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## EDITORIAL

I have recently been reading, once again, the account of the ascension of Jesus in Luke's writings (Luke 24 and Acts 1). These narratives, and the event they describe, fascinate me. Such a strange event – a human being going straight up into the air in apparent defiance of the laws of physics – and yet an event which Luke chooses to emphasise by recording it twice, once in each part of his two-volume work, so as to form a kind of narratological and theological 'hinge' holding the two parts together.

Yet the ascension has frequently been neglected in theological writing and in preaching in favour of much more 'important' matters: Christology, mission and evangelism, Christian community. There are papers on these themes in this Bulletin and we may well be inclined to think that we should indeed devote our attention to such central matters rather than be distracted by the seemingly bizarre event of the ascension.

Some reflection on the significance of the ascension, however, may help us to see that this astonishing event is, in fact, fundamentally important to each of the other matters we have mentioned. Let me illustrate this.

Firstly, the ascension points to the unique character of Jesus. For virtually every other human being in history, the end of their life on this earth is marked by their death. But this is not the case for Jesus because, following his death on a cross, God raised him from the dead. Thus, it is appropriate that, just as the entry of the Son of God into this world was marked, in the conception of Jesus by a virgin, by an amazing suspension of the physical laws which God himself put in place to govern human life, so the exit of the Son of God from this earthly sphere should also be marked by an astonishing event. Jesus' character is also highlighted by the presence of the cloud. Although Luke does not provide us with a detailed explanation of the event, I do not believe that Luke records the presence of the cloud in order to tell us that Jesus had reached a certain altitude, as if his journey to heaven was simply a matter of passing through the atmosphere and keeping on until morning. Though this may be a popular reading of the text, perhaps suggesting to a modern reader that heaven could be reached if we had a sufficiently powerful space rocket, it does not do justice to the biblical background. Readers of the narratives in Exodus which describe the pillar of cloud which led the people of Israel out of Egypt or the cloud on Mount Sinai will recognise that the cloud serves, paradoxically, both to reveal and to hide the presence of the divine. Alternatively, if Psalm 104 stands in the background then the cloud may point to the victorious authority of the ascended Jesus. And although Luke is the only NT author to provide an account of the event itself, there are numerous references

to Jesus' exaltation in key Christological passages, such as Philippians 2:5-11, at verse 9. So careful attention to the ascension narrative will encourage us towards a high Christology.

Secondly, the ascension is the necessary precondition for the sending of the Spirit of God upon all his people (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8; cf. John 16:7). Thus, without this event, we could not experience the gift of the Spirit which is described in Acts 2, where Peter draws upon the words of Joel to speak of the Spirit falling on all people regardless of age or gender (Acts 2:17-18). The sending of the Spirit is linked very closely in Acts 1:8 with the task of being 'Jesus' witnesses'. While there is more to the sending of the Spirit than simply empowering for witness, there is not less. Thus, we recognise in the ascension the event that opens up the possibility of Spirit-empowered community and evangelism.

Thirdly, the ascension points forward towards the parousia. 'This Jesus who has been taken up' (v. 11) will come back 'in the same way'. This is not only a reason for expectant hope, as we anticipate the full realisation of God's purposes for his people, but also an impetus to urgent missionary activity. The time available for mission is not unlimited. The question asked of the disciples could well be asked of the modern church: 'Why do you stand there looking into the sky?' There is a time for rapt theological reflection leading to adoration and worship; and there is a time for making disciples. It is unlikely that a church will be deeply committed to the latter task if it has not been led into the former by careful teaching and training in the Word of God. Yet a church which majors on the former activity, captivated for example by the wonder of the ascension, while the task of being witnesses is pushed to the side, has not truly understood the significance of the ascension at all.

May the Lord enable us to consider the narratives of the ascension of Jesus in such a way that they feed our minds and hearts... and fire our wills to action.

Let me take a moment to introduce to you a new member of the editorial team. Rev. Andrew Hayes is Minister of International Baptist Church in Aberdeen. I am grateful for Andrew's help and support in the editorial process and look forward to seeing more of the interests and competences which Andrew brings becoming evident in SBET.

Let me also express our grateful thanks to Mrs Alison Carter who has recently retired from her work at Rutherford House, but who has kindly agreed to continue to be involved in the editorial process in a freelance capacity. Alison has worked closely with me (Alistair Wilson) for most of my time as Editor and has carried out her task with patience, good humour and a careful eye. We are very glad to retain her services.

*In this number*

We are pleased to offer five articles for SBET readers to engage with in this number.

The first two articles come from papers delivered at the Annual Conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society 2007. I am delighted that the opening article comes from Professor David Wright, Professor Emeritus of Patristic and Reformed Christianity at the University of Edinburgh. For many years Professor Wright has devoted his scholarly skills to the church, not least in his commitment to SETS and the SBET. In this Finlayson Lecture for 2007, he addresses a theme of particular importance for the church: the 'Great Commission'.

The second article also had its origins in the 2007 SETS conference. In this paper, Rev. Peter Neilson, now serving as a Mission Consultant in Edinburgh, reflects on issues relating to the 'congregation' as a suitable expression of the church in the twenty-first century. The original character of the paper as a spoken presentation has been retained in this printed version.

In the third article, Dr Lynn Cohick of Wheaton College, IL, considers the question of 'Why Women Followed Jesus' by means of a comparison between the place of women in Pharisaism and 'the Jesus movement'.

The fourth article is by Dr Brian Talbot, Minister of Broughty Ferry Baptist Church, Dundee. Dr Talbot's paper reflects on the relationship between unity and uniformity in the experience of Scottish Baptists, particularly in the nineteenth century, and argues that attempts to impose uniformity have been unhelpful.

Finally, Dr Christopher Holmes encourages us to engage appreciatively but critically with the Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as expressed in his lectures on the subject given in 1933.

We are grateful to all of these authors for their writing and we trust that their presentations will stimulate SBET readers (whether in agreement or respectful disagreement) to think, discuss and act in ways which will glorify God and strengthen the church.

*Alistair I. Wilson*

# THE GREAT COMMISSION AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD: REFLECTIONS HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ON RELATIONS AND PRIORITIES (FINLAYSON MEMORIAL LECTURE, 2007)

DAVID F. WRIGHT, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

The last three verses of Matthew's Gospel have enjoyed an honoured place in the era of Protestant missions from the time of William Carey at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today they are commonly known as 'the Great Commission'. When they were first so described and, more significantly, when that designation became standard usage are questions which cannot yet be answered with any confidence. Occasionally writers have supplied over-confident answers to the second question, but for the present, pending more exhaustive research, a provisional judgement must suffice: it was not until the last decades of the nineteenth century, or even perhaps the earliest years of the twentieth, that Matthew 28:18-20 came to be conventionally referred to as 'the Great Commission'.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the importance assigned to this short passage during the last two centuries, no extended investigation of the history of its exegesis has yet been carried out. What makes this all the more remarkable is the well-known fact that not until the new initiatives of William Carey's generation was it liberated from seriously restrictive interpretations, which all in effect denied its applicability as a dominical mandate for universal mission to the Christian church as a whole from the age of the apostles onwards. This much is set forth, sometimes with an exaggerated

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<sup>1</sup> This provisional conclusion has been reached with the assistance of Dr Brian Stanley of the Henry Martyn Centre, Westminster College, Cambridge. For a discussion of the issue, see the Appendix to this article. For premature judgements cf. Rose Dowsett, *The Great Commission* (London, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), 19, 'For centuries, the church has known the concluding verses of Matthew's Gospel as "the Great Commission"'; Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, 1998), 137 n. 1, 'The term "Great Commission" was an appellation given to the command of Christ, in Matthew 28:18-20... by the great missionary movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.' Modern writers have frequently applied the phrase to uses made of all or part of these verses throughout the centuries of the church's history.

sharpness, in any number of brief surveys.<sup>2</sup> But this widely accepted and oft repeated summary account, with its obvious prima-facie bearing on the equally remarkable story of the failure of most of the Reformation to espouse the cause of world mission (to speak in general terms, without factoring in various qualifications), has not provoked the kind of rigorous historical enquiry into the reception of these Matthaean verses that they deserve. The discipline of the history of biblical interpretation is burgeoning, and there is scope here for more than one viable Ph.D. topic. The subject area should have a natural appeal to the students and scholars of the evangelical constituency, which among Protestants is increasingly distinguished by its commitment to a universal gospel mission. Why has the Great Commission for most of the church's first two millennia been anything other than its modern title suggests?

### THE GREAT COMMISSION'S UNIQUE AUTHORITY

First, however, it is worth asking whether Matthew 28:18-20 merits its grand designation. Jesus himself may have left us a clear identification of the two 'great commandments' (Mark 12:28-31, Matt. 22:34-40), but on the whole Christians have not gone in for honorific rather than descriptive titles of particular passages of Scripture. Yet good grounds can be advanced for recognising the uniquely authoritative character of this instruction by the risen Jesus to his followers. This does not entail downplaying the significance of other comparable commissioning statements near the ends of other Gospels, namely Luke 24:45-50 together with Acts 1:4-8, and the more diffused and less clearly worldwide note in John, with a special focus in 20:19-23.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For a useful if limited recent account see David Paul Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes, 2006), 121-46. See also the early chapters in Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, transl. George Robson (Edinburgh, London, 1901), Johannes van den Berg, *Constrained by Jesus' Love. An Inquiry into the Motives of the Missionary Awakening in Great Britain in the Period between 1698 and 1815* (Kampen, 1956), and Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (London, 1961); David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World. The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London, 1980), chs 10-14; W. R. Hogg, 'The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern, 1517-1914' in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (London, 1961), 95-111.

<sup>3</sup> On the range of missiological positions in the New Testament, see Johannes Nissen, *New Testament Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edit. (Frankfurt am Main, New York, 2004).

For our present exercise any of the endings to Mark's Gospel beyond verse 8 of chapter 16 must be discounted, but in considering the historical fortunes of the Matthaean Great Commission we must remember that all the Bibles of the Reformation era made no differentiation between 16:1-8 and 16:9-20 (the so-called Longer Ending), and the Authorised (King James) Version likewise. The New Testament of the Revised Version, published in 1881, was the first in English to introduce a space between verses 8 and 9, with a footnote pointing to the textual evidence for the omission of verses 9-20.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, until the later nineteenth century, Mark 16:15-17 was often conflated with Matthew 28:18-20, sometimes as together constituting the apostles' or the church's mandate for world mission, or treated as two versions of that mandate. The Marcan passage raised issues not glimpsed by the Matthaean, such as miracles attendant upon conversion, or not posed so sharply by the Matthaean, such as the relation between faith, baptism and salvation. One shrewd Anglican writer claimed that Mark suited a missionary church better than Matthew, where baptism preceded teaching, which must envisage the practice of infant baptism! He might also have drawn attention to the greater prominence given to creation-wide proclamation in Mark 16:15 compared with Matthew 28:19a.<sup>5</sup>

The long life of the Longer Ending of Mark's Gospel probably helped to delay the recognition of Matthew 28:18-20 as 'the Great Commission' without parallel. It is the argument of this lecture that it warrants that singular designation, for several reasons:

- its position, at the conclusion of its Gospel, and that regarded as the most Jewish of the Gospels;
- its context between the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus;

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<sup>4</sup> The influential text of the Greek New Testament established by Westcott and Hort placed the passage in square brackets, and justified this treatment at length: B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols (Cambridge, London, 1881), vol. 2: *Introduction, Appendix, 'Appendix'*, 28-51.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Meyrick Goulburn, *The Great Commission: Meditations on Home and Foreign Missions* (London, Oxford, Cambridge, 1872), 36: The 'Blessed Lord Jesus' had the foresight that the church by the Spirit would rightly interpret his mind about baptizing infants. 'Thou didst, in this great Commission, adjust Thy words exactly to the case of settled Churches, in which Baptism must always precede "teaching".' Cf. also 3: 'St. Mark's version is more purely missionary.' Goulburn was Dean of Norwich.

- its authority-rich setting, with the core commission of verses 19-20a preceded by ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me’ (v. 18) and followed by ‘Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (v. 20b);
- its clarity and directness;
- its inclusion of the Trinitarian baptismal formula;
- its explicitly dominical status.

No attempt is made here to deal with critical issues, for example, about the relation of these verses to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. As a believing Christian and member of the church which has received the Scriptures from its Lord, for me they stand in Holy Scripture bearing the authority of the risen Jesus Christ. The position assumed by this paper is as follows:

The Great Commission is the single most important statement of commissioning of the Christian church, from the risen Christ. In terms of what the church should be doing, the New Testament contains no other passage of comparable significance.

#### WHAT THE COMMISSION COMMANDS

It remains to spell out what the Great Commission commands, not with a detailed exegesis, but with a view to highlighting its dimensions as a whole and the articulation of its parts.<sup>6</sup> It is issued in the universal authority of Jesus that encompasses heaven as well as earth. The theme of his universal lordship consequent upon the completion of his earthly work is found on a number of occasions elsewhere, for example Acts 2:36, 39 and 17:30-31 and Philippians 2:9-11. His cosmic sovereignty makes the Commission inescapable for his servants, and at the same time renders its worldwide scope – ‘all the nations’ – feasible.

The central instruction of the Commission is ‘Make disciples of all nations’, as the sole Greek imperative is now almost always translated (the AV/KJV had ‘teach’). All the other verbs, ‘going, baptizing, teaching’, are participles. Those translations which make ‘going’ into an

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to the commentaries mention may be made of Dowsett, *Great Commission*; Karl Barth, ‘An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20’, in Anderson (ed.) *Theology*, 55-71; Bosch, *Witness*, 66-70; Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Leicester, 2003), 172-90.



imperative, or even connect 'all nations' to it as an indirect object (for example, the Contemporary English Version, 'Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples', and similarly the Revised English Bible), probably inflate its significance, although experts in the Greek of the New Testament seem not to be agreed on the point.<sup>7</sup> The key element is making disciples of people throughout the world. What is ordered here is not universal coverage in some token sense or in presence only or as a goal in itself, but travel with the aim of making disciples. In Matthew of all the Gospels the Great Commission's fulfilment must entail extension to the gentile nations.<sup>8</sup>

The central accentuation of 'make disciples' means that taking the Commission seriously will require investigating what that task involved in the teaching and activity of Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel in the first instance. For the present we note that it will certainly include 'baptizing' and 'teaching', according to the two dependent present participles in verses 19-20. Both are integrally part of or consequent upon 'making disciples'.

The specification of baptizing those who have been made disciples or are being made disciples may appear surprising or problematic to many readers of this journal, partly because of the low view of baptism prevalent among many evangelicals and partly because infant baptism may seem not to be accommodated by the implied sequence of baptizing those who are already disciples or in the process of becoming disciples. We may well feel more at home in 1 Corinthians 1, where Paul says with some recognisable relief that Christ sent him not to baptize but to proclaim the gospel and almost rejoices in having baptized only a handful of the Corinthian believers (vv. 14-17). The party divisions at Corinth help to explain Paul's comments but do not justify our playing them off against Matthew 28:19. There is no evidence that Paul was exempt from any part of the Great Commission, and implications sometimes drawn from his words – to the effect that baptism does not rate very highly in Pauline terms – fly in the face of the rest of the New Testament's witness to baptism.

So disciples are to be baptized, that is, into the church. There is thus a strongly ecclesial dimension to the making of disciples. Just as being a disciple and being baptized belong inseparably together, so too do being a disciple and being a living member of the church.

<sup>7</sup> Bosch, *Witness*, 69, citing Adolf Schlatter, suggests the participle is 'in a certain sense pleonastic and could even have been omitted. The crossing of geographical frontiers is no key idea here.' This issue will be touched on later in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Matthew 26:13 for the assumption of gospel publication throughout the world, but not as a necessary prelude to the end, as in Matthew 24:14.

In addition to baptizing in the name of the Trinity, making disciples also involves teaching issuing in obedience: 'teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you', says Jesus. This seems to envisage a special place for the teaching of the New Testament Gospels in the worldwide Christian mission. It might appear outrageous to think otherwise, but some of us have by habit and perhaps conviction been more often Paul people than Gospel people, or at least more Johannine than Synoptic (Matthew, Mark and Luke) people. Whatever curriculum or scheme is followed in planning instruction or preaching, the four Gospels must have a central place.

The sequence, then, is making disciples, to be pursued in all nations, which encompasses or leads on to baptizing and teaching. Questions of timing inevitably arise. Baptism is momentary, as a person moves from being unbaptized to being one of the baptized in a few minutes. Teaching may presumably be lifelong, even if there is a special focus on catechesis around being discipled and baptized. The aorist imperative translated as 'make disciples' is most likely neither as momentary as baptism nor as potentially long-lasting as teaching.

Finally, the whole of the Great Commission is to be carried out in the assurance of the presence of the risen Jesus Christ with the apostles and the church until 'the end of the age'. As Karl Barth put it, 'Because of Jesus' presence, the sum and substance of our text, the Great Commission of the risen Lord to baptize and to evangelise is valid throughout the days of this "last" age.'<sup>9</sup> Do we need to be recalled to Barth's simple summary? The Great Commission has not been withdrawn or lifted. Its implementation may have been made more difficult by massive geo-political and cultural shifts and by the resurgence of other world religions, but it remains in force. The church of Jesus Christ abides under commission from its Lord to make disciples of all nations.

David Bosch's summary is worth quoting at length:

[I]t remains undeniable that we... have to do with a mandate which, on the basis of Jesus' authority here and now ('in heaven and on earth', v. 18) is instructing the disciples that a totally new era has been inaugurated which implies their involvement in a world-wide mission....

God does not send 'ideas' or 'eternal truths' to the nations. He sends people, historical beings. He incarnates himself in his Son, and through his Son in his disciples. God becomes history, specific history, mundane history, in the followers of Jesus en route to the world.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Barth, 'Exegetical Study', 71.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, *Witness*, 68, 70. Cf. Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (London, 1961), 122.

## NEGLECT OF THE COMMISSION: FATHERS AND REFORMERS

In view of all this, in the light of the supreme significance of what we so familiarly call 'the Great Commission', it is astonishing that a respected modern book on the subject, Harry R. Boer's *Pentecost and Missions* (1961), is able to write of 'the apparently complete absence of this motivation [of the Great Commission] as a conscious factor in the missionary life of the early Church.... In the conception of the Reformers and of the majority of seventeenth-century theologians the Great Commission was binding *only* on the apostles.... It does not extend to the Church which the apostles founded.'<sup>11</sup> A slight measure of overstatement may be present in Boer's judgements, but they are sufficiently close to the mark, if such limited enquiries as have been conducted so far are reliable, to be truly shocking. This does not mean that the church of the long pre-Carey centuries did not engage in missionary extension, but our subject is not the general one of missionary motivation but the interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20. Certainly when one Adrian Saravia (of whom more later) in the late sixteenth century published a reading of this passage which the post-Carey world would instinctively recognise as its own, it was all but unknown to his contemporaries and he met with little but open hostility.

The church of the early Fathers was undoubtedly active and remarkably successful in mission and expansion,<sup>12</sup> but the broad picture is of disjunction between fruitful activity and halting, incoherent or even absent theory.<sup>13</sup> Some writers like Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea (an

<sup>11</sup> Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, 15, 18.

<sup>12</sup> See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Parris, *Reading the Bible*, 122-8, is a useful introduction, but gives only selected references. He exaggerates (127-8) the attention paid to Matthew 28 by Pope Gregory I, whose commitment to the preaching of the gospel to every creature favoured Mark 16 with its 'signs following'; one of his *Forty Homilies on the Gospels*, II:29, is based on Mark 16:14-20. See further A. V. Seumois, *La Papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles* (Paris, Louvain, 1951), esp. 84-5, and W. H. Fritze, 'Universalis gentium confessio. Formeln, Trager und Wege universalmissionarischen Denkens im 7. Jahrhundert', in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 3 (1969), 98-130, at 108-11. As these studies make clear, Gregory was so instinctively an allegoriser that he could ground a universal commission on a very wide range of Scripture. Further patristic references can be gathered from Harold Smith, *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, 6 vols (Translations of Christian Literature ser. 6; London, New York, 1925-1929), vol. 6, 145-55; L. B. Smith, 'The Contribution of Hadrian a Saravia to the Doctrine of the Nature of the Church and its Mission: An Examination of his Doctrine as related to that of his Anglican Contemporaries' (Unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1965), 237-43;

important witness later for Saravia), John Chrysostom and Gregory the Great showed greater awareness that Christ in Matthew 28 commissioned his church to be universally missionary in every age, but no central appeal to the Commission emerges with any clarity from the corpus of the mainstream Fathers as a whole. At least, this is the picture so far available from limited scholarly literature. It is perhaps not surprising that some patristic writers express the conviction that the mandate first delivered to the apostles had indeed been fulfilled in the apostolic generation. Statements within the New Testament itself may have encouraged this confidence, such as Romans 10:18 ('to the ends of the world') and Colossians 1:6 ('all over the world') and 1:23 ('has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven').<sup>14</sup>

One thing is clear from any foray into patristic citations of these Matthaean verses, as it is later with Reformation writings. Elements in them are cited repeatedly on other issues than the core mandate to make disciples. Among the Fathers, for example, in Athanasius and Basil the Great, it is chiefly Christological and Trinitarian controversies that elicit appeals to one or other verse. The only monograph devoted solely to use made of them in any period of church history is wholly given to vindicating the Trinitarian text of Matthew 28:19 with reference to texts from Eusebius which appear to count against it.<sup>15</sup>

The later patristic period in the West witnessed an accelerating tendency to channel the role and authority of the apostles, the original recipients of the Great Commission, into the episcopate and the papacy. In the central middle ages this would even give rise to the notion of an 'apostolic church' differentiated from the rest of the church. In time these developments would exercise a damaging restrictive influence on interpretations of the last verses of Matthew.

The problematic question of the subdued, if not altogether silent, motif of a mission to all nations among the sixteenth-century Reformers has attracted frequent comment, for obvious reasons. Yet bewilderment why those mighty theologians and preachers who took their stand on the supreme authority of Scripture were less than clear-minded about the imperative of world evangelization has not issued in a thesis or monograph

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Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt, 2 vols (London, New York, 1904), vol. II, 147-82. But the need for a comprehensive research investigation remains.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Rom. 1: 8; 1 Thess. 1: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Henry Cuneo, *The Lord's Command to Baptise. An Historico-Critical Investigation with Special Reference to the Works of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Catholic University of America, New Testament Studies V; Washington, DC, 1923).

on their understanding of Matthew 28:18-20, nor indeed, to the best of my knowledge, any study of any single Reformer's position. Nor is this the place to attempt more than some review, mostly in general terms.

As earlier, these verses were grist to other Reformation controversies, especially over Christology, chiefly raised by disputes about the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper, and baptism. Thus all of the references to them in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, which assembles all the Lutheran confessional texts from the Augsburg Confession of 1530 to the Formula of Concord itself (1580), bear on one or other of these issues. Verse 19a, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations', is not cited once.<sup>16</sup> The Anabaptist challenge to infant baptism brought the baptismal instruction in the Great Commission into play. The difficulty was sharpened by the unquestioned inclusion in all sixteenth-century Bibles of the Longer Ending of Mark with the much more explicit Mark 16:16, 'The one who believes [in response to the good news proclaimed in all the world] and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.' But the challenge to paedobaptism was clear enough in Matthew 28, which on a natural reading taught that baptism was for those who had been made disciples. It has even been argued, quite improbably on my evaluation of the evidence, that the original inspiration for what became the Anabaptist insistence on baptism for believers only derived from Erasmus's radical reflections on the apparent ineffectiveness of infant baptism, which came to crisp focus in his comments on Matthew 28:18-20 and the baptisms in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Theodore G. Tappert (transl. and ed.), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, 1959).

<sup>17</sup> This is the core thesis of Abraham Friesen's *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, 1998). (This book's title illustrates the tendency to anachronistic use of 'the Great Commission' identified earlier. Friesen's interest is confined almost entirely to the baptismal limb of the mandate, scarcely touching on Erasmus's concern for world mission – on which see further below – or the Anabaptists' professed commitment, virtually unparalleled in the Protestant Reformation, to the very heart of the Commission.) A key text for Friesen is what he calls Erasmus's preface to the third edition of his Latin New Testament of 1522, following the translation of it given by Robert M. Adams (ed.), *Erasmus, Praise of Folly and Other Writings* (New York, London, 1989), 117-18, 127-41. Adams builds quite a case on this preface's position in the third in the series of editions of Erasmus's new Latin translation of the New Testament, for which he supplied in justification his more celebrated Greek text. Adams claims this preface took over from the *Paraclesis* of the earlier editions. He is, however, thoroughly confused. The preface in question appears not in any of Erasmus's editions of the New Testament (in which the *Paraclesis* remains in place throughout),

Hence part of these verses and their counterpart in Mark 16 had to be confronted by mainstream Reformers in the refutation of Anabaptist radicalism. They did so in various ways. Luther characteristically met the challenge head on. ‘Baptizing all the nations’ included everybody without exception. Infants were not excluded. In any case, if faith were a requisite for baptism, Scripture threw up lots of examples of babies in and out of the womb who displayed the beginnings of faith – infant faith for infant baptism, as it were.

The Reformed wing generally followed the more tempered response of Calvin, who simply pointed out that the restriction of baptism to those who became disciples applied only to those capable of becoming disciples and could not debar young children. The precedent of covenantal circumcision provided sufficient warrant for baptizing the new-born. This line of reasoning survived with enhanced force into the theological fathers of the nineteenth-century Free Church of Scotland like William Cunningham and James Bannerman, as well as into the massive systematics and apologetics of B. B. Warfield. They were all quite convinced that the Great Commission need only mandate the new, that is, taking the gospel to the gentile peoples and their conversion-baptism. Infant baptism stood solely under the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant, and was truly the Christian form of circumcision. Cunningham and Bannerman could write in so many words of ‘adult baptism as affording the proper fundamental type of the ordinance’ (Cunningham) and of ‘The Bible model of Baptism [as] adult baptism, and not infant’ (Bannerman).<sup>18</sup> Such treatment of the baptismal clause in the Matthaean Commission must have contributed significantly to the marginalization of the Commission in the churches of the old Christendom which in practice knew almost exclusively infant baptism, just as the relish with which the Anabaptists owned the Great Commission as a whole goes some way to explaining the central Reformers’ apparent reluctance to make much of it.

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but as an additional preface in his *Paraphrase on St Matthew* (1522), after the preface proper addressed to Charles V; Erasmus, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Le Clerc, 10 vols (Leiden, 1703-1706), vol. 7 (1706), ff. \*\*2v-\*\*4v. It is here that Erasmus recommends a ceremony whereby those once infant-baptized would joyfully before the world make the equivalent of a baptismal renunciation and profession in self-dedication – a proposal he immediately recognised as sounding like rebaptism (*videatur iterari baptismus*; Le Clerc, vol. 7, f. \*\*3v, Adams, 136).

<sup>18</sup> For references see David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Milton Keynes, 2007), xxxv-xl. On the argument of the last two paragraphs, *ibid.*, 226-37, 349-56.

A search of Calvin's *Institutes* throws up interesting results. Most references to the Matthaean text have to do with baptism, the eucharist, Christology, Trinity and the ascension. It also attests the perpetuity of the church to the end of the world; greater concern is shown with extension in time than in space. Calvin evinces a tendency to collapse the Great Commission into the twofold ministry of preaching and sacraments (cf. *Inst.* 4:3:6). He rejects the Catholic claim that the promise of verse 20 was given only to the church as a whole, insisting that it belonged to the Twelve individually as much as corporately, 'as well as to other disciples, either those he had already received or who would after be added' (4:8:11). But he falls short of binding the promise to a universal mission, although once, after affirming the apostles' remit in terms of Mark 16:15 to spread the gospel and plant churches everywhere among all nations (cf. Rom. 15:19-20), he admits that 'the Lord has sometimes at a later period raised up apostles, or at least evangelists in their place, as has happened in our own day' (4:3:4). He means Luther and other fellow-Reformers.

If, as is certainly the case, this meagre harvest from the *Institutes* is far from exhausting what Calvin believed and practised in missionary outreach,<sup>19</sup> nevertheless we still search in vain for a clarion unambiguous charter for world evangelization. This is barely offered even in his commentary on the Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels. Verses from the three Gospels are intercalated, so that none receives single focus. The apostles' office 'to lead all nations into the obedience of faith by publishing the gospel everywhere' is opposed to false papal claims of sole succession to the apostles. 'Making disciples of all nations' demolishes the wall between gentiles and Jews; 'the Lord orders the ministers of the gospel to go far out to scatter the teaching of salvation throughout all the regions of

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<sup>19</sup> In a series of essays Peter Wilcox has expounded the expansive understanding of 'the progress of the kingdom of God' by evangelization found in Calvin's Old Testament expositions; cf., for example, 'Evangelization in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin' in *Anvil* 12 (1995), 201-17. The so-called 'First Protestant Missionary Effort' consisted of a group of French Protestant pastors sent from Geneva by Calvin in 1556 to a short-lived French colony near Rio de Janeiro; cf. Amy Glassner Gordon, 'The First Protestant Missionary Effort: Why did it Fail?', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8 (1984), 12-18; R. P. Beaver, 'The Genevan Mission to Brazil' in J. H. Bratt (ed.), *The Heritage of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1973), 55-73. On the highly developed training of missionary pastors for France overseen by Calvin and the Genevan pastors see Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563* (Geneva, 1956).

the earth'. Calvin tends to collapse 'making disciples' into teaching, and there is a stronger emphasis on extension in time than in space.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most eloquent plea in the sixteenth century for worldwide evangelization came from Erasmus, the year before his death, in *Ecclesiastes*, commonly translated as 'The Preacher'.<sup>21</sup> It appeals earnestly for Christian teachers to gird themselves for the fight of the gospel in Asia and Africa, for fervent prayer that the Lord would thrust out workers into these harvest fields (cf. Matt. 9:38, Erasmus's favourite biblical text in this context), and for Franciscans and Dominicans to exchange their soft comforts for apostolic simplicity and self-denial, knowing that they would always face the cross in bearing its message.<sup>22</sup> Surprisingly, the Great Commission seems not to have been among his biblical arsenal in this exceptional piece of highly rhetorical missionary exhortation.

It was among the Radicals that the clearest commitment to the Great Commission was to be found in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. As the distinguished historian of Anabaptism, Franklin Littell, has stated:

According to Anabaptist understanding of right faith, the Great Commission was fundamental to individual witness and to the ordered community of believers as well. The proof text appeared repeatedly in Anabaptist sermons and apologetic writings. Confessions of faith and court testimonies gave it a central place, and the series of questions prepared by various authorities for

<sup>20</sup> A. W. Morrison (tr.), *Calvin's Commentaries: A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. III (Edinburgh, 1972), 250-5. The English Geneva Bible of 1560 has no marginal comment on Matthew 28:16-20 except for a generalizing gloss on v. 20a.

<sup>21</sup> The anonymous *Ecclesiastes; or, the preacher. An essay on the duties of a public religious instructor, chiefly drawn from a Latin treatise...* (London, 1797) uses only a small portion of Erasmus's work, with none relevant to world mission. In 1730 Thomas Bray, founder of the S.P.C.K. and the S.P.G., brought out a new edition of the Latin as a preparatory manual for missionaries.

<sup>22</sup> Erasmus, *Ecclesiastes Libri I-II*, ed. Jacques Chomarat (*Opera...*V:4; Amsterdam, 1991), 144-60. A partial translation of the relevant paragraphs is given by J. R. Coates, 'Scholarship and Missions: Erasmus' in *East and West Review: An Anglican Missionary Quarterly Review* 2:3 (1936), 244-9. Cf. G. H. Williams, 'Erasmus and the Reformers on Non-Christian Religions and *Salus Extra Ecclesiam*' in T. K. Rabb and J. E. Seigel (eds), *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison* (Princeton, NJ, 1969), 319-70, at 335-7; Eike Wolgast, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam uber die Weltmission' in *Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 79 (1995), 111-19.



use in court indicates that the governments expected it be of prime importance in Anabaptist argument.<sup>23</sup>

As one Anabaptist put it, 'Our faith stands on nothing other than the command of Christ (Matthew 28, Mark 16)... For Christ didn't say to his disciples: go forth and celebrate the Mass, but go forth and preach the Gospel.'<sup>24</sup>

It was not only on believers' baptism that the Matthaean-Marcian Commission spoke to core characteristics of Anabaptist Radicalism – although we certainly must not underestimate the force of this particular attraction. Making the Commission binding on every believer expressed the Anabaptist rejection of all kinds of hierarchical privilege, while the travel involved served the commitment to pilgrimage and the homelessness of the persecuted. So it is not always on 'making disciples of all nations' that Anabaptist attention fastens when one or other limb of the Commission is cited, yet by the same token all its parts deeply informed the Anabaptist vision.

Alas, Anabaptist enthusiasm for the Great Commission (which in their usage would surely already have merited this honorific) served only to stiffen magisterial Reformers' reserve about it. Quite apart from baptism – on which Anabaptism posed a monumental challenge to the whole ecclesio-political basis of the conservative Reformations – the Radicals' freelance missionizing as 'strange unappointed spiritual gypsies', as a prominent Lutheran polemicist described them,<sup>25</sup> flew in the face of the Reformers' growing interest in fixed localized appointments – the Lutherans' 'stations' in particular. Together with Rome's intolerable citation of these Matthaean and Marcian verses to substantiate its claims to universal apostolic jurisdiction, one could scarcely imagine a scenario more guaranteed to ensure that respectable biblical Reformers would not set much store by the Great Commission – a classic case of neglect in reaction against others' misuse. An honourable exception or two can be named, such as Martin Bucer of Strasbourg and Cambridge, who, in his classic pastoral treatise *The True Care of Souls*, made the ingathering of

<sup>23</sup> F. H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York, London, 1964), 111. Cf. also Hans Kasdorf, 'Anabaptists and the Great Commission in the Reformation' in *Direction* 4:2 (1975), 303-18 – an important corrective article. Regrettably, the content of Roland H. Bainton's 'The Great Commission' in *Mennonite Life* 8:4 (1953), 183-9, bears very little relation to its title.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Littell, *Origins*, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Justus Menius, cited by Littell, *Origins*, 114-15.

the lost the first task of the pastor and listed Mark 16:15 among other texts mandating a universal offer of the gospel to all nations.<sup>26</sup>

#### DISTINGUISHED EXCEPTIONS: SARAVIA AND VON WELZ

Yet the inconsequentiality of such exceptional clarity became obvious when in post-Reformation decades isolated champions of the Matthean commission met with almost total indifference or hostility. Adrian (Hadrian) Saravia was a Protestant of Spanish-Flemish descent who served both in the Netherlands and England, where he was a friend of Richard Hooker and helped to translate the AV/KJV. In a Latin treatise published in London in 1590, *The Different Ranks of the Ministers of the Gospel*, he propounded ‘in his vision of the apostolate and apostolic succession’ an element which ‘was new in his day, new not only for England but for the entire sixteenth century Reformation. We mean his views on apostolicity in the sense of the church’s continuing missionary commission’ – which he based almost entirely on Matthew 28.<sup>27</sup>

Chapter 17 of Saravia’s work is entitled ‘That the Command to Preach the Gospel to All Nations is Still Binding on the Church, Although the Apostles are Removed to Heaven: and that Apostolical Authority is Necessary Thereto’. It begins as follows:

The command to preach the Gospel and the mission to all nations were so given to the Apostles, that they must be understood to be binding on the Church also. The injunction to preach the Gospel to all nations of unbelievers had respect not only to the age of the Apostles, but to all ages to come till the end of the world.... This promise [‘I am with you alway, until the end of the world’] cannot be disjoined from the precept preceding, and consequently appears that Christ commanded his Church to provide that the Gospel should be preached to unbelievers, after the departure of the Apostles, according as opportunities of time, place, and persons, should admit....

Even now, after the lapse of fifteen centuries, the Gospel has not yet reached to all nations....

The fact that none are now-a-days sent to nations ignorant of the Lord, does not prove that there exists no authority to send them, but shews a lack of persons fit to be sent: or, at all events, a lack of zeal for the extension of Christ’s kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Bucer, *Von der Waren Seelsorge* [1538] in R. Stupperich (ed.), *Martin Bucer Deutsche Schriften*, vol. 7 (Gutersloh, Paris, 1964), 141-9.

<sup>27</sup> Willem Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia (c. 1532-1613)* (Studies in the History of Christian Thought XXI; Leiden, 1980), 240. For publication details of the *De Diversis Ministrorum Evangelii Gradibus*, see *ibid.*, 117-18.

<sup>28</sup> *A Treatise on the Different Degrees of the Christian Priesthood*, transl. by A. W. S. [A. W. Street] (Oxford, 1840), 161-2, 164-5. The first translation

Saravia's treatise, whose argument he advanced and defended in his *Defensio* of 1594 and *Examen* of 1610, suffered from being a contribution to a debate about the apostolic grounding of the Episcopal office. This factor, as much as blinkered readings of Matthew 28, provoked opposition. From Geneva Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor, issued a chapter-by-chapter refutation in 1592. In essence he distinguished between the 'extraordinary' 'commands and activities which were restricted to the apostles themselves' and the 'ordinary' ones applying to the whole church, with worldwide mission assigned to the first category.<sup>29</sup> Also found in Beza is the view that the apostles had themselves fulfilled the universal dissemination of the gospel – which is not entirely absent from Calvin. A bizarre echo of this delusion crops up in the records of the Brazilian mission, which report a tradition of the Indians of a white visitor to their country very many years ago who taught them the same as the Genevans about the creator God – and was taken by our Genevan source to be one of the apostles.<sup>30</sup>

Lutheran opposition to Saravia's work went further still. The eminent Jena theologian, Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), regarded in Lutheran orthodoxy as third in importance after the two Martins, Luther and Chemnitz, included a refutation in his *Loci Theologici* (1610-1622). He explicitly uncoupled the promise of Matthew 28:20 from the command of verse 19, reserving the latter to the apostles. More brazenly than the Genevans he made a New Testament case for the apostles' implementation of universal evangelization.<sup>31</sup> Such reasonings were given a supreme Lutheran *imprimatur* in a notorious landmark judgement of the Wittenberg Faculty of Theology in 1651, which a German pioneer of the history of missions called 'to us of today almost incomprehensible'.<sup>32</sup>

One more lone voice in the Lutheran world deserves to be mentioned, Justinian von Welz (1621-1668), a godly, practical aristocrat whose religious pilgrimage passed through two hidden decades from which he emerged as a kind of evangelical ascetic prophet. In a handful of treatises published mostly in the mid-1660s he exhorted all 'Christians of the

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appeared in 1592; Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 118, 128. See Smith's dissertation, 'The Contribution' (see n. 12 above), for a fuller treatment of Saravia's treatise, but on historical and bibliographical matters his work has been superseded by Nijenhuis' monograph.

<sup>29</sup> Beza, *Ad Tractationem de Ministrorum Evangelii Gradibus... responsio* (Geneva, 1592), 106. Cf. Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 242-3.

<sup>30</sup> Beaver, 'Genevan Mission', 18.

<sup>31</sup> Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, ed. J. F. Cotta, vol. 13 (Tubingen, 1775), 38-42. Cf. Warneck, *Outline*, 28-31.

<sup>32</sup> Warneck, *Outline*, 27-8.

Augsburg Confession' to set up a missionary society to undertake the conversion of unbelieving nations. He argued on a broader biblical and theological basis than any predecessor, but with no greater success.<sup>33</sup>

### LEGACIES OF THE REFORMATION ERA

It is essential at this point to pause and reflect on the legacies of the Reformation generations. They bequeathed not simply ambivalence of various kinds concerning the abiding force of Matthew 28 and Mark 16, but also two other influential factors. One is the absence from the Reformation churches' confessions and other formularies of a chapter on world mission. It is not merely a matter of fatal uncertainty about the Great Commission. The typical normative church document of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries devoted no special treatment to a universal gospel mandate. This is not to deny the appearance of occasional statements, prayers and exhortations in various official texts expressive of a commitment to evangelizing all nations. Following Bucer's suggestion, the 1552 Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* prescribed the reading of Matthew 28:18-20 for the ordination of priests, but in the 1662 *Book* it became optional in consecrating bishops. The title-page of the first printing of the Scots Confession in 1561 quoted Matthew 24:14:

And this glad tydinges of the kingdom shalbe preached through the hole world for a witness to all nations and then shall the end cvm.

The Westminster Assembly's *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* includes this rubric in its draft 'Publick Prayer before the Sermon':

To pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Jews, the fall of the Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord.

The answer to Question 191 in Westminster's Larger Catechism, 'What do we pray for in the second petition [of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom

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<sup>33</sup> James A. Scherer (transl. and ed.), *Justinian Welz. Essays by An Early Prophet of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1969); Warneck, *Outline*, 32-7... It is clear from the studies of Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, John Eliot, Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards in Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965) that the Matthaean commission was taken seriously in at least some of these writers; cf. 98-100, 119ff., 153 on Baxter, and 235-6 on Eliot. Further research is needed to clarify whether their witness became representative of the Puritan mind.

come”]?, affirms that we pray for the gospel to be propagated throughout the world, the Jews called and the fullness of the gentiles brought in. The Westminster Confession itself talks of the covenant of the New Testament being held forth... to all nations, both Jews and gentiles (7:6), and of Christ having given the visible church ‘the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world’ (25:3). But the verses of Matthew 28 were added to the Confession’s chapters nearly always on other issues – Trinity, person of Christ, the sacraments, especially baptism, the church’s perpetuity on earth, issues of church government, church synods. In an address given to the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly in 1869, Alexander Duff commented on the Westminster Confession as follows:

Now, while there we have all the highest doctrines laid down faithfully and truly, we have no distinct allusion to what supremely occupied the soul of the Divine Redeemer shortly before His ascension into glory, and was embodied in His final instructions to His disciples – and that is the evangelisation of the world! ... That subject ought to have a whole chapter to itself; and if anything is to be added to the Confession, I would add that to it.<sup>34</sup>

But such scattered and generally incidental references scarcely amount to a charter on world mission. This is confirmed by a tell-tale feature of the second noteworthy legacy of the Reformation. This was an alternative framework for the fundamental task of the church which has remained hugely influential in the Reformation churches until the present day. It focuses on the marks (*notae*) of the church – either two, the faithful proclamation of the Word and the administration of the dominical sacraments, or three, if ecclesiastical discipline is also included. The specification of these marks originated in the special context of the sixteenth century as what distinguished the true church from the false, the reformed from the unreformed. Here is a point of crucial importance for this paper. These marks emerged in a quite specific ecclesio-political setting in early modern Christendom, and integral to that setting was competition between different claimants for recognition as the true church by the civil authorities and the community at large. The Reformation confessions largely served the same rivalry, which partly explains their limitations. Despite their origin, the marks of the church have retained a central validity to the present day, and significantly shape formal ecclesiastical definitions of what the church is for, as seen in the ordination services of Reformation churches. And note this well: mission is not one of the traditional marks we have retained from a hugely different context from our own.

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Duff, *Foreign Missions: An Address* (Edinburgh, 1869), 25.

The emerging Protestant churches occasionally found themselves on the receiving end of Catholic counter-charges that they could not be true churches because they did not engage in world mission – as the Catholic Franciscans and Dominicans had been doing for centuries.

#### APPLYING THE GREAT COMMISSION TO HOME CHURCHES

When the Great Commission was at last rescued from its obscurity, from, say, 1800, it was applied of course to the overseas ‘mission field’, and not to Scotland or England or Germany. William Carey’s *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) began with a section based on Matthew 28:18-20, ‘An Enquiry whether the Commission given by our Lord to his Disciples be not still binding on us’.<sup>35</sup> From this time on, the Great Commission hardly looked back, as it were, though there were struggles ahead in most churches. But for the home countries, the mark-based ministry of Word and sacraments sufficed as the regnant paradigm of the church’s role on earth. The dichotomy survives virtually unscathed into the twenty-first century, not least in significant stretches of Scottish Presbyterianism, not excluding the more conservative variety.

What if we were to abolish geographical distinctions and allow the Great Commission to be enthroned as the ruling authoritative mandate from the risen Christ to determine not only what we seek to do overseas but also the life of the church in Scotland, or wherever the home country is for you? That is to say, ‘making disciples of all nations’ will include rather than exclude Scotland, and proclamation of the Word and the service of the sacraments and pastoral discipline and no doubt other tasks will all be set within this supreme framework.

Perhaps it will be objected that there is little or no difference between the Great Commission and the ministry of Word and sacraments model. We have in this survey noted tendencies for the terms of the former to be

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<sup>35</sup> Carey, *An Enquiry*, 7-13. I have used the facsimile reprint published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1891. Most of the rest of its 87 pages are devoted to statistics and demographics of ‘the Heathens’. Carey’s indebtedness to Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) for his reliance on Matthew 28:18-20 is argued by Michael A. G. Haykin in ‘Andrew Fuller on Mission: Text and Passion’ [2-4, 14-16] forthcoming in Ian M. Randall and Anthony R. Cross (eds), *Baptists and Mission: International Studies* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought 29; Milton Keynes, 2007); cf. Fuller’s ‘An Apology for the Late Christian Missions to India’ (1808) in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, with a Memoir of his Life* by Andrew Gunton Fuller (London, 1841), 796-828, at 815, 820-1.

collapsed into the latter, so that this hypothetical objection merits attention.

Semantically, the two are clearly different. In the Great Commission the object of the dominant verb is 'all nations'. English translation gives us two objects – 'all nations' and 'disciples', but in the Greek 'disciples' is part of the verb, as reflected in the AV/KJV (inadequate) rendering 'teach'. The other paradigm has impersonal objects – Word and sacraments. The former is more obviously directed towards achieving an effect – making people everywhere into followers of Jesus, whereas the latter's emphasis falls on activities. The former, one might say, lends itself to a kind of verification test: are people actually becoming disciples? The latter appeals to the test of faithfulness: is the Word actually being preached, are the sacraments actually being celebrated? It is not invidious to suggest that this latter is even capable of falling prey to a sort of *ex opere operato* vindication: yes, we have preached, we have observed the sacraments, and if none has become a disciple, that is their responsibility, or perhaps God's.

Entailed here is what more detailed content should be given to these two activities: what rightly belongs to the making of disciples, and what to preaching the Word? And in particular what would a ministry of proclaiming the Word look like when undertaken from the perspective and within the framework of the Great Commission? This last question immediately takes us back to an outline analysis of the Matthaean passage, and the participles dependent on the controlling imperative, 'make disciples'.

First is baptizing in the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If the Great Commission is kept to the fore, it should not be possible for baptism to be so overshadowed by the ministry of the Word as it so often is. Since baptizing inseparably implies the baptized community, it carries with it the task of incorporation into the church, as a body of people whose character is that of baptized disciples, not simply of those whose identity lies in faith-response to a message.

Secondly comes teaching all that Jesus taught his closest followers to observe. That teaching is presumably to be done not solely by public formal exposition, but in some of the various ways in which Jesus taught his disciples.

'Discipling' as a form of Christian ministry and training has been gaining prominence within at least the evangelical constituency in recent decades. I remember very little emphasis on it in my formative years as a Christian student. Developments such as the Navigators and the variegated charismatic movement have helped to promote discipling as an intentional pattern of forming Christians to be truly followers of Jesus.

The changing position of Christians in a more brashly secularized or paganized culture will surely make attention to disciple-formation a higher imperative. Numerous commentators have discerned in the contemporary West uncanny parallels (*mutatis mutandis*, of course) with the early centuries when the nascent church had to make its way into the Mediterranean world, and converts from paganism needed to be ‘deconstructed’ and then ‘reconstructed’ through the pre-baptismal processes that William Willimon has called a ‘detoxification’ exercise.<sup>36</sup>

Another legacy of the Reformation was the absence of the global scope from the marks-of-the-church model. (Its currency from the sixteenth century onwards had the effect of superseding the traditional creedal notes – one, holy, catholic [i.e. universal], apostolic.) The Great Commission challenges our continuing bifurcation between home ministry and overseas missions. At what frontier does the Commission kick in, as it were? When do you first have to show your passport or secure a visa or start learning a foreign language? There is surely scope for urban cross-cultural mission in Scotland, and how much more in England. Have we thought how the application of the Great Commission looks from other vantage points, such as the church in Kenya or Korea or Singapore? Does each of these churches think of the Commission as placing among the ‘all nations’ not its homeland but other countries patently in need of primary mission, like Scotland – whose church once stood as the sending church, the home of Christianity, to these other nations? How deep does church decline in Scotland need to go before we are prepared to welcome ‘reverse mission’, to be designated ‘a mission field’ (if this terminology has to survive) as we once designated overseas territories in need of mission ministry? The sharpest question may be whether the Scottish church is yet ready to learn how to ‘do mission’ from churches originally among the ‘all nations’ but now, it seems, much better at it than we are.

If we take the Luke-Acts missiology as a variant of the Great Commission, then the task of bearing witness/making disciples begins on our doorstep, in Jerusalem – see Acts 1:8! One of the most thorough structural studies of Matthew 28:18-20 concludes that

[William] Carey’s concern to see men and women from among all the nations become disciples of Jesus the Risen Lord was certainly a proper concern. However, when the attention has been focussed on the ‘going’ rather than

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* (Cambridge, 1995), 26. See now Kreider’s highly suggestive essay, ‘Baptism and Catechesis as Spiritual Formation’ in Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton (eds), *Remembering Our Future. Explorations in Deep Church* (Milton Keynes, 2007), 170-206.



upon 'the making of disciples' it has been misplaced. The important thing about the Great Commission is that it has to do with bringing men and women to submit to Jesus as Lord, to become His disciples, wherever they may be.<sup>37</sup>

We surely have a long way to go in most of our Scottish churches before we have overcome a broadly self-sufficient mentality which still assumes that our own tradition contains all the resources needed, revitalized to be sure, for successful church recovery. That is to say, we are still content with a model of church action deriving from the Reformation. Hence we have churches which are biblical and orthodox to a fault but evangelistically quite ineffective – yet keen supporters of overseas missions! There 'our missionaries' engage in various kinds of disciple-making which we pray for and financially sustain but would not think of adopting into our own local mission outreach. Over the past half-century major sections of Scottish evangelicalism have come to place a high premium on a particular form of the ministry of the Word known as 'expository preaching'. The core remit of 'making disciples' must indubitably encompass more than this pattern of proclamation. An immediate distinction to be addressed is that between content and method. It took too long in some quarters for Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:21 to escape from the captivity of the AV/KJV: 'it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe'. It should have read 'by the foolishness of the message preached'. According to verse 18, it is the message about the cross which is the power of God to those entering into salvation.<sup>38</sup>

'Expository preaching' in the specialized sense which now almost monopolizes the phrase is a method for organizing teaching and preaching which has proved in the hands of God really fruitful in certain church-historical contexts. It cannot claim any special scriptural status itself, over and above other schemes for ensuring biblically-balanced instruction and proclamation.<sup>39</sup> The extent to which preachers adhere to it should be a matter of wisdom rather than an assumed biblical warrant or mere traditionalism, however venerable or recent that tradition might be. Ancient tradition may well command the respectful attention of practical wisdom.

One thing is certain if we elevate the Great Commission to the position of unequalled importance claimed for it earlier in this lecture. It

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<sup>37</sup> Peter O'Brien, 'The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. A Missionary Mandate or Not?', in *Reformed Theological Review* 35 (1976), 66-78, at 78.

<sup>38</sup> The recent usage of 'Word-ministry' is worrying if it implies a heightened emphasis on verbal method rather than scriptural content.

<sup>39</sup> See the sane comments by Iain H. Murray in *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh, 2006), 320-6.

will cast us back on the discipling ministry of Jesus, who was far more than a pulpit-preacher.<sup>40</sup> In seeking to obey the Great Commission's focal instruction to 'make disciples of all nations', perhaps our first priority should be to become disciples of our Lord and Master as the supreme maker of disciples.

## APPENDIX

*When did 'the Great Commission' become the standard title for Matthew 28:18-20?*

[I am grateful to Dr Brian Stanley of the Henry Martyn Centre, Cambridge, and Dr David Reimer, my erstwhile colleague in New College, Edinburgh, for assistance with this Appendix.]

Since 'commission' is a common enough English noun and 'great' an even more common adjective, occurrences of the pairing of the two words with reference to Matthew 28:18-20/Mark 16:15-18, or even in a more generalized sense of Christ's 'marching orders' to his church are to be found long before the more restricted application developed. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) used the phrase in a hymn first published in 1709.

The Apostles Commission; or the Gospel attested by Miracles, Mark xvi.15, &c. Matth. xxviii.18, &c.

'Go preach My Gospel,' saith the Lord,  
'Bid the whole Earth my Grace receive;  
He shall be sav'd that trusts my Word,  
He shall be damn'd that won't believe.

'I'll make your great Commission known,  
And ye shall prove my Gospel true,  
By all the Works that I have done,  
By all the wonders ye shall do.

'Teach all the Nations my Commands,  
I'm with you till the World shall end;  
All Power is trusted in my Hands,  
I can destroy, and I defend.'

<sup>40</sup> For a recent study by an educationalist, see Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples. The Significance of Jesus' Educational Methods for Today's Church* (Milton Keynes, 2004); cf. 41: 'The discipling model depended to some degree on formal verbal teaching and oral communication and this element was frequently present in Jesus' teaching, but he supplemented it to a large degree by many informal teaching methodologies.'

These are verses 1, 2 and 4 of five in all (Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected from the Scriptures. II. Composed, on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord's Supper*, 14<sup>th</sup> edit. [London, 1740], 101-2, where the hymn is no. CXXXVIII in Book I. For its first appearance in the second edition of this collection in 1709, not in the original in 1707, see John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit. [London, 1907], 1237.) The earliest comparable usage I have encountered is much more obscure, in a short pamphlet in the British Library consisting of three intensely rhetorical and biblical exhortatory letters written from York Castle by one W. D. in 1661: *To All the Faithful Brethren Born of the Immortal Seed, of the Father of Life, And sent forth in the great Commission, and Power of the King of Eternal Glory, to gather his elect from the Winds of the Earth, forth of all Nations & Kindreds where they are scattered*. 'The... Commission... of the King of Eternal Glory' is generalized, but seems to have mission to all nations in view in its reference to divine visitations of 'the Northern Countries, & Barbadoes, New England, Virginia, Bermudoes, & the Countries & Islands there awaies, and elsewhere'.

William Carey's *Enquiry* (1792) did not use the phrase, and the nature of his argument in Section 1 presupposes that the Matthaean-Marcian mandate did not yet enjoy the recognition that would have warranted it. Yet the struggle for recognition that Carey successfully advanced would see these texts increasingly prominent during the nineteenth century. In 1868 Henry Venn, long-serving Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, referred to Matthew 28:19 as 'a familiar text [that] has been in all our thoughts at these valedictory dismissals for more than half a century' (William Knight, *Memoir of Henry Venn, B.D.*, new edit. (London, 1882), 164.

During the nineteenth century a number of trends are apparent from a preliminary survey:

- The use of the phrase 'the Great Commission' becomes more frequent;
- It does not always refer to the Matthaean-Marcian commission, or to anything mission-focussed at all;
- When it does refer to Matthew/Mark, it may fasten on something quite other than the core discipling imperative;
- What we know as 'the Great Commission' continues to be spoken of in other terms, especially 'the apostolic commission';

- Around 1870, a number of occurrences may suggest that a more conventional usage in a twentieth-century sense is emerging, but there are exceptions, and at present no causes of this trend can be identified.

The following examples illustrate the difficulty of discerning any linear development.

A sermon preached in Peterborough Cathedral on September 25, 1870, by Francis Henry Thicknesse entitled *The great commission of the great King* (Oxford, London, 1870), focuses centrally on Matthew 28:18-20 but treats the episode as the first ordination, has no mission interest and in the body of the sermon never uses ‘the great commission’ or any similar phrase.

James Russell Woodford’s *The great commission* (London, 1886) is subtitled ‘twelve addresses on the ordinal’ and has no contact with the modern ‘Great Commission’ at all.

*The Charter of the Kingdom. A Sermon*, by Thomas Groser (printed privately, 1888), is based on Mark 16:15-18 (amplified at times implicitly from Matthew), ‘the great commission and charge given by our Lord’.

The world-mission dimension of Adolph Saphir’s *Christ & the church* (London, 1874) is inescapable. It is subtitled ‘sermons on the apostolic commission (Matthew XXVIII.18-20)’, but uses no language at all close to ‘the Great Commission’.

*The Gospel Commission: its import, its obligations, and its influence in the commencement and conduct of the Christian life*, by James Walker (Edinburgh, London, 1826), describes the Matthaean text as forming, in substance, ‘the fundamental charter of the Church of Christ’, but all is applied to the home church.

Daniel Wilson, *The Apostolical Commission considered, with reference to the clergy of the Church of England* (London, 1835), is interested in episcopacy, not world mission.

Henry Martyn preached a sermon, probably in England before his departure for India in 1805, on ‘Christ’s Grand Commission to His Apostles’ on Matthew 28:18-20, ‘the Farewell Charge of Christ to his Disciples’ (in *Twenty Sermons*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., London, 1822, no. XIX, 391-412). This is suggestive of a movement towards a more normative usage.

Great expectations are aroused by *The great commission, or, The Christian Church constituted and charged to convey the gospel to the world* (London, 1842), by John Harris, President of Cheshunt College. This work of over 500 pages was the best essay on 'The Duty, Privilege, and Encouragement of Christians To Send The Gospel of Salvation to the Unenlightened Nations of the Earth', in a competition set up in Scotland and commended by Thomas Chalmers and Alexander Duff. The book itself never uses 'the great commission' of the title, but clearly honours the combined final command and promise of Christ 'as the great Missionary charter of the Church for all time' (150-1). The Matthaean text, however, is but one of several commands of Christ listed under the scriptural basis for missionary enterprise.

Duff himself used the words 'the great commission' in his 1869 address, but not in a privileged sense (*Foreign Missions*, 26).

*The Commission Given By Jesus Christ to His Apostles*, by Archibald McLean of Edinburgh (3<sup>rd</sup> edit., Edinburgh, 1823), is structured throughout its 350 pages by Matthew 28:18-20, which is repeatedly called 'the commission' without need of qualification.

This paper has earlier noted *The Great Commission: Meditations on Home and Foreign Missions* (1872), by E. M. Goulburn, which often calls the Matthaean passage 'the Great/great Commission', and expounds it clause by clause (cf. 3, 7, 19, 36, 57, 59). It is distinctive in treating the shorter Marcan version of the Commission as 'more purely missionary' than Matthew.

*The Great Commission in its Missionary Aspect*, by John Laidlaw of Perth, a sermon preached to the same Free Church Assembly of 1869 (Edinburgh, 1869), uses 'great' throughout, and 'the Great Commission' is the most frequent way of referring to its text, Matthew 28:18-20.

But then in the same year *The Great Commission* by Robert Ainslie Redford of Hull, the annual sermon before the Congregational Union (London, 1869), has as its text Isaiah 43:10 and deals generally with the church's vocation of witness, with no hint of Matthew 28 or universal mission.

The need for more systematic investigation could not be more obvious, and the field of enquiry is huge. Meantime, suggestions are advanced which may be more or less plausible. Some website has given currency to the claim that it was Hudson Taylor who popularised 'the Great Commission' to describe Matthew 28. This has appeared in print, but no source

reference is supplied, and research so far (a skim through the relevant volumes of A. J. Broomhall's seven-volume *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, Sevenoaks, 1981-1989) has not come up with supporting evidence. More appealing is Brian Stanley's proposal that it was the Scofield Bible of 1909 which widely influenced an evangelical readership. Its heading for Matthew 28:16-20 is 'Jesus in Galilee. His great commission', with 'Christ's Commission to the Eleven' for Mark 16:15-18. Behind Scofield may lie the preference of A. T. Pierson, one of its consultant editors, who from the 1880s had been using 'the Great Commission', but more frequently of Mark than Matthew. It is not clear that at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 the honorific designation was customary.

Then there are the biblical commentators. Already in the early eighteenth century Matthew Henry's exposition used 'commission' several times in his analysis of the Matthaean passage, along with 'the great charter'. A small search of some widely-read late-nineteenth-century commentaries indicates that a decade or two before the Scofield Bible 'the Great Commission' came naturally to commenting pens. The volume on Matthew by John A. Broadus (Philadelphia, 1886) in the *American Commentary on the New Testament* (ed. Alvah Hovey) used the capitalized phrase four times in dealing with the verses in question (583, 586, 591, 596-7). John Monro Gibson's treatment of the Gospel in W. R. Nicoll's *Expositor's Bible* (London, 1890) deploys several phrases: 'the commission', 'a/this Great Commission', 'the great commission' (439, 443, 444-5). The *Pulpit Commentary* series (ed. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell) draws on a handful of contributors for each volume. *St Matthew*, by A. L. Williams *et al.*, vol. II (London, 1894), has different writers using 'a/the commission' and 'the great commission' (643, 656, 660, vi [at end]). In the first edition of the Century Bible (ed. W. F. Adeney) W. F. Slater on *St Matthew* (Edinburgh, 1901) introduced his exposition of 28:16-20 with the heading '[The disciples] see the Lord, and receive the great commission.'

This admittedly limited range of evidence counts in favour of the last quarter or third of the nineteenth century as the period when 'the Great Commission' really caught on and could be used as though its normal reference to Matthew 28:18-20 called for no explanation or justification. Only more extensive research will settle the issue.

# BEYOND CONGREGATION: CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FOR TODAY'S SEARCHERS

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## TRIGGER POINTS

### *James Hopewell: Congregation – Stories and Structures*

Sometimes you stumble on a phrase or a sentence which spins your mind out of its usual orbit. James Hopewell's magisterial work on *Congregation: Stories and Structures* did that for me. One sentence stood out rather awkwardly from the main theme. It was as though I had been walking on the beach and stubbed my toe on an invisible rock:

Common as they are in several religious traditions, congregations have never dominated the totality of the world's religious organisations ... The congregation is not as inevitable as church members might assume.<sup>1</sup>

For one who had grown up in congregations, ministered in congregations, encouraged and consulted with congregations and was part of a denomination – and nation – which equated the local expression of church with the language of 'congregation', this sentence made me realise that I was living within a cultural cage. 'Congregation' was not the only way of being church.

Every time we use the word 'congregation', we import a whole culture of assumptions about the way that church life will be expressed – from the physicality of buildings, seating and pulpits to the patterns of membership, belonging and participation in worship and service, through to the assumed roles of leadership, whatever names are given to the professional or voluntary leadership groups.

Hopewell's book is a brilliant plea for patient understanding of congregations, whom he describes as a 'thick gathering' who over time have woven an intricate 'web of significance':

A group that possesses a special name and recognises members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practised worship but who

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<sup>1</sup> James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, (London: SCM Press, 1987), p. 12.

communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, worship and story.<sup>2</sup>

While his book alerted me to the profound issues of identity which must be respected and understood if we are to adapt and adjust our congregations for the missionary challenges of a post-modern and post-Christendom era, that distinctive and disruptive sentence opened my mind to the fact that the congregation is itself a culture-bound model of Christian community. Perhaps the reconfiguration of our culture may require more than an adjustment of the congregational model. Perhaps it requires alternatives, parallel structures, complementary models, multi-faceted expressions of Christian community that can inhabit the multi-layered networks of our de-centred culture.

Our culture has been described as a spiritual centrifuge: ‘an apparatus that rotates at such tremendous velocity that existing densities break up as new densities emerge.’<sup>3</sup> We live at a time when the task of leading a congregation is becoming old technology. The task for the coming decades is learning how to build Christian communities in many different forms.

In times of profound change, the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.<sup>4</sup>

### **James Thwaites: The Church beyond the Congregation**

Five years later I came across the writings of James Thwaites, *The Church beyond the Congregation*, in which he presses the case even further.

Thwaites’ thesis is that Western theology and ecclesiology have been affected by Greek dualism that divides spirit from body and sacred from secular. He claims that this has led to an overemphasis on the congregational gathering point as the focus of our time and energy. He calls for a Hebrew view of life where we are released from inherited mindsets into a ‘re-evaluation of our present congregation-focused approach to church life’.

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<sup>2</sup> Hopewell, pp. 3-12.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer – Finding the Heart’s True Home*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> Al Rogers, quoted in Leonard Hjalmanson, *Kingdom Leadership in the Post-modern Era* at [www.Christianity.ca/church/Kingdom Leadership in the Post-modern Era](http://www.Christianity.ca/church/Kingdom%20Leadership%20in%20the%20Post-modern%20Era).



He traces that dualistic split through Plato and Aquinas and the rationalism of the Reformation and on to the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. He then identifies how we embody the split in our use of buildings. He points out that the Early Church had no public church buildings until Constantine used pagan temples as the base for Christianity as the imperial religion. He claims that buildings are a handicap:

In a post modern time it is becoming more and more obvious that the Christian's split universe, mostly expressed in and from a building we have named church, is benefiting the saints less and less. It is not attracting the attention of the un-churched tribes, heading into the diverse and desperate post-modern mosaic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I believe that our focus for divine meaning and mission on the church gathered is a major strategic error on the part of the Christian church. It must be overcome if we, as the body of Christ, are to enter into and impact a post-modern world. The Greek split has triumphed by detaching the church from most of the saints' life and work in creation. The reality we face at this time is that a kingdom divided cannot stand, a people divided cannot act, so a church divided cannot build.<sup>5</sup>

Thwaites suggests that we heal this split universe by listening to the voice of the Spirit in creation. Based on the image in Romans 8 of the creation groaning and waiting for the liberation of the children of God, he argues that the church finds its true identity when we hear creation's cry and are released to respond. The world will know the church when the cry is answered by the people of God as we move out from our buildings into what the Puritans called the various 'spheres of creation'.

He says that unfortunately

we continue to listen mostly to our own voices echoing off the walls, defining and redefining us again and again. And we are left wondering why the people don't come.

It is time to look again and locate the new people in Christ that make up the church. It is time to release them from their church containment set in place by the Greeks and send them into God's creation that, to this day, still knows and calls their name.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Flight of the Raven*

Between reading Hopewell and Thwaites came a watershed experience of ministry in the centre of Edinburgh, based in the Parish Church of

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<sup>5</sup> James Thwaites, *The Church beyond the Congregation*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

St Cuthbert, with the mandate to develop appropriate mission strategies for that part of the city centre – which turned out to be a mix of residents, businesses, homeless people and the entertainment industry. Each of them needed a distinct form of Christian community dispersed around the central hub of the mother church.

Hopewell alerted me to the need to explore other options beyond the congregation. Thwaites allowed me a lens to look back and read the map of an uncharted journey. We had been answering a call of the Spirit in creation to become dis-embedded from a congregational model and learn how to embed communities of faith in the various spheres of the life of the city.

The most challenging and radical of these journeys was our exploration of church for the club culture. That forced me to tear up all my mental maps of congregational experience in order to ask what church might look like for these young people who found in the clubs the experience of transcendence through the music and a community of intimacy in the friendships of the clubbing scene; people who processed communication electronically, sonically and bodily, for whom community life was active rather than passive, and for whom democratic participation was their mode of relating and making decisions.

We moved through three phases over a period of eight years: a project phase, a phase as a living community, and then a period of dispersal. The first phase explored patterns of worship in pubs and clubs which mirrored the dynamics of nightclub life – some dance worship with DJs and visuals, other contemplative worship reflecting the club's chill-out room. We explored the Celtic monastic tradition for rhythms of prayer and wholesome living, and generally wrestled with people who had been deeply damaged by church life which had suppressed their questions and given little space for their creativity.

Beyond the project phase a small community of Christians formed called the Raven Community – based in a flat in Lothian Road with a weekly rhythm of meals and worship, of prayers and personal involvement in some of the challenging areas of city life – from refugees to sexual health and concerns for prostitution. The flat became one of Edinburgh's 'boiler rooms' where 24/7 prayer was focused for particular seasons of the year.

Migration, illness, lack of funding, dispersal of key individuals and the sale of the flat meant that the Ravens flew the nest by 2005. Looking back it is not clear that the community of Christians became a Christian community. That remains one of the areas to be explored further in the light of the many new models of community which are appearing around the country and across the post-Christendom Western World.

The intentionally missional community became more of a therapeutic community for people struggling to recover lost faith or redefine it. It was an honest community – often painfully honest, but much to be preferred to the superficial politeness of much congregational politics. We were only at the edge of something, but we did touch the hem of Christ's garment, and some were healed.

### *Liminality and Communitas*

It has been said that we learn most on the border of order and chaos. This period was a time of living in what Victor Turner calls 'liminality' – living through a threshold moment, a transition from one phase of life to another. In such a time we need what he calls 'communitas'<sup>7</sup> – a form of supportive community that facilitates transition: from one stage of life to another, from one phase of faith to another, or from one cultural period to another.

We had hoped for a church that would be marked by permanence, and found we had simply offered community for a period of transition. We struggled with issues of leadership as we found previous experiences not translating easily to the new context, but perhaps being more diffident than we needed to be. Before we had the language we had experienced 'communitas' – and perhaps stumbled on a pattern of Christian community that is essential for today's spiritual searchers.

## TODAY'S SPIRITUAL SEARCHERS

### *Types of Searchers*

Let me turn now to say a word about the spiritual search that is around in our culture. In an Edinburgh Summer School in 2005 for Doctoral Students from Columbia Seminary, John Drane suggested that the spiritual search today could be grouped into three categories:

- those in search of a more *disciplined spiritual life*, whether through Buddhist meditation or Ignatian Exercises or the rise of the new monasticism. We only need to look at the extraordinary response to the BBC reality TV show 'The Monastery' – generating massive interest in the monastic life of prayer and a search for depth in our superficial culture, suffering from the diseases of 'affluenza' – 'a contagious

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1969), quoted by Ben Edson, leader of Sanctus 1 in Manchester, in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6, No 1, (2006), p. 30.

middle-class virus causing depression, anxiety, addiction and ennui'.<sup>8</sup> There are various groups exploring this such as the Community of Aidan and Hilda based on Lindisfarne who describe themselves as: 'A worldwide pilgrim people reconnecting with the Spirit and the scriptures, the saints and the streets, the seasons and the soil.'

- those who are simply looking for *common-sense wisdom for everyday living*. These would include the self-help books, the growing industry of life-coaching, the fascination with personality profiling. My wife does life-coaching, personality profiling and spiritual direction, and she has around 15 people who are meeting with her on a regular basis, many of them finding that church life does not touch their deep questioning and spiritual search for identity and new paths for spiritual growth.
- those who are into the more *bizarre aspects of popular spirituality* from crystals to tarot cards, astrology and spiritual auras. Much of the popularity of that is down to good marketing and gullibility. Nonetheless, behind the New Age search is a genuine quest.

Rob Frost is a Methodist evangelist of 30 years experience who has published the book, *A Closer Look at New Age Spirituality*. He opens with these words:

For too long the church has seen the New Age movement as a threat, an enemy, and a source of evil in the world. I began to write this book as a diatribe of Bible verses and theology condemning it.

I repent.

Since meeting some of those involved in New Age activity, hanging around their bookstalls and fairs and hearing them talk of their genuine quest for reality, I've changed my perspective. Now, I'm asking: what can I learn from the emerging New Age spirituality? What can it teach me? How can it help me?<sup>9</sup>

A number of Christians are now finding ways of being present in the Psychic Fayres to offer a Christian presence: listening posts, prayer for healing, the meaning of tarot (explaining the scriptural images), foot massage and prayer, interpretation of dreams, and ... Psalm Reading! Choose a number between 1 and 150 ... and be surprised at what you learn!

<sup>8</sup> Oliver James, *Affluenza*, quoted by Nick Spencer in *The Affluenza Epidemic*, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity's 'Connecting with Culture' comment 2 March 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Rob Frost, *A Closer Look at New Age Spirituality* (Kingsway, 2001), p. 9.

In the light of our question about the nature of spiritual community for spiritual searchers, we have to ask how far the congregational model helps those who are looking for a more disciplined spiritual life, or offers people accountability groups to apply the practical wisdom tradition of Scripture as God's guidance to everyday living, or begins to connect with the spiritual tourist who needs gentle guidance and a 'soul friend' to become a pilgrim in search of Christ.

### *Spirituality among Scots*

In a recent seminar at the University of Glasgow, Dr Eric Stoddart of St Andrews University, introduced some of his ongoing research into spirituality in Scotland through examining the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey of 2001.<sup>10</sup> I hesitate to use it because it is a work in progress and I am not sure that I understood it all, but a number of relevant themes emerged from the presentation and discussion.

This research is an attempt to reach behind the usual reading of the spiritual temperature in Scotland through church affiliation, and to look instead at attitudes to spirituality and levels of spiritual awareness. The survey asked questions related to

- The impact that religious practice had on daily life
- The range of other spiritual practices which people had engaged in
- The levels of awareness people had of spiritual influences

Only 20% said religious affiliation affected their lives to a significant degree. 55% were engaging in some other form of spiritual practice (e.g. astrology or horoscope) and 75% displayed some awareness of a spiritual dimension in life. There is a spiritual hunger out there.

Eric was working on a formula that pulled all the data together into a 'composite spirituality scale' in which 35% of respondents emerged as 'very low'. In relation to our issue about congregation and community, 33% of those in the 'very low' category were Presbyterian! This underlines the disjunction between our inherited models of congregational life and the spiritual quest in society today.

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<sup>10</sup> Presentation in the School of Divinity to a gathering on Religious Decline in Scotland, 9 March 2007.

### *Spiritual Revolution?*

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead are authors of *The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality*.<sup>11</sup> Based on research in Kendal, their thesis is that there is a movement in our culture from ‘life-as’ religion (i.e. ‘life as’ a wife or mother or doctor or minister) where the roles are given and understood by the conventions of society, to ‘subjectivity’ where we operate by feeling and intuition. Their study divided the spiritual quest into ‘congregational mode’ and ‘holistic milieu’ mode. They discovered that 7.9% of people express their spirituality in congregational mode and 1.6% in holistic milieu mode. While the figures were small, the immediate conclusion is that the spiritual revolution has not yet occurred. The congregation seems to be holding the ground.

However, at a lecture in New College in April 2005, Professor Heelas made the prediction that with the rate of decline of congregational life in UK and the rise of spiritual quest, he expects that by 2025 the holistic milieu will overtake the congregational model. If the ‘congregational mode’ reduces by half (to 3.9%) and the ‘holistic milieu’ doubles (to 3.2%), we will see a crossover point by 2025. Since he is basing his figures on England, and we usually follow about 10-15 years behind England in terms of culture shift, then we may expect the same change of focus in Scotland by 2040. Once again we are challenged not to place all our spiritual eggs in the congregational basket.

### *The Back Door*

Add to that prediction the stark observation of Stuart Murray that we are losing many people through the back door of our churches: ‘A recent estimate is that a million Christians no longer belong to churches and that is the fastest growing part of the Christian community.’<sup>12</sup>

The New Zealander Alan Jamieson has done research into post-church groups which reveals that these groups are made up of people in mid-life (average age 40-45), married with families and typically well-educated. High percentages had been in leadership roles in the church. Their reasons for leaving were related to two areas:

- the structure and orientation of the churches, e.g. shallowness of format, manipulative or controlling leadership, personal burnout

<sup>11</sup> Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 45.

- the need for space for personal and spiritual growth, e.g. the church was like a ‘stuck record’, too narrow, cutting them off from ordinary people.<sup>13</sup>

Jamieson argues that we are seeing people move through various ‘stages of faith’ such as those described by James Fowler. This same movement has been described by David Lyall in *Integrity of Pastoral Care* where people move beyond conformist-conventional faith to an individualive-reflective faith and then to a conjunctive faith with the ability to live easily with paradox.<sup>14</sup> Lyall sees this being consistent with our cultural movements from pre-modern to modern to post-modern culture. Jamieson goes further to use this progression as a clue to the elements of community life which will nurture and sustain people on their journey.<sup>15</sup>

### CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

In the midst of all these explorations and cultural adaptations, where are our theological anchor points? A Christian community is called to reflect the image of the God we worship, trust, serve and to whom we bear witness in Jesus Christ, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Church of Scotland report on *Church without Walls* offered a simple descriptor of the church taken from the stories of the Gospels: ‘people with Jesus at the centre, travelling where Jesus takes us’. It may not be sufficiently sophisticated for some theologians, but it does have the virtue of affirming the core identity of Christian community, and dislodging a settled church into its destiny as a movement ‘to the ends of the earth and the end of time’, as Newbigin reminds us. In theological shorthand, we are called to a Christological embodiment of the *Missio Dei*.

*Church without Walls* suggested that churches be shaped by four elements: by the Gospels, by our context, by friendship and by the gifts of God’s people. Interestingly, recent research by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger<sup>16</sup> on new patterns of church in UK and USA shows that across the spectrum of 50 new communities there is a primary focus on ‘identifying with Jesus’ – a return to the Gospels as the measure of personal and

<sup>13</sup> Alan Jamieson, ‘Post-Church Groups and their Place in Emergent Forms of Church’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6, No 1 (2006), p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> David Lyall, *Integrity of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 2001), pp. 111-14.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., pp. 74-5.

<sup>16</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches – Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London, SPCK, 2006).

community life. Of course, each Gospel has a different perspective, and each Gospel writer would shape a community differently.

From my observation, most congregations would be close to Matthew's model – rooted in history, orderly and with strong issues of legalism running through it, but finally capable of being liberated into disciple-making mission. Many of the new communities, however, would align more closely with one of the other Gospels: with Mark the activist, with the questioning disciples as confused at the end as at the beginning; with Luke the charismatic Spirit-alert adventurer, concerned about including the outsiders, and challenging attitudes to wealth and poverty; or with John focusing on a ministry of incarnation ('The Word became a human being and moved into the neighbourhood'<sup>17</sup>), recognising signs of God at weddings and funerals, and encouraging more of a contemplative, reflective community. Jesus at the centre – travelling where Jesus takes us.

To be shaped by our context – both local and cultural – is an invitation to earth our following of Jesus in the neighbourhoods and networks where we live, work or play, so that we 'transform secular space' by reclaiming God's world in the name of God's kingdom. When this engagement is combined with a commitment to the 'kenotic' ministry of Christ in Philippians who 'makes himself nothing' to come as servant, and the 'cosmic' ministry of Christ of Colossians 'by whom, through whom and for whom all things were made', then we are released from the ecclesiastical agoraphobia and paranoia that erode our missionary confidence. Jesus at the centre – travelling where Jesus takes us.

'Friendship' is a key word in the *Church without Walls* report – and it is a key word in all the literature about post-modern Christian community. It includes the spirit of hospitality to the stranger, a quality of community life marked by authenticity, honesty and generosity, as well as Christian witness and discipleship through faith accompaniment as a fellow traveller on the Way. This kind of friendship is rooted in Jesus' words in John 15 about calling his disciples 'friends' rather than servants: giving to them all that the Father has given to him, and laying down his life for them.<sup>18</sup> Jesus at the centre – travelling where Jesus takes us.

The final *Church without Walls* shaper is: 'shaped by the gifts of God's people'. Each of us is a gift from God to be given away to the world. So much church life is about finding people to plug the gaps in our ecclesiastical systems and to shore up what is struggling to survive. The New Testament speaks of many gifts being given so that we can be the multi-gifted Body of Christ, representing Christ in the world. When we listen

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<sup>17</sup> John 1:14 (*The Message* translation).

<sup>18</sup> John 15:13-17.



to the dreams and passions of people we will be surprised at the gifts God has planted in them by his Spirit. God is not caught out by our particular phase of history. He has already given the gifts that are needed for the work that he wants to be done.

Gibbs and Bolger discovered an immense range of creative gifts being released generously in these new communities, a desire to be producers rather than consumers, and patterns of leadership that allowed people to have a voice in the process of discernment about the future shape of the community.

Recently I met a young man who has a passion to connect with the punks and Goths in the alternative cultures of our cities. His love for their music came when he was converted. Up till then he did not even like their music. The spirit of Jesus did. We are his Body. He has given us more gifts for the mission than we know. Jesus at the centre – travelling where Jesus takes us.

These few theological pointers do not amount to a fully worked out ecclesiology, but they do allow us to respond to the call to follow Christ. Perhaps this is a time to travel light rather than not travel at all.

## CONTOURS OF COMMUNITY

As we travel into our post-Christendom world, Christian community beyond the congregation will require to attend to three contours of community life:

- ***We will require to explore patterns of Christian spirituality*** that recover contemplation, question and the mystery of silence, offsetting the inherited tendency to wordiness and offering tidily boxed answers. It has been said that Jesus was asked 183 questions, but only gave direct answers to three of them! There will be a clear practical focus on the Jesus of the Gospels and aiming to live faithfully as his followers amidst the realities and ambiguities of our times.

We will see worship that will be multi-voiced and de-centred from the single dominant leader, leaving space for interaction and dialogue around the Word of God. The art of story-telling will be recovered and there will be a re-imagination of the sacraments of baptism and communion as multi-sensory occasions shaped by creative liturgists who can use the symbols and communication skills of our time.

We will need Emmaus Road evangelists who walk alongside the questioners, hear the pain and set the mess of life in the mystery and meaning of the Messianic story, offering searchers the hospitality of the supper table where the Risen Christ reveals himself.

Sanctus 1 in Manchester has been exploring these themes and has developed a significant presence in the centre of the city for people on that spiritual search. Contacts are mainly de-churched people aged 20-40, young post-modern professionals working in arts, attempting something new because they have been hurt by church. They stay because of community, inclusiveness, creativity and sacred space for reflection.

Sanctus 2 is on the second Sunday of the month and is intergenerational with a café, prayer, film and creative space. Nexus operates as a night café between 2 and 4 a.m. offering coffee, chat, film and the arts for the night population of the city.

- *We will require to express authentic Christian community* that is honest and healthy, living out the courageous integrity of grace and truth. We will be clear about our centre in Christ, but allow for a movement of people around him like the ebb and flow of Gospel crowds – some committed disciples and others curious observers, investors and consumers. Community life will require to be simple but sustainable.<sup>19</sup>

Jamieson suggests the need to offer support to move through to James Fowler's 'fifth conjunctive stage' of faith, and uses the fascinating imagery of 'dual parentage' drawn from 'mother church' – the full Christian tradition of Scripture and church history; learning from 'father culture' – the symbols, language and media of today.<sup>20</sup> Leonard Sweet would describe such a culturally connected community as EPIC – experiential, participatory, image-based and connected or communal.<sup>21</sup> The metaphor is similar to the idea of 'double listening' and an 'ancient-future' faith, which recognises that the call to incarnation involves marrying transcendence and immanence.

Coracle is a small community in Edinburgh led by two Episcopal priests. It began as a young adults' group for people in their 20s and 30s, and has grown into another example of 'communitas' basing the rhythm of their life on three phases in the year – the journey inwards (prayer and spirituality), the journey outward (learning to live counter-culturally in the face of media manipulation, consumerism

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 217ff.

<sup>20</sup> Jamieson, p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims – first century passion for the 21st century world* (Broadman and Holman, Nashville, 2000).

and ecological challenges) and the journey together (reflecting on the health of relationships in the community). The relationships are now spiralling outwards towards, firstly, offering 'godly play' for children, and, secondly, a group of men exploring male spirituality.

- *We will require to engage with society in the slipstream of God's mission of grace* to transform people, place and planet as his Kingdom comes on earth as in heaven. People are looking for a faith that makes a difference and are open to joining hands with allies of good will who are working for a more just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable world. There is impatience with the religious divisions which create congregational competitiveness, duplication and self-absorbed use of resources.

Over the past year, 30 or 40 people in their 20s and 30s have met on four occasions for 'Dream Days' where people share their dreams of influencing the city of Edinburgh for the sake of the Kingdom of God. These dreams include work among the Goths, prayer networks, film production that teases people about city life, and a group of girls moving into the poorest areas of the city offering nutrition classes and dress-making skills to young mothers.

They have dreams that are not supported by their busy congregations – and some have now disconnected. They need another kind of network of support and some kind of spiritual framework to help them understand their sense of vocation. They resonate with James Thwaites' invitation to find their vocation in God's creation rather than in a congregation which saps time and energy into being self-sustaining. They respond best to questions rather than solutions. They need old heads to come alongside and listen, encourage and affirm them. They need to be healed of the sacred/secular schizophrenia and be given confidence to move into God's world and meet Christ on the streets.

These are now my companions on the Way. I am apprenticing myself to their dreams, and learning to be a learner, a beginner again, a follower rather than leader – always asking the question about how we might wrap supportive and challenging Christian community around these dreamers? What spiritual disciplines will sustain them for their journey?

They are below the radar of most church statistics and church strategies, but they are inhabiting a new cultural landscape as searchers, dreamers and activists – speaking of a new Galilee where the Risen Jesus is ahead of us, waiting for his disciples to meet up with him.

## BEYOND CONGREGATION

I stand at the door of my congregation. An angel meets me and says:

Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.... But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

Of course, we meet in Jesus in our congregations. But many do not, and he is moving on to meet them where they are. It is time to go.

# WHY WOMEN FOLLOWED JESUS: A DISCUSSION OF FEMALE PIETY

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Almost without exception, Jewish sects in Second Temple Judaism are treated as the reserve of male Jews. Though scholars rightly stress the diversity of Second Temple Judaism when its variety is explained, one has the very real sense that only men were doing religion. The sources tease us with glimpses of women participating in religion, but often women seem more of a foil for other interests. We cannot be sure whether the descriptions are idealistic dreams of how it should be (one thinks of Philo perhaps)<sup>1</sup> or angry mutterings of a frustrated misogynist (Ben Sira comes to mind).<sup>2</sup> While there are texts with women as central characters, such as *Judith*<sup>3</sup> or *Joseph and Aseneth*,<sup>4</sup> and there are tales where women are featured, such as *Susanna* in the Daniel corpus or Sarah in *Tobit*,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Romney Wegner, 'Philo's Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenic?' in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 41-66.

<sup>2</sup> W. C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View on Women: A Literary Analysis* (Chico, CA: Brown Judaic Studies 38, 1982). See Claudia V. Camp, 'Understanding a Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem through the Eyes of Ben Sira' in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This*, 1-39, who offers a nuanced view of Ben Sira's position on women as resulting from his fears about his changing social environment.

<sup>3</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Judith*, Anchor Bible, vol. 40 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1985.) See also Margarita Stocker, who examines *Judith* throughout its history of interpretation, and explores the myths and stereotypes, as well as the counter-cultural messages reflected therein. Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Ross Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> A helpful resource for information on women in the canonical texts, including the Apocrypha, is the *Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). See also *Women in Scripture*, Carol Meyers, general editor, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, associate editors (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000). For information on women in biblical Israel, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader*, edited by Alice Bach (NY: Routledge, 1999).

the reader is never quite sure that these narratives reflect reality on the ground, as it were.<sup>6</sup> Tal Ilan, contrasting the practical non-existence of women in the historiographical books of 1 and 2 Maccabees with the extensive references to women in the non-historiographical books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, remarks, 'I can only deduce from this that in the minds of the ancient historians, real history was enacted in the male realm, while women were confined to the field of fiction.'<sup>7</sup>

Initially, I will focus on two groups within Second Temple Judaism that offer potential windows into women's religious activities, the Pharisees and the Jesus sect. What questions or concerns drew women to follow Pharisaism or the Jesus movement? Discovering the options available to women, or choices women made with regard to Pharisaism might illumine aspects of the Jesus sect concerning women disciples. Given their historical and geographical proximity, often these two groups' treatment and attitudes towards women have been discussed together, often to the Pharisees' disadvantage. For example, more than a few scholars use a biased reconstruction of the Pharisaic position to highlight Jesus' 'enlightened' view of women.<sup>8</sup> While I reject this predisposition, nevertheless, distinctions between women within the Pharisaic movement and those who followed Jesus are suggestive. To understand these differences, especially as they shed light on women in the Jesus movement, useful information can be gained from Diaspora evidence about Jewish women. The similarities between data from the Diaspora and that mined from the New Testament suggest more continuity than many scholars have allowed between Palestine and the Diaspora, at least regarding Jewish women.

<sup>6</sup> The literature on ideological and methodological problems inherent in studying women in ancient texts is extensive. Ross Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (eds), *Women and Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 35-79; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the "Linguistic Turn"' (*Church History* 67:1, 1998, 1-31); Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2-43; Miriam Peskowitz, 'Spinning Tales: On Reading Gender and Otherness in Tannaitic Texts' in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, ed. by Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (NY: New York University Press, 1994), 91-120; Judith Romney Wegner, 'The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism' in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by J. R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1990), 68-93; *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. by Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 1-19.

<sup>7</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> See Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 132, 139.

In pursuing these avenues of inquiry, a variety of sources are explored. All literary evidence to one degree or another presents problems for the historian, as Elizabeth Clark wryly comments, 'historians should take care not to overlook the obvious: that we deal, always, with representation'.<sup>9</sup> Most all of our literary sources were produced by men, from the aristocratic or wealthy class. 'Dominant social status led men in these circles not only to express their opinions regarding women but also to try directly to shape women's social status according to their own evaluation of women's character, abilities and limitations.'<sup>10</sup> Josephus' stories about the Hasmonean and Herodian courts in a few instances focuses on the wealthy and powerful women and their interest in the Pharisees, but readers should not suppose that Josephus' material is untainted by rhetoric or political motivation. Novels such as *Judith*<sup>11</sup> or *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>12</sup> raise further interpretive problems for the historian asking what 'real women' were doing in our period, but may reveal aspects of everyday life much as do parables found in the rabbis' and Jesus' teachings.<sup>13</sup> Rabbinic texts and those of the New Testament are read with an awareness of their polemical and rhetorical posture, but with the recognition that they may reflect authentic women and their behaviour.<sup>14</sup> Also examined are epigraphic and inscriptional evidence from the Diaspora, appreciating that Palestine was continually impacted by news and views from Jewish communities outside of its borders.

Not only is the reconstruction of women's lives problematic given the limited and biased sources available to the historian, but also the difficulty runs to describing the Pharisees. Josephus' positive evaluation of

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes', 30.

<sup>10</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 40B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985); James C. VanderKam, 'No One Spoke Ill of Her': *Essays on Judith*, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature Series 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> See Ross S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*.

<sup>13</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 34, writes, 'The author of a parable uses examples he perceives as real-life situations in order to illustrate an important idea or message... thus a parable has the same historical value as an historical novel, such as *Susannah*, *Judith* or *Tobit*.'

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on interpreting historical material, including rabbinic and New Testament material, see Ross S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

the Pharisees is in sharp contrast to the New Testament's condemnation, while the rabbinic texts present numerous challenges to the historian. Martin Jaffee laments that we only have these partisan voices, but he adds, 'what does seem certain – because it is the only thing upon which our otherwise irreconcilable sources agree – is that the Pharisees placed a great premium on something called "ancestral tradition"'.<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, Anthony Saldarini's summary of the Pharisees is most helpful, 'the Pharisaic association probably functioned as a social movement organization seeking to change society... [and] probably sought a new, communal commitment to a strict Jewish way of life based on adherence to the covenant'.<sup>16</sup>

As Richard Bauckham notes, 'No historical reconstruction is possible without the exercise of historical imagination.'<sup>17</sup> This is especially true with the history of women, because of the paucity of evidence, and the questionable authenticity of much of the literary evidence about women written by male authors. However, preliminary conclusions suggest that Jewish women in Jerusalem were drawn to Pharisaism at least in part because of its approach to ritual purity. But women who interacted with Jesus were unconcerned about the ritual purity rites prioritized by many women (and men) who dwelt in Jerusalem and who thus lived under the intense purity codes of the Temple.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the women Jesus met and those who were drawn to him from Galilee and the land outside of Jerusalem, were to one degree or another likely interested in messianic issues, were acutely aware of apocalyptic ideas, and were comfortable learning from Jesus in a mixed group of men and women disciples. The inscriptional evidence from the Diaspora suggests that Jewish women enjoyed full and robust participation in the synagogue, matching the energy and engagement we find among Jesus' female followers.

## WOMEN PHARISEES

The question of whether a woman could be a Pharisee, or would consider herself under that banner, is raised directly by a short sentence in the Mishnah. In *m. Sot.* 3:4 we read,

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<sup>15</sup> Martin S. Jaffee, *Early Judaism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, 'Pharisees', *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. V, edited by David Noel Freedman (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 289-303.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, *op. cit.*, 194.

<sup>18</sup> The question of ritual purity would not be acute for those living outside of Jerusalem and the Temple. See Mary Rose D'Angelo, '(Re)presentations of women in the Gospels' in *Women and Christian Origins*, 140.



R. Eliezer says: If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the law it is as though he taught her lechery. R. Joshua says: A woman has more pleasure in one *kab* [portion of wealth] with lechery than in nine *kabs* with modesty. He used to say: A foolish saint and a cunning knave and a woman that is a hypocrite (*perushah*) and the wounds of the Pharisees (*perushim*), these wear out the world.<sup>19</sup>

The rabbis' intentions are debated extensively, though with consensus that the woman mentioned is not being complimented! The term *perushah* translated 'abstinence' has the same root as the word 'Pharisee'. Scholars argue whether or not to translate *perushah* as 'Pharisee',<sup>20</sup> but there is virtual unanimity that later, in *b. Sot.* 22b, the same Hebrew term should read 'Pharisee'.<sup>21</sup> Such convictions arise from a parallel story recorded by Josephus in *Ant.* 13.401.

The *m. Sot.* 3:4 passage raises several important issues. First, women seem to be associated with the label 'Pharisee', in that they are acting according to the ways of the Pharisees.<sup>22</sup> In particular, the women are condemned because they have decided on sexual abstinence over against their husbands' wishes. These women are married to non-Pharisees otherwise the condemnation makes no sense. Second, the *perushim* are likewise condemned, apparently for swaying women to their views. A story in *t. Nid.* 5:3 confirms this view. The wife of a Sadducean priest is conversing with a high priest. Some spittle from her mouth falls onto his clothes. He turns green with dismay about the possible purity ramifications, but she reassures everyone that she is examined by a sage, so is ceremonially pure. Note that the woman is certified by the rival group, the Pharisees. It is possible that this story tells us little beyond the rabbis' conviction of their own importance vis-à-vis the Sadducees. But it might also hold a kernel of authentic history in its suggestion that Pharisaic teachings were attractive to some women who chose to adhere to specific Pharisaic rites

<sup>19</sup> *m. Sot.* 3.4 in *The Mishnah*, translated by Herbert Danby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 296.

<sup>20</sup> Jastrow offers several definitions of the term, including: 'discreet', 'abstemious', 'saintly', 'pure', and when used of a woman, 'sanctimonious'. *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Marcus Jastrow (NY: Judaica Press, Inc., 1975), 1222.

<sup>21</sup> Ilan notes that in rabbinic literature, no individual male is identified explicitly with the term Pharisee, hence we should not be surprised if a circumlocution is used for a woman Pharisee. Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women in Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period', *HTR* 88.1 (1995), 1-33.

<sup>22</sup> The rabbis in the rabbinic writings do not use the name 'Pharisee' for themselves, so we should not look for them to name directly women as Pharisees.

rather than follow their husbands' sect. Control over her own sexuality could be a formidable claim by a woman to independent thinking about God and religious duties. For this insubordination, these women are condemned in *m. Sot.* 3:4.<sup>23</sup>

This picture fits well with Josephus' declaration that the Pharisees were influential over the masses. Moreover, in a story about Pharisees being fined by Herod the Great, we find a claim that Pharisees 'ruled over' women, perhaps meaning women of the court. Josephus, in *Ant.* 17.41-3, relays that about 6,000 Pharisees were unwilling to sign an oath to Caesar, and so were fined.<sup>24</sup> The wife of Pheroras, Herod's brother, paid the fine for them.

Several points are worth noting from this story. First, Josephus attacks Pheroras' character in part by accusing him of being under the controlling influence of his wife. Second, that she pays the fine might indicate further rebellion against her husband, or it might reflect her aggressive yearnings for power. Third, the Pharisees whom she helps return her favor by prophesying that she and her husband will rule in Herod's stead – and of course, the Pharisees will be empowered with their rule. As portrayed by Josephus, Pheroras' wife's designs in supporting the Pharisees rested on political hopes, though religious sympathies are not ruled out.

Another instance of a royal woman siding with the Pharisees is the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra.<sup>25</sup> She supported the Pharisees over against the Sadducees to avert the civil war caused by her husband's inept internal policies (*War* 1.91-98; *Ant.* 13.372-83). Thus the rabbinic evidence suggests that some women were drawn to the religious teachings of the Pharisees, and Josephus' picture of Pharisees having influence does not weaken the rabbis' picture. Yet Josephus also suggests that some women

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<sup>23</sup> Tal Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaiism during the Second Temple Period', *HTR* 88:1 (1995), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Tal Ilan notes that Josephus also speaks about this incident in *Ant.* 15.369-70. She holds that the two accounts reflect one event. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Josephus offers two contrasting portraits of Alexandra. In *War* 1.107-112, Josephus portrays her very positively as a strict observer of the national traditions and sacred laws. In *Ant.* 13.407, however, his tone shifts to the negative as he accuses her of having an unreasonable love for power and desiring those things unbecoming a woman. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 21-3, suggests this may be due to his sources. Steve Mason also notes that *War* was concerned to promote the Jewish aristocracy, and Alexandra clearly follows their lead. Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd edn (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

of the court colluded with the Pharisees to advance mutually advantageous political agendas.<sup>26</sup>

#### WOMEN PHARISEES AND WOMEN FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Women of some means were drawn to Pharisaism<sup>27</sup> and also to Jesus' movement. Why? Tal Ilan posits that both the Pharisees and the company that followed Jesus were reactionary opposition groups within Judaism.<sup>28</sup> In each case, these groups lacked clout in running the Temple, the centre of power within first century Judaism, and sought to influence the Jewish community to accept their teachings and lifestyles. Both attracted women who had wealth and provided for them an avenue for influence. Typically, a new group values any sponsorship, and opposition groups allow women to play a key role in leadership. Examples from Christian history are numerous, from the Methodists to the modern evangelical movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with its women pastors and missionaries.<sup>29</sup> Affluent women in the ancient world might have found the Pharisaic movement or the Jesus group open to women's participation inasmuch as the women were patrons of the group.

A key to understanding the attitude expressed about women is appreciating the role of social class. Wealthy women expected to have a role because of their wealth. Luke notes that 'Mary (called Magdalene)... Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others' (Luke 8:2-3, TNIV) supported Jesus and the Twelve from their own funds (see also Mark 15:41). Mark and Luke may be honouring these women in their Gospels as Jesus' patrons, as well as his followers. Bauckham notes particularly that 'Joanna's'<sup>30</sup> courageous independence in

<sup>26</sup> Richard Bauckham contrasts Pheroras' wife's behaviour with Joanna, wife of Chuza (Luke 8:3) by claiming that the latter actually became a member of Jesus' itinerant group traveling the countryside, thus giving up much more in terms of social status than Pheroras' wife, who followed the Pharisees' teachings but did not leave the court. Bauckham, op. cit., 162.

<sup>27</sup> Within Pharisaism itself, different positions were represented, such as the Schools of Hillel and of Shammai. We should not posit a homogeneous group. See Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 228.

<sup>28</sup> Tal Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women', 24.

<sup>29</sup> Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry around the turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> For discussion on women having wealth independent of their husband or father, plus a argument connecting Joanna with the disciple Junia mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:7, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 109-202. Tal

supporting the [Jesus] movement evidently stands in a tradition of Herodian aristocratic women who exercised remarkable independence in their religious allegiance and their financial support for religious movements.<sup>31</sup> These women had money to give and were disposed to do so.

The connection of money and leadership is found as well in some of the New Testament epistles. About some women leaders, such as Euodia and Syntyche, we have no data on their personal wealth (Phil. 4:2). But we know that Lydia was wealthy (Acts 16:11-15),<sup>32</sup> as was Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2)<sup>33</sup> and likely Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11).<sup>34</sup> These women might have found within the new Christian movement a freedom to participate that they did not find in the wider world.<sup>35</sup>

New finds from the Judean Desert have substantiated the possibility that some women might have access to financial resources independent of any male. In the archives of Babatha and Salome Komaïse,<sup>36</sup> we find

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Ilan in *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 167-74, discusses the topic of inheritance.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, op. cit., 162. He makes the important point that Luke's primary focus is not the women's patronage, but their discipleship, that they were first and foremost followers of Jesus, even as were the Twelve (see page 112).

<sup>32</sup> Lydia is called a 'dealer in purple cloth' from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. Purple cloth was a luxury item, and it is presumed that Lydia was a wealthy business woman.

<sup>33</sup> Phoebe is mentioned by Paul as being his benefactor (*prostotes*), a common term in the Greco-Roman world for the patron in a patron-client relationship.

<sup>34</sup> It appears that slaves from Chloe's household travelled from Corinth to Ephesus with news for Paul. This implies a household with enough wealth to support several slaves.

<sup>35</sup> Yet the evidence from the Mishnah and Josephus also warns us that the public was accepting of stereotypical formulations about court intrigue and scandal, and would believe that women connived and schemed to gain their own power. Sexual appetite was a common accusation, and served as a warning to unsuspecting men lured by women's advances.

<sup>36</sup> Naphtali Lewis, Yigael Yadin and Jonas C. Greenfield (eds), *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, Judean Desert Studies 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Hebrew University: Shrine of the Book, 1989) and Hannah M. Cotton and Ada Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Nahal Hever and Other Sites, with an Appendix Containing Alleged Qumran Texts* (the Seiyâl Collection II), Discoveries in the Judean Desert 27 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For a translation of pertinent material on women in this collection, see Ross S. Kraemer (ed.), *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: a Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143-55.

women given 'deeds of gift' in lieu of inheritances, as the latter always<sup>37</sup> went to male descendants in Jewish Law. These deeds of gift allowed a father or husband to pass financial resources onto his wife, mother or daughter.

The church theologian, Origen, defends Jesus and his disciples taking money from women against Celsus' slander that Christianity collected its money in a disgraceful manner. Origen counters that pagan philosophers as well accepted money from their students.<sup>38</sup> Celsus' comment reveals the low prestige women donors had in the eyes of the larger Roman world. Whether Jesus or the earliest church leaders shared this assessment is an open question. Claims about the parity between male and female disciples might indicate that some women leaders were accepted apart from their financial contribution (Euodia's and Syntyche's wealth is unknown, while their role as leaders in Philippi is attested to by Paul in Phil. 4:2).

Of course, we cannot assume that social standing and wealth were the only factors in women's attraction to either Pharisaism or the Jesus movement. Tal Ilan wonders whether women were drawn 'to the Pharisees' belief in a life after death or the Pharisees' middle ground on the question of predestination (*Ant.* 13.171-3) or simply the Pharisee life-style (*War* 2.166).<sup>39</sup> The women we meet in the gospels are interested in ideas about the resurrection and the end times, even as the male disciples are. For example, Martha shows knowledge of the resurrection when she declares her belief that her brother Lazarus will rise on the last day (John 11:24).

Nor should we conclude that women who followed Pharisaic traditions viewed menstrual purity regulations as did the rabbis, in no small part because the links between Pharisaism and rabbinic teachings is so disputed. But if we allow for the moment that first century women following the Pharisaic lifestyle were expected to keep the menstrual purity codes as recorded in later rabbinic material, it may be that some women viewed (or at least used) the laws to limit procreation by declaring themselves unclean when they were not to prevent or delay a pregnancy.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that some women followed Jesus without the consent of their

<sup>37</sup> Numbers 27:1-11 allows for women to inherit if there are no male descendants. Moreover, the Jewish marriage contract (*ketubah*) could be written so that the widow was maintained out of her husband's estate.

<sup>38</sup> Origen *C.Cel.* 1.65. Margaret MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 102.

<sup>39</sup> Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. See also Judith Wegner, 'The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism' in Judith Baskin (ed.), *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 80-1.

husbands, and perhaps others saw that decision as acceptable, just as within the Pharisaic movement.

#### EVIDENCE FROM THE DIASPORA

Strikingly absent from any account of women interacting with Jesus is a concern for purity issues pertaining to women's menstrual cycles. Neither women nor men are bothered by the presence among the group of potentially 'unclean' or menstruating women.<sup>41</sup> A likely reason for this discrepancy is that Jesus ministered primarily outside of the holy city, Jerusalem, and thus outside the sacred space created by God's presence in the Temple. Kraemer adds an important perspective with her evaluation of the evidence. Applying Mary Douglas' group/grid analysis<sup>42</sup> to Jewish women in rabbinic communities and in the Diaspora, she remarks that 'the weakening of both group and grid among many Jews in the Diaspora was likely to be accompanied by a relaxation of menstrual purity laws'.<sup>43</sup> The rabbis experienced high grid in their intense concern for boundary markers which set them apart from Gentiles and the unclean. Kraemer argues that among Jesus' followers, one finds a strong group/weak grid social arrangement. She characterizes the earliest Christian communities as having a 'strong group identity coupled with a rejection of status distinctions, of hierarchical structure, of ritual purity, and of social conformity.... In Douglas' cultural model, they were quintessentially egalitarian (strong group, weak grid).'<sup>44</sup>

Thus while the limited material about women and Pharisaism helps illumine some possibilities open to women who chose to join the Jesus movement, other questions are better addressed by considering the Diaspora evidence. As Kraemer's quotation above highlights, female

<sup>41</sup> Philo, *On the Special Laws* 2.54, writes that women are part of the world of the senses and cannot escape it, because of their menstrual flow, which symbolizes passion and senses.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1970, reprinted 1973); and 'Cultural Bias' in *In the Active Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). Douglas suggests that religious practices are correlated to social experiences measurable in two ways, through group participation and through a grid of regulation which an individual experiences. When grid is strong, the individuals share beliefs and symbols to express those convictions. A weak group/weak grid emphasizes individualism, while a strong group/strong grid includes ascribed hierarchy. A strong group/weak grid includes sectarians and egalitarians, those who promote a strong boundary against outsiders, but little internal hierarchy.

<sup>43</sup> Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 125.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

followers of the Jesus movement as witnessed in the canonical Gospels had apparent similarities to some Jewish women from the Diaspora. By considering this Diaspora evidence we can understand more fully the options open to women connected with nascent Christianity.

Recent scholarship has successfully challenged the older theory postulating a sharp dichotomy between Diaspora Judaism and Judaism in Judea and Galilee.<sup>45</sup> Hellenism had made great inroads into Judea, and many Diaspora Jews were 'faithful' to the traditions/Law.<sup>46</sup> The Diaspora evidence suggests that at least some women were vigorous participants in the public life of the Jewish community. Epigraphic evidence from the Greco-Roman Diaspora highlights some Jewish women's participation in the leadership of synagogues, their love of the Law and their relative economic freedom. Absent is any focus on purity issues such as menstrual purity which is stressed intensely in rabbinic texts. These inscriptions also offer a window into women's own expectations (or their families') about participation in religion, the family, and the economy.

In this sense, they reflect the Gospels' picture of women interacting freely and publicly with Jesus and apparently not overstepping major cultural taboos. I suggest that the similarities between women in the Jesus movement and Jewish women of the Diaspora further strengthens the contention that the Jewish Homeland and the Diaspora were deeply engaged and integrated with each other.

## WOMEN LEADERS

Several inscriptions from Asia Minor reveal women as leaders of the synagogues.<sup>47</sup> Bernadette Brooten has demonstrated conclusively from inscriptions from Asia Minor, Egypt, Rome and even Palestine that titles such as 'head of the synagogue' (*archisynagogue*), 'leader' (*archon*), and 'elder' (*presbytera*) represent for both men and women a functional role

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<sup>45</sup> Ross Kraemer remarks, 'As more and more scholars are beginning to concede, rabbinic sources may at best refract the social realities of a handful of Jewish communities, and at worst may reflect only the utopian visions of a relative handful of Jewish men.' She points to 'more persuasive evidence of epigraphical, archaeological, and nonrabbinic writings for Jewish communities'. *Her Share of the Blessings*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, it is the Jews from Asia who cause a riot in the Temple because they suspect Paul of inviting a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple, according to Luke (Acts 21:27-29).

<sup>47</sup> Bernadette Brooten in *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 23, notes that over 30 inscriptions list the title head of the synagogue. Only three refer to women.

and not an honorary title. For example, concerning the reference to ‘head of the synagogue’, in Smyrna a second century inscription reads in part, ‘Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house.’<sup>48</sup> The inscription reveals a Jewish woman with a Roman name, fairly wealthy and apparently making decisions for her household independent of males.<sup>49</sup>

In a burial inscription from Crete dated to the fourth or fifth century CE, we read ‘Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos lies here. The memory of the righteous one for ever [sic]. Amen.’<sup>50</sup> A second inscription honouring a donation from the same time period, but found in Myndos, Caria, reads, ‘[From [Th]eopempte, head of the synagogue, and her son Eusebios.’<sup>51</sup> Sophia’s titles are both in the feminine form and there is no husband mentioned. In Theopempte’s situation, likely she was married, but her husband is not mentioned, nor does her son bear a title.

These three inscriptions which identify women as head of the synagogue are among about thirty inscriptions found throughout the Roman Empire. Eight inscriptions praise the donations given by these heads of the synagogue, while the vast majority consists of funerary epitaphs, and note only the title without any description of its function.<sup>52</sup> Some conclude that this title identified a community benefactor and had no religious component.<sup>53</sup> But Levine counters that literary use of the term in rabbinic, Christian and pagan sources points to multiple responsibilities and roles.<sup>54</sup> He advocates reading the inscription alongside the literary material, because ‘a [literary] source should be acknowledged to have some measure of historical value, unless a persuasive case can be made to disqualify it’.<sup>55</sup> He finds that religious sources, such as rabbinic, New

<sup>48</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 5. Inscription CII 741, IGR IV 1452.

<sup>49</sup> Two other inscriptions noting male leadership have been found in the area, for example, CII 739 tells of a donation made by an elder and ‘father of the tribe’, who is also the son of an elder.

<sup>50</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 11. Inscription CII 731c.

<sup>51</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 13. Inscription CII 756.

<sup>52</sup> See G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 7 vols from MacQuarrie University (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-1994). Note especially vol. iv (1987) for a discussion of synagogue leadership.

<sup>53</sup> T. Rajak and D. Noy, ‘Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Graeco-Jewish Synagogue’, *JRS* 83 (1993), 75-93.

<sup>54</sup> Lee Levine, ‘Synagogue Leadership: The Case of the Archisynagogue’, in Martin Goodman (ed.), *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195-213.

<sup>55</sup> Lee Levine, ‘Synagogue Leadership’, 201.



Testament and Patristic writings, all emphasize the religious nature of this role, while inscriptions focus on the public benefactions. The general picture emerges of a key leader within the local Jewish community who represents it to the larger Greco-Roman world, 'an archisynagogue was looked upon by Jews and non-Jews alike as a leader and representative of his community'.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Levine does not address Brooten's discussion of a female *archisynagogue*, but proceeds under the assumption that those holding this title were all male.<sup>57</sup>

Looking at the evidence from the New Testament, we discover that Mark and Luke/Acts use the male form *archisynagōgos* in Luke 8:49 to describe Jairus (see also Mark 5:22-38, where he distinguishes Jairus as one of the heads of the synagogue). In Luke 8:41, in describing Jairus, Luke writes *archōn tēs synagōgēs*. Matthew in his telling of the story has *archōn*. The evidence suggests that for the Gospel writers, *archisynagōgos* is a functioning leader of the community. Again in Luke, we read of an angry 'head of the synagogue' who chastised the people about Jesus healing on the Sabbath (13:10-17). And we learn of heads of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch who invited Paul and Barnabas to speak to the congregation (Acts 13:15; see also 18:1-17, where Crispus and Sosthenes are also known as heads of the synagogue).

Rabbinic and pagan sources also use the term in discussing the Jewish synagogue.<sup>58</sup> Of particular interest is the statement in *t. Meg* 3.21 which notes that the *rosh kneset* (Hebrew equivalent of *archisynagogue*) read from the Torah, which coincides with the picture presented in the New Testament. And in a late pagan work, *Life of Alexander Severus*, a mob verbally abuses the Emperor Severus 'calling him a Syrian archisynagogue and a high priest'. Levine questions whether this insult reflects the historical situation of Severus (third century) or of the author (fourth century). In either case, Levine concludes this title had enough purchase among the pagan population to provoke the affront.<sup>59</sup>

The three inscriptions referring to women as *archisynagōgēs* suggest the need to reexamine preconceived notions about the possibilities open to women within Judaism. In particular, in our reconstruction of women in Jesus' life, we should not be shocked that Martha and Mary were free to

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>57</sup> Levine refers to Brooten's 1982 monograph about women leaders, but only to note that she speaks generally about the office. Levine, *ibid.*, 198.

<sup>58</sup> Brooten, *op. cit.*, 17-27. See also Lee Levine, 'Synagogue Leadership', 204-9, who cites the Hebrew equivalent, *rosh kneset*, occurring in *m. Yom.* 7:1; *m. Sot.* 7:7-8; *t. Meg.* 3:21, *y. Ber.* 3.1; *Semahot* 14.14; *b. Pes.* 49b; *b. Shab.* 29b; *b. Git.* 60a.

<sup>59</sup> Levine, 208.

invite Jesus into their home (Luke 10:38-41; John 12:2), and that they had religious education sufficient to understand Jesus' teachings on the resurrection (John 11:24). In this, they resembled the description of Susanna, whose parents had trained her according to the law of Moses (Dan. 13:3, NRSV). It does not stretch beyond our limited evidence to ask whether Mary and Martha's own mother or another woman served as a head of the synagogue, acting as a role model and educating these women. I am not suggesting in this reconstruction that a female head of the synagogue worked only with women, for nothing in the inscriptions would indicate such. But it is also possible that a primary focus might have been other women in the congregation. Nor am I suggesting that a female head of the synagogue worked alone, but instead might have been a member of a leadership team.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar vein, six, possibly seven, inscriptions from around the Roman Empire speak of women as elders (*presbyterai*).<sup>61</sup> The title is well attested for men throughout our period both in Palestine and the Diaspora. Moreover, the elders' functions seem well established; they served to represent the Jewish congregation to other parties, they were honoured with special seats, and they likely functioned as a governing council for the community, perhaps dealing directly with funds. It is entirely possible that in some communities women and men served together in handling the funds and the religious matters of the community.

My assertions build on the picture already presented in the New Testament. Women are assumed to be participants in synagogue worship. Luke tells of a crippled woman healed by Jesus while attending synagogue (Luke 13:10-17). No mention is made that she is separated from the men in the group. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla had sufficient education that she felt compelled to correct and teach her fellow Christian, Apollos, after he spoke inadequately on matters of the gospel. Lydia and other women (and perhaps some men) met in Philippi for worship, and neither the author Luke nor Paul register surprise at their gathering.<sup>62</sup> Rabbinic evidence may support this picture. A *baraitha* (Tannaitic saying) allows a Jewish woman to ask her gentile neighbour to stir her cooking while she visits the bathhouse or the synagogue (*b. Abod. Zar.* 38a-38b), highlighting the relative importance of synagogue participation over preparing (kosher) meals.

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<sup>60</sup> I must also note that women were not alone in being oppressed in the ancient world. Most men were under the authority of other men; very, very few men were 'free' in the sense we use the term today.

<sup>61</sup> Brooten, *op. cit.*, 41-55.

<sup>62</sup> Note Brooten's discussion about *proseuxa* being a synonym for synagogue, 139-40.

The overwhelming evidence for women and men enjoying the synagogue together, and participating in its running, has many affinities with the Gospels' description of Jesus' own community of disciples. His male and female disciples learn from him, follow him, provide for him, comfort him and worship him. Gender distinctions were probably less important in certain cases than economic differences; wealthy women and men might be given more honours, as was consistent with the larger culture.

### WOMEN'S PIETY

A second century AD inscription from Rome, wherein a devoted Jewish husband praises his Jewish wife, Regina, highlights several characteristics of piety. I will quote it here in full.

Here lies Regina, covered by such a tomb, which her husband set up as fitting to his love. After twice ten years she spent with him one year, four months and eight days more. She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the life promised, as is our true faith, to the worthy and the pious, in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land. This your piety has assured you, this your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance of the Law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all these deeds your hope of the future is assured. In this your sorrowing husband seeks his comfort.<sup>63</sup>

Key elements of her piety should be highlighted. Her husband believes that she is worthy of life again, of 'an abode in the hallowed land'. Her piety was expressed in her chaste behaviour, her commitment to the Jewish community, her observance of the Law, and her devotion to her marriage. Unfortunately for us, Regina's husband does not detail what she did in observing the Law or how she showed her devotion to her people. Yet the fact remains that she did observe the Law according to him, which gains her life in the hereafter. Did she study the Law? While we cannot answer that question with certainty, probably she did charitable work, investing time and funds for the betterment of her people. Unlike today, where women's volunteer service is often undervalued, in the ancient world, the giving of alms by men and women was highly praised.

This inscription also references her upholding her wedlock, because it holds a glory that is precious to her. The husband in this inscription seems to connect marriage and glory for a woman. This calls to mind the

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<sup>63</sup> CIJ 476, Translated by Ross Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: a Sourcebook on Women's Religion in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 301.

enigmatic and hotly contested passage of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.<sup>64</sup> He also uses the term 'glory' in speaking about men/husbands and women/wives. When he states that the woman is the glory of man (11:7), could he be speaking in a similar way as this devoted husband of Regina? Could he be reflecting a belief that a wife finds a sense of glory in her devotion to the marriage? Is Paul drawing on a picture of marriage whereby the woman in her devotion to the institution itself gains glory as her husband is also honoured by her behaviour? If this is what Paul is reflecting, it helps make sense of his next sentence which speaks of the woman having authority on her head, for she used her authority or free choice to maintain her commitment to marriage.

The inscription lauding Regina does not declare or imply that she was secluded in her home. But some literary evidence promotes this picture of women, even as it also reveals them active in the marketplace and synagogue. Philo, a wealthy, first-century Jew living in Alexandria, is often mentioned for his claims that Jewish women should never be seen in public and his dismay that in fact he does encounter Jewish women in public (*Spec.* 3.169-175). He desires that a free-born woman<sup>65</sup> go out in public 'to the temple' (εἰς ἱερός) when the market is not crowded so as to protect her honour as befits her social status.<sup>66</sup> In his warning against women defending their husbands engaged in public arguments Philo unwittingly reveals that women and men were together in the market place or other public venue. His stereotype of women as driven by passions underlies his attack against a wife's 'boldness', and he decries the shrill tongue lifted above the market din and the hands lifted to assault, 'hands which were trained to weave and spin and not to inflict blows and injuries' (*Spec.* 174). Though he speaks against it, Philo's Alexandria is populated with women in the market place, the synagogue, and other public spaces.

Moreover, Judith Wegner notes that 'Philo has no interest in women as a topic for sustained discussion... yet [he] expresses opinions on "the

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<sup>64</sup> See Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians in NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 800-48, for extensive summaries of the major issues. See also Tal Ilan in *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 129-32, for a brief discussion of rabbinic texts on a woman's hair/head covering.

<sup>65</sup> Philo is unconcerned about female slaves, who had to be out in public.

<sup>66</sup> F. H. Colson remarks in his footnote to his Loeb translation that Philo may be using the term 'temple' as a synonym for 'synagogue', but more likely is speaking here to all women, Jewish and pagan, and is using a generic term for place of worship.

female” at every turn.<sup>67</sup> Instead, in Philo, masculine and feminine characteristics are apportioned to traits of the soul, where mind (*nous*) corresponds to man, and sense perception to woman (*Opif.* 165), and mind is always superior to sense perception, because the former is rational, while the latter is irrational (*Q.G.* 1:43; *Q.E.* 1:7; *Leg.* 2:38). For Philo, women are primarily a vehicle to discuss allegorically the passions, the senses, and all that is unmanly. They become a foil for his claims on the superiority of the rational sphere, which even a woman can enter, if she becomes ‘male’ (*Cher.* 50; *Contempl.* 68-9).<sup>68</sup>

2 Maccabees 3:19-20 comments on the seclusion of unmarried women, though not married women. Concerning the potential defamation of the Temple, it writes of married women lamenting in the streets, while unmarried women stand at the gates of their homes.<sup>69</sup> ‘Women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows. And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made supplication.’ But Tal Ilan cautions that archaeological evidence does not support the claim that Jewish families (at least in Palestine) had separate women’s quarters, especially in the homes of the poor, which made up the vast majority of the population.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, though in most rabbinic texts, the wife is to be kept out of the public eye, we do find remarks which reveal women out in the market place. For example, *t. Nidd.* 6.17, admits that a possible source of blood on a woman’s clothing is that which spattered on it from the butcher’s market. Again, a Talmudic tradition (*b. Ned.* 49b) relates the story of a poor couple whose wife went to the market and bought wool from which she made a garment. Then both she and her husband in turn used the garment when they went to market (wife) or out to pray (husband). While both rabbinic sources are later than our period, they do reveal some ambiguity about the desired role of a wife and unmarried daughter, and the actual experience of those women. This pattern is consistent with material from the first century CE and earlier.

<sup>67</sup> Judith Romney Wegner, ‘Philo’s Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenic?’ in Amy-Jill Levine, *Women Like This*, 44.

<sup>68</sup> For a brief discussion of Paul and Philo on women, see Judith Gundry-Volf, ‘Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views’ in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Road from Damascus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 195-201.

<sup>69</sup> For another reference to women kept within the house, see *Ben Sira* 42:11, ‘See that there is no lattice in her room, no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house.’

<sup>70</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 132-4.

In all likelihood, the economic status of the individual woman had much to do with whether she was seen in public. The wealthy Aseneth is portrayed as secluded from the world, but she also has great power to refuse suitors (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 2:1, 4:8-15).<sup>71</sup> So too, Judith is described as remaining in her house until destiny ordained she save her people (*Judith* 8:4-8). The author of *Judith* draws on the figure of judge in ancient Israel, who saves Israel in a time of utter crisis, then returns to her private life.<sup>72</sup> But Judith had slaves who could go out into the market place and take care of her household business. Slave women, even Jewish slave women, would have been out publicly on a regular basis because of the nature of their tasks.<sup>73</sup>

Surprisingly absent in both Regina's burial inscription and Rufina's inscription forbidding anyone to plunder the tomb is any reference to children, or in Rufina's case, to even a husband.<sup>74</sup> Many scholars today take for granted that women in the Hellenistic period gained their status and value through bearing many children.<sup>75</sup> Yet that may not have been the

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<sup>71</sup> Ben Sira laments the burden a daughter causes her father, who fears she will not remain chaste before her marriage: 'My son, keep a strict watch over a daughter, lest she make fun of you to your enemies.... Let her not expose her beauty to any male, and let her not take counsel among women.... A daughter causes fear regarding disgrace more than a son' (42:11-14). The daughter is portrayed as sexually insatiable, and thus a constant worry for the father's honour: 'Keep strict watch over a daughter, lest she find freedom and make use of it.... As a thirsty traveler opens his mouth and drinks from any nearby water, she sits in front of every peg and opens her quiver to the arrow' (26:10, 12). In 4 Maccabees 18:7, the mother of the seven martyred sons, Hannah, proclaims 'I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house; but I guarded the rib that was built.' Clearly the author of 4 Maccabees believed that a chaste and holy mother would have protected her virginity before her marriage.

<sup>72</sup> Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 150. See also Sidnie Ann White, 'In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heroine' in James C. VanderKam (ed.), *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 5-16.

<sup>73</sup> Female slaves or maidservants were also the sexual property of their owners. Thus rabbis assumed that they were as prostitutes. Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 205-11.

<sup>74</sup> Girls married at about 15-18 years of age, though Roman girls may have married about 13. Rabbinic evidence suggests the age of 12 as appropriate for marriage, but there is no corroborating evidence to test this claim.

<sup>75</sup> Philo (*Spec.* 3.62) expands on the LXX's quotation of Numbers 5:28 when he writes 'For if she has been falsely accused, she may hope to conceive and bear children and pay not heed to her fears and apprehensions of sterility or

case, as epigraphic evidence does not support the common assumption that Jewish women had large families. Looking at burial inscriptions, often women have no more than one child. Even literary evidence could support this, as in *Tobit* where both Sarah and Tobias are only children, and in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where Aseneth is the only child of her father, the high priest. Women seemed to have nursed their babies for three years, and would also work as wet-nurses, which may have contributed to the low birthrate. Burial inscriptions reveal the likely prevalence of women dying during childbirth.<sup>76</sup>

Do the characteristics of observing the Law, belief in the resurrection, piety and love for one's people resonate with the women Jesus meets in the Gospels? Quite clearly they do. One need think no further than the eloquent sisters, Martha and Mary, to know that some of Jesus' female followers were well versed in the teachings about resurrection and believed that they and their loved ones would share in the life to come by God's power (John 11:24). So too, the Samaritan woman Jesus meets at the village knows the religious significance that both her people and the Jews give to certain holy sites in Palestine (John 4:7-26). She recognizes that Jesus is a prophet because Jesus can see into her past even as John tells the readers Jesus also saw Nathaniel's past (John 1:47-51). She is prepared and awaiting the Messiah, who will lead her in all truth. And she is astute enough to see in Jesus the coming Messiah. In believing her testimony, the village testifies to her pious life and trustworthiness (contrary to most readings of this passage, I do not think the issue here is her alleged sexual sin).

Luke tells us of Anna the prophetess who lived in the Temple and worshiped there night and day, praying to God. Her piety is exemplary, and from that close communion with God, she recognized in Jesus the hope of Israel (Luke 2:38). Luke's note that she never left the Temple is often interpreted as hyperbole, but it does raise the interesting possibility that women might have lived in the Court of Women. Luke's title of prophet is consistent with his language elsewhere, for he notes that Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Luke parallels his claim about Anna's call as prophet with his statement about Simeon being filled with the

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*childlessness.*' See Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 116, who notes that 'Philo's elaboration, here italicized, suggests that if childlessness was not viewed as evidence of adultery, it was at least seen as evidence of divine displeasure.'

<sup>76</sup> Tal Ilan estimates about 5% of women died during childbirth. She disagrees with G. Meyer's figure of approximately 50%. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 118-19. See also G. Meyer, *Die jüdische Frau in der hellenistisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart, 1987), 93.

Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25). Anna's response to Jesus is similar to Simeon's; upon seeing Jesus, they both praised God. It is unclear whether Anna represents an order of widows either within Early Judaism or nascent Christianity. Anna's love for her people is evidence in her preaching about Jesus as the redemption from God, directly after she sees the infant.

The Gospels also attributed one act only to women – only women anointed Jesus.<sup>77</sup> This is surprising because the act of anointing has a rich and very male history in Israel, with prophets anointing kings (see 1 Sam. 10:1, 16:13). Recognizing this record, many scholars point to Jesus' baptism by John as his anointing. All four Gospels speak of a woman who anoints Jesus (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:37-50; John 12:1-8). Scholars debate whether we have a single story altered by the various Gospel writers, or two different women anointing Jesus. My concern is not with textual issues; instead, I would like to focus on what those pericopes reveal about traditions of women worshiping Jesus.

The basic story is that a woman anoints Jesus with expensive ointment/perfume. In Mark and Matthew, she anoints his head with perfume, while in John she anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair. In Luke, her tears wet Jesus' feet, which she dries with her hair, and then anoints him with perfume. The Gospel writers explain the impact of the woman's deed variously. Mark, Matthew, and John all declare her actions to be prophetic; she has anointed Jesus in preparation for his death. In these accounts, Jesus reinterprets the ancient act of anointing future kings by the Hebrew prophets and instead focuses attention on his impending suffering and death. This picture is consistent with other evidence that women were learned in the theology of the day, and were free to mix with men in social situations. Note, for example, that the outcry in Mark and Matthew is not that a woman was present among the men, but that her action was extravagant and wasteful (Mark 14:4-5). In Luke's presentation, the woman, a sinner, represents the ideal disciple, full of contrition and humility in contrast to those who believe in their own righteousness. Women disciples serve as examples of proper theology in accepting Jesus' role as one who suffers, and as models of repentance in the face of God's supreme gift.<sup>78</sup>

In a final note, mention should be made of the various places and social locations in which these women met Jesus. As we have seen, most were quite public; Jesus met women at a well at midday, at a dinner party,

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<sup>77</sup> At Jesus' burial, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrap Jesus' body but do not anoint it.

<sup>78</sup> The positive picture of women does not *necessarily* mean that within Luke's communities women were held in this high esteem.



or at the Temple. Mark and Luke both note that several women 'used to follow [Jesus] and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem' (Mark 15:41). Luke confirms that Jesus numbered women among those who travelled with him 'through cities and villages' (Luke 8:1). Both Mark and Luke seem to indicate that women travelled with the men as itinerant preachers. Did they only do day trips? Luke 18:29 mentions Jesus' statement that 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.' In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus does not specifically mention 'wife', rather only notes that those who leave their house will receive much more from God (Matt. 19:29). It is not clear, then, from these statements whether women followed Jesus from town to town, or returned to their homes each night. Women pilgrims are known from later Christian history, and Thecla is an itinerant preacher par excellence in the early Christian tradition. Given the preponderance of Jewish villages in the Galilee at this time, as well as Jesus' apparent preference for ministering primarily in Galilee, it is entirely conceivable that women followed Jesus into towns and then stayed with friends and relatives much like the missionaries were enjoined to do by Jesus in Luke 10:1 and in Matthew 10:11. No convincing reason can be given to conclude that women did not travel with Jesus at least on part of his journeys.

Some scholars have argued, for example, that Martha and Mary might be such a team of missionaries, because both Luke and John refer to Martha as *diakonos* and to Mary as 'sister'. This mirrors Paul's identification of Phoebe as a deacon of the church of Cenchræa who travelled to Rome, perhaps delivering Paul's letter to that church. It also reflects Paul's use of 'brother' to describe his companion Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1). We know of couples that travelled as missionary pairs, including Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18; 2 Tim. 4:19), Junia and Andronicus (Rom. 16:7), and of two sisters who worked 'in the Lord', Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12).

## CONCLUSION

Viewed from the vantage point of Diaspora Judaism, the women who were part of the Jesus movement shared much with Jewish women outside of Roman Palestine. Both groups had a visible presence of women participating in significant ways, including leadership responsibilities, within the group. Women of means acted independently in caring for their slaves (Rufina) or in following a teacher (Mary Magdalene); they

were honoured for knowing the Law (Regina) and believing in the resurrection (Martha). The addition of Diaspora evidence fills out the picture of Jewish women's activities offered by the scant and highly problematic material about women within the Pharisaic movement.

By using both sets of evidence, a more complete picture is drawn of the options available to Jewish women, including those who were part of the Jesus movement. Women of wealth might have chosen to be followers of Jesus because this group offered a venue to promote their social prestige. Perhaps some women were drawn to possibilities in areas of leadership and/or learning. While we might not be able to answer fully the question of motivation (why women followed Jesus), our sources reveal women's behaviours from which we can build suppositions on their ambitions and aspirations. For some women, their social and/or religious goals of influence, learning and piety might be equally met within the Pharisaic community, the Diaspora community, or among those who followed Jesus. Some women who followed Jesus resembled their Pharisaic 'sisters' in their desire for political influence or in their strong convictions which set them at odds with the religious tradition of their family. Other female disciples of Jesus resembled their Diaspora 'sisters' in their hunger for religious knowledge and community leadership. To answer the question of why women followed Jesus, a comprehensive list of options must be reviewed, and this list must include not only the model of Pharisaic women, but also that of the Jewish women of the Diaspora.

# UNITY AND DIVERSITY? SUCCESS AND FAILURE AMONGST BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND PRIOR TO 1870

BRIAN TALBOT, BROUGHTY FERRY BAPTIST CHURCH, DUNDEE

Although the first Baptists appeared in Scotland in the seventeenth century, as converts of Baptist preachers serving as chaplains with the Parliamentary Armies stationed in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> persecution led to their virtual disappearance prior to the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The public re-emergence of the movement in 1750 in Keiss, Caithness, resulted from the conversion of a Scottish laird, Sir William Sinclair, who converted to Baptist views while serving in the British army. He brought his new-found faith back to his native land and established a congregation in his castle from amongst his family and employees. This congregation, though continuing to the present day,<sup>3</sup> remained isolated and small.

It took the emergence of the distinct Scotch Baptist witness in 1765, to produce the first modern network of congregations of this denomination in Scotland. A second cluster of churches associated with the former Independents, Robert and James Alexander Haldane, accepted Baptist principles in the period 1808 to 1810, largely following the pastor-deacons model of church life, a characteristic of the 'English' Baptist churches in Scotland, in contrast to the plurality of largely unpaid elders that was a feature of Scotch Baptist life.

In the 1790s another family of churches, the 'English' Baptists, first appeared in Edinburgh. Though the congregations struggled to establish themselves in the last decade of the eighteenth and first decade of the nineteenth century, they grew to become the largest group of Baptists by 1830, due to their evangelistic zeal. These Scottish Baptists held to the

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains 1642-1651* (Woodbridge, 1990), for information on these Baptist Chaplains, and for the Baptist Churches of this period, see D. B. Murray, 'The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in D. W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Baptists in Scotland: A History* (Glasgow, 1988), 10-13.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to some of the few Baptists surviving in the early eighteenth century is given in a forthcoming paper, B. R. Talbot, "'Go into all the World": The Home Mission Strategies of Baptists in Scotland from the 1790s to 1870', p. 1, n.4.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent introduction to this Scottish laird and his congregation is given in C. Lumsden, 'The Life of Sir William Sinclair', an unpublished paper presented to the Scottish Baptist History Project, Keiss, 6 May 2000.

style of Baptist churchmanship seen in England amongst the Particular Baptists.<sup>4</sup>

It appeared that the future for Baptist witness was extremely promising by the 1820s, but there were to be both encouragement and challenge during the next fifty years. The Scotch Baptists will be considered first, followed by consideration of the three attempts to produce unity in the midst of diversity that were unsuccessful, together with a brief examination of the grounds for the success of the 1869 Baptist Union of Scotland.

#### UNITY IS UNIFORMITY: SCOTCH BAPTIST SUCCESS AND ULTIMATE FAILURE

In the period from 1765 to 1834 the Scotch Baptists made considerable progress. They appeared to lay a strong foundation for the future by their constant measures aimed at maintaining union between the churches in the connexion. Consider the factors that favoured their success. First of all Archibald McLean, an elder in the Edinburgh congregation, was the major bond of union between the different congregations. In the first forty-four years of Scotch Baptist witness his pronouncements served as a definitive statement of their beliefs and practices. Officially they had no doctrinal standards, in contrast to English Particular Baptists, as Maclean made plain in an article provided for the Baptist Annual Register, edited by London Particular Baptist minister John Rippon.

As to their principles, they refer us to no human system as the unexceptionable standard of their faith. They think our Lord and his apostles used great plainness of speech in telling us what we should believe and practice; and hence they are led to understand a great many things more literally and strictly than those who seek to make the religion of Jesus correspond with the fashion of the times.<sup>5</sup>

This quotation appears to rule out the use of doctrinal standards as the basis for unity between Baptist churches, yet McLean seemed to have no difficulty in accepting the articles of faith of the 1812 Particular Baptist

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<sup>4</sup> Details of the emergence of these types of Scottish Baptists can be found in B. R. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Carlisle, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> J. Rippon, *Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1795), 374.

Union in England and appears to suggest that all Scotch Baptists could assent to them.<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of their position was easy to maintain while a strong leader like McLean dominated their connexion, but having an 'unwritten creed' was a potential source of problems for the future. The churches were in theory independent, but in practice closely dependent upon each other.

The nature of their connexionalism in the era of McLean bears some degree of comparison to Wesleyan Methodism in the time of Jabez Bunting, one of their most prominent ministers, though Scotch Baptist churches were by contrast officially independent. A strong leader was required to ensure the effective operation of their corporate activities. Methodism between the eras of the leaders noted above showed fissiparous tendencies which paralleled those amongst Scotch Baptists once McLean's influence began to fade near the end of his life.<sup>7</sup> There was no figure of similar stature within their midst to take Archibald McLean's place after his death in 1812.

A second apparent strength of this movement was the desire to work closely together and to ensure harmony within the family of churches. Scotch Baptists were convinced that unanimity was essential in their ranks. A church wishing to be received into fellowship faced a process that was lengthy and thorough. Samuel Swan, an elder of the Leeds congregation, Wellington Road, Wortley, near Leeds, made this clear in a letter, in 1835, to James Everson, one of the pastors of the Beverley Church. 'I admit the independent right of each church to judge, but surely when a number of churches are associated, none ought to be received into the association without the concurrence of the whole...'<sup>8</sup>

This principle had been practised by the Scotch Baptist churches when Haggate Baptist Church, Burnley, sought union with them in 1834. The correspondence between Swan and Everson that year records in great detail the process by which approval was granted. The initial contact was between the Leeds and Haggate churches and involved the exchanging of statements of faith and practices for mutual inspection. Swan noted that in reply to a letter from his church the Haggate friends had declared: 'with respect to what is said of the Institutions of Christ our views exactly agree with yours.... Indeed we can truly say that we agree with every sentence

<sup>6</sup> Rippon, *Baptist Annual Register*, 1795, 379-80; E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1959), 24.

<sup>7</sup> D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions* (Manchester, 1979), 1-19.

<sup>8</sup> Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Letters relating to the Scotch Baptist Churches, ACC 11076, Samuel Swan, Leeds, to James Everson, Beverley, 15 February 1835.

in your letter.<sup>9</sup> This outcome was remarkable considering that the Leeds letter contained a very full statement of their beliefs and practices. The Haggate church had been accepted as a sister church at the end of this process. In this example the friends in Haggate accepted all the changes of ecclesiastical practices recommended by the existing Scotch Baptist churches. Though on this occasion all went well, it was inevitable that there would be occasions when individuals or churches would stand their ground and the basis of church union would be severely tested.

A third factor promoting unity was mission. Evangelistic work led from within this connexion of churches became prominent from the late 1790s.<sup>10</sup> Scotch Baptists in Glasgow had gone further than McLean had done when they united with some Haldaneite Baptists to form the Baptist Highland Mission in 1816.<sup>11</sup> This cooperative venture in home evangelism pointed forward to the greater unity amongst Baptists in Scotland that would become a reality in the next decade.

Archibald McLean also sought to broaden the horizons of the churches by urging them to cooperate in evangelism in Scotland and by supporting the English Particular Baptist Mission in India as early as 1796. Support for this work was consistent and generous.<sup>12</sup> This was the area of their work where Scotch Baptists were most outward-looking and creative, though it did not have a sufficient priority in their witness compared to the other streams of Baptists in Scotland.

There were even more powerful reasons that led to the ultimate failure of the Scotch Baptist connexion in Scotland. Social analysis of the backgrounds of members of Scotch Baptist congregations revealed that members with a higher social class background were less inclined than those of humbler backgrounds to promote union within the network of churches. The strict conservative congregation in Edinburgh, Argyle Square Scotch Baptist Church, who led the 1834 division that destroyed the connexion, had a membership largely consisting of prosperous members engaged in business, whereas the smaller working class Clyde Street Hall Church was enthusiastic about working both with other varieties of Baptists in Scotland as well as within their own ranks though they had very limited resources.<sup>13</sup> Self-sufficient churches did not need the resources of other

<sup>9</sup> Haggate Letter sent by John Hudson to Samuel Swan dated 6 April 1834, cited in Swan to Everson, 7 October 1834, MS Letters.

<sup>10</sup> *Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine*, 1 (1798), 68-73.

<sup>11</sup> Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 47-8 gives details of this initiative.

<sup>12</sup> W. Jones (ed.), *The Works of Mr Archibald McLean* (London, 1823), lxxiii-lxxiv. W. Jones (ed.), *New Evangelical Magazine*, 2 (London, 1816), 76.

<sup>13</sup> B. R. Talbot, 'Baptists and the Scottish Commission of Enquiry on Religion, 1836-1838', *Baptist Quarterly*, 39.8 (October 2002), 380-1.

congregations to meet their needs, and could display a lack of awareness of the consequences of their actions upon smaller churches in their constituency.

The most prominent external cause of conflict was the pressure from the followers of Alexander Campbell whose ecclesiological opinions were similar in many respects to Scotch Baptist views, but revealed a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy for local congregations. The attraction of this younger and more energetic movement in the late 1830s, at a time when Scotch Baptists were most vulnerable due to the internal dissolution of their network led to the secession of a number of their congregations, for example in Saltcoats and Stevenson, Ayrshire, and divisions in others in Dunfermline and Kilmarnock.<sup>14</sup>

The most important reason was an inability to exercise forbearance on almost any matter by a large minority of the connexion. The final blow to any pretence of unity amongst Scotch Baptists came with the division in 1834, officially, over the necessity of elders presiding at the Lord's Table, a repeat of the battle which had earlier split the movement in 1810 and dramatically slowed its advance, both in numbers of new members and churches. It was, in reality, an acknowledgement that their basis of union could not survive in an era of changing theological opinions. Scotch Baptists were imprisoned by their past and consequently were unable, as a body, to come to terms with a changing religious environment in Britain. There were some conservative Scotch Baptists like John Cowan, an elder of the Galashiels church, who regretted the opportunities that the connexion had failed to grasp in earlier years. He stated:

Our churches will never be what they have been, I fear – if indeed they long survive. Other connexions are occupying the fields which I am convinced we might have occupied had we been properly alive to our duty. But let us not despair nor faint in the Lord's work. His end will be secured independently of man.<sup>15</sup>

The Baptists who worked hardest to maintain fellowship with one another ended up losing the grounds of their own unity. The Scotch Baptist tradition contributed much to Baptist life in Scotland. It was, however, destined to play only a minor part in the future due to disunity within its own ranks.

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<sup>14</sup> D. M. Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall* (Birmingham 1980), 26-7.

<sup>15</sup> MS Letters, John Cowan, Galashiels, to James Everson, Beverley, 11 December 1848.

## MAINTAINING THE OLD PATHS: THE 1827 BAPTIST UNION

The body within Scottish Baptist circles that had been the largest part of its constituency at the start of the nineteenth century, the Scotch Baptists, had shown signs of its future demise by the 1820s when its more liberally minded congregations sought to work more closely with other Baptist traditions in Scotland, to the evident disapproval of others in their ranks.<sup>16</sup> The momentum towards union, though, had gathered pace in the late 1820s principally due to the desire of the majority of all the networks of Scottish Baptists to work together in home evangelisation. This process culminated in the formation of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, a body that encompassed the mission agencies of its constituent members. Union in this body resulted in greater income and the consequent benefits of employing a greater number of evangelists to lead its activities.<sup>17</sup> Morale was high as an increasing number of church members saw the practical fruits of co-operation.

The logical next step was a desire for a union of autonomous Baptist churches in Scotland. In the Spring of 1827 there was a series of meetings that culminated in the decision in June 1827 to form the first Baptist Union of Scotland.<sup>18</sup> The groundswell of support for this venture was evident from the fact that twenty-eight out of sixty-two Baptist churches, 45% of the total number, opted to join. The significance of this percentage was that it was only in 1869, in the fourth and enduring Baptist Union, that the allegiance of a higher proportion of Baptist causes was gained for this initiative in Scotland.<sup>19</sup>

There were also churches joining this body from each of the three Baptist streams, although in terms of their proportions the Scotch Baptists were under-represented compared to the Haldaneite and 'English' Baptists, reflecting the reservations held by many in that part of the

<sup>16</sup> See MS Letters, Robert Anderson, Edinburgh, to James Everson, Beverley, 1 March 1836, for an example of this disapproval of mixing with other types of Scottish Baptists.

<sup>17</sup> See B. R. Talbot, 'The Baptist Home Missionary Society: A Substitute Baptist Union 1827-1868?' in Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 153-90, and a forthcoming paper, B. R. Talbot, "'Go into all the World": The Home Mission Strategies of Baptists in Scotland from the 1790s to 1870'.

<sup>18</sup> The key published documents promoting this initiative were: Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Waugh Papers, *Circular from the Committee of Proposed Baptist Union*, 4 May 1827, and *To the Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 13 June 1827.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix 4.2 'The Proportion of Churches Affiliated to the Scottish Baptist Association or the Baptist Union of Scotland, 1827-1879', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 357.



constituency about aspirations for a union of churches in which uniformity in all ecclesiastical matters was not required. The chances of success appeared to be strengthened by a strong leadership team and by a good geographical representation of urban and rural congregations throughout Scotland from Aberdeen in the north-east to Hawick in the south of the country.

In addition, the strength of sharing the same Calvinistic theological heritage could be assumed. Although there were some ecclesiological differences between these groups, these were small in comparison to what was held in common. These factors ought to have guaranteed the success of this Baptist Union, but by 1830 it had ceased to function.<sup>20</sup>

What was the catalyst for the failure of this innovative venture amongst Scottish Baptist churches? By contrast, the home missionary society had gone from strength to strength since its inception, also in 1827.<sup>21</sup> There were two stumbling blocks that had to be addressed.

The lesser of the two issues here was the Scotch Baptist fear of doctrinal and ecclesiological compromise. The small number of congregations from this Baptist stream that joined the union came under pressure from other Scotch Baptist causes for assurance that they had not 'compromised' their principles. This factor explained the lengthy and detailed correspondence between David McLaren and Charles Wallace, joint-pastors of the North Portland Street Baptist Church, Glasgow, and Archibald Smith, secretary of the new union. Smith, himself a Scotch Baptist, and a member of Clyde Street Hall Church, Edinburgh, understood their position and patiently answered their questions until this Glasgow congregation felt sufficiently assured to join the Baptist Union.<sup>22</sup>

The major issue was a controversy concerning James Watson, minister of Montrose Scotch Baptist Church. Watson had preached for one Sunday in Clyde Street Hall Scotch Baptist Church in Edinburgh. Given that Scotch Baptist elders regularly preached in each other's congregations this in itself was uncontroversial, however, on some unknown occasion(s) the Montrose minister was suspected as having uttered Arminian sentiments in his own pulpit.

Archibald Smith, in written correspondence, assured David McLaren that the decision to invite Watson to preach in Smith's church was an error of judgement.<sup>23</sup> After all McLaren had previously issued a similar

<sup>20</sup> *To the Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 13 June 1827.

<sup>21</sup> *Baptist Home Missionary Society Reports* (Edinburgh, 1829-1836).

<sup>22</sup> Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Waugh Papers, correspondence between David McLaren and Charles Wallace with Archibald Smith, 1827.

<sup>23</sup> Archibald Smith to David McLaren, 27 June 1827.

invitation to Watson, an opportunity presented when the Glasgow congregation 'were ignorant of his [Watson's] Arminian sentiments'.<sup>24</sup> So Smith could have expected understanding from a colleague who had apparently made the same 'mistake' on an earlier occasion. However, this plea of ignorance was deemed inadequate by this Glasgow minister, who was of the view that Smith ought to have known of the reservations of other Baptists regarding Watson's apparent departure from Calvinistic orthodoxy, and therefore prevented the Montrose minister from fulfilling this engagement. He proceeded to give advice as to the appropriate course of action.

I entertain the opinion that you should disavow to Mr W [atson] all further connection with him. This would be much better than a circular entertaining a statement of the sentiments of your church in opposition to the Arminian heresy.<sup>25</sup>

Smith and his own congregation would have readily agreed to separate themselves from James Watson, as Scotch Baptists regularly disassociated themselves from individuals or churches deemed to be less than orthodox. However it was another matter altogether to persuade the churches from other Baptist traditions represented in the Baptist Union to do the same thing – after all neither the Montrose church nor its minister had applied to join the union! So this would be an extraordinary step to take.

The matter was referred to the committee of the new union, a body that included Jonathan Watson, minister of Cupar Baptist Church and brother of James. The Cupar minister was a man of genuinely ecumenical sympathies. His church was an open membership cause that had both Baptists and paedo-baptists in its ranks. There was no possibility that he would entertain notions of the union agreeing to separate from someone who was outside its constituency.<sup>26</sup>

In the twenty-first century it is difficult to comprehend how a difficulty of this sort could result in the dissolution of a most promising initiative. Documents regarding the later stages of the union have not survived, but it is clear that the inability of Scotch Baptists to comprehend the compromises necessary for this new body to function caused its demise.

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<sup>24</sup> David McLaren to Archibald Smith, 22 June 1827.

<sup>25</sup> David McLaren to Archibald Smith, 22 June 1827.

<sup>26</sup> *A Brief History of Cupar Baptist Church* (Cupar, 1936), 1-9.

STAKING OUT NEW GROUND: THE SCOTTISH BAPTIST ASSOCIATION  
1835-1842

After approximately a five year interregnum a new initiative was launched by a group of small churches in Perthshire, together with a handful of other Baptist causes. These congregations had formerly been Scottish Independent bodies that had followed their mentors Robert and James Alexander Haldane into Baptist circles at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. During their time in Independency these causes had benefited from funding from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home (SPGH),<sup>27</sup> the mission agency associated with that loose network of Scottish churches, but had suffered severe hardship due to financial difficulties since adopting Baptist principles.

Under such circumstances it was not difficult to grasp the advantages of sharing resources in a union of churches. A more positive reason that inspired the launch of the Scottish Baptist Association (SBA) in 1835 was the reconstituting of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (BUGBI), in 1832, on a more inclusive evangelical basis. In fact the objects of this new body were the same as those of the earlier and larger English body.<sup>28</sup>

There were ten churches that agreed to launch the SBA, but although numbers rose to fifteen by 1842, it was an initiative that failed to grasp the imagination of the majority of the ninety-four Baptist churches in existence in Scotland. From 45% of churches involved in the first attempt at union now a mere 16% at best were constrained to support this initiative just over a decade since the demise of the 1827 Baptist Union of Scotland.<sup>29</sup> This body did grasp the need for a greater flexibility in the operations of the SBA and also choose to allow the Montrose Baptist Church, together with its minister James Watson, to join in 1840. This decision was taken unanimously. Like the English Baptist Union on which it was modelled the SBA was still in sympathy with Calvinistic doctrinal views, but it also allowed evangelical Arminians like Watson to associate with them.

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<sup>27</sup> Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 78-83; for fuller details on the work of that agency see D. W. Lovegrove, "A set of men whose proceedings threaten no small disorder": The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, 1798-1808', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 79.207 (April, 2000), 61-81.

<sup>28</sup> E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1958), 60-1; Glasgow, Scottish Baptist History Archive, Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 29 July 1835, 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 1835-1842, 1-16.

What were the reasons for the failure of this body to attract greater support for its efforts? First and foremost it failed to attract support from the leading ministers and the larger churches. Undoubtedly there were some individuals who were disappointed by the failure of the previous initiative and were extremely hesitant to invest time in a similar venture without any certainty of success. Secondly, any organisation with the vision to be a national body lacked credibility without any support from Baptists, for example, in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The supporters that had been attracted were essentially rural and Highland in location, with no interest in the south-west of Scotland or in the east of the country south of Kinghorn in Fife. Likewise the north-west and north-east of Scotland had only one representative in the SBA, the small and struggling John Street Baptist Church in Aberdeen. New vision and fresh leadership were required if the SBA was not to expire like its predecessor body.

#### UNIFORMITY PRECEDES UNITY: THE BAPTIST UNION OF SCOTLAND 1843-56

In 1842 a new and young Baptist minister with a charismatic personality, Francis Johnston, joined the SBA. His dynamic impact was such that he was invited to become the secretary of this organisation and to have the honour of writing the annual circular letter for the following year.<sup>30</sup> This practice was long established amongst the English Baptist Associations, and gave an opportunity for one of the ministers to put before his colleagues and other church leaders an address on a particular subject deemed pertinent to their current situation.

The vision outlined at the July 1843 assembly was centred on evangelism and the means whereby Scottish Baptists could more effectively reach the unchurched people of the country, especially in the growing urban communities of the central belt of Scotland. He called for the employment of more full-time and part-time evangelists; more imaginative use of evangelistic literature; a greater focus on church-planting and the renewal of struggling causes, based on careful and strategic planning for the implementation of his vision.<sup>31</sup>

In the first seven years to 1850 affiliated churches had risen in number from sixteen to thirty-eight, though only 39% of the ninety-eight Baptist churches in Scotland; the geographical spread was transformed with churches from the Shetland Isles to the Borders and from Aberdeen across

<sup>30</sup> Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 1842, 14.

<sup>31</sup> F. Johnston, *An Inquiry into the means of advancing the Baptist Denomination in Scotland* (Cupar, 1843), 6-12.

to the Isle of Skye.<sup>32</sup> A theological tolerance of both Arminian and Calvinist opinions within its midst pointed to a very different kind of future spiritual life within Baptist circles in Scotland. This period of steady and sustained growth both in the quality of relationships between Scottish Baptists and the numbers of members and churches associated with the Baptist Union came to an abrupt halt in 1850, due to the adoption of a new vision for the future that came from union secretary Francis Johnston.

The seeds of the inevitable failure of this national agency were planted as early as the December 1845 Baptist Union Executive committee meeting and confirmed in August 1846 at the annual meetings of the Baptist Union when the proposed merger of the Union with the better supported Baptist Home Missionary Society (BHMS) was rejected.<sup>33</sup> The offer of uniting these two organisations had come from the Calvinistic leaders of the BHMS and had the support of the majority of the churches.<sup>34</sup> Yet Johnston, increasingly opposed to Calvinistic theological views and unwilling to yield some of his executive powers, vetoed the proposal persuading both the Union executive and the annual assembly that the time was not propitious for such a step.

There was a strong and passionate response to Johnston from the BHMS leaders in an open letter published in *The Free Church Magazine*,<sup>35</sup> a sign that the good will granted to Johnston by all sections of the Baptist community in Scotland in 1842 had now been forfeited. The initial inclusive vision of Johnston had dissipated, but it was not until April 1849 that his new perspective on the way ahead was revealed. It was a complete reversal of his former views. Now unity required uniformity and that was entering uncharted waters for independent-minded Scottish Baptists.

When the 1827 Baptist Union leaders set out the principles on which their union was based there were reasonable grounds for expecting almost universal agreement within the Baptist community in Scotland. By contrast, when Johnston persuaded the 1849 Baptist Union assembly to agree that from 1 January 1850 the Baptist Union would stand for militant Arminian views, as this viewpoint presents 'the only consistent view of the character of the triune God', he knew it would cost him a sizable proportion of union members, but this was apparently a price worth paying.

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix 5.1 'The Baptist Union of Scotland, 1843-1856', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 360-1.

<sup>33</sup> Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, August 1846, 33-9.

<sup>34</sup> Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, August 1845, 21-5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Free Church Magazine*, 26 (February 1846), 60-1.

We have counted the cost. Our principles we cannot renounce for friendship's sake.... We calculate on the defection of those friends, with whom we differ in sentiment.... The spread of truth, so important, is worthy of labour, of self-denial and sacrifice.... We ask no favour.<sup>36</sup>

Within less than three years the union had collapsed,<sup>37</sup> though it continued in name only for a further three years until Johnston left Scotland in January 1856. What factors precipitated this dramatic collapse? First of all the total breakdown of relations with home mission leaders, a group of men who were the most prominent and influential of the older ministers in the denomination. This ensured that Johnston's task of leading the union was now guaranteed to be extremely difficult. Secondly, differences in methodology between the union secretary and older colleagues were magnified by Johnston's confrontational style.

An example comes from the home mission station of Auchterarder where the evangelist Alexander Kirkwood had been appointed by the Home Mission in 1845 to work in that place and in neighbouring Crieff. Despite being funded by the BHMS, Kirkwood asked the union if they could take responsibility for him and his work. It was inappropriate for him to have asked, even if he was frustrated with the way he was instructed to carry out his duties, but it was even more foolish for the Baptist Union to consider seriously his request. Not surprisingly the BHMS sent a blunt letter to clarify the situation. It stated: 'that neither Mr Kirkwood, nor the station at Auchterarder have been yet given up by the society'.<sup>38</sup> As the work, including his salary were being paid by the BHMS, Kirkwood and the union had needlessly antagonised Baptist colleagues.

A third reason for its decline was the departure of James Taylor to Birmingham. In the period up to 1849 Taylor was the editor of the union periodical *The Evangelist* and a strong moderating influence on Johnston. Taylor was a bridge-builder who had good relations with BHMS leaders. Ill health through overwork forced him to relinquish many of his union duties to be replaced briefly as editor of the denominational magazine by William Landels and then by Thomas Milner, a fiery young member of Johnston's Edinburgh congregation. Milner appeared to relish confrontation, eventually falling out with Johnston and joining the Churches of Christ in Scotland,<sup>39</sup> but for two years he allowed Johnston to launch

<sup>36</sup> W. Landels, 'Editorial Address', *The Evangelist*, 5.1 (January 1850), 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, in *The Evangelist*, 7.9 (September 1852), 180.

<sup>38</sup> Baptist Union of Scotland Executive Committee Minutes, 18 December 1845, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 262-5.

personal attacks in *The Evangelist* against Baptist ministers with whom the union secretary had disagreements. Andrew Arthur, a co-pastor of Bristo Scotch Baptist Church, Edinburgh; Jonathan Watson, now minister of Dublin Street Baptist Church, Edinburgh, and Peter Grant of Stirling Baptist Church were recipients of this unpleasant attention.<sup>40</sup>

A final factor was Johnston's controversial book, *The Work of God and the Work of Man in Conversion*,<sup>41</sup> which was overloaded with passionate phraseology, but was extremely thin on edifying theological content. Some years later in March 1861 at a BHMS committee meeting Johnston apologised for writing some unorthodox theological views in that book concerning the work of the Holy Spirit and declared that he now was fully convinced of mainstream opinions on that subject.<sup>42</sup> An older, wiser Francis Johnston realised by the 1860s that trying to impose theological uniformity on the Baptist denomination in Scotland had been disastrous and taken together with his aggressive leadership style, destroyed the very initiatives he had been seeking to develop. In future a very different approach to union needed to be adopted.

#### UNITY INCLUDES DIVERSITY: THE GENESIS OF THE 1869 BAPTIST UNION

The final and successful attempt to unite Scottish Baptists began in 1856 with the formation of a society of interested individuals called the Scottish Baptist Association. Its activities culminated in the constitution of the third Baptist Union in 1869 which quickly gained and retained the support of the overwhelming majority of Baptist causes in Scotland. There were a number of reasons for this development.

First of all there was a more realistic attitude to theological differences. Calvinists and Arminians had to work together and acknowledge each other's ministries. The excesses of the later years of Frances Johnston produced a new realism on the part of ministers and churches. They were now more willing to accept each other and work with each other, accommodating their different emphases. An example of this new situation was James Malcolm, a supporter of Johnston, who was an evangelist

<sup>40</sup> *The Evangelist*, for example, 5.7 (July 1850), 135, 138-40; 5.8 (August 1850), 149-50; 5.9 (September 1850) 173-4;

<sup>41</sup> Details of this book and its significance is given in a forthcoming book, M. Smith (ed.), *British Evangelical Identities*, (Carlisle, 2006), in a chapter by B. R. Talbot, 'Contrasting Interpretations of Baptist Identity in Nineteenth Century Scotland'.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix to the *Report of the Home Missionary Society for Scotland*, (1861), 17-18.

of the Baptist Union of Scotland and minister of Michael Street Baptist Church, Greenock, 1853 to 1855. He moved to the more conservative John Street Baptist Church, Aberdeen in 1855, prior to accepting a call in December 1857 to Dover Street Baptist Church, Leicester, a New Connexion General Baptist cause in England.<sup>43</sup> A focus on promoting an evangelical faith, typified by Malcolm, was the direction adopted.

A second factor was the inclusion of the ministers and churches from the large urban areas in the central belt of Scotland. The leaders of this SBA were determined to learn from the mistakes of the previous union in failing to engage with Glasgow and Edinburgh ministers and their churches. Each year, but especially in the 1860s, the gatherings of the SBA grew in numbers. The organisers of these events deliberately alternated assemblies between Glasgow and Edinburgh and utilised the premises of more than one Baptist church in each city for these events, together with a dinner in a suitable temperance hotel to encourage fellowship outside of the context of formal meetings. When this strategy was placed alongside the equally wise invitations to different ministers from churches outside these cities to lead particular parts of the programme, it is not difficult to see how these confidence-building measures were extremely fruitful in strengthening the support base of this venture.<sup>44</sup>

One external factor that transformed the life of many denominations was the 1859 religious revival. The 1859 annual meetings heard that one of the grounds for Baptists working more closely together in Scotland in the late 1850s was in order to experience 'a larger outpouring of the Spirit of God... the report gratefully acknowledged that many of the church connected with the Baptist denomination had participated in these tokens of God's mercy and grace'.<sup>45</sup> The revival reports in the Baptist newspaper *The Freeman*, provided by Glasgow Baptist minister John Williams, emphasised the pan-denominational nature of the prayer meetings and other services.

A comment made of the churches in Eyemouth, Berwickshire, including the local Baptist church, was representative of what was happening in

<sup>43</sup> *The Freeman*, 1 (3 October 1855), 590; 1 (17 October 1855), 621; 3 (16 December 1857), 762. New Connexion General Baptists were working ever closer with the Particular Baptists in England during this period, though a merger of their operations did not occur until 1891. For further details see J. H. Y. Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism: The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891', *Baptist Quarterly*, 34.3 and 34.4 (1991).

<sup>44</sup> *The Freeman*, 2 (17 September 1856), 553; 4 (3 November 1858), 668; 6 (31 October 1860), 696; 7 (30 October 1861), 697; 9 (28 October 1863) 684; 11 (1 November 1865), 709; 13 (22 November 1867), 428.

<sup>45</sup> *The Freeman*, 5 (2 November 1859), 665.



many communities in Scotland at that time. 'The most cordial union exists among the ministers of the town, as well as among all Christians. Denominationalism is out of sight, and all are cooperating most heartily on behalf of Christ alone.'<sup>46</sup> The spirit of the revival continued into the 1860s. The 1861 SBA annual report declared that the SBA was 'designed to promote the cause of revivals'.<sup>47</sup> Cooperation with other Christian churches showed the benefits of this ecumenical activity and ensured that by the early 1860s Scottish Baptists saw the advantages of working much more closely with each other.

An equally important external factor was the influence of the London Baptist Association (LBA) and the settlement of ministers in Scotland who had been trained at the Pastors' College in London by Charles Spurgeon. This Baptist minister, together with clerical colleagues William Brock and William Landels, formed the LBA in 1865. The church-planting successes and track record in getting Metropolitan Baptists to work together was second to none.<sup>48</sup> Spurgeon's former students began settling in Scottish Baptist churches from 1859, and by 1870 twenty-five men were in pastorates and promoting a case for a union of Baptist churches.<sup>49</sup> The presence of individuals who could testify to the success of the LBA was the final confirmation needed before a union of churches was launched in 1869 with fifty-one churches in membership, a figure rising to eighty-three out of ninety-two a decade later in 1879.<sup>50</sup>

These English Baptist ministers had not convinced their Scottish colleagues of the need for a union of churches, or that joint efforts were required: these points were almost universally accepted in this ecclesiastical constituency. What they had done was demonstrate that this proposed course of action had worked in London and, therefore, was most likely to succeed also in Scotland.

Scottish Baptists, although holding many views in common, considered themselves a diverse group of church networks in the early part of the nineteenth century. The first opportunity presented by the 1827 Baptist Union failed because the Scotch Baptists in its membership could not grasp that unity does not automatically require unanimity in doctrinal and practical matters. The second body, the 1835 SBA, struggled to make an impact due to its support base being almost exclusively from small and

<sup>46</sup> *The Freeman*, 5 (21 December 1859), 778.

<sup>47</sup> *The Freeman*, 7 (30 October 1861), 697.

<sup>48</sup> For details see W. C. Johnson, *Encounter in London*, (London, 1965).

<sup>49</sup> Appendix 6.1 'English Baptist Colleges and Scotland', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 364.

<sup>50</sup> *Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Report*, 1 (Glasgow, 1869) 22-3; 11 (Glasgow, 1979), 14-16;

rural congregations. A more promising initiative was the 1843 to 1856 Baptist Union that began by offering an inclusive vision of Baptist identity, together with a plan of action for developing the work. The change of vision to an exclusive and militant Arminian identity for the union in January 1850 was disastrous. In their history independent-minded Scottish Baptists had never accepted that uniformity precedes unity.

The final and successful move to build ties between Baptist congregations was an overwhelming success. Its leaders grasped the need for an inclusive union in which time was taken to build relationships between the different congregations. Evidence on the ground of close ties between Scottish Christians during the 1859 revival and the impact of the LBA amongst London Baptists proved that closer cooperation by Scottish Baptist churches could gain similar benefits. At the heart of this successful union, was the recognition that in order to prosper, unity must include diversity within its ranks.

# WHOLLY HUMAN AND WHOLLY DIVINE, HUMILIATED AND EXALTED: SOME REFORMED EXPLORATIONS IN BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGY LECTURES

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## I. INTRODUCTION: ON GETTING THE QUESTION RIGHT

At the University of Berlin in the summer of 1933, the very year in which Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave a series of lectures on Christology. Bonhoeffer's dense treatment is worth our time and attention, precisely because of the way in which Bonhoeffer frames the christological question. Instead of asking the question 'How?', i.e. the question of how Jesus can be said to be both divine and human, Bonhoeffer asks the question 'Who?'.<sup>1</sup> The question 'Who are you?' promotes a salutary line of theological questioning precisely because the question 'Who?' is a question which is raised by the revelatory self-presence of Another. 'It [the question 'Who?'] is the question about the other person and his claim, about the other being, about the other authority.'<sup>2</sup> It is a question which is raised by the one who transcends us and, in so doing, establishes the terms of the account, pointing us away from ourselves to his self-disclosure.<sup>3</sup> Maintaining and defining human existence, Jesus Christ stands at its centre. Therefore, christological inquiry, for Bonhoeffer

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<sup>1</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. E. H. Robertson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), p. 31. The question 'How?' is the question raised by those who seek 'to examine Christ at arms' length'. M. Jenson, 'Real presence: contemporaneity in Bonhoeffer's Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (Spring 2005), p. 144. See also W. Krötke, 'Der begegnende Gott und der Glaube. Zum theologischen Schwerpunkt der Christologievorlesung D. Bonhoeffers', in *Bonhoeffer-Studien. Beiträge zur Theologie und Wirkungsgeschichte Dietrich Bonhoeffers*, ed. A. Schönherr & W. Krötke (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1985), pp. 25-35.

<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Bonhoeffer's lectures, J. Webster writes, 'thinking about Jesus Christ cannot be classificatory, a matter of assigning him a place in an existing order of objects, whether material or spiritual. Rather, he is that in terms of which all other reality is to be mapped.' See 'Incarnation', in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics I* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001), p. 116.

fer, includes a humbling on the part of the inquirer, insofar as he or she is the one who is questioned and gripped, 'mastered [as it were] by the subject-matter'.<sup>4</sup>

As the living Lord, the living subject-matter, Jesus Christ attests and imparts himself in the present, speaking his own Word, a Word which dethrones the human *logos* and the question which invariably accompanies it, 'How?' Christological inquiry, for Bonhoeffer, is thus grounded in the Christ who questions us, the Christ who is presently operative in the power of the Spirit. Such an inquiry is not a matter of reflecting on an ideal which Christ is said to represent and which can be known in advance. If such were the case, Christ would be an object at our disposal, an object that we could preside over. Quite the contrary for Bonhoeffer, christological inquiry concerns us with a *person* who lives and speaks today, a person who resists domestication. The christological question, Bonhoeffer writes, 'is [a question] about the revelation itself', about the God who discloses himself in his saving activity.<sup>5</sup> The centrality of revelation for Bonhoeffer's account is of ultimate importance, then, for the degree to which an account yields to revelation is the degree to which it delineates a true understanding of God's identity.

In this paper I undertake three things. First, I expound and comment upon Bonhoeffer's account of Jesus Christ in *Christ the Center*. Particular attention will be paid to Bonhoeffer's unfolding of the presence of Christ as the key to understanding the person of Christ, as one who is both contemporary and historical. Second, I offer a critique of Bonhoeffer's account of the threefold form of Christ's contemporaneity as proclaimed Word, as sacrament and as church. Third and finally, I reflect on the ethical resources which Bonhoeffer's account of Christ as *pro me* offers to the church in its perpetual struggle against absolutism.

## II. TOWARD A DOCTRINE OF 'THE CENTER'

Bonhoeffer's main concern in *Christ the Center* is to articulate a doctrine of Christ's person via a doctrine of Christ's presence, to provide a study of his person which is in accordance with his presence.<sup>6</sup> The doctrine of Christ's person arises as a kind of commentary on and summation of

<sup>4</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, translation ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 14 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-1975), II/1, p. 470.

<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that Bonhoeffer is uninterested in articulating a doctrine of Christ's work. Rather, it is simply the recognition that the intelligibility of the work of Christ depends upon the identity of the agent who executes the work. See *ibid.*, pp. 37ff.

the character of his presence. To speak of Christ as the present one is to acknowledge that he is not a person who is confined to the past, standing on the sidelines of our present as it were, awaiting realization. Rather, the Christ who was is indeed present now; Christ's past, for Bonhoeffer, is ingredient in his present identity. Christ, therefore, is contemporary with us; his contemporaneity is a function of the person he is. He thus stands with us, witnessing to, attesting and authenticating himself in the present.

Bonhoeffer's primary interlocutor, as he proceeds to articulate a doctrine of the person of Christ rooted in Christ's presence, is the liberal Protestant tradition. According to Bonhoeffer, 'two serious misunderstandings' have arisen in this tradition relative to its understanding of the presence and of the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> First, according to liberal Protestants like A. Ritschl, Christ's presence is depicted 'as the influence that emanates from him, reaching into the Church'.<sup>8</sup> That is, Christ is present insofar as he influences human beings by an ideal which he himself is said to embody, an ideal such as 'timeless truth'.<sup>9</sup> What matters, then, is 'the effect of his [Christ's] historical influence'.<sup>10</sup> In effect, liberals like Ritschl were more concerned with the question of *what* Christ does, and not so much the question of *who* he is. As a result, Jesus Christ is depersonalized: he simply functions as a name which is concomitant with an idea(s) or a value(s).<sup>11</sup> Put again, Christ is representative of a particular religious idea that has been taken up in advance and then applied to his historical person.<sup>12</sup> The result is, necessarily, an exemplarist Christology: Jesus' humanity – his life in general – represents something that can be known apart from him. Jesus Christ becomes a 'mythological expression of the religious or moral value which Christians find in him or place upon him as an object of regard or worship'.<sup>13</sup> His humanity, therefore, is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Of such attempts H. Frei writes, 'the endeavor . . . to represent the presence of Christ in and to our presence may well mean to the Christian the total diffusion of Jesus into our presence so that he no longer has any presence of his own. The cost of our being contemporaneous to him would then be, it seems, that he no longer *owns* his presence, or, if he does, that we cannot apprehend or comprehend that fact.' *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> Webster, 'Incarnation', in *Word and Church*, p. 118.

accidental; or, to use Hans Frei's language, the 'unsubstitutable identity' of Jesus Christ is eclipsed.<sup>14</sup>

The second serious misunderstanding espoused by exemplars of the liberal Protestant tradition, such as W. Herrmann, is evidenced, for Bonhoeffer, in their attempt 'to pass beyond the limits of the historical to make the image of Christ visible'.<sup>15</sup> Such an attempt proceeds on the assumption that Jesus did not rise from the dead; it stops 'with the Jesus of the cross, with the historical Jesus'.<sup>16</sup> Its concern is, instead, with the Christ of faith. Throughout his work, Bonhoeffer controverts the distinction between the so-called 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith', insofar as the present Jesus Christ is indeed the historical Jesus Christ. One cannot elide the historical dimension precisely because the historical person is present: Jesus Christ rose on the third day.

In order to respond to the challenge posed by the liberal Protestant tradition, Bonhoeffer draws upon the classical christological tradition. In particular, he reinhabits the Chalcedonian formula – albeit not without criticism – to describe the character of Christ's presence as being the presence of one who is both wholly human and wholly divine.<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer embraces Chalcedon because it does not try to say too much; it represents the supreme instance of an exercise in negative Christology. As such, Chalcedon does not isolate the two natures of Jesus Christ but assumes their unity in his person. Bonhoeffer explains: 'Since Chalcedon, it is no longer possible to ask how the natures can be thought of as different while the person remains one, but quite clearly who is this man, of whom it is declared, "He is God"?'<sup>18</sup> As the one present among us, Christ does not have two natures which can be treated as two separate entities or two separate substances; rather, the one person is at once human and divine.

Because the two natures are united in this one person without confusion and without change, without separation and without division, the man Jesus Christ is not limited by time because he himself is simultaneously God, and God himself is not timeless because he too is identified by the man Jesus Christ. Thus, as one who is wholly God, Christ is 'eternally present'.<sup>19</sup> And, as one who is wholly human – 'nothing human was alien to him' – Jesus Christ is 'present in time and space'.<sup>20</sup> The presence of this

<sup>14</sup> The language of 'unsubstitutable identity' belongs to Hans W. Frei. See Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.

<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 103.

person is the presence of one who is both temporal and eternal. Put again, the man Jesus Christ is not in the past, in a temporally remote sphere: the man Jesus Christ is, as one who is human, divine and therefore present. Because Jesus Christ is divine he can indeed be and indeed is our contemporary. This being so, liberal Protestantism misconstrues the nature of Christ's presence when it equates it with influence, or accounts for it in such a way that the historical dimension of the present Christ is eclipsed in its entirety. Bonhoeffer's text can be read as a sophisticated refutation of the perennial attempt to isolate the humanity of Jesus Christ from his divinity, or to bifurcate the historical element of Jesus Christ from the present Jesus Christ.

A very important corollary of the motif of 'wholly human and wholly divine' in *Christ the Center* is that of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Concerning humiliation, Bonhoeffer argues that it is an attribute of the incarnate one himself.<sup>21</sup> That is, humiliation indicates the mode in which the incarnate one exists. As such, the incarnate one chooses to accomplish his work under the opposite, in 'the likeness of sinful flesh'.<sup>22</sup> The incarnate one hides himself in weakness, then; he does not will to be separated from the *homoioima sarkos*. That the God-Man freely embraces the *homoioima sarkos* is regarded as a 'stumbling block' and, as such, 'the central problem of Christology'.<sup>23</sup> It is *the* stumbling block, explains Bonhoeffer, precisely because it controverts many of our basic assumptions about what is appropriate action for God. After all, how can God the Son be said to exist in the *homoioima sarkos*? Is God not far removed from the finite and material realm, from the vagaries of human existence? Quite the opposite, for Bonhoeffer: the great scandal and mystery of Christian faith is that the incarnate one goes to death: he embraces the *homoioima sarkos* without reservation, commandeering it as the instrument of his self-attestation even unto death.

The latter motif – exaltation – is never to be abstracted from Christ's humiliation. Just as humanity and divinity are united in this one person, so too are the modes of humiliation and exaltation. More specifically, Christ's resurrection, exaltation and ascension function as the very validation or assurance 'that in the incognito we have to deal with the God-Man'.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Christ's exaltation does not add to or take away from his humiliation. Christ's humiliation is not a stage on the way to exaltation; his humiliation is never to be regarded as something negated by

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<sup>21</sup> See further *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 8:3.

<sup>23</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

the resurrection – ‘even as the risen one he does not lift his *incognito*’.<sup>25</sup> Hence the resurrection is historically ambiguous, for it is subject to doubt and to numerous other interpretations until his coming again. Christ’s *incognito*, his humiliation – that is, his being in the likeness of sinful flesh – is nevertheless the manner in which he freely chooses to be for us and to be contemporary to us. To know him as he is present, that is, as the risen one, is to know him even as the humiliated one who continues to pose and to raise the question of himself to the church. The one who was for his people, the one who hid himself in weakness, is for them now and present himself to them in his unassimilable presence. Indeed, Christ imparts himself in the present, for Bonhoeffer, and in so doing creates faith in himself, as the man who was and is God-in-flesh.

With those thoughts in place, inquiry must be made into the structure of Christ’s person. If Christ is wholly human and wholly divine, humiliated and exalted, then what does this say about who he is in the very core of his person? More specifically, what is it about the structure of his person which enables him, as the crucified and risen one, to be present, and present no less in the church?<sup>26</sup> For Bonhoeffer, Christ is *pro me*: ‘Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, *pro me* . . . The core of the person himself is the *pro me*.’<sup>27</sup> Bonhoeffer leaves no room for speculation relative to Christ’s person and the character of his relationship to human beings. Christ is as the one who is *pro me*: his promeity is his own mode of existence. The person of the Christ who is present, then, is present according to the very *pro me* structure of his being. His being for me is thus not accidental: it is, rather, ‘of the essence of his nature’ and the mode of his existence.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it ‘is an ontological statement and, as such, is the heart of who Christ is’.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, God’s act and God’s being in Jesus Christ are one and the same: the Son of God – Jesus Christ – *is* for us. To describe who he is, is to describe him as one who, in the very core of his being, is *for* those to whom he, as the crucified and risen one, is present. His act is thus reiterative of his person. For this reason, an ontological gap is never to be posited between his act and being, as the act of Jesus Christ bespeaks the being of Jesus Christ.

The second and last section of Bonhoeffer’s text – ‘The Historic Christ’ – maps the relationship of the present crucified and risen Christ

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Jesus is the Christ present as the Crucified and as the risen one . . . Christ, as person, is present in the Church.’ Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> Jenson, ‘Real Presence’, p. 151.



who is *pro me* to the historical Christ. Bonhoeffer's ordering of the material in *Christ the Center*, beginning with the present Christ (Part One) and proceeding to the historical Christ (Part Two), is again significant, as it is reflective of his continual effort to undermine the perennial distinction of the 'Jesus of history' from the 'Christ of faith'. Bonhoeffer's continual engagement with this paradigm – despite the fact that he thinks the separation is a 'fiction' – is indicative of just how seriously he takes its concerns.<sup>30</sup> For example, he asks, 'how can the church be absolutely sure of the historical fact?'<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer answers the question by deliberately moving from Christ's contemporaneity to his historicity, with a view to undermining the assumption that Jesus is other than Christ, that Christ is present only in terms of the effects of his historical being, or the influence that emanates from him. 'He [Christ] bears witness to himself as there in history, here and now', Bonhoeffer writes.<sup>32</sup> That is to say, the Christ who is present *pro me* bears witness to himself in the present as the one who was then, too. The risen Christ has historical form; the One who is proclaimed is the One who is in history. In an arresting statement, Bonhoeffer writes, 'the historical becomes contemporary'.<sup>33</sup> By the power of the resurrection Christ attests himself as present, as 'a person who bears witness to himself' throughout time.<sup>34</sup>

An important question remains, however: what is the *form* of Christ's presence? The form of Christ's presence, the form of the crucified and risen one who is *pro me*, is ecclesial; ecclesial because Bonhoeffer is deeply concerned 'for the social concreteness of Christology', because it is in the Christian community that the presence of Christ attains this very concreteness.<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer's account of Christ's presence and promise also checks individualistic and pietistical impulses, in that the Christian is subject to the Christian community because that is how Christ 'in his *pro me* structure [is for her] as Word, as Sacrament and as Community'.<sup>36</sup> First, as concerns Word, the divine Logos enters the human logos in the form of preaching, in the form of the sermon. In the sermon God's Word is present to us. As a form of his presence, it attests how he presents him-

<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72. At this point, Bonhoeffer acknowledges his indebtedness to Kierkegaard.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> A. Pangritz, 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. J. W. De Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 48.

self to us as the humiliated one ‘to which we are bound and to which we must hold’.<sup>37</sup> That Christ would be willing to be present himself to us and would be willing to bind himself to us in the proclamation of human beings is a profound indication of the humility of the incarnate one. Second, something similar can be said of the sacrament of Holy Communion: it, as the second form of Christ’s presence, is a form of ‘the concealment of the God-Man in his humiliation’.<sup>38</sup> The Christ who is present for me ‘is [thus] present in the sphere of tangible nature’, in bread and wine.<sup>39</sup> Third, the presence of Christ as community or church bespeaks how the humiliated Christ ‘wishes to have the form of a created body’.<sup>40</sup> That is to say, the exalted Christ, the risen Christ, exists in a humiliated form, as the church itself. ‘He is head and also every member’, Bonhoeffer writes.<sup>41</sup> Again, ‘Christ is the church by virtue of his *pro me* being’.<sup>42</sup> He does not exist in any other way, for Bonhoeffer: Christ’s ‘ecclesiality’ is a form of his promeity.

To summarize: the christological question, for Bonhoeffer, is the question ‘Who?’ – i.e. ‘Who are you?’ It is not the question ‘How?’ The question ‘Who?’ undertakes the crucial theological work of ensuring that the inquiry does not proceed according to naturalistic assumptions. That is, the ‘Who?’ thwarts immanentizing procedures in Christology, as it indicates that the object of inquiry transcends creaturely reality. The one who grips and masters the human logos, for Bonhoeffer, reveals himself as wholly human and wholly divine, humiliated and exalted. And the ‘Counter-Logos’ himself, the one who in the very being of his person is contemporaneous with me and who exists, accordingly, for me, is such in a threefold form as Word, as sacrament and as church.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 57. Bonhoeffer’s Lutheranism comes through quite clearly in his doctrine of the sacrament, insofar as the sacrament is not a *sign* which signifies the One who is present; rather, Jesus Christ *is* indeed ‘completely present’ in the sacrament. See, further, J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 4.17.21; Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 59. Although Bonhoeffer recognizes that there is a separation of Christ and the church in the book of Ephesians, he dismisses the idea rather brusquely. In his mind, the two motifs – Christ as head and Christ as member – do ‘not contradict one another’.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

## III. CRITICAL REMARKS IN RELATION TO BONHOEFFER'S ACCOUNT OF 'THE CENTER'

On the basis of my discussion of Bonhoeffer's account of Christ as both the present one and as the historical one who is *pro me*, two points need to be made, one which is critical and one which is constructive in nature. The first (critical) point concerns the *form* of Christ's contemporaneity as Word, as sacrament and as church, a form which, I argue, compromises the necessary distinction between Christ and the church. The second point concerns Bonhoeffer's rather rich account of Christ's promiseity, an account which offers rich resources for the church today as it struggles against absolutism.

### 1. *The Form of Christ*

The threefold form of Christ's presence as proclaimed Word, as sacrament and as church is the manner in which Christ can be said to be present for me. Such an account performs crucial theological work, for Bonhoeffer, insofar as it controverts attempts to collapse the doctrine of Christ's promiseity into that of human subjectivity, and lends 'social concreteness' to his account of Christ's presence.<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer's account of Christ's promiseity, because it takes form as Word, as sacrament and as church, directs one to the Christian community and therefore to hear and obey Christ's address through the preached Word, to partake of the Holy Supper, and to live within the body of Christ. Yet, however salutary such an emphasis may seem, the question must be asked whether Bonhoeffer leaves adequate room for the freedom of the person of Christ relative to the church. Or, does the threefold form of the present Christ leave any room for the necessary distinction between Christ and the church?

Instead of arguing that the form of the present Christ is *as* Word, as sacrament and as church, I would suggest that it is better to say that Christ is present *to* the preached Word, to the sacrament and to the church. That is to say, the proclaimed Word and the Lord's Supper, in particular, are acts of obedience which attest Jesus Christ or point to Jesus Christ. In the case of the church, moreover, it is the body *to* which Christ, as the *Head*, is present in the Spirit. Indeed, Christ is pneumatologically present in such a way that he evokes these creaturely realities – Word, sacrament and church – and continues to sanctify them, in order that they may bear witness to himself. He is sovereignly present to these creaturely realities in the Spirit, as the very mode of his risen presence among us. Thus, proclamation, baptism and Eucharist, and even the church itself, are understood as that which is different from Christ, in the sense that he is

<sup>43</sup> Pangritz, 'Who is Jesus Christ?', p. 151.

the active agent who calls them into being, creates them *ex nihilo* as it were, and vivifies and sanctifies them by the power of his Holy Spirit. It is Christ who calls them into being and remains prophetically present to them in the Spirit, in such a way that they can never in any straightforward way be identified with himself, but always remain like the finger of the Baptist pointing beyond themselves to the one who establishes, maintains and perfects them.

Furthermore, to propose, in the case of the church, as does Bonhoeffer, that 'Christ is the head *and* [emphasis mine] also every member', is to dilute the truth of Christ's sovereign headship over his body and to compromise the 'relation-in-distinction' which exists between Christ and his body.<sup>44</sup> If Christ is to be the Lord of the church, a separation must exist between Christ and his church, a notion which Bonhoeffer, interestingly enough, agrees with in principle. 'He is the one who has really bound himself *in the freedom* [emphasis mine] of his existence to me', Bonhoeffer writes.<sup>45</sup> Mention of God's freedom is indeed crucial, as it demonstrates Bonhoeffer's awareness of the immanentizing tendencies of German Idealism. Thus Bonhoeffer can write, 'God's Logos does not become identified with the human logos, as is assumed by German idealism.'<sup>46</sup> Christ's humiliation in and under the preached Word, rather than being a forfeit of his sovereignty, is an act of sovereign self-disposal, for Bonhoeffer. Preaching is thus always subject to the judgement of the Logos. *And yet*, Bonhoeffer can say, virtually in the same breath, that 'Christ's

<sup>44</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 58; Webster, 'On Evangelical Ecclesiology' in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), p. 167.

<sup>45</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 48. The theological work that an account of God's freedom undertakes is that it denotes how God's immanent freedom *ad intra* is the basis of his relations *ad extra*. Although Bonhoeffer is self-consciously anti-Hegelian insofar as God's activity is not necessary in order for God to be God, he nonetheless ties the being of the Word too closely to history. On Bonhoeffer's view, 'Christ can never be thought of as being for himself, but only in relation to me.' (Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 47.) On my view, the Christ who is for me is as such, precisely because he, in an immanent sense, is for the Father (as the Father is for him) in the unitive power of the Spirit. God's immanent identity, therefore, is the basis of his economic activity *ad extra*. Put again, the freedom of the divine persons for the other in God is reiterated in their activity toward us: each is for us as each is for the other in the inner life of God. For a very sophisticated treatment of this theme, see P. D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2002).

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

presence *is* [emphasis mine] his existence as proclamation. The whole Christ *is* [emphasis mine] present in preaching, humiliated and exalted.<sup>47</sup> Bonhoeffer's salutary emphasis on the freedom of the Logos with respect to the human logos is undermined, I suspect, by his concomitant emphasis on the identification of Christ with the human logos in preaching. I suspect that a more robust account of the sovereign freedom of Christ in and under these forms, and thus the sovereign self-presence of Christ to these forms, is necessary if the immanentizing tendencies of German Idealism are to be fully blunted and resisted.

It is at this point that the Reformed tradition is of assistance, for it emphasizes, far more incisively than Bonhoeffer's Lutheran tradition, the importance of the separation between our words and acts and Christ's own word and act concerning himself, so as to point to the freedom of Christ himself relative to human words and acts. This is an important point, as Bonhoeffer's articulation of the form of Christ's presence as Word, as sacrament and as church, continually risks the freedom of Christ in relation *to* the preached Word, sacrament and church. Thus, Christ in the power of the Spirit commandeers, in the case of preaching, human words, sanctifying them in such a way that they may be a fit witness to himself, but only a witness, for he himself is not collapsed into them, but remains over them, thereby ensuring their integrity as *human* words caught up in the prophetic activity of the Son of God.

Similarly, in the case of the church, inasmuch as Bonhoeffer defines the church as '*the mode of existence* [emphasis mine] of the one who is present in his exaltation and humiliation', the headship of Christ in relation to the community is compromised.<sup>48</sup> I wonder whether the church, the community whose task is fundamentally that of attesting the 'inherent effectiveness' of Jesus' reality, comes rather close, in Bonhoeffer's account, to supplanting Christ.<sup>49</sup> This is precisely why an emphasis on the sovereign self-presence of Christ is necessary. As Barth states, 'Jesus Christ cannot be absorbed and dissolved in practice into the Christian kerygma, Christian faith and the Christian community.'<sup>50</sup> Following Barth, Bonhoeffer's account does not adequately maintain, I would argue, the 'profound contrast between the revelation and the community

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59. The same is said of the sacrament: 'This Word, Jesus Christ, is completely present in the Sacrament, neither his Godhead alone, nor only his humanity.' *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> J. Webster, "'Eloquent and Radiant": The Prophetic Office of Christ and the Mission of the Church', in *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 142.

<sup>50</sup> Barth, CD IV/3, p. 349.

of which Christ is the agent'.<sup>51</sup> In sum, the proclaimed Word, sacrament and church, are better understood as *witnesses* to, or signs instituted by, the sovereign self-presence of the God-man who is *pro nobis*, rather than as his very *form*. In other words, Christ is always the acting agent in relationship to them and is never to be immediately identified with them.

To be sure, such a (Reformed) emphasis on divine freedom does not sacrifice the 'social concreteness' of Christ's presence; one ought not to think that a robust emphasis on Christ's freedom is antithetical to an emphasis on the 'social concreteness' of his presence. Barth himself, for example, spoke of the church as the 'earthly historical form of the existence of Jesus Christ Himself'.<sup>52</sup> That is, the church is visible and concrete precisely because the Lord – the church's invisible head – wills to exist in an earthly form. But Barth does not mean the same thing as Bonhoeffer at this point, for Barth emphasizes 'the work of the Holy Spirit' to which the church owes its concrete and historical existence.<sup>53</sup> A Reformed emphasis on divine freedom is quite at home, I suspect, with an equally robust emphasis on the social concreteness of the church, insofar as that concreteness is effected by the Spirit and not creaturely media identified with Christ himself. Stated differently, the Reformed tradition, as Barth represents it, safeguards the asymmetrical relationship of Christ and the church: 'Because He is, it is; it is, because He is.'<sup>54</sup> Barth's concern, and I would argue the Reformed tradition's concern in general, is to account for and honour the invisible centre as that which makes possible and guarantees the very existence of the visible church. Accordingly, the invisible is the 'third dimension' of the church, its 'spiritual reality', the very 'awakening power of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>55</sup> And it is precisely this 'third dimension' which evokes the phenomenal being of the church and legitimizes its existence. In short, a Reformed perspective emphasizes the pneumatological as that which effects the concrete and historical form of the church, which is then said to be the 'earthly-historical form' of Christ's existence. And so, the difference between Bonhoeffer as a Lutheran and Barth as a Reformed theologian is that Barth is more keen to emphasize the invisible, though not 'in the direction of a *civitas platonica*', but rather in order to point to the Spirit as the one who effects the church's visibility, its

<sup>51</sup> P. Selby, 'Who is Jesus Christ, for Us, Today?', in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition: Paper Presented at the 7th International Bonhoeffer Congress, Cape Town, 1996* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, CD IV/1, p. 656.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 656.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 661.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 657, 660.

concrete and historical form.<sup>56</sup> Such an emphasis is always to be in the service of safeguarding the distinction of Christ and the church and the freedom of Christ relative to the church. In this consists, I suspect, the difference between the Reformed and Lutheran tradition with regard to Christology and ecclesiology.

## 2. *The Ethics of Christ's Promeity*

Second, and more briefly, Bonhoeffer's account of Christ's promeity is salutary for it disrupts not only naturalistic understandings of the 'us', but also evokes a rich account of the character of the church's witness to the gospel in the world.<sup>57</sup>

Concerning the former, that is Bonhoeffer's account of the promeity of Christ's person, it must be said that just as Christ does not 'accommodate himself to any self-chosen "us"', so, too, the church must not think that it exhausts the 'us'. Instead, Christ decides the 'us': Christ has the right to the definition of 'us'. Accordingly, Peter Selby writes, 'the question of who Jesus Christ is for us today cannot be interpreted so as to mean that we know who "us" is and the question therefore is how Jesus Christ is somehow to be accommodated to that us'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the doctrine of Christ's promeity is expansive: it calls the church to evaluate whether its form(s) of life compromise the inclusive character of God's overcoming of creaturely disorder and opposition by his judgement and grace.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> K. Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 142.

<sup>57</sup> The church cannot be said, as Jenson maintains, to have to '*flesh out* [emphasis mine] the life of the humiliated one', for the reason that the Christ who is *pro me* is effectively present in the power of the Spirit. Jenson, 'Real presence', p. 160. The language of 'fleshing out' bespeaks an incipient naturalism as far as the relation of Christ to the world is concerned. So Webster: 'God is not absent or mute but present and communicative, not as it were waiting to be "made sense of" by our cognitive or interpretive activities, but accomplishing in us the knowledge of himself.' Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', in *Word and Church*, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer's edifying account of Christ's promeity is compromised, however, precisely by his connected notion of Christ existing as Word, sacrament and church. Both the individual Christian and the church, for Bonhoeffer, are to be for others because Christ himself is for others. See further D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, ed. E. Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 381f. Such a notion, however, has different force in Bonhoeffer's own formulation than in the scheme modified along Reformed lines because of the different status afforded to human action. In Bonhoeffer's account, the church is an extension of Christ, as it is his form;

Concerning the latter, that is, an account of the character of the church's witness to the world, Bonhoeffer reminds the church that the doctrine of Christ's promise is imperative in character, as it includes a summons to radical discipleship in the church and in the world. As the church receives the word of forgiveness, it must proclaim that word to the world, as a word which is for the world. The promise of the new humanity grounded in the Christ who is for us is thus a promise which stands opposed to those individuals, churches and nations whose absolutist ambitions would identify such a promise with themselves and their activity. God in Christ controverts such claims, freeing us to be for the world which he loves and which he is for in the very core of his being. And by the Holy Spirit the church is renewed in its witness to the one who by his own self-definition exists for others and is present to them.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures offer the church of Jesus Christ the theological resources necessary for resisting absolutist and totalitarian claims. Few people in 1933 could have fathomed the horrific direction which National Socialist ideology would take, and the capitulation of many Protestant churches to that ideology. All the more reason, then, for a clear articulation of the church's christological confession as the basis for its moral and ethical activity in the world. More specifically, christological confession reminds the church that it 'is responsible *in* its context but not in any straightforward way *to* its context'.<sup>60</sup> Note: the church is not responsible *to* its context because the context – either in Bonhoeffer's

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the church does what Christ does, for Christ exists as church. In a scheme modified along Reformed lines, however, there is again more of a concern for the asymmetrical order of Christ and the church, and concomitantly Christ's action and the church's action. The church, in all its corruption and lostness, does seek to obey the command of God by existing for others, by serving others, but it does so only as a reflection, as an illustration, in order that 'in that way [it can] attest in its own activity His activity' (K. Barth CD IV/1, p. 662). Such a disjunction between Christ and the church is salutary, for only then can his promise in all its uniqueness and in its once-for-all character be acknowledged and honoured. When the church is seen to *attest* Christ and not to *represent* him as if there were a more direct correspondence between him and the church, the fragility of the church's witness in the world is all the more reason for it to pray to the one who can and indeed does sanctify it in such a way that it may indeed bear witness in its activity to the Christ who is for it and therefore for the whole world.

<sup>60</sup> Webster, 'Eschatology and Anthropology', in *Word and Church*, p. 266.



day or in our own – does not have and cannot therefore assume ‘a necessary character’.<sup>61</sup> That is to say, the church is not bound *to* the context but rather *to* the one who is present, in a hidden manner, to the church in its context.<sup>62</sup> Christ commands the church to act in its context in accordance with the true shape of reality which Christ himself proclaims and has effectively enacted. Jesus Christ remains what is *necessary*; he transcends given circumstances in such a way that the context is not ‘anything other than a contingent set of cultural arrangements which stands under the judgement of the Christian gospel’.<sup>63</sup> A theology which remains under the tutelage of the gospel will be genuinely responsible to that very same gospel *in* its context, and thus only so can the church be genuinely *for* its context. The church can only be for its context if it is free in relationship to it, taking its cues from one who transcends the context. ‘It [the church] is the boundary of the state in proclaiming with the cross the breaking-through of all human order’, Bonhoeffer writes.<sup>64</sup> Just as Christ, for Bonhoeffer, is *pro nobis* in the very core of his person, so too must the church exist for others.<sup>65</sup> Only thus will the church be able to resist hegemonic claims, in both word and deed, because it recognizes, in faith, that the one who is present to it is the great relativizer of all such claims and continually commands the church to pray, proclaim, worship, and witness in such a way as to faithfully bear witness to ‘the man who is there only for others’.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, it is legitimate and perhaps necessary, I suspect, to read *Christ the Center* as one of the most potent – albeit it a potency which is not without its problems – twentieth century theological attempts to resist immanentizing and domesticating tendencies in Christology and ecclesiology. When the church is so cozy with the state and the oppression that is committed in its name under the auspices of racial purity, then it is simply reduced to the status of a beggar, of an organ or extension of the state. Whereas, what Bonhoeffer does, by arguing that the historical Christ is the present Christ who is both humiliated and exalted as Word, as sacrament and as church, is to present a *politics* of Christ’s presence, the presence of one who always and indefatigably questions us, our assumptions, our words and ways of being. Thus, the present Christ – ‘the Counter

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The church also must be understood as the center of history.... Again this is a hidden and not an evident center of the realm of the state.’ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> Webster, ‘Eschatology and Anthropology’, p. 266.

<sup>64</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p. 381.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

Logos' – is not an ideal who can be swallowed up by the church.<sup>67</sup> He is present to the church even as he is the church, for Bonhoeffer, and is therefore present to the world and for the world in the church, as he calls the church to die to itself and relinquish its sinful way of being, that it may live in and for the world. Christ indissolubly binds himself to the church for the sake of the world, and remains present in the church, pronouncing upon the church and the world his word of judgement and pardon, commanding the church, in its situatedness, to acknowledge him, the reconciliation he is and the peace that he has made. Thus it is necessary for the church, in both Bonhoeffer's time and in our own, to speak to and to welcome the Jew, and indeed all others, in obedience to the peace which Christ himself effected between Jew and Gentile by his all-encompassing sacrifice. Such a response is indeed fitting and necessary for the church as it attests the Christ who is truth, and as it commends a form of individual and of cosmic existence which corresponds to Christ's own proclamation of and enactment of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>67</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, p. 33.

## REVIEWS

### **Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology**

A. T. B. McGowan (ed.)

Apollós/IVP, Leicester, 2006; 365 pp., £19.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741304

This collection of essays represents an attempt to (re-)engage conservative Reformed theology with the contemporary theological scene. In the words of the editor, the writers were ‘to assess the current state of scholarship in [their] area, before indicating areas where further work, development, restatement or clarification is required’ (p. 17). The aim is thus more broad than deep and for an audience not entirely expected to be familiar with the issues – perhaps a case in point for the need of re-engagement. The parameters provided give the explicitly evangelical orientation of the work, but encourage the reader to expect something more than a restatement of confessionalism.

Such is admirably fulfilled with Gerald Bray’s opening essay on the Trinity, a model of clarity and breadth. Bray is clearly fluent in many of the contemporary discussions of divine personhood and other important trends in the theological scene, and closes with a number of questions to which Reformed theology in particular might have a significant contribution to make. Likewise the essay on justification by Cornelis Venema sweeps from the Reformation to modern ecumenical discussions and into ‘new perspectives’ on Paul, attempting to balance historical theology, concern for nuance, and openness to continuing exegesis.

The high point is the article by Kevin Vanhoozer on the task of systematic theology. As always, Vanhoozer is well-read in contemporary and historical literature and puts his reading to good use in an informative and provocative look into systematic theology as an ‘imaginative, practical and spiritual enterprise’ of living out biblical interpretation.

Further essays include Richard Gaffin on ‘Union with Christ’ and Stephen Williams offering a brief essay on approaching theological systems – appealing to theological ‘rules’ rather than ‘moves’. The editor contributes an essay on the atonement as penal substitution and Derek Thomas closes the volume with an essay on ecclesiology that is interesting, even if somewhat lacking with regard to extra-evangelical interaction.

However, there are also a number of significant disappointments in the volume. Richard Gamble’s essay on biblical theology is little more than a restatement of Geerhardus Vos, with no dialogue or seeming awareness of the immense work on the subjects that have occurred since the early

20th century. Whether or not one sees recent work as an advance is, for this purpose, irrelevant. A simple restatement in a louder voice is unlikely to be the way forward. Likewise Robert Reymond's essay on Christology is a wonderful restatement of classical Christology – a task that is always welcome. But within the goals of the volume the essay interacts so little with any contemporary disputes on Christology, outside of rejecting James Dunn, that the reader might be forgiven for thinking the debate a rather simple one of just looking at the biblical evidence.

Henri Blocher's essay on 'Old Covenant, New Covenant' is (as expected) insightful and resourceful, but refers so sparingly to the exegetical work being done on the question that his appeal for a remodelled covenant theology appears anachronistic at best outside of conservative Reformed circles. Passing reference is made to a number of evangelical authors, but the main concern is re-presenting Herman Witsius' 17th century solution, bypassing the exegetical disputes and the large body of contemporary literature on the text – especially in recent Roman Catholic discussions. The assumption of the article is that the biblical texts are self-explanatory and the difficulty is doing justice to them all: an assumption that cannot stand given the historical and contemporary discussions.

The impression from these latter articles is the unsettling notion of a Reformed world that sees itself as simply needing to 'iron out' some of its details in dialogue with other conservative evangelicals (if that): precisely against the stated intent of the editor. So while the collection holds forward some hope for the tradition, it likewise holds some of its common pitfalls.

*Joshua Moon, University of Saint Andrews*

## **Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity**

Tom Smail

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2005; 304 pp., £9.99; ISBN-10: 1842273426; ISBN-13: 9781842273425

Tom Smail has led an interesting career – Church of Scotland minister, leader in the charismatic renewal movement, and canon in the Church of England. Smail is also an accomplished theologian of the Barthian variety, and in *Like Father, Like Son*, he formulates a theological anthropology starting from the perspective of the *imago Dei* as specifically triune. This book embodies much of what is right, and much of what is wrong, with contemporary neo-orthodox theology: it takes the Bible seriously enough to do sustained exegesis, and it offers creative answers within the bounds of faith. On the other hand, its deeply flawed doctrine of Scripture

(p. 286) means that in practice, problematic material can be dispensed with at will, thereby undercutting its own laudable attempt to move beyond the religion of human invention.

Smail's discussion of Trinity-imaged anthropology is wide ranging, interacting with issues from the family to penology – giving an *apropos* recommendation for restorative justice (p. 180) – to ecclesiology. Throughout these discussions, Smail is refreshingly insistent on the need for differentiated roles in the context of interdependent equality. The material I found most interesting, however, was on gender (chapter 7). Barth-like, Smail decries that the debate 'has been so crowded and controlled by egalitarian and feminist ideologies of one kind or another that the biblical witness is hard to hear' (pp. 240-1). He then offers a rather plausible theology of gender:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same nature of love in freedom, but they express it in different ways.... So, it is in line with the Genesis presentation to say that the same humanity in which both Adam and Eve are created has distinctive but inter-dependant modes of being in each of them. The distinction between them is not one of diverse qualities but of distinct vocation. The distinct calling of the man is the care of the garden; the distinct calling of the woman is the care of the relationships that make human life possible (p. 245).

Just as there are essentially equal but functionally different persons in the Trinity, so it is with humanity made in God's image. This correlation of theology proper with anthropology seems to be exactly how things in fact play out: where Jesus is on a different ontological plane than Allah, women and men are likewise thoroughly unequal. Conversely, Christian feminism is logically consistent enough to disparage all 'power over' roles, not only among humans, but also in the Godhead. In distinction to these positions, the Bible teaches full ontological equality coupled with meaningful role distinctions, both in God and among people, and Smail should be congratulated for seeing this.

Regrettably, Smail demurs from applying this insight consistently to the hugely relevant issue of women's roles in teaching ministry. And despite his ostensible rejection of 'pick and mix' approaches to Scripture (p. 241), Smail recognizes the validity of women as ministers and priests (pp. 258-9) without interacting with the *loci classici* of 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. and 1 Timothy 2:12ff. He concludes his chapter, tellingly, with a suggestion that the Pauline material he did discuss was perhaps 'provisional and in process' (p. 268).

There are many other significant highs in *Like Father, Like Son*, such

as Smail's discussion of christology and the Trinity (chapter 3) and his creative application of *perichoresis* to anthropology; as well as other lows, such as his rejection of the historicity of Genesis with regard to human origins (pp. 40-1) and to the fall (pp. 212-13). On the whole, however, there is more than enough in this volume to recommend its critical perusal.

*William Schweitzer, New College, Edinburgh*

## **The SCM Press A-Z of Thomas Aquinas**

Joseph P. Wawrykow

SCM Press, London, 2005; 190 pp., £22.99; ISBN-10: 0334040124; ISBN-13: 9780334040125

The concise dimensions of this paper-bound reference work scarcely hint at the lifetime of scholarship required to produce it. A cursory scan could mistake this volume for a mere dictionary of theological terms. But those who scrutinize the contents will regard Wawrykow's new book as an indispensable companion to studying Aquinas. More than lexicographical definitions, these articles bring readers into a thick web of interconnected doctrines: a carefully-reasoned ordering of God's revealed truth in Scripture.

This book challenges readers unacquainted with Aquinas, for Wawrykow writes from decades of immersion in the literature on this great theologian. Yet the informative 'Introduction' will guide the diligent in reading this volume and in exploring primary and secondary references. However, an initial familiarity with Aquinas will significantly boost the value of this resource. *The SCM Press A-Z of Thomas Aquinas* may not serve well as a stand-alone, ready reference. Rather, readers should use this tool as a knowledgeable guide to Aquinas' own works, principally the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as recommended secondary resources. Wawrykow thus provides a detailed outline of the *Summa Theologiae* prior to the articles (xii-xiii).

For seasoned students, Wawrykow facilitates ready acquaintance with Aquinas' key theological concepts. Rather than dredging through primary sources, thick reference books or massive databases, scholars, particularly doctoral students and theological faculty, can quickly 'get up to speed' with Aquinas and the related scholarly literature. Tagging each article with references to the primary literature, Wawrykow coordinates the study of Aquinas' own writings with the secondary literature and facilitates mastery of this theologian within an abbreviated period.

A close reading of selected major articles, e.g. Epistemology, Theological; *Esse*; Fittingness; Grace; Philosophy; Predestination; Scripture;

Theologian; and *Viator*, reveals a key advantage of a single-author reference work. A renowned Aquinas scholar, Wawrykow diligently parses the major issues associated with each concept while citing relevant passages in the primary literature. He also introduces readers to key debates pertinent to the concept—but he doesn't leave these issues unresolved. Wawrykow cogently brings the insight gleaned from decades of study to bear on these questions, and leads readers to a state-of-the-art grasp of current scholarship on Aquinas.

A further benefit of a single-author reference work drawn from a lifetime of study is the sense of consistency that readers will pick up as they work through the text. Wawrykow interprets each theological concept within the framework of related sections of the primary literature, and establishes a network of cross-references among his articles. For example, from the article on Grace he directs readers to *Viator*, Predestination, Original sin, and Merit (to name only a few) and further refers to articles on concepts denoted by prominent Latin phrases such as *Facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*. As a further mark of his expertise, the author interprets these concepts contextually within the structural arrangements of the primary source material and thus mentors his readers in his interpretive methodology. Along with consistency, Wawrykow enables readers to gain a developmental perspective of the primary literature. For example, in the article on Preambles of Faith (pp. 115-18) he distinguishes features related to this concept as contrasted between the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

Every serious student of Thomas Aquinas should own this book, especially graduate students and university faculty. Novices should consult 'A Note on the Literature' (p. 175) as an entry point to secondary literature. Wawrykow includes a brief lexicon of Latin terms common to Aquinas' writings (pp. 171-3), and extensive primary and secondary bibliographies. University and divinity school libraries should especially consider the purchase.

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## **Beyond the Box: Mission Challenges from John's Gospel**

Tom Stuckey

Inspire, Peterborough, 2005; 128 pp., £6.99; ISBN-10: 1858522854; ISBN-13: 9781858522852

Dr Tom Stuckey is the current President of the Methodist Conference. He believes that God is reshaping the 'institutional church' and this book presents his thoughts on the reshaping process for the 21st century. These thoughts are gathered around a particular interpretation of the Gospel of John: that it was written in Ephesus as an alternative Gospel to the synoptics; a Gospel 'rooted in Jesus himself'. Stuckey propounds that it was written as a call to an over-structured and authoritarian apostolic church to return to a clearer, purer expression of Jesus' vision for the church. This view obviously resonates with Stuckey's own views on the contemporary church. He seems aware that many will challenge this interpretation and his response is to acknowledge early on that he is no New Testament scholar. He states that the book is aimed at the 'ordinary church member' who wants a 'fast food' version of John's Gospel. Consequently, he gives his book a 'health warning' for its flaws and limitations.

The book itself is well presented. The intriguing title is backed up with inventive chapter headings. Each chapter closes with questions for reflection and a prayer, based on the content of the chapter. Stuckey does identify many real needs in the contemporary church: the need to be focussed outward, meeting the needs of a lost world; the need for the church to be open to the leading of God's Spirit; and the need for the church to avoid focussing on 'glory days' to the detriment of ministry and mission in the here and now. However, Stuckey's arguments can be hard to follow, overly laden with metaphor and anecdote, simplistic, and couched in unfamiliar language. In a chapter entitled 'The breaking of the waters' where Stuckey draws lessons for the church from what he understands as images of 'birthing' in the Gospel, we find the statement 'When the waters break in a rebirthing process we swim in a sacramental sea of possibility', which leaves the reader floundering, even when read in its context. Again, images of liquids in the Gospel develop into a call for a 'liquid' rather than a 'solid' expression of church. Stuckey cites an eclectic mix of authors along the way, with quotes from Frank Lake, John Bunyan and Joe Simpson the mountaineer, amongst others. A flavour of how provocative these can be is seen in the chapter 'Martha's Keys' where Stuckey is arguing for a gender-inclusive approach in leadership. He quotes Edwina Gateley (*A Warm Moist Salty God: Women journeying towards wisdom*, Anthony Clarke, Wheathampstead, 1994, pp. 38-40) who, in commenting on Peter and Martha's confessions of Christ's sonship, concludes that



Christ's differing responses to Martha in John 11:27 and Peter in Matthew 16:16 demonstrates 'a basic level of unfairness'.

There is little hint of a clear, coherent ecclesiology behind this book. It has the feel of a pick-and-mix – the author never gets stuck into any particular issue to any real depth. The theme of moving beyond the box is constant, the box changing from chapter to chapter, being identified with the particular issue at hand. At times this comes perilously close to a view that there are no absolutes. At several points Stuckey leaves things hanging ambiguously. Many passages will leave evangelical readers feeling uncomfortable: in later chapters he appears to limit God's omnipotence and to question his knowledge. The 'box' of the book's title is cast as the limitations of inactivity, tradition, fear, self-interest, and who could argue but that the church needs to move beyond these limitations. However, if the church is to move beyond the box of its ineffectiveness, it needs a framework and a clear message: both provided by God's inerrant Word.

*David Kirk, South Uist & Benbecula Free Church of Scotland*

## **The God Centered Life: Insights from Jonathan Edwards for Today**

Josh Moody

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2006; 176 pp., £ 8.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741311

Recent scholarly focus on Jonathan Edwards has scrutinized almost every conceivable aspect of his life and work, examining even his paper and ink. One could outfit a small library with the articles and books written about this pastor-theologian. Yet in this case there is room for one more.

Josh Moody, who earned his Ph.D. (thesis on Edwards) at Cambridge, has done us a service by illuminating the relevance of Edwards' thought and insights to the many challenges facing the contemporary church. His purpose is 'both to find Edwards in his times and to apply him to ours'. Moody argues that the cultural shifts that Edwards faced are paralleled by the lurching movements of our own time.

The book is well structured. The reader's interest is quickly engaged by Moody's account of his exciting discovery of Edwards in the main library at Cambridge and by the author's discussion of current directions and approaches in Edwards scholarship.

Moody begins with a clear explanation of why we need to read and apply Edwards' substantial theological and practical insights. Eight chapters follow, each presenting an aspect of Edwards' thought or practice, and in the final section, which helpfully summarizes the book, each chapter's conclusion is recapitulated in a paragraph.

The book examines, as may be expected, such topics as Edwards' views on revival, religious experience, and the importance of judging religious movements by their fruit. Other less anticipated themes include the human-centredness of modernism, the necessity of a biblically grounded church leadership, family life and effective ministry, and secondary issues in the church. The value of these journeys into the extensive Edwards corpus is not the mere reporting of his thought on particular subjects, but the application of Edwards' biblical insight on issues that remain relevant to the contemporary church, demonstrating once again the timelessness of biblical truth applied to the human condition.

Moody is not reluctant to confront modern issues. He addresses questions of charismatic gifts, freedom of the will, reason and faith, and self-esteem: topics or categories that may not often arise in a sermon or church meeting but which raise underlying principles that drive much that is troublesome in the present time. Moody demonstrates that Edwards' deep insights penetrate to the root of each of these questions by repeatedly asking and answering: 'What would Edwards do?'

While largely sympathetic with Edwards theologically, Moody is not all praise. A chapter titled 'Human Leaders Fail' reminds us of the dangers of enthroning saints of days gone by, and it may well caution the discerning reader's own tendencies in that direction.

The book is not aimed at the academy but invites all serious Christians into Edwards' literature. While conversational in style it demands the reader's full attention, which is readily engaged by the author's very readable prose. Some of the vocabulary might be a little beyond the average reader, though Moody usually defines his terminology.

This reviewer would have welcomed a few more details in the attribution of sources. Many of the quotations are from *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* published by Yale University Press. Readers without access to that anthology will have difficulty tracking down the relevant work of Edwards, as the titles are not always noted. The bibliography is a disappointment, listing the twenty-three volumes of the Yale edition of Edwards' works and only eleven other books, an incredible understatement of available titles.

These minor negatives aside, this is a valuable addition to the now-extensive Edwards scholarship. It is pastorally helpful and will be read with profit by many in the church. It is highly recommended.

*Robert E. Davis, First Congregational Church of Millers Falls,  
Massachusetts*

## **Get a Grip on Mission: The Challenge of a Changing World**

Martin Goldsmith

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2006; 240 pp., £9.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741267

Martin Goldsmith has poured his considerable experience into a very informative, interesting and readable contribution to mission literature. *Get a Grip on Mission* is essentially a practical book. Its chief concern is to arouse awareness of the need for the church not only to engage in mission, but to recognise that in order to do so she must learn to adapt to an ever-changing and cross-cultural world.

Among the many helpful issues tackled in this book are those of globalization, pluralism, urbanization and the increased mobility of large swathes of the world's population. In these areas there are many well-illustrated insights. The author is correct to stress that involvement in mission is not the prerogative of a specialised few, but the concern of the entire body of Christ. Furthermore, though not as peculiar a problem to our age as we like to think, the author properly identifies the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as the only way back to God as a major obstacle in reaching those living in a post-modern world. Nevertheless, he also wants the church to recognise that great opportunities still exist for missionary endeavour.

Sadly, for all the author's good intentions, there are a number of areas in his general outlook and approach which ought to be challenged. I will limit my observations to a consideration of three of these. First, in my view it is a mistake to define mission simply in terms of everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do (John 20:21). Despite stated intentions to the contrary, the tendency of this increasingly popular approach is to make evangelism and church-planting simply one of a number of equally competing responsibilities for the church in the world. In practice this often results in humanitarian, political and ecological issues assuming priority. It is disappointing that we rarely find mission commentators these days asserting that a necessary distinction ought to exist between those responsibilities which are the normal province of the church and those which primarily belong to the Christian as an individual.

Secondly, somewhat more disturbing is the author's tendency to regard non-evangelical viewpoints as secondary to the greater task of mission. Although he regularly calls for 'discernment', his minimalist requirement for cooperation in mission ('faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross and resurrection', p. 147) enables him to play down differences which ought to form a barrier to cooperation. For example, although

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox groupings may sometimes be seen as ‘in need of the reviving work of the Holy Spirit’ (p. 142), he does not seem to consider there are even more fundamental issues that divide us. Indeed, he is happy to use the word ‘great’ to describe Vatican II and its essentially ‘liberal’ deliberations (p. 150).

Thirdly, although as an evangelical the author is constantly reminding us of the necessity to place all things under the authority of the Bible (including cultural considerations), I am not convinced that he actually does this. Time and again, and despite his own warnings to the contrary, the driving consideration in his conclusions appears to be more pragmatic than biblical.

Notwithstanding these general reservations, I would not wish for these criticisms to detract from the author’s central concern. It is imperative that all Christians everywhere alert themselves to the great need to advance the course of the gospel. Clearly recognising the peculiarities and opportunities of the days in which we live, we must also retain a firm grip on the biblical principles which informed and guided former generations.

*Daniel Webber, European Missionary Fellowship, Welwyn,  
Hertfordshire*

## **John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist**

(American Reformed Biographies: 2)

D. G. Hart

P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2005; 263 pp., £13.95; ISBN-10: 0875526624; ISBN-13: 9780875526621

When Darryl Hart declares that ‘John Williamson Nevin should matter to American Presbyterians and Reformed Christians more than he does’ (p. 17), the tone of the most recent biography of the nineteenth-century Mercersburg theologian is set. *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* is both a solid intellectual biography and a provocative endorsement of Nevin’s sacramental ecclesiology and critique of evangelicalism as warranting renewed attention within Reformed circles.

Biographical details of Nevin’s long life (1803-1886) are prefixed by a lucid survey of the American colonial and post-colonial process whereby historic Protestantism was democratized and ‘Americanized’ into evangelicalism through political rhetoric and religious revival. This trading of altar for anxious bench, catechism for conversion, in much American Protestantism unseated the Reformation’s liturgical practices, confessional theology, respect for ecclesial hierarchy, and esteem for the church as a visible means of grace. It is this altered theological landscape that provides the locus of Nevin’s career: subsequent chapters trace his

Scottish-Irish Presbyterian upbringing; his college 'conversion' which, argues Hart, set him on a future collision course with evangelicalism; his Princeton education under Charles Hodge; his teaching career at the Mercersberg, Pennsylvania seminary of the German Reformed Church, and collaboration with Phillip Schaff.

The weight of *John Williamson Nevin* is devoted to Nevin's impressive theological contributions. Inspired by German idealism and the historical consciousness of the Romantic movement, Nevin attacked evangelicalism's conversion gimmicks as excessively subjective and corrosive to proper Christian nurture (*The Anxious Bench*), Puritan departures from Calvin's eucharistic teaching (*The Mystical Presence*), and ecclesiastical voluntarism which undermined the one catholic and apostolic church (*The Anti-Christ*). Nevin's historical sensitivity and theological convictions found expression later in life through his chairmanship overseeing a revised liturgy for the American German Reformed Church.

Hart is to be commended for a thorough perusal of primary-source church periodicals which detail the controversial effects of Nevin's opinions and liturgical suggestions; further, he considers reviews buried in the *Mercersberg Review* which indicate Nevin's reading material and, more importantly, disclose the depth of his agonized wrestling over the nature of the church, a struggle which sent him back behind the Reformers to the Fathers and, indeed, almost to Rome. Hart considers Nevin's various theological efforts as serving an overarching aim of countering evangelicalism's democratic and subjective religion with an organic concept of the church as the continuing incarnation of Christ in history and, therefore, the means of salvation. Against prevailing interpretations of Nevin as a liberalizing or romanticizing figure, Hart reads him as a paleo-Calvinist who condemned evangelicalism as aberrant Protestantism because its worship and mental habits effectively denied its supernatural origins and organic nature as the body of Christ.

A concluding assertion that Nevin's critique of revivalism might help historians assess the 'crisis' of the Protestant church in the nineteenth-century according to theological rather than pragmatic criteria, thus finding root earlier with Edwards and the Great Awakening rather than later in Darwinism or biblical criticism, is extremely challenging. Unfortunately, this maverick case is made by side-stepping, rather than refuting, prevailing interpretations. Richard Wentz's recent assessment of Nevin is never engaged, nor are the many valuations of Nevin as an American conduit for German idealism and romanticism adequately addressed. Instead, Hart's interpretation forces readers into two choices, the first of which is obvious in the title of the opening chapter, 'Romantic or Reformed?'

But the *either* Reformed *or* romantic grid seems artificial: it neglects Nevin's creative reworking of selected elements of Reformation-era Protestantism, his considerable debt to philosophical idealism and mid-century German theology, and renders him a sort of *deutschen* Old Side Presbyterian. The second choice that Hart (formerly of Westminster Seminary) implies Nevin as posing, is between 'evangelical' and 'Reformed' as incompatible forms of Protestantism. This more significant choice seems to me to depend on the validity of the first question – that Nevin was not romantic but Reformed – but more so upon ecclesiological presuppositions regarding the historical contextuality of the church and its missional responsibility with which many evangelical and Reformed Christians will not agree. That *John Williamson Nevin* is clearly written and free of academic jargon means that laypersons and scholars alike will be able to consider Hart's interpretation of this challenging figure.

*Todd Statham, McGill University, Quebec*

### **Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the Francophone 'Reveil' 1816-1849**

Kenneth J. Stewart

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2006; 281 pp., £19.99; ISBN-13: 9781842273920

About the same time that the Napoleonic Empire collapsed with the defeat of its ruler in 1815, a remarkable revival of Christian fervour and evangelistic endeavours occurred which was especially pronounced in French-speaking areas of Europe. This phenomenon comprises the basis of Kenneth Stewart's careful examination of the *reveil*, especially with regard to its connections with and influences upon the Evangelical movement in the British Isles.

Stewart, a professor of theology at Covenant College in Georgia, has in this work demonstrated great thoroughness in research, as the massive documentation and extensive bibliography attest. This book is a revised and updated version of the author's doctoral dissertation in which the author was scrupulously careful to support his assertions and conclusions with an impressive array of evidences. This feature could be both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength if the author intended the book for professional historians and theologians, but a weakness if he wanted to interest intelligent general readers. In either case, appreciation for Stewart's contribution will require patient reading and frequent reference to the copious footnotes.

In the judgment of this author, the revival which began in Switzerland and France was not due primarily to influences coming from British

evangelistic efforts after the Napoleonic Wars, but was the result of the Holy Spirit's work on the continent, a work to which some Britons eventually contributed and which many of them supported, even with financial donations and occasional preaching missions. Stewart is quick to give all due credit to such British efforts as well as to the encouragement from Moravians in Germany.

After a survey of spiritual conditions in England during the eighteenth century, Professor Stewart concluded that Reformed authors of the preceding two centuries continued to exert much influence upon eighteenth-century Protestants, but that the reading of Calvin's own works was not as common or influential as the use of others such as Turretin, Ames, Baxter, Gill, and others. One might wonder why Stewart regards the doctrine of particular redemption as 'restrictive to the free preaching of the gospel' (p. 13), especially since this widely-held conviction did not deter the zealous mission work of both British and continental evangelists during the period under study.

One of the most valuable features of this study is the substantial coverage of selected evangelical leaders who brought intense fervour and scholarly competence into the service of the *revail*. There are informative accounts of J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, Cesar Malan, Louis Gaussen, as well as an exciting description of the work Robert Haldane conducted in Switzerland, a ministry which this author does not consider altogether admirable. He criticized Haldane for being poorly informed about the actual condition of the state church in Geneva and therefore acting in a prejudiced manner in his relations with Reformed clerics who, while within that body, had not departed from the historic confessions of that church. Stewart displays a dislike for Christians he has denominated 'separatists and restorationists', which is a rather odd disdain, since it comes from one at a college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America, a body which separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1973 as a protest against the prevailing liberal theology in the older denomination. Stewart is, at least by implication, not convinced the state churches in Switzerland were in a state of irretrievable apostasy, yet he described policies of repression some of those bodies employed in their efforts to thwart the work of independent preachers critical of the religious establishment. The brutality with which state authorities attempted to repress religious dissent, which efforts church leaders approved and encouraged, would seem to justify the posture of orthodox believers who could not, without seriously compromising their faith, remain within the churches established by law. The free churches which developed in connection with the *revail* did far more than the older state bodies to promote

the resurgence of the Reformed faith and the vigorous evangelism which attended it.

Despite some dubious interpretations, this book is a compendium of factual information about a very important period in church history, an example of thorough research and clear writing. Although is not light or devotional reading, the time required to comprehend it will be a fine investment, especially for serious students of modern church history and theology.

*James Edward McGoldrick, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, USA*

### **Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square**

Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (eds)

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2005; 167 pp., £13.99; ISBN-10: 0664227503; ISBN-13: 9780664227500

In this volume, fourteen members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary write on the nature, necessity and practice of lament. The essays are grouped under three headings, 'Reclaiming Lament in Christian Prayer and Proclamation'; 'Loss and Lament, Human and Divine'; and 'Reclaiming the Public Voice of Lament'. A concluding essay follows these on the theme of lament and grief, expressed as a tapestry of poetry and theological reflection.

Brown and Miller indicate that the essays arise out of the conviction shared by the contributors 'that lament, particularly biblical lament, provides the church with a rhetoric for prayer and reflection that befits these volatile times, a rhetoric that mourns loss, examines complicity in evil, cries for divine help, and sings and prays with hope' (p. xix). The 'shared conviction' is evident, but this does not translate into a strong internal coherence. The essays cover a diverse range of topics, and the essayists themselves are free to acknowledge their own divergence from other contributors. One of the clearest examples of this occurs in Miller's own essay 'Heaven's Prisoners: The Lament as Christian Prayer', which argues that the Psalms of lament (and other prayers for help) are private utterances, not designed for use in public worship. While recognising that this claim 'is somewhat against the grain of much contemporary thinking, including the voices of others in this volume' (p. 18), the contradiction is left to stand, and thus acts as a helpful counterweight to some of the more strident voices regarding the public nature of lamentation and its implications for liturgy, preaching and ecclesiastical practice.



The essays form a divergent set of reflections on the general theme. Some of the essays address issues that are deeply controversial (e.g. Robert Dykstra's discussion of exhibitionism, homoeroticism, love and desire in relation to God's self-disclosure and the rending of the Temple curtain). Others address the matter of lament from the perspective of suffering minorities (e.g. Luis Rivera-Pagán's 'Woes of Captive Women: From Lament to Defiance in Times of War') and others address the matter of grief and lament, sometimes from tangential angles (e.g. Donald Capps' 'Nervous Laughter: Lament, Death Anxiety and Humor').

With one or two exceptions, the essays consistently adopt an approach to the biblical text that questions traditional assumptions about its meaning and implications. For example, William Stacy Johnson's 'Jesus' Cry, God's Cry and Ours', takes up what has commonly been understood as our Lord's cry of dereliction on the cross, and argues (unconvincingly, in my view) that this was not a cry of abandonment at all, but a cry of solidarity with the human race in which he knew God's presence with him. The cross was, in this view, no place of propitiation, but of God's patient suffering with us.

One of the disappointing features of the book is the lack of sustained engagement with the text of Scripture itself. In many of the essays, the Scriptures become one voice to be heard along with many others. One of the implications of this is that the issues that give rise to lament in the biblical drama fail to be treated with proper balance. For example, one of the key biblical themes connected to lament in the Bible is the reality of human sin. One's personal sin and God's response to it in holy wrath is often a cause of the lament, as is the sin of a nation/people group (e.g. Psalm 38; the book of Lamentations respectively), but the biblical connection between sin, judgement, and misery is a theme almost wholly missing from these essays.

This is not to say that I read the book without profit. I found a number of helpful insights, and I was stimulated to go back to Scripture itself to examine many of the interpretations. On balance, however, the essays are too divergent to be truly satisfying, and leave too many areas of biblical theology behind in their quest for contemporary engagement.

*Noel Due, Coromandel Baptist Church, South Australia*

## **He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith**

Douglas McCready

IVP/Apollos, Leicester, 2005; 349 pp., £16.99; ISBN-10: 1844741044; ISBN-13: 9781844741045

This book will strengthen your faith that Jesus Christ is unique and that none other than a preexistent God could be our Saviour. While there is nothing sensational or revolutionary in terms of theological insights, McCready makes a good job of proving that Christ did preexist. His main argument is that Christ is God and therefore he preexisted. McCready demonstrates the necessity of our Saviour having to be God, and also man, otherwise he could not save humanity. The book covers the whole spectrum of critics from the early church to the present day.

McCready does not shy away from the post-modern arguments of present day skeptics. As everyone comes to the Scriptures with his or her own preconceived ideas, even on preexistence, McCready shows how the early church received the doctrine because the evidence was plain. He shows how those who first encountered the doctrine had to accept the evidence on its own credentials. Modern skepticism comes, not from new evidence which has arisen, but from a changed outlook towards Scripture. That outlook comes from a new worldview and its definition of reality. One popular view which McCready constantly exposes as false, is the 'ideal preexistence' of Christ. This view means Christ existed in the mind of God prior to the incarnation, but did not exist personally prior to that same incarnation.

The six main challenges to the traditional preexistence of Christ are dealt with. These challenges are the exegetical, presuppositional, philosophical and ecumenical, theological and ecumenical, Christ's deity at the expense of his humanity, and finally the adoptionist challenge. McCready argues from the New Testament witness, Paul's writings, other New Testament writings, John's writings, the Jewish and Hellenistic background, and Postapostolic developments. He refers much to the doctrine of the Trinity. McCready reminds us of an important point which is relevant for today: 'Too many conservative Christians, even today, describe Jesus simply (and incorrectly) as God, and in doing so they fail to realize that the early defenders of orthodoxy fought as hard to defend Christ's humanity as they did his deity. Seeking to defend Christ's real humanity against its absorption into an utterly divine Christ, Schleiermacher for all intents and purposes gave up Christ's deity.'

McCready's evangelical concern comes through often. He brings his arguments to bear upon our need of a Saviour and how this doctrine

brings great comfort. 'Because Jesus is the preexistent Son, we can be confident God is not too busy for us, unconcerned about us, or ignorant of what we face daily. Instead, we know God loves us, values us, and has acted personally and decisively to restore our broken relationship with him.' This doctrine tells us about a God who came himself to save us, instead of sending an emissary and is thus a God who really loves us. It is a doctrine which should be relevant to a world lost in its search for meaning and happiness.

In reply to the modern ethical charge that a God who inflicts punishment on an innocent victim to satisfy his anger is not a God worth having, McCready responds by saying it was God himself who chose who should suffer. And he chose himself as the victim – it was God himself who suffered and paid the price of sin. 'Substitutionary atonement may be a horrible doctrine, but its horror lies in the human sin that made it necessary, not because God is a mean, unfeeling deity who condemns the innocent to death.'

This book strengthens faith, but is not bedtime reading. One needs to be fully awake and able to concentrate on the various arguments.

*Donald C. Macaskill, Associated Presbyterian Churches, Dundee*

## **Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church**

E. A. Livingstone (ed.)

Oxford University Press, revised 2nd edition, Oxford, 2006; xi+655 pp., £11.99; ISBN-10: 019861442X; ISBN-13: 9780198614425

The first edition of this book was based on the second edition of F. L. Cross (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (published in 1974). The latest version of the *Concise Dictionary* depends primarily on the revised third edition of the parent volume published in 2005. This abridged work contains over 5,000 condensed and accessible entries. It provides coverage of theology, patristic scholarship, churches and denominations, the church calendar and organisation, and the Bible, as well as entries on theologians, philosophers, painters, musicians, and writers of religious works.

The aim of this book is to provide basic information in an accessible form for those who may not need, or who cannot afford the more substantial edition. For example, fuller information and books for further information will not be provided in the *Concise Dictionary*, but will be found in the corresponding article in the larger volume. Biblical quotations are taken from the Authorised Version in the absence of a consensus regarding the best modern translation.

The updated information includes recent changes in various Christian denominations since the last edition. For example, the installation of Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 is a necessary updating of the information on the papal office. However, this updating is not consistent in every place. For example, the article on Baptists ought to have mentioned the departure of the Southern Baptist Convention (USA) from the Baptist World Alliance, a decision taken in June 2004. The Evangelical Alliance and Evangelicalism in general merited larger entries than have been allocated to them. The former organisation surely deserved more than a reference to its foundation in 1846 and union with a similar American agency to form a World Evangelical Fellowship in 1951.

The majority of the article on 'Evangelicalism' focuses on British Anglicans, yet there is no reference to the increasing importance of African, especially Nigerian, Evangelical Anglicans, within that communion, though the developments in the Episcopal Church in the USA are updated to 2003. The article on Presbyterianism may be accurate in what it states, but was it necessary to state that 'most Presbyterians now recognise that the Early Church had Episcopal and congregational as well as Presbyterian elements'? The entry on Pentecostalism appears to subsume this tradition under the charismatic movement in the mainline denominations after the 1960s, but even in the briefest of entries on the charismatic renewal movement more space is given to its entry into the Roman Catholic Church. The world-wide spread of Pentecostalism in recent decades and the emergence of 'New/House Churches', over the last forty years, not just in the United Kingdom, surely was entitled to some acknowledgement even if only in the entry on the charismatic movement.

Issue could also be taken with some other entries. For example, in the article on Christianity in Burma, a country where the horrific slaughter and persecution of Christians and ethnic minorities by the military government of that country is very widely acknowledged, to state that: 'Reports of recent persecution of Christians are denied by the government' is an extremely weak description of what is happening in that country. Despite these criticisms the book is recommended and the information provided broadly accurate; its failings are in the area of omissions and balance of Christian perspectives.

*Brian Talbot, Broughty Ferry Baptist Church*

## Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views

Myron B. Penner, (ed.)

Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, 2005; 240 pp., £12.99; ISBN-10: 1587431084

For about two decades, evangelicals have pondered and debated what approach they should take toward postmodernism. While many have conflated postmodern *culture* (or postmodernity) with postmodern *philosophy* (or postmodernism), this academically-oriented book sticks almost entirely to the philosophy of postmodernism.

*Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* collects six perspectives on postmodernism and its relationship to Christian thought. Three contributors are enthusiastic supporters of postmodernism (James K. A. Smith, Merold Westphal, and John Franke), two are strong critics of postmodernism (R. Douglas Geivett and R. Scott Smith), and one is situated somewhere between both groups (Kevin Vanhoozer). Vanhoozer, who is more closely aligned with the critics than the enthusiasts, responds to all the other contributors, while the other exchanges consist of mostly J. Smith, Franke, and Westphal arguing against Geivett and R. Smith. (Geivett, R. Smith, J. Smith, and Westphal are philosophers. Vanhoozer and Franke are theologians. Vanhoozer evinces more philosophical acumen than Franke, who stumbles when articulating philosophical arguments, particularly concerning foundationalism, as Geivett and R. Smith note.)

Including this many authors, all of whom are called to respond to the other authors, makes for a bit of a jumble. This is a debate book with too many voices. Had there been only two or three contributors, one pro-postmodernist, one anti-postmodernist, and perhaps someone in the middle, it might have pushed further into the issues.

Given the plethora of perspectives, it is impossible to do justice to the arguments of each author. One can, however, chart two essential epistemological items of debate: realism and foundationalism. Geivett and R. Smith are realists in epistemology. They argue that language refers to and (when true) corresponds to an extra-linguistic realm through propositions. Both take this feature of language (there are, of course, other features) to be non-negotiable for the Christian worldview and its rational defence (I have defended these claims as well in *Truth Decay*). They also defend a modest foundationalism: the theory that our knowledge is divided between basic (non-inferential) beliefs and those derived from them. Postmodern thought in its many forms is non-realist (or anti-realist) and non-foundationalist in epistemology.

Geivett and R. Smith focus like laser beams on epistemology, carefully defending their own account of knowledge and critiquing those who

oppose it. J. Smith, Westphal, and Franke accuse them of hitching Christianity to a defective modernist program and claiming a hubristic ‘God’s eye’ view of the world that is impossible for finite, fallen mortals. We must rather, they claim, emphasize our contextual and enculturated situation and our immersion in language. Westphal, in an intemperate rhetorical flourish, even accuses Geivett of being like the Pharisee who ‘justified himself’ before God instead of humbly admitting his sin (p. 239). Of course, trying to justify a proposition about God intellectually is a far cry from trying to justify oneself morally before a holy God.

To my mind, the pro-postmodernists fail to demonstrate the compatibility of postmodernism with Christianity. This is largely because they fail to undermine realism or foundationalism. The claim that one must be postmodern to be epistemically humble is a *non sequitur*. Even realist/foundationalists admit the limits of knowledge and the defeasibility of many of their beliefs. Moreover, the postmodern perspective endangers knowledge itself, collapsing language and meaning into cultural contexts, thus rendering objective truth unattainable. The pro-postmodernists’ claims to the contrary are unconvincing.

Despite my philosophical agreement with the two strongest critics of postmodernism, I must state that the rest of the contributors are able exponents of their respective viewpoints. A careful reader of this volume, despite its overabundance of contributors and the ensuing over-stimulation, will come away with a solid acquaintance with the core issues at stake in this debate. One hopes he or she will also come away with a measure of wisdom as well.

*Douglas Groothuis, Denver Seminary, USA*

## **The Holy Spirit**

Mateen Ellass

Geneva Press, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 2005; 94 pp., £8.99; ISBN-10: 0664501370; ISBN-13: 9780664501372

‘This series enables readers to learn about contemporary theology in ways that are clear, enjoyable, and meaningful...’. This book does more or less exactly what it says on the cover.

The book has many strengths. It is concise at ninety-one pages (eight chapters) and readable. Aimed at the ‘layman’, it uses bright, contemporary illustrations and anecdotes to carry home its biblical theology. The language is up-to-date: ‘The “church-goers” of his day recognized with excitement that Jesus brought some new power to the table.’ And in a foreword, Ellass explains why he resists contemporary pressure to ‘de-gender’.

Chapter one sets forth the writer's wish to redefine 'spirituality', amongst Christians at least, in terms of the work of the biblical Holy Spirit: 'even among God's people the link between holy and Spirit has been severed in day to day life'.

Chapter two, 'Playing Twenty Questions', seeks to 'clarify the nature of the Holy Spirit'. The author works quickly (though not inadequately given the introductory nature of the book) through key biblical and confessional material.

'Getting Tuned In' (chapter three) introduces the critical connection of Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit, who is 'God's Internet technology, the enchanting connection who makes the incarnate, and now glorified, Jesus accessible to all who desire to become apprentices of the kingdom of God'.

Chapter four, 'The People of the Spirit', looks at the work of the Spirit in and for the church. It avoids a merely individualistic view of the Spirit's influence.

'Spirit-filled Worship' (chapter 5) begins with an evaluation of today's 'worship wars'. Ellass takes a middle ground between 'Reformed soberness' and 'charismatic disorder': 'When our services reflect a business-as-usual attitude, we can be sure that our hearts or minds, or both, have derailed somewhere. On the other hand, excitement does not necessarily mean jumping up and down...'. The chapter does not get entirely 'hung up' on this one issue, however, as Ellass proceeds to discuss the critical role of the Spirit in preaching and the sacraments. Prayer, consequently, features large.

Chapter six, 'The Gift that Keeps on Giving', enters another controversial area: spiritual gifts. Some will feel that Ellass is here more than a little dismissive of the view that the 'supernatural' gifts have ceased. This Ellass puts down 'at least partly' to post-Enlightenment rationalism – a little hard on Calvin *et al.* He does not discuss the other possible reasons for this view. However, Ellass is careful to keep all the gifts under the control of love, order and, of course, the sovereignty of the Spirit to distribute as he pleases.

Chapter seven moves into 'safer' territory with the title 'Fruitful Lives' and a discussion of the lifestyle qualities produced by the Spirit – 'the fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22, 23). How does the fruit grow? Ellass draws on C. S. Lewis's analogy: 'the good infection'. 'For those "infected" with the Spirit, their actions and attitudes begin to show the symptoms of his presence.' This is not, however, pure passivism, but: 'The Scriptures make clear time and again that God calls us to respond to his overtures of love, to exercise our wills to walk by faith, to act in the world on the basis of our trust in the divine promises found in the Bible, to open ourselves to

the life of Christ so that every day, every hour, every moment, we think, intend, dream, hope, speak, act, surrender to the Father, with the mind of Christ.' (Not dissimilar to J. I. Packer's 'God-dependent effort' as key to Christian living.)

The final chapter is entitled 'Furrows in the Heart' – a look at 'means of grace' employed by the Holy Spirit to channel his transforming grace into renewed hearts. The scope of this chapter is impressive. Ellass discusses six 'disciplines of abstinence' – fasting, simplicity, silence, solitude, chastity, Sabbath-keeping – then eight 'disciplines of engagement' (two more positives!) – Sabbath-keeping (again), worship, prayer, study, meditation, confession, fellowship, service. As promised on the cover, this chapter is particularly 'enjoyable' and 'meaningful'. Examples: 'Many of us have... discovered that the more we possess, the more we tend to be possessed' (simplify!); 'In confession of sin... we not only recognize our wrong, but seek the grace of God and the accountability of the community to keep us from falling again into the same traps.'

All in all, Ellass has provided a sound and thought-provoking introduction that I would have little trouble in recommending.

*Oliver Rice, Bow Baptist Church, London*

## **A Clear and Present Word. The Clarity of Scripture**

Mark D. Thompson

Apollos, Downers Grove, 2006; 196 pp., £12.99; ISBN-10: 083082622X; ISBN-13: 9780830826223

This is the 21st book in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series and in it the author seeks to defend the biblical doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, which Thompson defines as 'that quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it by faith'.

In the opening chapter, Thompson outlines the traditional objections to the doctrine, referring back, in general terms, to the time of the Reformation, and in doing so he prepares the reader to have these objections thoroughly, systematically and very clearly addressed throughout the remainder of the book. Also in the opening chapter, Thompson addresses the doctrine in the contemporary light and context of the postmodern age in a section entitled, 'Postmodern Philosophy: Radically questioning epistemological certainty'. Interestingly, Thompson claims that whilst postmodernism has 'generated a series of fresh challenges' to the doctrine, in many respects it has merely 'amplified the protests of the past'. In other words, there may well be nothing very new under the sun when it comes to arguments against this doctrine.



Thompson launches his description and defence of the doctrine by claiming that with God as the effective communicator, the clarity of Scripture must be guaranteed. He claims that 'if God chooses to speak to us personally, in his Son and through those whom he commissioned and enabled to write his words for us, then it is no transgression of his majesty to take him at his word'. He then proceeds to survey and unpack the biblical texts from the Old and the New Testament which assert the veracity of the doctrine. Thompson addresses the objection that Scripture acknowledges its own difficulty in places, e.g. the meaning of parables being hidden (Mark 4) and the Ethiopian eunuch requiring Philip to interpret the meaning of a text (Acts 8:30-31). He proposes that 'clarity is not the same as uniform simplicity or even transparency' and in saying so explains why the so-called problem texts are actually more to do with the individual than with the text of Scripture.

Thompson devotes the final chapter to reviewing in fuller detail the arguments for and against the clarity of Scripture which took place at the time of the Reformation (1520s) and later (1580s). Here Thompson argues that what formed the substance of these debates has not changed in principle from then to the present day debates on the issue. He outlines Erasmus's challenge against the doctrine which Luther rebutted in the mid-1520s, then describes how in 1586, Robert Belarmino, Professor of Controversial Theology, again challenged the doctrine, and was responded to by many Protestant scholars, of which the most significant was the response of William Whitaker, a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in 1588. Much of the material in this section was novel to the reviewer, particularly in relation to the debate which took place in the latter part of the 16th century. This I found to be most enlightening and informative.

One important pastoral issue regarding the doctrine for today, which was also a concern on the part of Whitaker as a defender of the doctrine, is that Scripture's clarity (or lack of it) could be used to dissuade Christians from private reading and study of the Bible.

This book was a pleasure to read and served to reinforce the belief in the clarity of Scripture. The historical background material relating to the Reformation was especially helpful. The book was well referenced in terms of a Scripture index and an author index, and uses footnotes in a helpful and moderate manner.

*Colin L. Macleod, Leith Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh*

## **Revelation and the Spirit: A Comparative Study of the Relationship between the Doctrine of Revelation and Pneumatology in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel and of Wolfhart Pannenberg**

Graham J. Watts

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005; 230 pp., £24.99; ISBN-10: 1842271040; ISBN-13: 9781842271049

In this work Watts explores the relationship between revelation and pneumatology by comparing the theology of two apologetically-minded Lutheran theologians, Eberhard Jüngel and Wolfhart Pannenberg, in the context of the postmodern rejection of metanarrative and truth. He aims to 1) provide a theological explanation of truth, 2) clarify the language of revelation and the Spirit, and 3) construct a trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit emphasizing participation. The comparison of Jüngel and Pannenberg proves interesting and insightful, as their unique contributions are highlighted by their commonalities: both are influenced by Barth's christocentric understanding of revelation – being as becoming, existence as act/event, and God's presence-in-absence – yet they also share an apologetic bent largely alien to Barth. Jüngel's theology serves as an apology to philosophical atheism, while Pannenberg directs his apology to the scientific academy.

In attempting to answer philosophical atheism, Jüngel expounds an existential, cross-centered theology emphasizing the death of God, the effect of the resurrection, and the ontological primacy of possibility over actuality. In response to the scientific community, Pannenberg offers a scientific theology focusing on the historical actuality of the resurrection, the death of the Son, and the future as determinative of being. Watts rounds out this comparison by drawing ably on notable contemporaries such as Moltmann and Jenson, and influential forerunners, especially Luther and Barth.

Watts concludes that, although Jüngel and Pannenberg's theologies furnish rich insights and provide fertile ground for development, their pneumatologies are ultimately deficient. Jüngel's emphasis on the interruptive nature of the Spirit's activity is restrictive, Pannenberg's emphasis on the idea of the Infinite does not mesh well with the biblical witness, and both tend to conflate the person of the Holy Spirit and God's spiritual being. As a corrective to these deficient pneumatologies, Watts suggests an eschatologically-grounded pneumatology emphasizing communion. He proposes a plan for developing a fully trinitarian, practical pneumatology of doxological and semantic participation in Christ, in harmony with the doctrine of creation, and attentive to the prophetic public field of

force created by the Spirit by drawing on the thought of Alan Torrance, Michael Welker, and Ingolf Dalferth. This plan, however, is no more than a sketch, a direction in which the next step should be taken.

This work shines as a comparison of the theology of Jüngel and Pannenberg and as an exploration of the correlation of revelation and pneumatology in recent theology. Although this work originated as a doctoral thesis and Watts does not write at the introductory level, this exploration results in a broad introduction to Jüngel and Pannenberg. Those unfamiliar with their theology but interested in the topic ought not to be deterred, though the Jüngel material is quite dense. The lack of a clear exposition of his eschatological and trinitarian evaluative criteria mars Watts's comparative and constructive effort. In particular, while Watts holds the full personhood of the Holy Spirit to be a *sine qua non*, his definition of divine personhood remains ambiguous. The same is true of his conception of the eschaton, which is broad enough for both Jüngel's cross-centered and Pannenberg's future-oriented eschatology. Similarly, the emphasis on God's being as event seems to require some nuancing of the 'three persons, one substance' formula. Overall, the work is an excellent comparative study, though with errata throughout and a few missing or misattributed citations.

*Luke Ben Tallon, University of St Andrews*

### **Caspar Schwenckfeld: Eight Writings on Christian Beliefs**

H. H. Drake Williams III (ed.)

Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2006; 183 pp., \$20.50; ISBN-10: 1894710649

This small book comprises a number of the theological treatises of the minor Protestant Reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561). The most important of his works is entitled: 'A German Theology for God-fearing laity from Christ and the Christian teaching of Godliness'. It was produced at the request of Philip Melancthon, a fellow-Reformer who had complained that Schwenckfeld had not produced a systematic view of his theology. This document written in 1560 was possibly his final major work and was his considered statement of his views.

The second document in this volume is entitled, 'The Confession of our Common Christian Belief'. It was dated from 1542 and sent as part of a larger letter to Dr Johann Kneller from exile in the hope that he might be allowed home to Silesia, if his faith was accepted as orthodox.

The third document, 'Statement on the Unity of God and the Holy Trinity', is undated. It is an affirmation of the Apostles' Creed and a declaration of his acceptance of mainstream Christian belief on this subject.

The fourth document is 'How to study the Scripture', dated 1529. It explained his hermeneutical principles with respect to the Old and the New Testaments.

The next document is a summary of his 'Faith and Confession of the Lord Jesus Christ', a summary of his teaching on the person of Jesus Christ. 'Confession of the Beliefs of Caspar Schwenckfeld' is a resumé of his teaching sent in 1545 to Herzog Christoph of Württemberg, to rebut false claims regarding this Reformer's views on the major doctrines of the faith. The seventh document is 'A Discourse on Freedom of Religion, Christian Doctrine, Judgement and Faith'. This work was written in 1561, the last year of his life. It indicates the open-ended nature of his thinking and emphasized that Christians ought never to be bound by creeds or confessions of faith; fidelity to the Scriptures was paramount.

The eighth document is 'What, Who or Where the true Christian Church is'. It provided a brief illustration of how Schwenckfeld viewed the Bible and the early Christian creeds and applied them to his understanding of the Christian church. Its dating is unclear, possibly 1530. This volume also reproduces the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the statement on Jesus Christ from the Council of Chalcedon. It concludes with a brief history of the interpretation of Schwenckfeld's thought by theologians in the twentieth century.

The production of this book, a compilation of the key writings of this Reformer, translated into English, was intended to provide greater understanding of the central points of the thought of Schwenckfeld and ultimately to encourage 'more Confessors of the Glory of Christ', to use a phrase from his vocabulary. It was acknowledged by the compilers of this volume that interpreters of his thought in the last century had varied opinions and did not interact with each other as could have been expected. They are hoping that this work will assist future theologians and historians gain a clearer understanding of Schwenckfeld's views and also to stimulate further interest in a Reformer whom they believe has not received the attention that could have been expected. This book is clearly laid out with appropriate endnotes and index. It is easy to read and accessible for readers who would not count themselves Reformation specialists. Anyone interested in finding out more about the theological views of Caspar Schwenckfeld would find this work a good place to begin their investigations.

*Brian Talbot, Broughty Ferry Baptist Church*

## **Confessing our Hope: Essays Celebrating the Life and Ministry of Morton H. Smith**

J. A. Pipa, Jr and C. N. Willborn (eds)

Southern Presbyterian Press, Taylors, South Carolina, 2004; ix+328 pp., \$24.00; ISBN-10: 1931639043

This collection of essays is an enriching and illuminating summary of the Southern Presbyterian theological tradition in the United States. It was compiled to mark the eightieth birthday of Morton H. Smith, whose own earlier work on the Southern Presbyterian tradition introduced many of us to such luminaries as Dabney, Girardeau and Thornwell.

Smith was stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church of America for fifteen years as one of the founders of Reformed Theological Seminary. In his ninth decade he is still teaching theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina, with which he has been associated since its inception in 1987.

A native of Virginia, Smith is described in Pipa's biographical introduction as a bridge between the faith of the nineteenth century theological giants and the present generation. Pipa describes Smith's theology as exegetical, Reformed, evangelical and experiential. That helpfully serves as a blueprint for the nature of the collections in this volume.

In addition to the biographical summary there are eleven essays in this volume. Of these, nine deal with historical themes, while two deal with ecclesiastical themes. The church topics are the diaconate and the role of women. Of these only the latter is exegetical, as George W. Knight III defends male headship and the differing roles for men and women in the church. C. N. Willborn's discussion of the diaconate is within the context of the southern ecclesiastical tradition.

Ligon Duncan discusses Irenaeus on the covenant, demonstrating that federalism was an early development in theological reflection. One could not do better than read this essay as a fine introduction to patristic literature. Jerry Crick introduces us to Anselm in an essay on Anselm's doctrine of satisfaction, while Ian Hamilton discusses Amyraldianism, and is at pains to point out that Amyraldianism is no modified Calvinism.

Discussions which focus specifically on the Southern Presbyterian tradition include David Hall on confessional relaxation, Robert Penny on the Mayhew Mission, examining church-planting and educational ministry among the Choctaw Indians in the early nineteenth century, Mark Hezer on the Scottish influence on Girardeau's philosophy, Douglas Kelly on Dabney, David Calhoun on William Childs Robinson, and Willborn again on 'Southern Presbyterianism: the character of a tradition'.

As with any kind of festschrift, the collection is mixed and a little eclectic. However, they amply convey the interests of the scholar whom they celebrate: a Reformed tradition firmly rooted in Scripture and in patristic literature, a defence of Calvinistic views on the atonement and the application of redemption, and, of course, a high regard for the Southern Presbyterian ethos.

That ethos is not foreign to Scottish Presbyterianism; though forged in different historical contexts, commonalities abound. The romantic view of 'Our Southern Zion' strikes a chord with lovers of Christ's church everywhere. In our day of confessional laxity, confused theology, and shallow piety, we would do well to recover the doctrinal and spiritual emphases of the Southern tradition. This collection would not be a bad place to start.

*Iain D. Campbell, Isle of Lewis*

## **Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology**

John E. Colwell

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005; 284 pp., £13.99; ISBN-10: 1842274147; ISBN-13: 9781842274149

Works on sacramental theology written from a Protestant perspective have been the opposite of plentiful in the period since the release of D. M. Baillie's *The Theology of the Sacraments* (1957). If one were to ask for something written on the subject from a broadly evangelical perspective, the supply of titles would not appreciably increase. One thinks of I. H. Marshall's exegetically-informed *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (1981) and the similar approach seen in C. K. Barrett's *Church Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament* (1985). In the North American context, two recent titles, both leaning more to the side of theological reflection are Leonard Vander Zee's *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (2004) and Gordon T. Smith's *A Holy Meal* (2005). John Colwell's welcome *Promise and Presence* deserves to be seen in connection with the two latter titles, not because of any observable overlap or dependency, but because the works are all responsive to and symptomatic of recent evangelical engagement in what could be called the 'ecumenical theology' project.

In the UK setting in which Colwell has written (Spurgeon's College and the Baptist Union of England and Wales) this ecumenical context has been provided both by the inter-confessional structure of theological study established in the university faculties of theology and by his own denomination's involvement in the 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry' (B.E.M.) project of the World Council of Churches since its inception in

1982. It is the latter influence which, even more than the former, goes some considerable distance to explain the tendency being worked out across the pages of *Promise and Presence*.

I will term this the tendency to sell short one's own particular denominational theological heritage (irrespective of whether that heritage is Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal or Presbyterian) in the hope of appropriating some wider, wiser, more 'catholic' theological expression bearing the stamp of antiquity and permanence. In this respect, John Colwell's wrestling with his subject is a timely case-study of what can become of an evangelical theology (in his case, in the Baptist tradition) when it is reduced to being just another voice in the ecumenical theological discussion. The remarks which follow are not a plea against that theological discussion, but only against the reduction in it of evangelical theology to a mere 'variant'.

The author insists (p. 253) that he has not provided us with a detailed theology of the sacraments in this book. I think him too self-effacing. He has provided us with a stimulating sacramental theology: the question is: 'of which kind?' Given this reviewer's concern (expressed above) about the tendency of B.E.M. to mute the distinctive theological contribution of various theological traditions, the reader might expect that there will now follow a charge that Colwell is on the road to Rome or Antioch. What one finds instead in *Promise and Presence* is that, in interaction with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Methodism and the other voices represented in B.E.M., Colwell has constructed a thoroughly eclectic approach to the sacraments which, while it incorporates a wide range of insights and sympathies drawn from across the ecumenical spectrum, really conforms to the views of no single communion – his own included.

Working out the principle that God is known in this world through mediated action (Jesus Christ, the mediator, being the epitome of this action), Colwell lays out an interesting argument that evangelicalism in its various expressions has generally prized the idea that God is known (in Christ) by immediate, that is direct, divine action. Such an emphasis on immediate knowledge of God as standard can regularly seem to render not only baptism and the Lord's Supper, but also the church and ministry (to give but a few examples) peripheral and even superfluous to the life of the modern Christian; he contends further that Christian life lived out on the principle that knowledge of God is gained immediately entails the taking of a subjectivistic and perilous road.

To his credit, this concern for mediated knowledge of God (commended as offered to us not only through baptism and the Lord's Supper but also through Church, Word, Confirmation, Cleansing, Healing, Confirmation, Ministry, and Marriage – each added 'sacrament' receiving

a chapter) does not lead him to embrace the Roman Catholic error that God's working in the world is 'imprisoned' in these forms of mediation, such that the mere administration of them binds God. Yet, about this interesting proposal, several concerns can be registered.

The first is a biblical concern. To its credit, Colwell's treatment is regularly informed by appeal to biblical and particularly New Testament passages. However, at a deeper level, Colwell has not shown either that our Scriptures contain even a latent theology of the sacraments taken collectively, let alone that his quite elaborate scheme of multi-channelled mediation of knowledge of God is scripturally authentic. As for the first, the only New Testament scripture which even mentions baptism and the Lord's Supper in conjunction with one another is 1 Corinthians 10; a sober reading of this passage would not lead one to believe that Paul was himself there and then building an elaborate theology of the sacraments. This being so, if scriptural warrant is critical, and the biblical material is in short supply, simplicity has much to commend it in sacramental theology.

There is a greater scriptural burden of proof on John Colwell than he seems to have acknowledged in this matter of multiplying rites, calling them sacraments, and building up a theology of mediation. It is not enough to speak of the 'implicit ordaining of each of these ecclesial rites by Jesus' (p. 5). This theology lacks a substantive biblical foundation-laying.

Secondly, the concomitant of Colwell's insistence that in this world, God is known only by mediated means (hence the need for multiplied rites) seems to have the unintended effect of rendering God less accessible under his scheme than the one he aims to displace. If God is, in this world, only available to us, in connection with the gospel, by the media Colwell specifies, then the heavens are relatively closed under this scheme compared to another, which Colwell has rejected from his past exposure to evangelicalism and the charismatic movement.

Here there are two considerations which concern me. For one, it follows from his view that exceptional biblical cases aside (the penitent thief of Luke 23:43, and Paul on the Damascus road in Acts 9), the believers of the New Testament era either had experience of God through these media, or not at all. I cannot see that Christian experiential knowledge of God in the New Testament is so confined to these media as is proposed. Does the account of Lydia's conversion conform to it (Acts 16), or that of the Galatians – who were reminded by Paul that they had received the Spirit by 'hearing with faith' (3:2) or that of the Ephesians, for whom Paul prayed that Christ might 'dwell in their hearts by faith' (3:17)? The emphasis here is not so much on the media employed by the Spirit in reaching the believer as on there being a divine action which engages and engenders



faith. It is significant that Protestant theology has long emphasized that divine regeneration, when narrowly conceived, is itself an immediate act of the Spirit. While he has avoided 'imprisoning' the Spirit in the *ex opere operato* sense, it is not clear that that he has avoided the error entirely. (This is not a plea for the opposite error of an utterly casual relationship between Word, sacrament and divine action.) For another, there are the numerous and persistent reports from the Arab world of sincere men and women who encounter Jesus in dream and vision; Jesus is reported to advise them of a person who will soon speak to them or soon offer them a book. So, unmediated knowledge of God has not vanished from this world. The categories are too tight. Colwell is riding a pendulum, which he hopes will deliver from subjectivism; but at the end of this pendulum swing stands ritualism.

Third, there lingers the difficult question of the relationship of the Word to the sacraments. Historically, Protestant theology has seen the two sacraments, baptism and the Supper, as auxiliary to the preaching of the Word. The grace offered in one is offered in the other, yet the two sacraments stand in a position of dependency on the Word for their meaning and for their proper administration. They are the word of the gospel made visible. In Colwell, this relationship is under new management. The Word is numbered among his multiplied sacraments, but is – in the end – only ranked with them. There is no primacy reserved for the Word, written and preached. Knowledge of God can be gained as truly through the sacrament of healing, or confirmation – apparently – as through the Word. Whatever this is, this is not theological advance. J. I. Packer, describing Thomas Cranmer's sacramental theology in 1964, wisely cautioned against any view 'that awarded more efficacy to the sacraments than to the preaching of the Word'. Colwell ranks all his multiplied sacraments equally, and the danger of doing so seems identical to the one against which Packer cautioned.

Here is an engaging, thought-provoking book based on very wide reading and deep reflection; it is an interesting example of what evangelical theology can absorb (and sadly, jettison) through ecumenical dialogue. That it in some respects disappoints should provide no-one who is eager to advance in understanding sacramental theology with an excuse for shunning it.

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