and invigorates all things by virtue of the Spirit, and that according to the peculiar nature which each class of beings has received by the Law of Creation. But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the work and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics, mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly punished for our sloth (*Institutes* 2:2:15-16).

I imagine that when Calvin refers to 'heathen poets', he is thinking in the first instance of Paul's approving quotes in our Acts 17 passage. Anyway, here ends the parenthesis. We had dropped in on Athens. Let us now get back to Babel.

Implosion

We could say that Babel was a demographic, cultural and spiritual implosion. It was not so much that mankind had stalled in its commission – rather it had slammed all engines into reverse. This was an apostate human enterprise. Now here is another interesting connection. According to my NIV Study Bible, Babel would have been a ziggurat, *i.e.* a stepped pyramid with a shrine at the top. These ziggurats were intended to be staircases to heaven and were given names like 'the House of the Link between Heaven and Earth' or 'The House of the Foundation-platform of Heaven and Earth'.

In Genesis 28:10-18 we have the story of one man who, as it were, turns over a stone and finds God – Jacob. Jacob uses a stone for a pillow and dreams of a ladder up to heaven with angels ascending and descending and the Lord at the top. It seems, however, that what is envisaged here is not a runged ladder but the staircase of a ziggurat. 'How awesome is this place', says Jacob. 'This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.' And what does the Lord say to Jacob in this dream?

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'Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.' This stone-centred Bethel – 'the House of God' – is centrifugal. A multiplicity of peoples will be blessed.

Now Jacob was a cheat – a man of guile. In John 1, Jesus tells an Israelite in whom was *no* guile – Nathanael – that he would see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Had Nathanael been asleep under the fig tree? We are not told. But we are told that Jesus – the Son of Man – is the reality behind Jacob's dream. He is the True Ziggurat, the true gateway of heaven. He is Jacob's offspring through whom the diverse nations of the earth will be blessed.

Pentecost and Babel

Now getting back to language, I want to connect Pentecost and Babel. In Acts 2 the ascended Christ sends down the Spirit. This blessing manifests itself in the apostolic ability to speak Gentile languages. Can we make the link here with Babel? God comes down on the upper room in Jerusalem, our third biblical city. If, as is thought, they were in the Temple precincts, we have another stone 'gate of heaven' here. The utterance of many languages results. And the commission is outwards – to go to the ends of the earth. The Spirit speaks in our Gentile languages and his holiness is not compromised. The truth is not compromised. On the contrary it is by these languages that the truth of the moment is best expressed. The medium is integral to the message. Our Gentile languages are legitimized, validated. Their worth and status is proclaimed. Henceforth the Word will be inscripturated in Greek rather than Hebrew. It is symbolic, but not *just* symbolic. It is practical and tactical. Greek could say things that Hebrew could not, and vice versa. They are complementary. The historical suitability of Greek to convey the truth was as much a mercy of Christ as was that of Hebrew.

We read the passage from *1984* and we highlighted the word 'city' in Genesis 11 to emphasize that Babel is not just an edifice symbolizing humanistic religion – glory to man in the highest – it is also about isolationist culture and even totalitarian politics.

New Jerusalem

We have moved from the City of Babel to Athens to Jerusalem and to the place called Bethel. There is yet another 'city-link'. In biblical symmetry this City of Man (Babel) is mirrored by the City of God at the end of the Bible. This fourth and final City does not rise impudently upwards from the earth. Rather it descends graciously to earth from heaven. We are told that the New Jerusalem will be as clear as crystal, that each unique gemstone foundation will be inscribed with the name of one of the twelve apostles (plurality of identities not just allowed by, but underwritten by,

Christ). The glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. Its gates will never be shut (Rev. 21:23-5). It is an open, pluralistic culture, focused on Christ.

And if I may be allowed some poetic licence here, Babel, far from being a sun radiating light (remember our initial connection between language and light), is rather a collapsed star – a black hole – its gravitational pull sucking in everything, even light itself. In terms of our quote from Dooyeweerd, Babel seeks a ‘fixed point’ in ‘temporal reality’. It prefers man-made brick to God-given stone. Language ceases to look for meaning ‘beyond and above itself’ in the Eternal Word, and so becomes babble. God comes down at Babel. Ironically, it really turns out to be the ‘gate of heaven’ (with God as gate-crasher). Remember the hourglass. Time runs out for man. The linguistic Alcatraz is liberated. The gate of the archetypal Gulag yields.

Search-lights

The light of God floods the black windowless skyscraper of Babel. It becomes a crystal – a prism of colours exploding in all directions. (Remember the transparent be-jewelled New Jerusalem.) Each refracted colour (each language!) is a search-light. Not like the search-lights of a prison-camp spotlighting escapees in order that they may be shot down, but tunnels of coloured light acting as corridors of escape. And the fugitives are not escaping *from* God – they are escaping *unto* God. For Christ is the True Ziggurat, the True Staircase, the True Door, the True Route of Escape, the True Light, the True Word. Only in him do our words have meaning. To him who overcomes Christ will give a ‘white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it’ (Rev. 2:17). To each a personal name (word? language? identity?) of God-given, God-filled meaning, rock-solid meaning. The Second Adam is the true name-giver.

The single language of Babel is refracted into the many. Why? To deliver us from the tyranny of pagan thought-control which a monopolistic world language threatens. To deliver us from the silence which totalitarianism always seeks to impose on the populace in its grip. God leads the jailbreak. For freedom Christ has set us free, free to seek God while he may be found and where he may be found (though he is not far from any of us). And each language is a searchlight with which to seek him. A fissure, a hole punched in the wall of silence.

Silence and Modern Literature

Vladimir. Écoute!

Estragon. Je n’entends rien.

Vladimir. Hsst!

Estragon. Tu m’as fait peur.

Vladimir. *J'ai cru que c'était lui.*

Estragon. *Qui?*

Vladimir. *Godot.*

Estragon. *Pah! Le vent dans les roseaux.*

Each language is a critique of silence. Much modern literature senses an encroaching silence. A gathering G-force of cosmic emptiness. According to Colin Duckworth in the introduction to his edition of *En Attendant Godot*, one of the convictions of Beckett is that 'words give thoughts their existence and are therefore the only defence against being plunged into Nothingness (le néant), the Void (le vide) of silence and timelessness'. Duckworth quotes Pascal's very modern angst: 'Le silence éternel des espaces infinis m'effraie' (The silence of the eternal spaces terrifies me), and points out that Pascal's remedy – 'tendre les bras au Libérateur' (to reach out to the Deliverer) – was not open to Beckett. For Beckett, 'such a reaction would be a sterile, facile, cowardly, and undignified failure to come to terms with the universe in which we live and to accept it fearlessly. The choice lies with each one of us.'⁵ Well, I am with Pascal on this one! And if I am accused of needing a crutch, I will readily admit it. Though actually what *I* need is more like a life-support system! But the cowardice bit (and the rest) is of course gratuitous. Neither my cowardice nor Beckett's bravery can dethrone Christ if in reality Christ is Lord of all. Christ's Lordship – that is the issue. In rejecting the stone which will become the chief cornerstone Beckett senses the silence closing in. His tower of words is not so much a rampart of defence as a vantage point above the hubbub of the street, the better to hear the silence approach. For Beckett and other modernists (like Sartre) Godot never was, and if the universe is filled with anything it is the dying echo of hollow laughter: 'Maintenant, je savais: les choses sont entières ce qu'elles paraissent – et derrière elles... il n'y a rien.' (Now I knew: things are precisely what they appear to be – and behind them... there is nothing.)⁶

If ultimate reality consists of void, and if we are determined that as writers we shall bear witness to what reality is, eschewing the escapist romantic fantasy that out there somewhere lies the Big Smiling Meaning, how shall we defend our very words from ultimate emptiness? Can we create words which have meaning 'in themselves'? Can we happily dispense with the need to underwrite, to validate their meaning with reference to absolutes 'above and beyond' them? What if only escapist 'let's-pretend-there's-meaning' words are possible? What if realism reveals that the void is not just 'out there', but down here where we are also? That it is in the void that we 'live and move and have our being'? That our words are hollow – that they have always been hollow – and that only

⁵ Beckett, *En Attendant Godot* (London, 1966), pp. xxxiii-iv, cxxxi.

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (transl. as *The Diary of Antoine Roquentin*).

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the legacy of past faith-systems and current pretence save us from babble and silence? How will we build out great tower if our bricks are hollow and frangible? How shall we build without those white stones inscribed with meaning?⁷

In Beckett we find an increasing dislocation between words and meaning, between brain and voice. Syntax breaks down. Phrases are forlornly repeated as if in the hope (there is no hope, of course – he just wants rigorously to impress that fact upon us) that some coherent reality might yet be conjured up. But the incantation does not work. The man-made bricks will not transmute into white stones of meaning. The walls of silence close in further. In this context, we have also the stark, memorable imagery of T.S. Eliot's 'Hollow Men' (though I believe Eliot is alerting us to a danger that he believes can be escaped):

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.

...Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

...For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*, London, 1970).

⁷ Cf. Deut 27:1-8, especially in the en français courant version: 'Vous dresserez de grandes pierres que vous peindrez en blanc; sur ces pierres vous écrirez tous les commandements de la loi.'

Nature and Wisdom

Christ the last Adam is the true name-giver. It is interesting to me that at the outset of his ministry Christ, like Adam, was alone with the animals (Mark 1:12, 13). Let us bring animals and language and poetry and wisdom together by turning to one passage of Scripture –

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.... He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish (I Kings 4:29-34, NIV).

So what did this wisest man in all the earth talk about? – Plants and animals! (And maybe this brings to mind a passage in the NT – ‘Consider the lilies how they grow – Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.... The Queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom. And behold a greater than Solomon is here.’ Luke 12:27.) Each plant, tree, creature is an irreplaceable book of wisdom – library of wisdom. The extinction of a species is an incalculable loss to mankind – not just spiritually and philosophically but in inestimable practical ways, for example in medicine. Part of us dies with every species. With every extinction another door slams shut in our heads. What if every bird species dies out but one? What if every animal species disappears but one? What if every flower species perishes but one? Will we be all the wiser for that? We must be as interventionist when it comes to conservation of nature as we would be if we could salvage irreplaceable books from a burning library. And what of the demise of languages? Can it be that in this regard the Highland Calvinist suddenly becomes a doctrinaire, laissez-faire, survival-of-the-fittest Darwinist? Is it ‘only natural’ that a language which has ‘failed to adapt’ should become extinct? Is the world inexorably evolving upwards towards a single world language? The last time one language had a monopoly God intervened. Has he changed his mind? Can intervention on Gaelic's behalf *not* be the will of God? Do we think God is as Darwinian as we are? And if all languages fail but one will we think that progress? Progress that one tongue should consume all others? Is each language not a unique articulation of reality, a treasure-house of wisdom? And as each language dies does a light not go out for ever? Does a door not close forever in the human mind? Is one more route of escape not denied the human soul? Is a monolithic monolingual Babel not being rebuilt block by block as successive languages fall finally silent? Are we so naive as to imagine that if mankind speaks only one language – be that language even English (!) – then civilization will expand apace? If the grand piano swallows all the other instruments in the orchestra what will become of

symphonies? Will not even pianists in time wince and wonder if there might be more to music than this?

And where are the messengers of meaning? It is surely a tragedy and an outrage that we who claim to follow Christ are so often diffident, dumb or downright deadly when it comes to natural or cultural rescue efforts? Who else on the earth but believers in the Creator should be arguing the case for the conservation of the creation? Who else but those who believe that the Word was with God, and that the Word was God, and that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, should be defending words from meaninglessness, speech from debasement and languages from oblivion? I am not just talking about lying and swearing and morality and piety! I am talking about the raw stuff of existence – the fabric, the warp and woof of life, the elements of daily human experience. I am talking about the lilies and about the hyssop that grows out of the wall and about the sparrows that fall! I am talking about words as an expression of the divine image in humanity, words, for every careless one of which men will have to give an account on the day of judgement (Matt. 12:36).

To our shame we so often stand 'like coos lookin ower a dyke' at unbelievers as they frequently struggle heroically to safeguard or salvage the meaningful in life. Thank God for common grace! Let me spit this out – a Calvinism, a Christianity which has no interest in the earth and the human lot on the earth is in my opinion infected with a hideous heresy, having more to do with Gnostic mysticism and Plato than the Bible. Cursed is the ground because of our disobedience. Can we not see? Can we not glimpse the glory that 'from him and through him and to him are all things'? And so therefore all things are ours 'whether the world or life or death or the present or the future' (I Cor. 3:21)? Have we never read that the body is meant for the Lord and 'the Lord for the body' (1 Cor. 6:13)? That it was in hope of the redemption of our *bodies* that we were saved, and that the whole physical creation will share in that deliverance (Rom. 8:19-24)? That the consummation of history is not when the earth is abolished and we become ghosts in an aethereal heaven, but rather when heaven comes down to *earth* (Rev. 21:1-4, 22-27; 22:1-5)? Did the second Person of the Trinity become flesh in order to annihilate flesh? Did he become a man in order to dematerialize mankind? Has the second Man and the last Adam not the slightest interest in speaking meaning to the animals? Has he changed his mind about the lilies and the sparrows? Have we to abandon any notion of discovering wisdom in the creation? Has God not the least interest in scientific truth, political truth, historical truth, linguistic truth, and dare I even whisper it – aesthetic truth? (Lilies being more glorious than the bedecked Solomon is of course an aesthetic judgement.) Has God not the least interest in whether or not humanity invents the wheel, or flies to the moon, or whether our suspension bridges fall down? Is the earth no more than a seedy waiting room for an incorporeal eternity? What if we are wrong?

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What if there is work to be done? Has the cultural commission of Genesis 1:28 been rescinded? Does it not rather remain an integral part of the great evangelical commission of Matthew 28:18-22?

Stewards

Cursed is the ground because of our disobedience. Did not God make Adam steward of the earth? Are we not stewards still? Are we not stewards also of the languages we speak – how shall we preach Christ in Newspeak? What if our only newspaper is called *Pravda*? Are we not stewards in particular of the languages unique to our own nations? And if the saying ‘It is not the healthy but the sick who need the doctor’ holds good culturally also, then where should the attentions of the linguistically-called Scot be? Before the light fails. Before the wisdom dies. And what if God chooses to speak Gaelic to our generation? Is that ridiculous?

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him (1 Cor. 1:27-9, NIV).

One of those beams of light from Babel is called Scottish Gaelic. It is flickering and fading. It was in our stewardship but we have neglected it. If it goes out there will be one less route of escape for mankind. One less window through which to look for and find God. Let us act. Before the light fails. Before the wisdom dies. Before the silence steps closer.

Christ is Lord of all. And should we the messengers fall mute, the very stones will cry out! As to what language they will speak, well...!

THE GOSPEL AND SCOTTISH FICTION

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In Scotland the novel made its first appearance when society was predominantly Christian and continues to be a significant literary form in today's secular society. Such a lengthy historical period has produced many substantial works of fiction. In this short paper, I intend to outline, necessarily briefly, the changing impact of Christianity on Scottish fiction from Sir Walter Scott to the present. The paper will provide a range of observation rather than specialist analysis, though I hope to make a few critical points throughout.

Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816)

The nickname 'Old Mortality', which provides the title of Scott's novel of the vexed religious history of the seventeenth century, belonged to an historical figure who in a slightly later period visited Covenanting graves to ensure that tombstone inscriptions were kept legible. Thus it is Scott's contention in the novel that only one side of the historical argument was being remembered. In *Old Mortality* he sets himself the task of redressing the balance. Scott thought of his novel as a warning against religious bigotry and many contemporary literary critics accept it as an accurate account of the period:

Generations of subsequent research have only confirmed the essential justice and fairness of Scott's picture of both sides.¹

The novel's plot centres on Henry Morton who, grieved by Royalist excesses, joins the Covenanters. Morton's piety is not of the Covenanting variety but it is real and sincere. His belief that the Covenanters should be free from oppression is what determines him to identify with them. Thus we are faced with the familiar split in Scott's work, where he cannot support the Episcopal state, personified by Claverhouse, though his heart lies there, but must support the oppressed Covenanters, simply because they are oppressed. Oppression is a symptom of government which has become so bad that it is destroying those it is meant to serve. Morton may not participate in the ethos of the Covenanters but he does share with them a unity of purpose which cannot be easily ignored. Even here, however, identification cannot be total, precisely because Scott fears in the Covenanters that same impulse to destructive authoritarianism which he detects in the state.

Though Morton fights for the Covenanting cause, the Covenanters Scott depicts are viciously sectarian, foolish or entirely mad. After the

¹ David Daiches, 'Scott's Achievement as a Novelist', in *Modern Judgements: Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin (London, 1969), pp. 33-62, at 50.

Battle of Bothwell Bridge, the Covenanters in disarray turn on Morton with a hatred so extreme that they contemplate his murder. As it is Sunday, they decide not to kill him till after midnight. In an extended note, Scott reveals that the essence of this story came to him from a Galloway exciseman who found himself in precisely that disturbing situation. In other words, one of the main pieces of evidence adduced by the narrative to establish the terror of the Covenanters has no basis in Covenanted history. Of course it could be argued that that does not affect its importance if it is true to the sort of things the Covenanters did. However, it is significant that Scott does not have to rely on reports of criminal activities from Galloway excisemen to produce evidence of state-sanctioned torture – he merely uses eye-witness accounts.

The notes did not appear until the Magnum edition of 1830: thus this distinction between sources would not have been apparent contemporaneously. Notwithstanding, contemporary reaction to *Old Mortality* was swift, forthright and hostile. John Galt said Scott 'treated the defenders of the Presbyterian church with too much levity, and not according to my impressions derived from the history of that time'.² Galt went on to write *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823), a historical novel dealing with events between the Reformation and the Restoration, which outlines the Covenanted position more sympathetically. Similarly James Hogg wrote *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818) to counter Scott's novel. Unsurprisingly Scott found Hogg's novel 'false and exaggerated', to which Hogg replied by questioning the veracity of *Old Mortality*:

[T]here is not one single incident in the tale – not one – which I cannot prove from history to be literally and positively true. I was obliged sometimes to change the situations to make one part coalesce with another but in no one instance have I related a story of cruelty or a murder which is not literally true. An' that's a great deal mair than you can say for your tale o' Auld Mortality.³

Despite this contemporary antagonism, which shows clearly how strong feelings still ran about the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century, among twentieth-century writers, artists and literary critics Scott's interpretation has carried the day. Scott's depiction of the Covenanters as bigoted and uncultured has often been followed by later writers when they too wish to dismiss Covenanters, Calvinists or Christians.⁴ A writer such as Lewis Grassie Gibbon, who knew the story

² John Galt, *The Life and Literary Miscellanies of John Galt*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1834), I, p. 254.

³ James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh and London, 1972), p. 106.

⁴ Further discussion of these issues can be found in Beth Dickson, 'Sir Walter Scott and the Limits of Toleration', *Scottish Literary Journal* 18

of Dunnottar Castle and on that basis aligned the Covenanters with ordinary Scots of his own day who wrested better working conditions from what they perceived to be a socially unjust state, is the exception rather than the rule.

James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)

This title takes its reference not from history but from theology, from the central Reformation doctrine of 'justification by faith'. It concerns a strangely tormented character, Robert Wringhim, who believes he is one of the elect, but who murders his brother and finally takes his own life. That this novel has a multiplicity of interpretations is a literary commonplace. For the purposes of this paper I wish to suggest that it may be read as a warning not against intolerance, as Scott intended *Old Mortality*, but against excessive rationalism.

The novel is written in three parts. The Editor's narrative is written by a member of the Edinburgh Enlightenment *literati* and purports to be the objective, rational account of Robert Wringhim and the strange events of his life. The Sinner's Confessions are Robert Wringhim's own subjective, irrational account of these same events. Robert, being an 'elect and justified person', believes that he cannot lose his Christian identity by any action however wicked. Strictly speaking, therefore, the novel is not so much about justification as its theological but heretical double – antinomianism. Finally there is a short final account by the Editor of the discovery of the Sinner's grave together with his Confessions.

During the Sinner's narrative it becomes apparent that Wringhim fears the devil may have an interest in his soul and may at times possess him. Actions which seem inexplicable in the Editor's narrative, when told from the Sinner's point of view may be understood either as madness or occult possession. Wringhim has a friend he calls Gil-martin, who has close similarities to the devil as he is described in the Bible and in the Scottish folk tradition in which Hogg was steeped. It is apparent that Wringhim is a deeply troubled individual and describes in himself what the reader may recognise as the symptoms of schizophrenia. Gil-martin, the name he gives to the voice he hears which tells him to commit murder, may be the evidence of a split personality.

Hogg's novel has been constructed to show the limits of rational endeavour. Douglas Gifford has said: [T]he parts are designed so that they fit an overall pattern of rational / objective experience set against supernatural / subjective experience Part 3 is a weighing up of the

two claims, with new evidence on both sides, which significantly comes to no final resolution of both or decision for either.⁵

Similarly it is Tom Crawford's judgement that 'Uncertainty, ambivalence and mystification prevail throughout Hogg's masterpiece.'⁶ Most criticisms of the novel take the form of arguments which are almost legal in the tightness of their construction, using the tiniest details to build up a case for one interpretation which harmonises all the evidence. However, the text stymies every attempt to reduce it to intellectual order. No matter the density of the argument it is hard for any reader to pronounce on the most basic question one may ask of a plot: what happened?

The novel is an open narrative *par excellence* and its view of reason contrasts strongly with that found in theological works which were commonly known. The Shorter Catechism, for example, proceeds by question and answer. The answers are categorical and closed. Theological narratives have an air of finality, assurance and confidence in their theoretical position. But Hogg is never categorical about what can be known. He demonstrates this in his work by forcing the reader to experience the crippling of their own rational powers by a text which thwarts intellectual endeavour.

Hogg also uses the narrative to make the obvious point that excessive rationality may distract from a proper attention to behaviour. Robert Wringhim is a clear example of a man who speaks a Christian rhetoric but whose behaviour is the antithesis of the gospel. Less obviously, however, the novel may also warn against the common but miserable emotional reaction to the rationalism of Reformed Christianity – spiritually unhealthy habits of morbidity and introspection which lead to self-obsession and self-absorption – habits which disrupt, worry and unsettle the processes of grace and faith in the life of the believer.

Old Mortality and *Justified Sinner*, novels from the first quarter of the nineteenth century, clearly show how deeply Christianity informed the intellectual and imaginative processes of Scottish writers. The novels raise question about politics, statecraft, history, philosophy and religion which are all discussed with reference to Christianity. Such an intense intellectual atmosphere which makes serious demands on the will – for what is apprehended intellectually must be lived out practically – seems to have had more perilous implications for the emotions and the imagination. Those strongly human functions when proportionately neglected produce a strange, dark mental interior of fear and unhappiness. (Similar psychological reactions are linked with the Puritan inheritance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's New England fiction.) Hogg's novel was hardly

⁵ Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 145.

⁶ Tom Crawford, 'James Hogg: The Play of Region and Nation', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1987-8), III (1988), p. 100.

understood in its time. It was not until the early twentieth century when the processes of human psychology were more widely understood that this difficult novel received fresh attention. It may be read still as one of the great religious novels of all time, a *Pilgrim's Progress* in reverse, a terrifying study of human destruction.

George MacDonald's *Malcolm* (1875)

This title contains a common Scottish Christian name and as such is reminiscent of other MacDonald titles, such as *David Elginbrod* (1863) and *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865). These names suggest an Everyman figure. This Everyman's quest is not Calvinist in nature or origin but rather is in flight from Calvinism, reflecting MacDonald's rejection of Calvinism and his appropriation of a more liberal Christianity. MacDonald was educated at King's College, Aberdeen, and became a Congregationalist minister in 1850. In 1855 he resigned over his views on the fate of those who had never heard the gospel. He turned to journalism, lecturing and literature in order to make his living. He was deeply influenced by the ideas of F.D. Maurice on the links between art and religion.

MacDonald combined unusual powers of making imaginative worlds with perceptive psychological insight. Works such as *Phantastes: A Faery Romance for Men and Women* (1858) influenced C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and David Lindsay. In his fantasy work Christian doctrine is implicit in myth. In the short story 'The Golden Key', the children Mossy and Tangle embark on a journey which leads them to the end of the rainbow. There Mossy finds the keyhole which fits the golden key he found at the outset. Through the 'complex and puzzling symbolism' of forests, baths, wildernesses, fire, and old men who look like children, MacDonald is able to deal with ageing, purification, perseverance, the love of God and his overriding theme that death is the aim of all existence.⁷ While a paraphrase of the symbolism is always useful, the power of MacDonald's writing inheres in his symbolism which communicates, in ways which anticipate the theories of Freud and Jung, with the imagination and the emotions at their most profound.

Not all MacDonald's writing is fantasy. Although there may be fantastic elements in novels there are also psychologically realistic elements. Attacks on Calvinism as a distortion of the gospel are common in his fiction or on any view of Christianity which stresses guilt, judgement and hell, as in this extract from *Malcolm* which is an account of a revival in a north-east fishing community. MacDonald is content with the revival as a natural, spontaneous expression of fishermen's spirituality but is against all attempts to organise revival. The preacher is

⁷ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, 1988), p. 319.

a young student whom the privations of student life, particularly hunger, have made seriously ill. MacDonald criticises his sermon:

Not one word was there in it, however, concerning God's love of fair dealing, either as betwixt himself and man, or as betwixt man and his fellow; the preacher's whole notion of justice was the punishment of sin; and that punishment was hell, and hell only; so that the whole sermon was about hell from beginning to end – hell appalling, lurid, hopeless.⁸

Like Scott's criticism of the Covenanters, MacDonald's criticism of Calvinism has not gone unchallenged. In his book *The Churches in English Fiction*, Andrew L. Drummond takes MacDonald to task, arguing that his Calvinist characters are oddities, never reasonable representatives of their beliefs.⁹ This is exactly the same charge made against Scott. Drummond also accuses MacDonald of holding too optimistic a view of humanity, arguing that sin was much more serious than he supposed. These criticisms are similar to those made earlier by T.G. Selby in *The Theology of Modern Fiction*, who says of MacDonald's characters:

[They] do wrong because they dislike the demand the law of right makes upon the forces of the moral life, and perhaps never take active delight in evil for its own sake and in those who work evil. Sin is inertia, passivity, unresisting supineness, and not positive malignancy which may be as aggressively purposeful as a career of righteousness. This one-sided philosophy of the will often underlies the delineation of some of the incidents of common life, and gives a touch of artificiality to the scenes.... Under no circumstances does evil enlist the unknown powers of the will.¹⁰

The contrast with Robert Wringhim could not be more striking. Changing interpretations of Christianity have in this case precise fictional parallels.

The Kailyard

This is the dismissive epithet coined by W.E. Henley and given to the great outpouring of popular Scottish fiction at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. William Robertson Nicoll (1857-1923), a son of the manse from Aberdeenshire, became a journalist and the hugely influential editor of the *British Weekly* (founded in 1886). He cultivated a number of Scots – J.M. Barrie, S.R. Crockett, Ian MacLaren and Annie S. Swan – who could produce the blend of popular fiction and

⁸ George MacDonald, *Malcolm*, new edition (London, 1875), p. 186.

⁹ Andrew L. Drummond, *The Churches in English Fiction: A Literary and Historical Study* (Leicester, 1950), ch.8.

¹⁰ Thomas G. Selby, *The Theology of Modern Fiction* (London, 1897), pp. 154-5.

religious sentiment which attracted such a large market. Nicoll's aim in producing the magazine was to civilise Non-conformists by introducing them to art and culture, of which they had been traditionally suspicious. These Kailyard writers share with George MacDonald a liberal theology and an idealised view of human nature.

Ian MacLaren's *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* (1894), a series of sketches of life in a rural Scottish community, was one of the Kailyard's runaway successes, eventually selling over three quarters of a million copies. Its initial sequence concerns George Howe, lad o' pairts, who has had to return home from his brilliant College career because he is terminally ill. In conversation with his mother he recollects how frightened he was after a revival evangelist had preached on eternal punishment and the fate of all those who did not repent and believe and had vividly illustrated his theme by burning a piece of paper and drawing the obvious conclusions. George's view of God is based as much on experience as on Scripture and rejects as unworthy of God some ideas of judgement and eternal punishment. Discussing this with his mother later, George remembers how she had come into his room and what she had said to comfort him that evening:

'Am I a guid mother tae ye?' and when I could dae naethin' but hold, ye said, 'Be sure God maun be a hantle kinder.' The truth came to me as with a flicker, and I cuddled down into my bed, and fell asleep in His love as in my mother's arms.¹¹

The nature of the Kailyard as a popular fictional phenomenon was not fully grasped at the time. Kailyard fiction provoked a howl of protest from more literary writers who anathematized it for being sentimental in characterisation (people were too good to be true), in plot (all was not well), in theme (all was not for the best) and in setting (this was not the best of all possible worlds).

George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901)

It was this novel which vented much of the very real anger the Kailyard aroused. It can be read as a black parody of the Kailyard, though finally it is much more than that as it moves readers back to some of the central historical concerns of the Scottish novel – identity, conflict and history – using supernatural motifs to produce an Ayrshire more reminiscent of Burns than the Kailyard. Like Kailyard fiction, however, the novel is set in a rural community but that place seems more like hell than heaven. Its inhabitants are malign rather than benign and are motivated by self-interest. Its civic, business and institutional leaders are bereft of moral value. The village has two ministers, neither of whom has any influence for good on their parish. Its 'lad o' pairts' becomes an alcoholic at

¹¹ Ian MacLaren, *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* (London, 1894), p. 37.

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University and returns not to die in his mother's garden but to kill his father in the kitchen.

The writers of the Scots Literary Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s consolidated this position. They wanted to re-create Scotland, to free it from the stereotypical images of it which dominated Kailyard fiction. They wanted to strip away the sentimentality which seemed to surround its history and literature in relation to figures like Bonnie Prince Charlie and Robert Burns. They also wanted to put an end to what they saw as the deathly influence of religion on culture. Many blamed Calvinism for blighting Scottish culture. Edwin Muir, Hugh MacDiarmid, Neil Gunn, Naomi Mitchison, Fionn MacColla and a number of others all held that view with varying degrees of intensity. It is a view which is still common today. However, if we take the case of Edwin Muir as an example, the form of Christianity with which he was familiar as a child was nineteenth-century revivalism. The early twentieth-century demonisation of Calvinism, while it is a serious historical argument, may also be understood as a reaction against a form of Christianity which was almost synonymous with a late Victorian outlook. Thus when reaction set in against that culture, its religious component was rejected as well. This case however remains to be made. Someone who does seem to highlight the need to discriminate between Calvinism and Evangelicalism is Catherine Carswell, to whom we now turn.

Catherine Carswell's *Open the Door!* (1920)

The title of this novel contains a sense of anticipation, of new possibilities. It is an obscure biblical quotation taken from 2 Kings 9:3 in which Jehu is advised to 'Open the door and flee'. This modifies the original anticipatory thrust by highlighting the necessity of escape from a dangerous environment. By using a biblical quotation in this way, that is by using an obscure quotation to apply to a present personal condition, Carswell shows a familiarity with evangelical habits of mind, which are so saturated in Scripture that its words are often used to articulate personal, even mundane, occurrences. For Carswell to use Scripture in this way is deeply ironic, because she uses the text to criticise the outlook which could produce such allusions.

Catherine Carswell was born Catherine MacFarlane in 1879. Both her grandfathers were ministers who came out at the Disruption in 1843. Carswell did not profess Christianity in adulthood. Her son John Carswell has written of her:

Though she was converted to socialism by reading Blatchford at the age of seventeen, and later espoused many left-wing causes, she could never quite abandon the idea that 'underneath were the everlasting arms' or bear the depreciation of private charity.¹²

¹² John Carswell, 'Introduction', in *Open the Door!* (London, 1986), pp.

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Carswell was brought up in a deeply evangelical family and knew from personal experience the genuinely attractive outworking of religious faith in the lives of her parents. Although intellectually she could not believe in Christianity, and although she found parts of her parents' evangelical lifestyle life-denying, she did not use ridicule or satire to caricature believing people with whom she disagreed.

Many scenes in her novels will strike a chord with evangelical readers. In *Open the Door!* she describes the children's embarrassment when their mother begins to evangelise on the train. She describes the austerity of the Free Church assembly in a way which is moving rather than rebarbative. In *The Camomile* (1922), one of the main characters is an aunt who attends the Keswick convention and who entertains many lady missionaries who come to Glasgow to give reports of their work.

However, *Open the Door!* is a *Bildungsroman* which follows the development of Joanna Bannerman; Carswell sees it as necessary for the development of her human potential that she leave this busy religious world. Although full of activity, Joanna finds Evangelicalism empty in two significant areas. It does not sympathise with her interest in art and music, finding in these a rather doubtful distraction from the spiritual life. The varieties of human relationships it offers do not provide her with the deep blend of emotional, intellectual and sexual satisfaction she seeks. Neither does her affair with Louis Pender, though it seems to at first. The novel presents this relationship as Joanna's true marriage, though she has been married once before. (Her first marriage was brief and ended with the accidental death of her husband.) She 'had come from marriage immune', says the narrator as Joanna prepares to receive Louis; the use of the colour white in this description emphasises ideas of virginity and bridal nights.¹³ However, Louis is married and has no intention of allowing his affair with Joanna to alter his respectable public persona in any way. This dooms the relationship. Joanna is left distressed and alone. She reflects on her love for Louis that there was much to be said for it but for her 'it was not enough'. As she accepts that the affair is over she hears 'a new voice',

but it was the oldest of all voices. For it was the voice before creation, secure, unearthly, frail as filigree yet faithful as a star.¹⁴

It is not without significance that into this aesthetic description of a beautiful but vague universal benevolence, Carswell inserts the moral quality whose absence in Louis so destroyed Joanna.

Towards the end of her life Carswell began collecting materials for a life of Calvin, in order to tease out, as she had done in her biography of Burns, the myth from the reality of this figure who had such an effect on

vi-vii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

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Scottish life. At the same time she kept an informal diary, published as *Lying Awake*, in which she writes of her own spiritual disappointments:

For me as an individual the worst thing in this unhappy age in which I have grown old is that one was born into a faith which could not, without deceit or strain, be maintained.¹⁵

Open the Door! is an important novel because of its critique of late-nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, which shows how close the relationship was at that time between Evangelicalism and contemporary culture and how that closeness created conditions which proved restrictive to a growing generation. When Joanna rejected the parochial, formal, active and yet soulless Glasgow middle-class society she found herself in, she also rejected the form of Christianity which seemed inseparable from it.

Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Cloud Howe* (1933)

This title has no Christian significance. It is part of Gibbon's habit of selecting an image or group of images which sum up his theme. In this work, cloud imagery is used to describe beliefs and ideologies, in particular the passing of Christianity as a shared outlook among Scots. The novel charts the beginnings of pluralism and eclecticism in Chris but in the male characters – Robert, and then in *Grey Granite*, Ewan – the rising power of Christian Socialism and Communism.

Robert Colquhoun has married Chris Guthrie, heroine of *Sunset Song*. The couple move to Segget, a small town, and Robert, the local minister, sets out to improve the conditions of the millworkers who live in the town's poorest area. Robert begins by believing that men are basically people of goodwill and once shown the way will walk in it. Gibbon finds this outlook naive. Robert tries to enlist the help of local shopkeepers and others with civic responsibility but is dismayed by their unrepentant self-interest. Geddes, the schoolmaster, says, 'leave the lot alone, if there's anything a hog hates it's cleaning its sty'.¹⁶

Robert is swayed by Socialist activists who argue that politics must become increasingly radical to change conditions for these workers. He is embittered by the collapse of the General Strike but instead of being radicalised, he retreats into mysticism. He has a vision of Christ which turns him in the direction of quietist reflection. However, in one last awful incident he goes to relieve the suffering of a poor family. The prevailing weather conditions take a toll on his health, which was broken by the exigencies of life in the trenches in the First World War. In the last stages of his final illness, he preaches his last sermon:

So we see, it seems, in the darkened sun... the end of Mankind himself in the West, or the end of the strangest dream men have dreamt – of

¹⁵ *Lying Awake* (London, 1952), p. 169.

¹⁶ Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, in *A Scots Quair* (London, 1946), p. 270.

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both the God and the Man Who was Christ, Who gave to the world a hope that passes, and goeth about like the wind, and like it returns and follows, fulfilling nothing. There is no hope for the world at all... except it forget the dream of Christ... and turn and seek with unclouded eyes, not that sad vision that leaves hunger unfed, the wail of children in unending dark.... But a stark, sure creed that will cut like a knife.¹⁷

The sure stark creed which will cut like a knife is of course Communism, which Gibbon explores further in the last volume of the trilogy, *Grey Granite*.

MacDonald's inclusivist and universal gospel – and behind it the formative influence of F.D. Maurice's Christian Socialism – presents a different thought world from that of the earlier nineteenth-century novels, still clearly influenced by, though often critical of, Reformed Christianity. In *Open the Door!* and *Cloud Howe* Carswell and Gibbon operate within a framework in which Christianity is still a strongly informing factor. Amid the intellectual disbelief and emotional dissatisfaction there is still a memory of respect and admiration. However, from this period onwards, even the memory of a living Christianity is forgotten. The move towards a political solution rather than a religious one, which Gibbon outlined, became more attractive to writers. The gospel is marginalised and loses its cultural primacy as the prevailing world view. To illustrate this development I want to look at three contemporary works of Scottish fiction: *Lanark* (1981) by Alasdair Gray; *The Bus Conductor Hines* (1984) by James Kelman and *Strange Loyalties* (1991) by William McIlvanney.

Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981)

No Christian significance in the title is stated or implied. It is a fantasy novel. The reader follows Duncan Thaw on an after-life journey which takes him to Unthank – a nightmarish version of a Glasgow-like place projected into the future. In Unthank, Thaw is at the mercy of a powerful and dangerous social organisation which he cannot control or influence. This world feeds on all that is admirable in humanity. Man 'is the pie that bakes and eats itself', says the novel, taking to extremes the cannibalistic metaphor present in the phrase 'consumer society'. These passages alternate with passages set in Glasgow in the very recent past. In them Duncan Thaw, as an adolescent, meets a minister who tells him 'nothing that almost every Scotsman did not take for granted from the time of John Knox till two or three generations back, when folk started believing the world could be improved'.¹⁸ Thaw voices common twentieth-century difficulties with Christianity, asking why God does not intervene to prevent suffering and saying he could not believe in hell. To

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

¹⁸ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 62, 184.

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which the minister responds that once he is older he will not find it such a fanciful concept.

Strangely enough this is exactly what happens. Unthank is hell. But this world is not a vision of the future, it is our own world heightened and highlighted. In *Lanark* Alasdair Gray implies that our own world, our materialistic, individualistic society, is hell.

James Kelman's *The Bus Conductor Hines* (1984)

Kelman writes about inner-city life. He believes that there is no such thing as bad language, and that ordinary people and their language and culture have been excluded from literary discourse because of discrimination against their social class practised by a literary élite.¹⁹

The only remnants of Christianity in the world he describes are a few of the names of God repeatedly taken in vain. Through the unrelieved bleakness of his prose style, Kelman shows a narrow society restricted to the pub, the betting shop, the DSS office and sometimes a dreary workplace. The chief activities of this world are gambling, quarrelling, hanging about, joyless sex, getting drunk. The vision is of anomie, the hopelessness, misery and despair of the kind of life many people lead, of human beings deprived of choice, opportunity and change. It is a society of inhuman narrowness and restriction where poverty is the condition of existence and an unchangeable destiny.

William McIlvanney's *Strange Loyalties* (1991)

William McIlvanney writes, among other fiction, crime novels about a detective called Jack Laidlaw. McIlvanney has been influenced by existential writing and thinking, left-wing politics and American detective fiction, particularly the work of Raymond Chandler. In *Strange Loyalties* he probes Laidlaw's experience, moving through the political explanations of late twentieth-century life which characterize a novel such as *The Big Man* (1985), and deepening the existential analysis which surrounds Laidlaw, the hero of his detective stories. Reflecting on his work in *Strange Loyalties*, Laidlaw thinks:

In just about every case I've investigated, I've wanted to implicate as many people as I could, including myself. My ideal dock would accommodate the population of the world. We would all give our evidence, tell our sad stories and then there would be a mass acquittal and we would all go away and try again.²⁰

Strange Loyalties is a study of guilt. The plot centres on a car accident in which, although a man was killed, the occupants of the car covered up their involvement. The novel describes their differing reactions. One of

¹⁹ Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', in *Chapman* 57 (1989), pp. 1-9.

²⁰ *Strange Loyalties* (London, 1991), p. 10.

the passengers of the car was Scott Laidlaw, the detective's brother, whose sudden death provokes Laidlaw's investigation. Reflecting on Scott's death Laidlaw concludes:

[H]is last gift to me from the grave had perhaps been a more intense vision of the blackness in myself. It gave me a proper fear of who I was. In trying to penetrate the shadows in his life I had experienced more deeply the shadows in my own. I was his brother, all right. That beast he had fought, that ravens upon others, slept underneath my chair. I would have to try to learn to live with it as justly as I could. Beware thyself.²¹

In these passages, McIlvanney through his existential beliefs and his observation has formulated human guilt as something deeply personal, of greater enormity than any of the deeds it feels guilty about, as well as being a measure of human solidarity. The closeness of this formulation to the Calvinistic conception of total depravity is as striking as the fact that McIlvanney does not see the resemblance and is unaware that Laidlaw's image of all the world being called to court is reminiscent of Paul's language in Romans 3. While McIlvanney has given a searchingly honest, 'warts and all' portrayal of Jack Laidlaw, who sees human failings in others and in himself and who finds others and himself 'guilty', there is no evidence so far in McIlvanney's fiction of any redemptive mechanism, whereby mankind could extricate itself from its predicament, but only the resolute refusal to deny this knowledge but to live as uprightly as possible in the light of it.

Conclusion

In conclusion I offer a contrast and a comparison. The contrast could not be clearer between a novel such as *Old Mortality*, in which the gospel was so much part of everyday life that an entire society was in bitter disagreement about it, and *The Bus Conductor Hines*, where the name of Christ exists merely as a curse against the obstacles of life. The titles of the earlier novels show an easy familiarity with Christianity, yet by 1991 a well-educated author can come up with an image which happens to be significant for the New Testament and be unaware of the similarity. A working knowledge of Christianity has disappeared. That being said, it should not be overlooked that within the period of Christianity's common acceptance, there are different emphases. While the Reformed influence produced novels of a serious disposition, the liberal influence of the late nineteenth century produced a much more optimistic outlook as reflected in the fiction of George MacDonald and, in its popular manifestation, in the sentimentality of the Kailyard.

However, there is a comparison which, though not so obvious, is in some ways more striking. It concerns the resilience of a pessimistic view

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

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of humanity in Scottish fiction. We are used to hearing Calvinists being condemned for their gloomy outlook on life, their insistence on hell, predestination and sin. What we are not so used to noticing is that the themes of hell, destiny, guilt, judgement and the overwhelming seriousness of life are the province of our contemporary and fashionable novelists, such as Gray, Kelman and McIlvanney. That a society which has foresworn its Calvinistic past because of its detrimental effects on human life should, when left to its own devices, come up with a secular version of it shorn of any conception of redemption or an afterlife seems perverse. It seems almost possible to argue the opposite of Edwin Muir's thesis, not that Calvinism produced gloom and pessimism but that it was because Scots found much to discuss about the darker side of human nature, that Calvinism appealed to them. Or it may be, as T.G. Selby has argued, that any author, Christian or otherwise, is valued because of the accuracy with which he or she depicts the human condition:

It is something more than a complimentary tribute to the moral sense of the reader that truth, fidelity, disinterestedness, either by some innate property of the mind itself or by the providential forces which order the world, receive their due reward; whilst the latter end of treachery, corruption, and crime thrusts itself as irresistibly upon the apprehension of all the great masters of fiction as upon that of the psalmist when he 'went into the house of God'.²²

Whether or not Scottish fiction bears out this opinion is arguable. What does seem to be apparent is that whether influenced by the theological opinions of the seventeenth century or by the crimes of the twentieth, Scottish writers have produced some of their greatest fiction by studying with remorseless honesty the frailty of humanity and the difficulties of this present life.

²² T.G. Selby, *The Theology of Modern Fiction* (London, 1897), pp. 6-7.

REVIEWS

No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?

David Wells

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993; 336pp., £18.99; ISBN 0 8028 3713 1

This is an excellent book. Focussed on the situation in the United States, it provides a devastating indictment of an evangelical culture that has capitulated alarmingly to secularity and modernity. It has lost theology. That, someone may say, does not matter so much as long as we have not lost God. David Wells explodes that claim. In losing theology we do lose God; loss of theology is both a way of losing and a sign of the loss of God. This volume sustains the point in a wide-ranging and penetrating critique.

The tone of the book is not irenic, nor should it be, if the author's contention is correct. For this would be to cry peace where there is no peace. Neither is it bitterly polemical. It is a straightforward address. The author achieves this in extremely well-written prose, never obscuring the message by its performance but clothing it to good effect. Until the end of the book, the reader may be worried on one important score, namely that it is negative, indicating the problems but touching only in the most general way on what is positively required. However, the author takes care of that worry by announcing that he has set out to be diagnostic in this volume and will follow it up with constructive remedies in the next. To say that a reader should look forward to the next volume is not to take David Wells seriously enough; *we need* the next volume.

If the analysis is sound – and it is compellingly offered – there are two noteworthy points on which one might raise questions or dissent. The first is whether the Calvinistic tradition, considered in its socio-ecclesiastical and not just theological development, bears any responsibility for the loss of theology. I am not saying that it does, so much as saying that the question naturally arises. Wells emphasizes his allegiance to the Reformed faith. But one wonders whether he allows that proud and censorious attitudes or chilled dogma, provoking counter-emphasis on experience, played their role in discrediting theology. The second is whether it is right to say that we need reformation and not revival. Wells associates revival with a turn from sufficient concern for true reformation under the Word of God and he has the legacy of Finney especially in mind. But despite some early reference to pre-Finney revival, he tends to generalize as he comes to his conclusions and it is somewhat dangerous to play off reformation against revival as he appears to do.

If modernity had not debased the word 'prophet', one could use it for this book. If reviewers had not said so many times: 'This book is a *must* for anyone concerned for theology and the Church', one could say it of this book. I hope it is widely and penitently read by those of us who think differently, not just by those of us who think alike.

Stephen Williams, Union Theological College, Belfast

So You're Looking for a New Preacher

Elizabeth Achtemeier,

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991; 62pp., \$5.99; ISBN 0 8028 0596 5

Achtemeier's job is to 'teach preaching' (she is Professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, USA) and she offers here to help us find 'good preachers / quality preachers' and to avoid those who are 'duds in the pulpit'. Preaching we are told 'carries the church'. What the minister preaches will 'determine the whole tone and direction' of the congregation's life, either feeding them with the Bread of Life or starving them spiritually and mentally; either enabling growth, or leaving people dead and stunted. Reflecting the Reformed background of the author, the term 'preacher' here is uncritically elided with 'minister' and associated with a traditional monopolistic doctrine of ministry. The 'New Preacher' will have to be a Jill/Jack of all ecclesiastical trades.

Achtemeier sets herself to tackle the question 'What is Good Preaching?' since 'in order to call a good preacher, you need to know what preaching is supposed to be and do'. Preaching is a means of grace like the sacraments, God's action, through which he works immediately on a Sunday morning in the lives of his gathered people. It is only this when it is formed by and comes out of the Bible; only then do words of the preacher become God's Word, God's speech and action to us. Otherwise, they remain just human words. Good preachers should be orthodox, in terms of the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. Good preachers are also widely read in good literature; we are offered the improving statement that 'there is nothing that develops a preacher's imagination, creativity and style of speech so much as delving into fine prose or poetry'. Personal piety and integrity are crucial and Achtemeier supplies a list of questions for examining these. Sermons should be well crafted but preaching is not a performance.

Achtemeier encourages congregations not to rule out calling single people and notes the difficulties they often find in being called to a church. She treads cautiously on the subject of divorced clergy. She suggests 'basic criteria that separate good sermons from bad': contemporary relevance, focus on the work of God, a realistic treatment of human sinfulness, logical structure, pace and ability to hold the

interest of hearers, warmth and practicality. Pulpit stance and delivery are to be energetic and engaged – would their voice and gestures drive you mad if you lived with them week after week? The preacher is also envisaged as sole worship leader in Achtemeier's model, doing everything including reading the Scriptures in person.

Perhaps the most disappointing thing about this guide is that it was written in 1991. Its focus is thoroughly traditional, its theology is orthodox, its models of church and ministry middle-of-the-road. The equation of preacher with minister with worship leader betrays her lack of interest in new forms of ministry, and the liberal sprinkling of worthy gem-quotes appears completely comfortable with the traditional sermon format as a model of communication. The irony of this booklet in a UK context is that those most likely to warm to its contents are also those most likely to experience discomfort over the fact that it was written by a woman.

Doug Gay, Glasgow

The Autobiography of C.H. Spurgeon

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;
ISBN 0 340 57778 9

Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, first published in four volumes in 1897-1902, was an edited version of his personal records and reminiscences, supplemented by extracts from sermons and narrative accounts by his widow and friends. The volume under review, one of a series of *Spiritual Lives*, has been further edited down to its present size.

Here we have a well-selected storehouse of anecdotes, told with pungent common sense and not a little humour, fascinating in their human interest, and characterised in their telling by practical Christian wisdom. They give us a vivid introduction to the personality and character of a great Christian. We can quote only a few words of wisdom:

I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit.

Let every man called of God to preach the word be as his Maker fashioned him. The good and evil in men of eminence are both of them mischievous when they become objects of servile imitation.

You don't want dying grace in living moments, but shall have dying grace when you need it.

If you cast out the poor, you cast out the Church's strength, and you give up what is, after all, the backbone of the Church of Christ.

The story moves naturally forward through Spurgeon's conversion and early preaching, his rural ministry at Waterbeach and London ministry at

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Park Street Chapel, and on to the building of the huge Metropolitan Chapel in 1856.

After this point the narrative flags a little: the canvas has become too large to cover chronologically, and a topical approach is adopted. Spurgeon's effectiveness as preacher, evangelist and pastor was numerically impressive: he admitted 14,691 people into fellowship at the Tabernacle, and probably as many more were converted through hearing and reading his sermons. A chapter on 'Enquirers and Converts' deals with some twenty instances in an individual and personal way. Mrs Spurgeon's reminiscences point to something of the sacrificial cost that such a preaching ministry demanded of both husband and wife. An interesting chapter on 'Mr Spurgeon as a Literary Man' gives an account of the extent of his library and the breadth and depth of his reading.

The concluding chapters, as now edited, are scrappy and inadequate. In the one on 'The Growth of the Institutions' one misses any reference to the 1864 controversy on baptismal regeneration, which led Spurgeon to break with the Evangelical Alliance. The 'Downgrade Controversy', the upshot of which was his leaving the Baptist Union, is simply referred to without explanation. The chapter on 'The Last Illness' opens by referring to Spurgeon's 'return from the sunny south', but reference to a sojourn there has been edited out. On p. 254 we read 'Towards the end of the week', but the week is not specified.

Minor criticisms: the book is printed in rather harsh black type; it needs an index; on p. 148 the date should be 1856 not 1956.

†*William G. Young, North Kessock*

Christian Theology: An Introduction

Alister E. McGrath

Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; 510pp., £12.99; ISBN 0631 16078 7

This book by Alister McGrath is the most significant theological textbook to appear for some time. Its success is guaranteed, primarily because of its scholarship and general excellence but also because it fills a gap in the market, namely, a one-volume introduction to the whole discipline of Christian theology. It is almost certain to become the standard text for first-year theological students. Readers of this *Bulletin* will be particularly delighted by the fact that it has been written by one of our most prolific evangelical scholars.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is an historical overview of Christian theology, divided into four parts (Patristic, Middle Ages and Renaissance, Reformation and Post-Reformation, Modern Period) looking at the key theologians, theological developments and ideas within each period. The second section deals with sources and methods, covering important questions of prolegomena, including the

nature of faith and the existence of God, as well as the nature and significance of religious language. Most of the section is given over to a discussion of the various modes and concepts of revelation. The third section is an overview of systematic theology, largely following the traditional breakdown: God; Christ; Salvation; Human Nature; Sin and Grace; Church; Sacraments; Last Things, *etc.* In addition there are two sections entitled 'Faith and History' and 'Christianity and World Religions'.

Above all, this is a book for students. One of its great advantages is that it repeats the main lessons as you move through the various sections, so that what you learn is reinforced and built upon. There can be little doubt that anyone who masters this book will be well equipped to begin a deeper and more sustained study of the whole discipline of theology.

As well as reading the book for the purposes of review, I also used it as a seminar text during the 1994/95 session with a mixed-ability class of first-year students, some of whom were completely new to theology. Their response was significant – they found that it was easier to read than some of the more 'popular' books on the subject which they had been asked to read as 'preparation' before coming to McGrath. This is principally because McGrath is a superb teacher who presents the material in a most readable way and never uses a theological word or expression without explaining its meaning.

It seems churlish to make negative comments about such a fine book but there are a few points where the book could be improved:

1. It seemed to be utterly inappropriate to begin a study of the doctrine of God by asking if God was male. This is surely pandering to the feminist agenda. It may be that such matters have to be dealt with, given the theological climate today, but this is not the place. The self-revelation of the self-contained Trinity must surely be the starting point for any orthodox doctrine of God.
2. Given the increasing prevalence of Unitarianism in its denominational form and as a phenomenon within the mainstream denominations, it is surely odd that McGrath does not mention it as a heresy when dealing with other Trinitarian heresies, such as modalism and tritheism.
3. It is particularly disappointing to find that the book adopts American spelling. It is surely absurd for an English writer based in Oxford and with an Oxford publisher to concede to cultural imperialism in this way (whatever size the American market might be).
4. As a Scot I was very disgruntled to see that the map of 'Centres of theological and ecclesiastical activity at the time of the European Reformation' contained Oxford, Cambridge and London but made no mention of Edinburgh and St Andrews. This is particularly irritating when we consider that Scotland had a genuine Reformation whereas England had only half a Reformation!

5. Despite the generally fair and objective tone of the whole book I sensed a somewhat negative attitude every time he referred to 'Calvinism' – by which he clearly means those who hold to the federal theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Despite these comments, however, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Those who want to grapple with systematic theology must begin here.

A.T.B. McGowan, Highland Theological Institute, Moray College, Elgin

Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin

B.A. Gerrish

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993; 210pp., £12. 50; ISBN 0 567 29233 9

This suggestive and sympathetic study originated in the Cunningham Lectures delivered in New College, Edinburgh in 1990. Its starting-point is Charles Hodge's inability in the mid-nineteenth century to stomach Calvin's catholicizing doctrine of the Lord's supper as expounded by J.W. Nevin. In the circumstances of the Lectureship, it is surprising - or perhaps a signal act of *pietas* - that the author, who teaches historical theology in the University of Chicago, fails to mention William Cunningham's similarly low estimate of Calvin's doctrine of the supper: 'perhaps the greatest blot in the history of Calvin's labours as a public instructor'.

But only two of the book's six chapters are devoted to Calvin's theology of the eucharist, which is set in the context of a comprehensive interpretation of the Reformer's thought that focuses on the fatherly generosity of God as the fount of all good things and the response of gratitude as the sum of true piety. For Calvin, father, here often without an initial capital, is more a characterisation of God than a name. To it belong the images of the church as God's family, of the faithful as his sons and daughters, of baptism (to which a whole chapter is devoted) as the symbol of adoption, and of Christ as the heir, for us, of all God's goodness. The outcome is a wonderfully attractive exposition of Calvin's theology, which will be an eye-opener to those reared on caricatures of the dogmatic fatalism of the Genevan despot.

Not that Gerrish avoids the offence of Calvin's predestinarianism. 'Free adoption is the citadel of Calvin's faith; double predestination is a defensive outwork' - which had the effect of damaging the whole edifice. I doubt whether this can remain a wholly satisfactory account - in respect of either the ancillary role of predestination (too much is made to rest on the mere sequence of the 1559 *Institutes*) or, on this interpretation, Calvin's failure to discern its disastrous implications for the heart of his

teaching ('he risked making humans more benevolent than God'). Nevertheless this is a powerful corrective to many presentations of Calvin, grounded in a lifetime's study of the Reformer and the Reformed tradition. The case is built up with abundant quotations that display a rare sensitivity in translation, and in continuing comparison with Zwingli, Luther and Bullinger - but never Bucer, remarkably enough.

Gerrish discerns the distinctiveness of Calvin's view of the supper in what he calls symbolic instrumentalism: the reality that the signs point to does not merely simultaneously accompany the signs (symbolic parallelism) but is given (through the Spirit and received only by faith, to be sure) by and with the signs. What is this reality? Nothing less than the whole Christ, not merely his benefits, or his divinity separated from his humanity. More specifically, it is his body and blood, given once for all for us on the cross and, on the basis of that one sacrifice, given ever anew for our lifelong nourishment. In a concluding attempt to clarify what Calvin means by this true partaking of Christ's flesh (which is not an oral partaking), since Christ's risen and glorified body is in a single place in heaven, Gerrish argues that it is communion in its power or influence or efficacy through the radiance of the Spirit.

I would be surprised if the readership of this *Bulletin* were unanimously persuaded that Gerrish has drawn the sting of Hodge's and Cunningham's bewilderment. In the last resort Calvin's teaching retains an elusiveness not shared by the gross simplicities of Zwingli and of Luther. But this volume is a contribution of the first importance which no student of Calvin or the Reformed doctrine of the supper dare ignore.

David F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Towards a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith

Wolfhart Pannenberg

Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1993; 166pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 664 25384 9

This is not really a new book, but a collection of seven previously published articles. Four have appeared in English. Three come from the early 1970s - 'Contingency and Natural Law' (1970), 'Spirit and Energy' (1971) (both previously available only in German) and 'The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature' (1972). Three come from the early 1980s - 'Theological Questions to Students' (1981), 'Spirit and Mind' (1982) and 'God and Nature' (1983, previously only in German). Only one chapter takes us into the late 1980s - 'The Doctrine of Creation and Modern Science', first issued in 1987, and, in an expanded form, in 1989. There is the suggestion that some more material

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will be forthcoming; its tentative title is *Laying Theological Claims to Scientific Understanding: Pannenberg in Dialogue with Scientists*.

This volume also has a readable and helpful editor's introduction, written by Ted Peters (whose introduction to Pannenberg's *Theology and the Kingdom of God* is also well worth reading as an insightful introduction to his theology). Reading Pannenberg is very heavy going. It is made a bit easier by starting off with this introduction from Peters. Whether or not he whets your appetite for more from Pannenberg, he will give you the gist of what he says. Pannenberg poses theological questions to natural scientists. He 'criticizes the scientific vision of nature as incomplete', challenging 'scientists to consider incorporating the idea of God into the picture they paint'. He 'asks how theology might become more scientific and how science might become more theological'.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

The Shadow of the Galilean

Gerd Theissen

Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987; 212pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 8006 2057 7

The recent scholarly interest in the life and teaching of Jesus understood against the background of the religious, social and economic situation of his day has brought forth many weighty volumes of historical analysis. Rather than follow this trend, Gerd Theissen has written a piece of 'narrative theology' by which he intends to introduce us to the scholarship of 'life of Jesus research' in a digestible form.

In this historical novel, Theissen introduces us to a fictional character, Andreas, an educated, wealthy and fairly liberal first-century Jew from Sepphoris (the major city in Galilee, about an hour's walk from Nazareth). Andreas, through being in the wrong place at the wrong time, is arrested and manipulated into acting as a spy for the Roman authorities. In the course of executing his task, Andreas encounters various members of Palestinian society including the separatist Essenes (of Qumran), some oppressed peasants, a tax collector and Barabbas (who is portrayed as one of the 'freedom fighters', often identified as 'Zealots'). As Andreas learns more about the various people and groups, the reader also gains insight into the sociology of first-century Palestine.

Throughout his travels, Andreas never meets Jesus, but he does encounter, again and again, the effects of his teaching and life. The key elements of Jesus research are confronted such as Jesus' attitude to the law, his teaching, his miracles, his association with 'the least, the last and the lost', and his attitude towards the Temple. The closest Andreas comes to Jesus is when he looks from a distance at the cross on which Jesus is crucified and, as the sun sets behind Golgotha, Andreas realises that he is standing in 'the shadow of the Galilean'.

The story kept the reviewer interested, though some dialogue is a bit contrived in order to teach history, and Theissen does succeed in introducing many details of New Testament background in an accessible format, attempting to set them in real life.

The fundamental question concerning the book (which Theissen himself raises) is, how can the reader tell what is fact and what is fiction? Theissen's response is that the detailed footnotes will supply the necessary authority for statements of fact. The problem is that several times the beliefs of 'critical' (read, sceptical) scholarship are presented in the text, giving the impression that everything will be justified in the footnotes, whereas many 'facts' are simply a reflection of the author's attitude to the historicity of the gospel narratives and have no other authority. (This problem is exacerbated by the notes being at the end and by the 'novel' genre. These factors make constant reference to the notes less likely.) Consider the statement that represents Mark 15:33: 'the sun did not go dark.... It was a normal day and the darkness was only in me'. I found no endnote to corroborate this statement! As a presentation of Jesus research, Theissen's book introduces the reader to the important issues on the scholarly agenda, but it also accurately reflects the unwarranted historical scepticism of much (not all) contemporary scholarship in the field.

Though the book has some value for getting a feel for the time in which Jesus lived, the critical stance taken towards the biblical narratives and the inclusion of non-historical events is likely to mislead, unless the reader already has some familiarity with the relevant material. I would instead recommend the more dependable work of E. Ferguson on background and N.T. Wright on Jesus.

Alistair Wilson, Free North Church, Inverness

Nature, God and Pulpit

Elizabeth Achtemeier,

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992; 206pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 8028 3706 9

The publisher announces this as treating one of the subjects most neglected in US pulpits in recent years. Chapters 1-6 were the 1992 Payton Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. Professor Achtemeier's aim has been to draw together and interpret for the church's preachers the biblical materials having to do with the natural world and God's relation to it.

The book's eight chapters deal with the subjects of: our contemporary hunger to reconnect with the natural realm; revealed versus natural accounts of the cosmos; the purpose of creation; biblical anthropology; contingency and providence; sin and the corruption of creation; eschatology; and homiletic applications. Placed through the text are seven

sample sermons preached by the author in different contexts. There are indexes of Scripture quotations and of names.

Achtemeier's central concern is to insist that a theology of creation must flow from a theology of redemption and not vice-versa. 'In and of itself, nature gives no true knowledge of God'. Her main targets are liberal and feminist proponents of natural theologies and the various species of process thinking which flourish in their work. She takes seriously the contemporary desire to renew a relationship with nature and asserts that the disconnection experienced by people today is 'partly the fault of the church's partial theology' failing to move on from its focus on redemption to articulate a biblical understanding of creation and God's relation to it. The resulting void is, she believes 'vulnerable to inrush of alien faiths – whether aboriginal, New Age or feminist pantheism'.

We are called to understand the full dimensions of a biblical theology of creation, which encompass not just the beginnings of the cosmos, but how it continues and how it will end. If the transcendence of God is to be safeguarded, the contingency of the universe must be insisted on, against the assumption inherent in process theology that God needs the world. Creation exists through and for Jesus Christ. Its proper vocation and final destiny is to praise its Creator. While rejecting contemporary green mysticism, Achtemeier repeatedly stresses the importance of responding to the ecological crisis. In her first sample sermon, she characterises the polluting activity of human beings as 'the gagging of creation's praise'. There are no new thoughts, either profound or theologically speculative on *imago Dei* – we are just 'gloriously like God' and this should be 'rhetorically opposed to every other cheapening definition'. However, biblical anthropology should lead us to a proper care for creation and action to prevent ecological devastation. Serious attention is devoted to Ian Barbour's proposed metaphysic of the natural order, but the tensions with Scripture Achtemeier sees in this cause her to distance herself. The romanticisation of nature is given short shrift; we have to consider the ravaging effects of sin – 'nothing is *natural* any more' and suffering and death are ultimately unnatural enemies rather than just natural and neutral processes. But in her sample sermon preached at Harvard on Transfiguration Sunday she manages to be both sternly anti-utopian and glowingly hopeful for the transfiguration of creation in Christ. In the final section she gives preacherly exhortations to let the marvellous metaphors of nature flourish in the window-box of the pulpit.

Achtemeier writes elegant, warm and lucid prose, even if her style is slightly pompous and pious at times. She displays a towering command of the Scriptures, and one of the most impressive features of the book is its judicious and extensive use of biblical quotations, drawn widely and aptly from both Testaments. She is a writer who knows her Bible better than most and one who believes firmly in the possibility of biblical theology.

With a good range of references to recent literature, this is a worthwhile read. It is both conservative and contemporary, even if it is more concerned with holding old lines than breaking new ground.

Doug Gay, Glasgow

The Journals of George Whitefield

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;

ISBN 0 340 57777 0

John Wesley's Journal

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;

ISBN 0 340 5774 6

These two books are the newest additions to the publishers' Spiritual Lives series. Its aim is to provide challenge and inspiration from Christian greats of the past, drawing on acknowledged autobiographical and biographical classics. Surely the inclusion of the writings of these two leading Christian figures requires no real justification. Of John Wesley, Birrell writes in his appreciation, 'No single figure influenced so many minds, no single voice touched so many hearts.' At the funeral of Whitefield, John Wesley said that history records none 'who called so many myriads of sinners to repentance'. The publishers are to be congratulated for these two attractive, new editions.

Wesley's original Journal amounted to twenty-six volumes, which Wesley himself edited to four volumes. In 1920, P.L. Parker published his own abridgement of Wesley's four-volume edition. This present volume is itself an abridgement of Parker's single volume. It also contains H.P. Hughes' original introduction, together with A. Birrell's appreciation, both from the 1902 edition. Both provide helpful insight into the life and work of Wesley. It must be said that the contents section of this book is extremely detailed, increasing its usefulness.

Wesley began his Journal in his youth and continued making entries until shortly before his death at the age of 88. Through this book one hears from Wesley himself, of his remarkable country-wide preaching tours, of his break with the Church of England and of his experience of God.

George Whitefield originally wrote seven Journals, together with an account of his life up to his ordination. He tells us that he wrote them specifically for publication, both for the glory of God and to help raise funds for the orphanage in Georgia that he founded. In 1756, he himself revised, corrected and abridged them into a single volume. Backhouse's

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edition follows the text of Whitefield's own corrected edition of 1756 and also retains Whitefield's original Preface.

Whitefield was clearly one of the greatest itinerant preachers in Protestant history. He would regularly preach to enormous open air gatherings for between forty to sixty hours per week. As he records, 'Preached nine times this week, and expounded something like eighteen times, with great power and enlargement.' This is his dramatic life-story in his own words.

Of necessity much detail is omitted from the original Journals, but what is retained is presented in a lively, active style. What has been omitted seems to consist of more routine entries.

Perhaps all this is lacking is a brief chronology at the start of the books, placing the men and their writings in an historical context. With respect to both volumes, one can only agree with the words of Edward FitzGerald (as recorded in the editor's note): 'If you don't know it, do know it'.

Michael D. McMullen, University of Aberdeen

The Prophecy of Isaiah

J. Alec Motyer

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1993; 544pp., £19.99; ISBN 0 85110 647 1

Although on his own acknowledgement IVP have spent over thirty years anticipating Alec Motyer's commentary on Isaiah, the publishers cannot but feel, along with the Christian public at large, that it has been well worth the wait. This new publication will surely become a standard work on the shelves not only of conservative scholars and preachers, but of every serious theologian and student of the Old Testament.

This book is the fruit of a lifetime's labour. Here is a man who, through diligent and reverent study, has faithfully and painstakingly trampled the grapes of the Isaianic vine; and the long years of growing familiarity with, and reflection on, this literature have given to the wine of this commentary a richness and maturity which is always thoroughly satisfying and at times well-nigh intoxicating!

Motyer's commentary is, first and foremost, a manifestly *scholarly* work. He himself identifies 'three main thrusts in commentating: explanation (what the text means), encyclopaedia (the course of specialist debate), and exposition (the continuing reality of the text as God's word today)'. Of these, he decided 'to major on the first while by no means forgetting the last', but, there is no doubt that, at least in the sense in which he means it, his work has an encyclopaedic thrust as well.

His references to the course of specialist debate are largely confined to the concise – but not cursory – 22 page introduction and the detailed

footnotes, intruding into the main body of the commentary only as they have a bearing on the meaning of the text. Precisely this is his approach, for instance, in regard to the contentious question of authorship, where the main points of his argument are presented in the introduction, while ‘the possibility that the whole literature is pre-exilic and the product of one mind is tackled in detail, as appropriate, throughout the commentary’.

On this crucial issue of authorship Motyer argues the case for the unity of the text fully, cogently, and quite unashamedly. He speaks of, and illustrates, ‘a literature bursting with internal evidence of its unity’. Combining linguistic, manuscript, theological, historical, and logical arguments, he demonstrates why the whole literature can and should be attributed to the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem. His argument makes compelling reading, especially for those who might otherwise be awed by the apparent complexity of the ongoing debate. A second notable feature of this commentary is, as one has come to expect from this author, its marvellous *lucidity*. A full and helpful table of contents outlines the basic structure of the whole book of Isaiah, as Motyer sees it, a structure ‘built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1-37), the Servant (chapters 38-55), and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56-66)’. The introduction then fleshes out the skeleton, while throughout the commentary each new section is prefaced by further introductory comments, in such a way that the reader is well prepared for the detailed exposition, and well rewarded by the discipline of study. But that, surely, is a classic mark of the gifted teacher that Motyer undoubtedly is – the ability both to inform and to inspire the student by incisive insights presented in a down-to-earth and readable style (*e. g.* “justification by faith” is not a “Sunday” truth bearing only on our relationship with God, but also a “Monday” truth for the conduct of life in all its challenges”).

Other features that promote this lucid user-friendliness are the consistent adoption of the NIV as the working translation (though regularly his own illuminating rendering is given), the transliteration and explanation of the Hebrew words cited, and a regular reminder of the structure of the text.

For the academic purist, it is perhaps regrettable that there is no index, and that the select bibliography is so selective that it excludes, for instance, O.T. Allis. But these flaws are ultimately insignificant and (presumably) easily remedied.

No review of this new commentary, however, would be complete without brief mention of a third feature characterising the book: it is always and evidently a deeply *reverent* work from the pen of one who clearly strives to combine the pursuit of academic excellence with the spirit of ardent worship. As a result, the serious student of Scripture will find this a book that both engages the mind and inspires the heart, giving depth and substance to his praise, point and passion to his mission: a

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book to be read and used with the same patience and eagerness that the publishers themselves have shown in awaiting its completion!

*Jeremy R.H. Middleton, Davidson's Mains Church of Scotland,
Edinburgh*

Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World

Edited by Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1989; 387pp., £14.95; ISBN 1 55635 009 0

This is a collection of essays presented to the Revd Professor James B. Torrance on the occasion of his retirement from the chair of Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen. It is also the twenty-fifth volume in the Princeton Theological Monograph series.

After an 'Appreciation' by Professor Alasdair Heron, the essays are grouped into three sections: Christ and the Reconciliation of the World; Christ in the History of Christian Thought; and Christ and Salvation in Christian Theology. There are essays by former students, by colleagues, by scholars who shared his concerns and by members of his family (brother and son).

As one would expect from such a volume, it picks up and discusses many of the themes which were at the centre of Professor Torrance's own ministry (which is how he views both his teaching and preaching). This is most obvious in the essays supplied by the editors: Hart on Irenaeus and Thimell on John McLeod Campbell.

As one would expect from the title, most of the essays have a Christological focus. Ray Anderson, for example, argues that the unresolved dilemma between orthodoxy and orthopraxis can be settled by changing the focus to Christopraxis, and John Thompson, recently retired himself from Union College in Belfast, offers a discussion of Barth's Christology.

A number of the essays are controversial. Some, including this reviewer, would want to question James Houston's argument that the separation of dogmatics and spiritual theology combined with an Augustinian rather than an eastern doctrine of the Trinity has led to 'academic theology' separated from a real participation in inter-trinitarian relationships. Similarly, Jeremy Begbie's critique of the Dutch neo-Calvinist position (Kuyper and Bavinck) from a Barthian perspective (the perspective of most of the essays) should not go unchallenged.

It is a tribute to the editors (and to the respect in which Professor Torrance is held) that they have been able to persuade so many fine scholars to contribute essays to the volume. Eberhard Jungel's discussion of the phrase 'God is love' and Howard Marshall's argument against

universal salvation are notable contributions. There are too many essays to comment on them all individually but the overall standard is high and this is a volume well worth reading, especially for those who share the same theologians' concerns as J.B. Torrance. It is a worthy tribute to a scholar who has an undoubted passion for theology born of his deep commitment to the living God.

A.T.B. McGowan, Highland Theological Institute, Moray College, Elgin

Systematic Theology, vol 1

Wolfhart Pannenberg, translated by G.W. Bromiley

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; 473pp., £27.95; ISBN 0 567 09597 5

Pannenberg brings together many of the ideas previously suggested in a series of essays and articles in this rich first volume of his systematics. Like the Christmas cake on the sideboard in January, it needs to be partaken steadily and appreciatively; ministers desiring a substantial reading partner for several months may well find this good value in many ways. The publishers did well to recruit Geoffrey Bromiley as translator to ensure a clear and readable product.

Pannenberg is perhaps still best known for his work on the doctrine of revelation, and the opening chapters fill out the method of approach developed then. Pannenberg desires synthesis, he wants to blend ancient and modern, philosophical and biblical, analytical and experiential. The first chapter explores the grounds Christian theology has for talking about God. Having reviewed proposals ancient and modern, Pannenberg insists that we need to abandon the claim to any prior guarantee of Christian truth, and to make this claim to truth itself a theme of theology. Theology has to make sense of reality, to show its own coherence as a creditable interpretation of how things are. The fact that God is debated and contested in the world 'is part of the reality of the world which dogmatics has to consider as God's world'. This is the opposite of a dualistic approach or of purely kerygmatic theology.

Chapters 2 and 3 treat the concept of God, philosophically, and the experience of religions. 'God as the mystery of the world', to steal Jungel's phrase, might serve to sum up Pannenberg's explorations here. God is already there; before we ask the question, we somehow know something of the presence. Even polytheistic religions presuppose a world unity beneath their pantheons. An unclear presence of God is felt, preconceptually, and often distorted by what we make of this perception, as Paul tells us in Romans 1. The treatment of religions is especially fresh and challenges orthodoxies, conservative and radical. Pannenberg argues that a purely anthropological account of religions fails to get near the essence of religion since religions intend to focus on God. This raises questions of conceptualising God and of truth, the self-demonstration of

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the coherence of the religion's God historically. 'If the history of religion is not just a history of human ideas and attitudes, if the issue in it is instead the truth of divine reality in the deities of the religions, this is because the history of religion can be read as that of the manifestation of divine reality and the process of criticism of inadequate human views of this reality.'

It is interesting that the category of religion has again assumed such a prominent place in a Christian systematic theology, and perhaps even more so that it leads into the next chapter's theme, revelation. Pannenberg thinks that there is an increasing unity of view among religions, and that this itself reflects divine revelatory activity in history. Just as in his earlier essays revelation had a complement in history and reason, now this complement includes religion. Indeed he criticises Barth for dissociating revelation from religion, since received revelation will issue in some form of religion, although Barth is right in wanting to give priority to God and revelation in discussing religion.

The fact of the unclear prior perception of God plays a key role in the interpretation of revelation and biblical revelation. God was not discovered *de novo* in the experience of the figures of the Old Testament, for example. They had knowledge of some deity, which was then clarified by the revelatory experiences in history. Content was given by revelation rather than new discovery. Revelation happens in all kinds of ways, but indirectly through the historical and natural so that form can be given and can be mentally understood. The kerygmatic idea of self-revelation does not commend itself to Pannenberg, who wants to reappropriate cognitive content into the experience. Again we rub up against one of Pannenberg's interesting features: he appeals to both conservative and liberal wings, often for reasons neither likes! Revealed content sounds a conservative notion, but it is wholly cut loose from an inspired Bible by Pannenberg.

Furthermore, Pannenberg criticises the category of 'story' as a substitute for history; historical reference has to be maintained if the revelation of Jesus is divine self-demonstration of lordship. The focus on the resurrection of Jesus in this account of revelation is far less prominent than in *Revelation as History* and *Jesus God and Man*. Jesus' life and his teaching provide the base for the following chapter on the Trinity. We begin with the prayer of Jesus and the self-differentiation of Jesus from the Father; this theme was present in *Jesus God and Man* and was further developed in some untranslated essays, but now it becomes a major focus.

Pannenberg makes the doctrine of the Trinity central to his whole theology, and his exposition is typically refreshing. He uses Athanasius' doctrine that the Father is the Father of the Son in mutual reciprocity, and criticises the Cappadocian stress on the originative relationship of Father to Son. This fails to state the real mutuality sufficiently. The Trinity is not, with Barth, best seen as a single subject in three modes of

being, but as reciprocal relations interdependent and mediating one another. Pannenberg uses the model of a force field, a context or environment which is Spirit and love, the essence of God who exists in the three persons. Pannenberg has some good words to say of Augustine as well as the standard criticisms: the authors of *The Forgotten Trinity* take note!

Pannenberg continues to stress the historicity of divine presence and action in the world, and holds that there is a sense in which the divine identity depends on the outcome of history. The history of salvation, the economic Trinity, is real for God and therefore the immanent or essential Trinity. But we are told that God is not therefore becoming in the historical process, and 'The eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity'. I have called this a theology of the 'future perfect' in an effort to explain Pannenberg's attempt to have his historical cake and eat it; that is, God will be seen always to have been this – without prejudice to the reality of the free history of the kingdom and human response. God relates to the world by acting creatively upon it and this is the context of explaining his trinitarian omnipotence. The incarnation is the reassertion from the creaturely side of divine monarchy and the ending of autonomous rebellion.

This theology gives much stimulus in its systematic, very German, outworking. Pannenberg seeks to revise the traditional doctrines along modern lines and remains scriptural as well, displaying massive continental learning in philosophy and dogmatics. He remains convinced that the orientation of reality and truth to and from the future can solve the difficult question of divine immanence and sovereign transcendence; he wishes to retain divine eternity and monarchy, but through the Sonship as well as Fatherhood of God. The Trinity is his key and provides the real interest and importance of the book.

Tim Bradshaw, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Say One for Me: The Church of England in the Next Decade

Wesley Carr and others

SPCK, London, 1992; 126pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 281 04556 9

The Church of England: What It Is and What It Stands For

R.T. Beckwith

Latimer House Oxford, 1992; 18pp., £1.25; ISBN 0 946 30785 7

Restoring the Vision: Anglican Evangelicals Speak Out

Edited by Melvin Tinker

Monarch, Eastbourne, 1990; 286pp., £8.99; ISBN 1 85424 048 X

On the surface, these three books would appear to be of little interest to anyone outside the Church of England, but a closer examination reveals that they are dealing with issues of equally deep concern in the Church of Scotland. Moreover *Restoring the Vision* contains a sufficient number of articles to make it of value to Evangelicals at large. Meanwhile, all three books are principally evaluating the opportunities and responsibilities afforded to an established church.

Wesley Carr's *Say One For Me* (the non-churchgoer's passing remark to a friend on his way to church) does not come from the pen of Evangelicals, but it is addressed to one of the most prominent of them, the Archbishop of Canterbury (and, of course, through him to the Church of England at large). Wesley Carr is the Dean of Bristol; together with a team of other prominent Anglicans from different walks, he pleads that the Church of England should not allow itself to be pushed into sectarianism, but should hold fast to and exploit for the gospel those advantages with which it is endowed by being the established Church. By and large, the people of the land regard it as being their Church, even if they do not go, and they harbour a whole variety of expectations of it. (The regard in which it is held was underlined by the announcement of George Carey's appointment to Canterbury as the first headline of the one o'clock news.)

People are to be engaged where they look to the Church; *i.e.* baptisms, weddings, funerals and other special services, on the 'common land' of the parish church (whose buildings at least they are prepared to maintain, especially in country areas), as well as in the 'alternative parish' – the media, where the Church's viewpoint gets a ready ear – and in the cathedrals, which have recently taken on a new significance, drawing literally millions of visitors each year. The Church must engage with the people on the fringe, even at the cost of having ragged edges and much of

its ministry ephemeral. Who can measure its success? The ministry of the church is 'incarnational'; its job is to interpret the gospel to the market place, and the minister must be given plenty of opportunity for contemplative meditation if he is to be efficient in his task.

Roger Beckwith in his *Latimer Briefing* also warns that the opportunities available to the established Church should not be lightly discarded, although his approach is rather more academic and not without a hint of the archaic. Beckwith wants the Church of England to be true to itself and return to its great Reformation heritage, which for him is the yardstick of genuine Anglicanism. Not everyone would agree with him: perhaps the majority of Anglicans would prefer the *via media*, but Beckwith wants the Church of England to manifest the marks of a true church – a biblically directed church. His booklet also is dedicated to George Carey, 'an old friend', albeit 'sometimes outspoken on the other side of contemporary questions from the side which you are thought to favour'. Dr Carey's regard for Beckwith is sufficient for him to have awarded him a rare Lambeth D.D. – commendation enough for all his work at Latimer House!

The 'other side' referred to by Beckwith is that of the 'classic evangelicals', as they are coming to be known, as they begin to marshal themselves together through unease with the newer Evangelicalism. Their stance is given much fuller expression in *Restoring the Vision*. Melvin Tinker, formerly Chaplain of Keele University and now Vicar of All Hallows Cheadle, has gathered contributions from thirteen prominent conservative evangelical Anglicans, together with a foreword by the Bishop of St Albans and imprimaturs from Dick Lucas and Michael Green.

The symposium addresses itself to questions being widely asked in their circles such as 'Are evangelicals unwilling to hold fast to their convictions in a period in which they are paradoxically gaining their ascendancy?' and 'Has evangelicalism become so broad that it has lost its focus?' David Holloway sets the scene by considering a definition of Evangelicalism, and in calling for Evangelicals not to revert to a former partisan attitude but rather to 'evangelicalise' the Church at large, thus making itself true to its roots. All the contributors argue for a restoration of genuine biblical principles in addressing contemporary issues, which include the ministry of women; a reassessment of evangelism and how people become Christians (Gavin Reed); inter-faith dialogue, which must be sensitive but never allowed to displace the uniqueness of Christ (Chris Wright); Evangelicalism and ecumenism (Beckwith again); culture and Christianity – while culture is the necessary medium of the gospel, it in turn must be changed by it (Melvin Tinker) – and so on. Who better to guide us in finding out what are 'genuine biblical principles' than Jim Packer in a characteristically lucid essay on 'Understanding the Bible'?

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All three books emphasise the need of the church to engage with people where they are. There is little that is original, but they crystallise much thinking over the last twenty-five years from their own standpoints and make a considerable contribution towards restoring confidence and vision for the gospel in England in the Decade of Evangelism. And they are bold essays in antidisestablishmentarianism!

Peter Cook, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme

The Supremacy of God in Preaching

John Piper

IVP, Leicester, 1990; 119pp., £5.50; ISBN 0 85110 695 1

This book is intended for preachers, would-be preachers and those concerned about the vital significance of preaching. It is based on lectures given at Gordon Conwell Seminary and Wheaton College.

In the preface, the author, who is a well-known writer and the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, states that people today are 'starving for God'. This is an assumption, which is made without reason or analysis. However, it becomes the basis for a very powerful appeal for preaching which encompasses a 'God-entranced world view'. Piper indicates that his thinking has been greatly influenced by studying the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Part 2 of the book examines Edwards' contribution with regard to the centrality, sovereignty and supremacy of God in preaching. The first part of the book deals with the reasons for a God-centred approach, which he outlines in terms of the glory of God, the cross of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Much of what Piper says has to do with the style, manner and mood of the preacher who is controlled by the vision of God. His thesis is set out in a measured sentence. 'Gladness and gravity should be woven together in the life and preaching of a pastor in such a way as to sober the careless soul and sweeten the burden of the saints.' He lists seven practical suggestions for cultivating this gravity and gladness in preaching. These seem to me to focus more on gravity than gladness, especially 'direct your mind often to the contemplation of death'!

Piper highlights helpfully two crucially important insights from Edwards on the nature of true faith. First, faith arises from a spiritual taste, love of God being the main thing. Second, saving faith is persevering faith. These two truths carry great implications for preachers, according to Piper. In particular preaching must not only enlighten the mind but stir up holy affections. Also, true preaching must have as one of its chief aims assisting the saints to persevere. Piper explores these implications in a challenging way in his final chapter.

This is a short book. However, it is a book to read slowly. It demands thought, self-examination and prayer. It is the kind of book that a

preacher might want to pull out on the 1st of January every year in order to humble, inspire and clarify his goals. There are several memorable quotations, for example, 'all genuine preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation. You wake up on Sunday morning and you can smell the smoke of hell on one side and the crisp breezes of heaven on the other.' Piper identifies with the anxiety felt by the preacher moments before the sermon and outlines five steps for focusing the mind on God's strength at that time. The steps are contained in the acronym APTAT. If the reader wishes to find the formula, buy the book!

Martin Allen, Chryston Parish Church

Eastern Orthodox Christianity. A Western Perspective

Daniel B. Clendenin

Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1994; 208pp., \$ 14.99; ISBN 0 8010 2588 5

Daniel Clendenin, with roots in Protestantism and strong ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, shows that Orthodox Christians and evangelical Protestants have more similarities in common than they are aware of. This volume is designed to be read in conjunction with *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, 1994), the two together aiming to introduce major aspects of Orthodox history and theology to Protestant Christians who might otherwise not have encountered Eastern Christianity.

This volume focuses descriptively on four theological themes in Orthodoxy – apophaticism, icons, Scripture and tradition – making contrasts and comparisons between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, and occasionally referring to Roman Catholicism. Clendenin makes the point that, whilst Orthodoxy has operated with a degree of anonymity because of its confusion with Catholicism, Orthodoxy tends to see Protestants and Catholics as opposite sides of the same coin in their juridical frameworks and their appeals to external theological authorities (Scripture alone for Protestants and the papacy for Catholics). Clendenin shows similarities between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in their sacramental and liturgical frameworks.

Clendenin lifts the curtain on Orthodoxy, dispelling myths and at the same time setting Orthodoxy in its rightful place amongst other denominations. He points to one of its unique features – a fusion of the aesthetic with the theological, both in relation to its concept of God and the way in which, for Orthodoxy (unlike Christianity in the West), art and theology are inseparable. Another important feature is the way in which Orthodoxy 'affirms unequivocally the primary position of

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Scripture', the only theological authority for Orthodoxy being 'a charismatic authority grounded in the assistance of the Holy Spirit'.

Clendenin's Protestant background enables an excellent introduction of the two faiths to one another, as he considers what Protestants can learn from the spirituality of Orthodoxy. He draws a conclusion that, by 'practising a hermeneutic of love' and emphasising the essentials of Christian teaching, Protestants and Orthodox Christians will then be able to move forward together to witness the gospel to the world.

Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College

The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem

Willem Van Gemeren

Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1988; 432pp., \$24.99; ISBN 0 310 23130 2

Biblical theology is a central discipline among Christian studies, for it lies between exegesis on the one hand and systematic theology on the other. Those who work in both would benefit greatly from time spent in its study. The exegete's preoccupation is often with the minutiae of textual study, set perhaps in the context of Near Eastern studies for the Old Testament or of Palestinian and Hellenistic studies for the New. He can easily lose sight of the larger dimensions of biblical truth. The systematic theologian, on the other hand, may be taken up with contemporary theological or philosophical literature. In so doing he may neglect the biblical roots of the Christian faith.

The dust jacket of this volume summarises its main theme: 'The underlying thesis of the *Progress of Redemption* is that as long as our Lord has not come in glory, believers in all ages must live with the dialectic tension between alienation and blessing, creation and redemption, promise and fulfilment, Israel and the nations, the people of God and the kingdom of God, and God's love for his creation and his love for the saints.' Among those the author mentions with gratitude as influencing him are Geerhardus Vos and Edmund Clowney. To claim to stand in such a tradition is to promise much, and in terms at least of his work here on the Old Testament he does not disappoint us. From a somewhat different perspective, he has also been influenced by Brevard Childs, whose canonical criticism has contributed in no small measure to a rebirth of biblical theology, although his doctrine of Scripture is that of Vos and Clowney rather than Childs.

The author develops his work on a redemptive-historical pattern, dividing redemptive history into twelve periods. Interestingly, he includes church history as well as biblical history. 'Each period is distinct and

relates organically to the previous and succeeding epochs. Each period reveals elements of continuity and discontinuity and contributes to a greater appreciation of the overall plan of God.' Is this a new version of dispensationalism? Not really, for it places greater emphasis on the elements of continuity than is usually the case in the dispensational approach. It does, however, recognize the element of truth in dispensationalism, that God's dealings with his people down the ages have been characterized by variety without inconsistency (for the character of God is the consistent factor throughout) and that there is therefore profit in the study of Bible History era by era.

There are so many helpful insights within these pages that the present reviewer hesitates to express dissatisfaction. The Old Testament material is certainly satisfying (after all, the author is an Old Testament professor), but it occupies two-thirds of the book, leaving just 160 pages to cover the inter-testamental period, the New Testament and the history of the church. Inevitably, the coverage of these suffers from superficiality from time to time, especially when compared with the larger treatment of the Old Testament. So, for example, a survey of Parts 5, 6 and 9 shows that the space given to the life and work of David falls little short of that devoted to the life and work of Jesus. Yet it is so helpful, in a book of this character, to be constantly reminded of the importance of the spiritual life, and to find a stress on the practical bearing of each part of Scripture and on the lessons we need to learn from the history of the church. This gives vitality and warmth to the study.

G.W. Grogan, Glasgow

The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation

Christian D. Kettler

University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1991; 338pp., \$28.00; ISBN 0 8191 8273 7

'A memorable month in 1981', when Kettler served as teaching assistant at Fuller Seminary to Thomas F. Torrance, stimulated him to explore further 'the profound evangelical and ecumenical implications of Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ'. This study – originally a Fuller Ph.D thesis – is, however, much more than a study of Torrance's theology.

Kettler begins with an analysis of the doctrine of salvation in the teaching of John B. Cobb Jr., Leonardo Boff, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Hick and Hans Küng. Identifying these theologians as 'anthropocentric', Kettler uses Karl Barth's teaching on the 'humanity of God' as 'a telling critique of the dangers of the

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anthropocentric tendencies in modern theology'. From the importance of Barth's teaching that 'God himself in Jesus is the foundation of true humanity', Kettler moves on to the teaching of Torrance – 'To see the humanity of Christ is to see the revelation of who God really is' – and J. McLeod Campbell – 'not only is there a revelation of the Father in the Incarnation, but there is also the gracious atoning response of obedient, faithful humanity'.

Kettler then considers the doctrine of 'the vicarious repentance of Christ' with special reference to the teaching of McLeod Campbell and Barth. He stresses that this 'vicarious repentance of Christ' is 'absolutely needed because of the inability of humanity to provide a perfect repentance'. He emphasizes 'the total obedience of Christ' as 'the basis of vicarious repentance'. Discussing Barth's doctrine of vicarious repentance, Kettler writes, 'God in Christ undertakes to do himself "what the world cannot do"'. He commends Barth's exposition of the atonement in terms of 'the obedient Son of God ... taking the place of sinners and ... becoming "the one great sinner"'.

Those less at home in the field of systematic theology may be interested in the two biblical studies offered by Kettler on 'The Exalted Humanity of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews' and 'Humanity Restored: Christ as the Last Adam and the Church as the Body of Christ'. Other helpful features of this book are its lengthy bibliography and indexes. These aids to study will appeal to those who may wish to 'dip into' this difficult and demanding book without attempting to read it from cover to cover.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

An Interpretation of Religion

John Hick

Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989; 432pp., £15.99; ISBN 0333 39489 5

Do all religions lead to God? The orthodox Christian answer has always been either 'No', or at most 'Well, some may, but (except in the case of Christianity) this happens only by accident'. Nonetheless, there has long been pressure to say something convincing about other religions, pressure which can only grow in this present age, in which the knowledge that religions have of each other and religious intolerance seem, disappointingly enough, to be increasing simultaneously. Thus the pressure is on Christians now, as it often has been before, either to show that although all the adherents of other religions are eternally damned, this is somehow all right (Augustine, sometimes though not always); or to show that other religions are in some way back-doors to heaven, and to account for that (C.S. Lewis); or to come right out and renounce all

claims to a Christian monopoly on the truth, in which case the question is to be raised whether one has not given up Christianity altogether.

Ever since his 1973 book *God and the Universe of Faiths*, John Hick has been an articulate advocate of the third option, to which one recent influential convert has been Keith Ward. In *An Interpretation of Religion*, based on his Edinburgh Gifford Lectures of 1986-7, Hick takes up this theme again. The book has five parts. In the first Hick addresses the question 'What is essential to religion (or the great religions)?', and comes up with the answer that it is the idea of human transformation through the idea of the transcendent. In Part Two, 'The Religious Ambiguity of the Universe', we are invited to assent to the proposition that deductive and evidential argument can get us nowhere if we want to be sure of God's existence. In the third part, Hick lays a different foundation for the knowledge of God as he conceives God, namely religious experience (by which Hick means the experience of the world 'as' the locus of religious value). In Part Four, Hick gives us his central hypothesis, that (*e.g.*) 'the Hindu Krishna and the Jahweh of Israel are two personae of The Real', *i.e.* of God. In Part Five, Hick discusses the question: What makes the difference between a good religion and a bad one? In brief his answer is that it is not doctrine, but moral goodness, that marks a good religion.

Hick's book contains much fascinating material, comprising sympathetic and perceptive comparative accounts of, in particular, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist religious experience, about which I do not feel qualified to comment. But there are two points I do worry about.

The first worry is what I may call the Esperanto question. It is a well known phenomenon of human life that, in the attempt to systematise and unify disparate and incompatible elements, one often ends up furnishing others with just one more disparate and incompatible element. So a perfect and logical new language is invented to supersede all those messy, inconvenient, and grammatically / morphologically perverse old languages; but no one except a few rationalist-minded folk seem to want it; it may be a very handy language, the others say, but it is not our language. For all his learned and accurate reportage of Hindu, or Muslim, or Buddhist practice, we may want to ask: is John Hick giving us a faithful account of how it is with the religions which already exist? Or is he inventing a new religion, the status of which is (presumably) no more or less favourable than that of any one of the old religions?

Perhaps the acid test here is whether adherents of the old religions take it that the Hickian view is indeed, as it claims to be, an *interpretation* – perhaps a revealing one – of their own positions; or rather think of it as (at best) a *reinterpretation*, or (less hopefully) a *misinterpretation*: as not something that they can recognise as *their* religion at all. Obviously reactions here are going to vary. For my own part I find Hick wanting to say that what I think is deep truth, the deepest there is – that Yahweh is

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God – is in fact only one way of understanding something much deeper: that our use of the word ‘God’ actually refers to something called by Hick ‘The Real’, and that this is what, in our own poor stumbling way, we are really worshipping. Now this I find unconvincing, as a factual claim, and unattractive as a religious appeal. It simply does not seem to me that what orthodox Christians (or Muslims, or Jews; Eastern religions are a different matter) mean when they say ‘God’ is best spelled out – ‘interpreted’? – by calling it ‘The Real’. If Hick’s thesis is meant as a claim about the real meaning of the word ‘God’, it simply strikes me as false. But if Hick is rather saying that we should revise what we mean by the word ‘God’, so that it means what he means by ‘The Real’, then I am not attracted by the proposal. I feel plenty of inclination to worship God. None at all to worship ‘The Real’.

My second worry is like unto my first, and is about religious experience, on which Hick relies a good deal to make his case. Hick wants to say that there is a common core to all, or all important, religious experience, which is experience of the Transcendent Real; and that if we understand religious phenomena properly, we will be able to abstract away those elements of religious experience which are determined by our culture, and extract the jewel at the heart of it all – experience of The Real. There is one question here about whether any such core is in fact extractable at all. Experiences seem to be necessarily experiences of what they are of and not some other thing. It is a constitutive, essential part of any experience that it has some particular intentional content, which is not readily reducible to anything else – unless one is prepared to say that the experience in question is illusory.

There is a second question about whether, if such a core can be extracted, it proves to be of much interest or worship-worthiness. (Might not what such experiences all have in common be of such extreme generality and vagueness as to have no interest?) Further, just as I doubt whether believers would be interested in worshipping The Real rather than in worshipping Allah or Vishnu or Christ (*etc*), so I also doubt whether they will value their experiences in the same way if they discover that all along they have been under a benign misapprehension about the object of their experiences. For to believe that Yahweh is God is to believe that nothing could surpass Yahweh or experience of Yahweh; if one comes to take it that one’s supposed experiences of Yahweh are actually veiled experiences of something much greater, The Real, then one has by that very token ceased to believe that Yahweh is God. In short, one has changed one’s religion.

There is absolutely no doubt that, in an age when Ayodhya and Pat Robertson and the Ayatollah Khomeini are all unpleasantly real possibilities, attempts to mediate between different extreme positions, and find what is good in the various religious traditions, are absolutely imperative for the good of the human race. John Hick is to be

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congratulated for the boldness and imagination of his project. But there is room for doubt about whether what he offers as an interpretation of 'religion' (all religion?) might not turn out, in the end, to be a misrepresentation of any particular religion – or perhaps the creation of a new religion.

T.D.J. Chappel, Merton College, Oxford