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SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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

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

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GUEST EDITORIAL

There is little debate that the secularisation of Western society is not wanting and even, it must be admitted, increases seemingly by the year. Philip Jenkins has recently brought this to our attention, stressing that Christianity is migrating south to such an extent that the idea of a white, European (certainly ‘evangelical’) Christian will be as surprising a concept as a ‘Swedish Buddhist’.¹ One need only stand on the corner or walk down the street on a typical Sunday to be persuaded that Jenkins is probably correct. Church buildings sit empty, and most that house a minister are far from full and lively. The beautiful structures built to dominate the skyline with spires that point us to an existence that gives us hope and meaning have become merely historical landmarks or architectural novelties. This cultural condition has presented a huge challenge to ministers and parishioners alike. How do we express the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that they stop and listen? Every minister who takes the calling of God seriously is consistently burdened by this question.

In spite of the pessimistic (or, maybe, realistic) tone there is much for which to be hopeful, and this is where Rutherford House finds its place. It is the aim of the House to enable biblical ministries by ‘ministering to ministers’—both current and future ministers. We want to support churches by providing resources that aid them in answering that all important question of how to communicate the gospel to those around us. Though sometimes his hand of providence may be less obvious than in other parts of the world God is very much at work in the West. The gospel is far from death or hibernation, which is why Rutherford House has renewed its vision for the UK by appointing a new director and setting a course that we pray will help to bring hope and life to a secular society. I am privileged to receive this appointment and look with great anticipation toward the future. To accomplish this vision we have adopted a two-pronged approach that includes the following goals and activities:

First, we want to do everything possible to assist evangelical ministers reach their parishioners and speak to the culture. This will involve seminars, small groups and a pool of resources that address issues such as preaching, theology and culture, developing leadership and shepherding. We would like to see the development of a strong, vibrant network of ministers, united around the gospel for the purpose of strengthening the church. The House, through the work of the director and volunteers, also aims to provide pastoral care to ministers and congregations who have

¹ P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

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ministry needs or are enduring a crisis. We strongly believe that the life of the church and the cause of the gospel can be advanced through these activities.

The second aspect of our renewed vision centres on evangelical academic work, both for the benefit of students and ministers. There is an indissoluble relationship between the academy and the church, and both should be controlled and guided by God's Word. Thus, we wish to engage in academic work that takes seriously God's revelation in Jesus Christ in Scripture and that impacts congregations across the country. This Bulletin greatly contributes toward this goal, and Rutherford House will strive to support the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society in maintaining the high, gospel-oriented academic standard of SBET, whilst working to increase its profile, relevance for the church and circulation. Additionally, we anticipate continuing the successful Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference that has resulted in theological publications of the highest order. We also wish to host day conferences that concentrate on various topics in Reformed theology or pastoral ministry. Participants would hopefully include students, elders, pastors and professors, highlighting the link between academic work and the practical mission of the church. Finally, as the old cliché reminds us to 'put our money where our mouth is', Rutherford House plans to provide bursaries toward study in evangelical and Reformed theology. If the future of the West is to look different than it currently does, we must invest prayer, time, effort and financial resources in it.

As director, I am excited about these opportunities and intimidated by the overwhelming nature of the challenge. I cannot go it alone. We humbly ask that you pray and contribute to the ongoing task of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with our society. By the grace of God we expect great things in Scotland and beyond.

Dr Jason Curtis, Director of Rutherford House

TOO NARROW A STRAIGHTJACKET? REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE IN WORSHIP

GRAHAM KEITH, AYR

John Calvin did not originate the Regulative Principle that worship should be confined to those elements clearly set out in or reasonably deduced from Scripture.¹ It was already an important theme with Zwingli and with his successor at Zurich, Bullinger.² There can, however, be no doubt that Calvin was the Reformer who put this Principle on a sound theological footing. That is not to say that he was the most rigorous in pursuit of this Principle. On the contrary, he was able to use the Principle himself with flexibility, and to show magnanimity towards others who in less propitious circumstances had to proceed slowly in the outworking of this Principle.³

A correct view and practice of worship was one of the few criteria which justified to Calvin the establishment of a separate Reformed church, and cleared it of the guilt of schism. But there was a more fundamental issue than a public apologia for a separate church. Where God's own people were present to worship God in accordance with his revealed will, God was graciously present in the midst of his people to bless them.⁴ This was a promise attached to those who showed the obedience of faith, not to those who displayed zeal or fervour in following their own lights. 'To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the

¹ I will use the expression Regulative Principle though technically this expression did not become current until the 20th century. R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), pp. 38-40.

² Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 54-104 describes the earliest Protestant polemic which touched on the themes of false worship and of idolatry.

³ Cf. the remarks of William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 36.

⁴ W. Robert Godfrey, chapter 2, in *The Worship of God* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), p. 32. The editors of this collection of essays are left unnamed; but the volume was produced in association with Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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evil of idolatry' – these words of Samuel to King Saul (1 Sam. 15:22-23) epitomised Calvin's outlook.⁵

Writing in 1543 to the Emperor Charles V a work entitled *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Calvin declared, 'If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.'⁶ A similar emphasis emerges from Calvin's exposition of the Decalogue within the *Institutes*. He accepted the traditional division of the Decalogue into two tables and explained this by the priority God gave to his worship even over the duties of love towards our fellow-men. Indeed, Calvin felt it was inadequate to conclude that religion was merely the principal part. 'It is the very soul,' he declared, 'by which the whole lives and breathes. Without the fear of God, men do not observe justice and charity among themselves. We say, then, that the worship of God is the beginning and foundation of righteousness; and that wherever it is wanting, any degree of equity, or continence, or temperance, existing among men themselves, is empty and frivolous in the sight of God. We call it the source and soul of righteousness, inasmuch as men learn to live together temperately, and without injury, when they revere God as the judge of right and wrong.'⁷

We may be surprised today by the pre-eminence given to the correct mode of worship, but we can best understand it if we consider Calvin's outlook on improper worship. He saw this not simply as futile in existential terms but as an insult to God's majesty which in its turn brought divine judgment in the form of increased spiritual blindness.⁸ A wrong context of worship, therefore, as in the presence of images or under ceremonies prescribed by men as essential for salvation, brought dangers. Not only did this context conceal from the worshippers the true source of salvation; but it induced the worshipper to take what was due to God

⁵ E.g. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:18:9; Calvin, 'The Necessity of Reforming the Church', in *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* (tr. H. Beveridge) (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 1:128. The Latin text is to be found in *Corpus Reformatorum* 6: 461.

⁶ Calvin, 'The Necessity of Reforming the Church', 1:126. *Corpus Reformatorum* 6: 459.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:8:11.

⁸ Like others before him, Calvin appealed to the 2nd of the Ten Commandments to justify his position and it was marked by a distinct note of judgement for those who ignored the commandment (Exod. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10).

alone and to give it to something other than God, usually something material. Calvin insisted that there was no such thing as worship that was religiously neutral. An act of homage to a statue of some saint (or of Baal for that matter) was a communication or transaction which would not go unnoticed by the true God and would be registered on the human conscience. The First Commandment, after all, warned against having any other God *in his very presence*.⁹

Calvin did not wax eloquent on the insidious dangers of idolatry just because it was a problem that had infested the church of his own day. (He was certainly not slow to say that the idolatry of the Roman Church was worse than that of paganism.¹⁰) Calvin believed idolatry had become a real possibility for everyone because of the Fall. Though we all possess the seed of religion in the sense that we hanker back to that fellowship enjoyed with God in Eden, this seed does not do any good when it does take root. Rather, it manifests itself in idolatry. ‘Even when we are in a manner forced to the contemplation of God...and are thus led to form some impression of Deity, we immediately fly off to carnal dreams and depraved fictions, and so by our vanity corrupt heavenly truth. This far, indeed, we differ from each another in that one appropriates to himself some peculiar error; but we are all alike in this, that we substitute monstrous fictions for the one living and true God.’¹¹ This reflects the fleshly bent of our minds, which means that we delight in physical gratification to the extent that all our thoughts are dominated by material conceptions. As a result, we are alienated from the spiritual realm of the true God.¹² Even in the church it requires no mean effort to ensure it is free of all human devices that usurp the place of God’s spiritual worship which is clearly set out in his word, the Bible.

In this Calvin went a lot further than Luther. There had been a tendency in Lutheran circles to assume that as long as the doctrine of justification was preached, all would be well. The externals of worship mattered little.¹³ Indeed, to devote too much attention to them would seem to militate against the inwardness of true religion. Though Calvin was careful not to criticise Luther directly, there is no doubt that he saw this as an inadequate response to the testimony of Scripture where God claimed the right to regulate his own worship. Carlos Eire also argues that Calvin went further than his Swiss predecessors whom he describes as ‘some-

⁹ For a detailed account of Calvin’s theological contribution see Eire, *War*, pp. 195-233.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:24.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:5:11.

¹² Eire, *War*, p. 206.

¹³ Eire, *War*, pp. 66-8.

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what fundamentalistic and more inclined towards action than systematic exposition' as far as their theology of worship was concerned.¹⁴ Calvin's own contribution was to develop an understanding of reverential acts and to promote the idea of true worship as central to a blessed human life.

Before Calvin came to the fore as a Protestant leader, the Swiss Re-formers were already contrasting divine precepts, which were altogether good and sufficient, with human traditions, which were on no account to be made a necessary part of the worship of God. The basis for this distinction, of course, was Christ's own criticism of the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees as recounted in Matthew 15. Calvin maintained this contrast, saying, 'the whole Church is forbidden to add to, or take from the word of God, in relation to his worship and salutary precepts'.¹⁵ He believed that Scripture had spoken clearly when it came to 'the whole sum of righteousness, and all the parts of divine worship, and everything necessary to salvation'.¹⁶ However, this did not mean that Calvin would include in church services only those features for which a definite Scripture proof text could be cited.

Calvin was aware of a double danger. There were those 'pseudo-bishops', as he called them, who would readily impose impious and tyrannical laws on their people when they insisted that these congregations follow non-Scriptural precepts as a necessity to salvation. At the same time there were at the other extreme some who wished to do away entirely with all ecclesiastical rules for which no definite Scripture warrant could be given.¹⁷ Calvin's answer was to insist that if an ecclesiastical ordinance could be subsumed under the rubric of 1 Corinthians 14:40 (let all things be done decently and in order), it was to be regarded as a divine rather than a human ordinance. To Calvin's mind this justified suitable ecclesiastical ordinances on two fronts – that of decency and that of order. He clarified the idea of decency by saying it touched on ceremonies and would embrace anything which helped the congregation show appropriate modesty, seriousness and reverence in holy things. The other criterion of order involved external discipline, effectively everything that made for the peace and tranquillity of the congregation – e.g. the hours for services, the practice of catechesis, the times for fasts etc. Calvin added the proviso that none of these ordinances be thought necessary to salvation or imposed as a burden on consciences. Ideally, a wise pastor should explain the proper significance of such ordinances to his flock. Under these cir-

¹⁴ Eire, *War*, p. 232.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:17.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:30.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:27.

cumstances he felt the congregation could (and indeed should) readily follow these ordinances as a contribution to the edification or well-being of their church. They should not, however, be bound to them as something immutable. They should appreciate that circumstances might entail the alteration of these ordinances, though Calvin did stress the pastoral wisdom of resisting hasty innovations. In all these matters as to what would help or harm a church he insisted that love was the best guide.

Calvin backed up his account with an illustration which he thought his readers could then apply to other contexts. This involved the question of kneeling in prayer about which some were asking whether it was a human tradition which people could freely repudiate or neglect. Calvin's response was that it was both human and divine. He could describe it as of divine origin since it met the criterion of decency set out in 1 Corinthians 14:40. Yet, it was also human since it was inappropriate to seek a specific command in Scripture to this effect. Calvin contended that it was no part of Scripture to lay down detailed instructions on external discipline and on ceremonies since these depended on the times and it was out of place to lay down one set form to suit all occasions. Instead, the church leaders should consult the more general guidelines given in Scripture - that is, the criteria of love and of our duty to do what we can to build up the church.

Though Calvin does not mention this example in relation to ceremonies, we may profitably look at his attitude to confirmation, as it illustrates the same principles at work. Calvin was opposed to confirmation as practised in the unreformed Roman Church of his day, because they made it into a sacrament which overshadowed baptism, in that it could only be administered by a bishop whereas a simple priest could carry out a baptism. Moreover, Calvin could find no scriptural warrant for the smearing of oil on the forehead of those being confirmed. Despite these and other scathing objections to the contemporary practice, Calvin expressed his belief that in the early church there had been sound instincts for bringing youngsters who had been baptised at infancy before the bishop and people for a formal ceremony when they reached the age of adolescence. This ceremony involved an examination into their knowledge of the church's catechism, and if all passed off well, it would be completed by a blessing through the laying on of hands. Calvin thought there would be practical advantages if the church of his day restored what he saw as a valuable part of the catechetical process.¹⁸ We might summarise the principles involved by observing that Calvin inferred the church's (and parents') catechetical responsibilities from Scripture and saw the early church ceremony as a useful means of attaining that end. However, in the course of time the

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:19:4-13.

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modest early church practice had been undermined by outrageous claims that it was a means of conferring the Holy Spirit. A practice which had proved useful at one time had thus been undermined when its original catechetical purpose was set aside. It seems that there were a number of such practices which Calvin believed had an acceptable origin but had been so corrupted that the church of his day had little choice but to get rid of them.¹⁹

Calvin, therefore, urged churches to be very careful about such ceremonies and external discipline as they had. Careful, that is, not to engender superstition and not to insist on too much from them. Above all, such observances were to be few in number. Many ostentatious ceremonies were usually accompanied by hypocrisy: ‘While it is incumbent on true worshippers to give the heart and mind, men are always desirous to invent a mode of serving God of a totally different description, their object being to perform to him certain bodily observances, and keep the mind to themselves. Moreover, they imagine that when they obtrude upon him external pomp, they have, by this artifice, evaded the necessity of giving themselves.’²⁰ Moreover, churches were not to despise other churches simply because of a difference in external discipline. In fact, in one letter to the Bernese Council, Calvin was bold enough to express the view that there were advantages in not having too strict a uniformity across different national churches on the matter of ceremonies; that would make the point that the essence of Christianity was not involved in them.²¹

If we want a sample of what Calvin believed to be involved in a service of worship that was faithful to God’s precept, we can look to the liturgy he established at Geneva in 1542. This went as follows –

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

1. Scripture Sentence Psalm 124:8
2. Prayer of confession (written down in the liturgy)
3. Psalm

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:32. There was a biblical example in Hezekiah’s destruction of the bronze serpent Moses had made on God’s instructions in the wilderness (2 Kngs 18:4).

²⁰ Calvin, *Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 1:153. *Corpus Reformatorum* 6: 479.

²¹ Calvin, in *Corpus Reformatorum* 15:538 cited in Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948), p. 39.

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4. Prayer for illumination (an example was given in the liturgy, but the minister was free to use his own).

5. Scripture Reading.

6. Sermon

THE LITURGY OF THE UPPER ROOM

1. Prayers of intercession, followed by long paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer (all written down in the liturgy).

2. Preparation of the elements while the congregation sang the Apostles' Creed.

3. Words of institution.

4. Exhortation to congregation.

5. Prayer of consecration.

6. Communion, while a psalm or other passage of Scripture was read out.

7. Set prayer.

8. Benediction from Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24-26).²²

As we have seen, Calvin would not have insisted that every Reformed church should follow this exactly. In fact, Calvin had to be content in Geneva with less than his own ideal which would have conformed more with the practice of the church in Strasbourg where he had been earlier. This is clear in three main respects. Most importantly, he could not get the magistrates at Geneva to agree to a weekly Lord's Supper; he had to be content with a monthly celebration. In Strasbourg, the liturgy had contained a scriptural absolution after the prayer of confession; but in Geneva Calvin omitted it because the people were suspicious of it as an innovation. Finally, in Geneva Calvin accepted the use of unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper – a practice about which he had no strong view in itself,

²² I have based this on the material set out in Joseph A. Pipa Jr. from chapter 6 of *The Worship of God* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), p. 140.

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but he disliked the way the practice had been forced on the Genevans by the Canton of Berne.²³ These examples of compromise on Calvin's part underline his flexibility on areas where the peace and tranquillity of the church were at stake.

But it would be misleading to suggest that Calvin's primary concern was with the externals of Christian worship. He did undoubtedly believe that externals had a vital part to play and he himself made a unique contribution to Protestant theology in this very area. At the same time he was keenly aware of the prophetic criticism that sometimes religion could so degenerate as to consist entirely in ceremonies.²⁴ Hence his priority was to promote internal, spiritual piety. We may take Calvin's reflections when he first began work in Geneva in 1536 as evidence of his concerns, 'When I first arrived in this church there was almost nothing. They were preaching and that is all. They were good at seeking out idols and burning them, but there was no Reformation. Everything was in turmoil.'²⁵ It is surely significant that Calvin did not identify the Reformation with iconoclasm or even with preaching. At best these were merely preliminaries. If we want to know what was at the heart of piety for Calvin, he provides a useful summary in his exegesis of the First Commandment. There he says there are four main duties humans owe God: (1) adoration, by which he means 'the veneration and worship that each of us, in submitting to his greatness, renders to him' and this includes bringing our consciences into subjection to God's law; (2) trust, that is, 'the assurance of reposing in him that arises from the recognition of his attributes, when – attributing to him all wisdom, righteousness, might, truth and goodness – we judge we are blessed only by communion with him'; (3) invocation, that is, 'resorting to his faithfulness and help as our only support' in times of need; (4) thankfulness, 'the gratitude with which we ascribe praise to him for all good things'.²⁶

All these were marks of internal, spiritual worship, and clearly went further than a concern to get the externals of worship right. Calvin could summarise the fruits of spiritual worship in these terms: 'When duly imbued with the knowledge of him, the whole aim of our lives will be to revere, fear and worship his majesty, to enjoy a share in his blessings, to

²³ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 20-21.

²⁴ Calvin, *Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 1:151. *Corpus Reformatum* 6: 477.

²⁵ From a letter of Calvin in *Corpus Reformatum* 9.891 cited in Eire p. 160.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:8:16. There is a most useful article on Calvin's theology of worship by Hughes Oliphant Old in (ed.) Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas and J. Ligon Duncan III, *Give Praise to God*, (Phillipsburg,:Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2003), pp. 412-35.

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have recourse to him in every difficulty, to acknowledge, laud and celebrate the magnificence of his works, to make him, as it were, the sole aim of our actions.²⁷ This was Calvin's vision of pure worship – a true inward piety which was threatened by any false ways of worship. It was a demanding vision; but one which put worship at the centre of human life.

ASSESSMENT OF CALVIN'S POSITION

Calvin's analysis of worship has many strengths. He is the first to put the Regulative Principle on a sound footing. He does so both from his doctrine of God and his doctrine of man. God and God alone has the right to say how he should be approached. He has given clear directions in this regard through the first four of the Ten Commandments and elsewhere in Scripture. For any human being to suggest on his own initiative how God should be worshipped is an arrogant assumption of a right that the God who will not let his glory be given to another claims only for himself. Besides, since the Fall the human condition is such that idolatry is an ever present danger. It is one way in which the carnal mind will suppress the testimony God has given to his own being. (Calvin's scheme of thought can equally accommodate the practical atheism of modern western society. He would view it simply as an alternative strategy for suppressing our natural knowledge of God.²⁸)

By insisting that true worship is at the heart of what it means to be fully human Calvin stresses both its importance and its application to the whole of life. By stressing the inward nature of that piety he at the same time saves his Regulative Principle from being entangled in detailed questions as to what can be deduced from Scripture.

His dichotomy between true scriptural injunctions and mere human traditions, which might seem rigid and perhaps legalistic, gains flexibility from the way he handles 1 Corinthians 14:40. Anything that promotes reverence (or decency) and good outward order is to be seen as an ordinance of God, not as a mere human invention. But it is a divine institution only in a modified sense. It does allow for change at different times and places. The vital thing is that the people of God understand the reason for these ordinances promoting reverence and due order. They are not to bind their consciences to them as to an unchanging command of God. 'There is a great difference,' he wrote, 'between instituting some exercise of piety which believers may use with a free conscience, or may abstain from

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:8:16.

²⁸ Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:1:4.

if they think the observance not to be useful, and enacting a law which brings the conscience into bondage.²⁹

Indeed, Calvin's Regulative Principle was designed to help believers maintain true freedom of conscience. For him the conscience is a witness to the fact that God is our supreme and ultimate Judge. True obligations of conscience, therefore, bind us even when we are acting or thinking in private apart from any other human being.³⁰ Only when a human looks to the free grace of God in Jesus Christ and applies it to himself will his conscience be set free from the guilt of sin. At the same time the justified man acquires a living inclination to worship God and a sincere desire to lead a holy life.³¹ It is that sincere desire that should mark out a good conscience in the life of a believer. Hence it is vital that it be maintained and cultivated. However, the conscience may be tormented if it is faced with ecclesiastical rulings imposed on human authority but in the name of God. Calvin was convinced that the Roman Church of his day had loaded all sorts of burdens on the consciences of the people with devastating consequences. He would not let his opponents dismiss these matters as ones of trivial externals about food, dress and suchlike. Once they had set up regulations on such matters and claimed divine authority for them, they created a labyrinth from which the conscience found it difficult to escape.³² The remedy was to set these consciences free from all man-made rules which claimed the authority of God, and these would include all non-Scriptural prescriptions about worship.

Whereas other traditions (notably the Lutherans and the Anglicans) used the concept of *adiaphora* (indifferent things) in the matter of religious practices and ceremonies, Calvin gave at best minimal theological importance to this term.³³ He does use the word in his treatment of Christian liberty, but there he has in mind primarily ethical *adiaphora*, a usage which relates best to the origin of the term in Stoic ethics.³⁴ And when he deals in *Institutes* 4:10 with church laws and traditions, he abstains from using the term altogether, though at one point he does speak of *res inter se mediae* which has much the same sense.³⁵ Probably Calvin realised that this term did not fit well with his judgement that positive sanction

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:20.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:19:15-16 (= 4:10:3-4).

³¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:19:2-6.

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:19:7.

³³ For the Lutherans see Article X (*Church Rites, Commonly Called Adiaphora*) of the Formula of Concord.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:19:7-8.

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:10:4.

was needed in the word of God for practices used in worship.³⁶ To talk of *adiaphora* leaves the impression that the church has a range of options to use in worship as it saw fit. That Calvin should use the word at all, albeit sparingly, reflects his engagement with contemporary ways of thinking. It was not an integral part of his thinking. His wisdom in sidelining the term is evident from the disputes over *adiaphora* which emerged in Lutheran circles in the second half of the 16th century.³⁷ Speaking of *adiaphora* does not make for an easy route to consensus among churches or even within the same church. For *adiaphora* in a worshipping context have to be as carefully qualified as the word ‘circumstances’ in Puritan Britain, as we shall see.

If there is a weakness in Calvin’s approach, it lies in the fact that Calvin does not spell out in detail what exactly Scripture prescribes in worship. We can see this as both a strength and a weakness at the same time. It is a strength in allowing flexibility on the question. But it does assume that most churches will be able to assess for themselves what rites make for the appropriate reverence in approaching God. With his own mastery of the past history of the western church and his admiration for the first five centuries, which he saw as a relatively unsullied period, he could tap into those traditions which seemed to him most wholesome. But not everyone had Calvin’s grasp of church history and not everyone shared his optimism about the state of the church in the early centuries.³⁸ Besides, in Geneva the pastors enjoyed relative freedom to discuss debatable points with one another and reach conclusions without much interference from the secular authorities. In other places that freedom might be lacking, so that those who did try to implement the Regulative Principle might well be inclined to more idiosyncratic interpretations.

In these and other contexts there might well arise futile and bitter controversies, with one side accusing the other of idolatry if they did not adhere to their own interpretation of the Regulative Principle. In general terms Calvin was keenly aware of the damage such controversies might

³⁶ Curiously, Richard Hooker from a very different perspective also disliked the term *adiaphora*, and preferred the term ‘accessory’. See Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, (London and New York: T and T Clark, 2002), p. 46.

³⁷ In the Formula of Concord, a definitive Lutheran statement, some ambiguity remains about *adiaphora*. On the one hand it asserts in almost Calvinistic terms that ceremonies or rites, neither commanded nor prohibited in Scripture, are not to be considered part of divine worship. Yet, on the other hand churches have the right with such ceremonies that are in effect indifferent to use them, to abrogate them, or to re-introduce them as they think best.

³⁸ For Calvin’s positive view of the early church see *Institutes*, 4:4:1.

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do. He could even declare, ‘All that is unedifying is to be rejected, even if there is nothing wrong with it, and all that serves only to stir up controversy should be doubly condemned ... We should remember that this is the rule by which all doctrines are to be tried; those which tend to edification may be approved but those that prove themselves material for fruitless controversies are to be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God.’³⁹ Not all would have the same theological acumen as Calvin in discerning where a futile controversy lurked around the corner. Besides, once a controversy has broken out and emotive words like idolatry used, it may be too late to stop. Ecclesiastical disputes, like wars between rival nations or groups, have a tendency to take on a momentum of their own.

THE LEGACY OF THE PURITAN/ANGLICAN CONFLICT

The history of the Regulative Principle in the English-speaking world has become intertwined with Puritan-Anglican debates on the character and thoroughness of the English Reformation, and to a lesser extent developments in Scotland under King James VI (James I of England) and King Charles I. In England the course of the Reformation was influenced by the remarkably high degree of control imposed by the monarchs and the bishops who generally represented their interests. As it turned out, it was Queen Elizabeth I who gave the Church of England its most lasting form. And in her view doctrinal uniformity mattered much less than uniformity of outward profession of faith and unity of national purpose.⁴⁰ Needless to say, this did not suit the aspirations of those who believed a greater measure of doctrinal uniformity was desirable, and that this should be evident in the public rites of the church.

Moreover, uniformity of outward profession entailed coercion. This was enforced not only by the laws of the land but was written into the creedal documents of the English Reformation. This emerges from a feature of the 39 Articles which may be almost unique for an authoritative creedal statement. These Articles have parallels when they assert the right of the Church of England to decree rites and ceremonies provided these do not contradict Scripture and provided they are not made essential to salvation.⁴¹ This emphasis can be found in the Lutheran tradition.⁴² (In

³⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Timothy*, 1:4.

⁴⁰ Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, p. 21.

⁴¹ Article 20. Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards*, (London: James Nisbet and Co, 1883), pp. 4-5 comments on the historical uncertainty over the origins of the controversial opening clause of this Article.

⁴² Cf. Augsburg Confession , sections 15 and 26.

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more recent times it has been called the Normative Principle by contrast to the Regulative Principle.) Again precedents can be found for the insistence that traditions and ceremonies need not be the same for all churches and at all times. These rites can be ordained, changed or abolished in accordance with the general edification of the church. This is not dissimilar to the emphasis of Calvin. But a new and more sinister note appears when Article 34 declares – ‘Whosoever through his private judgement willingly and purposely doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.’ By ruling out private judgment in these circumstances as both subversive and spiritually destructive, this Article is in effect ruling out individual conscience. Ecclesiastical and state authorities – there is an overlap between the two – are allowed to prescribe church rites and practices where these have no warrant from Scripture. Little wonder that protests were raised on the scope of this Article. It is amazing too that this Article which claims to be protecting the consciences of weaker brethren is in fact endangering the consciences of those who scrupled at some of the ceremonies of the Church of England as smacking of superstition or idolatry. Conscience, according to this Article, is subject not only to Scripture but to the laws of the state on religious matters.

A similar tone can be found in other key documents of the English Reformation. A section was included in the Prayer Books of 1549, 1552 and 1662 with the title *On Ceremonies, why some be abolished and some retained*. The introduction to this section reads almost as if it could have come from the pen of Calvin himself:

Of such ceremonies as be used in the church and have had their beginning by the institution of man, some at the first were of godly intent and purpose devised, and yet at length turned to vanity and superstition; some entered the church by undiscreet devotion, and such a zeal as was without knowledge, and for because they were winked at in the beginning, they grew daily to more and more abuses, which not only for their unprofitableness but also because they have blinded the people and obscured the glory of God, are worthy to be cut away and clean rejected; other there be which, although they have been devised by man, yet it is thought good to reserve them still, as well for a decent order in the church (for the which they were first devised) as because

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they pertain to edification, whereunto all things done in the Church (as the Apostle teacheth) ought to be referred.⁴³

The section continues in Calvinistic vein when it affirms that the church needed to be purged of an excessive number of ceremonies which had the effect of obscuring the glory of Christ. Again, it sees a danger not only on the side of those who would retain undesirable ceremonies but also of those who desired change for change's sake. The only jarring note emerges perhaps when it addresses those who offend against public order. 'The wilful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God.' It goes on to say that challenging such order is not in the power of private individuals but only of those lawfully called to that responsibility. Of course, Calvin likewise would not have been happy with individual Christians challenging the order he and the other pastors had established at Geneva. And Calvin has been criticised in his own time and thereafter for the powers the Consistory, the body responsible for maintaining ecclesiastical discipline, assumed in Geneva.⁴⁴ But in Calvin's Geneva there were certain safeguards - a clearer differentiation between civil and ecclesiastical authority and a provision for pastors in open forum to resolve any differences among themselves – which did not exist in Elizabethan England or among her Stuart successors.

At first, therefore, considerable common ground was shared by the official Anglican position and by that of Calvin.⁴⁵ The Anglicans, to be sure, did not endorse the Regulative Principle as such; but that was at this stage more a matter of emphasis. They were convinced that such ceremonies as they had retained suited the scriptural criteria of decency and order – criteria that Calvin had attested as marks of divine rather than human origin. There remained, however, the tricky area of foisting ceremonies on unwilling consciences. When Calvin had dealt with this question, he had in view the misuse of church power by ecclesiastical authorities. Exactly the same principles would apply if the same power were in the hands of monarchs or political leaders.

This was the issue that was raised most acutely in England as the Book of Common Prayer was made binding by Queen Elizabeth I. There was no question of its being used selectively or according to individual

⁴³ I have taken this from Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation*, (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1994), pp. 274-5.

⁴⁴ Francois Wendel, *Calvin*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1963), pp. 83-91.

⁴⁵ Cf. the remarks of Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 3-4, on the relative insignificance of the differences between Puritans and the mainstream of the Church of England at the start of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

conscience, at least at first.⁴⁶ It had to be accepted *in toto*; otherwise the dissentient would face penal sanctions. As long as there was hope that the Prayer Book might be revised in a more Reformed direction through constitutional moves, the party in the Church of England with misgivings about the Prayer Book – in effect, the Puritan party – desisted from an extensive attack on the contents of that Book. But as it became clear that the Prayer Book was here to stay, the Puritans were obliged to detail their objections. It was inevitable that these objections should seize on very specific, even narrow, issues, many of which might seem rather trivial on their own. And it is easy from hindsight to decry the Puritans as precisionists or tied to an unrealistic view of a perfectionist church on earth. But given their acceptance (in most cases) that there should be one church in the realm, they had to justify their plea for changes in the Prayer Book, and could only do so by elucidating specific objections. It was inevitable too that many of these objections should be seen as characteristics of the Regulative Principle as it emerged from the hands of the Puritans. In short, the intransigence of the Anglican Establishment forced the Puritans into an elaboration of the Regulative Principle beyond what Calvin would have envisaged. There was little room for friendly discussion on an equal basis between brethren over the bones of contention – this came only in the short interlude which saw the Westminster Assembly – and even less room for the charity which Calvin hoped would lead to a solution on what was beneficial and what was harmful to the Church.

One important result of this controversy was, on the Puritan side, to seek proof-texts for various details of public worship. They went in this respect some way beyond Calvin as they looked for Scriptural justification not only for such central themes as the nature and number of the New Testament sacraments but for such details as to when and how often they were to have services. On the latter count some Puritans found Scriptural sanction for the practice of two Lord's Day services, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, from the unlikely source of the double burnt-offering stipulated in Numbers 28:9. Even such a minor matter as to who should collect the offerings of the people and when they should present them was settled by the evidence from Acts 4:36 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.⁴⁷

The latter example illustrates how far-reaching Scriptural consequences could be drawn from occasional directions and examples given in the Bible. (It was generally agreed that what could be logically deduced from

⁴⁶ There were, however, later modifications in practice. Cf. Claire Cross, *Church and People 1450-1660*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), pp. 172-3.

⁴⁷ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 54.

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the precepts of Scripture was as binding as the words of Scripture itself.) The examples I have cited may be relatively innocent; but a more dangerous path was taken when an argument was pressed from the silence of Scripture. With rigid use of the Regulative Principle an argument from Scriptural silence would mean a particular practice was not allowed. It is understandable that some should use this to argue for the unlawfulness of infant baptism.⁴⁸ It is perhaps more surprising that the absence of marriage from the pastoral duties listed in 2 Timothy 4:2ff should be used to prove that the celebration of marriage was not the duty of a Christian pastor.⁴⁹

However, Horton Davies concludes that in the most contested issues of the day between Anglicans and Puritans – vestments, ceremonies and fixed or free modes of prayer – the Puritans had a better grasp of the general liturgical principles formulated in Scripture than their opponents. On the question of ecclesiastical vestments, for example, the Puritans wanted them abolished because they were Aaronical and so unsuited to the new dispensation of Christ, because they were badges of idolatry, and because they did not edify but presented a stumbling-block to weaker brethren. In this the Puritans could point to a major theme of the Letter to the Hebrews as well as the teaching of Romans 14:15; while their Anglican opponents could appeal only to an argument from tradition and the rather dubious warrant of Revelation 15:6.⁵⁰

Davies also credits the Puritans with attaining a considerable degree of unity and agreement on the nature of biblical worship, irrespective of some differences on points of detail and the use by some of unusual ordinances like that of foot-washing.⁵¹ This is evident, for example, in the fact that the Westminster Assembly, despite being a mixed body of English Presbyterians, Scottish Presbyterians and English Independents, was able to agree on *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*.⁵² Agreement here contrasts with their inability to agree on church government, another item for which different sides appealed to scriptural prescriptions and precedents.⁵³ Such agreement can only have been possible if their basic grasp of biblical teaching on worship was sound.

Yet, in the heat of the controversy, in some respects at least, Scripture was being pressed to do a job it was never designed to do. There is no end

⁴⁸ Tom Nettles, *The Baptists* (Fearn, Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 1: 138-42.

⁴⁹ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 55-56.

⁵¹ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 244-252.

⁵² Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 141-2.

⁵³ Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 213-4.

of questions that can be raised in theory about external church order; such is the complexity of the human situation and such the ingenuity of the human mind in turning anything and everything into a matter of controversy. If we look more broadly than the immediate controversies over ecclesiastical vestments in the post-Reformation Anglican Church, we can for example ask these questions – should those appointed to the ministry of the word and sacraments in Christ’s church wear a special dress? If so, when? Are there other outward marks that should distinguish the clergy from the laity? Scripture does not of itself provide definitive guidance on any of these questions though they might at certain times become vexed issues.

Again, if we consider the sacraments, many points of basic procedure are not addressed in Scripture directly. For instance, Scripture nowhere lists proper candidates for baptism; nor does it say exactly how the service of baptism should relate to the catechetical training appropriate to baptizands.⁵⁴ Yet, these are surely key issues on which we can follow only the general principles of Scripture. In dealing with the sacraments, Calvin displayed a sound methodology in moving from general principles to highlighting those items which were central to the sacrament. Then he was in a position to specify those matters which he saw as of little moment in the administration of sacraments (e.g. whether immersion or sprinkling was to be used as the mode of baptism).⁵⁵ Individual churches were free to follow whatever practice they saw fit on these indifferent matters.

Another limitation of the Puritan treatment of the Regulative Principle arises from the fact that it was most often used in reaction to their opponents. This was largely inevitable given the political situation they faced. Apart from the brief period of Parliamentary ascendancy and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell in the 1640s and 1650s they had to defend themselves against the charge that they were being subversive in opposing the Book of Common Prayer. In that defence it was convenient for them to appeal to the principle of a definite Scriptural warrant for every rite and ceremony they were required to accept. That put the intellectual onus on their opponents either to find such a scriptural warrant or in effect to concede they were using some principle other than Scripture. This may have been a good tactic as well as a fruit of genuine conviction for the Puritans; but it did mean that they rarely had the opportunity to set out from their first principles a full picture of what true, biblical wor-

⁵⁴ Christ’s famous words in Matthew 28:19-20 create an indissoluble link between baptism and instruction in everything Jesus taught his first followers.

⁵⁵ For baptism see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:15:19; and for the Lord’s Supper see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:17:43.

ship should resemble. There were exceptions. Some Puritans, especially in separatist groups, did produce their own unwritten liturgies.⁵⁶ Some, after initial misgivings, drew up prayer books of their own. But these had such limited impact on the wider stage in England that they can hardly be said to have contributed to a debate on the implications of the Regulative Principle. Within more limited spheres there is no doubt that the Puritans left a more lasting legacy. Their criticisms of the practice of confining prayer to the set forms of a prayer book are a case in point, though it is only fair to add that this critique owes as much to bitter and lengthy experience as it does to scriptural considerations. Horton Davies shows how the Independents, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, developed a rationale and a detailed procedure on excommunication directly from Scripture.⁵⁷ But the sort of piecemeal approach adopted by the Puritans falls short of a comprehensive treatment of the implications of the Regulative Principle. In a sense the agenda had been set by the Common Prayer Book and the ‘popish ceremonies’ it was thought to endorse, and the Puritans were never entirely able to escape that agenda.

We may conclude that by the end of the Stuart era (1688) there had been a notable hardening in the Puritan position as compared with that of Calvin and even the early Elizabethan Puritans. The latter had been prepared to endorse some ceremonies if they helped promote reverence, as long as they were not numerous and did not obscure Christ. There was no demand for a Scriptural proof. But the imposition of ceremonies by the crown and the episcopal courts changed the Puritan perspective. An imposed ceremony was no longer an indifferent circumstance; it had become an integral part of the worship. It was, therefore, to be resisted as bringing the Christian conscience into bondage to men and their teaching. John Owen, for example, even opposed all set liturgies, however sound in themselves, on the ground of the infringement on Christian liberty.⁵⁸ Calvin would not have gone so far. He would have had the pastors explain to their congregations the benefits of such liturgies when they were first introduced; but would have seen it as captious to quarrel over their value.

⁵⁶ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 77-95.

⁵⁷ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ As argued by Douglas Kelly in J. Ligon Duncan III (ed.), *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Vol 2* (Fearn, Christian Focus Publications, 2004), p. 74. Not all Puritans would have been as rigorous on this point as Owen. Richard Baxter, for example, saw things differently. But the general point stands that the scope of indifferent things or circumstances was greatly reduced.

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Whereas Calvin would have embraced both ceremonies inculcating reverence and practices promoting good order under his understanding of what lay within the discretion of church leaders under 1 Corinthians 14:40, there was a tendency among the later Puritans to restrict this to issues of order like the time and place for church meetings. In short, very little freedom was left to these leaders by this understanding of the Regulative Principle.⁵⁹

THE DOCUMENTS OF THE WESTMINISTER ASSEMBLY

When the Puritans did enjoy some respite from state imposition, they had an opportunity positively to lay out their theology of worship and its practical implications. Their big opportunity came with the Westminster Assembly, which lasted from July 1643 to February 1649. It was attended by representatives of English Presbyterians and Independents as well as some commissioners representing the Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian body. All of those present can broadly be described as puritans, though there were important differences among them on church government. Representatives who supported episcopacy were invited, but did not attend.⁶⁰ The Assembly promoted the Regulative Principle but in such a way as to leave it largely free from excessive rigidity or from an undue emphasis on the externals of worship.

The Assembly's most important document, the Confession of Faith clearly enunciates the Regulative Principle. Chapter 21 (*Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day*) begins in these terms: 'The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped, according to the imaginations and devicess of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.' This carefully guards God's prerogative to set out in Scripture those ways in which he should be worshipped. At the same time it warns against the sin of visible idolatry and implies that though this may be the most common way of infringing the Second Commandment, it is by no means the only one.

This chapter then proceeds to tackle a number of related themes – the triune God as the exclusive object of worship (section 2); prayer (sections

⁵⁹ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 35-48, provides a detailed comparison of Calvin with the Puritans.

⁶⁰ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 127.

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3-4); other parts of biblical worship (section 5); places of worship (section 6); times of worship, especially the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath (sections 7-8). Throughout the chapter the writers keep to the forefront the spirituality of true worship. Thus, they are not content to list the parts of worship; but they define their appropriate characteristics. Thus it is not enough for them to mention the reading of the Scriptures; rather, they speak of 'the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear'. Again, they do not simply write the 'singing of psalms', but add 'with grace in the heart'. And so we could go on. The prescriptions about prayer take up two whole sections.

If this part of the Confession emphasises the spiritual characteristics accompanying acceptable worship, it means less stress on items which others have considered important in the Regulative Principle. It is unclear, for example, whether this chapter has been framed to describe all the biblical parts of worship (both regular worship and that on special occasions) or more modestly to set forth the most important. I prefer the latter view since the Confession lacks any language to suggest it is being comprehensive, and it employs the rather vague word 'parts' to describe aspects of worship. Moreover, the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* produced by the same Assembly includes items like marriages, funerals, visiting the sick and arranging collections for the poor which are not mentioned here. We also know that some Puritans included formal catechising as part of their worship. This is not mentioned in this chapter. I doubt if the Assembly wished to exclude this.

Even before this chapter, the framers of the Confession have acknowledged that Scripture will not answer every problem relating to the worship of God and government of the church. In their first chapter (*of The Holy Scripture*), they state, 'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men.' They go on, however, to qualify this with the assertion that 'there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common in human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.' To justify these qualifications, the Confession alludes to that text which was a favourite of Calvin's (and of many others at this time) 1 Corinthians 14:40 as well as verse 26 from the same chapter (teaching all things should be done for edification) and 1 Corinthians 11:13-14. Clearly, even where Scripture does not speak directly, leaders in worship must reckon with the

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general principles of God's Word, which will normally involve respect for social decorum and custom.

But what did the Confession mean by the term 'circumstances'? Fortunately, there was much contemporary discussion on this point – ironically perhaps more than on the parts or elements of worship. It was made clear that circumstances were not intrinsic to worship; they were peripheral.⁶¹ They were common to other corporate human bodies. Indeed, they embraced the sort of practical arrangements that were necessary to make sure that corporate body worked in harmony. As far as a church was concerned, they would cover such items as the time and place of services. The authorities in the church, the Kirk Session or whatever, had the right to lay down regulations on this, as long as they did not give their rulings the status of divine commandments. It was recognised, however, that there was not a clear line of demarcation between circumstances and elements of worship. A circumstance might be given by ecclesiastical authorities a religious significance. For example, a congregation might be expected to face the same direction when praying in a church building. Normally this would follow naturally from the layout and topography of the church; but sometimes the church might be designed or the people urged to face east when praying, because that was more acceptable in God's eyes. In the latter case a circumstance had effectively become a vital point of religious worship, and so could no longer be considered a circumstance or a matter of comparative indifference. This was frequently the nub of the matter in Puritan-Anglican disputes. George Gillespie, a Scottish Presbyterian minister writing against the imposition of 'English Popish Ceremonies' on the church in Scotland, declared,

The ceremonies against which we dispute are more than matters of mere order, forasmuch as sacred and mysterious significations are given unto them, and by their significations they are thought to teach men effectually sundry mysteries and duties of piety.⁶²

This is one point at which the Confession is stricter than Calvin. If circumstances are restricted to items common to other human societies, it

⁶¹ Nick Needham, in J. Ligon Duncan III (ed.), *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Vol 2* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), p. 237, points out that in scholastic terminology there was a contrast between circumstance and act. He quotes from John Owen *Works* Vol 15, 35, 'The schoolmen tell us that that which is so made the condition of an action, that without it the action is not to be done, is not a circumstance of it, but such an adjunct as is a necessary part.'

⁶² George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, 4:9:11.

is difficult, for example, to see how they could be applied to an ordination service for a minister or elder, a distinctively ecclesiastical ceremony. And yet that is an important subject on which Scripture gives relatively little detailed guidance. Calvin could happily have embraced such a ceremony under what promoted seemliness or reverence, as well as good order. It is probably at this point that the Confession's teaching on the Regulative Principle is weakest. It does not indicate in what ways the church is similar to other human societies and in what ways it is dissimilar. We are surely reminded of William Cunningham's remark that the Regulative Principle must 'be interpreted and explained in the exercise of common sense'.⁶³

There is one other chapter of the Westminster Confession that refers directly to the Regulative Principle. This is in the context of the theme of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience more generally. It states, 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.'⁶⁴ The last section of this chapter makes it clear that the Confession is not against the lawful use of authority by the civil or ecclesiastical power. For anyone to resist a lawful use of power is to resist an ordinance of God and to be liable to punishment. But at the same time the Confession in effect spells out two areas which limit civil or ecclesiastical authority. These authorities are to require (a) nothing that is contrary to Scripture in any area of life; and (b) nothing in addition to Scripture in matters of faith or worship. The limits, therefore, in the areas of faith and worship are more demanding than on the rest of life. This is the Confession's response to Articles 20 and 34 of the Church of England. It agrees that to act against the lawful use of ecclesiastical power is sinful and may well have important implications for the state as well. But these Articles did not sufficiently restrict the areas of proper ecclesiastical authority when they gave the church the right to decree ceremonies as long as these were not directly contrary to God's word.

⁶³ Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Westminster Confession 20:2. It is worth noting that there is a variant reading, 'God alone is Lord of the conscience ... which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship.' To put a comma after 'Word' rather than semi-colon means less emphasis is given to the last part of the sentence. R.J.Gore, *Covenantal Worship*, p. 34.

Liberty of conscience was a crucial point for the Westminster divines as it had been for Calvin before them. Church worship, like any other communal activity, needed to be regulated. The church, therefore, was bound to lay down rules and procedures for orderly worship. But at the same time, in order to promote that order and the sincere worship of the participants, it had to make sure its arrangements contained nothing to offend the conscience. That meant it could not require people to participate in an element of worship not sanctioned by Scripture. For corporate worship was not an optional activity as far as Christians were concerned.⁶⁵

When the same Westminster Assembly produced its separate *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, it claimed a rationale which involved both attention to biblical precept and regard for those circumstances which were not set down in Scripture but were to be determined by Christian prudence. The drafters declared, ‘Wherein our care hath been to hold forth such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance; and other things we have endeavoured to set forth according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God.’ The Directory, therefore, may be viewed as modelling the Regulative Principle for the times it was first issued.⁶⁶ It avoided many of the pitfalls of the English Prayer Book which it was intended to replace. For one thing, it was discretionary. No one was under obligation to follow it to the letter. In Scotland those who wished could still use the older *Knoxian Book of Common Order*, which had also been a discretionary document. Besides, the Directory did not include set prayers which the minister would repeat word for word. Instead, it laid out headings or topics for prayer which could be used as guidelines. Thus, the minister would still have to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to stir up his own gift of prayer in order that he might frame the public petitions or thanksgivings of the church in an appropriate manner.

The Westminster Directory roused little controversy. The Assembly of the Church of Scotland requested two small additions to the version it was sent from England; and these were readily allowed.⁶⁷ But perhaps the lack of controversy reflected the fact that from the start it was never intended to be imposed with any degree of strictness. This, of course, meant that in practice it might be easily ignored, and it does seem that worship in Presbyterian circles moved steadily in an antiliturgical di-

⁶⁵ See Edmund P. Clowney in chapter 5 of D. A. Carson (ed.), *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), pp. 115-7.

⁶⁶ So Needham, *Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, p. 236. R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship*, pp. 41-51, takes a different view, seeing the Directory as inconsistent with the teaching of the Westminster Confession.

⁶⁷ Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 218-220.

rection.⁶⁸ Moreover, Horton Davies is accurate in his description of the Directory as a *via media* between Independency and Scottish Presbyterianism.⁶⁹ Both sides had to make compromises, and in a political situation where neither party gained the ascendancy over the other, each side was bound to take what it wanted from the Directory.

There can be no doubt that the Westminster standards on the Regulative Principle are more precise than those of Calvin. This was inevitable since in the British context there was no longer any room for optimism that vestiges of the Roman mass or other undesirable ceremonies would disappear with the passage of time or with a favourable government. In fact, the preface to the Directory indicates that some Roman Catholics had been optimistic that the Book of Common Prayer would eventually lead the English nation back into their allegiance: ‘Papists boasted that the book was a compliance with them in a great part of their service; and so were not a little confirmed in their superstition and idolatry, expecting rather our return to them, than endeavouring the reformation of themselves.’ However, while the Westminster Assembly had to be more precise in proscribing improper ceremonies, they took very seriously Calvin’s concern that true worship should not be identified with externals. Hence the importance of their describing the spiritual characteristics accompanying the elements of worship. This emphasis continues into the Directory when (for instance) it tells the congregation how to prepare or and to behave during public worship; while it offers detailed advice to preachers on how to craft and deliver their sermons. Thus, the Westminster documents avoid both pettiness and an imposed liturgy – which were among the chief criticisms of the Book of Common Prayer. These documents also leave room for men of the outlook of John Robinson who had said to the parting Pilgrim Fathers, ‘I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of his holy word.’⁷⁰ There is no suggestion that the Westminster Assembly thought that it had said the last word on all the issues it handled – to say nothing of those areas where it did not express a judgment. This is not to say that it thought the Regulative Principle might one day be refuted from Scripture; there was, however, plenty of scope for working out its implications.

It is worth noting that at the time of the Westminster Assembly there was no sign of the phrase ‘purity of worship’ which features in conserva-

⁶⁸ Joseph A. Pipa in *The Worship of God*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 138. The whole section from pages 127 to 142 of Davies’ book is an invaluable commentary on the Directory in its historical context.

⁷⁰ Cited in Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 37.

tive Presbyterian circles in modern Scotland. Such an expression appears to date from 1707, in particular from the Act for Securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government, which was distinct from but made an indispensable condition towards the forthcoming Treaty of Union between the English and Scottish Parliaments. By this Act it was agreed that ‘theforesaid true Protestant Religion, contained in the above-mentioned Confession of Faith (i.e. the Westminster Confession), with the form and purity of worship presently in use within this Church, and its Presbyterian Church Government and Discipline ... shall remain and continue unalterable’.⁷¹ It is not entirely clear why the expression ‘purity of worship’ was used; but some light on this may be obtained through an Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that very year against ‘Innovations in the Worship of God’. This Assembly Act spoke of its satisfaction with the earlier reformation in the Church of Scotland, but saw that as threatened by recent developments, which were probably the use of certain liturgies by Episcopalian sympathisers: ‘the purity of religion, and particularly of divine worship, and uniformity therein, is a signal blessing to the Church of God, and ... it hath been the great happiness of this Church, ever since her reformation from Popery, to have enjoyed and maintained the same in a great measure, and ... any attempts made for the introduction of innovations in the worship of God therein have been of fatal and dangerous consequence.’⁷² Here there is an allusion to purity of worship under the broader rubric of purity of religion, the latter being a biblical expression from the Letter of James, though it is doubtful that the sense corresponds, since James does not have the public context of worship in mind.⁷³ It seems that the Church of Scotland in 1707 was in an ultra-defensive frame of mind. There were uncertainties as to what would happen with the union of parliaments. There was an understandable fear that distinctive Scottish institutions like its Church would be swallowed up by its southern neighbour. There were also fears arising from the activities of Episcopalians unsympathetic to the current constitutional and ecclesiastical arrangements in Scotland. To this we can probably add more general fears engendered by consciousness of the dawn of a new era where more scope was being given to religious toleration and where sceptical and deist notions were being freely discussed. In this climate it is understandable that the leaders in the Church of Scotland

⁷¹ Dated January 16, 1707. I have used the text as set out in Appendix II of A. Ian Dunlop, *William Carstares and the Kirk by Law Established* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1967), pp. 152-3.

⁷² Charles McCrie, *The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1892), p. 259.

⁷³ Jas 1:27.

should react by making exaggerated claims for their religious settlement. They would incorporate them in 1711 into the vows to be taken by all ministers and probationers, who were to ‘own the purity of worship presently authorised and practised in this Church’ as well as its Presbyterian government and discipline. As a result, from 1711 the Church of Scotland tended to commit itself to what might be described as an almost perfectionist view of its institutions.⁷⁴ At the same time there was real danger that it might ignore the weakness of all religious institutions - that none can escape the danger of formality - and might overlook the inwardness of spiritual religious worship. In the longer term it has probably left the impression that the Regulative Principle means the same as being against innovation.

MODERN CONCERNS

The Westminster Confession has given creedal status to the Regulative Principle. It has not solved all the problems associated with it. Notably, there has been no full agreement on all the elements or parts of public worship. In some ways this is a glaring gap because one of the leading biblical texts to support the Principle is ‘see that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it’⁷⁵. Historically the Principle has been used almost invariably to argue against the intrusion into the church of ceremonies unwarranted by Scripture. (In the Anglican-Puritan debates concern was fixed on ceremonies that had been retained from the old Roman sacramentalism or were to be re-introduced after they had been abolished.) Rarely, if ever, has the Principle been used to contend for the introduction of biblical elements of worship which for some reason have been omitted.⁷⁶ And yet, if a major plank of the Regulative Principle is that God has the right to determine his own worship and his own glory and honour are sullied when humans overturn that right, then this applies just as much to situations where some element in God’s worship is being denied as to where some human addition is being made. In the light of this it would surely be desirable to set out as full a list as possible

⁷⁴ There is an interesting contrast with the previous formula (from 1694) to be subscribed by ministers and probationers, according to which they undertook to ‘observe uniformity of worship, and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church as the same are at present performed and allowed’. This strikes a much less confident note.

⁷⁵ Deut. 12:32, one of the proof-texts cited for Westminster Confession 21:1.

⁷⁶ There are passages of Scripture, notably Ps 50: 8-15 and Mal. 1:6-14, which have as their emphasis the denial to God of aspects of worship which are properly his.

of biblical elements of worship to ensure that nothing essential was being omitted.⁷⁷ That is not to say that every service of worship has to embrace all these elements. (Even the Westminster standards distinguish between occasional and regular elements.) Perhaps there has been a tendency to shirk this task both because of its inherent difficulty and because it might overemphasise the external as opposed to the internal aspects of worship. After all, does not our worship often fall short in the lack not so much of basic elements but of the spiritual graces that should accompany them? But in the anti-authoritarian 21st century western ecclesiastical scene where talk of church power in ordinances seems to emanate from an alien world, there may well be benefit in churches spelling out what they consider the demands of biblical worship. That at least would dispel the common impression that sincerity is everything in worship.

A closely related difficulty concerns the distinction between elements and circumstances. As we have seen, even in the 17th century the distinction between the two was not clear cut. Today difficulties remain, not so much because of attempts by authority to impose certain ceremonies as a necessary part of worship but because of the intermingling of a number of different traditions. To take an important example, some people have suggested that the use of instrumental music to support church singing is a separate element of worship and so in need of specific scriptural authorisation; others, however, see it as a circumstance and so to be assessed in the light of Christian prudence.⁷⁸ And even if we consider singing in itself, while most are agreed that this is an element of worship, there remains an influential minority view that this is a circumstance in the sense it is simply a vehicle for a more basic activity like prayer, instruction or exhortation.⁷⁹ If there can be disagreement at such a fundamental level, no modern Reformed denomination would be wise to insist on its own understanding of the Regulative Principle at the expense of others. We have to reckon that other churches in pursuit of fidelity to the same Principle have reached somewhat different conclusions. In fact, there will always remain areas of debate on the outworking of the Principle; perhaps this is to prevent us becoming so satisfied with the externals of

⁷⁷ Useful recent lists can be found from Clowney, *Worship: Adoration and Action*, p. 117, from Terry L. Johnson in chapter 1 of *The Worship of God* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 18-19 and from John M. Frame *Worship in Spirit and in Truth* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1996), pp. 55-61.

⁷⁸ Clowney, *Worship: Adoration and Action*, p. 117 argues the view that musical accompaniment is not in itself a religious observance, but ‘only a culturally conditioned way of supporting singing’.

⁷⁹ Frame, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, p. 53.

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worship that the inward aspects of piety are neglected. It is worth recalling Calvin's remark that there was a practical advantage in a divergence in local ceremonies so that people did not think piety rested exclusively in them. This does not, however, undermine the validity of the Principle as such. William Cunningham puts it this way, 'Difficulties and differences of opinions may arise about details, even when sound judgment and good sense are brought to bear upon the interpretation and application of the principle; but this affords no ground for denying or doubting the truth or soundness of the principle in itself.'⁸⁰

Historically, the Principle has most commonly been applied in the area of liberty of conscience. It has proved a formidable defence for those individuals and groups who have wanted to resist what they have seen as the unwarranted intrusions of ecclesiastical or civil authorities. And one section of the Westminster Confession that features the Regulative Principle, as we have seen, is that on *Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience*. This, of course, ties in with what I have said about the almost exclusive association of the Principle with additions to Scriptural injunctions on worship. It is much more straightforward for state or church authorities to compel the commission than the omission of some duty. No doubt, the appeal to freedom of conscience will always remain a powerful reason for upholding the Principle, because it is biblical teaching that believers are not to fall under the sway of the teachings of men and because liberty is such an emotive concept. Now, liberty may also be misused, as both Calvin and the Westminster divines knew well. Both, therefore, insisted on the lawful useful of church and of state power. This balance may well be lacking today in a culture which has become excessively individualistic. It is easy to make protests today against church authority, however legitimately exercised, by switching to or even establishing another denomination – steps that were not such a straightforward choice in the 16th and 17th centuries. To offset this tendency the Regulative Principle needs to be set in proper context as a guard against illegitimate use of church power, not against all church power as such. In particular, it is not to be seen as a device to baulk all innovations.⁸¹ Calvin recognised that a church may have good reason from time to time to introduce new ceremonies just as it might have cause to get rid of ceremonies or practices which had once been useful but had over time become effectively superstitions.

⁸⁰ Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, p. 32.

⁸¹ Clowney, *Worship: Adoration and Action*, p. 115, makes this distinction: 'what it opposes is the introduction of new *observances* in worship; it has no quarrel with any culturally appropriate arrangement of the *circumstances* of worship.'

Certainly, Calvin did urge caution. The innovations were not to be introduced hastily and their usefulness was to be carefully explained to the congregations. In Presbyterian circles, however, appeal to the Regulative Principle has sometimes unfortunately been a knee-jerk reaction to proposals deserving more serious and considered reflection.

Broadly speaking, the Regulative Principle has two main aspects. It has a God-ward dimension insisting on God's right to regulate his worship by fallen man as he sees fit; and it has a human dimension that focuses on the right of the conscience to be guided only by biblical teaching in its expression of worship. Undoubtedly there has been an historical imbalance with much more attention being given to the human aspect, that is, issues of liberty of conscience, than to the divine aspect. Leaders in Reformed churches today need to be aware of this and to direct their teaching to ensure that God's prerogatives in establishing his own worship are fully recognised.⁸² Calvin provides an excellent explanation for this, 'I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God.'⁸³ Human nature has not changed from the 16th to the 21st century. We would, therefore, do well to devote ourselves to the proper teaching of this truth, however difficult it is to apply in detail. It will not do to leave the Regulative Principle stuck in history as an understandable reaction to the gross ceremonialism and sacramentalism of the medieval Roman Church, but with little relevance for today.

⁸² There is also a place for further theological study, not least to embrace the point well made by David Petersen in chapter 3 of D.A. Carson (ed.), *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), p. 52 that 'acceptable worship is something that God makes possible for us, through Christ'.

⁸³ Calvin, *Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 1:128. *Corpus Reformatorum* 6: 461.

DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

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I. READING AND REVEALING—IMPASSE?

Recent discussion regarding the reading of Scripture has suffered from much confusion.¹ Many evangelicals (and Protestants more generally) have pleaded for the primacy of divine action in revelation. For their own part, many catholic-minded theologians have noted the necessity of human activity, particularly in its ecclesial form. Both accounts have much for which to be commended and leave much to be desired. The bipolar nature of the debate, however, bespeaks the confused nature of doctrinal formulation in these days. Both sides have assumed that their emphasis competes with the concerns of the other side—such an assumption may seem politically savvy, though I shall argue that it fails to sit well with the traditional doctrine of divine transcendence.

A dogmatic argument for God's transcendence will be shown to necessitate discussion of both divine and human action. According to classical Christian doctrine, God's transcendence and otherness allow for creaturely activity. God is divine; humans are not. God is his own existence. Humans exist as God's own. For humans to be free to act is not to take causal authority away from God. Rather, God's fullness provides for and grants existence to creaturely causal agency. At least since the rise of nominalism in the high middle ages, Christian theology has begun to sense tension between the existence of divine and human action.² Com-

¹ A revised version of a paper delivered at the seminar for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture at Wheaton College in December 2005 and later at the ‘Going Beyond the Bible Biblically’ conference at Grand Rapids Seminary in March 2006. I am most grateful for the attention, care, and generosity given me by respondents in both venues and especially by Stanley Hauerwas, Stephen Spencer, and Daniel Treier.

² The link between a competitive view of divine and human action and the rise of nominalism cannot be defended in this paper. In short, the nominalist consideration of God and humanity under the umbrella of a common concept of ‘being’ allows for a competitive view of causality. Whether or not this competitive view and the tension that it creates between Scriptural and doctrinal affirmations of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility can be tied to the rise of nominalism will not be discussed here. The tie of nominalism to the persons of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham cannot be discussed

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petitiveness between divine and human activity is not necessary, traditional (in Christian doctrine), or gospel-centred.

A ‘thick description’ of the reading of Scripture will be offered which takes account of both divine and human action.³ To further this description, the recent work of Stephen Fowl and John Webster will be utilized to note the human and divine activities which, respectively, go into Christian reading of Scripture. Neither account can stand alone. My argument will proceed in several steps: (1) a sketch of the apparent opposition between these two modes of theology—Christian pragmatism and dogmatic theology; (2) summary and critique of John Webster’s account of the holiness of Scripture and scriptural reading; (3) summary and critique of Stephen Fowl’s account of Christian reading of Scripture for ecclesial formation; (4) dogmatic discussion of the doctrine of divine transcendence; (5) cautions related to the need for a magisterium, the presence of indwelling sin, and the need to avoid an over-realized eschatology and pre-emptive assumption of interpretive closure; therefore, ‘thick description’ is necessary to a Reformed-catholic theology. The necessity of ‘thick description’ in depicting theological reality will be demonstrated dogmatically by engaging the doctrine of divine transcendence and found to be particularly fruitful in discussing the reading of Scripture. A Reformed-catholic account of scriptural reading, tying Word to Spirit and noting the particular role of the ecclesial location of Scripture, will be shown to circumvent many of the wrong turns that have plagued recent reflection on Scripture and hermeneutics.⁴

here either—controversial as this may be. In brief, the author finds the many studies of Catherine Pickstock, Henri de Lubac, and David Burrell to be helpful on the whole regarding the role of Scotus (and later appropriations of his work) in the push towards competitiveness, tension, and nominalism. For recent studies on this issue, see the fascinating debate in *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), pp. 539–661; for introduction, see William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 93–4.

⁴ Matthew Levering describes the plague as such: ‘[P]resumptive nominalist metaphysics has limited the ability of many modern biblical exegetes, and thus also of many modern theologians, to read Scripture in the ways required by the Scriptural revelation of divine providence as the order of divine gift’ Matthew Levering, ‘Participation and Exegesis: Response to Catherine Pickstock,’ *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), p. 597.

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2. THE APPARENT OPPOSITION

Before examining the works of Webster and Fowl in some depth, a few initial remarks regarding their apparent disjunction will be helpful. By plotting Webster and Fowl within the current hermeneutical debate, the disjunction will be adequately highlighted.

Current hermeneutical debate, at least within Christian circles, revolves around questions regarding the ontology of texts, the structure and genre of texts, and the possibilities for reading. Textual ontology relates to the role of authors in the life of the text beyond the initial speech-act: do author's intentions or motives define meaning? Can such a thing as either an author's intention or an author's motive be discovered within a text?⁵ Structures of texts receive much discussion, particularly by those who have answered these two questions with a 'no'. If meaning is not lodged primarily within some notion of authorial action, the particular structure of a text may be the key to adjudicating meanings of words and phrases.⁶ Finally, if authorial action and textual structure do not result in crystal-clear meaning, readerly action must pick up the slack. Some continue to posit that readers can apprehend authorial action; however, many now argue that readers' interpretation, in some degree, change the speech-act and help create meaning (to some degree or another).⁷ These three questions might be helpfully related to three movements within literary theory: Romanticist theory, New Criticism and post-structuralism.⁸

Fowl advocates a hermeneutic which emphasizes the role of readerly activity in the interpretative process. Fowl explicitly argues for the possibility of apprehending some type of authorial intention in the text. But this is not *the* meaning of the text, though it may be quite helpful at times. Fowl is most interested in backing the debate up beyond the question of readerly possibilities to question the particular ends for which Christians interpret Scripture and the effects such reasons ought to have. Theory takes a backseat to questions of teleology. In short, Fowl advocates an *underdetermined* notion of interpretive pluralism as the best means by which Christians might flourish in interpreting Scripture.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), ch. 2.

⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, ch.3.

⁷ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, ch.4. See also Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), esp. pp. 72-5.

⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 25-9.

Webster comes at the debate from a different vantage point: that of dogmatic theology in the Reformed tradition. Previously known as an able interpreter of Barth and Jüngel, Webster has recently given much attention to the notion of holiness, particularly as it relates to Scripture. If we notice nothing else about Webster's project, we must notice the priority given to describing divine action in revelation, sanctification, and inspiration. Webster fears the equation of human action (even the human action of the ecclesia) with divine action, and he emphasizes the continual need to discuss reading as receptive of divine action (rather than being inventive).⁹

Webster and Fowl, then, are two strange bedfellows. The dogmatic theologian and the Christian pragmatist do not seem to have much in common. Both will be found to be correct (at least in their major assertions), however.¹⁰ To note the particular payoff in a project of bringing these two into conversation, another dialogue must first be discussed: this one between Webster and another British theologian, David Ford.

David Ford has published a highly-innovative work, entitled *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*.¹¹ Webster offered an extended review which called into question Ford's entire conversational approach to theology.¹² Whereas Ford had engaged ideas and thinkers as disparate as Levinas, Ricouer, Jüngel, the Paulinist's letter to the Ephesians, the eucharist, Therese of Lisieux, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his monograph on human flourishing, Webster called for a more thoroughly dogmatic theology, centred around discussion of traditional *loci* such as election, justification, etc. Ford, in response, noted the particular value of the type of *theological theology* for which Webster has been calling.¹³ Ford noted the occasional need for both dogmatic and conversational modes of theol-

⁹ Webster, *Holiness*, pp. 54-7.

¹⁰ This broad agreement with Fowl and Webster should not be taken as comprehensive agreement. Both have certain weaknesses, some more pertinent than others, which will not be dealt with here unless necessary for my argument.

¹¹ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹² Webster, 'David F. Ford: *Self and Salvation*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001), pp. 548-59. Ford has elsewhere noted the 'conversational mood' of recent British theology to be its distinctive strength, by which theologians mediate their doctrinal concerns through topics of historical revision, feminism, economics, pluralism, etc. See 'Theological Wisdom, British Style,' *Christian Century* 117 (2000), pp. 388-91.

¹³ John Webster, *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 28 October, 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); repr., *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), ch.1.

ogy, even as he notes the necessity (but not sufficiency) of Webster's style of dogmatic theology.

The Christian doctrine of creation seems to necessitate that all sources of thought be taken seriously. The planting of the *imago Dei* within each and every human, both before and after the entrance of sin into the world, necessitates a thoughtful engagement with whatever form of divine attestation may be found in various discourses and sources (be they Christian or not). Such cross-disciplinary concern will grate on the modern institutional sensibilities of specialized professionals and the secular mindset which fears ideological mutation of objective data. A dogmatic account of creation will not allow for such restraint, although such an account will provide for a stringent caution against naively receiving the plunders of the Egyptians. Though the Christian *polis* must bring in guest lecturers from every part of the globe, consideration of such propaganda must be Word-centred and, therefore, distinctly Christian. This is not a pragmatic concern apart from its dogmatic foundation: the Spirit blows where he wills, but the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son and, therefore, attests to the Son's glory wherever it may blow (albeit more or less explicitly). Distinctly Christian engagement of disciplines and concerns distinguished from theological study (in modern times, though not classically) is mandated by the doctrine of creation.¹⁴

The "linguistic turn" has, if nothing else, demonstrated that theological use of language will necessarily demonstrate affinity with other socio-cultural uses of language. Theology cannot testify to the gospel in culture apart from use of cultural terminology—classically, language from philosophical discourse. Webster's project, if it is seeking a dogmatic theology free of philosophy, must be doomed to failure.¹⁵ At best, one can offer a plea for the primacy of distancing engagement with philosophy from the theological task or for emphasis upon traditional areas of dogmatic inquiry (as opposed to current philosophical debate). Such a

¹⁴ See, e.g., the intent of 'Radical Orthodoxy' to be 'more mediating and less accommodating' in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (Radical Orthodoxy; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 2. I have noted my own concerns elsewhere about Radical Orthodoxy as a dogmatic proposal, amidst a deep appreciation for their fine work in cultural exegesis; see my 'Putting Suspenders on the World: Radical Orthodoxy as a Post-Secular Theological Proposal or What Can Evangelicals Learn from Postmodern Christian Platonists?' *Themelios* 31, no. 2 (Jan. 2006), pp. 40-53.

¹⁵ See the polemics especially in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II.1: *The Doctrine of God*, transl. T. H. L. Parker et al, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957).

concern might be prophetic in our day, when more and more theological monographs fail to engage traditional dogmatic concerns at all.¹⁶ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock have also pled for the overcoming or consummation of philosophy.¹⁷ Such concerns tend to be tied to historical judgments regarding the effects of particular philosophical commitments to the freedom in which Christian theology can attest to the gospel and ought to be read in that context.

Webster's plea ought to be charitably read as a plea against the broad retreat of theologians into doing *mere* philosophy, sociology, hermeneutics, or seemingly anything other than distinctive Christian doctrine. Barth argued against the *analogia entis* and the captivity of theologians to philosophy in its neo-scholastic and Kantian permutations. Barth never sheds the engagements and use of philosophical terms, categories, and interests, however.¹⁸ Milbank and Pickstock have shown little restraint in their polemic regarding nominalism and its modern and neo-scholastic bastards.¹⁹ No reader could ever claim that in so doing they leave philosophy behind. In fact, Milbank's epoch-making book, *Theology and Social Theory*, is notably subtitled, *Beyond Secular Reason*, rather than behind social theory or sociology.²⁰ Milbank continues to be chock-full of socio-political concern and has no desire to leave such disciplines

¹⁶ For example, Jürgen Moltmann wrote an entire 'systematic contribution to theology' on Christology without once mentioning the Council of Chalcedon [*The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, transl. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994)].

¹⁷ John Milbank, 'Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,' in *Word Made Strange: Language, Theology, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), ch. 2; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Challenges in Contemporary Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

¹⁸ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997). McCormack notes the continual use of a somewhat chastened Idealism in Barth's developed theology.

¹⁹ Milbank, Pickstock, and the 'Radical Orthodoxy' movement tie the 'false humility' of theology to its embrace of the univocity of being and nominalist metaphysics and tie this decline to the influence of Duns Scotus, in particular, argued most recently by Catherine Pickstock ['Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,' *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), pp. 543-73]. Etienne Gilson predicated this claim in his *Jean Duns Scot: introduction à ses positions fondamentales* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1952).

²⁰ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Signposts in Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

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behind *en toto*. Rather, Milbank attempts to get beyond a particular secular version of social theory by use of Augustinian metaphysics.²¹

Hyperbolic language, as found in Webster, Milbank, and Barth, ought to be read within its particular polemical context. Milbank wants to move theology beyond a ‘false humility’, because ‘once theology surrenders its claim to be a meta-discourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy’.²² At the end of the day, however, such hyperbole cannot stand alone. Christian theology must engage other disciplines. Such engagement must and should take various forms, categories, and moods.²³ Though Webster’s concerns regarding the danger of losing truly *theological* moods of doing theology must be heeded, Ford persuasively noted the need for multiple architectural designs in the theological city.²⁴

Having noted these concerns tied to the doctrine of creation and the necessary multiplicity of theological forms, it will now be demonstrated that the theological designs erected by Webster and Fowl mutually complement one another and, when taken together, go a long way towards a theological depiction of the task of reading Scripture.²⁵ Webster’s dogmatic project provides theological space for description of human reading, and Fowl’s depiction of readerly activity requires a theological account of divine action as related to the notion of vigilant or intrusive reading.

3. WEBSTER AND THE PLACE OF REVELATION

Webster has offered an account of the ontology of Scripture as a means of interaction with recent hermeneutical discussion in modern theolo-

²¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, chs.11-12.

²² Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 1.

²³ That such multiplicity is not mere submission to historical necessity may be evidenced by the existence of the four-fold gospel witness in Scripture (each of which engages various cultural terms and categories—imperial cult, Greco-Roman religion, etc.); see William Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), ch.4.

²⁴ David F. Ford, ‘Salvation and the Nature of Theology: A Response to John Webster’s Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*.’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001), pp. 560-75.

²⁵ Much more would need to be said about the inspiration of prophets and apostles, the affirmation of the canon, and the perfections of Holy Scripture. I am limiting my discussion here to the *reading* of Holy Scripture construed as a theological act.

gy.²⁶ Both fundamentalism and liberalism have fallen prey to a common problem: lack of a theological ontology.²⁷ Current hermeneutical theory, likewise, suffers the fate of anemic discussion of ontology.²⁸ The danger of ontological discussion will be the tendency to slip into phenomenological depiction of readerly activity tied to a flawed metaphysics; therefore, a distinctly *theological* ontology will be necessary.²⁹ Such a concern leads Webster to deny all attempts which begin by constructing a general hermeneutic to, then, apply to the reading of Scripture.³⁰

Webster outlines four points that must be made in discussion of Christian reading of Scripture: (1) God is present and communicative in Himself as Word to us; (2) the Bible is primarily an instrument of divine action and, only secondarily, a text-act; (3) the primary modes of being human are having faith, hearing, and obeying (creatureliness precedes creativity); (4) such description must be description of the *church's* reading (as *creatura Verbi divini*).³¹

Such a theological ontology requires that primacy be given to Trinitarian description.³² The uniquely *self-manifesting* revelation of God, an ingredient part of the Trinitarian life, commands attention.³³ God's self-communication is free, sovereign, and spiritually-purposeful. Webster notes that the term 'Word of God' is a good deal preferable to 'revelation', as it denotes the particular presence of Jesus which commissions our reading in the Spirit.³⁴ The presence of Jesus, in fact, demonstrates the incarnational principle of *sacramentum*, the hallowing of creaturely reality for divine purposes, which Webster will apply to Scripture.³⁵

²⁶ Most pertinent to Webster's hermeneutical discussion will be *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); idem, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections', in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), pp. 47-86; idem, Holiness.

²⁷ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 21.

²⁸ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', p. 49.

²⁹ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', p. 58.

³⁰ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', pp. 58-9.

³¹ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', p. 64.

³² Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', p. 65.

³³ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 13; idem, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', p. 66.

³⁴ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', pp. 68-70. Stanley Hauerwas has suggested to me in correspondence that talk of revelation 'constantly threatens to become an epistemological category, which it plainly is not.' Webster avoids this by witnessing to divine antecedence.

³⁵ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 17-8, 21.

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The Bible must then be placed within the life of the Triune God. Webster notes, again and again, that in moving from depiction of the Triune God to that of the Bible, one has not left the doctrine of God behind. In fact, ‘Christian theology has a singular preoccupation: God and everything else *sub specie divinitatis*. All other Christian doctrines are applications or corollaries of the one doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity.’³⁶ The Bible is an instrument of divine action, best described by the categories of revelation, sanctification, and inspiration.³⁷ The sacramental depiction allows both the divine and human action of the Scripture to be discussed by taking particular note of the *indirect* nature of God’s ‘real and effective’ agency.³⁸ The Bible, then, is both dynamic and partially determined; therefore, meaning is never final.³⁹ God remains free to speak continually through the particularly human conventions of the text-act in fresh ways. By noting that the Bible’s holiness is due to God’s hallowing of it, objectification of the text-act is avoided.⁴⁰ More importantly, the instrumental nature of Scripture distances it from the *Logos*, avoiding immanentist and incarnational depictions of Scripture which fail to do justice to the unique nature of the *Logos ensarkos*.⁴¹ Christology, particularly affirmation of the unique lordship of the God-man, retains precedence to bibliology, precisely because Christ is the Word of God in a personal sense which surpasses the identity of Scripture as ‘word of God’.

The being of Holy Scripture is its reference to revelation, using textual visibility to witness to the *viva vox Dei*.⁴² In short, Webster articulates (though not in so many words) that ‘the being of Holy Scripture is in becoming’.⁴³ Throughout his discussion, Webster ‘relativizes the Bible, because to talk of the text as an instrument of divine action is primarily to say something about God, not about the text’.⁴⁴ Dogmatic theology can only address Scripture as being within the economy of salvation, an as-

³⁶ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 43.

³⁷ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, ch.1.

³⁸ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 74.

³⁹ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 72.

⁴⁰ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 30-34.

⁴¹ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 23.

⁴² Webster, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 49-50.

⁴³ Bruce McCormack, ‘The Being of Holy Scripture is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism,’ in V. Bacote, L. Miguelz, and D. Ockholm (eds.), *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 55-75.

⁴⁴ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 73.

pect of creaturely reality set apart by God for his particular purposes at particular times.⁴⁵

Webster chastens the hermeneutical discussion by referring to interaction with the Scriptural texts as ‘reading’ rather than the more pro-active term ‘interpretation’.⁴⁶ In fact, ‘reading Holy Scripture is “faithful” reading: exegetical reason caught up in faith’s abandonment of itself to the power of the divine Word to slay and to make alive’.⁴⁷ Readers do not actualize the text, nor do they finish its text-act (at least not in an ultimate sense). Rather, readers demonstrate true humanity by means of faith, hearing, and obedience.⁴⁸ Webster continually brings in language of mortification and vivification to describe the effects of consensual reading, noting a particular danger of radical reader-response criticism.⁴⁹ The particularly *intrusive* nature of mortification seems to rule out any theory which states that readers have an unchecked ability to construct textual meaning.⁵⁰

Likewise, in limiting the creaturely ability to manipulate the text-act, Webster also limits the need for the elite to decipher the text-act. The clarity or perspicuity of the text is a divine quality bestowed upon the text so that it might be termed ‘self-interpreting’.⁵¹ As he puts it, ‘Scripture’s clarity is neither an intrinsic element of the text as text nor simply a fruit of exegetical labour; it is that which the text becomes as it functions in the Spirit-governed encounter between the self-presenting saviour and the faithful reader’.⁵² While ‘reading Scripture cannot but involve the acts which are part of all reading: construing words, grasping their relationships, following a narrative or argument, and so on’,⁵³ much more is going on than human ingenuity. Graciously, the ‘Spirit has been and continues to be given to illuminate the reader, and so exegetical reason may trust the promise of Christ to lead us into the truth by the Spirit’s presence and power’.⁵⁴ The divine role in human reading is, obviously, emphasised in Webster’s account of the receptive posture of faithful humans before Scripture.

⁴⁵ Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Sacra Doctrina; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴⁶ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 86.

⁴⁷ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 86.

⁴⁸ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, pp. 80-1.

⁵⁰ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 84.

⁵¹ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 93-5.

⁵² Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 95.

⁵³ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 91.

⁵⁴ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 91.

Finally, Webster notes the particularly *ecclesial* nature of reading Scripture. The reading of Scripture requires certain ‘dispositions and skills which are deployed by the wise Christian reader’ and can only be cultivated within the church.⁵⁵ Webster’s contribution to discussion of the corporate nature of interpretation/reading lies in his warning that talk of the ‘corporate aspects of Christian reading...not allow theological language about the church to dissolve into generic language about “forms of life”, “sociality”, even “ecclesiality”’.⁵⁶ The church, the elect community of the intrusive grace of Christ, requires distinctly theological description at the communal level.⁵⁷ As with the individual, ‘the church, if it reads well, always reads against itself’.⁵⁸ Ruled behaviour will provide the type of skills and structures in which proper receptive reading might take place to chasten and exhort the community of God’s electing work. The witness of the Spirit in the church ever points to the Word, requiring distinctly Christian explication.⁵⁹

John Webster has articulated the place of Scripture within the economy of God’s saving grace. At each step, he has articulated all actions *sub specie divinitatis*. Human action, while not denied or ignored, is accorded a secondary role in theological description of reality. Such an account provides theological space for description of human action in the activity of reading and will be quite incomplete apart from such depiction. Webster’s account must precede that of Fowl, for divine action precedes (prevenes) and provides for (creates) creaturely activity. The doctrines of creation and election necessitate intellectually-rigorous attention be directed at the particular human means by which God reveals himself; such leads us to the need for an account of human interpretation and its provision by the work of Fowl, considered secondarily and *sub specie divinitatis*.

⁵⁵ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 85.

⁵⁷ Such is the danger of interacting with much postmodern theory: that Christians would be content merely to depict their existence (individually and/or corporately) in merely socio-cultural terms with non-ecclesial carryover. The warnings of George Lindbeck to allow the text to absorb the world, while one-sided, provide a helpful supplement to such secular jargon [*The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)]. See George Hunsinger, ‘Postliberal theology,’ in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge Companions to Religion; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 42-57.

⁵⁸ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, p. 86.

⁵⁹ Webster, *Word and Church*, ch.7.

4. FOWL AND FAITHFUL READING

Stephen Fowl has written a book quite different from those of Webster. Four points provide a rather helpful path through his picture of theological interpretation of Scripture: (1) access to authorial intention is plausible, albeit in a chastened form; (2) human authorial intention is not *the* exclusive meaning of Scripture; (3) theological interpretation has as its goal the cultivation of virtue and excellence amongst the people of God; and (4) an *underdetermined* theory of interpretation will provide a more helpful manner for talk of meaning. In short, Fowl's account of readerly activity supplements Webster's account of activity and, in fact, requires something like the account of divine action provided by Webster to account for the vigilance and mortification present in Christian reading of Scripture.

First, Fowl has revived the author by positing that her intentions can, in fact, be evident in texts and apprehended by readers.⁶⁰ Intentions and motives must be distinguished, avoiding tying intentions to psychological factors involved in the writing of the text, which answer the question, '*Why* is the author doing this?' Rather, intentions answer the question, '*What* is the author doing here?'.⁶¹ Finitude and sinfulness limit the author's self-knowledge, thus making the quest for motives perilous for the author and even more so for the reader.⁶² Intentions, in contrast to motives, are present in the grammatical, linguistic, and rhetorical features of the particular text and, therefore, can be apprehended by the conscientious interpreter.⁶³ Such intentions can be spoken of in a 'coherent and constrained way'.⁶⁴ Fowl, in short, has argued for the possibility that one might encounter the author's intentions in the reading of a text.

Second, Fowl places great emphasis upon the need for interpreters to note the plurality of interpretive interests and, therefore, resists claims to exclusivity with regard to meaning.⁶⁵ Fowl continues to note the plausibility of referring to the author's intention as a meaning of the text; however, it is simply *a* meaning and may not be the most useful meaning

⁶⁰ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,' in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 73-7.

⁶¹ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', p. 74.

⁶² Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', p. 73.

⁶³ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', p. 75.

⁶⁴ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', p. 73.

⁶⁵ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', pp. 77-82; see also Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), ch.2 (esp. pp. 33-40).

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at any given time or place.⁶⁶ Any attempt to limit meaning to human authorial intention is question-begging, for the definition of meaning is exactly what everyone seems to disagree about.⁶⁷ Fowl notes the lack of ‘a general, comprehensive theory of textual meaning that is neither arbitrary nor question-begging’.⁶⁸ Not only is ‘any attempt to tie a single stable account of meaning to authorial intention’ theoretically problematic, it also places Christians in an ‘awkward relationship to the OT’.⁶⁹ Fowl also notes that, even in the robust medieval fourfold interpretation of Scripture, the so-called *determinate* meaning (*sensus literalis*, or literal) was anything but single and static. He demonstrates that advocates of tying meaning exclusively to human authorial intention have to write off centuries of Christian interpretation as methodologically skewed and theologically misleading.⁷⁰ In summary, Fowl has argued that for theoretical, theological, and historical reasons, human authorial intention can and should only be one of several meanings of Scripture.

Third, Fowl has noted the particular ends for which Christians are to interpret and embody Scripture.⁷¹ Christians are to read Scripture so as to live faithfully before God and deepen communion with God and others in their present context; therefore, varying contexts will require various styles of reading.⁷² ‘Theological interpretation of Scripture therefore

⁶⁶ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, p. 86. As I note in fn. 110, Fowl’s movement beyond the human authorial intention may be nuanced by interaction with the practice of typological and/or figural reading by the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox theologians.

⁶⁷ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, p. 79; *idem*, *Engaging Scripture*, p. 35.

⁶⁸ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, p. 79.

⁶⁹ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, p. 80. To note the difficulty of tying meaning solely to human authorial intention, see David Steinmetz, ‘The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis’, in Stephen E. Fowl (ed.), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 28.

⁷⁰ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, pp. 82-5; see also Eugene Rogers, ‘How the Virtues of the Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas’, *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996), p. 65. Rogers notes that, while the *sensus literalis* is that which the author intends, Thomas understood God to be the primary author of Scripture. Such a divine view of Scripture’s authorship led Thomas to emphasize the diversity of literal meanings.

⁷¹ In addition to ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’ and *Engaging Scripture*, see also Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture & Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), esp. chs. 1-3 and 7.

⁷² Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, pp. 86-7.

needs, ultimately, to advance these ends for which Christians are called to interpret Scripture.⁷³ Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Fowl notes the particularly canonical (or text-based) focus of communal argument which fosters creativity in faithfulness to the tradition.⁷⁴ The practical necessity of embodying Scripture for all Christians necessitates a theory of interpretation that renders the Bible accessible to all Christians, avoiding a magisterial elitism. Fowl, drawing on the trenchant historical work of Eugene Rogers, finds such a theory in Thomas's notion of the *sensus literalis*, a diverse 'plain sense' of Scripture.⁷⁵ As noted above, many texts in the OT cannot minister to the people of God now apart from a creative re-reading in light of later revelation.⁷⁶ The particular ends for which Christians read Scripture necessitate diverse methods of reading at particular times and places, leading Fowl to argue for a pragmatic theory of meaning which acknowledges a plurality of methods as useful.⁷⁷

Finally, Fowl advances what he calls an *underdetermined* theory of interpretation which will posit some manner of determinancy without ty-

⁷³ Fowl, 'The Role of Authorial Intention', p. 86.

⁷⁴ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 6-7. Note that Fowl emphasizes the functional authority of Scripture in the church. Such a non-ontological argument, of course, is not necessarily contradictory to an ontological description of Scripture's authority (as in Webster's argument for Scripture's *holiness*); see also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

⁷⁵ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 38-9; Rogers, 'Virtues', pp. 65-74.

⁷⁶ Fowl notes the French monk who must preach Psalm 137 in the fourteenth century, the famed example of Steinmetz in his, 'Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis', p. 28.

⁷⁷ Here Fowl's argument is particularly weak in that he fails to offer broader salvation-historical parameters within which the OT may be re-appropriated by the people of God after the ascension of Christ. His lack of interest in salvation-historical movements paves the way for his errant reading of Acts 10-15 regarding parallels to the full inclusion of practicing homosexuals into the church. For all his interest in the history of biblical interpretation, Fowl has failed to notice that interpreters as diverse as Origen, Augustine, Thomas, Calvin, and Barth all value the necessity of salvation-historical development for Christian reading of Scripture (obviously in different ways, as seen in comparing Origen to the others). Such is the hermeneutical problem best expressed by Fowl's dogmatic weakness: a tendency to sever the witness of the Spirit from the ministry of the Word; see Katherine Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the 'Plain Sense' of Genesis 1-3* (Issues in Systematic Theology 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), ch.1.

ing meaning solely to the human authorial intention.⁷⁸ Fowl attempts to navigate between two foils: (1) those who tie meaning solely to authorial intention; and (2) those who attempt to deconstruct any and every attempt to read a text. Fowl, while noting the benefits of acknowledging the unfinished work of interpretation, finds deconstructive theorists to be guilty on three accounts: (1) limiting interpretation to professional readers, who have the wherewithal to find determinate meaning and overthrow it;⁷⁹ (2) poor historical narration of the metaphysics of presence;⁸⁰ and (3) exalting text *qua* text to the point of denying the possibility of interaction with the other (author) apart from violence.⁸¹ By noting the determinate nature of texts, with certain formal limits (i.e. grammar, rhetoric, etc.), Fowl argues that the meaning of Scripture will, for a Christian, fall within a certain field or matrix allowed by the *regula fidei*.⁸² Christian accounts of the Triune God and his engagement with the world in the story of Israel and Christ provide limits to the range of meanings which may be drawn from the canonical Scripture. Where other meanings may be drawn out by Marxists or Muslims, such readings will not be Christian readings unless they conform to this *regula fidei*. Meaning must make sense of the words. Careful attention to the particular textual features cannot be avoided. But meaning may be quite diverse and, oftentimes, will enjoin supplementation of human authorial intent, precisely within these ecclesially-noted (and we might add: biblically sketched) limits.⁸³

Fowl has argued that Scripture ought to be interpreted for its *underdetermined* meaning—without adherence to one particular method, but with a constant eye to the *regula fidei* and the ends for which Christians are to interpret Scripture, particularly the cultivation of virtue and faithful-

⁷⁸ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 56ff.

⁷⁹ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 48-52. Fowl makes particular note of the manner in which Catherine Pickstock demonstrates the ways in which to avoid finality in interpretation without overthrowing the entire Western metaphysical tradition. See Pickstock, *After Writing*.

⁸¹ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 55-6.

⁸² Fowl, ‘The Conceptual Structure of New Testament Theology’, in Scott J. Hafemann (ed.), *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 232-5.

⁸³ Fowl, ‘The Role of Authorial Intention’, p. 85. By adding the phrase ‘biblically sketched,’ I mean to affirm that Fowl’s account affirms the pluriform nature of meaning (oftentimes) at the expense of singular canonical unity about the *res* of Holy Scripture. While noting the discontinuities in revelation at various stages of redemptive history, a deeper appreciation for the biblical-theological continuity of the covenant of grace would be instructive.

ness. Webster's discussion of receptive reading and the communal task of virtuous listening resounds with clarity in Fowl's depiction of charitable conversation with fellow readers present and past within the church. The mutual inherence of both accounts is only rendered possible by a classical account of divine transcendence which provides for a non-competitive account of divine and human action and allows radical immanence of the wholly other Lord who speaks.

5. GOD TRANSCENDS CREATION: JOSEPH, COMPATIBILISM, AND NON-COMPETITIVENESS

In this attempt to draw on the strengths of both Webster and Fowl, differentiation of modes of discourse must be sustained. These theologians are not doing the same thing; however, that does not mean that they cannot be describing the same thing in different ways or genres. The doctrine of divine transcendence, characterizing the categorical distinction between God and world, must be articulated to account for the diversity of human reports on the event of scriptural reading.

At this point, it would be helpful to remember the climactic statement uttered by Joseph, 'As for you, you planned evil against me, but God planned it for good' (Gen 50:20). Use of the same verb, *hasab*, to denote the actions of both his brothers and God demonstrates that Joseph sees one action (or series of actions) from two perspectives. Human actions have been described in the preceding 13 chapters (and accurately so). Only now (with the sole exception of Joseph's statement in Gen 45:5-9) are these very same events articulated as properly *theological* events, divine actions.⁸⁴ Such multi-perspectival description of action occurs throughout the Scriptures,⁸⁵ demonstrating the simultaneous work of God and

⁸⁴ The narrator, of course, knows that the dream recounted in Gen 37 has been at work all along; however, the theological characterization of the actions of Joseph's brothers is only now presented in hindsight for pedagogical purposes (i.e. comfort). See Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 370-74; for similar judgments regarding the larger context of Genesis, see Murray H. Lichtenstein, 'An Interpersonal Theology of the Hebrew Bible', in Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (eds.), *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (SBLSS 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), pp. 61-82.

⁸⁵ Victor P. Hamilton notes the later parallels to the multi-perspectivalism present in the Joseph-story in the stories of Daniel, Esther, Ruth, and (most explicitly) Judas [*Genesis* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 707]. The most extreme example of multi-perspectival rendering of an action is the Petrine interpretation of the crucifixion in Acts 2:23—noting the divine action of delivering Christ to death, and the sinful action of the humans who

humans in the events of history. The hermeneutical point to be taken is this: both modes of discourse are appropriate and correct and, at the same time, entirely inadequate apart from each other. A dogmatic argument such as this entails discussion of the divine attribute of transcendence, a characterization of the distinction between God and world. Philosophers have attested to such a distinction in the articulation of various *compatibilist theories* regarding the relationship of divine and human action, which require that one encourage description of both divine and human action as it pertains to Scriptural reading. Without endorsing such philosophical accounts *as is*, the particular import of a doctrine of transcendence can be sketched by articulating the pay-off of compatibilism.

A *compatibilist theory* commonly entails that ‘determinism does not undermine freedom and responsibility’.⁸⁶ Without entering into the quagmire of debate regarding degrees of determinism, definitions of liberty and responsibility, or the applicability of the term ‘determinism’ to the Trinitarian interaction with human history, it must be said that something approximating the *compatibilist* commonality would necessitate the assignment of intellectual effort to description of both levels of action—divine determination or action and human action or responsibility. Applied to the current hermeneutical discussion, two currents of thought must be present: description of revelation (a divine action) and reading (a human activity). Both descriptions must be attempted and not played off against one another; chastening one another without calling one another’s right to exist into question. There is no tension.

Perhaps the best way to characterize such a *compatibilist* theory of interpretation would be as an attempt to offer a ‘thick description’ of human and divine action centred on the readerly interaction with the canonical texts of the Church. Dogmatic reflection on the gospel requires one to centre such an account on the traditional doctrine of divine transcendence. God is wholly other than creation, so the tradition has argued. God’s activity, therefore, cannot be competing with human activity. Rather, God’s activity actually enables humans to live, move, and have our very being. Applied to scriptural reading, such an account must take note of the manner in which God uses human texts to reveal Himself to others, without neglecting the human activity of reading to hear God’s speech.

The doctrine of divine transcendence, undercut for too long by the

brought about his murder. This was the greatest act of love and the greatest sin.

⁸⁶ Ishtiygue Haji, ‘Compatibilist Views of Freedom and Responsibility’, in Robert Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 202.

univocity of being, has found recent prominence in the writings of Kathryn Tanner.⁸⁷ Tanner has emphasized the gift-giving which is at the heart of the gospel—the Triune God granting life and freedom to creation.⁸⁸ Classic accounts of transcendence are mined from the texts of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, who are found to hold to the non-competitive-nature of divine and human action in the most thoroughgoing manner.⁸⁹ A ‘god of the gaps’ would find no place in such an account, for Tanner and the classical tradition suggest that creational activity accounts for all events. Obviously, epistemic limitations will limit humans from ascertaining such causality in varying degrees with regard to different events. But the causality of created beings remains total—extending to all occurrences.⁹⁰ Renaissance humanists were right to attempt to account for the immanent causes of natural events. The classical account provides for the broadest account of creational agency and freedom on the market: God gives life and agency to created beings.

But the secular naturalists went wrong in assuming that their accounts, insofar as they link natural causes to observable effects, negate the simultaneous agency of the Triune God. A Christian account of divine transcendence will remind us that God is completely other, veiled beyond our sight and fluid beyond our categories of conceptuality. God cannot be accounted for by Newton or Einstein, for he is utterly different from composite, created beings. God is spirit and utterly free to move and be. God’s fullness is the very fount of creaturely freedom, for ‘the fuller the giver the greater the bounty to others’.⁹¹ God’s freedom and completely actualised existence allows God to bless others with God’s overflow of actuality. The breadth of divine sovereignty and actualisation allows for human agency, rather than creating any perceived tension between two agents.

⁸⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); idem, *Politics of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); idem, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); idem, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

⁸⁸ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁹ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*, p. 3; see also Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, pp. 105-19.

⁹⁰ Miracles, traditionally called supernatural events, are the exceptions to the rule. But the traditional account of divine transcendence treats miracles as a subcategory of broader divine engagement of the world. Whether such a distinction is merely epistemic or also ontological remains a topic for debate.

⁹¹ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*, p. 3.

The incarnation, when the Son of God took upon himself human form, represents the most intense example of this relationship between Creator and created. Two levels of agency, in contrast to all *monothelite* and *monophysite* tendencies, are within one person, this Jesus of Nazareth. Christ's divine agency, as judge and eternal Son, in no way undermines the genuine human agency of the obedient Nazarene. 'Most generally, Jesus is the one in whom God's relationship with us attains perfection. In Jesus, unity with God takes a perfect form; here humanity has become God's own.'⁹² Perceived tension between the humanity and divinity of Christ fails to note the categorical distinction between these two levels of existence, Creator and created. Precisely because they are so distinct can they be so close: transcendence provides for immanence.

A dogmatic account of divine transcendence which provides for radical immanence is a necessary prerequisite to any account of human action. Without such an account one will drift towards Pelagianism, with its faulty ontology and inadequate doxology; or into Stoic fatalism, with its inadequate account of the doctrines of creation and election. In short, a non-competitive understanding of divine and human action is essential to provide for an extensive theological account of any event within salvation-history.

John Webster has recently articulated this dogmatic distinction between divine and human existence in terms of God's immensity: 'in theological usage, transcendence, like infinity, is non-comparative: its content cannot be reached either by the magnification of creaturely properties (so that immensity is mere vastness) or by their negation (so that immensity is simply lack of spatial limitation). God's immensity is his qualitative distinction from creaturely reality, and can only be grasped on the basis of its enactment in the ways and works of God...immensity is thus not quantitative disparity but a "differential of quality".'⁹³ Webster has yet to articulate the effects such an account should have upon the actual task of dogmatics: the freedom of God to create necessitates co-extensive accounts of covenantal agency at both the human and divine levels.⁹⁴ Such a dogmatic account, with broad rhetorical similarity to philosophical accounts of compatibilism, must be in place for theological discussion of the reading of Scripture.

Christian interpretation of the OT requires mention at this point, for

⁹² Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*, p. 9.

⁹³ Webster, *Confessing God*, p. 94.

⁹⁴ See his forthcoming 2007 Kantzer Lectures for greater specificity in this regard: *Perfection and Presence: God with Us according to the Christian Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

it is such textual interaction that has necessitated much of this debate. ‘Thick description’ of such reading will not fail to include historical-critical study of what God did through the original writers and compilers (as Jewish text *qua* Jewish text); however, it will also and essentially pay attention to the present appropriation of these texts as locales for God’s speech to the church today (as Christian text *qua* Christian text). God does not speak to us the same way he spoke to Hosea and Joel. Yet God does not speak to us apart from how God spoke to Hosea and Joel.⁹⁵ As history has developed, moved forward, the people of God have the benefit of a history of listening. Present-day believers may hear the words God spoke to our ancestors, an inheritance to be ignored only at our peril. However, God continues to speak and requires constant attention. Scriptural reading in each context finds fresh meaning in the text, demonstrating God’s faithfulness to speak to generation after generation in its own time and place. The origin of Scripture itself requires complex description, as divine and human action. However, the divine use of created reality to reveal Godself continues even now and, therefore, contemporary readerly activity requires multi-perspectival description as well.

In these varied instances of reading with their diverse range of meanings granted, humans are reading. At the same time, God is revealing: granting existence, providing proper cranial functioning, removing the fog of sinful limitation in some measure, and providing at least a hint of the *visio Dei*. Both God and creature are busy about their work. The task of theological reflection upon such an event cannot shortchange either agent’s activity. All these elements will fit into what might be called a ‘thick description’ of God’s revelation in Scripture.

6. DOCTRINES OF SIN, ESCHATOLOGY, AND ECCLESIOLOGY: REFORMED AND CATHOLIC EMPHASES

Who knows which type of reading may be more or less helpful at various times and places? Whatever style of reading is adopted, the dogmatic account of divine transcendence and its radical provision for non-competitive divine-human relations provided here allows sufficient theological foundation for sustained reflection on both levels of agency (and, therefore, allows the conjoining of Fowl and Webster’s accounts of the reading of Scripture).

Something like figural or typological reading of Scripture is certainly necessitated to account for the plurality of ways in which God has made

⁹⁵ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 58.

use of Scripture to perpetuate the flourishing of the church.⁹⁶ The purpose of Scripture is human flourishing,⁹⁷ according to the famed statement in 2 Tim 3:17: Scripture is inspired for usefulness in the church, ‘so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’. The immediate objection to such an underdetermined theory of interpretation accuses it of ‘baptising social readings’ and endangering the church by opening the door to false, self-deceptive teaching.⁹⁸ Such a concern is most appropriate, given the immediate turn from the above-quoted statement regarding the purpose of Scripture to the warnings about false teachers in 2 Tim 4:3ff.: ‘the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine’. The ultimate cure for such a danger is not adoption of a particular methodology (either historical-criticism or reader-response), nor is it the work of some magisterium (either the New Testament Ph.D. or the Roman Pontiff). Rather, the only cure for such danger will be the direct vision of God. That is, danger will only be dispelled by eschatological fulfilment and cannot be foreclosed by adoption of any method. Modern promises of closure and peace have been shown false and require deconstruction by dogmatic accounts of sin and eschatology.

The tendency of Christians to find comfort in the rules of method or magisterium resides in an over-realized eschatology which fails to understand the lingering effects of sin and finitude. If deconstructionists have demonstrated nothing else, they have pointed out the lunacy of claiming interpretive closure.⁹⁹ The Christian life, in all components, will undoubtedly be dangerous—by avoiding the segmentation of Scripture reading from the rest of Christian existence, one can gain a healthy appreciation for the place of danger in such reading. A dogmatic account of

⁹⁶ David Steinmetz, ‘The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis’, p. 37; see also Daniel J. Treier, ‘The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? *Sic et Non*’, *Trinity Journal* 24 (2003), pp. 77-103. The ‘figural reading of Scripture’ is a more Christ-centred hermeneutical theory than the four-fold medieval approach (see Westminster Confession of Faith I.9), though this comparison of figural, allegorical, and four-fold readings of Scripture would take this essay way beyond my limits here; see David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

⁹⁷ Ellen Charry utilizes the language of ‘human flourishing’ in *By the Renewing of Your Minds: the Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁹⁸ Willie J. Jennings, ‘Baptizing a Social Reading: Theology, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernity’, in Roger Lundin (ed.), *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 117-127.

⁹⁹ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 52-4.

the tie between Word and Spirit aids in such a caution. The Spirit has been left for our comfort and enlightenment. But the Spirit testifies to the Word and comforts us *in the Word's absence and until the Word's return*. The very ministry of the Spirit throughout creation must always be tied to the doctrine of ascension (the distance between the Word and the creation) and eschatology (the promised return of the Word for closure). Shy of the *parousia*, reading of Scripture (and all human activity) will be flawed. The comforting ministry of the Spirit will never move the church beyond coping with its lamented distance from Christ (prior to his return). A Reformed emphasis upon the indwelling effects of sin must ever chasten our attempts to account for the practices of the church, in particular the reading of Scripture.

Such danger must be countered by the communal emphasis upon ruled reading and regeneration of readers. Both Fowl and Webster have articulated the need for virtue as a prerequisite to proper reading of Scripture. Reading requires patience, care, and compassion in attending to the oftentimes tedious and taxing nature of texts. Such virtue, of course, is not a form of nicety or uncritical affirmation, but a particular focus upon seeing Christ as the glue holding all together. Webster, in particular, has noted the danger that discussion of human activity might fail to take particular note of the distinctiveness of Christian virtue and community.¹⁰⁰ Needed is not mere virtue, but divinely-wrought righteousness; not mere community, but the church in the economy of grace. This is one example of the chastening of discussion of human action by description of divine action; the election of the church and individuals by God requires *distinctive* description of those individuals (and their reading) as supplementation to the terms provided by a more creationally-based sociology. Enough with Christian use of the term ‘community’—we need the church and language to suit it.¹⁰¹

Adequate virtue will not be acquired by all, resulting in the need for communal rules to note when and where someone’s reading has gone wrong. Such rules will not deny that person’s interpretation the claim to have found a ‘meaning’; rather, they will note that it is not a ‘Christian meaning’. Fowl makes particular note of the way in which the *regula fidei* was developed to do just this in debates with early heretics.¹⁰² The ‘rule of faith’ does not specify a particular reading method or strategy. The ‘rule of faith’ does not seek to define the term ‘meaning’. Rather, the ‘rule of

¹⁰⁰ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, pp. 85-6.

¹⁰¹ John Webster, ‘Christ, Church, and Reconciliation’, in *Word and Church*, pp. 211-30.

¹⁰² Fowl, ‘Conceptual Structure of New Testament Theology’, pp. 232-5.

faith' articulates a particular meta-narrative within which all Christian interpretation must find its home.¹⁰³ All objections which find the interpretive program of Fowl to promote unchastened pluralism are answered by the use of the 'rule of faith' within the life of the Christian community. Things certainly become more complicated when one asks the truly difficult questions, such as those regarding the application of the 'rule of faith' in judgment upon certain interpretations of Scripture. However, the difficulty must be noted to lie, not in the pluriformity of interpretations, but in the differentiating of whether any of them are, in fact, contrary to the 'rule of faith'. The Reformed emphasis upon indwelling sin and its necessary thwarting of all pre-glorified human activity must be held in union with a catholic emphasis upon the Spirit's presence within the whole body of Christ, which chastens the readings of individual Christians or congregations.¹⁰⁴

At this point, earlier comments regarding the tendency to turn towards a magisterium might have seemed hasty; however, the eschatological nature of interpretive agreement and accuracy must not be forgotten. While some notion of a magisterium does seem to be a healthy manner of applying the 'rule of faith', it cannot be assumed to provide eschatological presence or immediacy. Nicholas Healy has noted the need to move away from idealized conceptions of the church *in via*.¹⁰⁵ In short, bureaucratic vision (even of the holiest sort) must not be allowed to replace the need for beatific vision. We cannot theorize beyond our sinfulness and brokenness. While communal discussion seems essential to survival (much less flourishing), magisterial infallibility falsely enslaves the church to modern considerations and inevitably leads to an escalation of the Spirit's work beyond mere comfort and testimony. Thus, any magisterial authority—be it a creed or confession, a presbytery or an elder—functions only in a ministerial or instrumental (and, thus, irreducibly contingent) role in the life-giving works of the self-revealing God.

Others might object that any credence given to Fowl's program carries

¹⁰³ Paul M. Blowers, 'The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith', *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997), pp. 199–228.

¹⁰⁴ It is the Spirit's presence which maintains what the Word taught in his life and, particularly, in the time between his resurrection and ascension. For the ministry of the forty days and the development of the *regula fidei*, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts: A Theological Commentary*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), excursus on the post-resurrection teaching ministry of Christ in Acts 1:2–3.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas J. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

with it the adoption of a non-realist position.¹⁰⁶ Such an objection, if true, would be devastating. At this point, however, objections which might apply to certain pragmatists (e.g., Stanley Fish, Jeffrey Stout, and Richard Rorty) do not apply to those who supplement their epistemic pragmatism with ontological realism (as demonstrated here by the supplementation of Fowl's work with that of Webster, a move which Fowl may or may not himself support). While human actions require pragmatic description, their interaction with divine action allows epistemic pragmatism to coexist with a strong account of ontological realism.¹⁰⁷

Such an equation of pragmatism with non-realism has also led to the objection that *underdetermined* theories of interpretation cannot account for the transforming nature of Scripture.¹⁰⁸ Such repentant reading is, in fact, humanly impossible apart from the divine gift of freedom. But God does elect and remain faithful to his chosen people: opening eyes, replacing hearts of stone with hearts of flesh, placing the law within them. Divine effulgence provides for creaturely obedience. The particularly *intrusive* nature of Scripture flows from the lordly appropriation of human texts for divine purposes and regeneration of human readers for holy reading.¹⁰⁹

The examples of sinful appropriation of Scripture to underwrite sinful practices which can be so easily culled from history have no theoretical impact on a dogmatic account of Scripture which maintains a Christian doctrine of sin and eschatology. Sinful readers will read sinfully, and the sinful readings of such readers will continue until the consummation of God's reconciling work in Christ. Tidiness is not an option, nor must it be sought apart from its divinely-appointed medium—the presence of Christ. Again, the Spirit's work in method and magisterium (used *ad hoc* by the church) cannot replace the promise of consummating divine action of the Word. The Spirit acts, providing freedom for our action. But such human agency will not attain final perfection apart from the re-entry of the Word himself into the creaturely realm.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 549-50.

¹⁰⁷ For a similar response to similar objections aimed at the postliberal project of George Lindbeck, see Bruce Marshall, 'Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian', *The Thomist* 53 (1989), pp. 353-402; see also Andrew Moore, *Realism and the Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 549.

¹⁰⁹ Webster's discussion of regeneration as a primary category for discussing Scripture, in his *Holy Scripture*, pp. 89ff, where he notes that proper reading requires rebirth.

7 'THICK DESCRIPTION' OF SCRIPTURAL READING

The reading of Scripture is a complex activity, with two subjects (divine and human) acting in regards to one object (canonical text) all at once, which requires a 'thick description.' To that end, the dogmatic project of John Webster has been utilized to offer description of divine action in revelation and has been supplemented by the pragmatic, *underdetermined* theory of interpretation of Stephen Fowl as a depiction of human readerly activity. While neither theologian might approve of such a union, the benefits of such conjoining have been seen to include matters epistemic, ontological, ethical, and ecclesial.¹¹⁰ Above all, the eschatological nature of human understanding reminds us that, in this time of spiritual and (even) interpretive suffering, the church ought to gather together often for exhortation lest any fall away from the truth. However such perseverance might be managed, the temptation to fight uncertainty and sinfulness with method or magisterium must be chastened by calls to patience, strength, and courage.

A Reformed-catholic account of human agency will note the fallenness of human activity between the entrance of sin into the world and the return of Christ as well as the necessity of ecclesial reading for the purpose of forming faithful Christians. A dogmatic account of divine transcendence and non-competitive relations between human and divine agency, articulated in the co-inherent work of Word and Spirit, provides the conceptual framework for such a Reformed-catholic theology and witnesses to the gospel freedom provided by our free, other, and graciously near Triune Lord.

¹¹⁰ For historical examples of such a multi-perspectival account of the reading of Holy Scripture, inclusive of both divine and human action in a non-competitive relation, see Richard A. Muller's sketch of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of Scripture, in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 2: *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), esp. ch. 7. The orthodox theologians of the post-Reformation era have much to teach us formally, as well as materially, about the manner in which to hold together affirmations about divine self-manifestation through Holy Scripture and rigorous theoretical and practical reflections about exegesis and doctrinal elucidation. Furthermore, Reformed orthodox reflections about the nature of typological and/or figural reading are particularly helpful, in as much as they specify and hone the earlier reformers' critical appropriation of medieval and patristic exegetical practices. In this regard, Fowl's proposals might be nuanced by assessment from a distinctly Reformed approach to construing the history of redemption and its concomitant parameters for figural and/or allegorical reading of certain texts.

NEWMAN VERSUS NEWMAN: THE APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA OF 1864 AND SUBSEQUENT AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS COMPARED.

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John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was the nineteenth century's most noteworthy convert to Roman Catholicism from evangelical protestantism. Raised in a middle-class home, the father of which experienced bankruptcy, he was won to Christ through the influence of his evangelical schoolmaster. In this faith, he had commenced studies at Trinity College, Oxford University in 1817 ; but he had certainly moved beyond this position by the time he was made a fellow of Oriel College five years later. From 1833, he had lent his support and his pen to the creation of the series of *Tracts for the Times* which aimed to rekindle in the Church of England both a sense of spiritual independence from the state and a recovery of pre-Reformation ideals of doctrine and worship. This series, ended abruptly with his penning of Tract 90 in 1839. Because the latter urged the holding of the Anglican 'Thirty-nine Articles of Religion' in a remarkably Catholic sense, it brought the censure of the Bishop of Oxford and a requirement that the series be ended. By 1845, Newman, thus-silenced, was received into the Roman communion.

That John Henry Newman was a man deeply concerned with his place in the historical record will be apparent to anyone who has ever taken in hand the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.¹ This, the account of the period of his life through 1845 (the year of his re-affiliation to Roman Catholicism) had been written in the year 1864 in reply to aspersions cast on his candor and transparency by the contemporary clergyman and historian, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875). The ease and rapidity with which Newman churned out weekly installments of this autobiography disclosed both his determination to be favorably portrayed *and* his possessing of a wealth of material covering the preceding half-century of his life. Writing the installments from his Oratory in Birmingham, Newman had at his fingertips notebooks, clippings, and correspondence in an amazing abundance. He wished to seem - and indeed did seem - unassailable in his treatment of the decades in question.

¹ For the purpose of this essay, I employ the *Apologia* edition prepared by Longmans and Co., London, 1934.

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Two different biographers² have drawn attention to Newman's predilection for hoarding up, as year gave way to year, these materials which were drawn upon in 1864. He had begun the process of collection, apparently, while still in his teens; the accumulation was accelerated both in his Oxford undergraduate years and those spent as a fellow of Oriel College. From the reckoned commencement of the Oxford Movement in 1833, this stream of materials gathered by Newman became a flood.³ In retrospect, it seems that from early adulthood he was desirous of being remembered by posterity, and aimed to facilitate an autobiography with no thought whatsoever, that in future, his relationship with the Church of England might change. That he did pass over to the Catholic Church in 1845 only made the undertaking of some biographical or autobiographical effort more likely still.

Thus, when Newman set to work to clear his own name against insinuations that he had concealed a secret Roman Catholic loyalty for years prior to his actual re-affiliation in 1845, he had at hand all the materials necessary to assist him in setting forward an account favorable to himself – an account which, in the event, also went far to rehabilitate his public reputation.

Now our interest is justifiably piqued when it comes to light that Newman did not think it sufficient – even in light of the *Apologia*'s marked success – to leave well enough alone; by it, at age 64, he had successfully caught the English-speaking world's attention. No, Newman was determined that there should be a *further* substantive biography in two parts: the first (to be written by a protestant)⁴ would cover his Anglican years,

² Henry Tristram, ed. *John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), pp.26-7. W. Robbins, *The Newman Brothers: An Essay in Comparative Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 16 speaks of 20,000 letters preserved and archived by J. H. Newman in the course of his life. He asserts that this illustrates a self-consciousness and self-absorption.

³ This being the case, it is very difficult to know what sense to make of Newman's claim, when writing the *Apologia* of 1864 that he possessed 'no autobiographical notes' and yet 'an abundance of letters from friends, with some copies or drafts of my answers...for the most part unsorted' pp. xxv,xxvi. The collection of autobiographical writings compiled by Tristram contains numerous items written by Newman *in advance* of his composing the *Apologia*. These included personal journals extending back to his pre-University days, an extensive sketch of his Mediterranean cruise of 1833, another regarding his services rendered to the Catholic University of Dublin, and two biographical sketches produced for reference works.

⁴ The individual was Ann Mozley, whose *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman* (2 volumes), were issued in 1891.

while the second (to be written by a fellow Catholic) would survey the balance of his life. And to further this work by biographers selected by himself, Newman – in his 74th year – began to compose an autobiographical memoir consisting of four parts. The memoir, when completed, was to be furnished to the chosen biographers, who were also to be permitted access to the trove of letters and other records Newman had amassed.

That Newman would undertake this project a mere decade after the success of the *Apologia*, in reliance on this same hoard of materials, makes a statement of its own about the man's determination to be remembered on terms chosen by himself. Yet the existence of two kinds of autobiographical writings, composed only a decade apart, also raises the highly interesting question of how they compare. Was the second effort necessary because the first was inadequate? Or too brief? Or incomplete? Or had new evidence come to light? This paper will proceed to compare the two documents in connection with several questions. Upon highlighting variations between the *Apologia* of 1864 and the *Autobiographical Memoir* composed in 1874, the paper will make some attempt at explaining these. We proceed to the comparison of the following items:

1. Accounts of his religious conversion while still a schoolboy at Ealing, and attachment to evangelical Christianity.
2. The roles played by various Oxford individuals in moving Newman from his early evangelicalism through a liberal phase, and then finally to an exaltation of the theology of the Church Fathers.
3. The circumstances under which Newman ceased to be a tutor in Oriel College in 1832.

I ACCOUNTS OF HIS RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND EARLY ATTACHMENT TO EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

In composing his *Apologia* of 1864, Newman had shown himself remarkably willing to acknowledge his former indebtedness to evangelical individuals and influences spread across the first twenty-five years of his life. His experience of conversion, in 1816 – as recalled in 1864 was :

that the inward conversion of which I was conscious (and of which I am more certain than that I have hands or feet) would last into the next life.

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As regards the means of that conversion, Newman spoke of his Ealing schoolmaster,

the excellent man, long dead, the Rev. Walter Mayers of Pembroke College, Oxford who was the human means of this beginning of divine faith in me.

He spoke also of the authors which this Mayers had urged him to read, writers 'all of the school of Calvin'. He went on to specify by name the writers (William) Romaine (1714-1795), Thomas Scott (1747-1821) – to whom, he added 'he almost owed his soul', Daniel Wilson (1778-1858) thereafter Anglican bishop of Calcutta, Jones of Nayland (1726-1800) and Joseph Milner (1744-1797).⁵ Though it is clear that Newman was in a steady process of disengagement from these evangelical influences during the 1820's, the disengagement was gradual enough that he still contributed a series of letters to the ultra-Protestant *Record* newspaper as late as 1833.⁶

We find quite a different story when we consult the *Autobiographical Memoir*, which he began to compose in 1874. 'Subdued' would be the appropriate phrase to describe the one-sentence account of his early evangelical faith which Newman supplies, one decade after the *Apologia*. Walter Mayers, of whom he had spoken with tenderness in 1864 was now only

an excellent man ... from whom he received deep religious impressions, at the time Calvinistic in character, which were to him the beginning of new life.⁷

The *Memoir* does not shrink from acknowledging that Newman entered Oxford with a strongly Protestant cast of mind; it acknowledges that in 1819 he wrote an extensive poem recalling the terrors of the St.

⁵ *Apologia* pp. 4, 5, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 43. Newman admits to having made a donation to the launching of this newspaper at its inauguration in 1828. Frank M. Turner, author of *Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 121 reports that in this same period Newman was an active supporter of both the Bible Society and Church Missionary Society. The former was a pan-evangelical trans-denominational organization, the latter entirely supported by concerned individuals in the Church of England. There is just a hint of this activity, spread across the 1820's given in the *Memoir* in Henry Tristram, ed. *John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings*, p. 78.

⁷ Henry Tristram, ed. *John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings*, p. 29.

Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.⁸ Yet none of the authors earlier recommended to him by Walter Mayers are considered worthy of mention until, in this *Memoir* of 1874, Newman is prepared to speak of the influences and forces that shifted him to a theological position standing beyond evangelicalism. In this connection, the names of John Newton, Thomas Scott and Philip Doddridge are introduced as representatives of a system which,

from the first failed to find a response in his own religious experience as afterwards in his parochial. He had indeed been converted by it to a spiritual life ... but he had not been converted in that special way which it laid down as imperative.⁹

To say that this represents revisionism, as regards the *Apologia* of 1864, would be to put matters lightly. The 1864 document had granted the substance of the conversion episode at age fifteen; a decade later the writer is dismissive. What did it all suggest about the author of both documents? To this question we must return below.

II THE ROLES PLAYED BY VARIOUS OXFORD INDIVIDUALS IN MOVING NEWMAN FROM HIS EARLY EVANGELICALISM

In the 1864 *Apologia*, Newman had proceeded on the assumption that he owed his various readers an extended explanation of how the early influences over him of the Ealing schoolmaster, Walter Mayers, and the authors which he recommended to Newman were gradually displaced by those of distinctly different views. This he proceeded to do in considerable detail.¹⁰

From Edward Hawkins, Provost of Oriel College and Vicar of St. Mary's Church, Oxford, Newman learned to distance himself further from the Calvinistic influences of his late teens, to embrace the hitherto unattractive doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, and to esteem Tradition more highly – though not as a thing independent of Scripture.¹¹ A fellow of the same college, Rev. William James, brought Newman to accept another doctrine hitherto ill-esteemed – the existence of an Apostolic Succession operative in the Church of England. From Richard Whately, another fellow of Oriel College and subsequently (from 1825) Principal

⁸ Tristram, p. 42 fn.1 indicates that Newman instructed that this recollection be deleted from his hand-written memoir.

⁹ Tristram, p. 79.

¹⁰ *Apologia* pp.8-25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

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of St. Alban Hall, he received the steadfast encouragement to develop his own reasoning powers. Whately was the first to press him to think clearly about the Church's existence as a substantive, free-standing body and the corollary of this – that the State ought never to interfere in what, properly considered, was the domain of the Church.¹²

John Keble, fellow of Oriel, was also named among those who had special influence upon Newman. To this man, he attributed his coming to embrace 'the Sacramental system; that is the doctrine that material phenomena are both the types and the instruments of real things unseen.'¹³ And then there was Hurrell Froude, a pupil of Keble. Froude was Newman's travelling companion on the celebrated Mediterranean cruise of early 1833, and a closest friend until his premature death in 1836. From Froude, Newman learned

to look with admiration toward the Church of Rome, and in the same degree to dislike the Reformation. He fixed deep in me the idea of devotion to the Blessed Virgin and he led me gradually to believe in the Real Presence.¹⁴

Here then was Newman's admission in 1864 of his having undergone a steady drift from an early, staunch evangelicalism into a mixture of rational belief and High Church thinking in the period to 1833. Would Newman construe those early years in Oxford similarly when compiling his *Memoir* a decade later?

In that *Memoir* Newman supplies both *more* and *less* than in the *Apologia*. Of his connection with Richard Whately, we are told far more about the influence of this Oxford don's system of logic upon Newman than in the earlier account.¹⁵ Once more, we read of the influence of Edward Hawkins; here in particular we read more fully of Hawkins' determination to push Newman beyond his lingering evangelical predilection to divide, when preaching, his audiences 'into two classes; the one all darkness and the other, all light'.¹⁶ In this connection, it is important to note Newman's new insistence in 1874 that it was not (as implied in the *Apologia*) the 'give and take' of discussions with liberally-minded senior colleagues in Oriel College which led to the softening of his formerly

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Tristram, ed. pp. 66-69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.77. At page 8 of the *Apologia*, Newman clearly dated his religious changes not to the period in which he commenced pastoral ministry (1824) but from 1822.

dogmatic evangelical views, but rather the undertaking of pastoral duties under the watchful eye of Hawkins.¹⁷

But there are more striking differences still to be observed. Two academics who formed little or no part of the 1864 discussion of how his earlier evangelical views were modified, are introduced in the 1874 *Memoir* and indicated to have been highly influential. As neither was of the rationalist or speculative tendency of Whately and Hawkins, we should suppose that these are additions of some considerable significance. Newman now treats Dr. Charles Lloyd, a Canon of Christ Church and Regius Professor of Divinity – in whose Divinity lectures he was a robust participant in the period 1823-4, as of as deep influence upon him in that era as was Whately. Lloyd, characterized by Newman as of the ‘high and dry school’ (High Church) undoubtedly upheld formal orthodoxy as it was then understood, and provided a kind of counterpoint to the un-dogmatic approach of Whately. We have Newman’s word for it that Lloyd looked on him with considerable approbation, and urged him to compose a theology textbook.¹⁸

Also appearing *de novo* as a formative influence in the mid-1820’s, according to the 1874 *Memoir*, is Edward Pusey, the future Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University. In the *Apologia* of 1864, this eminent person exits from the narrative after a few lines by reason of his leaving Oriel.¹⁹ Pusey is not encountered again until after the launching of the *Tracts for the Times*, in 1833. But in the 1874 account, Pusey – a fellow of Oriel before Newman gained the honor – is ranged with Charles Lloyd as the upholder of High Church orthodoxy in this formative stage of Newman’s life. A definite shift in portraiture is apparently underway.

Strikingly absent from the 1874 *Memoir*’s treatment of this formative period are two persons with whom Newman was undoubtedly associated, as indicated in the earlier *Apologia*: John Keble – then shortly to be famous for his publication, *The Christian Year* (1827) and Hurrell Froude, to whom Newman undoubtedly was indebted for the softening of his perspective on Roman Catholicism and the role of Mary.²⁰ But Newman has chosen, deliberately it seems, to lay all stress on formative figures who were of an older generation than his own. Again, we will return to the possible significance of these variances below.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 69-72.

¹⁹ *Apologia* p. 16.

²⁰ *Apologia* p. 25 and fn. 14 above.

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III THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH NEWMAN CEASED TO BE A TUTOR IN ORIEL COLLEGE IN 1832.

That Newman's future course was decisively affected by the phasing out of his Tutorship (though not his Fellowship) in Oriel College in 1832 is obvious to all. It was the liberty that this release gave him that permitted him to invest himself so heavily in the writing of his first major theological work, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (manuscript completed July 1832) and to undertake in December of the same year his extended tour of the Mediterranean. Yet the *Apologia* stops far short of indicating the strained and awkward circumstances under which this release from tutorial responsibilities occurred. Cryptically, Newman had declared simply that:

At this time I was disengaged from College duties, and my health had suffered from the labour involved in the composition of my Volume (i.e. *Arians*) ... I was easily persuaded to join Hurrell Froude and his Father, who were going to the south of Europe for the health of the former.²¹

Yet, in light of the disclosures entrusted by Newman to his 1874 *Memoir*, we are enabled to see that the words 'disengaged from College duties' (above) were very pregnant with meaning.

Simmering just beneath the surface of Newman's language in 1864, were recollections of a chain of events so trying that he would one decade later describe it as a gradual 'dying out of his Tutorship'. He would estimate the significance of this turn of events as of such magnitude as to provide the actual *terminus ad quem* for the launch of what he termed 'the Oxford theological movement' and which we simply call the Oxford Movement.²² The launch of the latter, according to the well-known statements of the *Apologia*, had been provided by the notable sermon of John Keble 'National Apostasy', delivered on July 23, 1833.²³

As the *Memoir* goes on to explain, a strong difference of opinion arose between Edward Hawkins, Provost of Oriel College, and two of the four college tutors – Hurrell Froude and Newman. At issue was the question of whether it was necessary or desirable that college tutors be ordained persons; Hawkins took the negative view while Froude and Newman took the affirmative. Hawkins in holding the negative opinion had no thought of dismissing the two who were otherwise-minded. It was simply the case

²¹ *Apologia* p. 32

²² *Memoir* p. 86

²³ *Apologia* p. 35

that Froude and Newman meant to function as clergymen as well as academic tutors in their relationship with the students assigned to them.

Newman, at least, refused to act deferentially to the numerous 'young men of birth, wealth, or prospects whom he considered (of course with real exceptions) to be the ruin of the place'. He also opposed the long-standing practice of compelling all College students to participate in Holy Communion.²⁴ Strong differences of opinion on such subjects existed between tutors and the college Provost, Hawkins from 1826 forward. In June of 1830, however, Hawkins informed a group (now consisting of three, rather than two tutors) that he had determined to assign no further students to them 'thus gradually depriving them of their office, according as their existing pupils took their degrees and left the University'.²⁵ The practical effect of this was that Newman was freed to write *Arians of the Fourth Century* and to accompany Froude (also relieved of his tutorial duties) to the Mediterranean. And the net effect of that, according to Newman's perspective of 1874 was that:

In the year after his relinquishing his College office, on his return from abroad, the Tract movement began. Humanly speaking, that movement never would have been, had he not been deprived of his Tutorship.²⁶

The Wider Significance of these Variants

With the help of the hoard of materials accumulated since his youth, Newman had written a largely plausible account of the first 45 years of his life, the *Apologia*, when 64 years old. We may grant that he had a legitimate desire in seeing some independent, yet sympathetic biographer or biographers describe his life as a whole, as it came nearer to its end a decade later. To that end, it was not inappropriate for him to provide access to copious pertinent materials he had accumulated over the preceding seven decades and even to provide sketches of portions or particular noteworthy incidents in his life. But when we have said all this, we are far from accounting for numerous stark discrepancies between the record Newman compiled for *public* consumption in 1864²⁷ (his *Apologia*) and that reflected in *private* memoir for his biographers after 1874 – especially when we consider that during all the intervening years and beyond, the *Apologia* was, through reprint editions, rapidly establishing itself as a

²⁴ *Memoir* pp. 87-8

²⁵ *Memoir* p. 83

²⁶ *Memoir* p. 96

²⁷ Perhaps the most glaring of which had been his complaint in the *Apologia* xxv of possessing no autobiographical notes!

religious and literary classic. Evidently, Newman felt no particular obligation to uphold the *Apologia* version of his life to 1845 when it did not suit his purpose. And after 1874, he seemed to pursue another purpose, distinct from that of 1864. Having achieved public rehabilitation in 1864, he was now determined to go further and fix his own place in the historical record.

In broad outline, this paper has drawn attention to the following:

- *First*, Newman's septuagenarian determination to insist that he had never *truly* been an evangelical Protestant, over against his earlier insistence that he had carried beneficial parts of this outlook with him through his subsequent developments. Would it be too much to say that now, near the end of his life, Newman had nothing more to gain by speaking warmly of his evangelical roots – whereas in 1864 a stress on evangelicalism's positive contribution to his formation was an important component of his appeal for rehabilitation in the court of public opinion?
- *Second*, Newman's septuagenarian determination to recast the story of his 1820's theological development so as to strongly downplay the influence upon him of the budding theological liberalism in that period and to stress instead that the leading influences on him in that period, while not evangelical, were undoubtedly orthodox persons such as Lloyd and Pusey.

The 1864 account had stressed that it was a return to Patristic theology which had stabilized him after a 'bout' of liberal teaching. By 1874, that liberal teaching was re-portrayed as something which while present, never really touched him. Not strong personalities associated with Oriel College, not questions about Scriptural authority,²⁸ but the challenges of pastoral ministry had been the catalyst for rethinking major theological concepts. Newman's theological development had, as portrayed in 1874, been guided by persons and emphases deserving of unquestioned admiration. The net effect of these changes was to portray a Newman whose theological development had been relatively seamless, and characterized by continuity.

²⁸ The *Apologia* (p. 9) of 1864 had admitted that Newman had, for a time, imbibed from Blanco White 'freer views on the subject of inspiration than were usual in the Church of England at that time'. The volume (p. 25) also had Newman describing how, circa 1828 he moved 'out of the shadow of liberalism'. All traces of this had vanished in 1874.

- Finally, Newman's reluctance in 1864 to speak of the developments in Oriel College which facilitated his long absence in the Mediterranean in the first half of 1833, and his clear determination to lay the whole story bare in 1874 are not properly explained by him. The explanation does not lie in any reluctance on Newman's part to speak of Edward Hawkins, provost of Oriel, for the *Memoir* of 1874 no less than the *Apologia* of 1864 records Newman's sense of satisfaction at ever having been connected to this prominent Oxford don. It may properly be said, however, that in 1864 when Newman was struggling both to recover his reputation (assailed by Kingsley and others) and to overcome his consignment to the relative obscurity of a Birmingham Oratory, he would have made his case harder to establish by admitting that he had been dismissed from a coveted Oriel tutorship. In that, perhaps, readers in 1864 might have claimed to find evidence of intransigence, ambition and singularity. But the net effect of suppressing this information in 1864 is that it will have prevented him from affirming, as he clearly did in 1874, that his freedom to depart from England on a Mediterranean tour meant that he (with Froude) was in fact on the path towards Tractarian radicalization a half-year or more before Keble's 'National Apostasy' sermon of July 1833; the latter has generally been taken to mark the launch of the Tractarian movement. The linking of these phenomena (as Newman did in fact link them in 1874) opens for us the clear possibility that Newman, the proto-Tractarian, was acting both in a kind of theological reaction against Hawkins, as well as in reaction to a perceived current intrusion of the State upon the Church.

In 1864, Charles Kingsley had, tongue in cheek, posed the question 'and what does Mr. Newman mean?' thereby provoking Newman to write his *Apologia*. That same question would appear to have been warranted by the multiple discrepancies incorporated into these autobiographical writings separated by a decade. In modern parlance, we might say that Newman had been busy spin-doctoring.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE FOR THE CHURCH'S IDENTITY AND MISSION

RICHARD GIBB

Religious communities are widely defined by a complex of moral, social, political, ethical, cultic/liturgical, philosophical, and other convictions. Common to the Christian community stemming from the Reformation tradition would be a concern to see itself as governed by the theology of grace. The concern of this paper is to consider what this might mean and how this might look. Our particular focus will be to consider the nature of the covenant of grace and the implications for the identity of the church and its socio-political mission in the contemporary world.

INTRODUCTION

The need for responsible theological engagement has been demonstrated by the increasing pluralism in contemporary society. In particular, there is a requirement in theological scholarship to examine an essential theological question: *What is it that makes the Christian community distinctive and how does this distinctiveness impact the church's socio-political mission in the world?* That fundamental question will be the focus of this paper.¹

In articulating our theological method, we will formulate and defend a primary interpretive motif in our approach to the task of systematic theology. It is an approach that enables the demonstration of unity and coherence, which Colin Gunton points out is core to Christian theology: ‘Being systematic in theology involves, first, responsibility for the overall consistency of what one says.’² Specifically, the central motif around which our theological analysis will be developed in this study is *the grace of God*, which is indeed central to the Reformation tradition. We find that

¹ For a further discussion of the key theological questions facing the Christian, see Joseph H. Oldham, ‘The Function of the Church in Society’, in *The Church and its Function in Society*, ed. Willem A. Visser’t Hooft and Joseph H. Oldham (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), p. 242.

² Colin E. Gunton, ‘Historical and Systematic Theology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12. Cf. Robert W. Jenson, ‘The Church and the Sacraments’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, p. 207. Robert Jenson states: ‘All loci of theology are interconnected as nodes of an intricate web.’

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in the New Testament, grace is inextricably linked with each person of the Trinity: the Father (1 Peter 5:10); Son (Acts 15:11); and Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29).

In considering this theological motif we can offer an approximate working definition of the grace of God as: *the out-flowing of the eternal triune love of God in and through his free, reconciling self-disclosure and self-giving to his creatures, supremely demonstrated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and through the presence of the Holy Spirit, bringing them into communion both with himself and with each other, such that they are given to share in his mission to the world.*

Yet although the doctrine of grace defines the Christian gospel, confused assumptions that have become prevalent within our Western culture have undermined the message of this doctrine and our perception of its significance. When we come to consider this central Christian doctrine we find there are two key identifiable challenges in particular for grasping the implications of God's grace for the identity and mission of the church in the contemporary world.

First, is the challenge presented by the influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, for one of the inclinations in the Enlightenment era is its desire to place humanity at the centre and not God. Gunton calls our attention to this tendency:

Enlightenment is essentially an eschatological concept, referring to the state of those who have achieved complete vision. To arrogate to a person or era the claim of being enlightened is to assert that the present era is, or contains the seeds of, a perfect knowledge and understanding ... To put it crudely, to claim for ourselves enlightenment is to claim to be 'like God'.³

Second, is a subtle and yet profound misunderstanding of the nature of the covenant relationship established by God: God's relation to humanity is by means of a covenant and not a contract. Significantly, as James Torrance points out, the Reformers recognized that it was from an understanding of the covenant of grace that the church was informed and motivated to engage with issues of social and political concern.⁴ Both of these challenges in theological scholarship must be confronted if we are to derive a theologically coherent and valid methodological approach

³ Colin E. Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology* (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1985), p. 150.

⁴ James B. Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 34/3 (June 1981), pp. 225-243.

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for assessing how the church is to conceive of its distinctiveness in the contemporary world. In this paper, we are going to focus specifically on the second of these challenges. The covenant of grace reminds the people of God that in response to his gracious redeeming work, the church lives under his kingship, which has profound implications for its holistic mission in the world.

GRACE AND COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The covenant of grace and the kingdom of God

Unquestionably the covenant provides a major theological motif in Scripture. F.F. Bruce highlights the central importance of the covenant in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and points out that the unity of the Bible is found in that it ‘tells the story of salvation - the story of God’s covenant-mercy.’⁵ If we were to think of the Bible as comprising ‘The Books of the Old Covenant’, and ‘The Books of the New Covenant’, Bruce claims, ‘we shall be well on our way to understanding what the Bible is and what it contains’.⁶ Furthermore, as the covenant is the means by which God establishes a relationship with his people, it is intrinsic to soteriology, because it expresses the fact that God wishes humankind to live in communion with himself.⁷

The word *covenant* is the normal English translation of the Hebrew word *berit*.⁸ The first biblical mention of the covenant is seen in the relationship confirmed by God with Noah (Genesis 6:17-18). William Dumbrell emphasizes that this first mention of the covenant in Scripture is of

⁵ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1991), p. 73. Cf. Gary A. Herion, ‘Covenant’, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David N. Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 292.

Although the covenant is the organizing principle that provides coherence to Scripture, and is mentioned in patristic and late medieval writings, it was not developed as a doctrine until the Reformation, of which particular influence was Heinrich Bullinger’s *One and Eternal Testament or Covenant* (1534).

⁶ Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 67. Cf. F. Charles Fensham, ‘Covenant, Alliance’, in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. James D. Douglas and Norman Hillyer, 2nd edn (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982), p. 243. Charles Fensham points out that the Davidic covenant with the promise of an eternal throne led to the expectation of the coming Messiah, which provides an important link between both testaments.

⁷ See Jean Giblet and Pierre Grelet, ‘Covenant’, in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier León-Dufour (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), p. 75.

⁸ Moshe Weinfeld, ‘berit’, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 253-279.

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significance, since here we find a definite link between the Noahic covenant and creation itself.⁹ Also, it provides the biblical-theological framework within which all subsequent divine-human covenants operate. Paul Williamson comments on the importance of the ‘universal scope’ of this covenant, as it encompasses not just one people or nation, but the entire earth.¹⁰ Dumbrell supports this claim by postulating a unity for biblical theology in covenant and persuasively argues that there can be only one divine covenant. Foundational to his thesis, he asserts that there is a unity between the testaments that is derived from the unfolding of God’s purpose.¹¹ Although God confirmed his covenant with different people on different occasions, there is still essentially only one covenant of grace.

Where Dumbrell goes yet further is in presenting an exegetical case for a ‘covenant with creation’. Arguing that the ‘fact of creation itself’ involved God’s entering into relationships with the world in the form of a covenant, Dumbrell proclaims that this is an all-embracing covenant between God and creation. Any theology of covenant, he subsequently asserts, must thus begin with Genesis 1. Later biblical covenants, such as the covenant confirmed with Noah, are to be seen as subsets and a renewal of an already existing covenant.¹² For the presupposition behind covenant, Dumbrell argues, is the present kingship of God. And God will not allow his divine purposes to be frustrated, either in regard to man himself or his world. This all-embracing covenant, Dumbrell insists, means ‘we cannot entertain the salvation of man in isolation from the world, which he has affected’.¹³

It is unclear, however, whether God actually entered into a covenant relationship with creation itself, as Dumbrell claims. Just because two things are related to one another in some way does not necessitate a cov-

⁹ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), pp. 11-46.

¹⁰ Paul R. Williamson, ‘Covenant’, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 141.

¹¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 42.

¹² Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 43. Cf. John H. Stek, ‘What Says the Scripture?’ in *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World’s Formation*, ed. Howard J. Van Til (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 203-265. John Stek explains that Genesis 1 is full of imagery presenting God as ‘the Great King’ in creating his visible kingdom: ‘God’s creative words are presented in form and function as royal decrees’ (232).

¹³ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 41.

enant.¹⁴ Despite this uncertainty, due to the sovereign reign of God over his created world, as Dumbrell highlights, this unified kingly rule indicates that the world and man should be viewed as ‘part of one total divine construct’. This is supported by the fact that in Genesis 9:8-17, the covenant God makes with Noah after the flood is with all living creatures, and not only with Noah and his descendants. Consequently, as Dumbrell notes, a biblical doctrine of covenant ‘cannot be merely anthropologically related’.¹⁵ Rather, the biblical metanarrative is the story about the whole of God’s creation.

So why is it significant to recognize the unity and continuity of the divine covenants for the church’s identity and mission? And what is its bearing to this central integrative motif of theology, namely, the grace of God? In recognizing there can be essentially only one covenant of grace, this highlights a principal feature of the covenant in that it demonstrates a progression of purpose and promise in which God’s purposes for his kingdom will prevail. Indeed the theme of the kingdom, which is inherently holistic in character, ties the covenant time lie together. Meredith Kline explains the nature and significance of this elemental link: ‘To follow the course of the kingdom is to trace the series of covenants by which the Lord administers his kingdom.’¹⁶

Entering into a covenant with God, therefore, determines the goal of God’s people which is to further the rule of God over his creation in opposition to all that alienates, disrupts and damages. If the church is to recognize this kingly reign, then this provides firm theological warrant for directing the church’s mission in addressing contemporary issues of social and political concern. This theocentric foundational priority to God’s kingdom, which is at the core of the doctrine of grace, is precisely the reason why the grace of God is a key interpretive motif for approaching the task of systematic theology, and around which theology will be developed in this paper.

¹⁴ Williamson notes that Dumbrell’s argument leans heavily on his exegesis of Genesis 6:18. It is from this position he infers that the Noahic covenant is simply the confirmation of the covenant God had previously brought into existence, which uses a possessive pronoun ‘my covenant’. Yet, Williamson asserts, prior to this there is no mention of any covenant being established – at least between God and humans. See Williamson, ‘Covenant’, p. 141.

¹⁵ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 41. Cf. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 164-198. In modernity, the word *dominion* has been misinterpreted to mean *domination* rather than *stewardship*.

¹⁶ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, Kansas: Two Age Press, 2000), p. 1.

The nature of the covenant

We have established that the covenant of grace is intrinsic to the kingdom of God, due to its intrinsic unity and continuity in which God's purposes for his kingly reign will always prevail; but what exactly is the nature of this covenant? In Scripture we find that the term *berit* is used to describe both interpersonal (Gen. 14:13; 21:27; 26:28; 31:44; Exod. 23:32; 34:12; Deut. 7:2) and also divine-human covenants. In concluding a covenant the most common Hebrew expression used is 'he cut a covenant' (*karat berit*), which is the term used of God's covenant with humankind. It points to the ancient rite of cutting an animal with the forming of a treaty or covenant. For in order to communicate in a meaningful way with his people living in the ancient Near East (ANE), there were elements in God's revelation, which had similarities with concepts found in that particular historical and cultural period.¹⁷ Indeed the idea of making a treaty, as Charles Fensham points out, pervades almost the whole history of the ANE.¹⁸

Several studies have identified both similarities and polemics between the biblical covenants and these ANE covenants and treaties.¹⁹ Yet the key difference between the biblical covenants and the treaties found in the ANE is that the covenants demonstrate a commitment made by God, and accordingly differed sharply in function through being a means to a more comprehensive end rather than being an end in themselves. In contrast with covenants and treaties made between humans, stress is placed on the initiative of God in the covenant he makes with mankind, by the use of the verbs 'establish' (Gen. 6:18; 9:11; 17:7), 'grant' (Gen. 9:12; 17:2; Num. 25:12), 'set down' (2 Sam. 23:5), and 'command' (Josh. 7:11, 23:16; 1 Kngs 11:11). This cannot be said about a mutual agreement. Thus the covenant made by God differs crucially from these other covenants and treaties.²⁰

Confusion has arisen, however, in the exact nature of this relationship between God and his creation. Its root cause can be traced to the translation of the Hebrew word *berit*. The word *berit* was subsequently

¹⁷ See John Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 15-48.

¹⁸ Fensham, 'Covenant, Alliance', p. 240.

¹⁹ For example, see Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), pp. 86-94, and Piotr Michalowski, 'The Torch and the Censer', in *The Tablet and The Scroll*, ed. William W. Hallo (Maryland: CDL Press, 1993), pp. 152-160.

²⁰ See Weinfeld, 'berit', p. 278. Weinfeld claims: 'The covenantal idea was a special feature of the religion of Israel, the only one to demand exclusive loyalty and to preclude the possibility of dual or multiple loyalties such as were permitted in other religions.'

translated into the Greek Septuagint as *diatheke*. Gleason Archer asserts that *diatheke* signifies ‘an arrangement made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject but cannot alter.’²¹ Oswald Becker states that this term, which occurs from Democritus and Aristotle onwards in the sense of a will or testament, denotes an irrevocable decision that cannot be cancelled by anyone. Therefore *diatheke* must be clearly distinguished from *suntheke*, which is the classical and Hellenistic word for an agreement.²² Bruce declares that the word *diatheke* is better suited to the biblical idea of covenant, ‘which God initiates by his saving grace and freely bestows upon his people’.²³

Misunderstandings were to follow when *diatheke* was translated into the Latin New Testament as *foedus* bringing with it not only the understanding of covenant, but also the notions of contract and agreement. As Latin was the dominant language of medieval government and intellectuals, Timothy Gorringe observes: ‘The New Testament was inevitably read through the interpretive lens of the Latin genius, which was law’.²⁴ Subsequently, there arose the idea that God’s relation to humanity is contractual rather than covenantal, a subtle, yet key misunderstanding of this relationship. Whereas a covenant ‘is a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another unconditionally’, as Torrance points out, a contract ‘is a legal relationship in which two people or two parties bind themselves together on mutual conditions to effect some future result’.²⁵ Inherent in this misinterpretation is the danger of legalism due to turning the covenant of grace into a legal contract.

Differing from contractualism, the gospel declares that out of his love God made a covenant with humankind. What this demonstrates, as Torrance emphasizes, is that ‘the God of the Bible is a covenant-God and not a contract-God’.²⁶ Although this covenant involved two parties, it was only made by one of them. It is a covenant of grace bringing with it promises and obligations. Yet these obligations are not conditions of grace, which was the heart of the Reformation rediscovery. The Pauline teaching about justification was crucial to the Reformers in that God accepts

²¹ Gleason L. Archer, ‘Covenant’, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 300.

²² Oswald Becker, ‘Covenant’, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1975-1986), p. 365.

²³ Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 65-6.

²⁴ Timothy J. Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 224.

²⁵ Torrance, ‘The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology’, p. 228.

²⁶ Ibid., 229-230, 239.

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us through his grace received by faith (Eph. 2:8-9). This is also evident in the characteristic statement of God's relationship with his people: 'They will be my people, and I will be their God' (Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8). It indicates that God unreservedly gives himself to his people, and they in turn give themselves to him and belong to him. That is why it is mistaken to perceive God's relation to humanity as being contractual rather than covenantal.

Frequently misconstrued is the nature of the Sinai covenant as reflected in the work of Walther Eichrodt in *Theology of the Old Testament*, which proceeds from a strong covenant base. Before the parallels between the Israelite covenant and the ANE treaty had been brought to light, Eichrodt's work highlighted the importance of the covenant idea in the religion of Israel. Eichrodt stressed that basic phenomena in Israelite religion, such as the kingship of God, revelation, liberation from myth and personal attitudes to God are to be explained against the background of the covenant. Yet it would appear that Eichrodt may be mistaken in his analysis of the nature of the covenant made by God in his reference to 'two contracting parties'. Eichrodt states:

The use of the covenant concept in secular life argues that the religious *berit* too was always regarded as a bilateral relationship; for even though the burden is most unequally distributed between the two contracting parties, this makes no difference to the fact that the relationship is still essentially two-sided.²⁷

As Dumbrell points out, however, in focusing on the Sinai covenant almost to the exclusion of other Old Testament divine covenant material, Eichrodt has taken too little account of the entire biblical presentation that identifies a sequence in which there can be no question of two parties being involved.²⁸ Moreover, the Ten Commandments do not set out contractual conditions, nor do they indicate the establishment of a bilateral covenant. Rather, the giving of the Torah emphasized Yahweh's faithfulness and the unilateral covenant commitment of Yahweh. For before the Decalogue commences, there is the vital preface: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery' (Exod. 20:2). Discussing the laws given in the Sinaitic covenant which are set in the context of a gracious, divine initiative, Gordon Wenham states: 'Obedience to the law is not the source of blessing, but it augments a blessing already given.' With the promise to be God's own possession among all

²⁷ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. John A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 37.

²⁸ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 32.

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peoples if they obey his covenant (Exod. 19:5), he notes, ‘Israel thus finds herself in a virtuous circle. Obedience to the law issues in further experience of the initial grace of God, who brought them to himself’.²⁹

The relationship between God’s commands and his previous acts on behalf of Israel in bringing them out of Egypt is highlighted in Deuteronomy where the whole historical prologue (Deut. 1-4), precedes the Decalogue (Deut. 5). It is from this demonstration of divine grace that the obligations to the covenant stem. Israel’s keeping of God’s law was simply to be a response to what God had already done. It is this foundation, claims Christopher Wright, which runs through the moral teaching of the whole Bible. It is a motivation that derives ‘from the facts of our redemption and our membership of God’s people, consciously living under his kingship’.³⁰ Dumbrell gives a summary of this essential nature of the covenant:

The initiative has lain entirely with God. Responses of course have been and would have been demanded, but they are responses, which would have brought with them the blessings, which attached to the covenant on the one hand, or the curses, which the rejection of the covenant would have invoked on the other. They are no part of the covenant itself, but rather results of attitudes taken to the covenant.³¹

What this underlines is that the obligations to the unilateral covenant commitment made by God are a response to God’s prior grace and are not a condition of God’s grace. It is sheer gratitude to God’s grace that compels obedience. The warrant for this is that the indicatives of grace, as revealed in Scripture, are always prior to the imperatives of law and human obligation. Consequences arise whether one chooses to obey these obligations, which results either in blessing or disaster, the so-called descriptive ifs (Deut. 8:19-20; John 15:9-10).

²⁹ Gordon Wenham, ‘Grace and Law in the Old Testament’, in *Law, Morality and the Bible: A Symposium*, ed. Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1978), p. 5. Cf. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, 76. Bruce highlights the unilateral nature of this covenant: ‘The covenant at Sinai might be a covenant of works so far as Israel’s undertaking was concerned; but it was a covenant of grace so far as God’s fulfilling it was concerned, for he continued to treat Israel as his people even when Israel forgot that he was their God.’

³⁰ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1983), p. 141.

³¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 31.

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God's grace is seen supremely in how he deals with his people leading up to the coming of Christ.³² Despite the rebellion of the Israelites and their disobedience to his laws, the plan of the covenant remains unchanged. Since, as we have seen, the covenant of grace is inextricably linked with the sovereign rule of God over creation. In his monumental section on creation and covenant, Karl Barth underlines this relationship:

Creation comes first in the series of works of the triune God, and is thus the beginning of all the things distinct from God himself. Since it contains in itself the beginning of time, its historical reality eludes all historical observation and account, and can be expressed in the biblical creation narratives only in the form of pure saga. But according to this witness the purpose and therefore the meaning of creation is to make possible the history of God's covenant with man which has its beginning, its centre and its culmination in Jesus Christ. The history of this covenant is as much the goal of creation as creation itself is the beginning of this history.³³

There will be a 'New Covenant' (*kaine diatheke*) established with God's people in the messianic era (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Hos. 2:18). It is a New Covenant realized in Christ (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:1-13). As it was God alone who determined that he should be Israel's God and that Israel should be his people, it is God alone who can restore the covenant when it is broken. T.F. Torrance comments on this supreme act of grace:

Grace in the New Testament is the basic and the most characteristic element of the Christian gospel. It is the breaking into the world of the ineffable love of God in a deed of absolutely decisive significance, which cuts across the whole of human life and sets it on a new basis. That is actualized in the person of Jesus Christ, with which grace is inseparably associated, and supremely exhibited on the cross by which the believer is once and for all put in the right with God.³⁴

³² Whereas in the Hebrew Bible the concept of grace is expressed mainly by three groups of words: the noun *hesed* focusing on the faithful maintenance of a covenantal relationship; *hanan* expressing the gratuitous gift of affection; and *raham* denoting mercy and compassion, in the New Testament the definitive manifestation of grace is the revelation of God in Christ.

³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1956-1975), p. 42.

³⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948), p. 34.

Because of this supreme act of grace, the worship owed to God in response to God's unconditional covenant commitment to us is itself realized for us and on our behalf in the New Covenant.³⁵ This implies that the covenant theme is the background for the whole New Testament even where it is not explicitly noted. God prepares the way for another covenant that would replace the first and succeed where it had failed. Bruce points out that this means both the Old and the New Covenant alike speak of Christ: 'It is he who gives unity to each and to both together. The former collection looks forward with hope to his appearance and work; the latter tells how that hope was fulfilled.'³⁶ Yet because God's promises cannot fail, this New Covenant is not new in essence. Rather, it is new in fulfillment. God's law would be written on hearts of flesh, which allows his people to keep the covenant in a more effective way.

Grace and the dynamics of community

That God has graciously established a covenant with those he has created has profound implications for our perception of human existence and personal relations. What it reveals is that humankind was created to be in covenant relationship with God. This is captured by St. Augustine of Hippo, who became known as 'the doctor of grace' (*doctor gratiae*), at the start of his *Confessions*: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'³⁷ Pannenberg relates this internal yearning after God with not being bound to a particular environment.³⁸ Man's unlimited openness to the world results only from his destiny beyond the world. This unending movement into the open is directed toward God, who is beyond everything that confronts man in the world. It is a path towards man's destiny to be in 'community with God'.³⁹ Indeed the biblical theme of creation, as Alistair McFadyen notes, 'is not ultimately concerned with cosmogony or cosmology but with the relationship between God and God's creatures'.⁴⁰

³⁵ James B. Torrance, 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ', in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed AD381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), pp. 128-129.

³⁶ Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 68-69.

³⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, vol. 1/1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 3.

³⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?: Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), pp. 1-13.

³⁹ Ibid., 54-5.

⁴⁰ Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

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As we are created to be in relationship with God, Barth describes this as being created to be God's covenant-partner.⁴¹ A genuine knowledge of humanity comes from realizing that to be a man is to be with God. In this covenantal relationship we see a unique feature, which is that among all God's creatures, it is the human being who has been chosen, fundamentally and ontologically, to be the object of God's personal election. Yet true selfhood is not something we can take for granted. On the contrary, it is a gift of divine grace. Thus, here we see the inextricable relationship between revelation and reconciliation. Our real humanity to be in covenantal relationship with God has only become visible and made possible in Jesus Christ. Starting from this point, which Barth calls the 'Archimedean point', enables us to discover the ontological determination of man.⁴² For Christ does not merely show our true humanity, he enables the fulfillment of our destiny to be in fellowship with God (Romans 8:29). This priestly ministry of Christ, Gunton notes, means 'the representative bearer of the image becomes, as the channel of the Spirit, the vehicle of the renewal of the image in those who enter into relation with him'.⁴³

If the church is to operate from this basis of divine grace for becoming God's covenant-partners, then it is important to understand the nature of the being of God as triune.⁴⁴ Before the world was made, the Trinity planned humankind's redemption. The Father purposed that the Lamb would be 'slain from the creation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). The Son entered the world as the Servant to fulfill this plan. The Spirit, who is the facilitator of the covenant community, would indwell those who accepted the Messiah as their Lord. In deriving significance from the doctrine of the Trinity for how we act, Stanley Grenz claims, the ethical life is 'the life-in-relationship'.⁴⁵ For when the Spirit indwells Christians we share in the love found at the heart of the triune God himself.⁴⁶ Thus, as we have

1990), p. 18.

⁴¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/2, p. 204.

⁴² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/2, p. 132. This does raise the issue, however, of Barth's repeated insistence on the ontological determination of all people in God's covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ. It is this aspect of universal divine determination in Christ that is a controversial feature of Barth's view of humankind's covenant relationship with God.

⁴³ Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), p. 101.

⁴⁴ See Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (London: Mowbrays, 1975), for a prime example of this recognition.

⁴⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 76.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 484. Cf. James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), p. 40.

argued, the theocentric and trinitarian nature of the covenant of grace not only reveals that we were created to be in relationship with God, but it also reveals that we were created to be in relationship with other people and with all of creation. We are rescued from our sin to enable us to participate in the new humanity in a redeemed world in the presence of the triune God (Eph. 2:14-19). This is in turn a foretaste, asserts Grenz, of the full fellowship God will bring to pass at the culmination of history:

The corporate-cosmic dimension of God's program arises from a wider soteriology related to the fuller biblical picture of the nature of guilt and estrangement...The divine program leads not only toward establishing individual peace with God in isolation; it extends as well to the healing of all relationships – to ourselves, to one another, and to nature.⁴⁷

We see this being for others supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. As well as being for God, as Barth states, Jesus is for men and is committed to meeting their needs.⁴⁸ It verifies the inextricable connection between being for others and being for God.⁴⁹ Stressing this juxtaposition and its attending ethical implications, Barth firmly refused to accept that true humanity can live in isolation.⁵⁰ In taking this stance, Barth's understanding of the relational self presents a strong parallel with the communal ontology espoused by John Zizioulas, who offers a theological dimension of the self as person. 'The highest form of capacity for man', Zizioulas claims, 'is to be found in the notion of the *imago Dei*'.⁵¹ It is this relational aspect of the *imago Dei*, which 'is a condition for an ontology of personhood'.⁵² Ontological identity, it follows, 'is to be found ultimately not in every "substance" as such, but only in a being which is free from

⁴⁷ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p. 482. Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Human Being, Individual and Social', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, 184. Kevin Vanhoozer states: 'To know oneself, as one whose individual and social being has been decisively shaped by Jesus Christ, is to accept gratefully one's vocation as a responsive and responsible communicative agent who exists in covenantal relation with oneself, with others and with God.'

⁴⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/2, p. 223.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 211-12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 229.

⁵¹ John D. Zizioulas, 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 28/5 (October 1975), p. 446.

⁵² John D. Zizioulas, 'On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood', in *Persons, Divine and Human*, ed. Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 41.

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the boundaries of the “self”.⁵³ Freedom of this kind derives as the Spirit through Christ forms human beings in community.

Contributing to our understanding of what it means to live as a community is the work of John Macmurray, who describes the self as existing only in dynamic relation with the Other.⁵⁴ To be part of a community, Macmurray explains, is fundamentally different from being part of an impersonal society. A society is based on self-interested relationships that are contractual. In contrast, to be part of a community is to be part of a covenant, which constitutes a fellowship. Yet although Macmurray emphasizes the importance of community for human relationships, there is tension with the full implications of the covenant of grace. For Macmurray, a community is constituted and maintained by mutual affection. It is within the family, where a child experiences dependence on a personal Other, which is ‘the basis as well as the origin of all subsequent communities’.⁵⁵ In its full development, ‘the idea of a universal personal Other is the idea of God’.⁵⁶ This suggests a failure to recognize that we are to live in community due to being created by a covenant-keeping God.

Divine affirmation of human value

Finding our true personhood through being in communion with God and with others has significance for our conception of human nature on which so much depends. Leslie Stevenson and David Haberman claim that for individuals, this will relate to the meaning and purpose of their lives. For societies, this will relate to our vision of community.⁵⁷ Our answers to these basic questions of life will depend on the value we place on a human being. Yet, in recent years, the belief that the self is purely material has increased impacting upon our conception of human dignity.

In contrast to physicalist accounts, in entering into a covenant of grace with humankind, this indicates that God affirms the value of every person. We were created in God’s image, which demonstrates that out of all creation humanity was made to be in a special relationship with God (Gen. 1:26; 9:5-6). This leads to the conclusion that man’s life is sacred as the image marks man as God’s possession. It denotes that humanity’s nature and destiny are tightly interwoven.⁵⁸ John Calvin captured this when

⁵³ Zizioulas, ‘Human Capacity and Human Incapacity’, p. 409.

⁵⁴ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation: Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Glasgow in 1954* (London: Faber, 1961), p. 17.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 154-5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁷ Leslie Stevenson and David L. Haberman, *Ten Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁵⁸ See David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 29.

he claimed there is something intrinsic about the way God is that is like the way we are also: ‘No one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he “lives and moves”’.⁵⁹ Hence, Calvin argues ‘we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honour and love’.⁶⁰

This understanding of our true nature and destiny highlights the differentiating feature that sets human beings apart from animals. We have been created to resemble God in certain important, though limited, ways. This includes the capacity to reason, to relate deeply on an interpersonal level, to be morally responsible, to make free choices, to be self-conscious, rationally reflective, and to be creative. Summarizing these features of what it is to be human, James Moreland declares: ‘We have been made in the likeness of a supremely valuable, self-aware, good, creative, free being’.⁶¹ Here we find the source of our personal identity. It is due to being created by God in his image, to be in a covenant relationship with God and with all creation, which gives persons tremendous intrinsic dignity and worth. In his examination of the *imago Dei*, John Webster highlights its inextricable relationship with the theocentric nature of the covenant of grace and God’s plans for his creation:

Theological teaching about the divine image ... is a central motif in ensuring the co-inherence of creation and redemption; it offers a means of emphasizing that salvation concerns the restoration of human fellowship; it roots a Christian understanding of human nature in language about God’s relation to his creation; and it serves to underline that the saving work of God includes within it a moral and cultural imperative.⁶²

Thus by highlighting the concept of the *imago Dei* through emphasizing the relational dimensions of human existence and life in community, the

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1/1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 35.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 3/7, p. 696. The parable of the Good Samaritan, Calvin claimed, taught the word neighbour extends to every man, ‘because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship.’ See John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 3, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 61.

⁶¹ James P. Moreland, *What is the Soul?: Recovering Human Personhood in a Scientific Age* (Norcross, Georgia: RZIM, 2002), p. 41.

⁶² John Webster, ‘What’s Evangelical about Evangelical Soteriology?’ in *What Does it Mean to be Saved?: Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 180.

covenant of grace presents a concept of human value that stands in sharp contrast with a post-Enlightenment understanding of human worth based on principles of natural reason.

The will of God and the mission of the church

As the covenant of grace affirms the intrinsic worth of every person, this informs the church in how it responds to issues of social and political concern in the twenty-first century. Not only will our understanding of the self be changed when we recognize that human beings are made in God's image to be in relationship with God; our sense of morality will change also.⁶³ Indeed through the covenant of grace, we discover the will of God and his desire for justice to be manifest in the world. This reflects the divine attributes of God who is the ultimate standard of righteousness and justice. No idea, Wright points out, is more all-pervasive in the Old Testament.⁶⁴ Hence, Wright maintains: 'Knowledge of God is prior to the practice of justice.'⁶⁵

With the goal being to reflect God's divine attributes, God calls his covenant people to righteousness, which means to live in accordance with his will and character (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 89:14; Isa. 61:8). The Hebrew word for righteousness is *tsedaqah*, which refers to the way things are supposed to be.⁶⁶ The way things are supposed to be is based on the inherent value God places on his creation. This is translated into Greek as *dikaiosune* and into Latin as *iustitia*, which means justice, fairness and equity. What we find in Scripture is that any form of injustice is in direct opposition to God's will. Biblical justice is a comprehensive term denoting God's desire for right relationships among all creation. For example, following the exodus from Egypt, God gave the Israelites laws of justice in order to protect the powerless of society (Exod. 23:1-9). Justice is to extend to the land itself and with all of creation (Exod. 23:10-12). We are to act justly and love mercy (Prov. 31:9; Isa. 10:1-2; Ezek. 16:49; Hos. 12:6; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10). God's complaint against Israel is a warning to those who exploit the powerless: 'They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed' (Amos 2:7). Likewise, the New Testament teaches that God chooses the poor to correct the injustice done to them by the rich (Jas 2:5).

⁶³ Charles Taylor argues convincingly in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) that self-hood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Living as the People of God*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁶ The root meaning of *tsedaqah* is rightness and that which matches up to a standard (Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:15; Ps. 23:3).

The poor receive God's special attention not because they are of greater value than the rich, but rather because God desires justice to be displayed for all humankind, which includes this group in society who are on the 'wronged' side of a situation of injustice. For God's righteous will to be done, Wright notes, there must be the execution of justice to have this situation redressed.⁶⁷ Jesus' desire to affirm the dignity of the marginalized of society was therefore not a neglect of others. Rather, as Richard Bauckham highlights, it was Jesus' mission to reach all with God's loving solidarity. In order to achieve this aim, Jesus placed a particular emphasis on serving those who were excluded from human solidarity. Bauckham asserts,

Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, provisionally present in a fragmentary way through his ministry, was of a society without the privilege and status, which favour some and exclude others. Thus those who had no status in society as it was then constituted were given a conspicuous place in society as God's rule was reconstituting it through Jesus.⁶⁸

If the Christian community is to see itself charged with continuing Christ's mission on earth, then to be true to the founder, God's desire for universal justice has profound implications for the holistic mission of the church. This is a hallmark of Reformational theology in that the indicatives of grace carry the imperatives of obligation. Central throughout Scripture is the conviction that the divine initiative in redeeming the world calls forth a response of faith from God's people commensurate with his revealed will.⁶⁹ Indeed as God's covenant people, whether this is Israel in the Old Testament or the New Testament church, it follows that the ethical life is a dimension of the response to God's grace. Elaborating on the nature of these imperatives, David Field claims: 'If knowledge of right and wrong is not so much an object of philosophical enquiry as an acceptance of divine revelation, it is only to be expected that imperatives will be prominent among the indicatives in the Bible.'⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wright, *Living as the People of God*, p. 147.

⁶⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 146.

⁶⁹ For example, see Charles H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), pp. 8-12. Charles Dodd notes that the *kerygma* (proclamation) always came before *didache* (ethical instructions).

⁷⁰ David H. Field, 'Ethics', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 233. Cf. Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, pp. 97-8. Elaborating on how the doctrine of grace under-

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In his discussion of social morality, Richard Longenecker draws attention to this human response to God's grace arguing that the final measure for human conduct 'stems from the nature of God, from the quality of his love for mankind, and from the character of his redemptive activity.'⁷¹ Thus Longenecker notes that obligation stems not only from the covenant in isolation, but due to God's graciously revealed nature in its entirety. Moreover, due to the moral teaching of the Bible always being presented in closest relation to the Bible's message as a whole, ethics for a Christian can never be considered as a trivial matter.

In summary we can say that due to God's desire for universal justice, in response to the divine work, the church is not to be passive. As Barth explains, the effect of grace is that it becomes the altered world-context into which our lives are inserted: 'Grace is knowledge of the will of God, and as such it is the willing of the will of God.'⁷² Describing heaven as 'the ultimate reality of God's sovereign rule', Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra illustrate how this vision of God's future embraces and informs human actions in the present.⁷³ The church, in being a sign of this eschatological kingdom, undertakes its mission through the empowering of the Spirit and is motivated and free to do so in response to God's grace. It is a response that has arisen from a life-changing encounter with the triune God, which leads to living in accordance with God's design and will for human existence.

CONCLUSION

As we have sought to demonstrate in this essay, a central interpretive motif in approaching systematic theology as a whole is the grace of God. Few doctrines more effectively sum up the Reformation position as this doctrine. Specifically, that in his grace God has spoken is the starting point for the theological enterprise. It is here that we derive knowledge of God and his purposes for the world. Inextricably linked with the self-communication of God is the redemption of his chosen people, which derives from the unilateral covenant of grace. Thus, in exploring our fundamental theological question of what it is that makes the Christian community

pins Christian ethics, Grenz argues: 'What we might call the ethical life is the theme of covenant.'

⁷¹ Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 9.

⁷² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 207.

⁷³ Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 276.

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distinctive and the implications for its mission in the world, we have discovered that the church is defined by grace in every facet of its being. As the covenant community, it is the indicatives of grace that provide the impetus for the church to respond to the imperatives of law. If the church is to operate from this theological basis, then in responding to the divine work, the church as an eschatological community of grace will seek to further the kingdom of God on earth, of which God's righteousness and justice are such essential constituents of his unified kingdom reign.

REVIEWS

The Rhythm of Doctrine: A liturgical sketch of Christian faith and faithfulness

John E. Colwell

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2007; 135 pp; £12.99; ISBN-13: 9781842274989.

The idea for this work came out of a conversation with a fellow theologian who posed the question, ‘What structure would you follow if you were to ever write a Systematic Theology?’ In response to this the author has produced a work that is constructed around the church calendar. Starting with Advent, he moves through the year with Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and concludes with All Saints Day.

There is value in such an approach, but, allowing for the ‘big themes,’ Lent and All Saints Day are of human manufacture, (some would argue that all are synthetic), and so his argument is weakened by their inclusion.

John Colwell is Tutor in Christian Doctrine and Ethics at Spurgeons’ (Baptist) College, in South London. His churchmanship is therefore evident as he works through his thesis. So too is his own personal experience: he claims that his devotional life was deepened as he came through, ‘the crushing darkness of clinical depression’. So also are his own theological prejudices: he speaks favourably, for example, of the enthusiasms of the Charismatic movement.

The author has attempted to present a case for the Christian Church to be more systematic in its worship and preaching, particularly in respect to the Christian diary that is used by some sections of the Church. By endeavouring to do this he will alienate some, but enthuse others, with the scheme he is proposing.

A number of points in this work give cause for concern. He is weak on original sin, and in places seems to prefer the writings of the Church fathers to Scripture. In proportion to the works of others referred, there are many more quotations from Karl Barth than, say, John Calvin. He also speaks of, ‘something quite “magical” about the atmosphere of midnight Mass’. Of greater concern, however, is the footnote on page 2: ‘I trust that I do sufficient in this book and elsewhere to demonstrate that I do not think of God as male and that I am sensitive to the continuing problems of this use of male pronouns’. There are other issues in the book which Reformed and evangelical Christians would have a problem with, and about which they would be rightly concerned.

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With these reservations, this book is not without its uses. First, it helps to focus on the great fundamental facts of the history of the Christian faith, albeit with a different approach to many. Second, it forces the thoughtful reader to engage again with Scripture to see if the argument holds together. Third, it demonstrates how a tutor in one of the best known colleges in England tackles these subjects; this serves as a pointer to the theological state of teaching in mainstream theology, which all should be concerned about.

The Christian leader has to use his time wisely, but always to be reading books that confirm held and cherished beliefs can lead to sterility in mind and ministry. Whilst it is impossible for a Christian minister to cover every great truth adequately each year, in his pulpit work, if the great truths about the Lord Jesus are not foremost in his work, then something is surely wrong. So this book could be a wake-up call to those whose ministry has become predictable. With many reservations, I commend it, as ‘iron sharpens iron’. Working with, or even against this text, could help to bring clarity to the Christian teacher as he seeks to proclaim the glorious gospel.

Clive Anderson, The Butts Church, Alton, Hampshire

Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament

Richard M. Davidson

Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2007; 844pp, \$29.95; ISBN 978-1-56563-847-1

In the present day, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive assessment of what the Bible says about human sexuality. The modern deconstruction of societal standards has been fuelled by a moral relativity that is evident in almost every aspect of contemporary life. Given this collapse of moral standards, a defence of the Bible’s teaching on human sexuality in all its many dimensions is a much more urgent need than it seemed to be in the past. It is for this reason, and a number of other reasons, that Richard Davidson has undertaken the enormous task of writing a thorough treatment of the OT teaching on sexuality.

The purpose of this work is to examine “every passage in the HB (Hebrew Bible) dealing with human sexuality in the final (canonical) form of the OT, building on previous research and engaging in original exegesis where necessary” (p2). While embarking on such a colossal project, Davidson asserts that the creation account of Genesis 1-3 is the theological key that unlocks the mysteries of the OT: “One of the central premises of this book is that the Edenic pattern for sexuality constitutes the foundation for the rest of the OT perspective on this topic” (p3). Davidson

recognizes that a “paradigm shift in modern critical scholarship in the last few decades now sees creation, and not just salvation history, as foundational to the rest of the OT canon” (p3). God’s intention for the lifestyle of his image-bearers can only be obtained by a careful consideration of the Eden account.

While keeping this “Edenic pattern” at the centre of his hermeneutical method, Davidson proceeds to address such issues as gender roles, heterosexuality versus homosexuality, bestiality, transvestitism, monogamy versus polygamy, adultery, premarital sex, divorce and remarriage, as well as a plethora of other subsidiary subjects related to human sexuality. In addition to these subjects, Davidson provides a section on ANE literature that captures the interrelation of sexual activity and worship as it is manifest in the cultic prostitution of the ancient near East. Toward the end of the book Davidson dedicates two chapters to a consideration of the Song of Songs. Following in the footsteps of Phyllis Trible, Francis Landy, and Jill Munro, Davidson draws the conclusion, “in the Song of Songs we have come full circle in the OT back to the garden of Eden” (p. 552).

At the outset of the book, it becomes evident that one of his overarching goals is to establish the role of women in ecclesiastical settings. Davidson seeks to provide answers for the many passages that have been understood to place women in a subordinate role with regard to leadership in the church. Davidson ultimately takes a *via media* between the modern egalitarian perspective and a traditional complementarian position. He concludes that subordination is only applicable within the marital relationship and should not be imposed upon ecclesial structures.

While, on the one hand, this work is full of valuable exegesis and a rich array of sources, on the other hand, there are serious deficiencies in the author’s methodology and conclusions. In the first place, at times Davidson’s approach to the text isolates it from the rest of the canon. For instance, in his treatment of headship/leadership roles, Davidson rejects the idea that man was given leadership responsibility before the Fall based on the fact that he was created first. He argues that “a careful examination of the literary structure of Gen. 2 reveals that such a conclusion about hierarchy does not follow from the fact of man’s prior creation” (p27). But this stands in stark contrast to Paul’s argument in 1 Tim. 2:13, where he explains that man is the spiritual leader/head of woman precisely because “Adam was formed first, then Eve...” When Davidson finally comes to deal with this NT passage, he explains that it is “the submission of wives to their husbands, not of women to men in general” (p644) that is in view. Davidson allows his conclusions on the role relationship between Adam and Eve in the Genesis account to inform his conclusions on the NT

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teaching about God's intention for man and woman, in the home and in the church. Instead of using the fuller revelation of the NT as a lamp to illuminate the text of Gen. 1-3, Davidson has chosen to do the opposite.

A second concern is that Davidson fails to utilize a Christocentric approach in his discussions of systematic and biblical theology. This is seen in the criticism above, as well as in a consideration of his treatment of the Song of Songs. After spending eighty-six pages on the history of the interpretation of the Song, while defending a literal interpretation that exalts human sexuality to the exclusion of a Christology interpretation, Davidson finally—and reluctantly it appears—admits that the Song “*typologically* points beyond itself to the Divine lover” (p. 632). While accurately making the “Edenic pattern” the centre of his hermeneutical method, Davidson fails to see the eschatological restoration of Eden, and its subsequent consequences, in the person and work of Christ—the centre of all special revelation. If the Song of Songs is “a return to Eden,” and if—as our Lord teaches—there is no marriage in heaven (i.e. in the eschatological Garden), then ought we to conclude that the lovers in the Song are representative of the heavenly Bridegroom and his bride?

Despite these criticisms Davidson's work is quite an accomplishment. I am unaware of any other single volume that deals so thoroughly with the issues addressed in this book. Its most valuable contribution is the way in which it lays out a multitude of positions with exegetical arguments in support of various the views. The reader will be led to realize the vast array of theological perspectives on specific issues of sexuality and gender relations. This book should serve to help pastors, scholars, and students alike develop and establish their own conclusions on these issues.

Nicholas T. Batzig, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, PA

Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation

Herman Bavinck (Translated by John Vriend; Edited by John Bolt)

Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2006; 685pp; \$49.99; ISBN-10: 0801026563; ISBN-13: 9780801026560

The third and penultimate volume of Bavinck's dogmatics is devoted to the theological *loci* of Christology and Soteriology. The opening chapters on ‘sin’ continue Bavinck's magisterial ability to engage modern thought, from psychological, anthropological and sociological descriptions of sin and guilt to the theological history of the concept of total depravity. Bavinck's strong emphasis on grace as restoring nature, unfolding from the very start of the volume, is set within a distinctively Reformed mould that does not shy away from such questions as God's role with regard to sin's entrance and persistence in the world, or the world as having miseries

seemingly unattached to any particular moral failings ('Fallen people no longer belong in paradise. Corresponding to their state is the earth, which exists between heaven and hell', p180).

The high point of the volume, and that to which most of it is devoted, is the second part on 'Christ as Redeemer'. Bavinck opens by situating the discussion within classical covenant theology – a topic already pervasive in the first two volumes but only here discussed at length. He offers a fascinating and informed history of covenant theology, especially on the Continent, with some rather harsh words for those who want to follow Cocceius' approach, though defending the *pactum salutis* famously developed by Cocceius (a doctrine that should be rehabilitated in present theological discourse). This covenantal structure in place Bavinck, following a hallowed Reformed pattern, turns to the mediator of the covenant of grace: the person of Christ. Here we find a masterful statement of a classical Christology, attempting to root all in the self-consciousness of Jesus as the apocalyptic messiah. Bavinck patiently walks through the classical topics, from the virgin birth to the *communicatio idiomatum*, defending at each point against Kant, Schleiermacher and Ritschl as representative heads, as it were, of modern unease with such doctrines.

From the person of Christ, Bavinck turns to the work of Christ, both in his humiliation and exaltation. Again, the historical surveys worked into the fabric of the discussions would make the work valuable even if they were not serving the larger end of dogmatic construction. This is particularly true in his lengthy discussion of the atonement and the various ways in which the church has struggled to conceptualize Christ's work. Not all will be satisfied with his argumentation for the classical position, but the ways in which the argumentation moves seamlessly across the arguments of his other volumes testify to the coherence of Bavinck's proposals and the fluency with which he addressed the subject. The final section on the application of the work of Christ, or 'salvation' proper, follows much the same pattern, with discussion of the *ordo salutis*, justification, and the nature of grace.

Reading the text today confirms strongly the 'modernity' of Bavinck's work. He is concerned at each point to have a dogmatic theology of application and use to his own day – and is valuable today precisely because this was done so masterfully. But the weaknesses are evident, such as in his willingness to trust (some) currents of exegetical opinion now appearing quaint at best, his then-acceptable sociological and quasi-sociological observations, and his lack of awareness of issues that very quickly become central (e.g. the relationship of the reprobate and Christ as the true human). But none of these can at all be fairly lodged against the value of the work. Bavinck did not aim to provide a 'timeless' dogmatics. He is

at his best in bringing into dialogue the history of theology, Reformed thought, and his contemporary world. And each volume of this set that is released cannot but add to his solid reputation in the English-speaking world.

Joshua Moon, University of St. Andrews

The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century

James R. Beck and Bruce Demarest

Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 428pp, \$24.99. ISBN: 0825421160

Any book which chooses as its subject ‘the human person’ is clearly embracing an ambitious agenda, whether in psychology or theology. The purpose of this book is to build ‘working alliances between the findings of science and the teachings of the Bible’. In doing so it seeks to avoid both a ‘theologized psychology’ and a ‘psychologized theology’, but argues that the integrity of both disciplines should be respected – psychology with its base in general revelation and theology with its base in special revelation – with the practical aim of enhancing understanding and fostering effective ministry through an integrated perspective. The authors affirm the integrity, inspiration and full authority of the Bible, and there are no respects in which the book is likely to disappoint the most conservative evangelical expectations.

Four aspects of the human person are explored, and these form the basis for the organisation of the book into major sections: origin and destiny, substance and identity, function and behaviour and relationships and community. In each of these sections one chapter deals with biblical, historical and theological considerations while a second covers psychological dimensions. A further chapter seeks to provide an integrative essay with conclusions as to how the two disciplines relate to each other in that area.

In terms of readership, while no prior expertise in either theology or psychology is required, this is a scholarly book aimed at informed Christian readers. It is well organized and on the whole very readable. I have to say it almost faltered at the starting line with an arcane section in the introduction about ‘a rejection of classical substance ontology and faculty psychology in favor of a relational ontology’ – no explanation needed, the assumption being that we all have some inkling of what on earth that might mean. I’m glad I read on, since the rest was both readable and worthwhile, although readers outside of the USA might find some features a little irritating. There is no accommodation to an international

cultural perspective. The book is thoroughly American: all its references to legislation, to statistics and trends, to psychology itself, are rooted in American experience, and when it refers to 'our ancestors in colonial America' it is unlikely to engage an international audience.

The book is supported by a useful bibliography, an extensive subject index and a Scripture index. The fact that the last mentioned covers almost 1,000 references to passages in 61 out of the 66 books in the Bible is an indication of how firmly the entire work is built on a scriptural foundation. I personally found the use of the Vancouver system of referencing (numbered footnotes) as opposed to the Harvard system most scholars use (author name and date in text and full reference at end of book) a little frustrating. Trying to check back later for a work by a particular author involves too much searching through the text again.

For me, both as psychologist and as Christian reader, this is a book with many strengths but also with a number of shortcomings. In relation to the latter, the attempt at integrating the two perspectives seems the weakest link, and the four integrationist chapters plus a chapter on conclusions occupy a total of only 30 pages out of over 400. The integration touching on the subject of human destiny is in my view meaningless since, as the authors acknowledge, psychology – while contributing to issues of death, grief and loss – has nothing to say on the matter of destiny. There also seem to be many lost opportunities. Why is there little or nothing on major psychological issues that are of central interest to theology – for example, the rise of 'critical psychology', with its focus on values in science, or the advances of positive psychology, with its focus on topics such as hope, well-being and happiness?

However, the strengths of the book are also clear. In addressing a very complex subject from two perspectives that are seldom combined effectively, it reflects solid scholarship throughout. As the two authors are clearly well qualified in their respective fields of theology and psychology, each discipline is approached in a balanced and informed way, while maintaining fidelity to Scripture at all times. Even at the level of providing scholarly theological and psychological summaries of the four areas selected for study, the book provides a vast amount of useful material. My feeling is that this book does not so much succeed in integrating the two perspectives in question but rather in applying the subject matter and evidence base of psychology to theological understandings of the human person in a useful and relevant way. As such it may be seen as a valuable textbook on a subject which is seldom addressed effectively.

Tommy MacKay, Dumbarton, former President, The British Psychological Society

Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg 2nd edn

Stanley J. Grenz

Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI; 2005, 318pp; \$35.00; ISBN-10: 802849091; ISBN-13: 9780802849090

Stanley Grenz (1950-2005) was a leading Baptist scholar who was professor of theology at Carey Theological College Vancouver and Mars Hill Graduate School Seattle. He was drawn to study under Pannenberg and did his doctorate on the topic of Isaac Backus, an important figure in Baptist life in 18th Century America. Grenz returned for further study with Pannenberg and in something of an academic coup gained the agreement of Pannenberg to publish a version of Pannenberg's as yet unfinished three volume systematic theology. Grenz therefore produced in advance an overview endorsed by Pannenberg, as the first edition of this book, 1990. This second edition now appears, posthumously, after the full publication of Pannenberg's three volumes of Systematic Theology. In fact there are few changes in the second edition.

Grenz's interpretation of Pannenberg is very accurate, and indeed approved by the subject himself. The future orientated metaphysic for which Pannenberg is well known remains a basic framework for the doctrine of God and the world. But Pannenberg has increasingly been uniting his theology of time and history with Trinitarian thought; now in his Systematic Theology volume 1, he outlines a very clearly Trinitarian ontology. The God of the open future, Jesus in revelatory union of essence with the Father, and the Spirit which continually integrates the present with the future, represent what classical dogmatics knows as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a temporal version of the Trinitarian framework which explains most aspects of Pannenberg's doctrine. In fact Grenz fails somewhat to demonstrate precisely how this is so. Nevertheless he does give an accurate account of the various parts of Pannenberg's overall position.

Grenz sets himself the task of providing a synopsis of Pannenberg's theology, of showing the lines of continuity and coherence within it, and finally of describing the criticism that Pannenberg's theology has received and responses to that criticism. The first aim seems to be well met, the second aim reasonably so, with the third aim perhaps least well achieved. For example, Grenz does have a largely American lens to his review and omits some important critical essays, for example that of Christoph Schwoebel. The second edition has the benefit of updating the critical literature and in particular Pannenberg's engagement with science to which he continues to remain very committed.

One particular problem, not identified by Grenz but which needs to be raised concerning Pannenberg's programme, is that of Apocalyptic and its interpretation. There is a rising tide of New Testament scholarly opinion arguing that Apocalyptic in the New Testament should not be interpreted in an eschatological fashion on a time line. If this opinion becomes the norm then Pannenberg's whole framework seems to be called into question. If the Apocalyptic thought forms of Jesus' day did not refer primarily to the end of history but to the presence of the Kingdom of God, then the end of history cannot be the interpretative matrix for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the way that Pannenberg argues. This will be a critical issue for Pannenberg and his school to address.

Grenz has written a very useful survey which will serve Christian ministers very well as an introduction to the important themes that Pannenberg handles. One hopes, however, that these readers will not be content with this introduction but will wish to move on from the processed version to the "real thing", particularly in the shape of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* or the much shorter introductory books *The Apostles Creed* (1972), and the little noticed *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1991). Pannenberg's basic positions have not changed significantly since his arrival on the theological scene in the early 1960s, save for the more and more clear Trinitarianism which, was however always implicit.

Timothy Bradshaw, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Letters of Thomas Chalmers

Edited by William Hanna

Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 2007; xxiv + 538pp; £17.50, ISBN-10: 085151 940 7; ISBN-13: 978 0 85151 940 1

In 1853 William Hanna edited *A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.* It is this scarce volume that the Banner of Truth has reprinted under the title *Letters of Thomas Chalmers*.

Two additions have been made to the original which are especially helpful to readers unfamiliar with Chalmers: a biographical table or timeline of Chalmers' life, and an introduction by Iain H. Murray in which he gives us a fine overview of Chalmers' life and of his impact on Scottish Christianity.

The vast majority of the letters are of course Chalmers' own. Hanna does, however, include a number of letters to Dr. Chalmers' with the replies that Chalmers penned. It is with two such exchanges that the volume opens. These exchanges are a continuation of a correspondence that begins for the reader in volumes one and two of Hanna's massive four-

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volume Memoir of Dr. Chalmers, and regrettably can only be entered into fully if one has access to that memoir.

There seems, indeed, to be an assumed familiarity with the Memoir throughout the *Letters*. Hanna makes quite a number of footnoted references to it. He also, whilst giving us the names of Chalmers' correspondents, rarely indicates who they are. To a large extent he has already done that in the Memoir and probably thinks it unnecessary to repeat it. Everyone who has read the Memoir, for example, knows that the Mrs. Jane Morton to whom over fifty letters are addressed is one of Chalmers' sisters, but she is not identified as such in the *Letters*. It is certainly not a barrier to appreciating Chalmers' letters if you do not have access to the Memoir. But it is a little frustrating at times and makes one wish that a brief introduction to the letters themselves had been prepared for this reprint.

The letters are largely grouped according to the correspondent to whom they are addressed, and cover a wide range of topics. Comfort for the bereaved, counsel for young Christians, opinions on distinguished men and their books, glimpses of life in Glasgow and St. Andrews, notes on journeys and holidays, insights into the calibre of his students, comments on the church scene, news about his wife and children – the reader will find all these and much more besides. There is warmth, wisdom, shrewd observation, humour, and above all Chalmers' own fervent breathing after God and delight in the gospel of God's grace.

Given Chalmers' key role in the ecclesiastical conflict that culminated in the Disruption of 1843 and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland it is not surprising to find an entire section of the correspondence devoted to 'the church question'. Readers who are familiar with Disruption history will appreciate the insights these letters afford into Chalmers' thinking, motives, and actions.

Who will *best* appreciate these letters? There is certainly much in them that even a reader unfamiliar with Chalmers will find both interesting and edifying. The *Letters* will be appreciated most, however, by those who already know and love Chalmers.

Commenting in one of the letters (No.CCLXVI) on a biography of Joseph Butler that he has just read, Chalmers says, 'I have perused it with great eagerness, and a very intense feeling of satisfaction and interest. My veneration for Butler gives a magnitude even to the minutest traits which are recorded of him, insomuch that I feel as if I had made a real acquisition by knowing of his fast riding on a black horse, and his habit of stopping and turning to his companion with whom he was engaged in talk.' Those who share a similar veneration for Chalmers will find a like pleasure in making their way through this rich and fascinating volume.

David Campbell, Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, PA

Must God Punish Sin

Ben Cooper

Latimer Trust: London, 2006, 54pp; £2.50, ISBN: 978 0 946307 55 5

One of the themes connected to an evangelical understanding of God's justice is whether or not he had to punish sin. There have been discussions of the theme in the past, notably in Britain by John Owen and Samuel Rutherford, and aspects of it have risen today with the attempt of some evangelicals to delete penal substitution from the meaning of the cross.

While the discussion may seem at first to be only a theoretical one, a little reflection will show that it concerns, for example, our concept of the character of God (if he did not have to punish sin, then there is something monstrous about him punishing his Son), our doctrine of what took place on the cross (if he did not have to punish sin, then penal substitution was not necessary and may not have taken place), and our understanding of why we have to confess our sins (why do Christians need an advocate at God's right hand?).

The author shows that much current theological objections to the necessity of God's punishing sin seem to be connected to the outlook that punishment cannot be retributive alone but must in one way or another include restoration or deterrence. Since God is love, his love must explain all that he does, and some suggest that it would be inconsistent for a God of love to punish without the prospect of restoration. This idea leads to the suffering of Jesus on the cross being regarded as an example of humility, or an act of solidarity with humanity in its pain, or some other non-penal view of the work of Jesus.

In chapter 2, having discussed some current secular ideas regarding punishment, Cooper details the biblical data on divine punishment, including examining the lexical evidence as well as biblical examples of divine acts of punishment such as the ten plagues on Egypt, the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, and the occasions that are marked by the use of the phrase, 'the day of the Lord'. It is clear that while some divine punishments did result in behavioural changes, other acts of divine punishment were clearly retributive.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the 'necessity' of sin being punished by God. The author admits that much of the discussion by theologians of previous generations is complex. He uses, in the main, the views of John Owen to oppose the idea of Socinian (vindictive justice is opposed to divine mercy) and of Rutherford (vindictive justice is not in God by necessity of nature, but is an option that he can choose to exercise; just as he could have chosen not to create, so he could have chosen not to punish sin). There is also some interaction with the thought of Turretin and

Jonathan Edwards. Owen, among other arguments, stressed as evidences that God must punish sin the following two aspects: (a) God's eternal hatred of sin and (b) the impossibility of Christ being punished for sin if another means of forgiveness was available. These are conclusive arguments once the penal nature of Christ's death has been established.

This booklet, within its limited compass, deals well with a difficult concept. There is a bibliography of relevant works which a person can use if he or she wishes to study the matter further.

Malcolm Maclean, Scalpay Free Church, Isle of Harris

Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture

Brian Brock

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007; 386pp., £16.45; ISBN 9780802803795

In this, his first book, Brian Brock (lecturer in moral and practical theology at the University of Aberdeen) aims to transcend the contemporary debate over the proper hermeneutical appropriation of the Bible for Christian ethics. He proposes to do this by articulating the meta-hermeneutical preconditions deemed necessary for correctly understanding the Bible's 'grammar'. For Brock, Scripture's aggregate grammar (p. 247), its ethos, is best approached via the motif of our personal and situated foreignness. He proposes to overcome this estrangement to Scripture by disjoining interpretation and hermeneutics so as to assign a secondary, clarifying role to hermeneutics (p. 265). This allows interpretation to reappropriate for itself all of the tools which history has offered it.

The first part of the volume provides a well footnoted summary of the contemporary meta-hermeneutical landscape. Anyone seeking a concise introduction to these issues, as they pertain to Christian ethics, will find these chapters tremendously helpful. The initial chapter describes and evaluates the hermeneutically oriented approaches offered by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Daniel Patte and Charles Cosgrove. The following chapter addresses the communitarian approach by interacting with the ideas of Bruce Birch, Larry Rasmussen, Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones. The biblical ethics trajectories of Frank Matera, Richard Hays and John Howard Yoder receive attention in the third chapter.

The next two chapters are organized around the biblical theology focus of the 'doctrinal Barth' and the exegetical theology approach of the 'exegetical Barth'. The former interacts with Brevard Childs, Francis Watson and John Webster while the latter with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The second part of the book narrows in on the psalms in order to offer a de-

tailed presentation of Augustine's and Luther's respective appropriations of Scripture. It is here that Brock seeks to secure the allure of the richness of premodern interpretation against the impoverished approaches of part one. In the third part the author summarizes the issues raised by the preceding sections and offers his solution to the widespread segregation of Scripture and Christian ethics.

Brock's scholarly treatment of this area will find favour with his readers to the extent to which they share his post-critical, post-Constantinian (p. 311) and generally postmodern predispositions. There is much to be commended in his thesis that approaching Scripture and its ethical call is only properly possible from within a doxologically grounded tradition. That biblical content should be given a role in moulding Christian interpretation is similarly worthy of embrace.

Likewise welcome is the affirmation that Scripture's ethos and plausibility structures should be heeded. Brock certainly recognizes that his work is susceptible to critique from a variety of angles (pxviii). In his final chapter, Brock demonstrates his interpretive toolbox on Psalms 130 and 104 to arrive 'textually' at his doxological, creational, redemptional, language-sustaining, political and community-oriented meta-hermeneutical stance. His creative interpretation is sustained, in significant part, on connections based on term recurrence in other passages, imaginative intertextuality, allegory and tropological usage.

Because Brock does not wish to offer any systematized interpretation process, he is set free to be creative within the broadness of biblical content, grammar, and the interpretive tradition. It is indeed difficult to ascertain how his interpretation could possibly be falsified within this broad path. If no course is laid for arbitrating competing meta-hermeneutical approaches (such as those derivable from other psalms), on which basis should this one be accepted? 'Richness' and inclusivity of methods and meanings does not appear to be enough.

This ambitious book assumes a graduate level of background knowledge on the part of its audience. More analytically oriented readers will likely struggle with its broad-concept, non-delineating style which leaves much of the necessary conceptual synthesis to the reader. The book concludes with a helpful bibliography followed by thorough name, subject and Scripture indexes.

Ondrej Hron, Protestant Theological Faculty of Universitas Carolina Pragensis

The Holy Trinity - In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship

Robert Letham

Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg, N.J, xv+551pp, 2004; \$24.99; ISBN-10: 0875520006, ISBN-13: 9780875520001

J I Packer commends this work as ‘solid and judicious, comprehensive and thorough, abreast of past wisdom and present-day debate, and doxological in tone throughout; this is far and away the best big textbook on the Trinity that you can find, and it will surely remain so for many years to come.’ This commendation is no exaggeration. The work is sheer excellence from first to last and is in a league of its own. It is not a book for beginners but is a volume highly recommended to all pastors.

Part one (biblical foundations) compactly surveys the Old Testament background. The only missing part is the activity of theophany on Sinai and fellowship with Moses. Perhaps Letham followed Wainwright into a mistake when he suggests that there is little, if any, trace of dialogue within the Godhead in the OT? What about Psalm 110 which is quoted often in the NT? And what about Isaiah 49:1-9 and 50:4-11?

The survey of Trinity in the NT is thorough, Jesus and the Father (chapter 2), the Holy Spirit and Triadic Patterns (chapter 3). It is refreshing to reflect on Jesus’ affirmation of binitarianism (John 5) and then his teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14 – 16. With regard to the Holy Spirit, the author by way of overview, comments as follows: ‘Due to the invisibility and anonymity of the Spirit, his presence is not normally noted, even though he may be known by what he does. Even so, there is a vast increase in references to the Holy Spirit in the NT, compared with the OT. The NT, while never explicitly calling the Holy Spirit “God”, ascribes to him divine characteristics. Among other things, fellowship with one another, and with the Father and the Son, is by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies, gives joy in sufferings, opens people’s minds to believe, enables us to worship, and brings about union with Christ’ (p. 56). A twelve page excursus is devoted to ternary patterns in Ephesians.

Part two (historical developments) and part three (modern discussion) is historical theology at its very best, totally fascinating to a Trinity lover and hugely informative throughout.

The Arian controversy was over-ruled for good in the providence of God to attain theological clarity. It was complex. Letham corrects the common myth that Arius challenged the orthodox doctrine, leaving Athanasius as the sole defender, *Athanasius contra mundum*. There was no definitively settled orthodoxy before AD381, and Athanasius was not alone in defending the truth (pp. 119 and 127). Chapters are devoted to the Cap-

padocians, the Council of Constantinople, Augustine, the *Filioque* Controversy and to John Calvin.

From Calvin we jump several centuries into the modern era. There is a chapter devoted to Karl Barth, one to the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Moltmann (1928 -) and Pannenberg (1928 -), followed by a fascinating and enlightening chapter describing Eastern Orthodox theologians Bulgakov (1871-1944), Lossky (1903-1958) and Staniloae (1903-1993). Finally a chapter is devoted to Thomas F. Torrance who on this subject is at the top of the climbing frame.

With regard to Barth, Letham observes: 'Then came Karl Barth (1886-1968), and it is from him that the recent revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity has its genesis. As R W Jenson puts it, "[It is] from Barth that twentieth-century theology has learned that the doctrine of the Trinity has explanatory and interpretive use for the whole of theology; it is by him that the current vigorous revival of Trinitarian reflection was enabled." The translator of the first half-volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* suggests that his treatment of the Trinity in that volume is the most significant since Augustine. While this claim is exaggerated, there is little doubt that Barth's work has had a seminal effect' (p272).

A thorough and helpful analysis of the early and later Barth ensues. Did Barth succeed in his doctrine of the Trinity? According to Letham the answer is no: 'There is this persistent ambiguity at the heart of Barth's Trinitarianism that does not change. If he is not modalistic, he will escape from the charge of unipersonality only with the greatest difficulty.'

Having explored and analysed the theology of Rahner, Letham explains the theology of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Thomas Weinandy's refutation of Moltmann is assessed. Letham then turns eastwards to 20th century orthodox theologians Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae, the latter having worked in Romania where he was imprisoned by the Communist regime for five years.

Letham suggests that Moltmann's Trinitarianism 'encourages a reversal of patriarchal structures and attitudes. His view of God as suffering love, co-suffering with the world, is that of a weak bystander who can do nothing to change the situation. He simply suffers. God is a feminized God, indeed a transsexual deity, a motherly Father and a fatherly Mother. In turn, Moltmann's Christian society is a feminized society of persons in relationship, devoid of authority. One might call it a castrated theology. It is a mixture of Christian teaching and paganism. Whatever else one might say, it is certainly "politically correct"' (p. 312).

In summary of Eastern Trinitarian theology this conclusion is made, 'The Eastern doctrine of the Trinity requires different Trinitarian levels, undermines our knowledge of God, and, in so doing, implicitly questions

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the faithfulness and reliability of God. Largely due to its isolation from the West, the East has had no medieval period, no Renaissance or Reformation, and no Enlightenment, and so has never had to grapple with the vital epistemological breakthrough achieved by Calvin' (p. 354).

Thomas F. Torrance's work is helpfully described with pithy, helpful insights. For instance, 'Torrance understands *perichoresis* (the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity in the one being of God), in a dynamic way as the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons in an ontological relational, spiritual and intensely personal way.'

Part four opens up four critical practical issues.

1. The Trinity and the Incarnation,
2. The Trinity, Worship and Prayer,
3. The Trinity, Creation and Missions,
4. The Trinity and Persons.

There is a stimulating section opening up the view that for the Reformed the whole of creation is an icon, 'The relationality of the cosmos points unmistakably to its relational Creator' (p. 436).

Analysis is made of Postmodern culture: diversity without unity. 'Postmodernism's world is one of instability, diversity and fragmentation. Since postmodernism allows no objective truth, there can be no fixed point of reference to determine what we should believe or how we are to act. This lack of fixity entails a total lack of stability in everyday life. No basis exists for a commonly accepted morality' (p. 451). While diversity without unity is the mark of postmodernism unity without diversity is the character of Islam: 'Its doctrine of God is the major weak point of Islam. It is the root of all other problems. It is here that the Christian apologist and evangelist can probe, with sensitivity and wisdom.' (p446).

There are two appendices addressing modern attempts by those with a feminist agenda (Bilezikian) to deny order within the Trinity. A six page glossary explaining the meaning of a wide range of terms used in Trinitarian theology is most useful.

Throughout the writing is robustly reformed. Robert Letham is the minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware, and adjunct professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He is an Englishman who having settled in the USA still understands with enthusiasm the finer points of cricket.

Errol Hulse, Leeds

Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books

Eds. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson

Leicester and Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005; 1025 pp. + index; \$60; ISBN: 9780830817825

This addition to IVP's outstanding set of reference dictionaries in every way lives up to the standards both of previous volumes and the current expectations for such a work. The editors have made judicious decisions as to what to exclude, keeping the work from devolving into another standard encyclopedia of place-names and people in the Old Testament historical books – a necessary tool, no doubt, but one of which there is no current lack.

Students will be especially pleased with the cogent summaries and bibliographies offered, while those more at home in the field will likewise benefit from the decision of most authors to push beyond simply a recounting of a 'scholarly consensus' into positive arguments. Topics covered vary from the Davidic line to non-Israelite written sources of history, and from the presentation of persons in the historical books (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah) to important cities and their archaeological discoveries.

On the whole the contributors show their awareness to the hermeneutical malaise surrounding the reading of historical texts and the reconstructive of a 'history'. The dual challenge is somehow to be concerned and informative about both our own construction of Israel's history and the presentation of that history that we find in the biblical texts. Though some of the authors find a greater gap between those two concerns than others, very little antagonism or altruistic assumptions make their way into the articles. This makes the book a pleasant read, even when one disagrees with the contributor's perspective – no doubt the editors are in large part to be thanked for that.

A number of the articles stand out, such as that offered by Craig Bartholomew on 'Hermeneutics' and reading the historical books; or the treatment of 'Ethics' by Christopher J.H. Wright. Among the more interesting and provocative essays is the lengthy one on 'God' as presented in the Historical Books, written by Daniel Block – one of a number of theologically interested essays (e.g. 'Faith', 'Forgiveness', and 'Word of God'). Not all of these are equally helpful, however, and some even perpetuate the notion that Old Testament scholarship stands in no need of dialogue with theology proper, even on such issues as these: that the proper application of a good methodology will yield what is sufficient for discussing these issues in the Bible. 'Theology' simply comes as a second step (if that) for the discussion. The antidote to such thinking is present in the volume with Bartholomew's essay (who speaks of 'the impossibility of keeping

theological issues out of the debate about the historical dimension of the Historical Books', 405b); but this could have been more widely heeded.

In short this is a work to be highly recommended and, though the large size means it will take up significant precious space on any already-crowded bookshelf, the work is worth every inch.

Joshua Moon, University of St. Andrews

In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians

Graham H. Twelftree

Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007; 351pp., £13.69 ; ISBN 9 780801 027451

Graham Twelftree examines the place and practice of exorcism among early Christians. He notes that while some scholars maintain that exorcism was central activity in the early Church, others argue that it was of very little interest to early Christians. Similarly, while the synoptic gospels portray Jesus as a successful exorcist, Pauline literature and more notably, John's gospel say little on Jesus as an exorcist. This range of views warrants a detailed examination of the subject.

The book has 13 chapters and is divided into 4 parts. Part 1: *Jesus and the Problem of Exorcism*, highlights the options and models available to the followers of Jesus for conducting exorcisms and describes Jesus as a 'Charismatic Magician' wherein the knowledge and art of the magician was combined with the personal force of the practitioner (pp.45-49). Twelftree notes that although there is no direct evidence in the gospels that the disciples were charged to conduct exorcisms, since the Kingdom of God and exorcisms were related and Jesus commanded the disciples to proclaim the kingdom, it may be assumed that they performed exorcisms (p.53).

Part 2: *The First Century*, deals with NT data on exorcisms: *Paul's* general silence on the subject can be explained by the epistolic and occasional nature of his letters (p.77). Similarly, in *Q*, "exorcism has a relatively low priority" (p.87). For *Mark*, exorcism plays a very important role and is "God's promised eschatological rescue of people" (p.128). *Luke* broadens the understanding of the demonic wherein all healing is seen as defeat of the demonic (p.154). In *Matthew*, preaching and teaching is central and not exorcism. But nevertheless can be seen as one aspect of Jesus' integrated ministry model to be followed (p.161). Strikingly, *John* is silent on the subject. This is due to a shift in perception of the demonic: Satan (the father of lies) is encountered in people's unbelief regarding the identity of Jesus. Thus, exorcism is not the response to demon possession; truth is its antidote (p.282).

Part 3: *The Second Century*, examines the place of exorcism in literature from the early part of that century. Interestingly, during this period, there appears to be no interest in exorcism. However, literature from the end of this period shows a renewed interest in exorcism (p.231). This exercise of using a second century literary lens shows that the importance of exorcism was set aside by early Christians of the early second century; in the latter part of that period, they responded to the demonic in ways that were different from the initial followers and earliest traditions of Jesus (p.293) - the demonic is confronted not by exorcism but in other ways (eg.) conversion: when Jesus, the word of God takes residence in a person or when one receives the Truth, the demon is displaced (p.286).

In Part 4: *Exorcism among early Christians*, based on these varying attitudes towards exorcism in the material surveyed, Twelftree boldly concludes: "the nature of the ministry of the historical Jesus was far less determinative... for early Christian ministry than some of the Gospels writers would lead us to suppose" (p.292). Consequently, the *existence* of Jesus was of fundamental importance to Christianity, not what he did or even said. From his study, Twelftree suggests that in the contemporary church exorcisms should be such that "the demon is confronted not by words, the exorcist, the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, nor even the church – but by Jesus" (p.295).

While the arguments in the book are very engaging, some of the texts examined (both in the NT as well as in the second century literature) deal with exorcism only fleetingly or at best, as arguments from silence; notwithstanding, this book provides ample evidence of scholarly research. The clarity of thought makes this study highly readable for theological students, while the meticulous notes, index and bibliography will undoubtedly be appreciated by the serious researcher. *In the Name of Jesus* will be an invaluable tool for the study of the demonic in the New Testament in particular and for the study of early Christianity in general.

Mark Jason, The Methodist Church, The Gambia

Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity

Kevin Giles

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006; 320pp., £14.99; ISBN-10: 0310266645; ISBN-13: 9780310266648.

With Athanasius, Giles emphatically expounds the complete and unabridged equality of the Son with the Father, and the complete identity of being of the Trinitarian persons. He charges evangelicals like Wayne Grudem, Bruce Ware and the Moore College, Sydney faculty with a de-

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viation perilously close to Arianism, in their advocacy of the Son – while fully God - being eternally in subordination to the Father in function and personal subsistence. Instead, Giles argues, the entire drift both of Scripture and the theology of the church has been to eliminate all forms of subordination, whether in being, status, power, or function. Giles has a tenacious grasp of these vital truths. With most of this book we are in full agreement. It is written at a level commensurate with this journal.

However, Giles paints people into a corner. For instance, Grudem emphatically expounds the full deity of the Son, that he is of the identical being to the Father and that “the only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and the rest of creation,” which merely reflects the language of begetting and procession, no more (*Systematic Theology*, 251). Giles also cites myself (24 where I am citing someone else, 206, 243), despite my never having written that the Son is “subordinate”, and despite denials to that effect. He seems unable to distinguish between subordination (imposed) and submission (a free act of love between equals). Giles complains he has been accused unfairly by his opponents of not holding to the differentiation of the persons; he should accord the same privilege to others he expects for himself.

It seems to me that Giles falls into what Quentin Skinner calls “the mythology of coherence” whereby in the interest of extracting a message of maximum coherence, a critic discounts statements of intention that authors themselves make about what they are doing, for “no agent can be said to have meant or achieved something which they could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what they had meant or achieved.” (*Visions of Politics* 1:69-77).

Another problem with Giles is that anything that doesn’t fit his thesis is “disjointed and hard to follow”, even when it comes from Augustine (229)! If it is not virtual heresy he claims it is incoherent. Discussion is difficult on this basis.

There are a number of significant historical inaccuracies. Giles believes the Grudem and Moore College line is new, provoked by the feminist movement. He misses the teaching of Reformed orthodoxy on the covenant of redemption, exemplified best by John Owen, to which I and others have raised questions. He also cites Richard H. Muller, 72, 160, 164, whose Calvin scholarship, Giles claims, is “confused, if not mistaken”! Nor is Tom Smail an *English* evangelical!

The issue comes down to Christology. Giles argument appears to require a *kenosis* of deity in the incarnation and a *kenosis* of humanity in the exaltation: in this way *nothing* can be read back from the incarnate Christ to the eternal Son. Similarly, in his exaltation, Christ leaves behind “all the limitations” that taking flesh involved (107). His opponents would

argue that the Son does not act out of character, demonstrating that the almighty triune God lovingly pursues the interests of the other. Giles seems to require a gap between the economic and immanent trinity.

Yet Giles agrees with the “irreversible distinctions” of the persons (230), which Grudem states are the basis for his position. Indeed, in the end he agrees that “the God revealed in Jesus Christ is both Lord and servant.” (103). Can anyone say it better?! What a pity Giles has an edge to his writing. His emotive language clouds the question.

Robert Letham, Wales Evangelical School of Theology

Last Things First

J. V. Fesko

Christian Focus Publications: Fearn, Scotland; 222 pages, £11.99; ISBN-10: 1845502299; ISBN-13: 9781845502294

J.V. Fesko, in *Last Things First*, provides us with a refreshing discussion of the first chapters of Genesis on the basis that Genesis 1-11 does not deal with general world history but with redemptive history. The book is compelling reading as he sets out to show that Genesis 1-3 sets forth the theological significance of the failed work of the first Adam, which serves as the entry point for the successful work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The basis of his thesis is the fact that in *protology*, the patterns of the beginning, we find all the strands of Christology and soteriology.

Fesko expertly extracts all of these strands from Genesis 1-2 beginning with the creation of the first Adam in the *image* of God. He argues convincingly that the first Adam was created in a covenant relationship with God, properly called a *covenant of works*. The central point of his protology is his exegetical analysis of Biblical texts to show that the Garden of Eden was the *archetypal temple* rather than simply an agricultural garden plot, and that Adam’s responsibilities in the Garden are primarily *priestly* rather than agricultural.

The first Adam, therefore, served in this official capacity as the original prophet, priest and king. ‘Adam is the prophet who explains God and proclaims his excellencies; he is the priest who consecrates himself with all that is created to God as a holy offering; he is the king who governs all things in justice and rectitude’. The logical conclusion of this part of his thesis is that there are four elements in the creation dominion mandate: (i) spreading the image of God throughout the earth; (ii) extending the temple to the ends of the earth; (iii) exercising dominion through elements (i) and (ii); and (iv) accomplishing this task with the assistance of his helpmate.

Fesko completes his unpacking of the different strands in protology by

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drawing attention to the concept of *eschatology*. There was, he says, ‘an eschatology before there was sin’. Following in the *Biblical Theology* of Geerhardus Vos, Fesko states that ‘the covenant of works was nothing but an embodiment of the sabbatical principle’. There was a terminus to Adam’s covenantal labours. God’s own work of six days and a seventh day of rest indicate that Adam was to emulate this pattern in his own work. ‘The probation would have ended, death would no longer be a possibility, and Adam would have rested from his duties as vicegerent over the creation once the earth was filled with the image and glory of God’.

By this stage in the development of his thesis not only is the reader grasped by the now firmly identified strands of protology but the writer has managed to excite anticipation of the journey that will follow through the rest of the book. Fesko moves on from the failure of the first Adam to the work of the last Adam. The dominion mandate correctly understood is still in effect; it is fulfilled by the second Adam, Jesus Christ. As the first Adam was placed on *probation* according to the terms of the covenant of works, so the last Adam entered into his public ministry having successfully passed through his probation period in the wilderness. The last Adam carries out his substitutionary work as prophet, priest and king, the offices that have their roots in protology. He has paid the penalty for the broken covenant of works for the people of God through his death on the cross, which ends with the cry *tetelestai*, “*it is finished*”, corresponding, says Fesko, to the completion of creation on the sixth day. Jesus’ public career is to be understood as the completion of the original creation with the resurrection as the start of the new.

The last Adam rose from the dead on the third day and entered into the Sabbath rest of God. In his discussion of this eschatological rest, Fesko draws the reader’s attention to the related ideas of *inaugurated eschatology* and *consummated eschatology*. The inaugurated eschatological aspect of the work of Christ is *his* entering into the Sabbath rest of creation. However, the people of God still pilgrim to the heavenly city, and so the events of consummated eschatology lie in the future.

It is in this intervening period that Fesko draws attention to the concept of *ecclesiology* and the role of the Church. The first Adam was unable to fulfil the dominion mandate without a helpmate. God created woman for man in order to carry out his temple duties. The last Adam has taken up the work of the original dominion mandate. In Fesko’s thesis, the second Eve is the Church, the ‘bride of Christ’. The last Adam fulfils the dominion mandate with the assistance of his bride. Fesko, of course, makes it clear that the dominion mandate cannot be fulfilled simply by procreation or by having large families. Christ takes up the work of the dominion mandate by producing offspring with his helpmate, the Church,

and creates, by the power of his Spirit, those who bear his image. The Bride-Church has a secondary role behind that of her husband as is evident in the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

The ideas presented by Fesko are not new. Some of them are found at least in seed form in the writings of Geerhardus Vos. Many of them are found in the writings of Meredith G Kline and Greg K Beale. But what Fesko has done is to draw out the strands that are found in these and other writings and given a concise, detailed and systematic explanation of them in relation to the saving work of Jesus Christ. *Last Things First* demonstrates the organic nature of Biblical revelation and is a valuable addition to the study of Biblical theology as well as to the study of anthropology and Christology. It focuses our minds on the fact that salvation is paradise regained. It does that whilst guarding against the misconception that Christ simply restores us to the place held by Adam in the first creation. The last Adam does more than that! He brings us to the place that the first Adam could see only on the horizon of hope. The book is an informative, instructive and enlightening read for anyone interested in God's work of salvation. It is stimulating and pregnant with ideas for those engaged in preaching the good news. I would recommend the book highly.

Malcolm Macleod, Shawbost, Isle of Lewis

The God of Love and Human Dignity: Essays in Honour of George M. Newlands

Paul Middleton (ed)

T & T Clark: London, 2007; 224pp; \$130; ISBN-10: 0567031659; ISBN-13: 9780567031655

An exciting and respected cast of thinkers celebrates themes from the work of George Newlands, whom the book's editor hails as 'Scotland's foremost liberal theologian' (p1). While occasionally tribute books are little more than students and colleagues gratefully echoing their honoree's thoughts back to him or her, this book is far more, offering its readers a particularly profitable collection of essays.

After a discussion of doctrinal controversy at Trinity College, Iain Torrance locates Newlands among the 'Glasgow Tradition'. John Webster, always confident in the intellectual resources of the Christian tradition, and, indeed, that gospel dogmatics is the most real way of addressing contemporary issues, sets the notion of human dignity within the economy of redemption. Because 'dignity' is a gift from God, 'creaturely dignity is necessarily a task'. 'God's gift of creaturely dignity gives rise to moral culture', Webster explains (p. 30). The church is the said moral culture.

Whereas Webster states that Christian theology 'stands at some dis-

tance from the paradigmatically modern assertion' that autonomy is the basis for human dignity (p23), Hendrik Vroom takes his 'starting-point in the widespread Western tradition that assumes that human beings are autonomous' which is part of 'what grounds the dignity of each human being' (p. 36). Vroom broadens autonomy and so dignity by presenting a more holistic conception of human decision making. Thus, he emphasises the social dimensions of human deliberation, arguing that dignity 'is not attributed to an isolated individual but, as a concept, already has reference to the relationships in which persons live' (p. 48).

Mona Siddiqui considers human dignity in Islam, arguing that the overall portrayal of God as merciful in the Qur'an needs to be taken more seriously in Muslim societies. Richard Amesbury contends that 'there is no reason in principle to suppose that the universality of the idea of human rights is incompatible with the particularity of religion' and that religious diversity is itself a part of affirming human dignity (p. 79). Working from Newlands' proposal that Christians should build 'transformative bridges' to culture that do not necessarily seek to convert its members into traditional Christians, Wentzel van Huyssteen reflects on the great nineteenth-century German composer Richard Wagner whose work, van Huyssteen believes, retrieved deep Christian truths even while relocating them 'within a post-doctrinal, aesthetic religious context' (p86).

David Fergusson's essay is a laughing matter. In light of Newlands' developed sense of humour, Fergusson highlights the redemptive value of laughter. Laughter can be the proper response to the paradox of present human existence – *simul iustus et peccator* – as well as to the folly of human bondage to sin. But it also is a mark of gospel freedom and joy.

After essays from David Jasper, Duncan Forrester, Gerard Loughlin, Brian Hebblethwaite and Walter Sparn, the book finishes with two essays on liberal theology. While liberal theology often fancies itself as progressive and at the forefront of societal progress, Markham argues that it should not be so optimistic about its impact, especially in light of the fact that mainline denominations are dwindling. Instead it should take on the self-image of a biblical prophet who is always unwanted and is the leader, not of a society or successful movement, but of a 'faithful remnant'. Keith Ward attempts to correct the conception of 'liberal' as 'believing little as possible, or believing whatever is most radical, new and fashionable, or being so individualistic in belief that Church tradition, creeds and Bible fade into insignificance' (p191). He does so both by clarifying the nature of liberalism and by showing its Christian warrants.

The diversity of contributors as well as contributions is a testament to the generosity of Newlands' body of work. And while such diversity carries with it the inevitability of live sites for disagreements – indeed, even

these essays are at odds – there is nevertheless a rewarding wealth from which every reader can prosper.

James R. A. Merrick, King's College, University of Aberdeen

Grace and Global Justice: The Socio-Political Mission of the Church in an Age of Globalization

Richard Gibb

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2006; 248pp; £19.99; ISBN 1842274597

This addition to the Paternoster Theological Monographs series makes a significant contribution to the re-awakening interest among evangelicals in social and political theology. In it, the author, formerly of the global business consultancy Ernst and Young and now a Baptist Pastor, tackles one of the most complex, daunting and fast-changing issues facing both church and society in the 21st century, that of globalization.

Gibb sets out to address two fundamental theological questions: (1) what does it mean for the Christian community to conceive of itself as a community defined by the covenant of grace? (2) what are the implications of this distinctiveness for its socio-political mission in an age of globalization?

The answers such big questions are of course by no means obvious. It is here that his selection of grace as a defining characteristic of authentic Christian faith provides an interesting and fruitful ‘route into’ issues of social justice connected to globalization. Gibb’s specific interest in the impact of a theology of grace within the broad Reformation tradition also helps to give depth and focus to what otherwise could have been an overwhelming task.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is on ‘Methodology and Foundations’. Chapter 1 contains a very useful survey of some of the conflicting opinions regarding the church’s involvement in issues of social and political concern, but it is chapter 2, ‘The Church as a Grace-Defined Community’ that is crucial for the rest of the book. Through engagement with biblical material, the case is convincingly argued for the holistic mission of the church arising out of an encounter with the transforming grace of God. Gibb contends that if the church is an eschatological community of grace it will pursue the advance of the Kingdom of God on earth. The church is not to be passive or pietistic (a fault of much Reformed and evangelical thought and practice), but active, empowered by the Spirit, motivated by God’s grace and passionate for the justice and righteousness that lie at the heart of the God’s kingdom reign.

Part 2 is an analysis and comparison of the impact of grace within the distinct political theologies of three influential thinkers within a broadly

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defined Reformed tradition; Jurgen Moltmann (chapter 3), Stanley Hauerwas (chapter 4) and Oliver O'Donovan (chapter 5). The purpose of this section is to provide an informed theological framework from which to progress to Part 3, which is 'The Test Case' of how theological insights can be applied in practice to the most pressing challenges posed by globalization. Chapter 6 offers a detailed analysis and evaluation of globalization itself, what is it, how it works, and what challenges does it pose for global justice in the face of weakened nation-states and changing global power relations. Chapter 7 then brings together these interdisciplinary insights arguing that an authentic Christian response to issues of global justice will be rooted in grace and take the shape of Christians from different traditions working together as servants and 'agents of justice' on behalf of the world's poorest and most powerless citizens.

This is no 'book of woe' about the evils of globalization, nor is it an easy 'how to' guide for the Christian life in a globalized world. It is constructive, demanding, theological and clear-sighted. That Richard Gibb has succeeded in his aim of providing a valuable theological resource for the church on the challenge of globalization is evidenced by the 'who's who' of warm commendations from leading evangelicals and thinkers engaged in related fields including Richard Bauckham, David Smith, William Storrar, Richard Mouw, Alan Torrance, Chris Wright, David F. Wright, Stephen Holmes, Mark Amstuz and David Bebbington. A line up like that is hard to ignore, and quite right too. This is a serious book for a serious subject – one which we all face and which is not going to go away any time soon.

Patrick Mitchel, Irish Bible Institute, Dublin

Israel, God's Servant: God's Key to the Redemption of the World

David W. Torrance & George Taylor

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2007; 224 pp., £9.99; ISBN 978184227 5542

With few exceptions, evangelicals responded in wonder to the rebirth of the Jewish state in May 1948 and at least one Dutch denomination, which had previously held that God had finished with the Jews as a nation, changed its doctrinal stance on Israel. The victories of Israel against overwhelming odds in the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the daring rescue of Jewish hostages from Entebbe airport in 1976 served to enhance Christian admiration for the Jewish people. Israel's Lebanon campaign in the early eighties, however, proved to be a turning point for the nation's public image. The image of Israel as a vulnerable David standing up to a terrifying Soviet-backed Goliath was speedily

transformed into a reverse image, and with the publication of Colin Chapman's hugely influential work *Whose Promised Land?* in 1983, anti-Zionism began to percolate down into evangelical thinking to the point where it has since acquired a theological respectability bordering on orthodoxy.

Israel, God's Servant is therefore a timely and valuable contribution to the current debate in which two Reformed and Barthian scholars, present a politically, historically and theologically positive view of the Jewish people and the modern state of Israel.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first part Torrance and Taylor set forth a brief pro-Israel history of the Middle East conflict, in which they argue that the root of the enmity between Israel and its Arab neighbours is theological rather than political. Referencing Arab leaders and the Hamas Covenant, which states that 'The Palestinian problem is a religious one', Torrance and Taylor contend that it is 'folly not to listen to and accept what Muslims themselves are saying'. While acknowledging Israel's shortcomings as a nation, they argue that the ethical standards demanded of the Jewish state by the western nations are often far higher than the standards those same nations apply to themselves.

The authors tackle in a masterly manner the argument of writers such as Colin Chapman and Stephen Sizer that the New Testament is silent about Israel's claim to the land and that the earthly Jewish nation has been replaced by Christ's 'universal spiritual kingdom'. While Chapman, Sizer and pro-Palestinian authors stress the ethical and conditional demands made on Israel by the Sinai Covenant, Torrance and Taylor argue that the basis of God's relationship with Israel was not primarily legal but gracious. "It is true", say the authors, "that the enjoyment of the full blessings of the covenant were [sic] dependent on Israel's behaviour, but the fulfilment of his purposes through them and their land was not." (p 49)

Focussing on an often neglected Old Testament principle, Torrance and Taylor point to the inextricable link that exists between people and land, underlining that as it goes with the people so it goes with the land. Thus whenever the Jews have been absent from the land in their periods of exile the land has languished. In the nineteenth century, for example, prior to the first wave of Zionist immigration, Mark Twain could describe Palestine as a land of deserts and malarial swamps. It was with the arrival of the Zionist settlers that the land began to blossom and become fertile.

In the second part of the book the authors focus on the history and causes of anti-Semitism and examine the claim made by Jewish and some Christian scholars that the New Testament is inherently anti-Semitic.

The third section addresses 'Replacement Theology', the future of Israel and the issue of Jewish mission. Chapter ten sets out a strong case for why 'The Church is Not the New Israel'. However, though the arguments

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are strong, they could be stronger. It will not escape the attention of some unsympathetic readers that in this crucial chapter the authors do not interact with O Palmer Robertson's *The Israel of God*, nor do they attempt to exegete Galatians 6:16, the cornerstone proof text of supercessionism. Furthermore, by accepting the assumption that 1 Peter was written to a gentile readership the authors weaken their case by conceding that "the Church" inherits some of Israel's titles and privileges. Nor is there any reference to the unconditional nature of the covenant with Abram recorded in Genesis 15.

Challenging the view of some respected commentators on Romans 11, Torrance and Taylor demonstrate that the chapter relates to the ultimate salvation of the bulk of the Jewish nation. The authors view the remarkable growth in the number of Jewish Christians throughout the world and Jewish churches in Israel as a sign that we may soon witness the fulfilment of the apostle Paul's prophecy.

The chapter on the priority of Jewish mission, while good, could have been strengthened by an exegesis of Romans 1:16 in the light of the Apostle Paul's missionary strategy in the book of Acts.

Part 4 consists of seven excellent appendices. Of particular value are the appendices 'The Refugee Problem', 'The Intifada, the PLO and Hamas', 'A Jewish View of the Land', 'Ancient Israel's Conquest of Canaan' and 'Jihad and Suicide Bombers'.

The book is marred by the fact that there is no index of Bible references and that the general index is inadequate. Nevertheless, in spite of some shortcomings and oversights, Torrance and Taylor present a case for Israel which is erudite, clear and persuasive.

Mike Moore, Christian Witness to Israel, Kent

Called to Be Saints: A Centenary History of the Church of the Nazarene in the British Isles (1906-2006)

T. A. Noble

Manchester: Didsbury Press; 100 pages, 2006; £15, ISBN-10: 0955250706
ISBN-13: 978-0955250705

The *Preface* indicates that the history of the Church of the Nazarene in the British Isles is still an ongoing story written by a theologian who continues to play a vital role in the story. Still, the book does not lose its critical historical balance as is evident in the first chapter. The opening chapter outlines the various early 20th century holiness movements in Great Britain (often influenced by American pragmatism) and places the origins of the Church of the Nazarene within the 'radical holiness' movement of Phoebe Palmer.

The second chapter on George Sharpe focuses on the controversy in Glasgow regarding 'radical holiness' and the eventual expulsion of George Sharpe from his Congregationalist Church, eventually placing him in the arms of the new Church of the Nazarene. This historical background continues in the next chapter with the account of the early 20th century holiness mission groups and their emphasis on lay leadership. This includes sketches of important people such as Reader Harris and David Thomas.

As the early history of the Church of the Nazarene developed problems arose including Phoebe Palmer's 'shorter way' and the 'written rules' of conduct imported from America. T.A. Noble does not shy away from these controversies since they have played a part of what has defined the Church of the Nazarene. The account given by T.A. Noble follows the Church of the Nazarene through WWI, the increased importance of 'ordained' leadership, the rise of 'modernism', the creation of Hurlet Nazarene College, and the merger of the International Holiness Mission and the Calvary Holiness Church to the Church of the Nazarene.

At this point the book changes direction and offers an historical account of British Nazarenes involved in world missions. Noble's approach centres in South Africa, Swaziland, and Mozambique. The importance of this chapter is not only the list of key figures but Noble analyses the holistic approach to missions defined by the pioneering work of Dr. David Hynd.

Few historians prefer to write history with many of the participants still alive and active, but the remaining two chapters are written with critical skill. The advent of the 70s saw the influence of the American Church Growth movement and its effect on the British Church of the Nazarene. Within the Church of the Nazarene the buzz word was 'internationalisation', although T.A. Noble sees it as 'foreign mission' outside of America. During this era change occurred in academics with a more established institution in Manchester designed to continue pastoral education with academic research. Behind all of this was the visionary contribution of Dr. Hugh Rae, Principal (emeritus) of British Isles Nazarene College, now Nazarene Theological College. Noble brings the history to a close with a final assessment on theological education.

The epilogue looks for lessons from the past in order to move into the future. Even here as the comments are directed to the Church of the Nazarene there are relevant ideas for the Church in Great Britain. An added feature of this book is the personal anecdotal stories, largely written by Hugh Rae, on various leaders involved in the growth of the Church of the Nazarene in Great Britain.

Although the names and places are familiar to people in the Church of the Nazarene the study is a worthwhile read for the account given of a

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church's dedication to the cause of holiness combined with mission. The book is written with theological and historical critical skill and makes a valuable contribution to the study of a relatively small group of dedicated people to the cause of the Gospel within the evangelical movement.

David Rainey, Nazarene Theological College

The Barth Lectures

Colin E. Gunton; Transcribed and Edited by Paul H. Brazier

T&T Clark, London/New York, 2007; xxiv+285pp., £24.99pb; ISBN 9780567031402

While Colin Gunton fruitfully enjoyed a life-long engagement with, and formation by, Karl Barth's work, produced numerous articles on various aspects of such, and lectured on the Swiss giant during most of the years he taught at King's College London, he never fulfilled his ambition to pen a monograph devoted solely to this his favourite theologian. Had he done so, these lectures (recorded and transcribed almost verbatim by Paul Brazier, complete with charts, diagrams, live-questions and Gunton's responses) would have served as the basis.

Chapters 1–3 attend to the intellectual, historical and theological background to Barth's thinking. Beginning with a focus on Enlightenment philosophy as it finds voice in Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel – all three of whom 'identified Christianity too closely with modern culture' (p17) – Gunton then turns to Barth's early theological formation in the nineteenth-century liberalism of Harnack and Herrmann, as well as to some other voices and ideas that impinged on Barth's theological development – Blumhardt (who also influenced Moltmann), Schweitzer, and Overbeck, through whom eschatology was re-confirmed on the theological radar.

Barth's engagement with existentialism (Kierkegaardian and other) and theologies of 'religion', 'crisis' and 'dialectics' are introduced in the second and third lectures, and re-appear subsequently throughout the book. Certainly, for the Swiss theologian, 'no road to the eternal world has ever existed except the road of negation' (p33). Thus when Gunton later comes to unpack something of the charge concerning Barth's 'irrationality' through the continuing influence of *Der Römerbrief*, empiricism, and Barth's 'assertive style', the United Reformed Church minister notes:

The influence of empiricism, especially on the minds of English and American theologians, cannot be dismissed. The English, or to be more pertinent, the Anglican theological mind is shaped by a philosophical tradition that does

not find Barth's approach to theology easy to understand let alone agree with ... Part of our intellectual tradition makes it hard for us to understand – particularly an Anglican tradition. Anglicans on the whole like things to be nice and middle way, the *via media*. And there is not much of the middle way in Karl Barth! ... Barth's assertive style does make it difficult for mild-mannered establishment Anglicans to cope with. (p66)

Whether critiquing Augustine, Calvin, Kant, the 'Absolutely Pagan' Hegel (p17), or the 'great opponent' Schleiermacher (p15), Gunton repeatedly identifies that the crucial question for the author of the groundbreaking *Der Römerbrief* remains 'how much of your intellectual method hangs on something foreign to Christianity?' (p42; cf. pp52–3).

To this end, Gunton also devotes an entire lecture (pp53–63) to Barth's 1931 work on Anselm, *Fides quaerens intellectum*, and to the Archbishop's understanding of the relationship between 'proof', 'reason' and 'faith'. He later writes: 'Barth is a post-Reformation thinker with the rallying cry, by scripture alone and by faith alone! Barth found in the Reformation tradition a conception of theology based on a view of God that is linked with human salvation. The problem for Barth with the Scholastic tradition is that it begins with a rational view of God – a rational idea of God abstracted from human salvation. Barth begins with scripture because the God of scripture is about salvation not philosophical argument' (p69). And on a comparison with Schleiermacher: 'the problem with beginning with religion is that it is not theological, it can be, it can lead into theology, but in essence it is not: religion is an experiential concept, not a theological concept. Barth wants a theology that is theological right from the very outset. Barth considers that Roman Catholics and Protestants such as Schleiermacher are wrong in thinking that there can be a non-theological basis for theology. Barth is a theologian you see, to the fingernails' (p69).

From Chapter 4 onwards, Gunton turns to Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, acutely aware that 'there is nothing as boring as résumés of Barth's *Dogmatics*' and that 'the way to get into Barth is to select and to read – read him, there is no substitute!' (p71). Over the next 190 pages, this is precisely what Gunton masterfully helps us do; whether on Barth's theological prolegomena, his witness to the three-fold Word, Trinity, the doctrine of God proper, election, christology, soteriology, ethics or creation, we are all along driven by the only thing of theological interest for Barth, the question 'Who is the God who makes himself known in Scripture?' (p77). 'When Barth is at his best', Gunton writes, 'he looks at the biblical evidence in detail; when he is weak he tends to evade it' (p119).

Throughout, Gunton is rousing his 30–40 mostly MA and PhD students (although the lectures were intended for undergraduates and so leave considerable ground un-traversed and engage minimally with secondary literature) to ‘read as much of the man himself’ not least because ‘the people that write about him are much more boring than he is’ (p9; cf. p39). In a sense, this is one book to ‘listen to’ more than to ‘read’. At times, it is a bit like the difference between a live album and a studio version. Not all the notes are spot on, but the energy – filled with a depth of theological and pastoral insight that betray years of wrestling with the things that matter – is all there.

Such wrestling means that whether expounding a key motif in Barth’s theology or fielding questions, Gunton reveals not only a deep indebtedness to Barth’s thought, but also points of divergence. He is upfront in the first lecture:

Not everyone buys into Barth ... I don’t, all the way along the line, as I get older I get more and more dissatisfied with the details of his working out of the faith ... over the years I think I have developed a reasonable view of this great man who is thoroughly exciting and particularly, I can guarantee, if you do this course, that you will be a better theologian by the third year, whether or not you agree with him – he is a great man to learn to think theologically with. (p10)

Clearly, Gunton is no clone of Barth. Though they are mostly unnamed, he draws upon Coleridge, Owen, Zizioulas and Polanyi as allies in order to attain a measure of distance from Barth’s theology (and that of Barth’s student Moltmann), notably on creation, trinitarian personhood (Gunton prefers the Cappadocians), natural revelation, Jesus’ humanity, Christ’s priesthood, the Word’s action as mediator of creation, ecclesiology, and an over-realised eschatology, among other things (see pp52, 74, 82, 88–90, 96, 133, 142, 148, 170–1, 186, 200, 212, 227, 236, 250, 253–4, *passim*). Gunton reserves his strongest criticisms for what he contends is Barth’s weak pneumatology (for which he blames Augustine and the *filioque*): there is ‘not enough of the Spirit accompanying and empowering Jesus at different stages of his ministry’ (p200). Again: ‘the second person of the Trinity is made to do a bit more than he does in Scripture’ (p212). However, Gunton is always cautious and respectful: Barth ‘never really forgets anything, he is too good a theologian for that. And when you are criticizing Barth it is only a question of where he puts a weight; he never forgets anything, he is too good a man for that’ (p171). Even on the Spirit, Gunton suggests that he can only be critical here because of what he has learnt from Barth already: ‘That’s the great thing about Barth: he

enables you to do other things that aren't just Barth but yet are empowered by him. Yes, that's his greatness' (p200).

While the reformed theologian is 'too-multi-layered a thinker to have one leading idea' if there is one, Gunton suggests it is that of covenant: 'that from eternity God covenants to be the God who elects human beings into relation with himself' (p149), that from eternity the triune God is oriented towards us. Gunton's chapter on Barth's revision of God's election in *CD II/2* is an astounding example of his adroitness and élan as a theological educator. Not many teachers could summarise so sufficiently and with such economy (just 12 pages!) what for Barth is the root of all things, 'creation, atonement, all' (p115), that is, election. Gunton concludes by suggesting that Barth's effort was 'a huge improvement in the crude determinism of the Augustinian tradition, which did not represent a gracious God. The Augustinian doctrine replaces grace with gratuity: God gratuitously chooses group A and not group B – this is not the God who seeks out the lost [even Judas] and does not reject them' (p121).

This volume is significantly more than merely a course on the theology of the twentieth century's superlative theologian. It is also a reminder that to read Barth attentively is to be introduced to a broader dogmatic and philosophical tradition. Moreover, it is to be led to do so by one of Britain's ablest pedagogues. A foreword by Christoph Schwäbel and a warm introduction by Steve Holmes prepare us for one of the freshest introductions to Barth available. Again, we are placed in Professor Gunton's debt.

Jason A. Goroncy, University of St Andrews

Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers

John W. Cooper

Nottingham: Apollos, 2007; 358pp, £19.99; ISBN: 1844741745

Contemporary theology is vociferous in charging that classical Christian theism has been distorted by its philosophical underpinnings. Proponents of the immutable 'God of the Philosophers', so the charge goes, embarrassed by the biblical witness to a God who busies himself in history, must resort to anthropomorphic exegetical tricks; philosophical notions of divine eternity and aseity make a charade of God's loving relationship with creation; theological issues of theodicy, incarnation, and freedom further inveigh against the tradition's transcendent deity.

Especially since the nineteenth century, classical theism is being jettisoned for panentheism, an ancient conception of the divine previously detected only among mainstream theology's shadows. The belief that God and the world exist in merely qualified distinction, the world exist-

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ing ‘in’ God ontologically, panentheism claims to be a *via media* between theism and pantheism that is scientifically credible and theologically appropriate for our era.

In what Langdon Gilkey described as modern theology’s “war with the Greeks”, Calvin Seminary philosopher John Cooper’s *Panentheism* is a non-belligerent counter-offensive. Courteous and fair in considering and handling criticisms lodged against the traditional formulation of God, Cooper maintains classical theism of a confessional Reformed variety, and aims in *Panentheism* to convince that, all things considered, panentheism is a poor replacement for it. Far from being able to claim the biblical ‘high ground’, panentheism too stems from Greek philosophy and, furthermore, its historical course from Plato to the present indicates that the flaws intrinsic to its origin have been exacerbated as it developed. In his historical and apologetic aims, Cooper succeeds magnificently, rendering real assistance to students, pastors, and scholars by making explicit the implicit foundation on which much contemporary theology is constructed, and doing so through patient, intelligible analysis.

A wide-ranging, historical survey, *Panentheism* first treats Plato’s ambiguous analogy of a divine Soul-body for the Creator-creation relationship, and the neo-Platonic doctrine of the emanation of all things from Being, as prepotent for blurring the distinction between God and world and investing notions of participation in the divine with ontological weight. A succession of medieval and early modern thinkers who reworked these neo-Platonic tenets within Christian theology like Pseudo-Dionysius, Nicolas of Cusa, and Jakob Böhme show the skirted path panentheism took into modernity. Marks of a later, full-fledged panentheism emerge in this period: necessary creation, God’s infinity as containing all opposites—even non-being, the dialectical return of all things to the Source.

Cooper locates the turning point between classical and modern panentheism in Schelling and Hegel. They tipped neo-Platonism’s vertical hierarchy of being on its side so that divine emanation became historicized; now, God actualized his existence in co-operation with humankind’s development. It is this ‘horizontal’ panentheism that attracts modern theologians by harmonizing divine transcendence and immanence and converging neatly with modern science. Indeed, Cooper argues convincingly that the issue of human freedom divides classical and modern panentheism and gives the latter genuine appeal as the only theistic option that ensures human freedom—with all the risk that entails for God’s own being.

The proliferation of modern panentheism is well represented in *Panentheism*. Broad movements like process, scientific, and ecological theology join meaty individual chapters on Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, Pannenberg (a controversial inclusion) and Moltmann. Cooper argues in

closing that Scripture and philosophical and theological coherence prefer a renewed classical theism to panentheism in explaining how we are ‘in’ God (Acts 17:28). Panentheism, because its blurs the distinction between Creator-creature, compromises the triune God’s freedom and sovereignty, and spawns theologies hard-pressed to condemn sin and evil as truly alien or to account for the agapic nature of God’s creating and redeeming love.

Todd Statham, McGill University

Communion & Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church

John D. Zizioulas, edited by Paul McPartlan

T & T Clark, London, 2006; 315pp, £25.00; ISBN 0 56703 1489

This volume continues the study of personhood and the Church that Zizioulas began in *Being as Communion* (1985). Both collections of essays present “a relational ontology in which communion constitutes the key idea for ecclesiology as well as anthropology (xiii).” The two volumes complement and balance each other, *Communion & Otherness* emphasizing the importance of otherness for relationality and communion, and *Being as Communion* emphasizing the importance of relationality and communion for unity, but the present volume does stand on its own.

After Rowan Williams’s panegyrical foreword, Zizioulas offers a masterful introduction to his relational ontology and his theological method. The first chapter demonstrates the sweeping movement of Zizioulas’s thought, moving from his doctrine of the immanent Trinity to Christology and ecclesiology, and then to a relational anthropology that calls for an ecclesial, ascetic and eucharistic ethos. As this chapter (composed for this volume) assumes subsequent argumentation, readers unfamiliar with Zizioulas should skip it, then read it as the conclusion.

Chapters 2-5 detail the basis for Zizioulas’s relational ontology in the immanent Trinity, the doctrine of which he develops with special attention to the Eastern Church Fathers and the pneumatological dimensions of their discussions. Particularly noteworthy is chapter 3 (new for this volume), in which Zizioulas argues that the Father is 1) the source of the Trinity, and, therefore, 2) the One God. Certain to provoke objections from Western readers, this essay should be read in light of the whole work, especially Zizioulas’s contention that: “God is not, logically or ontologically speaking, first one and then many; he is one in being many (11, cf. 126).” Also controversial will be Zizioulas’s continued adducing of the Cappadocians in support of his doctrine of the immanent Trinity and relational ontology, though he explicitly defends the fidelity of his patristic exegesis against doubts raised elsewhere.

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Next, in two standout chapters, Zizioulas treats communion and otherness in the divine economy and creation. Chapter 6, “Human Capacity and Incapacity”, remains a monumental work of christological anthropology and it is hoped that its republication will allow its voice to be heard in the nature-grace debate. In chapter 7 (newly translated), Zizioulas further clarifies the created-uncreated dialectic, i.e., the absolute difference between the Creator and his creation, by analyzing the Christology of Chalcedon. This analysis leads Zizioulas to present salvation as the restoration of right relations between others by the removal of sin’s distortion of difference into distance and division, not the abolition of radical difference—particularly that between Creator and creature. The final chapter (new for this volume) brings together the practical implications of the preceding material by outlining an “ecclesial mysticism” built not upon self-consciousness, but upon our gracious adoption into Jesus’ sonship, and our participation in the loving relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, “a relationship which allows each of these persons to emerge as utterly other while being utterly one” (306).

As with most creative theological proposals, readers likely will find much with which to disagree. Yet, if one takes the time to engage and not simply dismiss, this volume will pay handsome dividends. This is particularly true of the work’s *grundmotiv*: the free existence of divine and human persons. Alongside this crimson thread, there are a host of other themes that bear investigation, including the doctrines mentioned above, the way Zizioulas brings philosophy and theology into dialogue, and his combination of rigorous theological argumentation and pastoral priorities. Those interested in ecclesial theology will find in this volume much worth contemplating and an able dialogue partner.

Luke Ben Tallon, University of St Andrews

Judgment & Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul

Chris VanLandingham

Hendrickson Press, Peabody, MA, 2006; xvi + 384pp, \$29.95; ISBN 9781565633988

This book, a revision of the author’s dissertation, advances two main claims. He contends that E. P. Sanders’ construction of first century Judaism as a fundamentally gracious religion is mistaken. He also maintains that many, if not most, students of Paul have misunderstood what Paul means by ‘justification’.

After a brief introduction that helpfully outlines the argument of the book, VanLandingham in the first chapter seeks to prove that post-OT Judaism did not understand election to be entirely gracious. Rather, elec-

tion is ‘a reward for proper behavior’ (18). This understanding of election was drawn from the Old Testament itself. The Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and other biblical covenants were established upon the basis of human obedience (60f.). In the second chapter, the author contends that for the Intertestamental writers eternal life should not be termed a ‘gift’ or ‘reward’ (67). Obedience, rather, was the ‘criterion for survival or probation at the Last Judgment.’ (171) That meant that one could not be certain of his eternal destiny until the Last Judgment (171-74).

In the third chapter, VanLandingham asks whether Paul is in agreement or disagreement with the above model. Paul agreed with Judaism that one’s eternal destiny would not be settled until the Last Judgment, and that that determination would be on the basis of his obedience (240). Consequently the believer’s justification is not ‘itself the declaration one will receive at the Last Judgment’ (241). It does not refer to ‘the verdict of acquittal a believer will receive at the last judgment’ (17).

Paul’s understanding of justification occupies the fourth and final chapter. The author denies that the Greek verb *dikaioo*, conventionally translated ‘to justify,’ is a strictly forensic term. The verb and its cognates ‘embrace both the notions of (1) forgiveness, cleansing, and purification of past sins and (2) an emancipation from sin as a ruler over humanity’ (331). The verb should be translated ‘to make righteous’ to reflect the transformative character of ‘justification.’ These findings impact our understanding of well-known passages. For example, he sees Paul saying at Rom. 3:21-26 that ‘For the believer, Jesus’ death procures the forgiveness of sins, but also so thoroughly cleanses and purifies the believer from the effects of sin that sin no longer holds the believer under its influence.’ (326) The Last Judgment, VanLandingham elsewhere says, ‘will then determine whether a person, as an act of the will, has followed through with these benefits of Christ’s death’ (335). It is that person’s obedience and not those benefits that will be the basis of his acceptance or rejection at the Last Judgment.

VanLandingham is undoubtedly correct to affirm that many Intertestamental writers understood election to be grounded upon obedience. He is mistaken, however, to project such an understanding upon the Old Testament. The gratuitous and unmerited election of Abraham (Gen. 11-12) is fatal to his thesis.

The author’s language concerning the role of obedience at the Last Judgment is not altogether clear. At times he frames the question in terms of judgment *according to* deeds. This doctrine the apostle Paul readily affirms. At other times VanLandingham frames the question in terms of judgment *on the basis of* deeds. This doctrine the apostle Paul strenuously

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denies. Here, consistency of terminology would have lent clarity to the question VanLandingham is attempting to answer.

VanLandingham's proposed definition of justification is objectionable on at least two grounds. First, Paul does not define justification in terms of inward transformation. The handful of Old Testament and non-Pauline New Testament passages that the author adduces in order to support translating Paul's use of the verb *dikaioo* 'to make righteous' are not compelling (pp. 254-72). Paul categorically excludes the believer's performance (past, present, or future) from the basis of his justification (Gal. 2:16). The sole basis of justification is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:10-13, Rom. 3:21-26, 5:12-21).

Second, in claiming that our present justification has no reference to the Last Judgment, the author cannot account for the manner in which the apostle inexorably links justification and glorification at Rom. 8:30. It is therefore astonishing to see VanLandingham deny that Paul delights in the certain vindication of the believer at the final judgment at Rom. 8:31-39 (326-8). It is this point, in the end, that separates Paul from his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries.

Guy Prentiss Waters, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MI

Research for the Academy and the Church Tyndale House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years

T. A. Noble

Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 2006; 336pp, £19.99; ISBN-13: 9781844740956; ISBN-10: 1844740951

Some years ago, I resigned from the Tyndale Fellowship. I reasoned that there was no point in paying an annual subscription when I rarely managed to get to a Study Group meeting (living at the other end of the country) and when most of the articles in the *Tyndale Bulletin* were more geared to Old Testament and New Testament studies than to my own discipline of systematic theology.

Some time later, a good friend (and now Chairman of Tyndale House) Andrew Clarke told me that this had been a wrong decision and that the work of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship was very important and that I should support it even during those periods when I felt I wasn't able to fully participate. Shortly afterwards I was asked to give a paper at the next Christian Doctrine Study Group and I rejoined, having repented of my foolishness!

If I had ever again doubted the importance and the significance of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship, this book would have provided the perfect antidote. Dr Tom Noble, whose personal involvement over

many years ably prepared him to write this book, provides us here with a careful and scholarly account of the origins, development and progress of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship. One cannot read these pages without recognising the enormous achievements of the House and Fellowship over these past 60 years. Begun at a time when evangelical biblical scholarship was weak and not valued within the Academy and when there were few evangelical books available for theological students, the House and Fellowship have made a huge contribution to the present situation where evangelical scholarship is very influential and where the annual publications list of the Fellowship and of those researching at the House runs to many pages.

The story has been written on the basis of the minutes of the various committees which, over the years, have had responsibility for the work. There have been many such committees! Indeed, one of the fascinating aspects of the story is the apparent inability of those responsible to agree a final structural matrix for relating the House and the Fellowship to each other and to the parent organisation, UCCF. Having been written on the basis of these minutes, the book could have been rather stilted and formal but Tom Noble's personal knowledge of events combined with his many contacts with key people, helps bring the minutes to life.

A Biblical Research Committee was set up by what was then the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Christian Unions (now UCCF) in 1938. This Committee, including G.T. Manley, Alan Stibbs, John Wenham and Douglas Johnson, organised a conference at Kingham Hill in 1941 and it was here that the proposal was made by Dr W.J. Martin for an 'Institute and Library for Biblical Research'. There were varying perspectives on the need for such an institution, as well as disagreements on the relationship between the specialist biblical scholar and the place of biblical and systematic theology, so it was 1944 before what is now Tyndale House was purchased, with generous help from John W. Laing, the builder. The following year, 'The Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research' was established.

The book goes on to describe the slow but steady progress of the work since then (punctuated by the occasional crisis – usually financial) and lists the various scholars who served on the committees, worked at the House, led the Study Groups, gave Tyndale Lectures and so on. These names provide a litany of evangelical leadership: F.F. Bruce, D.M. Lloyd-Jones, J.N.D. Anderson, Donald Guthrie, Leon Morris, John Stott, J.I. Packer, David Wright, Howard Marshall and many others.

The development of the House itself is also a story of hard work and real commitment. The almost constant programme to upgrade and improve the facilities, the need to expand and grow the available accom-

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modation, the installation of computer equipment, the establishment of a world-class biblical library linked in to the library of Cambridge University – all of this combines into a remarkable achievement.

From this distance, it is difficult to grasp just how few evangelical biblical scholars were working at university level when the House and Fellowship were established. Only when we understand the position in 1944 and compare it to the present situation can we really appreciate what has been accomplished. The aim of the work has always been to encourage biblical scholarship at the highest level, in the context of a believing, evangelical community. That has been achieved and the vision of the early founders has been realised.

This book not only tells the story of an institution and a fellowship but provides an important contribution to the overall history of evangelical life and scholarship in Britain in the twentieth century. For that reason alone, it is a valuable and useful book.

Professor A.T.B. McGowan, Highland Theological College

Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology

Mike Higton

T&T Clark International, London and New York, 2004; 287pp. £40; ISBN 0567080528.

On the occasion of Mike Higton's *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* inclusion in the 'Contemporary Theology Collection' module now in pre-production for Logos' popular Bible Software (Libronix), we review this 2004 book as a potential addition to electronic libraries as well as to physical collections.

Christ, Providence and History is a first-class treatment of an important modern theologian. Higton's conceptual framework is admirably conceived and executed without discernable deficiency. Occasionally Higton's prose is a bit jargon-laden and dense—near inevitable reflections of his primary material—but on the whole, his writing is a welcome elucidation of Frei's notoriously challenging corpus. Higton also grasps quite firmly the central concerns that animated Frei's main conversation partners, thus avoiding all manner of false tensions and superficialities. Most importantly, Higton simply understands what Hans W. Frei was about, and is able to narrate the essentially unified project that underlies Frei's work.

And what is this project? Like his fellow Yale alumnus Jonathan Edwards, Frei died before he could personally provide us with a definitive answer. But according to Higton's reconstruction, Frei took seriously the nature of the foundational narratives of the Christian faith (the Gospels)

as ‘history-like’ and inherently *public*, and, through integration with a doctrine of providence, worked out a reading of theology and history that was consistent with these commitments: ‘Christian theology is most at home in public. At its source are narratives of public circumstance, of action and interaction in public spaces; it lives by ongoing engagement with communities whose lives are never lived entirely in private; and it issues in descriptions and counsels which are applicable in the public world of politics and history’ (p1). Among other things, Higton’s Frei is thus positioned to supply a needed critique of the privatised Christianity that so plagues the contemporary church.

Frei is perhaps best known in evangelical circles for his 1974 *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, a polished wrecking ball that appears as deeply critical of Enlightenment attitudes to biblical hermeneutics and history as could be desired. He points out the consequences of the church’s abandonment of the kind of figural interpretation that formerly held the canon together. But as Higton’s highly sympathetic monograph nonetheless exposes, Frei is less hospitable to the evangelical perspective than this exercise in ‘ground-clearing’ might indicate. Among other problems is Frei’s apparent agreement with H. Richard Niebuhr on the nature of history as being ‘both *uniform* and *contingent*’ (p28). If we were to take the biblical narratives as seriously as Frei apparently wants us to, history would seem to be neither of these things. History is always subject to the non-uniform (supernatural) intervention of God, and is ultimately rendered non-contingent by God’s ineluctable foreknowledge and sovereign determination. No matter how Frei wishes to transcend or transform Troeltsch, buying into key Enlightenment presuppositions about history is to give away the game.

Higton thinks that ‘Frei’s work can be seen... as one long attempt to laugh at Strauss—not because he has found a way of ignoring him, but because he has learnt to defeat Strauss with Strauss’s own tools’ (p35). While I am sure that this is true to Frei’s understanding, such a ‘defeat’ of Strauss is more apparent than real, as evinced by Higton’s summary of Frei’s baseline approach to the resurrection: ‘...Christ can be more nearly “present” if it is not claimed that he has been *factually* raised from the dead’ (p114, emphasis mine). Frei has several other things to say on this subject, but does so in language I find evasive. If he is still somehow able to laugh at Straus, I for one do not get the joke. We might note in passing Frei also finds ‘moral substitution’ in which Christ died ‘to satisfy the wrath of a literally offended deity’ to be ‘poor fare’ (p113).

In the end, we are left with a theologian whose root concerns were shaped by theological parameters not shared by evangelicals, and whose resulting project is only barely intelligible to us however laudable in in-

tent. Why then, read *Christ, Providence and History?* If nothing else, it is a model of how theological scholarship ought to be done. And even if we do not like his answers, Frei is raising precisely the sort of questions evangelicals ought to reflect upon as often as possible.

Bill Schweitzer, University of Edinburgh

Some Recent Commentaries

Following his massive commentary on 1 Corinthians published in the New International Greek Testament Commentary series, Anthony C. Thiselton has published *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2006, xvi+325pp, ISBN 9780802826824, \$30). It is a masterly digest of the largest work, with additional applicatory and reflective comments. It will prove much more accessible than the larger work, and a useful addendum to it.

The NIGTC series has itself been enhanced with the addition of Darrel L. Bock's commentary on *Acts* (BakerAcademic, 2007, 864pp, ISBN 9780801026683, \$49.99). Like his two-volume work on Luke, this commentary is marked by thorough exegesis and theological acumen. It opens up the sociological and historical contexts of the story of the early church, with detailed interaction with the Greek text.

Inaugural volumes in the new Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary series include James McKeown on *Genesis* (2008, 408pp, ISBN 9780802827050, £13.99) and Geoffrey Grogan on *Psalms* (2008, 502pp, ISBN 9780802827067, £13.99). This series seeks to bridge the gap between systematic theology and biblical studies, and demonstrates faithful exposition of the text followed by theological reflection on it. McKeown has some good discussion of the Genesis and science debate, and Grogan's Appendix on 'Preparing a Sermon on a Psalm' is one illustration of the practical nature of this commentary. The series promises to be fruitful and useful.

From the prolific pen of Ben Witherington III comes *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Eerdmans, 394pp, ISBN 9780802824882, £21.99). His thesis is that in these letters Paul is engaging in the transformation of existing social institutions, and he sees Colossians as a primary engagement, Ephesians as a follow-up and Philemon as personal and intimate rhetoric. While one may quibble with the general approach, there is much that is useful in this volume, not least in the historical and cultural engagement.

Iain D. Campbell, Review Editor

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