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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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## PAGES FROM A SCHOOL REGISTER<sup>1</sup>

Appropriately, as I was putting the finishing touches to this guest editorial today, a little volume entitled *Excellence in Theological Education* by Steven A. Hardy landed on my desk. I look forward to reading it. Scottish Presbyterians of the nineteenth century also highly prized intellectual excellence; unsurprisingly, therefore, a main plank of Scottish missionary strategy during the second half of the century was the cultivation of intelligence, particularly in the case of the children of higher placed members of the indigenous society. It was hoped that this would produce a trickle-down effect whereby society generally would be permeated by an intelligent Christianity. Though the strategy is somewhat discredited today, its implementation led to the establishment of important schools. In 1830, Alexander Duff, the Church of Scotland's first missionary, oversaw the setting up of the General Assembly's Institution in Calcutta; John Wilson was in charge of the General Assembly's English School in Bombay; and as late as the 1920s the Free Church of Scotland, under the leadership of John A MacKay founded in Lima, Peru, the Colegio Anglo Peruana as a centre for progressive educational ideas. Now known as Colegio San Andres, the school continues to function, more or less, on the old philosophy. But perhaps the jewel in the crown was the Lovedale Missionary Institute in South Africa's Cape Province.

The Lovedale mission station, named after John Love, secretary of the Glasgow Missionary Society, was established in 1826 by two of the society's missionaries, John Ross and John Bennie, as an outgrowth of the earlier work of John Brownlee. In 1841 William Govan arrived to take on leadership of the new institution and was succeeded in 1870 by the redoubtable James Stewart, who had joined the staff in 1867 and had been David Livingstone's companion on the ill fated Zambezi expedition.

Stewart's policy at Lovedale was the provision of a comprehensive liberal education, available equally to children of African and European parentage; the only segregation being in the dormitories. When Stewart's biographer, James Wells, visited Lovedale in 1905 he 'saw Stewart's grandson in a class alongside of [Xhosa] boys' and was so impressed with the standard of the teaching that he commented to the students that not only had they better opportunities of education than he had himself, but that education was fitted to deliver them from 'their self-despising and the despising of the whites'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cory Library for Historical Research, MS16 291.

<sup>2</sup> J. Wells, *The Life of James Stewart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p.189.

Today, much of the Lovedale archive is lodged in the splendid Cory Library for Historical Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Researching the life of a Lovedale teacher and Africa's first woman doctor, Jane Elizabeth Waterston, I recently requested the class register for 1860-1880. I was curious to see what might be deduced from Waterston's comments revealing how a mid-nineteenth century, middle class Invernesian related to girls largely from a rural Xhosa background. In fact the poorly indexed volume contained nothing of interest in that regard, but what did catch my eye was four consecutive pages with brief, matter-of-fact accounts of four of the most influential Xhosa students of their generation: Mpambani Mzimba, Elijah Makiwane, John Knox Bokwe and William Koyi.

Mpambani Mzimba was admitted in July 1860, aged 11, with the ability 'to read a little English and write fairly'. In 1865 he entered the printing department but, wanting to train for the ministry, was permitted to attend classes. In 1871 he attained prizes for zoology and in 1873 for theology and church history. On leaving he was ordained on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1873 as minister of Lovedale Native Congregation. Stewart lamentably failed to be present and Jane Waterston scolded him for his neglect, 'Your being away for Mpanbani's [sic] ordination gave me great pain...Mpambani said little about it...Perhaps it is because I am a woman, but I would allow people to think what they liked before I had wounded...such a faithful, loving heart as Mpambani's.'<sup>3</sup> Two notes follow to the effect that he was the first ordained native minister in connection with the Free Church Mission in South Africa and that he married an old Lovedale girl, one of Jane Waterston's pupils, Martha Kwabsha. In 1893 Mazimba visited Scotland to take part in the Free Church's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations but in 1898, owing to the failure to treat 'native' ministers equally with whites, he left to form the Bantu Presbyterian Church.

Elijah Makiwane, born around 1850, was first educated by Methodists at Healdtown but at fourteen he ran away and sought entrance to Lovedale with 'no certificate of character or letter of introduction'. He was admitted to the Preparatory School in August, 1865. At first the opinion of his ability was low, 'very defective in the most elementary branches, so much so that there was hesitation in admitting him, but he soon showed 'a marked diligence and was thoroughly reliable, trustworthy and ultimately took himself to study for the ministry'. Between 1871 and 73 he obtained prizes for moral philosophy, political economy, natural philosophy, logic, theology and church history. On leaving Lovedale in 1873 he became editor

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<sup>3</sup> L. B. and E. van Heyningen, eds., *The Letters of Jane Elizabeth Waterston, 1866-1905* (Van Riebeeck Society, 1983), p. 96.

of *Isidigimi Sama Xosa*, the Lovedale isiXhosa newspaper, a post he held for a number of years. In 1877 he was ordained minister of the Macfarlan congregation. He too married an old Lovedale girl, Maggie Magizima.

John Knox Bokwe was born at Lovedale on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1855. In the register, his parents are described as Christian with the *proviso* that 'his father did not continue steadfast, but his mother is a woman of high Christian character'. His father Jacob had been one of the very first Lovedale students when it opened in 1841. Admitted to the preparatory school, aged ten, John stated that his aim was to be a teacher, but this was subsequently changed to 'general usefulness to my countrymen'. Three years later he entered the college department but there is no record of prizes obtained. On completing his education he was employed at Lovedale as a clerk, marrying Lettie Neini, yet another old Lovedale girl who had for nine years been a maid to Mrs Stewart, in whose company she had visited Scotland. The slightly built Bokwe was a highly gifted poet and musician with a fine tenor voice, and became the most celebrated hymn writer in isiXhosa, not only composing many hymns and choral works, but also writing the biography of Ntsikana (1780-1820), the evangelist and first Xhosa hymn writer, producing a fine setting of Ntsikana's great hymn, *Ulothixo Omkhulu* (The Great God). In 1885 Bokwe published his own compositions *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale Songs).<sup>4</sup> Their five children contributed in such fields as education, medicine and African politics; Roseberry, born in 1900, becoming active in the African National Congress.

William Koyi, was born about 1847 near the Berlin Mission Society's Dohne Mission Station, near Stutterheim, and had no education before coming to Lovedale. The register provides a tantalising insight into his spiritual journey, stating in what seems to be Koyi's *ipsissima verba* that 'on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1869 [ I ] washed off the red blanket and began to attend to the concerns of my soul'. The blanket covered with red ochre being the badge of the followers of traditional Xhosa religion. His sole aim for attending Lovedale was 'to join mission work as a preacher'. In 1876 he and three other Xhosa students joined James Stewart, Jane Waterston, Robert Laws and others in the Livingstonia mission to the Ngoni people in what is now Malawi. The register adds, 'He has continued working most faithfully in that mission field (1880).' Today Koyi is feted by Ma-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dictionary of African Biography at [http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/bokwe\\_johnknox.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/bokwe_johnknox.html)

lawian Presbyterians as a founder of their church and his grave at Njuyu is still attended.<sup>5</sup>

The Lovedale Missionary Institution gave rise, in the late nineteenth century, to a Xhosa Christian intelligentsia. This network of gifted intellectuals, whose influence touched and enriched the lives of thousands, included, as well as the four mentioned, such luminaries as Tiyo Soga, the first Xhosa minister and translator of *The Pilgrims Progress* into Xhosa, and his Scottish-educated son, the ethnologist, Dr. John Henderson Soga; newspaper columnist and minister, Isaac Williams Wauchope; Tengo Jabavu, the founder of South Africa's first black newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, and his son Professor Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu, founder of the All-African National Convention (AANC) and Professor of Latin and Bantu languages at the University of Fort Hare. Additionally, Gwayi Tyamzashe, William Wellington Gqoba, Elijah Makiwane, and Walter B. Rubusana were all prominent in this Xhosa renaissance. It was Bokwe's son-in-law, the educationalist, church leader and African nationalist, Z. K. Matthews who once described them all as 'leaders [who] drank deep at the springs of western civilisation and yet...remained true Africans, loyal to the best traditions of their people and good examples of what has been described as the African personality.'

In later decades these eminent Christians, bravely grappling with the challenges of modernity and black identity, were cruelly deprived of a voice, but today merit a fresh hearing both in Africa and wider afield, as well. It is a cause of much thankfulness that *The Journal and Writings of Soga*, *The Selected Writings of Wauchope* and *The Letters of Waterston* have all been made available through the excellent work of the Van Riebeeck Society and Rhodes University's Graham's Town Series. Not only so, but there continues to be a distinctive, contemporary Xhosa spiritual and intellectual contribution in the church today.

*Dr John Ross*  
*King William's Town, South Africa*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Thompson *Touching the Heart: Xhosa Missionaries to Malawi, 1876-1888* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2000), p. 99f.

# THE CHURCH AND THE URGENT PATIENCE OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

KEVIN F SCOTT

## INTRODUCTION

The nature of the church, not as an institution, nor yet perfected as the body of Christ, is the seat of Christ's operations in his redemptive work. It thus bears the characteristics of the reign of Christ, but alas, also the features of a society still under sin. In this paper, a thesis is presented that suggests the church might be profitably regarded as the *frontier* between the reign of Christ and the old order of sin. The experience of the church is thus the tension on such a frontier, as it advances and suffers reverses. This model is investigated using the Corinthian church as an example, taking the two letters of St Paul in the New Testament and the First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians from the sub-apostolic age as sources. With four variables – faith, godliness, hospitality and knowledge – Clement reflects on the past Christian virtue of the Corinthian church and their present low estate in this regard. Using these qualities, revised under the headings of saintliness (response to the call of God), faith (fidelity to God), and godliness (attentiveness to God), the anatomy of the reverses of the church, represented by spiritual sloth, secularisation, and narcissism, are considered in the light of cultural and philosophical factors. Finally the urgency and patience of Christ's ministry to the church in upholding her in truth and virtue, in retrieving her from loss and degradation and, finally, presenting her to himself in perfection are considered in the long time-scale in which she works out her salvation.

## I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

We are familiar with the manifold biblical descriptors used to describe the church of Jesus Christ. It is his body.<sup>2</sup> It is his creation by virtue of his calling. It is the body of humans among whom his Holy Spirit is operative in a distinctive way, causing them to receive the spiritual energies of the age to come and thus to anticipate here and now, that which lies in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Finlayson Lecture, 22 March 2009

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 12.27 develops this model and identifies the church with the body of Christ explicitly.

future.<sup>3</sup> The church is, to use a reformation definition, the gathering of people to whom and from whom the gospel is preached and obeyed, the community of the baptised, among whom the word of God is rightly heard and comprehended and the sacraments duly administered.<sup>4</sup> It is the community which results from the fact that Jesus Christ manifests himself by the Spirit and is present with them, thus bringing them into being as his church wherever two or three are gathered in his name.<sup>5</sup> St Ignatius of Antioch defines the church on these lines: 'Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.'<sup>6</sup>

These are familiar definitions which mean that the church cannot be defined purely in institutional terms. Following Scripture, the church fathers and reformers steadfastly refused to accept that the church is merely a socio-historical construct - a society of humans, by their own determination and choosing. They insisted rather that it is a supernatural community of humans chosen and called by the living Christ and therefore not their own but his, among whom he disposes and reigns as he pleases.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the term 'in Christ', which occurs frequently in the Pauline epistles, describes the essence of the nature of the church, the dative signifying the sphere in which the power of Christ is recognised and operates. Being 'in Christ' thus means 'new creation',<sup>8</sup> as a result of this operative power which prevails over him. At baptism, the new disciple of Christ dies as one whose former life is now over, and is made alive together with Christ, beginning a new existence in the power of Christ's reign.<sup>9</sup>

As true as this is, the church cannot be fully identified with the sphere of the reign of Christ, or, to use gospel terminology, the kingdom of God, because the sphere of Christ's reign is clearly of infinitely greater compass than the extent of the church. Equally and conversely, the church, because it is a body of humans who exist in their former state as sinners alongside their new status as the people of God, cannot fully and unequivocally represent the body of humans in Christ, but can only do so provisionally and in a flawed way. The church cannot therefore be exclusively identified

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Eph. 1.13; and 4.30.

<sup>4</sup> See Article XIX of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 18.20.

<sup>6</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, 'The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans' in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), pp. 614ff.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor. 5.17.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. 12.13; and Eph. 2.5.

## THE URGENT PATIENCE OF CHRIST

with the sphere in which Christ power reigns, or the kingdom of God, but under the providence by which Christ calls the church into being, it will inevitably reveal his reign over and within it, and therefore will not be entirely without the characteristics proper to a body of humans under the reign of God. Even in its worst moments, and these have and continue to be, very bad moments, even if it is almost entirely unlike a church, it will not quite achieve this total differentiation from its true character and calling. It will always present, however, even in its greatest moments, a qualified representation of that which is proper to it, namely the society of men under the reign of God and in the fellowship of his Son.

The best understanding of the church will do justice both to the incipient perfection of the reign of Christ under which it is set and to the church's declension from that standard. We might best formulate the description of the church, therefore, as a *frontier*. This frontier exists at the intersection of the reign of God and of the world to which the saving power of the kingdom is directed. The church is, accordingly, a frontier at which God is active and Christ is saving, at which evil is continually being rebuked and set back while virtue and righteousness are furthered; a frontier at which the love of Christ triumphs over lovelessness, truth over falsehood, life over death; a frontier, finally, at which the death-throes of the evil one are negated by the loving reign of the everliving God. Under that definition, the church will exhibit a welter of characteristics as variable and diverse as might be found on a battlefield. There will be great love and sacrifice, great courage and endurance. There will be great triumphs of grace, and victories wrought in Christ's power and name. But there will also be set backs, there will be cowardice and betrayal, shameful defeats, desertions and reverses.

Any observer will notice the ambiguity in the church's life arising from this understanding of the church as frontier. There will be evident sins and crimes which will not go unrecorded by a scornful world. But there will also be signs of grace which will draw men and women to the Source of that grace, thus recruiting them to the membership of the church. This will happen, even in the darkest hours of the church, even when she bears the least resemblance to her true calling and nature. Furthermore, the gospel has the power to raise up better hearers and doers of Christ's word, and thus the church always exhibits the power of reformation in its midst.

Thus in this frontier, in this powerful encounter of God's reign with the world, there will always be regrouping, reforming, realignment in order that set-backs and reverses can be answered with true and godly advances. Thus the church will never be static even though overall and in the long run it proves to be invincible. Forgetful and faithless here,

it regroups and springs up anew there, disobedient and corrupt there, it is raised up holy and dutiful here. And because it is the creation of the One who is raised from the dead, it can never stand in any serious risk of diminution. Always his power is greater than the decay to which it is subjected. Always it will rise up in more or less better forms, in more or less better powers of witness and obedience.

Thus the church will inevitably become witness to two aspects of divine action in its midst, two aspects which are antagonistic in the sense that muscles are antagonistic to maintain and control limbs. The church will always be impelled forward by the energy of the Holy Spirit, pressed forward to make good its opportunities as they arise. It will prove tirelessly energetic under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and discover, like St Paul, that it is omniscient through Christ's strength. At the same time it will need and exhibit endurance, patience in the face of its reverses. It will never be allowed to forget that with the Lord one thousand years is as one day, and one day as one thousand years.<sup>10</sup>

There will be times when it is urged forward by the Spirit's gracious insistence, and other times when it will be held back because the Spirit of Jesus does not give it leave to advance.<sup>11</sup> It will inevitably become an advocate of the 'urgent patience' of Christ. No doubt we will hear of young exuberant churches and old, battle-hardened churches: young churches who know about the urgency of Christ's impulse, and old churches who can tell their story of patient endurance. But both urgency and patience are necessary and must be evident in every church.

## 2. AN EXAMPLE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH FROM CLEMENT OF ROME

There can be no doubt that the Corinthian church, as we are introduced to it in the New Testament, exemplifies the church as this kind of frontier. The life of the Corinthians is a turbulent mixture of great enthusiasm and energy, abundant spiritual gifts, outworking of divine grace, as well as destructive party spirit, ignorance and the despising of true apostolic instruction, serious moral failure and misbehaviour even in the context of worship. Some of these errors and sins are so gross that if they happened today, we would wonder whether the body in which they took place could really be considered a church at all. But Paul never suggests that. He calls them to be true to their vocation as a church, their denial of that can never succeed in reversing their call. 2 Corinthians ends with the

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Pet. 3.8

<sup>11</sup> See Acts 16 for the restraining of the apostles by the Spirit.

apostle's injunction to mend their ways, but as far as the New Testament is concerned, it is an open question whether they will do so.

The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians, which is represented in a single document in the Alexandrian Codex, gives an insight into the progress of the Corinthian church in the sub-apostolic age. The letter was written by one Clement, very possibly the Clement referred to in Philippians 4.3, who succeeded his co-presbyters, Linus and Cletus to the oversight of the Roman church. The letter appears to be written upon the occasion of some internal doctrinal corruption or seditious activity which threatens the integrity and effectiveness of the Corinthian church. Clement seeks to draw them back to moral and spiritual health by reminding them of previous better times in which they had exhibited a great godliness and holiness. While the compliments that Clement expresses may be to some extent an epistolary device to facilitate their acceptance of his criticism, it seems that the sedition is a very recent and acute matter and that the Corinthian church had enjoyed a more godly period of its history in the immediate past.

Putting this side by side with the New Testament evidence, it suggests a none-too-surprising oscillation in the quality of Corinthian Christianity and witness. They evidently exhibited besetting sins, arising, no doubt, from the cut-throat competitive spirit of commercial Corinth, which, from time to time, flared up and got the better of their godly intentions. St Clement's letter breaks no doctrinal ground but sets forward the virtue proper to a Christian church with persuasive encouragements to imitate the apostles and their spiritual fathers. The opening discourse of the letter runs thus:

The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied. Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us; and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy, that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be universally loved, has suffered grievous injury. For who ever dwelt even for a short time among you, and did not find your faith to be as fruitful of virtue as it was firmly established? Who did not admire the sobriety and moderation of your godliness in Christ? Who did not proclaim the magnificence of your habitual hospitality? And who did not rejoice over your perfect and well-grounded knowledge? For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments of God, being

obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honour to the presbyters among you. Ye enjoined young men to be of a sober and serious mind; ye instructed your wives to do all things with a blameless, becoming, and pure conscience, loving their husbands as in duty bound; and ye taught them that, living in the rule of obedience, they should manage their household affairs becomingly, and be in every respect marked by discretion.<sup>12</sup>

Clement explains that ‘sudden and successive calamitous events’ have overtaken the Roman church and there has been some debate as to whether he refers to the Neronian persecution, which seems too early, or perhaps a localised persecution during the reign of Domitian.<sup>13</sup> Either way this persecution prevented Clement making the urgent and prompt response to the plight of the Corinthian church as he would have liked. Nevertheless, he now makes that response, and his urgent plea is for a return to standards previously exhibited by the church. His plea is for an enduring quality to those previous virtues.

Clement is concerned not just for the reputation of the church in a general way, but in the specific name of the Corinthian church which was previously ‘venerable and illustrious and worthy to be universally loved’. Clement is too straightforward to be dismissed here as merely polite: rather he is referring to a reputation enjoyed by the Corinthian church prompted by Spirit-inspired virtues exercised at an earlier time. Four virtues are mentioned as being praised by visitors to Corinth: *faith*, fruitful of virtue and well established, *godliness* in Christ, yielding sobriety and moderation, *hospitality*, both habitual and magnificent, and *knowledge*, perfect and well-grounded. One cannot read this list without recognising how blessed it must have been to make a visit to the Corinthian church at this time.

In terms of the church as we have understood it as Christ’s ministry at the frontier with the world he came to save, it clearly represents an advance, a taking of a bridgehead in the hearts and minds of the Corinthian Christians. And the virtue within the church generated much collateral goodness as the fame of the church spread from visitors’ testimony. This is not unlike the growth of the reputation of the Thessalonian Christians as Paul records in his first letter to that church.<sup>14</sup> Such was their reputation that the apostles reports that ‘we had no need to say anything’, establish-

<sup>12</sup> Clement of Rome, ‘The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians’ in Roberts and Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> R. Grant and H. Graham, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1965), Vol. 2, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thess. 1.6ff.

ing a vital link between the quality of the Christian life in an ethical sense and the power of the church to exercise the missionary task.

It is worth noting that the virtues, or their root forms, all recur in Clement's section on the divine origin of church order (chapters 40-44).<sup>15</sup> Thus Clement regards them as issuing from the ordering of the Christian community by God's Spirit, an order which is impiously contradicted when godly bishops are deposed from office. And the virtues themselves are very practical in nature: 'faith' means 'fidelity to God'; 'godliness' refers to the Christian way of life characterised by humility of mind, mastery over appetites and impulses, respectful speech and kindly disposition; and 'knowledge' is something practical – knowledge of God's will and obedience to it.<sup>16</sup> In speaking of 'hospitality', Clement is drawing on Hebrews with which he was familiar. Here and elsewhere in his letter, Clement speaks of *hospitality* as a benchmark virtue, combining it with *faith* in 12.1 and *piety* in 11.1. The real virtue of hospitality is that by it all are welcomed, not only the needy but Christ for whom the poor are deputies. For Clement, hospitality is a way of admitting Christ into the life of the Christian and into the life of the church.

It is not surprising that St Peter urges the church to 'make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love'.<sup>17</sup> 'Making every effort' corresponds to a resolve to cooperate with the divine work of the Spirit in the church. This accumulated virtue, this edifice of righteous living is the powerful expositor of the gospel to those who witness it. If it collapses, the witness is destroyed. And that collapse had evidently occurred in the Corinthian church at the time of Clement's letter. The besetting sin of Corinth, of partisanship, faction and competition had effectively reduced their edifice of piety to rubble. Chapter 3 of Clement's letter describes this disaster:

Every kind of honour and happiness was bestowed upon you, and then was fulfilled that which is written, 'My beloved did eat and drink, and was enlarged and became fat, and kicked.' Hence flowed emulation and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, war and captivity. So the worthless rose up against the honoured, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, the young against those advanced in years. For this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from

<sup>15</sup> See chapter 44 of 'The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians' (p. 17).

<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the esoteric, speculative knowledge of a Gnostic type to which the Corinthians were wrongly attracted.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Pet. 1.6.

you, inasmuch as every one abandons the fear of God, and is become blind in His faith, neither walks in the ordinances of His appointment, nor acts a part becoming a Christian, but walks after his own wicked lusts, resuming the practice of an unrighteous and ungodly envy, by which death itself entered into the world.<sup>18</sup>

Clement here gives us a description of the anatomy of the downfall centring on their abandonment of God manifested as the disordering of all their relationships: the ignoble against the honourable, the disreputable against the reputable, the foolish against the wise, and the young against their seniors. Evidently Clement is echoing the terms of Isaiah 3.5 and 1 Corinthians 4.10. In Clement's chapter 4, he enlarges this moral catastrophe which has overtaken the Corinthians. It comes down, he says, to jealousy, a competitive party spirit which Paul had to reprove a generation or two earlier.

It is useful to trace what Clement says are the things which issue from this moral declension. Not only is there a loss of godly reputation, a rendering ineffectual of the church's witness, but also there arises persecution: either by external agencies alone or by such agencies assisted and encouraged by parts of the church. Their internal strife and sin gives an opportunity to their external enemies. Clement sees that there has been a comprehensive collapse of the church in Corinth by this progression from the initial jealousy.

To a great extent, in the rest of his substantial letter, Clement urges the necessary repentance. But here there are some interesting features. He invokes 'humility of mind' which is to be the hall-mark of the Christian attitude. But as a primary virtue in the ancient world, this was unknown, and the word used in the New Testament and by Clement, *tapeinophronoun*, was used in a bad sense among the Greeks to signify 'weak-mindedness'. Following Christ's example of obedience to God and humility of disposition, in Christian usage the same word now signifies a great virtue. Clement regards it as primary in initiating the path of repentance he advocates for the Corinthian church. So we find in Chapter 13 of his epistle,

Let us therefore, brethren, be of humble mind, laying aside all haughtiness, and pride, and foolishness, and angry feelings; and let us act according to that which is written (for the Holy Spirit saith, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, neither let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in the Lord, in diligently seeking Him, and doing judgment and righteousness'), being especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake, teaching us

<sup>18</sup> 'The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians', p. 5

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meekness and long-suffering. For thus He spoke: 'Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.' By this precept and by these rules let us establish ourselves, that we walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. For the holy word saith, 'On whom shall I look, but on him that is meek and peaceable, and that trembleth at My words?'<sup>19</sup>

It may have been very difficult for the Corinthian church to take hold of the necessary 'humility of mind', because Corinth thought itself only for the strong-minded. The Corinthian church was called, therefore, to be very strongly counter-cultural, and no more strongly than in the reverse of their mental attitude from pride of power to the humility of obedience. This must go far to explain why, tending to lapse from the apostolic standard, they sought out, even in the New Testament period, 'strong', impressive teachers rather than the diminutive and battered figure of St Paul. Evidently the instinct to do so again in the sub-apostolic age, was just as powerful. But the same sin calls out from St Clement, as from St Paul, the same remedy.

Clement repeats to the Corinthian church the exhortation found in Acts 20.35, that they should remember the words of the Lord Jesus. And he repeats words which have parallels in the Sermon on the Mount, though Clement seems not to have drawn them directly from the gospels. It is possible that they were in oral circulation or used in liturgy, judging from their catechetical style. Clement finishes with a quotation from Isaiah 66.2.

Overall, Clement understands the Corinthians to have followed the wrong examples, to have at least partially repudiated their counter-cultural status by adopting worldly standards of behaviour and moral evaluation. In doing so, outwardly, they stand at risk of losing their godly reputation, and, inwardly they suffer schism, party-spirit and a destructive worldly competition between themselves. The Corinthian church is an exponent of many of the dangers with which the church in general, and every individual church in particular, is surrounded. The story of the Corinthians, illustrates the fact that the state of health of a church is some measure of the degree to which God-given advance triumphs over human-made reverse. The church is always faced with the call of Christ, on one side, and the inclination to do otherwise, on the other. Of course, the issues may be more subtle: the putative disobediences may be clothed with an apparent piety or faithfulness, which may more or less convince their proponents.

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<sup>19</sup> Clement of Rome, 'The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians', p. 8

In time, the true status of such things, however, are usually elucidated. The church does always stand on a knife's edge between its faithfulness and its tendency to lapse, and God, willing always the church's faithfulness, does endure the reality that the church can, and frequently does, backslide. It gives pause for thought why this should be so.

The abundance of the grace and power of the Spirit, the readiness with which God stands to give this gift, the divine determination of Christ to be with and bless his church, might surely place the church in a better position than on a knife's edge from moral and spiritual disaster? And yet, no. The church is placed in a position where it will always have to make war, not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers. It will have to prove itself a co-victor with Christ. That is the far-ambition of God, and he wills the uncomfortable and demanding interim before it is realised. P. T. Forsyth says,

Our suffering can only be finally dealt with by him who is more concerned about our sin; who is strong enough to resist pity till grief has done its gracious work even in his Son; and who can endure not only to see the [church's] suffering go on for its moral ends, but to take its agony upon his own heart and feel it even as the victims do not, for the holy purpose, final blessing and the far victory of his love.<sup>20</sup>

The church's life ought then to consist of thousands of co-victories with Christ. It does so consist but only admixed with reverses to which it succumbs through its weakness. Even these reverses can be and are turned into co-victories through the Spirit's power and through the gift of repentance. Clement's aim in writing to the Corinthian church was to turn its reverses into co-victories in this way.

We turn now to consider various kinds of reverses and co-victories which the church may encounter on its way to the divine fulfilling of God's 'holy purpose, final blessing and far victory.'

### 3. THE REVERSE OF SAINTLINESS: THE SLOTH OF THE CHURCH IN ITS TWO FORMS

Everywhere in the New Testament, the church is described as 'holy', and Christian as the *hagioi*, the holy ones, the saints. The definition of a saint is very simple. *A saint is someone who comes when he is called by God.* Sanctification is divine causation which results in the addressee coming to God when he or she is called. The disciples of Christ in the New Testa-

<sup>20</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London: Independent Press, 1957), pp. 81-2.

ment demonstrated their sainthood by immediately rising up and following Christ at his bidding. But Christ did not make rising up and following at his bidding an easy matter. Indeed, as far as the capacity of humanity in the flesh is concerned, he made it impossible. To all would-be disciples he says, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it' (Mk. 8.34-35, NRSV). For any one of Jesus' contemporaries, who knew what it was to take up their cross and struggle with it outside the city to a shameful and agonising death, it would preclude following Jesus at all. Similarly to enthusiastic individuals he was scarcely encouraging, telling one that 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Mt. 8.20, NRSV), and to another, 'go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me' (Mt. 19.21, NRSV). Taken together, it is not too much to say that there was a deliberate policy to restrain people from following Jesus, even though he himself called them to do so.

Yet, there was a powerful impulse at work all through the earthly ministry of Jesus and beyond by which men and women became followers of Jesus, and therefore, saints. They did rise up and follow him even in the face of certain death. The creation of the church by the call of Christ is thus a radical and fearful thing to behold. And the closer they follow, the more nearly their life reflects Christ's way of suffering as the more nearly they share in his victory. Such is the danger and the pain of sainthood. It is thus not surprising that, in their fleshly weakness, the saints are always tempted to find ways of not being saints, being called in name only and not in deed. These are the reverses to their saintliness, and those things from which they are summoned back continually by the witness of the Spirit.

The opposite of saintliness, the refusal to come when we are called is a very old instinct, first encountered when Adam hid from God in the Garden of Eden, when the Lord sought him in the evening.<sup>21</sup> Then it was hiding in the bushes. Now it has developed into more subtle manifestations, although when evasion of God is felt to be urgently necessary, even the primitive form is pressed into service. This vice is sloth. Sloth is the abject refusal of humans to come when they are called by God, and it appears in many forms but generally in two types.<sup>22</sup> The first of these is

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<sup>21</sup> Gen. 3.8.

<sup>22</sup> The author is indebted to Karl Barth for this analysis. See *idem.*, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, pp. 403ff.

the type generally associated with the term: a *passive* sloth in which we give ground to an inertia, a physical, mental or spiritual laziness. Usually, the Christian call involves going from a place of relative comfort to a place, ordained by God, which is relatively uncomfortable. In its better moments, the church has always stood in difficult and draughty places for the sake Christ, but these places *are* difficult and draughty, and the nature of the flesh is to avoid them by staying in a relatively comfortable place, perhaps telling ourselves that, comfortable as it is, it is nevertheless where the Lord bids us stand.

Part of the Corinthian church's reverse, at least in the New Testament, was of this kind of sloth. This was not manifested merely as a laziness, but as the avoidance of standing in a position wherein the world is faced and challenged. The Corinthian Christians wanted a reasonably smooth and level interface between the world and its perspectives, priorities and desires, and those of the Christian church. It wished to cultivate the respect of the world for its wisdom, its rhetoric and above all, its message. This is a natural and understandable weakness. It is much more comfortable to agree with the world and please it by giving Christian authority to its practices and preferences. There is something awkward, angular and ill-fitting about the gospel set against the world. In more modern days, P. T. Forsyth has made a similar point:

The process should be arrested by which the frontiers of belief are being erased, and the church is opened to every aesthetic adventurer of the soul, or to free-trade in every opinion. . . . A Gospel which is not exclusive will never include the world for it will never master it No religion will include devotees which does not exclude rivals. Half gospels have no dignity and no future. Like the famous mule they have neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity. We must make it clear that Christianity faces the world, and does not merely consecrate it, that it recreates and does not just soothe or cheer it; that it is life from the dead, and not simply bracing for the weak or comfort for the sad. The church must be more occupied with conversion and less occupied with diversion.<sup>23</sup>

However it is concealed, this desperate accommodation of the world is a form of passive spiritual sloth in which the church seeks to avoid its sanctification. It stays in a comfortable place.

But this can easily be transformed to another kind of sloth altogether: and active sloth, in which many things are done with great diligence, to avoid doing the one necessary thing. In this active form of sloth almost

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<sup>23</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Longmans, 1917), p. 15.

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any agenda will do, and can often be followed up with great and vigorous effort, just so long as it covers up the fact that the church is not resorting to Jesus Christ, is not coming to his feet at his bidding. Of course, the church may, and probably will, claim that its activities are quintessential examples of obedience of Christ, that the church is fully committed to his commandments and to the service of his kingdom. In its more successful forms, this active sloth can put up a very convincing case for its own holiness. The Spirit of Christ and the Word of God will, however, finally unmask it.

It is not easy to say how the Corinthian church exhibited this form of un-holiness in its reverses. This active sloth is, to a great extent, a more modern, western manifestation of the reversal of the church's sanctification. Activism is a more prevalent phenomenon in the West and it is the general mode of spiritual evasion employed by individuals who are 'far too busy to attend worship'. In the form that the church appropriates it, this active sloth usually issues in a full church agenda which has the appearance of being very worthy. There is little sign that this was a feature of the Corinthian church unless it took the form of lecture series from the impressive orators of which they were apparently fond. More likely it took the form of a competitive infighting (or sedition) as Clement reveals.

The reverse of sanctification makes a church ineffective in the service of Jesus Christ. In a telling passage, Karl Barth underscores the ineptitude of sloth, especially in its mental dimension:

The stupidity of man consists and expresses itself in the fact that when he is of the opinion that he achieves his true nature and essence apart from the knowledge of God, without hearing and obeying His Word, in this independence and autonomy, he always misses his true nature and essence. He is always either too soon or too late. He is asleep when he should be awake, and awake when he should be asleep. He is silent when he should speak and speaks when it is better to be silent. He laughs when he should weep, and weeps when he should be comforted and laugh. He always makes an exception when the rule should be kept and subjects himself to a law when he should choose in freedom. He always toils when he should pray, and prays when only work is of any avail. He always devotes himself to historical and psychological investigation when decisions are demanded, and rushes into decision when historical and psychological investigation is really required. He is always contentious when it is unnecessary and harmful, and speaks of love and peace when he may confidently attack. He is always speaking of faith and the Gospel where what is needed is a little sound commonsense, and he reasons where he can and should commit himself and others quietly into the hands of God. In Eccles 3 we are given a list of different things for which there is a proper time - in accordance with the fact that God Himself does everything in its own time.

The genius of stupidity is to think everything at the wrong time, to say everything to the wrong people, to do everything in the wrong direction, to lose no opportunity of misunderstanding and being misunderstood, always to omit the one simple and necessary thing which is demanded, and to have a sure instinct for choosing and willing and doing the complicated and superfluous thing which can only disrupt and obstruct.<sup>24</sup>

Is there a church on earth that does not have to confess to being somewhat, if not substantially and wholly, on the wrong side of this analysis?

#### 4. THE REVERSE OF FAITH: THE SECULARISATION OF THE CHURCH

Secularisation of the church is usually regarded as resulting from an infusion of worldly mindset, outlook and morals into the life of the church. It is this. But there is wider picture to consider, which embraces not only the secularisation of the church, the secularisation of the world as well, which, in the case of Western Europe in the last five hundred years, preceded the secularisation of the church. The church, as we will see, was a key player in both these secularisation processes.

In medieval Europe, God was central. He was invoked constantly. His church was ubiquitous and entirely integrated into the functions of civilisation. The farm employee, working in the fields, would hear the church bell toll three times at the elevation of the host in the village church, and would fall to his knees and cross himself, for he knew that in that church, God was doing his miraculous deed in self revelation. In a thousand other ways, medieval life was criss-crossed with the activity and life of God. Of course, some of this was theologically and biblically insecure, some of it was superstitious, perhaps even exploitative. But these reserves aside, medieval Christianity was true to the incarnation that God certainly was with us. The reformation, especially in England, did address the superstition, the lack of biblical foundation and even the exploitative elements of the medieval system. But in doing so, it told the man in the field, not to kneel, not to cross himself, but just get back to work. It silenced the bell, and it publicly declared that God wasn't doing anything in the world after all, or at least, not too much. In reformation Britain, it was not quite true that God was nowhere, but he certainly had very much less to do. The subtext was that, under Enlightenment principles, the world could manage pretty well without God. So quite dutifully, the world started managing pretty well without God. The world wasn't atheist; it still believed in God. But it was deprived of the reason and encouragement to do so given by the medieval faith. It is not surprising that, without that reason and

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<sup>24</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p. 413.

encouragement, the world believed less and less in a God who now did rather little.

The secularism thus sown by the church is now being reaped. The church told the world to do without God, now the world is telling the church the same. And the church does tend to listen to the world. Perhaps she feels that she will get a better hearing if she seeks to make her message more or less continuous with the plausibility structure prevailing in her particular space and time. This may have been the temptation facing the Corinthian church to which Paul writes. He tells them that he 'did not come... proclaiming...the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom' (1 Cor. 2.1, NRSV). Rather he proclaimed the cross of Christ. Perhaps he was tempted to orient his message according to the plausibilities of his age, but instead he chose to proclaim only the singularity of the cross. Paul's decision runs counter to almost all the counsel offered on Church mission and growth. Nowadays, churches seek to be 'culturally relevant', as they are so often advised. As dutiful children of the Enlightenment, Christians now tend to argue for their faith, if they do so at all, along the lines of plausibility with the smooth predictability of the Greek world-view which they have inherited. Paul, in his visit to Corinth throws off this temptation and resorts to proclaiming not the plausibility of the gospel, but rather its *singularity*.

And this contrast between the plausibilities of the world and the singularity of the gospel lies at the heart of the problem of secularisation of the church. To the worldly man, the philosophical landscape is a very smooth, gently undulating outlook. Any point on it can be reached by reasonable extrapolation from any other. It is all intrinsically predictable, so much so that Aristotle believed the whole of it could be understood by careful thought from an armchair. The church has tried to fit itself and its theology into this smooth landscape, seeking a smooth weld, if not a seamless union between its message and this smooth philosophical environment.

But, of course, it fails. It either cannot gain the smooth weld, or it abandons the central elements of its message to do so. This latter temptation was evidently making ground in Corinth as it has done since in many times and places, not least our own. Both Wrede<sup>25</sup> and Schweitzer,<sup>26</sup> along with their theological descendants, in their respective approaches, have

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<sup>25</sup> W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); English translation: W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Grieg (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971).

<sup>26</sup> A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1913).

made the modifications necessary for this smooth weld.<sup>27</sup> But Paul will not give up the singularity of the cross, nor, as we find later in 1 Corinthians, the singularity of the resurrection.

##### 5. THE REVERSE OF GODLINESS: THE NARCISSISM OF THE CHURCH

Ezekiel describes a terrifying moment in Israel's history when God in defence of his own holiness forsakes the temple of Jerusalem, leaving it for his heavenly residence.<sup>28</sup> He is shaking the Israelites off his back. They evidently have got into the habit of a utilitarian attitude towards their relationship with the living God. Instead of their serving of God in the temple, they began to regard God as a service to them. Walter Brueggemann in his discussion of this phenomenon, relates it to the narcissism of the modern church thus:

For most of us utilitarianism (i.e. God's usefulness) is in fact ideological. God is drawn into and identified with a variety of social commitments which we advocate. It is so easy for conservatives to identify with God, because they know so fully the mind of God, to present God as a partisan in the struggle against homosexuality, or in the crusade against communism, even in justification of the arms race. Liberals also know the mind of God and know God is pro-busing and pro-choice and all of the other themes of justice to which one is committed. Drawing too close to God's will can, of course, be much more benign. It can be simply that prayer is good because it keeps families together, and tithing is good because one feels better, and worship is good because one gets refuelled, and singing in the choir is good because one meets nice people ... All such subjective, narcissistic, utilitarian, ideological postures finally become burdensome because they require us to know too much, and claim too much, and do too much. On most days it will work, but not for Ezekiel. And, I think, not for us just now.<sup>29</sup>

He continues,

The pathology of narcissism is enormously supported by consumer advertising, for that enterprise rests on a value system of satiation and self-indulgence ... Everyone of us knows how easily the life of the church is caught in this narcissism in which appeal to the Gospel is grounded in what it will do for us in terms of intimacy, problem solving, marriage saving, and so forth. None of

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<sup>27</sup> See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) for a thorough response to these historical critical approaches.

<sup>28</sup> Ezek. 10.

<sup>29</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1986), p. 85.

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these are in themselves wrong, but when they become the end, goal, ground of appeal, it becomes pathological because it is not 'for the sake of my holy name'.<sup>30</sup>

The proponents of this utilitarian Christianity are often not very aware of its narcissistic character or the incipient godlessness which lies at its heart. We advertise Christianity to our non-Christian friends on the basis of its utility. We think this is helpful because it shows how practical Christianity is. But it is, at the last analysis, merely another way to gain that plausibility we think we need to convince others of the value of Christianity and hence, in our narcissistic culture, its truth. There are even signs that the disciples were tempted to follow this line early in Mark's gospel. Jesus spent the day preaching and healing many people. The following day, very early in the morning, he goes out to a lonely place to pray.<sup>31</sup> The disciples realise that there is a busy day ahead of them, many new candidates for healing have presented themselves and clearly the day's clinic will be even busier than that of the previous day. But they cannot find Jesus. They search for him, and eventually come across him in the lonely place. They tell him that everyone is looking for him, expecting no doubt, that he would accompany them back to the obvious task which awaits him. But he shakes them off his back; 'we will go on to the next villages to preach, for that is why I came out,' he says. The disciples are, in part, evaluating Jesus as a healer and therefore useful. These were early days and it would be a harsh judgement of them to condemn them for it. But it does show how quickly we try to seize God make him serve our agenda.

Worship might be seen as a remedy for this utilitarian tendency, and indeed, it can be. The allocation of space and time and resources for honouring the invisible God might be seen as an antidote for the tendency to manage God for our benefit. But there is no guarantee that this will be so. The worship offered by God's holy church can never be, and inevitably will never be, free from a narcissistic element. This element takes the form of a *sacralisation* in which a church may vaunt itself in the name of Jesus Christ, but in reality is enamoured only with itself, with its music, with its preaching, with its antiquity, its traditions, its modernity, its spirituality, its asceticism. For all the intensity of religious observance, it may be true that it can function very well indeed whether God was present with it or not. The answer to this latter question is a measure of the degree to which the church has become sacralised.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Mk. 1.35ff.

## 6. THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL: THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

Reviewing the manifold hazards the church faces, the numerous temptations by which she is tried, the subtlety and depth of penetration that these errors can exhibit, it is a wonder that there is still a church, still able to name the name of Christ, and justly be called a church. It is a solemn tribute to the invincible reign and limitless grace of Jesus Christ that churches recognisable as such, exist and, in places exist in such strength and abundance. Equally, it is a tribute to the same reign and grace that deficient and corrupt churches live on to see the day of their reform. They form a visible witness to the implacable resolve of Jesus Christ to be the bridegroom of his bride and to present her to himself without any blemish.

The answer, therefore, to the plight of the church is not a programme of reform, no revision of its government, no re-writing of its liturgy, or a tightened disciplinary procedure. All these from time to time may be necessary. But they will not lift the church out of its sloth, or its worldliness or its narcissism. Only Jesus Christ can do that. And he will do so. And here we come to that subtle combination of the urgency and patience of his reign in the church.

Jesus Christ is patient with the church in that he will not collapse the problem to himself. He is prepared to wait for the church he redeemed and this so that the members of his body might prove to be infinitely more than spectators in the battle, but rather, as we have said, co-victors with Christ. The patience of Christ, moreover, is very great, so the time-scale for the co-victors is correspondingly long and the battle, very extended. The church finds it a quick and easy matter to fall to a low state, and a long and troubling journey to repentance.

A favourite theme of Clement and one to which we have not given any space so far, is the gift of insight. Clement speaks of the 'eye of faith' and the 'eyes of the heart'. This gift allows the Christian to see the purposes of God beyond his personal horizon. Following this spiritual line of sight, the Christian can follow a purpose which leads to a goal which will be reached perhaps long after the span of his natural life is complete. This means that every Christian can serve the purposes of the church's repentance even if that repentance may take hundreds of years to effect.

Jesus Christ is urgent in his ministry to the church in that he will not abandon the church to its own problem of repentance. In Chapter 36 of his letter to the Corinthians, Clement affirms this and refers to the spiritual vision of the church:

This is the way, beloved, in which we find our Saviour, even Jesus Christ, the High Priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our infirmity. By

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Him we look up to the heights of heaven. By Him we behold, as in a glass, His immaculate and most excellent visage. By Him are the eyes of our hearts opened. By Him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms up anew towards His marvellous light.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Clement of Rome, 'The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians', p. 14.

# MORE THAN THE SPIRIT OF MISSION? REVISITING THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

JAMES READ

## INTRODUCTION

The role of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts provokes a range of interest across the 'evangelical' spectrum. Whether it is reflected in practice or not most Christians would enthusiastically affirm the Holy Spirit as indispensable to the church's task of world evangelisation. They would endorse the notion that the power that drives the Great Commission comes 'wholly and exclusively from the Pentecost event'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, many would agree with the suggestion that the title of Luke's second volume might more appropriately be 'the Acts of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, enthusiasm for the book of Acts and the role of the Spirit in world mission has sparked something of a renaissance from within Pentecostal circles, as new mission theology is advanced from studies in Acts.<sup>3</sup> For example, South African Pentecostal scholar Allan Anderson proposes a 'Pneumatocentric Mission' in contrast to the *Missio Dei* of older Catholic and Protestant missions and the obedience to the Great Commission of Evangelical Christocentric missions.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that personal experience with the Holy Spirit was the key to the expansion of the church in Acts and remains so particularly in light of the globalisation of Pentecostalism.<sup>5</sup> The question remains whether these claims can be justified by Pentecostal NT scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> The suggestion is made by Pentecostal and conservative evangelical scholars alike. See J. C. Thomas, 'The Charismatic Structure of Acts', *JPT* 13.1 (2004), pp. 19-30; D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Key journals including regular work on the Spirit in Acts are *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, *Journal of Asian Mission*, *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* and *Pneuma*.

<sup>4</sup> A. Anderson, 'Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 8:1 (2005), pp. 29-47.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, 'Towards a Pentecostal Missiology', pp. 32-3. See also, M. W. Dempster, B. D. Klaus & D. Petersen, eds., *The Globalization of Pentecos-*

Questions of Pentecostal missiology and praxis<sup>6</sup> are beyond the scope of this article. My intention is rather to engage with the pneumatology articulated by a prominent Pentecostal scholar, Robert P. Menzies. If this scholar is to be believed, Luke's view is that the Spirit is for missiological empowerment and thus has no salvific import, in contrast to Paul who identifies the Spirit with conversion-initiation and on-going Christian experience.

I will attempt to demonstrate how reading Acts as narrative theology yields a composite and cumulative portrayal of the Spirit. Four interrelated areas are identified: i) the Spirit who equips all believers with prophetic insight, ii) the Spirit who brings conviction and conversion, iii) the Spirit who initiates the spiritual edification of restored Israel and iv) the Spirit who is at work in the context of mission in Acts to unite Jew and Gentile. I conclude by drawing together some relevant observations as to the role of the Spirit in the church and her mission today.

#### ROBERT MENZIES: APPROACHING THE SPIRIT OF 'PROPHECY' IN ACTS

For Menzies, Luke's pneumatology excludes any soteriological dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the Spirit in Luke is given to those already 'saved', as the source of prophetic inspiration referred to as a *donum superadditum*.<sup>8</sup> Such a gift is manifested by special insight or inspiring speech acting in the service of mission which is reflected in Luke's narrative.<sup>9</sup> In each case the basic point is made that subsequent filling with the Spirit is inextricably linked to preaching, prophesying or speaking the word of God boldly.

Although making reference to narrative features (plot, characterisation, setting etc.) Menzies employs redaction critical methods to establish Luke's 'arrangement and modification of received material'.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Ju Hur cautions that 'it is hard to deny that efforts to grasp Luke's

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*talism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> For example, the question of the places of 'signs and wonders' in the churches mission and the work of the Spirit in other religions.

<sup>7</sup> R. P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004). Menzies, writes (p. 44): 'I shall seek to establish that Luke never attributes soteriological functions to the Spirit and that his narrative presupposes a pneumatology which excludes this dimension (e.g. Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-7).'

<sup>8</sup> Literally, 'an additional gift' or more commonly a 'second blessing'.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Acts 2:1-41; 4:31; 8:4-25 and 19:1-7.

<sup>10</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 104.

original concept of the Holy Spirit have usually been preoccupied with scholars' own dogmatic or theological pre-understanding of the Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Therefore any consideration of Lukan pneumatology must come to terms with Luke as artist as well as historian or theologian. Against this background I will clarify the main tenets of Menzies' position.

First, Menzies rightly contends that the intertestamental Jewish literature is a key source influencing the NT writers' understanding of the Spirit, yielding an interpretation of the Spirit referred to in the Jewish context as the 'Spirit of Prophecy'. According to Menzies Jews at the time of Jesus viewed the Spirit as 'almost always related to inspired speech'<sup>12</sup> and as he shows in his survey of Diaspora, Palestinian, Qumran and Rabbinical literature<sup>13</sup> such activities are ascribed to the Spirit. For Menzies, Luke represents a pre-Pauline, Jewish pneumatology in continuity with the Spirit of prophecy but disassociated from soteriological and socio-ethical categories and based firmly on the principle of *donum superadditum*.

The pivotal argument both for Menzies and Pentecostal theology is that the Pentecost account in Acts 2 signals the Spirit as a *donum superadditum* of empowering. The disciples have experienced salvation *prior* to Christ's ascension. The Spirit does not produce faith, but is given to faith.<sup>14</sup> Menzies takes Luke's addition of *kai propheteusousin* (v. 18) as the hermeneutical key for the Pentecost event which, he insists, Luke demonstrates by recording the particular pneumatic events described in the ensuing narrative of Acts. In addition the Spirit of prophecy which was once the possession of prominent individuals within the covenant community is now universally available to all God's people. Of particular significance in Menzies' interpretation is the exclusion of any literary allusions between the giving of the Law at Sinai and Pentecost, removing any sense of a 'new Exodus' motif in the latter event. Together with his denial that Acts 2:42-47 is directly attributed to the work of the Spirit Menzies portrays the Spirit's coming at Pentecost exclusively as the source of prophetic inspiration, that is, 'the Spirit of mission'.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, Menzies evaluates the work of the Spirit amongst the Samaritans, Paul and the Ephesian 'disciples'<sup>16</sup> demonstrating that the Spirit always comes to empower for witness those already saved. He concludes

<sup>11</sup> Ju Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.49-62.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 8:9-25; 9:17-22; 19:1-10.

that ‘the spirit in Luke-Acts is not given principally for the benefit of its recipient; rather it is directed towards others.’<sup>17</sup> The question remains whether the Spirit of prophecy is *simply* the driving force of mission, and whether Spirit-filled individuals such as Peter, Stephen and Paul are prototypical for all Christians.

Taking our cue from Menzies we now examine Luke’s ‘distinctive’ Lukan pneumatology, asking whether it is as Menzies suggests intended ‘to teach a Spirit-baptism *distinct from conversion for empowering*’.<sup>18</sup> I will ask whether the ‘Spirit of prophecy’ (described by Menzies) is for Luke *only* this, and no more. Secondly, I will evaluate the validity of some of the exegetical and theological arguments that Menzies uses in support of his thesis, in order to begin to see how we should interpret the Spirit’s role in Acts.

### THE GIVING OF THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY IN ACTS

Without question the evidence suggests that the Spirit of prophecy is central to apostolic life and mission in Acts.<sup>19</sup> However, in insisting upon this Menzies appears to mislead in what he denies about the Spirit’s activity.<sup>20</sup> As already outlined Menzies’ thesis that Luke views the Spirit in non-soteriological, prophetic and missiological terms rests heavily upon an understanding of the Spirit in intertestamental Judaism. Two points must be made concerning the nature of the Spirit of prophecy in Menzies proposal.

#### *Spiritual and Ethical Transformation*

Turner posits a significant misunderstanding in Menzies’ work in terms of the false antithesis drawn between the Spirit of prophecy and ethical

<sup>17</sup> W. W. Menzies and R. P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> As evidenced by the very gift of the Spirit promised in Acts 1:8 and explained in terms of Joel 2:28-32 – the *locus classicus* of the OT for expectation of the out-pouring of the Spirit of prophecy. Several passages in Acts directly or indirectly depict the Spirit as providing the gifts of the Spirit of prophecy – *revelatory visions and dreams* (for example 7:55-56 and 16:6-10); *revelatory words or guidance* (1:2; 4:25; 7:51; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12, 28; 13:2, 4; 19:21; 20:22,23; 28:25); *charismatic wisdom and discernment* (6:3, 5; 9:31; 13:9); *charismatic praise* (2:4; 10:46; 19:6) *charismatic preaching/witness* (Acts 1:4, 8; 4:8, 31; 5:32; 6:10; 9:17).

<sup>20</sup> Following E. Schweizer, ‘*pneuma*’ TDNT VI, pp. 389-455, who does not attribute the new life of the community in Acts to the Spirit because he argues that Luke understood the Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy alone.

or religious transformation by the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Menzies seeks to substantiate that the Spirit of prophecy is of little ethical consequence for Judaism and that the function of the Spirit is almost always related to inspired speech.<sup>22</sup> However, the validity of extrapolating one dominant aspect of the Spirit's activity at least from first-century Jewish sources has recently been challenged by John Levison.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, despite Luke's distinctive pneumatology should we expect him to be as remote from Paul and John as Menzies argues? One would assume not if, as Menzies claims, he is influenced by Jewish sources, for as Turner concludes: 'neither the Old Testament nor Judaism know of any ethically transforming or recreating gift of the Spirit that is necessarily *other* than the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.'<sup>24</sup>

That the Spirit inspired prophetic words of inspiration and revelation is obvious, but is the Spirit *doing* more than functioning as the one who only inspires human speech. Wenk<sup>25</sup> argues that Spirit-inspired words in Scripture have a transformative force<sup>26</sup> and he goes on to claim that 'the Spirit's role cannot be limited to the *content* of the speech, stripping it artificially from God's intention *through* the speech.'<sup>27</sup> In his attempt to argue for Luke's unique emphasis on prophetic empowerment by the Spirit Menzies overlooks the broader intention and application of the Spirit's ministry which includes moral and ethical-religious transformation.

<sup>21</sup> M. Turner, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts' *Word & World* Vol. 23, no. 2 (2003), pp. 146-53.

<sup>22</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> J. R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 248-54 provides ample evidence from Jewish sources to show the association of the Spirit with creation, the conviction of wrong-doers, human purity and cleansing, community initiation and entrance into the life of faith.

<sup>24</sup> M. Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 133 (emphasis his); Cf. Ju Hur, *Dynamic Reading*, pp. 37-73 who explores the meaning and use of *rūah* and *pneuma* in the MT and LXX to determine the background against which the Lukan portrait of the Holy Spirit is conceived. He notes that in addition to the engendering of prophecy and revelatory speeches 'God's Spirit is depicted as *the source or sustaining power for the Israelite's religio-ethical life*', p.73 (emphasis original).

<sup>25</sup> M. Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: the Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> Seen for example in the way that prophetic speech in the OT restores covenant loyalty with Yahweh. For example: Isaiah 1:2-3:26; Jeremiah 2:1-5:13; Hosea 2, 6:1-14:9.

<sup>27</sup> Wenk, p. 132 (my emphasis).

Against Menzies Wenk provides evidence to demonstrate the Spirit's transformative effect. For example, in the account of Paul's Spirit-prompted directive to Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:9-11) Menzies betrays his reliance upon redaction critical methods to reinforce his point that Luke emphasises the Spirit as the agent of the prophecy. He concludes that the action of the Spirit on Paul (v. 9) has an '*exclusively* prophetic sense'<sup>28</sup> because in verse 11 Luke states that the 'hand of the *Lord*' actually brings about Bar-Jesus' blindness. Luke therefore denies certain functions of the *Spirit* such as miracles. This, however, drives a wedge between the work of the Spirit and the Lord in Acts 13:9-11 for Menzies fails to see that through the words of Paul, the Lord by his Spirit is effecting change in Bar-Jesus. Thus, we agree with Wenk that 'the story is narrated in such a way that suggests not only that the content of Paul's curse was Spirit-prompted, but the effect thereof also.'<sup>29</sup> The Spirit-inspired prophetic word is foundational for effecting spiritual change in individuals.

### *Salvation and the 'New Exodus' Motif*

Menzies' exclusion of any soteriological dimension to the Spirit represents not only a deference to intertestamental Jewish sources as the primary loci for interpretation of Lukan pneumatology, but also the lack of a salvation-historical framework. If, however, Luke considers present salvation to include God's dynamic, restoring and transforming reign through Jesus' exaltation,<sup>30</sup> then the bestowal of the Pentecost gift is the obvious candidate to effect salvation this side of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Without Pentecost the work climaxing in Christ's death and resurrection is unfinished and incomplete.<sup>31</sup> Pentecost cannot be understood apart from Christ's salvific work – territory unexplored by Menzies.

There is further reason to consider the soteriological role of the Spirit in Acts. David Pao has persuasively argued that Luke evokes Isaianic motifs throughout the Acts narrative, such that the entire Isaianic New Exodus programme provides the structural framework for the narrative of Acts.<sup>32</sup> He highlights how six themes in Isaiah's programme of restoration are shown to play a critical role in the first half of the narrative of Acts:<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, pp.112-3 (my emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Wenk, *Community-Forming Power*, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Luke 4:18-19 and Acts 2:29-36.

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of the place of Pentecost in relation to salvation history, see G. W. Grogan, 'The significance of Pentecost in the History of Salvation' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 4.2 (1986), pp. 98-100.

<sup>32</sup> D. W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Pao, pp. 112-42.

<b>Isaiah's 'new exodus' hope</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Luke's development of Isaianic motifs</b>	<b>Text</b>
The reconstitution of Israel	Isa. 40:10; 49:6; 63:17	The election of Matthias and reconstitution of the Twelve	Acts 1:12-26
The ingathering of the exiles	Isa. 40:11; 43:5-7; 35:8-10	The Diaspora Jews are first to hear the gospel in Jerusalem	Acts 2:5-11
The community of the Spirit	Isa. 32: 14-17; 42:1; 44:1-4	The Spirit is poured out to all who call on the name of the Lord	Acts 2:17f.; 3:20
The rebuilding of the Davidic kingdom	Isa. 9:6-7; 16:4b-5	The resurrection of Jesus Christ ensures an eternal kingdom	Acts 13:34-36; 15:16-18
The call to repent and turn to the Lord	Isa. 44:21b-22; 59:1-21	The call to repent is issued by the proclamation of the church	Acts 2:38; 3:19-20a; 5:31
The inclusion of outcasts	Isa. 11:12; 56:1-8	The church witness the inclusion of the Gentiles	Acts 8:26-40; 10:1-48; 11:18

The relevance of this for our understanding of the work of the Spirit in Acts is that Luke was unlikely casting the Spirit's work simply in terms of prophetic inspiration and therefore missionary witness as Menzies argues. Rather, it highlights the possibility that Luke used the Isaianic New Exodus as a paradigm to describe the breaking in of salvation in the early church. Jesus' eschatological rule was realized by the out-pouring of the Spirit of prophecy. Theologically speaking, Pentecost is portrayed as a redemptive-historical event 'not to be interpreted existentially and pneumatologically, but eschatologically and christologically'.<sup>34</sup> The logical conclusion is that Spirit-baptism is unlikely to be an empowering distinct from conversion as Menzies claims<sup>35</sup> and no wedge can be driven between missiology and soteriology in the pneumatology of Acts.

### *The Pentecost Event*

Menzies' failure to see this theological framework impacts his exegesis of the text. He correctly highlights that the Pentecost gift given in Acts 2 is in indubitably the 'Spirit of prophecy', particularly in light of Peter's appeal to Joel 2:28-32. However, in seeking to uphold the unity of Luke-Acts

<sup>34</sup> S. B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 238.

he argues that Pentecost was for the disciples what Jordan was for Jesus: empowerment for effective witness.<sup>36</sup>

Two key arguments used by Menzies to support his *donum superadditum* interpretation of the Pentecost event require attention. First, Menzies points to the presence of *loudaioi, andres eulabeis apo pantos ethnous ton hupo ton ouranon* (Acts 2:5) and the ensuing missionary proclamation of ‘the mighty works of God’ (v. 11) which may be attributed to *eplesthesan pantes pneumatos hagiou* in verse four. Whilst not denying the notion of empowerment by the Spirit for universal witness,<sup>37</sup> it is more likely that, due to the lack of a specific verb<sup>38</sup> implying an announcement or proclamation in verses four to eight,<sup>39</sup> *heterais glossais* (v. 4) should be regarded as ‘invasive charismatic praise’ directed to *God*, rather than prophetic gospel witness.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Menzies rejects the notion that Pentecost reflects a new Sinai event and explains away the suggestion that the Spirit is first said to be received within the context of conversion-initiation. In the case of the former Menzies is not alone in arguing that the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) would not have evoked images of Moses, Sinai or the covenant renewal ceremony in the minds of Luke’s readers.<sup>41</sup>

However, Luke’s account of Pentecost leaves little doubt that Jesus’ ascension evokes the Sinai tradition, particularly when the out-pouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 33) is considered alongside Peter’s account of Jesus’ ascension (vv. 33-34). Turner comments, ‘If Acts 2 describes the “son of David”, we have to say he appears to go to his enthronement decked out

<sup>36</sup> The corollary is that Spirit reception in Luke is not concerned with cleansing and ability to keep the law nor a foretaste of future salvation. See Menzies *Empowered*, pp. 203f.

<sup>37</sup> See A. J. Köstenberger and P. T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the ends of the Earth* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), pp. 133-5.

<sup>38</sup> For example, *kerusso* or *euangelizo*.

<sup>39</sup> So Turner, *Power*, p. 272.

<sup>40</sup> M. Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), p. 44.

<sup>41</sup> For example, C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles Vols. I & II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 111-2; E. Lohse, *pentecoste*, in eds., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. VI, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 48-49; I. H. Marshall, ‘The Significance of Pentecost’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977), pp. 347-69, who seems doubtful that this was Luke’s intention, but open to the possibility given that *some* Jewish circles associated Pentecost with the giving of the Law and renewal of the covenant. See also J. R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), p. 62.

in “Mosaic” regalia and with a Sinai chorus.<sup>42</sup> He asserts that Acts 2:1-13 contains sufficient structural and linguistic points of contact to evoke the Sinai tradition in a Jewish mind - the mysterious noise from heaven, wind and fire, the leader of Israel ascending on high to receive a foundational gift from God, the giving of the gift to the people and the word of God beginning to spread throughout the nations.<sup>43</sup> Just as the Last Supper and Calvary fulfil the Passover, so also Pentecost is inseparable from Sinai and its connotations for life within the redeemed community.<sup>44</sup> This conclusion seems more plausible especially in light of the literary style of Luke’s narrative demonstrating the Isaianic New Exodus motif.<sup>45</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS FOR LUKAN PNEUMATOLOGY

The hidden reality made public by Peter’s address at Pentecost is that the ascended Christ received from the Father the fulfilment of the promised Holy Spirit. Although Acts 2 echoes Moses’ theophanic Sinai experience Pentecost does not signal the transition into the new covenant age as understood by Dunn,<sup>46</sup> but is rather part of the on-going promised end-time salvation for all nations. Three implications for the role of the Spirit in Acts need to be noted.

#### *The Spirit and the Renewed Community*

Wenk<sup>47</sup> has shown how the Acts 2 narrative fulfils the prophecies given in Luke 3:16 and Luke 24:44-49. Continuity with Luke’s first volume<sup>48</sup> enables one to perceive the continuation of Jesus’ liberating ministry be-

<sup>42</sup> Turner, *Power*, p.279, Following L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 46f. who advocates Luke’s deliberate allusion to the giving of Torah and the similarity between 2:33 and 7:38 in reference to Moses.

<sup>43</sup> Turner, *Spirit in Luke-Acts*, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> See Wenk, pp. 246-51.

<sup>45</sup> The importance and significance of allusion within literature is noted by R. Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (London: Norton, 1996) who comments ‘Allusion is not merely a device, like irony, understatement, ellipsis, or repetition, but an essential modality of the language of literature’, p. 111.

<sup>46</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: a Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 38f. understands Jesus’ reception of the Spirit at Jordan as paradigmatic for the disciples at Pentecost in terms of entry into the new covenant age.

<sup>47</sup> Wenk, pp. 232-58.

<sup>48</sup> ‘...all that Jesus began to do and teach’ (Acts 1:1).

gun in Luke 4:16-40 explained in terms of Joel 2:28-32. If so, we ought to expect to find evidence in the Acts narrative. The Spirit is evidently operative amongst believers in a manner apart from simply mission and witness.<sup>49</sup> For example, Menzies overlooks an apparent contrast between the Christian community 'filled with the Spirit' (Acts 4:31) and Ananias who's heart 'Satan has filled' (5:3) and makes only a glancing reference to the summary section in 2:42-47,<sup>50</sup> overlooking the literary features which make it an integral part of the chapter two narrative. However, Luke expresses on a micro-level the pneumatic origins of restoration available to *all* who call on the name of the Lord.

### *The Spirit and Conversion-Initiation*

This concept in itself provides the background for understanding Luke's intention in associating conversion so closely with Spirit-reception in Acts 2:38. Why else would the two be combined, if not to bring about immediate experience of this new exodus salvation? If we are to understand this verse as paradigmatic of the promise of prophetic enabling given to those already converted, then it is surprising that Luke does not emphasise that the new believers were immediately impelled to witness. Although the Acts narrative offers little evidence that believers are expected to receive the Spirit in the context of conversion-initiation there is however less evidence which suggests that the norm is for Spirit reception to be separate from conversion-initiation.

The Samaritan narrative in Acts 8 is allegedly a counter-example used by Menzies to justify that, for Luke, the gift of the Spirit 'is a supplementary gift given to Christians, those who have been incorporated into the community of salvation'.<sup>51</sup> Menzies argues that the solution to the problematic account of Spirit-reception in 8:12-17 is simply to see Luke's consistency. Thus the Samaritans experience the same prophetic endowment as did the disciples in Acts 2,<sup>52</sup> which is given by the laying on of hands. However, nothing in the narrative itself connects the gift with missionary witness.<sup>53</sup> If anything, this passage demonstrates Luke's *inconsistency*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Acts 5:1-11; 6:3-6; 9:31; 11:28; 13:52; 15:28; 19:21; 20:22-23, 28; 21:4, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 258, following Haya-Prats, 'there is no indication that Luke considered the diverse aspects of community life mentioned in this summary...to be the direct result of the Spirit's activity'.

<sup>51</sup> Following the Pentecostal doctrines of separability (the gift of the Spirit is given separate from the grace of the Spirit involved in the forgiveness of sins) and subsequence (the Spirit is granted in this manner, subsequent to 'salvation'), cf. Menzies, *Empowered*, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Based on linguistic comparisons with 2:38; 8:15, 17, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ju Hur, p. 240, fn. 181.

Menzies overlooks the significance of Luke's reaction to the Samaritan situation and subsequent explanation in verse sixteen (*oudepo gar en ep' oudeni auton epipeptokos*). Such a comment is superfluous if Luke thought the norm was for a delay between baptism and Spirit-reception. The point of the narrative is not to justify empowerment for mission subsequent to conversion, but to emphasise the dramatic incorporation of the Samaritans into God's restored community Jews.

Clearly Luke had other intentions in Acts 8 rather than highlighting the gift of the Spirit as a *donum superadditum*. In terms of the overall narrative plot the Samaria incident is portrayed as the fulfilment of the second stage of Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8 demonstrating the historical uniqueness of the Spirit's work at this point.<sup>54</sup> Rather than a repeat of Pentecost the Samaritans enter into the Pentecost event.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Acts 8 represents the absence of the Spirit as anomalous makes it difficult to sustain Pentecostal doctrines of subsequence and separability.

### ***The Spirit and Renewed Prophetic Activity***

Given that the Spirit was sent with the promise that all who call on the name of the Lord will prophesy (Acts 2:17f.) in what sense is the 'new exodus' community to exercise the prophetic gift? Can we say that such individuals as Peter, Stephen and Paul are prophetic types for *all* Spirit-filled Christians as Menzies implies?

We contend that these three individuals demonstrate continuity with Jesus the 'prophet like Moses' (Acts 3:22-26) and are authoritative in their teaching of the Jews and Gentiles.<sup>56</sup> We can also point to other figures who by virtue of their gospel-based exhortation or even title *prophetes*, are no less 'prophetic' but show a different level of authority or prophetic expression, as those filled with Joel's Spirit of prophecy. These include Philip (8:5f.), Barnabas (13:23-24), Agabus (13:28; 21:11), Judas and Silas (15:27, 32) and Philip's daughters (21:9). Elsewhere we notice that gospel

<sup>54</sup> M. Turner, 'Interpreting the Samaritans of Acts 8: The Waterloo of Pentecostal Soteriology and Pneumatology?' *Pneuma* 23:2 (2001), p. 280.

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, p. 86, cf. Stott, p. 62, who makes relevant comments about 'the Ephesians' in Acts 19: 'They experienced a mini-Pentecost. Better, Pentecost caught up on them. Better still, they were caught up into it, as its promised blessings became theirs', pp. 304-5.

<sup>56</sup> For a recent and comprehensive analysis of the prophetic and other parallels Luke draws between Jesus, Peter, Stephen and Paul see A. C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), and D. P. Moessner, 'Paul and the Pattern of the Prophet Like Moses' in K. H. Richards, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1983 Seminar Papers*, 22 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

expansion came as a result of unnamed believers who went about preaching and speaking the word (8:4; 11:19). The implication is that ordinary Christians filled with the Spirit are clearly authoritative in their proclamation of the gospel and exhortation of new converts in the faith.

This prophetic activity indicates that Luke intended to show different levels of prophetic authority, but nonetheless equally derived from the Spirit described in Acts 2:17f. To his credit Menzies is correct in pointing to the church as a community of prophets, but he has not accounted for the fact that equal possession of the Spirit of prophecy does not mean equal rôles and authority. Under the old covenant the temple was the sphere of operation for the prophetic few who mediated the word of God to the people.<sup>57</sup> Yet Jeremiah promised that God would enable *all* his people to know him (Jer. 31:34) under the new covenant just as Moses had wished (Numbers 11:29). Beale helpfully comments,

Joel 2 transforms Moses' prophetic wish into a formal prophecy. Peter quotes Joel's prophecy to show that in his day it was finally being fulfilled in Pentecost. The Spirit's gifts, formerly limited to prophets, kings and priests, usually for service in connection with the temple, are universalized to all God's people from every race, young and old, male and female.<sup>58</sup>

The Acts narrative provides a corrective, not a confirmation of Menzies' proposal.

#### HERMENEUTICS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN NARRATIVE PROGRESSION

In light of the above discussion, a fresh assessment of the Spirit's work in Acts is necessary at least for the following two reasons. Firstly, our expectations of the Spirit's activity in Luke-Acts should not be restricted to, nor emphasised as, empowerment for mission alone. The Holy Spirit is the executive power who accomplishes this (consistent with expectations in intertestamental Jewish literature) as expressed in the narrative of Luke-Acts. Secondly, we need to pay greater attention to Luke-Acts as

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Jeremiah's indictment of Jerusalem's prophets in Jeremiah 23:9-40 indicates by virtue of their *failure* to represent his word to the people, what was in fact required of a prophet serving the people. Verse 22 shows God's requirement of a prophet: 'But if [the prophets] had stood in my counsel, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.'

<sup>58</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* NSBT (Leicester: Apollos/IVP, 2004), p. 210.

narrative.<sup>59</sup> This includes paying attention to narrative features and the manner in which the Spirit's character and activity are portrayed. It is to this latter issue that I now turn outlining the rationale behind such an approach, and re-examining the scope and activity of the Spirit of prophecy in Acts.

### *Acts and Hermeneutical Development*

In his appraisal of the current hermeneutical climate amongst biblical scholars, and with particular reference to Luke-Acts, Menzies states,

Pentecostal scholars have seized the opportunity afforded by the new hermeneutical context and raised important questions concerning the nature of Luke's pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) and its relationship to that of Paul.<sup>60</sup>

Embedded in this statement is the assumption that Pentecostals have brought us closer to an understanding of the Spirit in Acts because of recent shifts in evangelical hermeneutics. Regarding hermeneutics Menzies rightfully endorses Osbourne's perspective on narrative interpretation who avers,

I oppose the current tendency to deny the theological dimension on the grounds that narrative is indirect rather than direct...narrative is not as direct as didactic material, but it does have a theological point and expects the reader to interact with that message.<sup>61</sup>

Menzies rightly sets out to establish Luke's own theological perspective rooted in his 'narrative' and 'orderly account' (Luke 1:3). However, they make more of Luke's distinctive pneumatology than is warranted by a

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<sup>59</sup> Following B. R. Gaventa, 'Toward a Theology of Acts: Reading and Rereading', *Interpretation* 42:2, (1988), pp. 146-57 and W. S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). For example, intertextuality (a text alluding, quoting or echoing another text, e.g. Acts 1:8 and Isaiah 32:15), transtextuality (see Pao, op. cit., for example, the way in which Isaiah 40-55 lingers behind the narrative of Acts 1-8), allusion (Acts 2 and the giving of the covenant at Sinai), summary passages (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 9:31 highlighting the community transforming effect of the Spirit). See also D. Marguerat and Y. Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p.43.

<sup>61</sup> G. R. Osbourne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), p.78.

narrative reading, relying too much upon redaction criticism. Although Luke presents the Spirit in different terms to Paul and John, the question is whether Luke is so distinctive as to have so little in common with them. This necessarily leads to questions of other Pentecostal conclusions. Does Luke attribute missiological empowering and inspired prophetic witness to the Spirit at the expense of ethical and spiritual edification within the church? Do he and Paul contradict one another? Should all 'Spirit-filled' believers expect the same prophetic gifting as seen in Luke's portrayal of Peter, Paul and Stephen?

### *A Narrative Approach*

The answers to these questions depend largely on the interpretive methodology applied. The most comprehensive attempt to understand Luke's pneumatology from a narrative critical perspective is that of Ju Hur. By careful analysis of the literary repertoire of Luke's Holy Spirit<sup>62</sup> and the narrator's characterisation of the Holy Spirit, he arrives at the same conclusion as Turner. Besides the Spirit's undeniable function of empowering the leading witnesses to carry out God's purposes in a unique way (for example, Acts 1:8; 9:15-19; 13:1-4; 19:21) Ju Hur also notices that as the plot of Luke-Acts develops so do the functions of the Holy Spirit. Thus he concludes,

We also saw, on the one hand, that references to the Spirit function to verify group characters as incorporated into God's people; and on the other, the Spirit is employed in relation to the life-situations of believers in settled communities by granting them charismatic gifts, or comforting and encouraging them or initiating forms of patriarchal leadership<sup>63</sup>.

In other words by categorising the Spirit's activity we discover significant breadth in the Spirit's ministry, rather than one overriding pneumatological emphasis as credited to Luke by Pentecostal Lukan scholarship. The study of the Spirit in Acts reveals narrative complexity such that rather than 'reducing Acts to propositional statements or systematic affirmations'.<sup>64</sup> Luke sustains a variety of elements concerning the Spirit's work not recognised by Pentecostal interpretative frameworks.

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<sup>62</sup> Ju Hur, p. 280 examines *ruah* and *pneuma* in the Jewish Bible and portrays the Spirit's role in the following way: 'giving prophecy or revelatory speeches, miracles, wisdom, craftsmanship and the interpretation of visions-dreams to members of the Israelite communities, and inspiring fidelity to God and social justice among the Israelites'.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY IN NARRATIVE PROGRESSION: RECEIVING AND TRANSMITTING THE WORD OF GOD

Consideration of Luke's vocabulary describing the bestowal of the Spirit in Acts has recently given rise to a helpful metaphor which views the Spirit's ministry as different currents of the wind blowing through the narrative.<sup>65</sup> Hamilton examines the words describing the bestowal of the Spirit under three categories: the gale of the eschatological Spirit,<sup>66</sup> the constant breeze of the Christian life as full of the Spirit,<sup>67</sup> and the empowering zephyr of special fillings with the Spirit.<sup>68</sup> Hamilton concludes that these categories describe the ministry of the Spirit, but he admits that they do not exhaust the 'song of the Spirit in Acts'.<sup>69</sup>

In what follows I will observe how Luke's presentation of the Spirit of prophecy combines different 'currents' than those categorised by Hamilton. It is the eschatological gift of the *Spirit of prophecy* quoted by Peter in Acts 2 who is active in three distinct but inter-related categories as the narrative of Luke-Acts develops: proclamation and prophecy, conviction and conversion, and edification and ethics.

***Proclamation and Prophecy***

Acts 1-2 highlights both continuity and discontinuity in terms of the Spirit's prophetic enabling before and after Pentecost. Luke uses other characters to refer to the Spirit's work prior to Pentecost such as Peter in Acts 1:16.<sup>70</sup> Peter, *not yet* filled with the Spirit of Pentecost, assumes the role of teacher, and by his reference to the Psalm 69 and 109, reflects how the Spirit under the old covenant spoke through notable persons.

This stands in sharp contrast with Peter's proclamation in 2:14f. concerning the new manner in which the Spirit would work through *all* who called on the name of the Lord. The contrast in the narrative permits the observation that the Spirit was soon no longer to be exclusively the privi-

<sup>65</sup> J. M. Hamilton, Jr., 'Rushing Wind and Organ Music: Toward Luke's Theology of the Spirit in Acts' *RTR* 65:1 (2006), pp. 15-33.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, where the following verbs overlap to describe this aspect of the gift of the Spirit: *didomi* (11:17); *lambano* (8:17); *baptizo* (1:5; 11:16); *eperchomai* (1:8; 19:6); *ekcheo* (2:17-18); *epiipto* (8:16; 10:44).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, where the adjective *pleres* is used with regard to the Spirit (6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24) as well as other states of character (Tabitha in 9:36; Elymas in 13:10) and the verb *pleroo* (13:52).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, where the verb *pimplemi* is employed prior to extraordinary verbal declarations – inspired proclamation of the Gospel (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17, 20), authoritative denunciation (13:9).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p.33.

<sup>70</sup> Ju Hur, p. 94.

lege of the prophetic few (cf. Luke 1:67-79; 2:25-38), but the one enabling all to know and proclaim the Lord.

This last point is clearly illustrated on the day of Pentecost. Peter, filled with the Spirit (2:4) rises to address the gathering of Diaspora Jews, and it is the prophetic use of the Scriptures which explains what is going on (Joel 2:28ff.). Peter's use of scripture explains what prophecy and proclamation might look like in this new stage in salvation history, the main clue lies in 2:17f. A note of inclusivism the 'rhetoric of reversal'<sup>71</sup> is sounded by the reference to sons, daughters, young and old men, and male and female servants. Clearly there is something of a fulfilment of Moses' longing that *all* the Lord's people would have the Spirit of prophecy, without exception (Num. 11:29). In addition, the Spirit transforms and enables the unlikeliest of individuals paying no attention to social standing or oracular skill as shown in the response of the crowd in 2:7b: 'are not all these who are speaking *Galileans?*'<sup>72</sup>

Luke gives hints as to how this 'democratisation of the Spirit of prophecy'<sup>73</sup> looks throughout Acts, but we must first distinguish how Luke characterises the Spirit's prophetic work in terms of different levels of authority. Perhaps most striking is the attention given to prominent individual prophetic figures who proclaim the gospel such as Peter,<sup>74</sup> Stephen<sup>75</sup> and Paul.<sup>76</sup> Less conspicuous but no less important is the evidence relating to the church at large who embark on a public ministry of gospel proclamation, thereby fulfilling Joel's prophecy. First, Luke draws attention to the outward prophetic ministry of Spirit-filled believers in terms of bold proclamation of 'the word of God' in 4:31; 8:4 and 11:19. On each of these occasions Luke demonstrates how the word of God was boldly spoken despite or even because of persecution, thus, characterising it as Spirit-inspired prophetic ministry,<sup>77</sup> albeit less prominent than Peter, Stephen and Paul.

<sup>71</sup> Wenk, p. 236.

<sup>72</sup> My emphasis. In addition, the astonishment of the Jewish religious leaders to Peter – 'filled with Holy Spirit' – in 4:8 (cf. v13) is worth noting. They perceived that they were 'uneducated, common men'.

<sup>73</sup> Turner, *Power*, p. 442.

<sup>74</sup> Acts 2:14f.; 3:22-26; 4:8f.; 10:3,11, 34-44.

<sup>75</sup> 6:5; 7:2-53.

<sup>76</sup> 9:17-22; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:12-23.

<sup>77</sup> D. Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 121 says 'the work of the Spirit is essentially a work of the Word, which places Christians in the line of the prophets'; similarly, J. Jervell, 'Sons of the Prophets: The Holy

Secondly, we are given various insights into the kind of prophetic activity undertaken *within* the church by certain individuals. The use of the title *prophetai* is rare and attributed only to certain individuals,<sup>78</sup> suggesting that it ought to be seen as one office of the corporate 'prophesying' ministry foretold by Joel in Acts 2. It is first attributed to Agabus who gives an inspired prediction in 11:28 by the Spirit concerning an impending famine, before reappearing in Caesarea in 21:10. As Stott<sup>79</sup> notes, however, the focus in 11:28-30 is more upon the response to the prophecy to send relief, than the prophecy's fulfilment. The Spirit is therefore understood primarily as edifying the church through Agabus' indication of a future event (*esemanen dia tou pneumatos*).

In Agabus' second appearance we face the question of whether the Spirit distributes contradictory insight to Paul (19:21; 20:22-3), the Tyrian disciples (21:4) and Agabus (21:10-11). The tension is resolved when we see 21:4 as the Spirit consistently revealing Paul's impending hardships to the disciples just as he had done so to Paul and Agabus. Hur<sup>80</sup> points out that in 21:4 (cf. 21:11, 8:29; 13:2) the narrator reports the disciple's *interpretation* of Paul's persecution rather than the Spirit's direct speech, which is perhaps why this prompting of the Spirit seems incongruous with the other texts. Also, knowing as we do from verse twelve the extent and validity of the disciples' concern for Paul we can conclude that, far from exercising mere 'human concern'<sup>81</sup> the Spirit inspired such a love for Paul that their anxiety could not be restrained.

There is nothing extraordinary in what the Spirit is doing at this point in the narrative. Rather, the Spirit prompts Paul's obedience (20:22), makes him aware of his calling (20:23), and inspires a deep love and loyalty towards a fellow brother (21:4, 11-12). As Shepherd and Moessner argue<sup>82</sup> such a call reflects the prophetic pattern Luke uses in his narrative of Jesus, regarding the prophet's obedience in going to Jerusalem to suffer and die (cf. Lk. 11:49-51; 13:33-34). I conclude therefore that the enabling of the Spirit of prophecy in Acts 20-21 is that of making known and applying (albeit graphically in Agabus' case) what has been established as a

Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles' in *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 96-121.

<sup>78</sup> 11:27, 13:1; 15:32 and 21:9-10.

<sup>79</sup> Stott, pp. 205-6.

<sup>80</sup> As in Acts 21:11, cf. 8:29; 13:2, Ju Hur, p. 265.

<sup>81</sup> Barrett, p. 990.

<sup>82</sup> W. H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts* SBLDS, 147 (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1994), pp. 237-8; D. P. Moessner, pp. 203-12.

biblical precedent.<sup>83</sup> In this instance Luke describes what Paul's prophetic ministry will involve upon arrival in Jerusalem.

The ministry of Judas and Silas in 15:32 (*autoi prophetai ontes*) supports this view. That these 'leading men' (15:22) have a prophetic ministry is unquestionable. The issue is rather the precise nature of this ministry.<sup>84</sup> Their task (v. 27) is simply to spell out in their own words (*autous dia logou apangellontas*) 'the things' (*ta auta*) contained in the apostolic decree, notably the need to abstain from idolatrous pollutions (v. 29). Following their arrival in Antioch it seems logical to take their prophetic ministry (v. 32) as the task of encouraging the Gentile believers in their quest to abstain from these practices. The 'many words' (*logou pollou*, v. 32b) surely consist of guidance and wisdom in applying the decree given by exhortation. This then is another example of what a Spirit-empowered prophetic ministry looks like for Luke and in summary, we see the Spirit's activity through a designated 'prophetic ministry' is understood as inseparable from the apostolic word (15:27) and the edification of the church (15:32-33).

### *Conviction and Conversion*

Having argued that the Lukan Spirit is defined as Christ's executive in applying the benefits of salvation and the restoration of Israel, we assume that when the narrative describes the Spirit coming at conversion, Luke actually implies more than simply forgiveness and assurance of final salvation.<sup>85</sup> The Spirit's work before and at conversion is seen implicitly in the Acts narrative. Acts 2:38-39 indicates that Spirit-reception, for Luke, is normally<sup>86</sup> in the context of repentance and conversion and is therefore not a subsequent gift of missiological empowerment. Similarly, Peter's address to those who witnessed the healing of the lame man also issues

<sup>83</sup> See Luke 13:34 for Jesus' analysis of how Jerusalem treats the Lord's prophets.

<sup>84</sup> Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology With Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, JSNTS 54 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), p.224 (fn 2) associates all references to prophetic activity in Acts with the mission of the church. However, as 'prophets', Judas and Silas clearly exercise their prophetic gift in a teaching context *within* the church.

<sup>85</sup> Following Turner, *Power*, pp. 346-7 (contra Menzies *Empowered*, pp. 276-279). This is not to say that Luke minimises the forgiveness of sins (for example) – see Luke 1:77, where knowledge of salvation is seen 'in the forgiveness of sins'.

<sup>86</sup> Admittedly 2:38 does not give a precise order of salvation, for the accounts of mass and individual conversions in Acts 2 and 8-10 are at odds with this pattern (notably 10:44-48).

in a call to repentance (3:19-20). Here Luke indicates the connection between conversion and 'times of refreshment' by the purpose construction (*hopos*) which, given the context and literary link with 2:38, suggests that the gift of the Spirit is commensurate with such refreshment.

As already discussed above, both Acts 10:43-44 and 11:17-18 suggest the norm of the Spirit's coming at conversion. Inasmuch as 11:17 identifies the experience of the apostles with the events of 10:44 I disagree with Hamilton's interpretation that 'the Spirit falls upon the Gentiles at Cornelius' house *after* they believed'.<sup>87</sup> The participle *pisteusasin* (11:17) is best interpreted by events in 10:44 to mean 'when we believed' rather than 'having believed'.<sup>88</sup> The genitive absolute construction in 10:44 implies that it was *as* Peter was speaking that the Spirit fell upon them, not after. Additionally, 11:17 seems primarily about Peter's attempt to convince the Jerusalem church of the *fact* of God's approval of the Gentiles by giving them the Spirit (cf. 15:8), not the *timing* of it, which in any case seems clear enough from 10:44.

Despite this evidence it is not necessary to assume the Spirit is inactive *prior* to conversion.<sup>89</sup> A reasonable case can be built to suggest that the narrative implies the Spirit is at work in individual hearts prior to conversion. Given the inseparability of the word and Spirit and the response of the crowd to Peter's Pentecost address it is logical to assume that the Spirit aroused such a response prior to their conversion in 2:41. It is by the Spirit-inspired prophetic words of Peter's sermon that his hearers' hearts are exposed (2:37). Luke therefore implies what John explicitly states in his gospel (John 16:8) that the Spirit convicts of sin and righteousness. Luke is more emphatic about the Spirit's prevenient work when he describes Stephen's indictment of the Sanhedrin following his speech in 7:51. Their habitual resistance of the Spirit (*aei to pneumati to hagio antiptete*)<sup>90</sup> augments what the preceding narrative has highlighted already as both serious (5:3, 9) and futile (6:10).<sup>91</sup> To resist the word is to resist the Spirit. The implication is that the Spirit has the power to bring about both *rejection* of the gospel for the hard-hearted (7:51), but *reception* of the gospel for others (Acts 2:37).

<sup>87</sup> Hamilton, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> See D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 624.

<sup>89</sup> Even though Luke nowhere says anything such as 'the Spirit opened their hearts' for instance, but ascribes 'Jesus' (5:31), 'God' (11:18; 14:27); 'Lord' (16:14) as active in bringing conversion/repentance.

<sup>90</sup> Literally, 'constantly, the Holy Spirit you resist', cf. Isa. 63:10.

<sup>91</sup> F. S. Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts: a Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), p. 90.

*Edification and Ethics*

There are different occasions in Acts where Luke draws attention to the Spirit as forming and building up God's people. We can speak of this as edification or 'temple-building' by the Spirit. Acts 2:4 is certainly suggestive of a new Sinai theophany and Beale<sup>92</sup> argues that because Sinai was a prototype of the 'temple',<sup>93</sup> so the theophany at Pentecost indicates 'the irrupting of a newly emerging temple in the midst of the old Jerusalem temple that was passing away'.<sup>94</sup>

Not only does the dwelling of God, by his Spirit amongst his people redefine the administration of prophecy it makes the parameters for holy living more immediate and less remote. This is demonstrated in the episodes concerning the life of the church following Pentecost in addition to other indications Luke gives as to how the Spirit builds the new temple.<sup>95</sup>

The starkest example of this is the Spirit's role in Acts 5:1-11. Luke makes the striking contrast with the Spirit-filled church community in 4:31-37 repeating key phrases.<sup>96</sup> Despite Peter's centrality in the narrative, the offence of Ananias and Sapphira is not primarily directed at the

<sup>92</sup> Beale, pp. 105-6 provides the following reasons: (i) Sinai as 'the mountain of God' (Ex. 3:1; 18:5; 24:13) is synonymous with 'house of God' (cf. Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:2). (ii) Mount Sinai was divided into three sections of increasing sanctity just the tabernacle and temple were – Israelites at the foot of the mountain (Ex. 19:12, 23), the priests and seventy elders allowed on the mountain (Ex. 19:22; 24:1) and Moses alone could ascend the mountain (Ex. 24:2). (iii) Sinai was the place where God's theophanic 'cloud' and presence 'dwelt' (Ex. 24:15-17) as was the tabernacle (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:17-18) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:12-13).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Beale points to the following evidence for Pentecost as marking the dawning of the church as the new temple-dwelling place of the Spirit. He points to Exodus 40:34 where following Moses' construction of the tabernacle, the 'glory-cloud' descended and filled it. Similarly, when Solomon finishes the temple (1 Kgs. 8:6-13) the same events take place. The parallel to the 1 Kings 8 text in 2 Chronicles 7:1 is even stronger with Pentecost: '*fire came down from heaven...and the glory of the Lord filled the house...and they...gave praise to the Lord.*' Acts 2:11 records the onlookers saying, 'we hear them speaking...of the mighty deeds of God', pp. 204, 211-2.

<sup>95</sup> Not only so, but this provides another reason to draw similarity between Lukan and Pauline pneumatology, See Ephesians 2:18-22.

<sup>96</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: a Literary Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 79, for example, selling property – 4:37 & 5:1; laying money at the apostles' feet – 4:35,37 & 5:2. It is interesting to note how in 4:31 the disciples are 'filled' (*eplesthesan*) with the Holy Spirit, but in 5:3 Satan has 'filled' (*eplerosen*) Ananias' heart.

church's leadership, nor those gathered in general, but at the Spirit who builds the community. Marguerat comments: 'Ananias and Sapphira have not sinned against morality, but against the Spirit in his function of constructing unity.'<sup>97</sup> The prophetic exposure of deceptive hearts and death penalty seems indicative of the standards God has always had for his temple reinforcing the way that horizontal relationships amongst God's people affect the vertical relationship to God. To lie in the community of the church is to offend the Spirit of God himself.

Luke highlights Spirit-reception as the grounds of preserving unity at another point of conflict and disunity in the church (15:1-2, 5, 7). At the previous assembly in Jerusalem in Acts 11 Peter reported that the Spirit told him to go to Caesarea 'making no distinction' (v. 12). Therefore Luke makes sure that both 'Gentiles' (11:12, 17-18; cf. 8:14-17) and 'Jews' (15:8-9) know that the Holy Spirit himself provides divinely-sanctioned solidarity.

Related to the church's holiness and unity is the role of the Spirit in guidance, but space only allows for brief comment on the high point of the Acts narrative – the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).<sup>98</sup> The issue at hand was the Jerusalem church's response to God's acceptance of the Gentiles, through faith by grace, apart from circumcision (15:1-21). Luke leaves the reader in little doubt that unity was established between Jerusalem and Antioch via the deliberations of men, with the assurance of the Holy Spirit. Variations on the verb 'to consider' (*dokeo* in vv. 22, 25 and 28) illustrate the pattern of guidance amongst the apostles. In 15:28 Luke asserts that it was the Holy Spirit in particular who bought unity of mind. Such guidance came as a result of deliberation upon the divine pattern of mission (v. 8f.), evaluation of Scripture (vv. 15-17) and subsequent corporate musings (vv. 22, 25). The narrative flow therefore cuts against a purely 'Spirit-led' form of guidance, maintaining that the Spirit is the one who brings united conviction on pastoral matters.

In two other passages Luke indicates how the Spirit oversees the church's leadership, a matter of critical importance during the establishment of Christian communities. The first mention is in 6:3 where the Jerusalem church's growth called for leadership of exceptional spiritual quality (cf. 11:24).<sup>99</sup> Such Spirit-endowed wisdom facilitated the application

<sup>97</sup> Marguerat, p. 123.

<sup>98</sup> In what follows, I am indebted to Rev. Prof. David Peterson for his insights on 'guidance' at the Jerusalem Council (in lectures given on Acts 15 on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006 at Oak Hill Theological College, London).

<sup>99</sup> Turner, *Power*, pp. 165-9 argues that for Luke the term 'full of' (*plereis* + subjective genitive of quality) often denotes a 'long term state of affairs' (cf. Lk. 4:1; 5:12; Acts 6:5, 8; 7:55; 9:36; 11:24). Used with the Spirit, we understand it

of the Gospel pastorally within the day-to-day praxis of the church. Later in 20:28 Paul declares that the Holy Spirit legitimated the appointment of overseers in the Ephesian church. Not only so, but the Spirit appoints leaders in order that they might 'shepherd' God's flock. The implication is clear: leaders minister on the basis that the Spirit has appointed them with the primary interest that they teach and nurture the church, guarding against false teaching (cf. vv. 29-30). Wenk puts it succinctly, 'It is doubtful that [the Spirit] can even be restricted to empowerment for ministry. It seems rather that the Spirit placed elders as overseers over the flock *for the wellbeing of the community*.'<sup>100</sup>

Chapter 9:31 is perhaps the clearest example of Luke's association of the Spirit with the church's edification. Regarding this verse Menzies argues that 'Prophetic inspiration in Acts is always given principally for the benefit of others (not the recipient of the Spirit) and ultimately for the expansion of the church.'<sup>101</sup> Yet this conclusion is unsatisfactory. The growth attributed to the *parakleseis tou hagiou pneumatos* manifest in the Church is more likely a secondary effect. Undoubtedly a church walking in the fear of the Lord, exhibiting peace and encouragement attracts converts (9:31), but as in 5:1-11, Luke's focus is clearly on the inner life of the church. Whatever form this comfort by the Holy Spirit took it would most likely have been mediated through a teaching ministry not unlike that ascribed to Judas and Silas in Acts 15:31-32 who also encouraged (*parekalesan*, 15:31-32) the brothers in Antioch.

#### THE SPIRIT AND MISSION: WHITHER THE GIFT OF MISSIOLOGICAL POWER?

That the Holy Spirit in Acts empowers the mission of the early church is undisputed both by Luke<sup>102</sup> and many scholars writing throughout the modern missionary movement.<sup>103</sup> However, when the overall thrust of the

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to mean there is exceptional (not extraordinary) evidence of the Spirit's gifts and graces over a period of time. This is contrasted with the passive 'being filled with' (*pimplemi* + genitive) indicating Spirit-prompted manifestations of shorter duration (Lk. 1:15; Acts 2:4; 4:31; 9:17).

<sup>100</sup> Wenk, p. 287 (fn. 42) (my emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> Menzies, *Empowered*, p.187, fn 4.

<sup>102</sup> Numerous texts in Acts associate enabling for missionary activity and the evangelistic growth of the church as inextricably linked to the Spirit: for example, 1:8; 2:4f.; 4:31; 8:29, 39; 9:17-20, 31; 10:19; 11:12, 16-17; 13:4; 16:6; 20:22-3.

<sup>103</sup> R. Allen, 'Pentecost and the World: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit in the "Acts of the Apostles"' (1917) reprinted in D. M. Paton (ed.), *The Ministry of*

church's mission in Acts is considered we are bound to conclude that, for Luke, the emphasis lies on the uniting of Jew and Gentile as the restored people of God and the subsequent inauguration and sanction of mission to both.

In terms of the missionary-theology of Acts Robert Wall contends that Acts 15 explains retrospectively (vv. 8-9) and prospectively (vv. 19, 28, 35) how God's mission has and will advance.<sup>104</sup> These two watershed moments in the 'mission' of the church are both interpreted by Scripture to demonstrate and justify the movement of God's universal salvation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in accordance with Jesus' programmatic statement in Acts 1:8. With respect to Acts 15 Wall comments,

For the first time in Acts the theological principle is explicated that non-Jews may be enrolled among the people of God. James now appeals to another Scripture (Amos 9:11-12) to explain that...Gentile conversion does not annul God's promise of a restored and redeemed Israel, but rather expands it.<sup>105</sup>

What is significant for this paper is that twice the Spirit is mentioned in relation to this Gentile mission – first as the divine sign of approval of the Gentiles (vv. 7-9) and second as divine approval to the church as to the way forward (v. 28). Thus, in keeping with the Jerusalem Council's evaluation of God's plan of salvation in incorporating Gentiles, we note other instances of the 'divine frame of reference' at crucial points of the narrative, verifying the mission to the non-Jews.<sup>106</sup> These include an angel of the Lord,<sup>107</sup> heavenly voices<sup>108</sup> and visions with divine ori-

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*the Holy Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen* (London: World Dominion Press, rev. edn., 1965); G. W. H. Lampe, 'The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke' in D. E. Nineham, ed., *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955) and H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). In recent years works such as C. D. McConnell, ed., *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series Number 5 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997); M. W. Dempster, B. D. Klaus & D. Petersen, eds., *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999); A. H. Anderson & W. J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostals after a Century* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>104</sup> R. Wall, 'Israel and the Gentile Mission in Acts and Paul: A Canonical Approach', in Marshall & Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: the Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 441.

<sup>105</sup> Wall, pp. 449-50.

<sup>106</sup> Ju Hur, p. 283 (fn. 9).

<sup>107</sup> Acts 8:26; 10:3; 27:23.

<sup>108</sup> Acts 10:13, 15; 11:7, 9.

gins.<sup>109</sup> Combining this theme of the new people of God together with the question of the ministry of the Spirit in Acts, we see that the primary mission motif associated with the Spirit is not empowering for witness (though it is certainly there), but the Spirit who incorporates and legitimates non-Jews into God's eschatological people. Luke has consciously characterised the Holy Spirit to make this point more clearly in the narrative, as Ju Hur comments: 'the Spirit's direct speeches and actions *are noticeably highlighted in relation to the witness-mission to non-Jews*.'<sup>110</sup> Whether this is intentional by Luke or not it certainly emphasises for the reader how the Spirit prompts and oversees the inclusion of Gentiles into restored Israel. The great out-pouring of the Spirit to Jews on the day of Pentecost is matched by Luke's portrayal of the Spirit as the possession of the Gentiles too.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This overview of the Acts narrative shows a composite and cumulative picture of the Spirit much needed in today's churches. An appreciation of the broader contours of Luke's narrative demonstrates that the gift of the Spirit is given both to intensify knowledge of Christ and his purposes for the church as well as empower the communication of the apostolic witness. The Pentecostal reading is untenable if it argues that the Spirit comes subsequent to conversion and/or primarily for the sake of empowering the church's witness. If some scholars are prone to reading Pauline theology into Luke's narrative, it seems that the Pentecostal tendency is to read missiological empowering into all Spirit-related texts.

In terms of the relationship of the Spirit to mission I conclude that in light of the narrative flow and significance of Acts 2 and 15 Luke's emphasis is upon the Spirit as the one who initiates and verifies the mission to the Gentiles and their inclusion into restored Israel. Therefore, we cannot appreciate the Spirit of mission and the notion of 'empowerment for witness' until we have first considered the Spirit who unites people across the greatest of social divides to be God's restored people. It is as the Spirit exercises dynamic and transforming power within the church that he helps God's people fulfil the Old Testament promises to be a light to the nations.

The following propositions seek to safe-guard against the polarisation of views described in the introduction. Luke is an artist as well as theologian-historian. We must therefore appreciate the different currents

<sup>109</sup> Acts 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 16:9, 10; 23:11.

<sup>110</sup> Emphasis, mine. See also 10:19; 11:12; 13:2-4; 15:28; 16:6-7; 19:21; cf. 8:29, 39.

blowing from the one wind of the Spirit. The evidence of the Spirit's ministry should be felt in the following ways:

***Enablement of all believers to know and proclaim the Lord***

The Spirit is sent to effect and deepen knowledge of the Lord. Though the Spirit may provide a special equipping for particular tasks or circumstances<sup>111</sup> it is not separate from the one gift given at conversion. There is no special class of spiritually-gifted Christians. The ascended Jesus makes himself known to *all* through the Spirit's ministry and gifts enabling *all* believers to make known the ways of the Lord.

***Temple transformation as well as empowerment***

The Spirit not only imparts wisdom and knowledge, but effects change in the life of God's church – the temple, on a corporate level as well as individually. For example, shared conviction of sin as prophetic words confront hearts and minds,<sup>112</sup> the incorporation of outsiders,<sup>113</sup> the extravagance of financial stewardship,<sup>114</sup> and fellowship across all social classes and genders<sup>115</sup> exemplify the transformation and ethical imperative effected by the Spirit. It is curious that Menzies does not recognise this dynamic given the proliferation of social change implemented by Pentecostalism across the globe.<sup>116</sup> In this respect the Spirit in Acts challenges individualistic complacency and urges a deeper sense of solidarity amongst believers.

***Preservation of a holy church and united mission***

The Spirit does not tolerate the flouting of God's holy standards.<sup>117</sup> By purifying the church the Spirit preserves unity and humility within congregations.<sup>118</sup> At another level the gift of the Spirit and not the law is the identity marker for belonging to the community of faith, bringing oneness of heart and soul.<sup>119</sup> When the church slips into discrimination or prejudice the note of Acts 15:9a needs to be sounded. With thoughtful delibera-

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<sup>111</sup> Hamilton, pp. 29-32.

<sup>112</sup> Acts 2:37; 5:1-11; 6:10; 8:12; 13:9f.

<sup>113</sup> In particular the conversion stories of Acts 8-11 including the Samaritans (Acts 8:5f. cf. Luke 9:51-53), the Ethiopian Eunuch (cf. Deut. 23:1-9), Saul (Acts 8:1; 9:1) and Cornelius (Acts 10:34).

<sup>114</sup> Acts 2:45; 4:32, 34-37; 11:29; 20:35.

<sup>115</sup> Acts 10:48; 11:3; 15:1-35; 16:15.

<sup>116</sup> For example, Anderson and Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, pp. 89-107.

<sup>117</sup> Acts 5:3, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Acts 5:11.

<sup>119</sup> Acts 2:44; 4:32.

## THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN ACTS

tion of gospel principles and reflection on the imperatives of Scripture the Spirit brings unity across the most diverse denominations and traditions and unites missions to different people groups.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> For example, the unity forged between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch in Acts 15:1-35.

# CHRIST-CENTRED INTERPRETATION ONLY? MORAL INSTRUCTION FROM SCRIPTURE'S SELF- INTERPRETATION AS CAVEAT AND GUIDE

JASON HOOD

A number of leading evangelical scholars and pastors employ and propagate a Christ-centred or gospel-centred approach to interpreting the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This essay describes this influential method for interpretation and encourages its use, but also provides a caveat in light of Scripture's self-interpretation. The consistent use of Scripture for moral instruction may be seen in the use of the OT in the NT and in Scripture's own purpose statements, which must guide contemporary interpreters in building an interpretative method. Moral instruction is an overlooked and sometimes denigrated component of biblical interpretation by those engaged in the otherwise healthy drive to interpret Christ in all the Scriptures.

## A CHRIST-CENTRED SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

The roots of Christocentric interpretation derive chiefly from the Protestant Reformation and evangelical pietism, although some neo-orthodoxy and other 20<sup>th</sup> century theological currents share these interests in some respects. The first part of this essay is a review of more recent influential scholars and pastors, since their voices are shaping contemporary interpretation. The observations in this review are selective, designed to provide a workable overview of the Christocentric method and to focus attention on aspects of the method to be addressed in the third section.

### *Timothy Keller and Edmund Clowney*

Perhaps the best-known proponent of Christocentric preaching is New York Times best-selling author Timothy J. Keller, a pastor of an influential church in New York City and former professor of preaching at Westminster Theological Seminary. Keller relies heavily on the concept of 'sanctification by gospel', a dictum inherited from Martin Luther.<sup>2</sup> All

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Christ-centred' and Christocentric will be employed interchangeably in the present essay, as they are more widely used than the moniker 'Gospel-centred'; several of those practitioners cited below use these terms more or less interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> See similarly the citation of Luther and the use of gospel as motivation in R. S. Clark, 'Letter and the Spirit: Law and Gospel in Reformed Preaching', in

sins are a function of failing to believe the gospel; therefore, gospel, not moral instruction, should receive the focus of Christian sermons. He is concerned to motivate audiences to the obedience required by Scripture not with law, fear and guilt, but with a better grasp of the substitutionary nature of the gospel. Along with others named below Keller warns against doctrinal preaching that pitches the riches of theology at a high academic level and misses the heart and the life of congregants, and moralistic preaching that targets wills but not the heart.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary interpreters have much to learn from Keller's method. He is arguably the most influential of those pastors and scholars addressed here despite the fact that he has not published on this issue, apart from influential church planting materials and unpublished lectures. Keller sees himself in large part as utilizing and popularizing the method he received from his predecessor at Westminster, Edmund Clowney. The two men co-taught a Doctor of Ministry course, 'Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World', now popular as a free download available via the iTunesU platform.<sup>4</sup> A number of Clowney's works remain in print and continue to exert influence.<sup>5</sup>

### *Bryan Chapell*

Also notable for his influence in contemporary practical theology is Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Seminary and author of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*.<sup>6</sup> This text is one of the most successful books on preaching ever written, going through seven printings in its first six years. *Christ-Centered Preaching* receiving the award for 'Book of the Year' by *Preaching* magazine and the Religious Speech Communication Association; a second edition appeared in 2005.<sup>7</sup> In the interest of centring interpretation and proclamation on Christ and

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*Justification, Covenant and Pastoral Ministry*, ed. R. S. Clark (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2006), p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Keller helpfully notes that moralism can be found on the right and on the left of the theological and ecclesiological spectrum.

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://itunes.rts.edu/>

<sup>5</sup> 'Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures', in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. S. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), p. 163–91; *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988); *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003). The latter book and the audio from Reformed Theological Seminary contain, among other gems, sage advice on possible mistakes made in preaching Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

redemption, Chapell criticizes sermons whose main messages constitute anything other than sinners' need for redemption in the work of Christ. Therefore, "'be good" messages', "'be disciplined" messages' and "'be like" messages' alike are off-limits.<sup>8</sup> We are warned: 'A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian *even if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behaviors.*' 'Moral maxims and advocacy of ethical conduct fall short of the requirements of biblical preaching.'<sup>9</sup>

### *Michael Scott Horton and R. Scott Clark*

Michael Horton also contributes to this debate. As a cultural critic and apologist, Horton is concerned with the way in which the church is consumed by the culture. He and Scott Clark enjoin preachers to commit to preaching the Law-Gospel divide which is "found throughout Scripture" and in church history.<sup>10</sup> Specific differences in content notwithstanding, in practice the interpretive emphases in these authors is not substantially different from the Christ-centered focus of evangelical expositors.

### *Sidney Greidanus*

Homiletics scholar Sidney Greidanus explored interpretive method in an extensive study of a major debate over the content of preaching in the Dutch Reformed Church in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>11</sup> More recently Greidanus builds on this work in articulating and defending the practice of Christ-centred preaching.<sup>12</sup> Although writing as an evangelical Greidanus also cites recent interpreters outside evangelicalism. Forerunners from the middle of the twentieth century include Donald Gowan, Ernest

<sup>8</sup> Chapell, p. 281–4. See also 267–8 for preaching requirements that render the book of James and much of Jesus' own preaching sub-Christian.

<sup>9</sup> Chapell, p. 268 [274 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.]; emphasis in first sentence added.

<sup>10</sup> M. S. Horton, 'What Are We Looking for in the Bible?' *Modern Reformation* 5.3 (1996), pp. 4–8. R. Scott Clark critiques modern sermons as failing to engage law-gospel in favour of focus on humans and 'one's self'. See his, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), p. 73. Compare Clark, 'What the Bible is All About', *Modern Reformation* 16.2 (2007), pp. 20–4; 'Letter and Spirit'; and D. E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From all the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> S. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), and most recently *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

Best and Karl Barth, all cited as purveyors of an explicitly Christocentric (as opposed to theocentric or anthropocentric) approach to preaching and interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Among others on whom Greidanus relies Leander Keck challenges the notion that the historical-cultural gap between Scripture and contemporary audiences should be bridged by means of moralizing, 'drawing moral inferences, usually things to do or become'.<sup>14</sup> William Willimon states that such moralizing is 'perhaps the most frequent modern interpretive pitfall', into which interpreters stumble as a result of their desire to 'be relevant'.<sup>15</sup>

Greidanus denigrates 'biographical preaching, character preaching and the use of human "examples" for imitation'.<sup>16</sup> 'Imitating Bible characters, though popular and superficially easy, is a dead-end road for true biblical preaching.'<sup>17</sup> He again cites theological heavyweights from across the theological spectrum, including Martin Noth: 'A legitimate "re-presentation" cannot use the individual human figures of biblical history as its subjects, either as ethical "models", which in fact they never are, or as exemplary "heroes of faith" since in the biblical narratives they are never so presented.' Characters must not, Noth and Greidanus contend, 'be imitated'.<sup>18</sup> John Goldingay is similarly cited: 'To concentrate on the human deed' as opposed to the divine act, which more often than not works *despite* human effort not through it, 'is often to miss the point of it. Indeed, it is not merely to misuse it: it is to bring a message that is its opposite.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 117. For Barth, see especially *Homiletics* and *Church Dogmatics* 1.2.

<sup>14</sup> L. Keck, *The Bible and the Pulpit: the Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), p. 101; cited by Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, p. 163.

<sup>15</sup> W. Willimon, *Preaching and Leading in Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 71; cited by Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, p. 164. See also pp. 178–9 in the latter text.

<sup>16</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, pp. 117, 163.

<sup>17</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, pp. 161–3. He references his *Sola Scriptura* 56–120.

<sup>18</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, p. 163, citing M. Noth, "'Re-presentation' of the OT in Proclamation', in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann (Richmond: John Knox, 1962), p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> J. Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 39.

*Graham Goldsworthy*

Goldsworthy's context is that of a biblical scholar working against the resistance to Christian interpretation in the guild. One of his most helpful observations is that, for the purpose of Christian interpretation, the context of a passage is not just the biblical book in which the passage is located or the paragraphs surrounding it, but the whole of Scripture. As a result whenever a passage is interpreted 'in context', Christ becomes an integral (in his view, a central) component of the passages meaning. He cites multiple texts undergirding a Christocentric approach including 2 Timothy 3:15-17: 'Paul here expresses the important hermeneutical principle that the OT instructs us for salvation, but only in relation to Jesus Christ. The function of the gospel as the means of interpreting aright the OT is inescapable unless we believe that there is something other than salvation involved as the main subject of God's word to us.'<sup>20</sup> Along with other observations in this review the use of this passage by Goldsworthy and others will be revisited below.

*Conclusion: A Christ-centred school of interpretation*

Notwithstanding differences in emphasis, theology and practice in these writers they share enough of a common focus that one can speak of a 'Christ-centred' or 'Gospel-centred' school of interpretation in hermeneutics and preaching. In particular this school's tenants derive from Reformed scholars and preachers going back to Spurgeon and beyond. The impact of Christocentric interpretation is felt among evangelical biblical scholars, theologians, homileticians and laypersons, although it should be noted that Christocentric trends are also present in mainline Protestant thought, as Greidanus shows.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 84-5.

<sup>21</sup> The label also percolates in Roman Catholic thought, although the content of 'Christocentric' here departs from evangelical and mainline Protestantism, oriented more toward the Mass and the imitation of Jesus. Pope John Paul II debates those desiring to move away from Christocentric models to anthropocentric catechetical material in 'What is a Christocentric Catechesis?', *Origins* 18 (August 4, 1988), pp. 124-7, and the *General Directory for Catechesis* released by the Vatican in 1997 (esp. nn. 97-8). This interest is shared by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 'The New Covenant: A Theology of Covenant in the New Testament', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22 (1995), pp. 635-51; and 'Christocentric Preaching', in *The Word: Toward a Theology of the Word*, Readings in Theology, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Kenedy, 1964).

There is much to learn from these scholars and their efforts to overturn reigning paradigms of grace-less moralistic preaching and Christ-less interpretation in the academy are commendable.<sup>22</sup> No doubt many interpreters and pastors are in need of increased sensitivity to the gospel context of the whole Bible. All believers need frequent instruction in the centrality of biblical salvation in the work of Jesus and the way in which the plot of the Scriptures revolves around this salvation. Clearly, there is a need to read and preach Christ throughout the Scriptures, using the methods and objectives for interpretation the NT illustrates for us.<sup>23</sup> It is my contention that Scripture's self-interpretation supports the emphases of the Christ-centred school of interpretation. But is this the only way in which one is to interpret Scripture?

#### PROBLEMS WITH CHRIST-CENTRED PREACHING

Before answering this question by examining Scripture's self-interpretation it is worth noting several aspects of the present Christ-centred movement which suggest a need for balance in rhetoric and praxis.

##### *Reception history*

Quite apart from the observations regarding Scripture's self-interpretation, which will follow this section, the use of the Christocentric model suggests that some modification in nomenclature, content, and dissemination may be required.

##### *Reception History: Lay confusion and a misleading label*

The 'Christ-centred' moniker is a valuable rhetorical and descriptive tool. Yet it can create problems, particularly for lay persons who do not appreciate the nuance found in a number of the scholars cited above. Major labels are powerful forces, and negative criticism about 'moralizing' in sermons and teaching can at times exert more influence than positive affirmations.<sup>24</sup> For instance, my colleagues in ministry in various parts of

<sup>22</sup> One invaluable resource and an excellent entry point are Timothy Keller's sermons. Many of these are available at <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store> (note the 'free samples'); Steve McKoy's listing is well-maintained: [http://www.stevekmccoy.com/reformissionary/2005/07/tim\\_keller\\_arti.html](http://www.stevekmccoy.com/reformissionary/2005/07/tim_keller_arti.html), sites accessed November 12, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent, succinct introduction to the use of the OT in the NT which reinforces this point, see S. Motyer, 'Old Testament in the New Testament', in *Evangelical Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker 1996), pp. 582–5.

<sup>24</sup> Greidanus allows the use of an example to illustrate a point in a sermon (Jas 2 and Heb 11), but disallows making an example a primary point in a sermon.

the country sometimes report dissatisfaction among some leaders and laity influenced by the Christocentric school if their sermons or lessons are not exclusively centred on Christ.

'Christ-centred' is Greidanus's preferred nomenclature for the homiletic method, despite the wider canonical perspective he employs, which would seem to render 'Christian', not Christ-centred or biblical as the appropriate adjective.<sup>25</sup> Chapell likewise broaches a fuller emphasis on 'redemption', which seems to suggest the need for a broader adjective than Christ-centred. In the second edition of *Christ-Centered Preaching* his presentation of the label 'Christ-centred' as 'synecdoche', such that the phrase incorporates all aspects of redemption—the kingdom of God, for example, and some notion of spirit-inspired moral effort—comes as a welcome clarification.<sup>26</sup> But perhaps such confusion warrants a move away from the label, toward a superior term more accurately understood by laypersons, and more capable of embracing the breadth of interpretative concerns found in Scripture. It is worth noting that other pastors and teachers have found alternative labels beneficial.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Reception history: children's literature*

One important barometer, inasmuch as theological and interpretive trends influence educational material, is the fast-selling text for children by Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*.<sup>28</sup> Its subtitle reveals its affiliation with the Christ-centred school: *Every Story Whispers His Name*. Per Lloyd-Jones's note in her introduction Keller's wife served as 'theological reviewer', and the book reflects the Christocentric emphasis found in Keller's preaching.<sup>29</sup> According to this book Jesus is essentially the sum of what every story is intended to say. I gratefully use this book with my children and appreciate the focus on Jesus in the OT and the way in which fuller aspects of biblical salvation such as the promise of New Creation are addressed. It is refreshing to find a text capable of helping my chil-

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The vociferous opposition to the latter seems to squelch the quiet acceptance of the former.

<sup>25</sup> *Modern Preacher*, pp. 118–9.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Future of Expository Preaching', *Presbyterion* 30 (2004), p. 73; and the second edition of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> For Fee and Stuart, God is the hero of each OT story, not humans. See, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 81–5. Similarly, one finds a 'theocentric' focus quite apart from the quest for Christ in every single passage in D. Ralph Davis' *The Word Became Flesh: How to Preach Old Testament Narratives* (Fearn: Mentor, 2006), pp. 121–38. Cf. John Piper's preference for the label 'God-centred'.

<sup>28</sup> Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, p. 6.

dren see how *Every Story Whispers His Name*.<sup>30</sup> Yet educational theory and my experience as a parent and educator suggest that a Christ-centred approach to the Bible needs to be augmented by a rich moral formation component.<sup>31</sup>

### *The sermon and its context*

One should not overlook the role liturgy plays in creating a gospel context for sermons. No doubt the creation of such a context requires careful selection of prayers, psalms, corporate readings and other elements of worship. Greidanus holds that early Catholic elevation of Mass and semi-Pelagian theology diminished the concentration on gospel in the sermon and allowed for an increase in moral instruction, so that 'of the four senses, the moral sense gained the upper hand in preaching'.<sup>32</sup> One can envision, however, a healthier theological and liturgical context for moral instruction in sermons. Horton mentions but does not specify 'other contexts' for instruction and education rather than preaching.<sup>33</sup> But are there biblical grounds for making preaching a time where one avoids sustained moral and doctrinal instruction while soteriology must be articulated from the pulpit every week? At least some criticisms I hear from laity are critiques of Sunday School teachers for not featuring a regular diet of gospel, Christ-centred teaching, and, as we shall see, Scripture's moral instruction is far too forceful and frequent to relegate it to Sunday school or similar non-pulpit times.

<sup>30</sup> For a similar approach, relying more on redemptive history than on typology, see David Helm, *The Big Picture Story Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway 2004).

<sup>31</sup> W. Yount, *Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher's Introduction to Educational Psychology* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 105. Clark, 'Letter and Spirit', pp. 333–7 holds that the early Church fathers were responding to moral and doctrinal threats from Gnosticism and charges of immorality from Jews (see esp. 334 n. 8). As a result they gave themselves over to law-centred preaching which continued for over a millennium. But surely they found grounds for emphasising moral effort in Scripture (i.e., the Sermon on the Mount and James)?

<sup>33</sup> I am sympathetic to Horton's criticisms of contemporary preaching, such as 'exegesis of the Constitution' rather than the Bible and the lack of Gospel emphasis in some quarters. Horton's interest in preaching law (but only in conjunction with gospel; again, one wonders if James and the Sermon on the Mount would pass muster) should be noted; I am more concerned about potential abuse of the method in general than with his articulation of the same.

*Overlooking or denigrating the moral use of Scripture*

In some instances one finds the marginalisation and even the denigration of the moral use of Scripture. Chapell's disavowal of 'be like' interpretation mirrors Clowney's admonition to preach 'Christ only' from the life of David: 'We dare not preach David's encounter with Goliath as an example of bravery to be emulated in our conflicts with the 'giants' that assault us. Such an approach trivializes the Old Testament revelation.'<sup>34</sup> Goldsworthy explicitly disavows that moral emphasis could play a significant or central role in Christian preaching and teaching, instead favouring sermons or instruction centred upon the gospel, redemption and Christ.<sup>35</sup> In his treatment of Genesis 22 Greidanus denigrates the efforts of some interpreters because they dare to employ Abraham as an exemplar (in the footsteps of Hebrews and James).<sup>36</sup> Horton provides more balance with his caveat: 'To be sure, Scripture provides God-centred and divinely-revealed wisdom for life, but if this were its primary objective, Christianity would be a religion of self-improvement by following examples and exhortations, not a religion of the Cross.'<sup>37</sup> In principle this is a valuable reminder to celebrate redemption in Christ. In practice, however, the volume and forcefulness of 'Christ-centred' admonitions may lead seminarians, pastors and laity away from deep reflection on the moral use of Scripture in its self-interpretation, described in the following section.

R. P. Gordon targets mere Christocentric interpretation as reductionistic: "'Christ in all the Scriptures" is a slogan that has been misapplied by too many preachers and writers.' Among other problems Gordon holds that Christocentric interpretation sometimes 'diverts attention from other lessons that the biblical text is intended to teach...and inevitably depends for credibility on a principle of selectivity, involving the highlighting of biddable elements in the narrative and the downplaying of others less so.'<sup>38</sup> Of course, sermons with other emphases may also engage in selectivity. But if interpreters consistently fail to follow evidence of Scripture's interest in being interpreted in ways that do not easily fit the description

<sup>34</sup> Clowney, 'Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures', p. 187, cited in Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, p. 163 n. 19; cf. Clowney, *Unfolding Mystery*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, pp. 115–32.

<sup>36</sup> *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 293 n. 47, citing an 'anonymous preacher' and K. Matthews, 'Preaching Historical Narrative', in *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle*, ed. G. L. Klein, (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Horton, 'What Are We Looking for in the Bible?', p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> R. P. Gordon, 'A Warranted Version of Historical Biblical Criticism?', in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, Scriptures and Hermeneutics 4, ed. Mary Healey, Craig Bartholomew, et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 87.

'Christ-centred', the charge of reductionism must be taken seriously and appropriate adjustments to the preferred model of interpretation must be made. Priority must be given to 'Reading the Bible the New Testament Way', which is to say that wise biblical interpreters should carefully attend to Scripture's own self-interpretation, lest a slogan like 'Christ-centred' lead to a one-dimensional approach to a text which demands that interprets itself in variegated fashion.<sup>39</sup> As the next section illustrates Scripture's self-interpretation and explicit purpose statements show that another component that is often not given its due by the Christ-centred school of interpretation.

#### MORAL INSTRUCTION IN SCRIPTURE'S SELF-INTERPRETATION

A variegated approach to interpretation is required if one wishes to portray an accurate reflection of Scripture's intent for Christian interpretation, and particular attention must be given to moral instruction for believers. The present section shows the variety of ways in which Scripture's self-interpretation supports such a conclusion, culminating in the NT's explicit testimony regarding the purpose of Scripture.

#### *Characters and Stories in the New Testament*

##### *Interpretation of characters in the NT (1): OT characters and stories in the NT*

According to Paul these characters were included in the Bible and their stories 'were written for our instruction' (Rom 15:4) and 'as examples' for us (1 Cor 10:6). The contexts of these quotes illustrate Paul's belief that the stories and characters and the successes and failures recorded in the OT inspire and guide our moral effort. According to Paul NT readers do not see Jesus alone in the OT, but rather they see themselves. The book of James references four OT characters and 'the prophets', all of whom are used as examples for the guidance of NT believers (Jas 2:14–26, 5:10–28). James underscores this function by noting that Elijah 'was a man like us' (5:17). The life of Jesus is often an 'expansive echo' of the characters and events of the history of Israel, and these OT stories may rightly be interpreted as pointing to the redemption believers have in Jesus. If Paul is a guide, however, the way in which manna points to the person and work of Christ (John 6:31–60) does not exhaust the interpretive possibilities for manna, for in 2 Corinthians 8:13–15 manna functions as a model for be-

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<sup>39</sup> 'Reading the Bible the New Testament Way' provides an excellent slogan (It is a subtitle in a section of Clark's essay, 'What the Bible is All About', p. 20).

lievers.<sup>40</sup> In this passage and elsewhere God's provision guides the moral effort of believers (cf. Matt 5:43–48). The author of Hebrews appears to challenge Chapell's disavowal of 'be like' interpretation; he repeatedly mentions believers as models of active faith in the face of difficulty (11:2–12:4).<sup>41</sup> Here as elsewhere the NT does not limit itself to a focus upon typological or symbolic relationship between the OT text's events, characters and their offices (including their strengths and weaknesses) and the person and work of Jesus. Moreover, Hebrews has no problem holding out Jesus himself as an example at the conclusion of a long line of OT characters, not because they point only to him, but because these characters and Jesus are useful examples, pushing NT believers to persevering faithfulness and the rejection of entangling sin (Heb 12).

*Interpretation of characters in the NT (2): applying the story of Jesus*

This observation on Hebrews 11:1–12:2 calls to mind the stress on the imitation of Jesus throughout the NT. Elsewhere I have written extensively on the role of Jesus as exemplar in the NT, and will not repeat such material here in detail, save to note Paul's own emphasis.<sup>42</sup> The interpretation of Philippians 2:5–11 in the twentieth century is an example of a text clearly rife with ethical implications. But notable interpreters including E. Käsemann, R. P. Martin, K. Barth, and J. A. Sanders routinely downplayed or even denied such an ethical interpretation in favour of a more strictly Christological or redemptive-historical approach, focusing on the uniqueness of the Christ event. Such a track was often taken over and against the tendency in early Protestant liberalism to reduce Christ to an example.<sup>43</sup> This mistaken interpretation reminds contemporary interpreters of the need to guard against truncating one's interpretative method

<sup>40</sup> See my 'Theology in Action: Paul's Theology of Christian Social Care', in *Transforming the World? The Gospel and Christian Social Care*, eds. J. Grant and D. Hughes (IVP forthcoming, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Calvin, at least, feels free to celebrate David and other characters as examples in sermons (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, pp. 150–1). Calvin was clear enough that the interpreter's task also included interpreting Christ from the OT; see his commentary on John 5:39.

<sup>42</sup> On Jesus as exemplar, see my forthcoming articles in *WTJ* (2009); *EvanQ* (2009); Heb 6:12–15; 13:7.

<sup>43</sup> F. Thielman, *Philippians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 123–5, citing Sanders, 'Dissenting Deities and Phil. 2:6–11', *JBL* 88 (1969), p. 280; Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 71–3, and *Philippians* TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 99–100, 160.

out of fear that a particular component is employed by an undesirable theological movement.

***Interpretation of characters in the NT (3): Paul's self-application***

1 Corinthians 2:2 is sometimes wrongly cited as evidence for a Christ-only or gospel-only approach. But Paul here is teaching the imitation of Christ. He is describing the way in which he modelled a self-sacrificial lifestyle for the Corinthians, which they are now neglecting. Paul's ministry features the propagation of 'my [cross-imitating] ways in Christ as I am teaching them in every church in every place' (1 Cor 4:17). The Corinthians' failure to follow his Christ-like example led him to send Timothy, who followed Paul's sacrificial ways in Christ so that he could function as an example, a message that is especially clear in 2 Timothy. Elsewhere in this same letter he insists that the church 'imitate me as I imitate Christ' (1 Cor 11:1), as he does throughout the NT.<sup>44</sup>

***Interpretation of characters in the NT (4): characters in parables***

Parables routinely enjoin hearers to imitate a character in a story. Chapell's warning against 'be like' sermons notwithstanding, such a 'be like' emphasis seems entirely appropriate for the interpretation of a number of parables, including the wise builder (Matt 7:24–27), the wise virgins and investors (Matt 25:1–30), and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), which concludes with Jesus' moral exhortation: 'Go and do likewise.'

***Old Testament law in the New Testament***

Granted widespread acceptance of the use of aspects of OT law for moral instruction by Christian interpreters a few examples still aid in ascertaining the relevant presuppositions of the NT authors. Paul is not content to limit himself to the use of the Ten Commandments. In passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:9–10 and 1 Timothy 5:17–18 he also employs so-called ceremonial or civil law in an effort to guide readers' actions, not just to point to Christ and the gospel. Paul surmises that God spoke 'entirely for our sake' (1 Cor 9:9), because God's intention in the OT law is paradigmatic for church life.<sup>45</sup> New Testament believers are routinely called to practice holiness on the basis of God's holiness (1 Pet 1:15–16; Heb 12:14a; cf. Matt

<sup>44</sup> See also Rom 8:17, 36; 15:2–7; 1 Cor 4:8–17; 9; 11:1 (cited); 2 Cor 4:7–18; 12:7–10, 15; 13:3–5; Gal 4:12; Eph 5:2; Phil 2:4–11; 3:10–11; 4:9; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:6–7; throughout 2 Timothy; and Acts 20:33–35.

<sup>45</sup> This use of the law is described by G. Wenham, *Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 32–7.

5:48), after the pattern in Leviticus 19:2: ‘Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’ In a similar way the command that there should be ‘no poor among you’ (Deut 15:4, 11) likely stands behind the early church’s radical generosity in Acts.<sup>46</sup>

Christ-centred preaching could undercut such an emphasis on moral instruction and direction if ‘Christ-centred’ means that the law is not employed for moral instruction, or if the facts and structure of salvation ‘in Christ’ are elevated in such a way as to mitigate the component of moral instruction. Clark applies the phrase ‘the righteous requirements of the law’ to Jesus’ work on behalf of sinners.<sup>47</sup> This application functions in Clark’s argument as a reason for subordinating law to gospel. But the use of this phrase *for Christ* detracts from a more Pauline approach: believers who ‘walk according to the spirit’ are those in whom the ‘righteous requirement of the law’ is fulfilled (Rom 8:4; cf. Gal 5:22–6:8, esp. 6:2). Christians must receive moral instruction to direct them in their Spirit-led walk, which Paul provides in Romans 12–15 and Galatians 5–6.<sup>48</sup>

### *Old Testament Psalms in the New Testament*

Clowney argues that from the NT’s perspective, all the Psalms are messianic. Scripture gives us permission to read the Psalms in a messianic direction even when explicit pointers to a Messianic figure are not present.<sup>49</sup> His assertion that this can be done for Psalms (and other passages) that the NT does not explicitly use is commendable. But such emphases *must not* overshadow the use of the Psalms in the NT for moral and missional instruction.<sup>50</sup> According to Paul Christians are ‘like sheep to be slaugh-

<sup>46</sup> So I. H. Marshall, *Acts* TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 109.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Letter and Spirit’, pp. 349–50.

<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Clark’s emphasis on preaching law and gospel lead him to the incorporation of moral instruction (which he would limit to the Ten Commandments, the ‘moral law’) in a Christ-centred or gospel-centred framework. But according to Clark the law is not a ‘stimulus to sanctity’ (‘Letter and Spirit’, p. 355). If that is the case, why is that the NT authors use the law to push their readers to holiness and righteousness?

<sup>49</sup> Clowney, *Preaching Christ*, pp. 40–42; Clark, ‘What the Bible is All About’. Tremper Longman III similarly encourages the interpretation of all Psalms as Messianic, relying on Jesus’ statements in Luke 24 as a guide. See, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), pp. 63–73.

<sup>50</sup> On the Psalms’ use of the king as a paradigmatic or exemplary figure see, J. Grant, ‘Psalms and the King’ in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. D. Firth and P. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), pp. 114–8, which is based in part on Grant’s published dissertation, *The King as Exemplar: the Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the*

tered' (Rom 8:36). This appellation, most often applied to Christ as the consummate righteous sufferer, is here an application of the description of righteous sufferers in Psalm 44:22, and in the context of Romans 8 fleshes out the required task of 'sharing in Christ's sufferings' (8:17). Paul similarly uses Psalm 112:9 as a guide to Christian generosity in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

It is important not to posit a clean break between interpretive focus on Christ and interpretive focus on human effort. Several NT passages illustrate the simultaneous use of a Psalm in both Christological and moral modes. Romans 15:1–7 applies Psalm 40 to Christ, but does so in order to hold out Jesus' sacrificial suffering as an example for believers to imitate in neighbour-service, not crushing those weak in faith nor pleasing only themselves. In a similar way both a believing component (in terms of trust in God) and a moral, striving component (in terms of personal effort) are applied to believers from Psalm 69 by the writer of Hebrews in chapters 3–4. These examples illustrate that, for the NT writers, finding Christ in the OT does not eliminate moral exhortation; it may very well sharpen and enhance it, as Christ is held up as an example.

### *Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament*

The NT's use of prophecy is dominated by Christ-centred appropriation, but this is by no means the only way in which OT prophecy is used. As observed in previous categories a focus on Christ and his people's labours fits together in the NT. Paul's remarkable use of prophecy in Romans 16:20, which echoes Genesis 3:15, invites reflection on the role of believers in redemptive history. Christians are not just spectators in God's victory; they are also *participants*, the means by which God himself brings his victory (John 20:21; Col 1:24; Matt 28:18–20). Jesus similarly ascribes a label from the prophets, 'the light of the world' (Is 42:6, 49:6, 60:3), to himself (John 8) as well as his followers (Matt 5:13–16). Paul cites Isaiah 45:23 in Romans 14:11 in order to provide moral direction to his readers in rendering judgment to God and accepting one another in Christ in light of the future appearance of all before his judgment seat. Matthew's use of prophecy is generally Christocentric. Yet the only prophetic text he cites twice describes both Jesus' salvific mission (Matt 9:13) and the moral judgement expected from God's people (Matt 12:7): 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (Hos 6:6).

*Old Testament Wisdom in the New Testament*

Clearly the Proverbs can and should be interpreted in a Christ-centred manner. Yet as Bruce Waltke notes, ‘The apostles generally use Proverbs to teach the church how to live godly lives.’<sup>51</sup> An interest in providing such direction for believers explains such the use of Proverbs 3:11–12 in Hebrews 12:5–6; Proverbs 3:34 in James 4:5 and 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 25:21–22 in Romans 12:20; and in an allusion to Proverbs 3:7 in 2 Corinthians 8:12. One can contrast such moral instruction with Tremper Longman’s introductory section, ‘Reading Proverbs in the Light of the New Testament’, which addresses only Christocentric interpretation and only mentions the significance of one passage from Proverbs (Prov 8).<sup>52</sup> A wisdom-tinged passage celebrated by Clowney and Clark as a pointer for Christ-centred interpretation, Matthew 11:28–30, in point of fact describes wisdom’s dual function in the NT. The point of the passage, not noted by these writers, is that Jesus is the source of wisdom *and* an example; he requires his disciples to follow him (‘take my yoke’) and imitate his humility and gentleness (‘learn from me, for I am...’).<sup>53</sup>

*Jesus’ sermons in the New Testament*

Not one of Jesus’ lengthy teaching blocks or ‘sermons’ in Matthew could be construed as *primarily* teaching or preaching the person and work of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Instead, they work out the implications of Jesus’ identity in areas such as the nature of God’s kingdom, Christian mission and ethics, and temporal and final judgement. The use of Jesus’ own words in the remainder of the NT confirm an interest in moral interpretation; Paul employs them so as to shed light on the moral example he has offered his flock in Ephesus (Acts 20:33–35).

*Old Testament motivations in the New Testament*

Fear of the Lord, reward for one’s labours, and the threat of divine judgement all function as motivators to enjoin believers to faithfulness. The NT shares the OT’s concern to put such motivators to work in procla-

<sup>51</sup> *Proverbs 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> T. Longman III, *Proverbs*, BECOTPW (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 64–9. Given the academy’s resistance to interpreting Jesus in the OT, scholars are commendably fighting an uphill battle in placing Jesus on the map of OT interpretation at all.

<sup>53</sup> Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, pp. 42–3; Clark, ‘Letter and Spirit’, pp. 362–3.

<sup>54</sup> Matt 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 23–25; see my forthcoming article in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2009) on the extent of these passages and implications for their interpretation.

mation. Luke even describes such exhortation as ‘gospel proclamation’ (Luke 3:7–18). Such variegated motivation calls into question an insistence on the exclusive use of gospel as sanctification for believers.

### *History of interpretation and proclamation*

Two historical facets of biblical interpretation also shed light on Christian interpretive method, although both must be treated very briefly. First, contemporaneous exegetical practices in Judaism, while obviously lacking the crucial Christological component, confirm the present assertion that the biblical writers freely employed the Scripture for moral, didactic training. Brian Rosner’s observation summarises the relationship adequately for our purposes here: ‘Virtually without exception, [early] Judaism presents a powerful demonstration of Paul’s notion that Scripture was written to teach us how to live.’<sup>55</sup> This emphasis is not lost when Paul or others add a Christ-centred component, for as noted above, the moral use is frequently *enhanced* when Christological interpretation is present.

Secondly, expositors throughout history have employed more than a bare Christ-centred approach. Not surprisingly, they have incurred critique from the Christ-centred school. Calvin routinely employs biblical characters as examples for moral instruction in his theologising, commentating and preaching, against which Greidanus levies rather unfortunate criticisms. In his first sermon on Job 1:1 Calvin states: ‘[I]t is good that we have examples who show us that there are men frail like us, who nevertheless have resisted temptations, and have persevered constantly in obeying God, although He afflicted them to the limit. Now we have here an excellent example of it.’ In Calvin’s thought, Job is an excellent example, and should be preached as such.<sup>56</sup> Again, in light of the use of Abraham in James 2, Hebrews 11, and John the Baptist’s preaching in Matthew 3 and Luke 3, Calvin is in fact expositing Genesis 22 in accord with NT interpretation of the OT when he describes Abraham as ‘entirely devoted to God’ in Genesis 22. He surmises that Scripture’s depiction of the patriarch is an ‘example proposed for our imitation’. Greidanus, however, critiques the use of Abraham as exemplar throughout his analysis of Genesis 22, and particularly calls Calvin’s interpretation of Genesis into question.<sup>57</sup> For Greidanus, even if Abraham could be an *illustration* of

<sup>55</sup> Rosner, ‘“Written for us”: Paul’s View of Scripture’, in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, eds. D. Wright and P. Satterthwaite (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Cited by Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 150 n. 58.

<sup>57</sup> *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* 292–318, esp. 303 n. 49. To Calvin’s Genesis commentary, add the use of Abraham in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.10:11.

faithfulness and faith that works appropriately, such texts could perhaps be referenced (he cites Jas 2 and Heb 11), but never preached without elevating Christ.<sup>58</sup>

As he targets ‘anthropocentric interpretation’ and moralism, Greidanus attributes an early moralising ‘slide’ to Clement of Rome, denigrating his use of OT characters as exemplars.<sup>59</sup> Clark similarly believes that various social and theological factors contributed to a loss of pure gospel presentation (he cites 1 Cor 1–2) in the early church fathers.<sup>60</sup> But it is difficult to believe that Clement could have instigated any sort of ‘slide’ toward moral instruction, since antecedent NT passages such as Hebrews 10:36–12:2 and James 2:14–26 and 5:10–18 already feature the use of OT characters as examples of enduring fidelity and righteousness. In light of Christian and early Jewish use of characters for moral instruction Clement has not fallen from the heights of some well-worn, pristine Christ-centred interpretation of the OT from the apostolic era.<sup>61</sup>

### *The New Testament’s explicit purpose statements*

No doubt the examples of moral instruction in the previous categories could be multiplied. Clowney surmises, ‘It is true that the New Testament does not often speak of the way it interprets the Old, and we are often left to draw our own conclusions.’ He concludes that the ‘grand structure’ of the NT’s use of the OT leads us to feature Jesus as ‘the fulfillment, the realization of what was anticipated’ in the OT.<sup>62</sup> This latter statement is true, but the former statement must be tempered by the way in which Paul variously summarises the interpretation of the OT. Careful examination shows that he does not do so in a merely Christ-centred manner. As noted previously, for Paul, the Scriptures are written ‘for our instruction’ in be-

<sup>58</sup> *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 305.

<sup>59</sup> *Modern Preacher*, p. 116. Blame for Clement is also found in Goldsworthy who decries the early Christian ‘concentration on the exemplary and ethical Christ, rather than on the substitutionary and redemptive Christ’. See his, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), pp. 92-3. See especially *1 Clem* 4:1–12:8. Against this view of the history of interpretation a moral sense is already profoundly important in the NT itself, as it was in early Jewish interpretation.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, ‘Letter and Spirit’, pp. 333-7.

<sup>61</sup> Nor an interest in characters as exemplars among early Jewish and Christian authors should be attributed to Hellenization, according to Michael Crosby. See his, *Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), p. 109.

<sup>62</sup> Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, p. 20.

havioural matters (Rom 15:4 in light of 15:1–7), and characters and events were ‘written down for our instruction’ (1 Cor 10:11) ‘as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did’ (10:6). The belief in Scripture as a guide led Paul to surmise that *every* Scripture ‘is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim 3:16–17).

Failing to attend to these explicit statements of moral intent Christ-centred interpreters in some instances over-interpret other passages, attempting to prove that the NT itself teaches a thoroughgoing Christ-centred method. Luke 24:27 probably does not teach that every single OT passage points directly to Jesus. Rather, Jesus teaches that his identity and mission can be found *in many passages* from all over Scripture. This point receives further clarification both in extent (Jesus can be preached from the Law, prophets, and Psalter) and in content (Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection on the third day and reception in glory; and repentance and forgiveness being proclaimed everywhere, beginning in Jerusalem) in several verses in the immediate context (Luke 24:25–26, 44–47).<sup>63</sup> Dan G. McCartney holds that the latter passage from Luke 24 teaches us that Jesus is something of a ‘skeleton key’ for interpreting the OT; ‘it appears that Jesus is giving the disciples the key to understanding the Old Testament as a whole.’<sup>64</sup> Such an assertion is not wrong, but if not properly nuanced it encourages a loss of focus on Scripture’s broader intentions and opens the door to a failure to honour the moral instruction component of Scripture.

Paul charges Timothy, ‘You have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim 3:15 NIV). Like Luke 24:27 this verse is also cited as a passport to the interpretation of Christ in all the Scriptures.<sup>65</sup> It is true that 2 Timothy 3:15–17 summarises Scripture’s utility, just as it summarises its *theopneustos* character. But wisdom for salvation in Jesus, according to this passage, is not the limit, nor always even the goal of Christian interpretation (though Christian interpretation must never be opposed to this). Rather, good works are the *telos*, and *all* Scripture is to be used to this end

<sup>63</sup> Pace Clowney, *Preaching Christ* 39–40. Davis is particularly helpful in identifying concerns regarding the use of Luke 24 (*Word Became Flesh* 134–138).

<sup>64</sup> “The New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate* (ed. Harvie M. Conn, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 109, 113–4, 116. Cf. *English Standard Version Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) 23.

<sup>65</sup> Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible* 84–5, noted above.

in 'teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'. These tasks, not the articulation of 'wisdom for salvation in Christ', explicitly describe the utility of *all of Scripture*.<sup>66</sup>

Paul's purpose statements explicitly contradict what must be regarded as poorly nuanced statements in Goldsworthy, Chapell and others which (intentionally or unintentionally) move believers away from attending to Scripture's self-interpretation for the moral instruction of believers. 2 Timothy 3:15–17 and 1 Corinthians 10 both illustrate that moral instruction is not contrary to interpreting Christ from the OT. In the latter passage, however, it is worth noting that he draws attention to Christ in the OT ('the rock was Christ', 10:4) not to clarify Christian salvation, but to clarify and sharpen the relevance of the OT passage he has mined for Christian moral instruction.<sup>67</sup>

### Summary

If Scripture is to be the guide for Christian interpretation, its explicit statements of intent and the patterns of interpretation modelled therein reveal that Christian preaching not only *may* but *must* feature moral exhortation. Therefore, Christ-centred interpretation that overlooks, explicitly excludes, or denigrates the use of moral examples and moral instruction in preaching requires considerable modification.<sup>68</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Practitioners concerned to preach and interpret biblically must pay careful attention to the articulation of God's good news. Opportunities to impress God's grace on the fallen and forgetful must not be overlooked. Preachers must also attend to the diverse ways in which the Bible itself

<sup>66</sup> Rom 15:4 seems to be similarly comprehensive in scope. Chapell attempts to account for 2 Tim 3:16–17, but it is unclear that his model is capable of fostering the degree of moral instruction advocated by Paul. In the second edition of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, see pp. 49–53, 269 and 378. On the latter page his use of this passage morphs quickly into 'proclamation of the gospel' and 'convinc[ing] others to put their trust in [Jesus]'.

<sup>67</sup> One wonders if 2 Tim 3:15 is therefore explicated in 3:16–17, with the soteriological aspect in view in 3:15 thus understood in a holistic sense along the lines of Phil 2:13.

<sup>68</sup> I encourage students (and laypersons with criticisms!) to ask diagnostic questions of their preferred model of interpretation: 'Does my model of interpretation render the book of James sub-Christian?' 'If my pastor [teacher, campus minister] simply reads the book of James, would he fail my litmus test as a biblical expositor?'

## CHRIST-CENTRED INTERPRETATION

teaches us to use the length and breadth of God's Word for moral instruction. The depth of the NT's interest in Christian moral formation requires preachers and teachers to engage such material frequently and in detail. Claims that we *only* teach and preach Christ and that *every* sermon must be focused squarely on Christ are misguided. At the same time, however, it is crucial for Christians to employ the Christocentric use of the OT, recognising that the NT itself models such interpretation. I respect the efforts of scholar-expositors mentioned herein to overturn the pattern of reading Christ *out* of the OT, particularly in light of the failure of interpreters in previous generations to incorporate Christ-centred interpretation into their moral instruction and doctrinal preaching.

This essay is not intended as a full-fledged assault on the Christ-centred school, a movement with which I identify and whose observations I employ in my own ministry. I simply wish to encourage interpreters and preachers to follow Scripture's lead in implementing a diverse approach to biblical interpretation that honours the moral component of Scripture's self-interpretation. Whatever one labels one's interpretive method this moral component cannot be overlooked, mitigated, or disparaged if we are to use 'every Scripture' as the NT teaches us (2 Tim 3:16–17).

# IMAGE RIGHTS AND ICONOCLASM: A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTOLOGY AND IDOLATRY

JAMES EGLINTON

## INTRODUCTION

‘Little children, keep yourselves from idols’ (1 John 5:21).

What is idolatry? This article is, in part, borne out of Greenspahn’s concern that in wider theological discourse, the term *idolatry* is regularly applied with little clarity of definition. However, it differs with Greenspahn’s own willingness to admit the inherent ambiguity of the term.<sup>1</sup> The relevance of idolatry to the various loci of theology necessitates a clear definition of the term.

Following on from this initial question, one then asks, why is idolatry a sin?

This article attempts to answer these questions by examining idolatry in relation to Christ as the image of God. In that sense this is a work on Christology in relation to idolatry, with its focus on the relationship between these two concepts. The basic thesis put forward is that the answers to these questions are ultimately Christological. In essence, this study aims to prove that understanding Christ as the image of the unseen God (Col. 1:15) is essential in comprehending all aspects of idolatry.

With this in mind, this work takes a two-pronged approach. First, idolatry is explored in an Old Testament context. This probes how one can take a Christological approach to idolatry in the pre-Incarnation Scriptures. Second, idolatry in the New Testament is examined. Here, the Old Testament findings are expanded through the Christology of Paul. The consequences of a Christological approach to idolatry are then investigated.

It ought to be made clear from its outset that this work focuses on the primary concern of all Christology; the person of Christ himself. Its accent is on the theological relationship between the reality of the second person of the Trinity and the sin of idolatry. The secondary question of

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<sup>1</sup> F. Greenspahn ‘Syncretism and Idolatry in the Bible’, *Vetus Testamentum*, LIV 4 (2004), pp. 480-94.

the legitimacy of pictorial representations of the Christ is not taken up at this time.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT, IDOLATRY AND CHRISTOLOGY

Hypothesising that the answers to all questions of idolatry are ultimately Christological, this article works on the principle that Jesus Christ being the *eikon tou theou tou aoratou* (Col. 1:15) is central to Scripture's theological concept and ethical condemnation of idolatry. However, if idolatry is most fully understood via Christology, the immediate question is; how does this relate to the Old Testament? The aforementioned hypothesis seems unusual given that the bulk of Scripture's references to idolatry come before the incarnation.

Clearly, idolatry is a major focus in the Old Testament. From the creation account onwards its flavour is consistently anti-idols and pro-Yahwhistic monotheism. Indeed, Genesis 1 has an almost overwhelmingly polemic drive against Canaanite idolatry. According to Kline the creation account is the total demythologising of pagan cosmological mythology and idolatry.<sup>2</sup> The law is also often taken up with idolatry; it is the subject of both the second commandment (Exod. 20:4-6) and much other instruction (Deut. 29:17). In the same vein the prophets regularly railed against Israel's idolatrous habits (Isa. 10:11; Jer. 8:19).

It should be noted that Jesus' own Old Testament hermeneutic had a basic Christ-ward trajectory: 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). Likewise the concern of this section is to understand the Old Testament's handling of idolatry in a way which prepares the reader for the New Testament's clearer Christological understanding. With that in mind, two areas of Old Testament theology will be dealt with: first, the salvation context of its teaching on idolatry; and secondly, the ethical nature of its teaching on idolatry.

#### *The Salvation Context*

The Old Testament is a story of salvation. God creates humanity, humanity falls into sin, God initiates his redemptive plan in the history of Israel. Within this great redemption metanarrative the first port of call in an overall Old Testament approach to idolatry is the decalogue; in particular, its preamble and first two commandments.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal World-view* (Overland Park: Two Age Press, 2000), p. 28.

As it is a theological concept, *idolatry* must be defined within a theological context. This is found at Mount Sinai. The decalogue represents the covenant terms laid down by Yahweh as suzerain for his vassal people.<sup>3</sup> Its context is one where Sinai follows the exodus. Through Moses Yahweh gave these laws to a people who had already received his salvation. The New Testament makes much use of this exodus deliverance as a motif for the greater salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. At the transfiguration it is evident that Christ's work in leading his people out of bondage to sin has superseded that of Moses' work in the exodus. Here the divine voice, 'added that [Jesus], the promised prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22), is the only voice they are to listen to'.<sup>4</sup> Paul, writing post-Incarnation, expresses this exodus redemption in unambiguous, New Testament, salvific terminology: 'For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:4). Interestingly, the Apostle identifies them as idolaters ('Do not be idolaters as some of them were', 10:7) and describes their idolatry as Christological ('We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did', 10:9) before again exhorting the Corinthians, 'Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry' (10:14).

The fuller New Testament significance of this exodus salvation picture will be explored in the following section. However, what is made clear at this point is that in Exodus one finds a gospel story. In the immediate context the Israelites were saved from their slavery in Egypt having been supernaturally delivered from an oppressive pagan regime. Such deliverance was intended to facilitate God-centred worship. This salvation context is immediately apparent in Exodus 20: 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'

An Old Testament theology of idolatry, while not Christological in name, is perhaps not far from Christological in nature. The pre-incarnation context in which idolatry is most clearly illuminated is a context in which Yahweh's gracious provision of salvation is pre-eminent. Indeed, 'The Lawgiver and his gracious act of redemption provide the context and the backdrop against which the "ten words" are given'.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that the decalogue defines idolatry against the backdrop of Old Testament

<sup>3</sup> J. Mackay, *Exodus* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), p. 340; M. Kline, 'The Ten Commandments', *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. Douglas (London: IVP, 1962), pp. 1251-2.

<sup>4</sup> D. Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> W. Kaiser, *Towards Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 84.

gospel. Idolatry is also defined in relation to Yahweh as the Ultimate Reality.

While the Lutheran joining of Exodus 20:3-6 into a single commandment is not followed in this work, Luther's *Doctrine Concerning Good Works* has nonetheless shed light on this issue. Luther interprets the commandments in their salvation context, seeing, 'You shall have no other gods before me', as intrinsically related to justification by faith alone. He then restates Exodus 20:3 in positive terms: 'Since I alone am God, thou shalt place all thy confidence, trust and faith on Me alone, and on no one else.'<sup>6</sup> What is required by the first commandment is faith in nothing but Yahweh alone; there is no other source of justification or salvation. Only Yahweh took Israel from Egypt, and thus only Yahweh can be trusted in as Saviour. In this light, it seems impossible simultaneously to keep the second commandment whilst breaking the first. To flee idolatry, one must first believe the gospel.

Calvin held a similar view of the interconnected nature of commandment keeping: 'Surely the first foundation of righteousness is the worship of God. When this is overthrown, all the remaining parts of righteousness, like pieces of a shattered and fallen building, are mangled and scattered.'<sup>7</sup> In the decalogue's chain of theological events rejection of Yahweh (and his salvation) is the birthplace of idolatry. Thus, one can say with assurance that idolatry is the product of unbelief in the one true God and his gospel.

The investigation then moves on to its second major question: why is idolatry a sin? Due to its nature as progressive Messianic revelation, Scripture provides a two-part answer to this question. The Old Testament makes plain the prohibition against man-made icons. The New Testament then spells out fully how God has revealed his image.

Dealing, then, with why the Old Testament prohibits idols two points stand out. First, the second commandment primarily prohibits not the worship of pagan idols, but the worship of Yahweh through man-made images (as was the case with the calf worship at Bethel and Dan). This is argued from the decalogue's context; the first commandment has already ruled that foreign gods must not take Yahweh's place. Within these covenant terms between Yahweh and Israel, commandments three and four deal with Yahweh's *name* and Yahweh's *Sabbath*. The second commandment is, in modern terms, concerned with Yahweh's *image rights*. In the decalogue, this is an area where Yahweh reserves total control; he can be

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<sup>6</sup> M. Luther 'Doctrine Concerning Good Works' ([http://www.ststephen-stow.com/pages/50\\_HistoricalWorks/Luther\\_GoodWorks.htm](http://www.ststephen-stow.com/pages/50_HistoricalWorks/Luther_GoodWorks.htm))

<sup>7</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes* II.VIII.11

nothing but self-defining. By way of exploring the LORD's use of these image rights he has already 'created man in his own image' (Gen. 1:27). For an Israelite to be reminded of the reality and presence of God, he should need to look only at his fellow human beings.<sup>8</sup> After all Yahweh has made them in his image. Humanity, however, has rebelled against him and this image has been defaced. Idolatry is thus exposed as cruelly misleading. It leads humanity to look instead to golden calves rather than Yahweh himself.

The notion that Yahweh alone can define himself leads into a second point; the decalogue's condemnation of Yahwhistic icons is a battle in an epistemological war. Calvin writes that Scripture contrasts God with idols 'to expose the world's folly, nay, madness, in searching for God when all the while each one clings to his own speculations'.<sup>9</sup> The point here is that a biblical epistemology places divine revelation as both its highest source of knowledge and indeed the only source of knowledge of God. This is what Van Til referred to as 'revelational epistemology'.<sup>10</sup> All true epistemology begins with Yahweh's sovereign self-revelation. Such a message is clear in Deuteronomy 4:15-16: 'Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves.' This point leads naturally into the second major concern of this section.

### *The Ethical Context*

In Deuteronomy 4:16 it is explicitly recorded that making one's own icon of Yahweh is 'corrupt' (*shachat*). It follows that an answer to the question 'why is idolatry a sin?' must consider this issue in terms of ethics. Why does Scripture portray the idolater as morally corrupt?

The starting point of discussion on the ethical aspect of idolatry is the honour and glory of Yahweh. Indeed, this is the beginning of all Old Testament ethical studies wherein one finds God's character expressed.<sup>11</sup> Calvin, writing on Deut. 4:16, claims that 'Every figurative representation of God contradicts his being'.<sup>12</sup> This is the foundation on which the Bible's ethical condemnation of idolatry stands. As it is impossible accurately to depict Yahweh through unaided human reasoning or imagining,

<sup>8</sup> cf. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.I.1

<sup>9</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.XI.2

<sup>10</sup> C. Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology (In Defence of Biblical Christianity)* (Pittsburgh: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1979), p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.XI.2.

any attempt to do so will necessarily misrepresent him in some way. This in turn highlights truth as the reason idolatry is ethically *shachat*. God is honoured by truth (John 4:24) and dishonoured by falsehood. Defamation and misrepresentation of character is ethically wrong. This is particularly the case where the subject being misrepresented is Yahweh himself. Indeed, it marks out idolatry as a particularly gross sin. Thus, the reason Scripture portrays the Yahwhistic idolater as morally corrupt becomes clear. At best he misrepresents Yahweh. At worst, he blatantly lies about him. Either way the author of truth is denied a truthful representation. Such an inherent denial of truth is, by its very nature, unethical. Again, epistemological issues are closely related. Trying figuratively to represent the LORD involves a serious epistemological crime. Calvin notes that Yahwhistic idolatry follows directly from a rejection of revelational epistemology.<sup>13</sup> It involves idolatrous human reasoning overruling the divine injunction not to imagine of Yahweh what he has not chosen to reveal of himself. This is unethical as it breaks the decalogue's divine image rights and attempts to depose God and assert humanity as judge of truth.

In the Old Testament idolatry is a sin primarily because truth matters. Jesus highlighted the truthfulness of God in naming Satan as the 'father of all lies' (John 8:44). If Yahweh reserves the right to reveal himself, inaccurate and misleading depictions of his character cannot begin with the Father of all truth. The Yahwhistic idolater is corrupt because he lies about Yahweh. At an even more rudimentary level than this he is corrupt because he is a covenant breaker. The terms of Yahweh's covenant stipulate that the divine image rights belong to the LORD; any attempt to subvert this is to act in breach of contract. Of interest in this regard is that both Calvin and Luther regarded justification by faith alone as the source of all true moral life and ethical conduct.<sup>14</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that one keeps the first commandment (by attributing salvation and deliverance to Yahweh alone) so that one might not break the second commandment through idolatry.

### *Summary*

The Old Testament's total aversion to the use of images in worship has thus been noted. At the beginning of this section, the validity of an Old Testament Christological approach to idolatry was questioned. The following comments stand in summary.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.V.11.

<sup>14</sup> D. Sinnema, 'The Discipline of Ethics in Early Reformed Theology', *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 10-44.

First, the nature of divine revelation is progressive. God's self-revelation is as One in the Old Testament and Triune in the New Testament. This reality is significant in how one relates a Christological understanding of idolatry to Old Testament references to idol worship. Second, nothing in the Old Testament's handling of idolatry contradicts a New Testament Christological understanding of the topic. In fact the opposite is evident. The Old Testament defines idolatry within the context of the good news of God's deliverance. This leads naturally into a New Testament approach centred on Christology. In addition to this as Yahweh has already laid an exclusive claim on his image rights in both the decalogue and Deut. 4, he is firmly within those rights in revealing himself most fully 'in a Son' (Heb. 1:2) who is 'the image of the unseen God' (Col. 1:15).

On the basis of Old Testament evidence alone what is idolatry and why is it a sin? As this work has a Christological conclusion definitively answering these questions at this point is impossible. However, substantial observations can be made. Idolatry is fuelled by unbelief in the God who reveals himself and who saves. The decalogue deals primarily with idolatry as icon worship which Scripture condemns as ethically corrupt. This verdict is reached via the covenantal nature of the decalogue; Yahweh alone has the right to reveal himself and his image. No human imagining of him ever faithfully represents him or does justice to his glory.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT, IDOLATRY AND CHRISTOLOGY

Examining idolatry in relation to Christology in the New Testament will principally involve the examination of two Pauline texts: 1 Cor. 10:1-14 and Col. 1:12-14. In the former Paul uses overtly Christological concepts to relate the idolatry of the Israelites to the New Testament Corinthians. In the latter the same author uses exodus concepts prior to embarking on a *tour de force* of the highest Christology. In this context he describes Christ as 'the image of the unseen God'.

In the Incarnation of Jesus Christ one finds a virtual paradigm shift in the progressive self-revelation of God. The Gospel of Mark immediately introduces Jesus Christ as *huiou theou*. Matthew and Luke begin with accounts of his supernatural conception. John's Gospel describes him as *ho logos*. Not only was this *Logos pros ton theon* but the Logos was God (*kai theos en ho logos*). The New Testament immediately makes clear that with Jesus' enfleshment something utterly unprecedented has happened: God has become man (Matt. 1:23). The experience of knowing this Jesus of Nazareth prompts staunchly monotheistic Jews to proclaim without reservation or embarrassment, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:16), and 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the

King of Israel' (John 1:49). This phenomenon thus has a profound effect on all theology from this point onwards. With respect to the incarnation Barthelemy perhaps goes some way to shedding light on its relationship to iconology:

YHWH would not tolerate any idol made by man's hand because he would not tolerate man's reversing the relationship of moulder to the moulded. He would never give man any image distinct from himself, for fear that the image, instead of playing the part of transparent sign, should become a veil which masks him. Only one possibility remained: that he should raise up among men an image that would not be distinct from himself, that would not be other than himself. That would be the incarnation.<sup>15</sup>

In this section we will propose that the Incarnation was the ultimate divine act of iconoclasm. In the person of Jesus Christ God has most fully revealed himself, and that entirely on his own terms. Yahweh's covenantal image rights are exercised most fully in the one who has said, 'Whoever who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). It will be concluded that the revelation of Christ as the *eikon* of God will ultimately mean the end of all idolatry.

### *Christology and idolatry in Corinth*

Beginning in 1 Corinthians one finds Paul from 8:1 (*peri de ton eidolothuton*) to 11:1 dealing with idolatry in a New Testament context. Ancient Corinth, circa 600 BC to AD 350, was the site of the Temple of Demeter. The apostle's topic is how New Testament believers should conduct themselves in a culture where pagan iconolatry formed an important part of social and political life.<sup>16</sup> Within this extended discourse (8:11-11:1) scholarship seems settled on 1 Corinthians 10:1-22 as a separate section.<sup>17</sup> Here Paul condemns pagan sacrificial meals as idolatrous and exhorts Christians not to partake in them (1 Cor. 10:7, 14). It should be noted that considerable debate has been generated over from which perspective Paul

<sup>15</sup> D. Barthelemy, *God and His Image* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> J. Smit, '1 Corinthians 8:1-6: A Rhetorical *Partitio*: A Contribution to the Coherence of 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1' in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. Reimund Beiringer (BETL, 125; Leuven: Peeters-University Press, 1996), pp. 557-91.

<sup>17</sup> P. Naylor, *A Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1996), p. 184.

approaches this issue. The majority of commentators view Paul as dealing primarily with idolatry on a theological level.<sup>18</sup>

Viewing 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 as a passage where Paul deals theologically with the ongoing problem of idolatry in the New Testament church one finds him highlighting an Old Testament example: the idolatry of the Israelites in the wilderness. Paul freely describes this Old Testament experience in the language of New Testament Christology. In 10:1 Paul makes mention of 'our fathers' (*hoi pateres hemon*). That he is speaking of the Israelites in their wilderness experience is evident from the context. These were the fathers who had been delivered through Moses in the Exodus (10:2); their experience was of grand divine salvation. These were the fathers with whom Yahweh had declared his covenant terms in the Decalogue and who had subsequently broken those terms; 'some of them were idolaters' (10:7). The interest of this study is in Paul's Christological emphases in verses 4c and 9.

What is apparent thus far is that Paul is using the example of the Israelites, and particularly their idolatry, as a comparator through which his hearers may more clearly comprehend their own situation; 'these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did' (10:6). It seems, however, that the fathers provide more than a mere analogy. Paul describes the experience of Corinthian and Israelite as substantially the same. This point will be argued by Paul's application of New Testament Christ-terminology to their Old Testament experience. In what sense was Christ the Israelites' rock? This verse has caused much divergence of opinion. By way of a wider context the sacraments are on Paul's mind in 1 Cor. 10. He refers to the Israelites as having been 'baptised into Moses' and later goes on to apply his iconographic principles to the eucharist (10:16-22). Having thus already mentioned baptism is it legitimate to say that Paul understands the Israelites' spiritual eating (manna, Exod. 16:4-36) and drinking (from the rock at Kadesh, Num. 20:2-13) as typologically prefiguring the two eucharistic elements? Undeniably, Paul refers to these things as *tupoi*. Whether he is conveying a definite sense of theological typology as opposed to the *tupoi* merely serving as examples is less clear. Baird claims that 'here Paul does not

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<sup>18</sup> For example, G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 469; J. Smit, "'Do Not Be Idolaters" Paul's Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 10.1-12', *Novum Testamentum* 39.1 (Jan. 2007), pp. 40-53. For contrasting opinions, see W. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 196-219; M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, HUT, 28 (Tubingen: Mohr, 1991), pp. 138-42, 250-6.

depict types to be fulfilled but moral lessons to be learned from negative examples.<sup>19</sup> This, however, does not do justice to the text's Christological nuances. Certainly, Paul does not explicitly make out that the Israelite and Corinthian experience is consubstantial. That said his description of their actions as 'drinking from Christ' and 'putting Christ to the test' does point to their experiences as substantially very similar.

Much can be said in favour of a typological approach to this passage. Calvin understood 1 Corinthians 10 in this way. He translates 10:6 as 'Now these things were types to us', and adds that 'it is not without consideration that I have given a different rendering from that of the old translation, and of Erasmus'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, such an approach leads Calvin to describe the manna and water as 'emblems of Christ':

It follows, that Christ was connected with them, not locally, nor by a natural or substantial union, but sacramentally. On this principle the Apostle says, that *the rock was Christ*, for nothing is more common than metonymy in speaking of sacraments.<sup>21</sup>

Paul, it is claimed, is using metonymy rather than metaphor. In what sense, then, was Christ their rock? The incarnation was still some way off. The trinity of God (particularly in relation to the second person) was still unknown and shrouded in mystery. Nonetheless, Jesus Christ was with the Israelites as the undisclosed author of all their blessings. The substantial reality of this unbeknown presence has an immediate practical consequence for the Corinthians: 'Christ lived in the midst of the ancient people, and the people perished! How can you think yourselves, you Christians, secure from the same lot!'<sup>22</sup> The fathers fell into idolatry when the reality of Christ's presence with them was shrouded; the stakes, therefore, are considerably higher for those born on the other side of Bethlehem. With most of the Israelites 'God was not well pleased'. In becoming idolaters, they broke the suzerain's covenantal stipulations. At this point it is important to note the technical distinction between idolatry and apostasy. The Israelites did not formally renounce Yahweh as the true God (à la Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kings 16:29-33); instead they made

<sup>19</sup> W. Baird, '1 Corinthians 10.1-13', *Interpretation* 44.3 (July 1990), pp. 286-90.

<sup>20</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, tr. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 322-3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>22</sup> F. Godet, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), cit. in Geoffrey Wilson, *1 Corinthians* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), p. 144.

and worshipped Yahweh-icons (Ex. 32:4; cf. 1 Kings 12:26-33). However, this difference aside, the sin remains serious.

Paul then describes the circumstances in which their idolatry presented itself. First, *ekathisen ho laos pagein kai perin kai avestesan paizein*. Meeks<sup>23</sup> sees this as a midrashic technique whereby Paul is reduplicating his words; God provided them with food and drink which they consumed and then ‘rose to play’. However, this analysis perhaps overlooks an important point. Having already set out their privilege in the provision of spiritual food and drink through Christ (10.3-4), Paul recounts their descent into idolatry by quoting Exodus 32:6. Such a choice of reference is highly significant. Paul is referring to the incident of the golden calf; the epitome of Israel’s idolatry. There the people responded to Moses’ extended time on Mount Sinai by abandoning their divinely mandated revelational epistemology and demanding of Aaron ‘Make us gods who shall go before us’. It is within this context that Paul refers to their ‘sitting to eat and drink, and rising to play’. Thus viewed it is clear that this eating and drinking is part of the overall paganism into which the Israelites’ true religion was degenerating. Such an interpretation reads cogently in the Hebrew text which resonates consistency between the three actions (*w’yeshebh ha’am le’ekol w’shato wayaqmu l’tsaheq*).

‘The word means “to play” anyhow; more especially to dance to the sound of music. Here it means to *dance religiously* round an idol; the idol in this case being the golden calf.’<sup>24</sup> The Israelites’ shame is evident. Christ was spiritually in their midst. He had provided them with sacramental types. While in the position to eat and drink Christ’s provision they instead chose to participate in the pagan cult; eating and drinking what Paul refers to as ‘the cup and table of demons’ (1 Cor. 10:21). On the basis of this, Paul states why the Corinthians must abstain from idolatrous pagan cultic rituals. His reason is Christological; the Christian cultic meal is centred on body and blood of Christ. ‘You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons’ (10:21). For the Corinthians the answer to their theological dilemma on idolatry is Christological; Christians belong to Christ, not idols. In this sense Paul sees Christ as the Corinthians’ deliverance from their idolatrous origins. Calvin notes the probable reason that Paul emphasises pagan feasts rather than the act of idol worship. Corinthian Christians were unlikely to have participated in direct acts of

<sup>23</sup> W. Meeks, “‘And Rose Up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Cor. 10.1-22”, *Journal for The Study of The New Testament* 16 (1982), pp. 64-78.

<sup>24</sup> D. Brown, *1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark) cit. in Geoffrey Wilson, *1 Corinthians* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), p. 145.

idolatry. They were, however, under social pressure to attend feasts held in honour of these pagan deities; 'base ceremonies, which were tokens of idolatry'.<sup>25</sup>

Second, the Israelites 'put Christ to the test' (*mede ekpeirazomen ton christon, kathos tines auton eteirasan*). The relationship between their idolatry and their 'testing Christ' must be explored. Paul's reference is to Numbers 21:5. Here the Israelites in the wilderness are recorded as denouncing Yahweh's act of deliverance from Egypt and decrying manna as *q'loqel* (worthless). Yahweh's response was to send serpents which killed many of the Israelites. Indeed, Paul's graphic use of the imperfect *apollunto* (literally 'lay perishing', a past-continuous form) emphasises the calamity of their situation. In response the Israelites repented and implored Moses to ask Yahweh that the serpents be removed. The divine reply was, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live' (Num. 21:8). In this context Paul focuses on their rejection of Yahweh as *deliverer* (Num. 21:5a, b) and as *provider* (Num. 21:5a, c). He isolates this rejection and describes it as 'tempting Christ'. The question which thus arises concerns Paul's use of Christological terminology; how could they tempt Christ in the pre-incarnation period?

Although it handles a new set of facts, this is essentially the same question as has already been asked of 1 Corinthians 10:4c: how could Christ be their rock before the incarnation? It is therefore possible (and necessary for consistency) to answer using the same hermeneutical principles. In what sense was Christ present to be tempted by the Israelites? It is noteworthy in the passing that Jesus applies this incident to himself in John 3:14-15: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.' According to Calvin Christ was present in the wilderness through the Angel of the LORD. Whether he would place the Angel in the category of theophany or Christophany is unclear. 'Let us then regard it as a settled point, that the angel was the Son of God.'<sup>26</sup> The reformer holds that the term *Christ* 'from having a signification that corresponds with his human nature...was not as yet applicable to the Son of God, but it was assigned to him by the communion of properties'.<sup>27</sup> For Calvin Jesus' presence was as the Son of God rather than the Christ, and this through the Angel of Yahweh. Such an approach is consistent with the earlier handling of Christ as their rock.

<sup>25</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 323.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Having detailed the Israelites' drinking from and testing Christ Paul summarises both in a single command (10:14): *dioper* (literally, 'for this very reason') *pheugete apo tes eidololatrias*. What is fascinating here is how readily Paul relates Christology to iconology. His logic works as follows: Christ was previously found only in shadows and types, but now he is now openly known by the Corinthians; therefore, they should flee from idolatry. It is in this sense that Christ is the great divine iconoclast. He is the *eikon* through which the believer has seen the Father; hence, Paul's abhorrence at Christians participating at any level in idolatry. This theme will now be developed through an examination of Pauline Christology in Colossians 1:12-15.

Helyer interestingly relates 1 Corinthians 10 to Colossians 1:15 through the topic of cosmic Christology. He writes that Paul 'does appear to ascribe to Christ an historical presence in those events' and refuses to 'reduce this passage to allegorical language representing the spiritual realities currently being experienced by the Corinthian believers'.<sup>28</sup> Paul makes clear that when the Israelites were falling into idolatry, Jesus was Lord of all. This is intimately connected with the awesome cosmic Christology of Colossians 1.

### *Christ as the image of God: Christology in Colosse*

This study began in Exodus. There the salvation context of the decalogue was highlighted as the primary Old Testament context in which idolatry is to be understood. After this Paul's Christological teaching on idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10 again reverted to the time of the exodus. What will be demonstrated in this section is that another exodus picture provides the backdrop for the ultimate divine act of iconoclasm; the revelation of Jesus as *eikon tou theou tou aoratos*.

The chapter in question, and in particular verses 15-20, contains some of the most important Christological truths in the New Testament. Some scholars have argued that the verses are the quotation of a hymn.<sup>29</sup> Schweizer<sup>30</sup> claims that this hymn was 'probably known and sung often' by the Colossians. Such an assumption is doubted by Behr<sup>31</sup> and openly

<sup>28</sup> L. Helyer, 'Cosmic Christology and Col. 1.15-20', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/2 (June 1994), pp. 235-46.

<sup>29</sup> R. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (New Century Bible, Oliphants, 1974), pp. 61-4; R. Roth, 'Christ and the Powers of Darkness: Lessons from Colossians', *Word and World* 6.3 (Summer 1986), pp. 336-44.

<sup>30</sup> E. Schweizer, 'Colossians 1.15-20', *Review and Expositor* 87 (Winter 1990), pp. 97-104.

<sup>31</sup> J. Behr, 'Colossians 1.13-20: A Chiastic Reading', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40.4 (Issue 4, 1996), pp. 247-64.

disputed by Wright.<sup>32</sup> Of greater likelihood is that the verses form a piece of Greek poetry.<sup>33</sup> Such poetry is outstanding in form but much more so in terms of its Christological content.

In Colossians 1:12-14 Paul reminds the Colossians of their new covenant privileges. God has 'qualified' them 'to share in the inheritance of the saints in light' (1:12). In the following verse Paul writes, *hos errusato hemas ek tes exousias tou skotous kai metestesen eis ten basileian tou huious tes agapes autou*. What is particularly striking here is that echoes of the exodus are found in Paul's language. 'Of prime importance in the interpretation of this passage is the fact that, in both vocabulary and imagery, it is based on the Old Testament.'<sup>34</sup> The verb *errusato* (from *ruomai*, 'deliver') is used in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 78:9 in reference to God as Israel's deliverer in the exodus. Its aorist middle tense describes an already realised eschatology. That the Colossians have already been taken from their Egypt is beyond doubt. In Colossians 1:12-13 Paul refers to both light (*en to photi*) and darkness (*tou skotous*). Such a progression is not intended to parallel Gnostic dualism, but rather works to emphasise the dramatic nature of the Colossians' deliverance.<sup>35</sup> In 1:13 Paul then similarly juxtaposes the domain of darkness and the kingdom of his beloved Son. The grammar of this verse is carefully constructed:

1:13a	delivered	from	the authority	of darkness
1:13b	transferred	into	the kingdom	of his beloved son

That God is the sole subject of such a substantial predicate (*hos*) resonates with the Old Testament exodus salvation paradigm. Two other Old Testament echoes can be detected in these verses. First, the verb behind 'redemption' in 1:14 (*lutroo*) has clearly recognisable overtones from the Israelites' time in Egypt (Exod. 13:13). It is used in the divine promise of deliverance (Exod. 6:6, LXX) and in Deuteronomy is used almost exclusively of the exodus itself. Second, God is referred to as the exodus redeemer in Psalm 78:35. Paul sums up the Colossians' exodus experience in 1:14b; it is 'the forgiveness of sins'. Wright recognises the "'exodus" ideas of 1.12-14' as belonging 'exactly where they are in relation to the

<sup>32</sup> N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> For a thorough overview of different approaches to the structure of this passage see, J. Lamp, 'Wisdom in Col. 1.15-20: Contribution and significance', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (March 1998), pp. 45-53.

<sup>34</sup> J. Behr, p. 249.

<sup>35</sup> T. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, eds. S. Driver, A. Plummer and C. Briggs (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1985), p. 207.

poem<sup>36</sup>. At this point the Old Testament decalogue (in its preamble and first two commandments) and Paul's Christ-poem (in its introduction and opening statement) are operating out of highly similar paradigms:

**Exodus 20:1-6**

I am the LORD your God, your deliverer

You shall have no other gods before me

You shall not attempt to reproduce the image of God

**Colossians 1:12-15**

The Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness

His beloved Son is our sole king

Christ is the image of the invisible God

The primary difference between these two paradigms is that the former is stated negatively, whereas the latter is expressed positively. 'The Decalogue could have been stated positively throughout as well as negatively, for moral law is always doublesided. Every moral act is at the same time also a refraining from a contrary mode of action that could have been taken.'<sup>37</sup> Is it legitimate to see Colossians 1:12-15a as a suitable positive restatement of Exodus 20:1-6? An answer to this question must first ask what Paul means when he describes Christ as the image of God. Several options are presented.

First is the understanding that this refers to the incarnation. Lucas is a proponent of such an interpretation which 'must be governed by the fact that the glory of the *invisible* God has actually been manifested to people through Christ. This must therefore refer to the incarnation'.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach finds support in John 1:14-18 and is also the position of Calvin. Second, Markus Barth<sup>39</sup> renders *aoratou* in a factual, pragmatic way. He argues that humankind is incapable of perceiving God as ruler of the cosmos, and because of this, *image* should be understood primarily in reference to Genesis 1:26-28. Barth's understanding of the *imago Dei* is one of dominion over the earth and contains little thought of divine self-revelation in the image. This, perhaps, is the weakness in such an interpretation of Christ as simply the divine ruler. God's highest act of self-revelation in Genesis 1 was the creation of the human being. In God's

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<sup>36</sup> N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> Kaiser, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> D. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1980), p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> M. Barth, *Colossians* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 249-50.

eyes it elevates the 'good' to become 'very good'. Third, some commentators take all of Colossians 1:1-15 as 'descriptive of the Word before the Incarnation'.<sup>40</sup> However, Paul's chosen verb tense (*estin*) clearly shows that Christ currently is the image of the invisible God.

In trying to discern the meaning of 1:15a it is prudent to consider Paul's use of *eikon* in Colossians. In this epistle the word is used twice (1:15; 3:10). Paul's context must also be recognised. Although Colossians never directly quotes from the Old Testament it alludes to several Jewish disputes which presuppose an awareness of the Old Testament (2:16-17). In addition to this it contains allusions to biblical texts and concepts. These also point to the epistle being written against the backdrop of Old Testament religion (1:6, 10, 14; 2:11, 13-14). For Paul twice to use the concept of 'image of God' in such a context the most obvious connection the reader will make is with Genesis 1:24-30.<sup>41</sup> What is important at this point is that Scripture, in both Testaments, refers to humankind as the 'image of God' (Gen. 1:24-30; 1 Cor. 11:7). Does Paul hold Christ to be the 'image of the unseen God' in any unique way?

The two references to the *imago Dei* in Colossians make clear that Paul does regard Christ's divine image bearing as distinctive. In 1:15 Christ's status as the *eikon tou theou* is unqualified. Paul's dramatic contrast between the emphatic *aoratou* and *eikon* highlights how fully one can see the invisible God in Christ.<sup>42</sup> In 3:10 the Christian's image bearing is in view. Ruined by sin but undergoing repair by grace this believer has 'put on the new man' which is being 'renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator'. Much sanctification is required before God can be clearly seen in the believer. The God-Man, however, needs no such improvement. Whoever has seen him has seen the Father (cf. John 14:9).

### Summary

At this point, one might ask what Paul's theology of the *imago Dei* in Colossians has to do with idolatry. The following should be noted:

First, Yahweh has reserved complete control over his image rights. These rights have been exercised twice: initially with the creation of humankind in his image, and then in the revelation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Second, although fallen humankind continues to bear the

<sup>40</sup> T. Abbott, p. 209.

<sup>41</sup> A thorough investigation of the *imago Dei* in Gen. is outwith the scope of this article. For a succinct summary of various viewpoints (Classical Reformed, Roman Catholic, Lutheran etc.) see J. Murray, 'Man in the Image of God', *Collected Writings of John Murray 2: Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), pp. 34-46.

<sup>42</sup> T. Abbott, p. 210.

*imago Dei* its image bearing has been grossly distorted by the fall and now requires renewal (Col. 3:10). In contrast Christ needs no renewal as the *eikon tou theou*. Third, Colossians 3 provides a context in which both humankind's idolatry (3:5) and fallen image bearing are dealt with (3:10). Johnson provides sage guidance in this regard:

But what does it mean to be renewed according to the image of God? Does this point to a renewed function of exercising dominion over the world (as Christ does) by the new humanity? This seems to be a logical direction; but it is one in which Colossians does not go. Instead, Colossians points to the supremacy of Christ. He is everything...So to be renewed in the image of God refers to the process of becoming like Christ. He is already the image of God; he has dominion.<sup>43</sup>

What is thus apparent is that it is only in Christ that man finds freedom from idolatry. One flees from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14) by pursuing Christ, the invisible made visible.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction two questions were posed: what is idolatry, and why is it a sin? The hypothesis was put forward that the answers to these questions are ultimately Christological. Having thus followed a path through the Old and New Testaments it remains to be asked, can these questions be answered? If so, in what sense are those answers ultimately Christological? The title of this article, 'Image Rights and Iconoclasm', holds the key to these answers.

In order to understand what idolatry is one must grasp the covenantal context of the decalogue, particularly in its preamble and first two commandments. Within the covenant terms Yahweh reserves for himself an absolute right of self-disclosure. Idolatry occurs when humankind acts in breach of this term and sets out predicating Yahweh without divine revelation. It is undergirded by a fundamental attitude of unbelief towards God and his salvation. Its nature as an act of covenant betrayal explains its sinfulness. However, if this can be said from the Old Testament alone, why pursue the aforementioned Christological hypothesis? Quite simply the divine concern in Scripture is not only to identify and define sin, but also to isolate and then defeat it. This is as true of idolatry as it is of any other sin. That God has set about the destruction of idolatry through the incarnation of his Son requires such a Christological line of thought. As

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<sup>43</sup> D. Johnson, 'The Image of God in Colossians', *Didaskalia* 3.2 (April 1992), pp. 9-15.

has been demonstrated from Corinthians and Colossians Jesus' status as the unimpaired image of God necessarily spells the eventual demise of all idolatry. Idolatry was mortally wounded when the Son of God became incarnate. It is in this light that Jesus himself stands out as the ultimate iconoclast. He is a jealous God who will share his glory with no other.

By most fully disclosing his image while enfleshing his Son God has set about redeeming his people from every sin, including the sin of idolatry. The idol factory of the human heart finds its only cure in the *eikon tou theou tou aoratou*. Human beings restlessly worship lesser icons until they worship the true divine icon, the person of Christ. In putting on the new man fleeing idolatry and being renewed in the image of one's creator all roads ultimately lead to Christ. He is the authentic divine self-revelation in whom the believer has seen the Father. Furthermore, he is the great reason that Christians, whatever else they may be, should never be idolaters. Jesus Christ is thus both the divine icon and the divine agent of iconoclasm; those who follow him should see the wrongness and redundancy of all other icon worship. In closing, Calvin's wisdom seems appropriate:

[God] is revealed to us in Christ alone. For in Christ he shews [sic] us his entire righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self. We must, therefore, beware of seeking him elsewhere, for everything that would set itself off as a representation of God, apart from Christ, will be an idol.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, tr. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 150.

# THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE SECULAR: DOUBLE PREVENIENCE IN KARL BARTH'S ETHICS OF RECONCILIATION

BENJAMIN MYERS

John Milbank has famously argued that there is no independent 'secular' reality to which the church must somehow adapt its message and practice.<sup>1</sup> The church is not to be contextualised within the broader reality of a secular world; on the contrary, the church is *wider* than the world, and the church's own life discloses the world's reality as a world that is never truly 'secular' or autonomous. But while Milbank's project posits the church itself as the society which eliminates the possibility of secularity Karl Barth's work offers an alternative – and more compelling – theological response to 'the secular'. For Barth, the answer to the question of secularity is to be found not in the institution or history of the church as such, but in the church's *witness* to a reality which precedes it and in a particular ontology of the relation between God and world as it is established in the man Jesus.

Such a theological critique of the possibility of the secular was a persistent motif throughout Barth's career. His refusal to take seriously Rudolf Bultmann's 'demythologising' program hinged on this point: whereas Bultmann assumed the existence of an autonomous secular sphere – the world of 'modern scientific man' – to which the church's message had to be adapted, Barth simply insisted that there is *no such world*, that the notion of a godless, secular sphere is a fictitious construct which must itself be demythologised. For Barth, the church's message discloses the true reality of the world; the 'new world of the Bible'<sup>2</sup> is the *only* world that exists, so that any attempt to 'translate' the church's witness into some broader, ostensibly neutral discourse is already a betrayal of that witness.

The theological ontology which Barth develops so expansively in the *Church Dogmatics* can also be read as a sustained refusal of the possibility of a godless world. Indeed, as Barth himself announces in the preface to *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, his doctrine of reconciliation unfolds as 'an

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<sup>1</sup> J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (2d ed.; Oxford, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> K. Barth, 'Die neue Welt in der Bibel', in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Munich, 1925), pp. 18–32.

intensive, although for the most part quiet, debate with Rudolf Bultmann<sup>3</sup> – where Bultmann assumes the priority of a neutral and self-evident secular reality, Barth's ontology posits the absolute ontic and epistemological priority of divine action in Jesus Christ. From this perspective the notion of a 'godless world' becomes a mere contradiction in terms.

In the unfinished ethical section of *Church Dogmatics* IV, published posthumously as *The Christian Life*,<sup>4</sup> Barth construes this theological ontology in terms of what might be called *double prevenience*: Jesus is the one in whom God has definitively turned towards humanity, and he is also the corresponding movement of humanity towards God. This two-fold movement is itself the reality of the world; the world's 'realness' is enacted in Christ's prevenient divine-human action. As I will indicate in this paper such a theological description of reality issues in a rigorous refusal to concede autonomy to any sphere of godless secularity.

### PREVENIENT ACTION

Barth's entire ethics of reconciliation is posited on the absolute distinction between divine action and human action and on the irreversible priority of the former over the latter. This is the whole point of Barth's controversial distinction between water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Here he affirms that the Christian life, which is founded on baptism, has both an objective and a subjective element: the divine action and the human response. In water baptism 'we have the wholly different action of two inalienably distinct subjects'.<sup>6</sup> There is first of all 'the action of God in his address to the human', and then, corresponding to this divine action, there is 'the action of the human in his turning towards God'.<sup>7</sup> According to Barth, both these acts have taken place definitively in the history of Jesus. A person's turning towards God in faithfulness, he says, 'is the work of this faithful God', and this work is already 'perfectly accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ'.<sup>8</sup> This means that Jesus is himself the foundation of the Christian life, since he is both the divine movement towards humanity and the corresponding human movement towards God. As Eber-

<sup>3</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1956–77) IV/1, p. ix.

<sup>4</sup> The material was published in German in 1976 and was translated as K. Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV/4, Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> This distinction is articulated in the fragment on baptism in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

hard Jüngel notes, therefore, Barth's entire doctrine of baptism highlights the christological distinction that 'in Jesus Christ, *God* became human – and God became *human*'.<sup>9</sup> Divine action and human action are unified and differentiated in the one history of Jesus Christ. This conception of Christian ethics builds on the theological anthropology developed earlier in the *Church Dogmatics* where Barth had characterised Jesus as 'the real human' – the one who fittingly corresponds to God, and therefore the one in whom 'the ontological determination of humanity is grounded'.<sup>10</sup> In the strictest sense, therefore, all Christian existence is existence 'in Christ'. It is active participation in the subjectivity of Jesus' own existence; it is, as Jüngel observes, correspondence (*Entsprechung*) to an action which has always already preceded it.

This sharp concentration on the priority of divine action over human action continues throughout Barth's ethics of reconciliation in *The Christian Life*. For Barth, all human action can be properly understood only in the context of the prior reality of God's gracious action. The kingdom of God is 'the new thing that precedes the beginning of all [human] action'.<sup>11</sup> Every human response to God is already preceded by this 'new thing', by God's own prevenient reality. Indeed, as a kind of limit-concept, Barth can even say that the kingdom of God 'would still be what it is' even if it never produced any human response.<sup>12</sup> Human agency adds nothing to the divine act; it neither validates nor completes the prior work of God, but it simply participates in a reality which is always there in advance.

This understanding of divine prevenience forms the centre of Barth's account of the knowledge of God. The fact that God is known precedes all actual human knowledge so that God is (objectively) 'very well known in the world' even when he is (subjectively) still unknown.<sup>13</sup> God has already turned towards humanity in grace; he has already elected humanity for himself and himself for humanity. For this reason, God is 'objectively a very well known and not an unknown God'.<sup>14</sup> Barth's use of the term 'knowledge' here is admittedly rather ambiguous: God would be 'known' even if no one had yet participated in this knowledge – just as in *Church Dogmatics I/1* Jesus Christ is both the God who reveals and the human who knows God in his self-revelation. Human knowledge of God thus depends entirely on the prevenient act of God; it is only ever a response to

<sup>9</sup> E. Jüngel, 'Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe: Ein Hinweis auf ihre Probleme', in *Barth-Studien* (Gütersloh, 1982), p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> *CD III/2*, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> *The Christian Life*, p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

what has already been decided by God's electing grace in Jesus Christ. In order to correspond subjectively to the knowledge of God we must simply 'recognize' what is already the case. In other words, when we correspond to the objectivity of God we are also corresponding to human nature itself as a nature wholly oriented towards God. To awaken to the reality of God is at the same time to awaken to one's own true humanity.

In similar fashion Barth argues that the petition 'hallowed be thy name' does not imply that God's holiness depends on any human or ecclesial action. 'God already made himself known in his free grace and already hallowed his name in a far more unequivocal manner than anything Christianity has ever done or will do.'<sup>15</sup> God preceded all our action when he 'determine[d] for himself and orient[ed] to himself the nature of man, his human essence, in its irreversibly good creation'.<sup>16</sup> Long before we had ever prayed for the hallowing of God's name, the name of God was 'already holy in the world'.<sup>17</sup> The only world that exists is the world in which God's name is holy. The church's role, therefore, is not to hallow God's name, not to actualise God's holiness in the world, not to establish God as the world's Lord. Instead, our role consists simply in following what God himself does in the world. God precedes and we follow. God acts and we correspond. 'Gott spricht' and 'der Mensch entspricht'.<sup>18</sup> This sharply differentiated relation between divine and human action lies at the heart of Barth's ethical thought in *The Christian Life*.

Indeed, it is precisely in order to clarify the structure of this divine-human relation that Barth characterises ethics as 'invocation of God'.<sup>19</sup> Prayer is, in John Webster's words, the 'paradigmatic human moral action',<sup>20</sup> since it is an act of pure *response*. On the one hand it is a genuine human act – not merely one of private inwardness, but a real outward movement, charged with its own 'political and even cosmic' significance.<sup>21</sup> But on the other hand this act is the very opposite of autonomous self-determination; it is mere humble response to the divine act. By God's grace human beings are set free for this authentically human action. By grace we are liberated to call upon God and to address God as our 'dear

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> E. Jüngel, 'Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie: Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths', in *Barth-Studien*, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup> *The Christian Life*, pp. 85–109.

<sup>20</sup> J. Webster, *Barth* (London, 2000), p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> *The Christian Life*, p. 95.

Father'<sup>22</sup> – and that means to correspond to God's own prevenient action. Divine freedom and human freedom, therefore, are not a zero-sum game; there can be no competition between the two, since the freedom of human agents consists precisely in a rightly ordered correspondence to the free act of God. In Barth's words:

The grace of God is the liberation of [human beings] for free, spontaneous, and responsible cooperation...By God's free grace these people are not marionettes who move only at his will. They are given the status of subjects who are able and willing to act, able and willing to do what is appropriate to them in dealing with him, able and willing to call upon him as the Father of Jesus Christ and therefore as their Father and also as the Father of all people.<sup>23</sup>

Human beings thus find their proper place – their true freedom – in correspondence to the gracious action of God. They are 'subjectivated' by the prevenient subjectivity of God.<sup>24</sup>

Crucially, though, Barth takes this argument a step further. The proper human response to God, he observes, has already been performed by Jesus Christ. Jesus himself addressed God as Father, and in this way 'he founded calling on God'.<sup>25</sup> Jesus has thus already taken Christians up 'into the movement of his own prayer'.<sup>26</sup> The paradigmatic human action of invoking God already precedes us; we can correspond to God's gracious summons only by participating in Christ's own movement towards God, his own invocation of God as Father. We ourselves can pray precisely because '*he* knows the Father, *he* loves him, *he* is in him, *he* is one with him, *he* reveals him'.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, then, God's action remains prevenient; and on the other hand, the proper corresponding *human* action also precedes our own response, since Jesus has perfectly and definitively enacted both God's movement towards us and our human response to God.

In the same way Barth's account of knowledge accentuates the prevenience of Jesus' knowledge of God. God is objectively known in his own lordly actuality; but even the corresponding subjective human knowledge of God is also prevenient. It is not as though God merely reveals him-

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 58–9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> On the concept of the 'subjectivation' of human agency, see B. Myers, 'From Faithfulness to Faith in the Theology of Karl Barth,' in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle (Carlisle, forthcoming 2009).

<sup>25</sup> *The Christian Life*, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

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self objectively, leaving us to perform an autonomous response. On the contrary, the subjective response to God is already enacted prior to any movement on our part. The locus of this subjective act is the man Jesus who is himself not only the objective revelation of God to us but also the subjective human response to God. In Barth's words: 'As we search for a knowledge of God in the world that is unequivocally achieved both objectively on God's side and subjectively on man's...., we can think only of the one Jesus Christ.'<sup>28</sup> Jesus himself is thus 'the God who is finally, totally, and definitively well known', just as he is also the human being in whom God is perfectly known.<sup>29</sup> In Jesus' knowledge of God, Barth says, a decision is made concerning our knowledge, so that all human beings' subjective knowledge of God is already 'enclosed' in Jesus' own prevenient act of knowing.<sup>30</sup> We respond to God only by participating in Jesus' prevenient response.

I have suggested that such a christological rendering of divine-human action might be described as a *double prevenience*. The structure of this concept is the same both in Barth's doctrine of baptism and, before that, in his doctrine of election: Jesus Christ is the movement of God towards us just as he is our corresponding movement towards God. As God Jesus precedes our action *objectively*; and as human, he precedes our action *subjectively*. In this way Barth envisions the absolute priority of grace over all human action. Jesus Christ is the event of reconciliation both in his divine faithfulness to us and in his human faithfulness to God. The reality of what it means to be human is thus enclosed in Christ. Our own humanness lies outside ourselves, and we *become* truly human only as we participate in the prevenient reality of Jesus' faithfulness before God.

## THE ABSURD POSSIBILITY

On this basis Barth thus argues that all human attempts to deny God are unmasked as futile denials of reality. To posit a sphere of autonomous secularity – to imagine a world without God – is to 'kick against the goads' (Acts 26:14). It is to refuse the reality that has already been established in Jesus Christ. Now, because of Jesus, ignorance of God 'has been fundamentally outdated'; it is merely 'a brute fact devoid of meaning or basis'; it is 'meaningless and nonsensical', a 'monstrous lie'.<sup>31</sup> In relation to Jesus, therefore, Barth insists that 'ignorance of God can be recorded

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 124–5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

and defined only as an excluded and absurd possibility'.<sup>32</sup> God is already there; the world is, by its very nature, a world that knows God; there is simply no worldly reality outside the God–world relation which has been enacted in Jesus Christ. A good deal of Barth's ethics of reconciliation is thus devoted to unmasking the 'absurd possibility' of godlessness, and to insisting that the reality of Jesus Christ is the world's *only* reality.

Even though the world already knows God through the human agency of Jesus Barth nevertheless observes that there are various forms of ignorance of God which assert themselves in the world. One such form is intellectual atheism, which Barth describes as 'the most primitive form of the ignorance of God in the world'.<sup>33</sup> Atheism, for Barth, is interesting precisely because it discloses the impossibility of *true* ignorance of God. Atheism tries to deny that God is known, but instead it simply shows 'that while the world to whom God is unknown would like to deny him, it cannot in fact do so'.<sup>34</sup> In denying that God has a place in the world atheism necessarily posits a 'God' as one particular datum in the world alongside others – which is to say, it posits and then rejects a god who has nothing to do with 'the true and living God' who reveals himself in Jesus.<sup>35</sup> In this way – here Barth's argument echoes Anselm's ontological argument<sup>36</sup> – atheism demonstrates the impossibility of a thoroughgoing denial of the knowledge of God; atheism proves its own incapacity to render God unthinkable. God is already known in the world. He is known by the man Jesus – *that* is the inescapable reality of our world.

Further, Barth draws attention to the 'belligerent character' of atheism, its persistent tendency to erupt into polemics.<sup>37</sup> If God were really unknown to the world, why does atheism feel the need for such polemics? Why does the world 'fight God so excitedly' instead of merely resting content with the non-existence of God?<sup>38</sup> In Barth's view this fierce militancy discloses the fact that atheism 'finds itself unsettled, pressured, and threatened by the objective knowledge of God, so that it has to wrestle and debate with him'.<sup>39</sup> It is so anxious to resist God precisely because God's reality is so inescapable in its sheer prevenient *thereness*. Even as

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See K. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (London, 1960).

<sup>37</sup> *The Christian Life*, p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 128–9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

atheism denies that there is a God, God is in fact already present, already unsettling, pressuring, and threatening it in lofty supremacy over it'.<sup>40</sup>

Atheism, then, is a flight from reality. It is the construction of a fictitious 'secular' world in which God is absent and unknown. It is an attempt to take refuge in this world of secularity – a world that does not exist! The *only* world that exists, the *real* world, is the world to which God has revealed himself, the world that God has grasped and loved in Jesus Christ. Jesus is, we might say, the space and time within which the world has its being. The world *is* world only in him; he is both God's prevenient turn towards the world and the world's corresponding conversion to God. He is the world's reality, its truth and actuality (*wirklichkeit*). For Barth, therefore, 'the world simply cannot be absolutely godless, as it would like to be'.<sup>41</sup> A godless world is sheer fiction; there is no sphere of secularity, no space or time which is not already preceded and constituted by the divine-human action of Jesus Christ.

According to Barth, then, rebellion against God is nothing else than an absurd possibility, a mask that conceals the truth about God and ourselves. Speaking of those who wish to flee from God, Barth says: 'there is none to whom [God] has not come first, long before the flight began. There is none whom he does not precede from all eternity'.<sup>42</sup> Rebellion against God is therefore sharply relativised – it is seen to be only *relatively* real – when it is placed in the context of the antecedent reality of God's gracious action. To be human is to be oriented towards God through grace; indeed, earlier in the *Dogmatics* Barth had argued that the very essence of creatureliness is a teleological orientation towards grace.<sup>43</sup> But sinful persons fail to recognise this fundamental determination of their being, and so they deceive themselves. And for just this reason 'it is in vain that God is well known...in nature, that "what can be known about God is plain to them" (Rom. 1:19)'.<sup>44</sup> Although God is objectively well known those who reject God fail to recognise God. This failure, however, 'does not alter in the least the objective knowledge of God in the world'.<sup>45</sup> The individual is always already 'recognized by God', and thus always has the opportunity 'to recognize God in return and therefore to know him'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> See for instance *CD III/1*, p. 97: 'By its whole nature the creature is destined and disposed for [God's] covenant. There is no peculiarity in man and the world which does not as such aim at this covenant.'

<sup>44</sup> *The Christian Life*, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Already from eternity, in the decree of election, God has decided on the meaning and reality of human existence. Already from eternity God has made himself known. To reject the reality of God, therefore, is simply to don a mask, to choose an absurd possibility, to opt out of reality. In the same way Barth insists that the demonic powers which oppose God have no proper reality; they are merely 'pseudo-objective realities' which exist only as a lie – even though, strangely enough, they are 'still powerful realities which make a fine display of their lying objectivity'.<sup>47</sup> They exist, in other words, only as baffling instantiations of what does *not* exist; they construct a godless world through their refusal of the world's true reality in Jesus Christ. Even godlessness itself is thus a kind of perverse witness to the reality of God. The sheer *nothingness* of godlessness is a witness to the world's reality, a reality which is real just because it has been enacted by the divine–human agency of Jesus Christ.

#### MASKS AND DISGUISES

All this explains why the metaphor of 'disguises' comes to play such an important role in Barth's depiction of sinful human action. True and fitting human action is that which corresponds to God's prevenient act in Jesus. But in different ways human beings persistently seek to disguise themselves, to conceal the truth about their own existence before God.

The human person, Barth says, tries to identify herself politically or economically or ecclesiastically as a member of a particular nation or social stratum, as a believer in particular doctrines or ideas. But all such forms of self-identification are merely 'garbs or masks' that thinly veil the reality of human identity.<sup>48</sup> They are disguises – the disguises of 'man at work, man at play, business man, organization man, or' – with a disapproving glance at Bultmann – 'so-called modern man'.<sup>49</sup> They are disguises in as much as human beings seek their identity in these seemingly autonomous and non-theological realities rather than in the prevenient reality of humanity's reconciliation to God in Jesus.

In what, then, does the identity of the human person consist? According to Barth, human identity is constituted by the relation into which we have already been gathered through the electing grace of God:

In, with, and under all the apparatus by which [the human being] is surrounded and with which he surrounds himself and usually hides himself, he is the being who, whether he knows that God is on his side or not, is to achieve his

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

right, live in dignity, and enjoy freedom, peace, and joy, but who...does not achieve his purpose.<sup>50</sup>

The reality of a person's existence is that 'God is on his side' because of God's prevenient act in Jesus Christ. In reality the individual has already been elected to participate in freedom and joy. But strangely enough this objective reality does not find expression in the concrete form of an individual's life. And for this reason the person suffers amidst the absurd possibility of life without God. In Barth's words: 'Man himself *suffers*, and he fights tooth and nail against admitting this even to himself, let alone to others. He acts – this is the point of his disguises – as if he does not suffer.'<sup>51</sup> The human being suffers because he inhabits an unreal world, a world which amounts to little more than an unconvincing veneer of godlessness. Even in this self-appointed anguish, however, the human being remains grasped by God: 'This one who suffers is man himself whom God loves.'<sup>52</sup> Again, godlessness itself bears witness to the impossibility of godlessness, and so to the sheer inescapable *realness* of the reality of God. Godlessness receives its defining *Angst* from the unbearable nearness of God.

For Barth, therefore, both Christians and non-Christians alike stand in the same ontic situation: both are loved by God, both have been grasped by God, both inhabit (whether willingly or reluctantly) the same world before God, both can find their identity only in Christ. The task of Christians is thus not to place themselves above others, but only to perceive the real identity of the human person. This will require looking beyond all masks and disguises so that we perceive the real person who stands before God and is loved by God. In Barth's words, Christians

do not believe at all that clothes make the man. They cannot be impressed or deceived...by the Sunday clothes or working clothes or fool's clothes in which they will often enough meet him. They will not fear him because of the armor and cut-and-thrust weapons with which he tries to impress them and behind which he simply hides his anxiety; they certainly will not fear him, because his coat has too many holes to conceal effectively the emptiness of his vanity and his real need.<sup>53</sup>

This merciful understanding, this *seeing*, involves profound solidarity. By perceiving and understanding the real person, we show that we are

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

this person's 'companions and friends', irrespective of the masks he may wear.<sup>54</sup> And in this way we bear witness to the reality of human existence itself; we gesture to the hope that stands over the life of all human beings; we become 'witnesses, shining lights of hope, to all people'.<sup>55</sup> The church's role is thus to bring glad tidings to all, to offer the world a glimpse of reality, to present to others 'the image of a strangely human person'.<sup>56</sup>

Members of the Christian community appear before the world as 'strangely human' precisely because their lives – even if only imperfectly and fleetingly – peel back the veil that conceals the reality of the world. In the church – not in its institutional practices as such, but in its *witness* to that which lies beyond itself – the veneer of godlessness and secularity is stripped back; the world appears for once in the reality of its relation to God in Jesus Christ. The *real* world appears, and the sad chimera of godlessness dissolves into the mist of its own futility and nothingness.

## CONCLUSION

For Barth, therefore, there is no 'secular' world, no world without God, no world in which God is not already present and known in his own luminous reality. The pursuit of godlessness is always a flight from reality; it is an absurd possibility, the construction of a fictitious world. In his ethics of reconciliation Barth thus emphasises the ways in which human beings try to cover the reality of the world with a veneer of godlessness. We wear masks, we don disguises, we construct a godless world, we try in vain to persuade ourselves that this is the *real* world. But the reality of the world has already preceded us in Jesus Christ so that all our masks and disguises are ultimately futile and ineffective. Godlessness is a mere nothing, and the light of Christ's reality dispels the vanity of this nothingness.

In this way Barth articulates the ontological impossibility of the secular in terms of the inescapable reality of God's own action in Jesus Christ. If this ontological vision is more compelling than John Milbank's response to secularity, it is precisely because Milbank's ecclesial ontology lacks grounding in *divine action*. While Milbank rightly diagnoses the problem of secularity and the historical constructedness of the idea of the secular his work is nevertheless pervaded by a fundamental christological deficit. He counters the possibility of secularity not with a theological appeal to divine action – not, that is, with any reference to *God* – but instead with an appeal to ecclesial practice. Here, Milbank's ecclesiology proves

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

incapable of sustaining the sheer weight that it is made to carry. Barth's theological ontology, in contrast, is from first to last a *christological* rendering of reality – a vision of Jesus Christ as the agent who enacts (and so constitutes) what is 'real'. Jesus is not subsumed within the broader reality of the church;<sup>57</sup> he is rather the one who *precedes* the church and to whom the church bears *witness*.

Against Milbank, therefore, we may conclude with Barth that it is not the church, but Jesus Christ, who makes genuine secularity impossible, and who dissolves the dark chimera of a godless world. The world receives its reality from an act which precedes it – an act of double prevenience, in which God turns to the world in love and the world responds to God in conversion. The world has its being, its reality, within the space and time opened up by this twofold movement. And for Barth, the name of this prevenient relation between God and world – the name of the world's reality – is Jesus Christ.

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<sup>57</sup> Compare J. Milbank, 'The Name of Jesus', in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford, 1997), 145–68.

## REVIEWS

### **The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World**

David F. Wells

Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 2008, 253pp, £14.99 ISBN 9781844742783

If I were a rich man I would buy this book for every church leader in Scotland. If I were a despot, a benevolent one of course, I would arrange for every evangelical church member in Scotland to read and discuss this book. It is a book for the hour.

Scottish evangelicalism has caught the disease; we are losing our minds and if we are not careful our souls. A revival in Florida with exploding tumours and gut-kicking evangelists is seen as having some value. A key Scottish evangelical organisation is sponsoring a preacher who advocates a most ungenerous heterodoxy, and the sharpness of the inerrancy of Scripture is being blunted. There is a herd of elephants within our evangelical sub-culture and David Wells is pointing them out.

David Wells is the author of several books which analyses and critiques the contemporary church scene. His other books are *No Place for Truth* (1993), *God in the Wasteland* (1994), *Losing our Virtue* (1998) and *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* (2005). These books are challenging and are well worth a read.

*The Courage to be Protestant* is a distillation and recasting of the arguments of the other books. Wells looks at evangelicalism in its present form and detects three main streams: classical evangelicalism, marketers and emergent. It is his opinion that the term 'evangelical' is 'a synonym for what is trite, superficial, and money grabbing, a byword for what has gone wrong with Protestantism'. The solution is to re-discover the dynamic and radical roots of historic Protestantism. In the Scottish context the term 'Protestantism' has been sullied by the men with beards who give away cheap newspapers outside Ibrox, but Wells observes, 'It takes no courage to sign up as a Protestant. After all, millions have done so throughout the West. They are not in any peril. To live by the truth of historic Protestantism, however, is an entirely different matter. That takes courage in today's context.'

It could be argued that the book is too Western-orientated and even limited to North America. The truth is that just as the golden arches are known all over the world, so also is the ubiquitous Perspex lectern of the American mega-church.

It could also be argued that it is a little too much of a jeremiad. Wells himself recognises that he is open to this type of accusation: that he is heavy on critique but light on cure. The truth is that the cure for the current crisis in the church is on every page of the book; the true church declares that God's holiness being what it is, and sin being what it is, the only possible mediator between God and sinners is the God-man, Jesus Christ. To his work we can add nothing, and from it nothing can be taken.

I only have one problem with the book. It does not concern the book itself but in how people may use the argument. Wells rightly observes, 'if the church is to be truly successful, it must be unlike anything else we find in life'. My concern is that our calling to be counter-cultural is seen as permission to be weird. *The Courage to be Protestant* is itself a model of contemporary reformed teaching where the teaching of Augustine, Calvin, Luther and Edwards is found side by side with references to i-Pods, Pepsi and Manny Ramirez.

If this book is taken seriously it will change your life and the life of your church.

*David C Meredith, Smithton-Culloden Free Church of Scotland,  
Inverness.*

## **Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics**

Richard A. Burrige

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007; 490pp., £20; ISBN 978 0 8028 4458 3

The central claim of this volume is that something crucial is missing from Richard Hays' influential work concerning *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. Richard Burrige (dean and director of NT studies at King's College London) contends that Hays' rule, principle, paradigm and symbolic world approaches to NT ethical appropriation are insufficient in themselves. Burrige argues that this insufficiency is evident in the apparent failure of these hermeneutical approaches to stem apartheid in South Africa. Only the meta-hermeneutical precondition of an open and inclusive interpretive community can prevent 'abusive or morally repugnant readings' of Scripture (p. 390).

Burrige asserts that such a meta-hermeneutical requirement is derivable from the examples of the historical Jesus, the evangelists' Jesus and Paul. This assertion is founded on an understanding of the gospels as bibliographic genre which, in turn, entails imitation via the Jewish custom of precedent or *ma'aseh* and the Graeco-Roman mimetic purpose in mimesis. In the Pauline epistles, calls to imitate Christ, and his follower

Paul, are similarly understood to advocate the open and inclusive community envisioned in the gospels.

Burridge begins to make his case by providing a brief overview of approaches to Christian ethics within British, German, American, Scandinavian, French and South African scholarship. Attention is also allotted to Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical and broadly sociological trajectories as well as to some of the very recent material in the field. The following chapter works through the source material on the historical Jesus and finds that He taught a rigorous ethic but maintained an "open pastoral acceptance of sinners" (p. 79). In chapter three Burridge turns his attention to Paul and detects a parallel desire for a mixed community in the Pauline churches and in Paul's overriding mandate to imitate Christ.

The next four chapters investigate the ethics of Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts and John respectively. Here Burridge isolates the ethical emphases of the gospels and finds echoes of the historical Jesus' concern for inclusive communities. In the final chapter Burridge contends that all of Hay's modes of ethical appropriation were utilized by South African Christians during apartheid but without significant agreement or profit. He proposes that an inclusive reading community is a necessary precondition for approximating the content of biblical ethics. Burridge's style is very readable and systematic throughout. The book incorporates an extensive bibliography and a helpful array of indexes.

Burridge enunciates a significant challenge to biblical ethics, namely, how to thwart oppressive readings. He is certainly right in affirming that we must ask of each proposed hermeneutical methodology whether it would 'work' in segregated South Africa, Nazi Germany and imperialist Europe. His emphasis on the imitation of Jesus' words and actions is commendable, as is his concern for listening to the untrained 'ordinary reader'. Because he does not distinguish between the invitational openness of proclamation and service to unbelievers and believer community openness (deprecating 1 Cor 5:10-11), Burridge assumes that the inclusiveness of the one warrants the inclusivity of the other. His Christian community is borderless — ultimately, there is no 'outside' (p. 393).

The tendency, to know more than the text does, also remains insufficiently defended. Burridge claims that Paul would have re-thought his undesirable moral mandates, being the 'creative theologian' that he was, had he enjoyed broader pastoral experience (p. 130). Burridge has astutely sensed that Hays' approach is not sufficiently determinate, it is nevertheless uncertain whether Burridge's solution of wedding historical-critical studies with an inclusive community would generate a stronger moral voice. By setting rules and principles aside (p. 396), he proposes a process rather than a destination — a process without stable moral guidance

on much, save borderless inclusion. Nonetheless, Burrige's work goes far to excite his readership unto the hermeneutical challenge of hearing Scripture's moral voice — a quest worthy of further pursuit.

*Ondrej Hron, Protestant Theological Faculty of Universitas Carolina Pragensis*

## **The Forgotten Christ**

Stephen Clark (ed)

IVP: Leicester, 2007, 256pp, £14.99 ISBN 9781844742103

I began reading this book on a flight to Chicago and its contents enabled my mind and heart to soar higher than my body. This volume contains six papers prepared for the second Affinity Theological Conference which was held in 2007, plus an introduction by Stephen Clark.

The first chapter is by Andrew McGowan and in it he details the background to the Creed of Chalcedon and shows the validity of its definitions in helping to assess denials of the divine and human natures of Christ. Chapter two, by Philip Eveson, looks at the inner or psychological life of Christ, discussing several important issues connected to the church's understanding of the human nature of Christ. Paul Wells, in the third chapter, considers the significance of the cry of dereliction from the cross, indicating that the Saviour was undergoing the wrath of God.

Chapter four, by Matthew Sleeman, focuses on the ascension and heavenly ministry of Jesus, opening up several doors of thought regarding what it means for the church on earth. Richard Gaffin, in the fifth chapter, deals with Jesus as the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. Chapter six, by G. K. Beale, leads readers to reflect on the divine identity of Jesus in the Book of Revelation.

As its subtitle states, this book is concerned with the majesty and mystery of God incarnate. The title indicates that truths of the person and work of Christ have been forgotten today, even in evangelical sections of the Christian church. While many reasons can be given for this state of affairs, it is important that the situation be addressed before it gets worse. The papers in this book open up essential aspects of who Jesus is, what he has already done as Saviour and Lord, and what he will yet do. Read carefully and thoughtfully, they will increase a sense of wonder as well as providing guidelines to keep us within orthodox thinking. My basis response, as I read the volume, was to thank God for the help given to those who gave us the definitions of Chalcedon.

As with all multi-authored books, there are differences between the style of each chapter and the depth of their contents. Nevertheless this is a very stimulating collection of essays and is worth a place in the library of

pastors and others wishing to understand truths about Christ. In case you are wondering, I did not finish reading the book during the flight. Thankfully, the descent back to earth did not mean that appreciation for what is going on in heaven was diminished. Instead, further reading of the volume only elevated my mind and heart and hopefully enabled me to set my mind on things above. I am sure that the book will do the same for you.

*Dr Malcolm Maclean, Scalpay*

## **Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion**

Brian Kay

Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2007, 199pp, £19.99 ISBN 9781842274088

Puritan theologians have been described as using a combination of writing style which is rigorous, scholastic, and tedious. Brian Kay writes to overcome some of that criticism. In this study he attempts to integrate doctrine and spirituality which underlies the theological thought of John Owen.

In order to understand theological spirituality one needs to understand, in particular, the doctrine of the Trinity. This, according to Brian Kay, was John Owen's unique contribution to Puritan thought. For those who believe that doctrine and spirituality have an integral relationship, this book will become an important read. Brian Kay's intention is to present Puritan spirituality, under the leadership of John Owen, as heart-warming rather than rigorously scholastic to the point of being dull. Kay's study presents Owen as avoiding the scholastic splitting of theology into unrelated parts.

The book is designed to explain Western spirituality at a deliberately personal level. Social implications beyond a type of individualism do not pertain to Kay's intention. He is very clear on this. The work begins with a discussion of twentieth century trinitarian thought in relation to spirituality, then moves to trinitarian thought and spirituality in the medieval era, and finally re-connects with John Owen's contribution. After laying this foundation, chapter five arrives at the heart of the investigation and develops the particularity of Owen's work on the Trinity and spirituality.

The book reveals important insights into John Owen's manner of developing spirituality. While being highly personal, Owen did not lose the way to vital living by creating his own personal experience as a model. It was Owen's intention to develop a redemptive- historical agenda through the trinitarian revelation which could then lead to an organic, vital spirituality. In other words, spirituality becomes centred in the trinitarian God rather than through anthropology. There is no doubt that an impor-

tant point is made. Owen's particular Puritan theology works to avoid the pitfalls of rigid scholasticism and, instead, enters into the more dynamic activity of spirituality required for current theological devotional life. Kay is setting up a theological model that is not out of step with present concerns regarding spirituality.

Chapter three is an invaluable piece of work in which Kay traces the medieval writers on Christian devotion and places them in relation to John Owen. The evaluative criteria is, according to the book's purpose, the interaction of devotional life and the trinitarian salvation history process. Chapter four continues the theme by demonstrating Owen's particular agenda and, then, chapter five is developed with a more concentrated emphasis. Time is taken, again, to investigate the theological place of the devotional life in light of the trinitarian concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not only in particularity but in essential union. Of particular interest is the explanation of prayer offered to each Person of the Trinity.

A few criticisms can be offered concerning this interesting study. There are some spelling and grammatical errors in the text, but fortunately these do not detract from the quality of the writing. Secondly, it appears that there is an ease of dependence upon the criticism of Cappadocian trinitarian thought through Alan Spence (pp. 106-109). Also, the implications of the ontological love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit given to humanity is in tension with limited atonement and this was passed over too quickly and handled in the traditional scholastic manner (pp. 135, 141-142).

Fortunately, none of these criticisms detract from the importance of this study as a highly recommended read for trinitarian theologians looking for a model of the integration of doctrinal work and devotional practice.

*David Rainey, Nazarene theological College, Didsbury*

## **The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians**

Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (eds)

Paternoster Press: Milton Keynes, 2006; 228pp., £14.99 ISBN 184227378 7

*The Suffering Body* is a collection of essays written by a variety of scholars from differing theological and ecclesiastical backgrounds. The majority of the papers were delivered in lecture form during the triennial meeting of the International Charismatic Consultation which took place in Salina, Malta on January 20-24, 2004, around the theme of 'The Suffering Church'.

While the blurb claims that the book has a special focus on Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity this was not always obvious from the content. This being said, the very questionable attitude towards Christian suffering and persecution espoused by exponents of what has become known as the 'Prosperity Gospel', was dealt with very early on by the editors. They noted that the acknowledgment of suffering as being 'a normal part of the Christian life' was 'a well-timed corrective' (p. xvii).

Ironically the most helpful, and in my opinion, relevant chapters were those written by Patrick Sookhdeo and Bob (Xiqiu) Fu, scholars who had no part in the 2004 Consultation meetings. Their writing unquestionably rose above that of the others, demonstrating far greater depth of knowledge on this subject.

Sookhdeo is the Executive Director of UK based Barnabus Fund, a mission serving the Persecuted Church. He is widely acknowledged as an expert in the field of Islam and the persecution of Christians in Islamic countries and has in the past advised the British government on the subject of Islam. He writes frankly on the situation facing Christians across the Middle East and goes even further by highlighting examples of persecution in North and East Africa, Indonesia and Pakistan. This essay is an extremely valuable and commendable assessment of a situation that has only deteriorated in the intervening years since the publication of this volume.

Fu, who currently heads China Aid Association, an American based organisation serving the Persecuted Church, writes on the current situation in China. He is well placed to do so as he himself has tasted persecution and suffering, having been imprisoned while leading a house church on the Chinese mainland. Writing on the eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics his essay was and is timely and helps to dispel the widely held belief, even in evangelical circles, that China is opening up as far as the relationship between Church and State is concerned.

Being candid I was largely disappointed by the remaining chapters. I found them to be a little mundane and not quite as relevant as one might have hoped or expected. Dr. Helen Rhee, a church historian and Assistant Professor of World Christianity at Westmont College in California, opens the study by providing a fairly comprehensive outline of some milestone events which took place during the first four centuries of Christianity.

Her analysis is followed by an examination of suffering as it relates to pneumatology by Dr. Keith Warrington of Regents Theological College, London. His study is followed by an interesting chapter which charts the suffering of believers within the Anabaptist movement from its inception right up to the events within today's Mennonite churches.

A number of the following chapters are also more historical in scope, particularly those relating to the former Soviet states and Eastern Europe. Though the era of communism is over in these areas, the essays are somewhat beneficial in that they map out the relationship between communism and certain branches of the church following the imposition of communist ideology. They serve to aid our understanding of the difficulties common to believers today in the remaining communist nations such as Laos, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba.

One disappointment, which may well betray a lack of real engagement with the Persecuted Church around the world, is a suggested prayer point made by Dr. Robeck Jr in the course of his contribution. Topping a list which he compiles suggesting an appropriate response to the 'current situation' is an appeal to 'Pray for the end of all religious persecution' (p.77). I cannot agree with this request as it does not fit with my theology of suffering and persecution or the message that comes from persecuted Christians themselves.

While I am open to correction, I can think of no one instance where Christ or the divinely inspired writers of the New Testament canon suggest or imply that persecution is something that the Church should hope to see ended. On the contrary, we are assured that seeking to follow Christ faithfully only leads to increased and by inference, prolonged persecution which will endure until the Second Advent of Christ (cf. Jn. 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12).

In conclusion, this is not the best book I have read on the subject but it is nevertheless a welcome addition to the library of titles that deal with the subject of Christian persecution and the theology of suffering. Though written by scholars it is not necessarily aimed at academics. On the whole the book is accessible to all and benefits from detailed endnotes which serve to encourage further study of what is arguably an extremely relevant and crucially important subject to the whole Body of Christ – we are one (Eph. 4:4-6).

*Malcolm Macleod, Steadfast Global, Isle of Lewis, UK*

## **Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory**

David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant (eds)

Apollon: Nottingham, 2008; 317pp., £19.99 ISBN 978781844742882

As the sub-title of the book suggests, this book is an investigation into the realm of literary theory and its relation to biblical interpretation. The book is thus not a final, definitive word on the subject matter; it is a first sounding, the beginnings of an examination, and the opening up of pos-

sibilities. The editors and essayists believe that literary theory has much to offer the interpreter of the Bible. They thus offer a broad sketch of the various methods in the discipline that will provide the reader with the opportunity 'to draw on the possibilities these methods suggest' (p. 15). The book begins with a brief introduction, and then divides into two parts.

The first section addresses general issues in literary theory and contains two essays: the first is by Grant Osborne ('Literary Theory in Biblical Interpretation'); the second is by S. D. Snyman ('A Structural-Historical Approach to Exegesis of the Old Testament'). Both of these essays cover much ground in a short compass. The basic premise of both is that one must engage in the art of biblical interpretation at a more sophisticated level than is evident in wide swaths of evangelicalism. They argue persuasively in their own ways for the necessary move from what Snyman refers to as a naïve interpretation of Scripture to one that is properly considered 'scientific', that is, one that is sensitive to the nature of the text as text. This scientific approach is a move beyond the pre-theoretical into the more nuanced and reflective encounter with the text.

The second section is concerned with specific literary approaches to biblical interpretation. These essays are 'Speech-act theory', by Richard Briggs, 'Genre Criticism and the Bible', by Jeannine Brown, 'Ambiguity', by David Firth, 'Poetics', by Jamie Grant, 'Rhetoric', by Peter Phillips, and 'Discourse Analysis', by Terrance Wardlaw. The essays in this section are insightful and illuminating. Each author helpfully lays out his or her topic and shows how one may properly use the particular subject under consideration in conversation with biblical material. The value of literary theory for biblical interpretation becomes abundantly clear in these sections, for the theories outlined in the essays are shown to bear interpretive fruit through an engagement with the biblical material.

Because the book is designed to be an introduction to literary theory and its use in biblical interpretation, it is well suited for use in the classroom. It would be an ideal textbook for those teaching an introductory course in hermeneutics. It would also be an excellent resource for those interested laypersons who want to become familiar with recent trajectories in biblical interpretation.

Several features of the book underscore these points. First, none of the essays presuppose prior knowledge of the subject-matter. The prose in each of the essays is clear and easy to follow. In addition, the essays are free from overly-technical jargon. Second, each essay ends with a bibliography. This helpfully provides the reader with immediate access to the specific works used in the essay, and also provides a pointer for un-

dertaking further, more detailed study. Third, each of the essayists uses footnotes. This contributes to the ease of reading.

However, one caveat is in order. The editors could have enhanced the value of this work as an introductory textbook with the addition of indices (e.g., Scripture, author, and subject). This would have provided the reader with an invaluable resource with which he or she could easily and quickly reference a particular topic of interest. Other than this very minor criticism, the book is well worth both the time and effort needed to read and digest it.

*Roland Mathews, Duncan, South Carolina*

### **Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study**

Gordon D. Fee

Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody MA, 2007, xxxi + 707pp, £26.99 ISBN 9781598560350

For thoroughness in New Testament exegesis and interpretation, Gordon Fee has always set a high standard and a good example, and his latest work on Paul's doctrine of the person and work of Christ meets every expectation. It is a work both of breadth and of depth, drawing on the entire Pauline corpus of literature to ask 'What did Paul think of Christ?' Having done so, this volume complements his earlier work *God's Empowering Presence*, a similar study on the Holy Spirit in the theology of Paul.

Fee introduces his task as one of 'looking for the Christology that emerges in each of the letters in turn and thus trying to analyze each letter on its own terms' (p.4). There is, after all, no explicitly Christological passage in Paul (with the exception, perhaps of Colossians 1:15-17), but the doctrine of the person and work of Christ is everywhere present.

For Fee, the theological dimension of this study is compounded by Paul's monotheism and by his primary interest in explicating our salvation in Christ. Fee does not wish to be driven by later Christological debates or the conclusions of later church councils; but he does wish to highlight the christocentrism of all of Paul's theology.

The study proper is divided into two parts: analysis and synthesis. The analysis looks at the Pauline letters in chronological order, beginning with the Thessalonian letters, the Corinthian correspondence, Galatians, Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians and the Pastoral Epistles. In each of these the approach is the same: a brief survey of the data is followed by an examination of relevant passages. The Greek text is highlighted throughout.

The synthesis of the material highlights six main themes: Christ as Divine Saviour, Christ as Pre-existent and Divine Saviour, Jesus as Second

Adam, Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, Jesus as Messiah and Exalted Lord, and Christ and the Spirit. The final theme suggests that Paul was a proto-trinitarian, and that later Trinitarian formulations maintained his biblical integrity.

I found the section of analysis more satisfying than the section on synthesis, possibly because I would wish to make far more of Paul's statement in Romans 5:14 that Adam was a *typos* of the coming one than Fee seems willing to. For him, there is no Adam Christology (p. 517), whereas I think Romans 5 points precisely in that direction. On the other hand, Fee's analysis is very helpful, for example in highlighting the Old Testament themes that feed into Colossians 1:12-16 (pp. 538ff).

While we may take issue with some of the conclusions, this remains an extremely helpful guide to its subject. It is a reminder that there is a congruity and coherence between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of Paul, and that the occasional letters written by him are indispensable for our understanding of who Jesus is. An outstanding resource.

*Dr Iain D. Campbell, Isle of Lewis*

### **Alvin Plantinga and Christian Apologetics (Paternoster Theological Monographs)**

Keith A. Mascord

Paternoster: Milton Keynes, UK, 2006; 235pp., £13.14; ISBN 9781842272565

Having lived and moved and had much of my fledgling academic being within the context of the American research university, I and other young Christian philosophers will confess that we are indebted to the influence of Alvin Plantinga. His presence has loomed large within the analytic philosophical tradition now for the last half century, and, humanly speaking, he shares a substantial part of the responsibility for the resurgence of *Christian* philosophy within the discipline.

With philosophical and theological fluency, Keith Mascord exegetes and engages this giant in contemporary philosophy. His book will be of service to those both within and outside of the academic philosophical community. Those outside the discipline who desire a concise yet accurate glimpse of the contemporary dialectic in those areas of philosophy with which Plantinga is engaged would do well to consider this book. However, those without at least some background in philosophy, especially epistemology and philosophy of religion, will be at a disadvantage, though not an insurmountable one. Those unfamiliar with Plantinga can be assured that they are hearing his authentic voice, at least as much as is possible without engaging the primary sources composing the corpus of

Plantinga's prodigious scholarship. While professional philosophers will not find vast amounts of discipline-expanding philosophy in this volume *per se*, they will be challenged and enriched by Mascord's own critical interaction with Plantinga.

Mascord's aim is to present and evaluate the philosophical contributions of Plantinga within the context of Christian apologetics as construed both *negatively* (that is, broadly with the goal of rebutting challenges to Christian belief) and *positively* (broadly with the goal of offering positive evidence and argumentation in support of Christian belief). In service to this aim, he navigates a substantial portion of the philosophical territory relevant to the task of Christian apologetics where Plantinga's presence has been felt, including Plantinga's Christian epistemological efforts under the rubric of Reformed epistemology, his free-will defense against the logical argument from evil, and his interaction with other extant philosophical issues relevant to the apologetic task. Mascord's exposition of Plantinga along with critical evaluation of his contributions for both negative and positive apologetics is helpfully framed within larger interpretive contexts, including the historical and contemporary dialectic between Augustinian and Thomistic strands of thought on the relationship between faith and reason, as well as Plantinga's philosophical and theological relationship to his own Reformed heritage.

In addition to his accurate exegesis of Plantinga, Mascord's work excels in several areas; here I only mention that which I consider to be the most prominent. Most notably in the last chapter, he offers much fodder for future research, research that will link back to Plantinga both explicitly and implicitly. Here are two possibilities that struck me upon reading this chapter. There should be further exploration into the relationship of current instantiations of Reformed epistemology to the thought of the Magisterial Reformers as well as positions advocated in subsequent reformed orthodoxy and beyond. Where are the continuities and discontinuities? Have the relevant depths of Calvin and Bavinck, among many others, been fully plumbed?

Additionally, there is a great deal of generous yet rigorous conversation that needs to occur between Augustinians and Thomists, and between the presuppositional, classical, and evidentialist methodological schools of apologetics. While these views have some postulations that are incommensurable, surely there is much dialogue to be had and progress to be made as we consider the philosophical and theological nuts and bolts of how we are to *contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*. Moving toward this end will partly require interdisciplinary scholarship *in community* among philosophers, theologians, exegetes and

church historians among others. Mascord helpfully nudges us in such a direction.

Aside from a few quibbles over an undersized index and what appears to be ambiguity in Mascord's statements on Christian exclusivism and the doctrines of grace where further elaborative discussion might fit naturally within his intended aim, I have little criticism of the book. There is one caveat, however, that is important for readers who are unaware of Plantinga's latest philosophical contributions. Given its date of publication, this book does not track the most recent developments in Plantinga's philosophical labours, developments potentially relevant to the task of negative apologetics. Indeed, within the last few years Plantinga has turned a portion of his philosophical attention toward issues within the philosophy of mind, most recently defending a dualist ontology of the human person against a materialist ontology that dominates the current scene, and which appears to be gaining momentum among Christian philosophers. (Of course, this is a matter of perspective. Those who consider a materialist ontology of the human person to be consistent with orthodox Christian belief will see no reason for negative apologetics in this area, while those who see inconsistency will.) To be clear, this limitation is no fault of Mascord's, but simply a product of his and our being temporally limited and historically situated. It is an unavoidable fact that a book published in 2006 cannot account for developments in 2007 and 2008.

In sum, Keith Mascord's *Alvin Plantinga and Christian Apologetics* is at once irenic, insightful, engaging, and thought-provoking. Along with the work of Plantinga so nicely expounded within its pages, it should prompt us to consider afresh and continually appropriate the Anselmian-Augustinian maxim *fides quaerens intellectum*.

*Joshua Seachris, University of Oklahoma*

## **What Are We Waiting For? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture**

Stephen R. Holmes and Russell Rook, (eds)

Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2008; softcover, 243 pp; £9.99 ISBN 978-1-84227-602-0.

Packaged under an intriguing, artsy cover, this collection of articles on eschatology for the general reader addresses many issues on the evangelical mind today, emphasizing the contemporary relevance of Christian beliefs about the future.

The introductory chapter by editor Stephen Holmes, subtitled 'The dangers of being Left Behind', states his aim to fill a present void: 'Eschatology, the biblical truth about the last things, interests me — it interests

most theologians these days. Christian theology has been fascinated by the uses of eschatology for a couple of generations now, and there are lots of profound insights, useful explanations, and serious disagreements out there. In our churches, though, the choice seems to be Tim LaHaye or an embarrassed silence. (Most evangelical churches in Britain, displaying good sense, and an instinctive understanding of the gospel, have tended to opt for the embarrassed silence.) Holmes organizes the seventeen chapters which follow under four divisions: *Hopeful Word*, *Hopeful Church*, *Hopeful Culture*, and *Hopeful World*. It is an ambitious (and only partially achieved) undertaking for such a slim volume; each chapter runs only about eleven or twelve pages long.

Eighteen authors contributed to the work; a few are quickly recognised names — John Goldingay ('Eschatology in Isaiah'), I. Howard Marshall ('Eschatology at the Heart of New Testament Theology'), Richard Bauckham ('Eschatology in the Book of Revelation'), and David Bebbington ('Eschatology in Evangelical History') — but most are young, lesser known academics and/or ministry leaders. The contributors represent much of the spectrum of evangelical theology today, including some who are sympathetic with the controversial emerging church movement, as well as a few who interact critically with it. The book uses endnotes, includes a short glossary (39 entries), and lists 'selected further reading' (citing 52 works).

The first division begins with one of the weakest chapters, 'Eschatology in the Old Testament' by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer. She aims at several expected topics but amputates others right at the start ('...the coming of the Messiah/the Eschaton, will not be discussed at any great length as they play merely a marginal role in the Old Testament'). The next chapter, by Goldingay, is better organized, but employs some contentious views, such as open theism ('...God's plans are worked out in dialogue with human responses...the way they work out is subject to continuous renegotiation').

With chapters four (Marshall) and five (Bauckham) — two of the best — the keel of the book drops more deeply and systematically into biblical material, then sails the reader in the direction promised in its title. One application of Marshall was particularly clear and helpful: 'Consequently we are to avoid the defeatism which sees only the decay and powerlessness that we experience, but equally we are to avoid the triumphalism and unreality which thinks that we already enjoy full perfection and deliverance' (p. 44).

In the second division, commendable chapters include 'Eschatology in the Church Fathers' (Thomas Noble), and 'Hell' (Robin Perry) — although an interesting chart on various views of the nature of hell is rel-

egated to the endnotes. Noble does answer his question, 'How then was Christian eschatology changed by that cultural transition from Judaism to the Hellenism of the Graeco-Roman world?', but doesn't connect his observations to our present cultural changes; whereas Perry's conclusion applies his discussion of hell to the present under four wide headings: missions, holiness, persecution ('Injustice will not prevail forever'), and, Calvary.

But far more helpful and engaging are Bebbington's masterful chapter on 'Eschatology in Evangelical History' and Tim Chester's exciting chapter on 'Eschatology and Mission'. Chester uses bold, biblical language (and ample references) as he here preaches, 'This is our missionary message: kiss the Son lest you be destroyed when he comes'. His conclusions are inspiring: 'Neglecting resurrection hope leads to weak mission and weak discipleship. Eschatology is central not only to the message of mission, but also to the motivation of mission..Without eschatology we are left with a limp Christian existentialism in which immediate experience is everything...In contrast the New Testament constantly redirects our attention to future hope' (p. 96).

The eight chapters in the last two divisions are a mix of fresh, thought-provoking writing on one hand, and, obtuse exegesis and/or esoteric wanderings on the other. I do not hesitate to list in the latter category: 'Eschatology and Imagination' (Trevor Hart), 'Eschatology Goes to Work' (Darrell Cosden), 'Eschatology and the Environment' (Ruth Valerio), and, 'We are but Shadows of our Future Selves' (Ann & Douglas Holt). Those in the former category include: 'In God's Good Time' (by co-editor, Russell Rook), 'Eschatology and Pop Culture' (Krish Kandish), 'Eschatology and Politics' (Luke Bretherton), and 'Living for the Future, the End of Ethics' (John Colwell). Rook's chapter, subtitled 'Music and the Hope of the World', draws upon Augustinian theology and testimony, and covers fascinating new ground. Kandish gives ample evidence that he understands our present cultural scene; while also presenting some hope for penetrating post-modernism with the gospel: 'If the future is bleak, the past is a joke and the present does not measure up to expectations, then the stage is set for a retelling of the Christian story for this generation' (p. 154).

The theological assumptions and assertions in several chapters will noticeably irritate conservative evangelicals, while the handful of engaging chapters, highlighted above, should be pursued, with much profit to many levels of readers.

*David J. Bissett, Clifton Park Community Church, New York, USA*

## Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology

Neil B. MacDonald and Carl Trueman, (eds)

Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2008; 181pp., £19.99 ISBN 978-1-84277-567-2

This volume surprises with its excellence. I expected to find a rather dreary and predicable affair in which the devotees of either Calvin or Barth spend their time explaining why their preferred theologian stands closer than the other to the Reformed ideal. What I found instead was a selection of stimulating and creative essays in which both Calvin and Barth are treated forthrightly and with an eye for the particularity of their contributions to the Reformed tradition and its future. Taken together, these essays stand as an excellent example of how Reformed thinkers can bring a careful and critical eye to these two figures while simultaneously avoiding the polemics that so often have marked past discussions. The fact that such an examination occurs under the auspices of a larger goal—a consideration of the nature of Reformed theology and its future—marks this collection as an important achievement.

The book is divided into four sections. After Carl Trueman's introductory essay on the 'historical prolegomena' to the dialogue between Calvin and Barth, the book features two essays each on the topics of the sacraments, the nature of the atonement, and Scripture. In most cases, the authors—Trevor Hart, Anthony Cross, Neil MacDonald, Myron Penner, Stephen Holmes and Craig Bartholomew—provide original and probing readings of Calvin and Barth on their respective topics. They do so, however, with an eye toward raising larger questions about Reformed identity. What does it truly mean to be a 'Reformed theologian?' And how can two thinkers who differ so greatly on key doctrines like election and atonement fall within this one tradition?

These questions are not left unanswered, although the answers the authors give vary in predictable ways. It is no surprise, for example, to learn that Trueman prefers Calvin over Barth as the model of Reformed orthodoxy, or that MacDonald thinks a fresh reading of Barth's doctrine of the atonement could vindicate him in the eyes of the Reformed faithful. These rather predictable conclusions, however, do not undermine the new and often surprising vistas that several of these essays open up for the interpretation of both Calvin's and Barth's theology. Quite simply, there is much excellent and creative thinking to be found in this book, and this excellence speaks to the inherent value of putting these two great theologians into conversation with one another on matters central to the Reformed tradition.

On the whole, the essays tend to find Calvin more amenable to Reformed orthodoxy than Barth. One reason this is the case can be found

in the clear differences between the two thinkers especially on the nature and function of Scripture in theology. Here, many of the authors' critiques of Barth are creative and penetrating. Another reason, however, is found in the fact that Barth's departures from Calvin are, more often than not, couched in terms of his desire to move away from Calvin to address contemporary concerns rather than Barth's self-perceived goal of adhering even more closely than Calvin to basic Reformed commitments and their implications. That is, Barth's reconfiguration of what it truly means to be Reformed often is left unacknowledged. The result is that several of the authors overlook Barth's conviction that it was precisely his firm adherence to Reformed principles that led him to depart from Calvin in the way that he did, and this, in turn, leads to a more brusque reading of Barth's innovations than is warranted. This over is important, because a clearer acknowledgement of Barth's belief that the Reformed tradition itself was guiding his innovations over against Calvin would go a long way in laying bare several key assumptions and distinctions still functioning today in the ongoing debates between Calvin's and Barth's interpreters, especially those centred upon the doctrine of election.

Of course, no book can be perfect. On its own merits, this book is a well-written, carefully edited, thoughtful and stimulating volume that will do much to prompt and sustain dialogue about the nature and future of Reformed theology.

*Keith L. Johnson, Wheaton College*

## **The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions**

Martin I Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, (eds)

B&H Publishers: Nashville, 2008. 228 pp., \$14.99 ISBN978-080544300-4,

It is seldom the case that volumes planned as 'festschrifts' – indicators of the high regard for the one honoured by various specialists – also have the appeal to reach a broad readership. Both of these objectives are admirably achieved in this notable volume of essays, presented in a 2006 conference on the occasion of the sixty-fifth birthday of Professor John D. Woodbridge of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

The reputation of John Woodbridge does not need any enhancing here; the contributors to his 'festschrift' properly recognise the contribution he has made in past decades in writing noteworthy material about the post-Reformation French Protestant tradition, the history of biblical criticism, and Christian biography. In this review, I propose to focus on the prospective utility of this collection of essays considered as a contribution to the available literature on the history of Christian missions. In a word, the

release of *The Great Commission* is most timely.

Many (like this writer) will have found it difficult to spur students to read through the still-standard work of the late Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986). Neill aimed at comprehensiveness, and seemed to deliver *something* about *everything* in mission history from the age of the Apostles to the time of writing. But on such a plan, Russian Orthodox missions to Siberia and the Aleutians received about equal coverage with Carey's going to Serampore. It was all there across twenty centuries, but...Though Neill's perspective was broadly evangelical, the standpoint was nevertheless post-colonial British. Neill's own missionary sojourns in India and Africa meant that these continents received disproportionate coverage when compared to South America, where the colonial interests of Spain and Portugal had been at the forefront.

Since the publication of Neill, we have witnessed a proliferation of other works of mission history. These have been of two main types, which because distinct from Neill's attempt at total coverage, have kept his work still in print. On the one hand, Ruth Tucker's *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (1983, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2004) met the need for attention to missionary biography across twenty centuries; her preponderant interest was nevertheless in the colonial period and beyond. On the other hand, we have witnessed a profusion of in-depth mission studies focused both on particular eras and regions of the world (typified by the excellent Eerdmans *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* volumes edited by Brian Stanley and R.E. Frykenberg) and upon issues inherent in mission history (typified by the excellent volumes of Andrew Walls, e.g. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* [1996] and of David Bosch, e.g. *Transforming Mission* [1991]). But for all this profusion of literature, reflective of a massive expansion of interest in this field, many will feel that we still lack that 'first book' which, when placed into the hands of a curious reader, will leave him or her wishing to go further.

It is the great strength of *The Great Commission* that taking impressive cognizance of this profusion of mission research of the last decades it presents the mission history of the last half-millennium in a form assimilable by upper division undergraduates. Whereas the standard volume of Neill (supra) viewed the global expansion of Christianity from a decidedly European and late colonial standpoint, *The Great Commission* has an understandable interest in how the missionary mandate was pursued (for good or ill) within and from the Americas. Particularly of note in this respect are the admirable chapters of Jon Hinkson, 'Missions Among Puritans and Pietists' and Bradley Gundlach, 'Early American Missions from the Revolution to the Civil War'. Particularly the first of

these goes far to show how deficient was Neill's treatment of pre-Great Awakening Protestant Missions. Further, whereas Neill had been content to rehearse the oft-told tale of meagre Protestant missionary interest in the age of Reformation, Glenn Sunshine's chapter 'Protestant Missions in the Sixteenth Century' serves the interests of balance well by pointing out that initially, early Protestant regions, because 'landlocked', had neither access to the sea or any initial share in the building of seaborne empires. Their early missionary focus was, for the time, 'home' mission. The well-crafted chapter by Timothy George, 'Evangelical Revival and Missionary Awakening' helpfully draws attention to the ways in which eighteenth century missionary effort stood on the shoulders of earlier efforts.

Most striking of all is the fact that *The Great Commission* has chapters on mission in Latin America and Africa written by scholars, J. Daniel Salinas and Tite Tiénou, native to the regions they describe. In a way very much in keeping with the emphases introduced by Andrew Walls (supra), there is a happy emphasis on the indigenous missionary movements within the various cultures of these continents. Their point is not that western missionaries were never needed, but that they, having introduced the gospel into receptor cultures, the real 'legwork' of spreading and contextualising the Christian message was and is largely the work of nationals.

But as Neill's classic volume (still referred to regularly) had weaknesses, so, it must be admitted, has *The Great Commission*. While it is understandable that a volume sketching the progress of evangelical Protestant mission must confine itself to the last half-millennium, something is lost when – as in this volume – not even a single chapter is devoted to Catholic and Orthodox missionary labour in previous centuries. *The Great Commission*, in order to function as a major text, will need to be augmented by such material from other sources. I have noted Neill's preponderant interest in India and Africa; the present volume sadly gives only a single chapter to *all* of Asia. Finally, while it is the great strength of a multi-authored symposium such as this that its component parts are provided by persons with enhanced expertise, there is the downside of overlap of subject matter. For example, the New England missionary to the Indians, John Eliot, proves to be of interest to five contributors; William Carey, pioneer missionary to India, receives the attention of four. Total coherence, therefore, is more easily achieved by the single-author approach. Should this current volume go to a second edition, perhaps such concerns can be addressed. But all in all, *The Great Commission* is well-researched, broad in its Protestant sympathies, and alert to the major issues at the forefront of today's mission history. I wish it a wide usefulness.

*Kenneth J. Stewart, Covenant College, USA*

## Christ and Culture Revisited

D.A. Carson

Apollos: Nottingham, 2008; 243pp., £12.99 ISBN 978 1 84474 279 0

How should Christians appropriately interact within a fallen world? How do we live as dual-citizens, members of God's heavenly kingdom, yet sojourning here on earth? This question intersects with a number of other areas – such as Christian ethics, evangelism, ecclesiology, politics, social issues – and so contemporary discussion has become encumbered by a long history of competing agendas and sloppy thinking.

D. A. Carson's *Christ and Culture Revisited* endeavors to sort through the mess and provide a new framework. In both academic and popular circles, much of the present state of debate traces its origins to Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, and as the title implies, a large portion of Carson's book deals directly with Niebuhr's five paradigms (Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, Christ the transformer of culture). Carson contends that these paradigms, while helpful, should not be treated in isolation, as if any one of them provides a totalizing or complete picture of 'the' Christian position. Carson's critique of Niebuhr is fascinating and valuable; he resists the urge to promote one of the paradigms and instead uses them as foils to broaden our expectations, thereby providing a more all encompassing and less reductionist paradigm of his own.

Carson claims he can avoid a 'truncated or distorted vision of Christianity' by using the Bible's own Christ-centred and eschatologically-oriented plot line, which he labels the 'biblical-theological' perspective, as a framework for the discussion (p. 82). He is right. His outline of biblical history in chapter two is enormously helpful. 'The great turning points in salvation history, *taken together*, constitute a bundle of non-negotiables', which in turn forces us to take a more nuanced approach to the Christ and culture debate than Niebuhr's paradigms permit (p. 67).

These first two chapters comprise the center of Carson's argument, and thus 'much of the rest of this book can be read as a meditation on how a robust biblical theology tends to safeguard Christians against the most egregious reductionisms' (p. 82). That is, indeed, how the rest of the book reads. The result is a happy mixture of penetrating insights somewhat haphazardly collected, with the result that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. This is largely a strength. The reader is treated to a wealth of happy rabbit trails—the culture of postmodernism, the relationship between church and state, the West's worship of democracy and freedom—that, once collated and combined, serve to pick apart the various facets of this discussion with remarkable efficiency.

Yet at times the book loses its way, neglecting topics central to its core in favour of more in depth (and usually polemic) treatment of this or that controversy. This is mostly harmless; uninterested readers can simply skip the offending sections (the book is neatly organised and topics are clearly marked), while those with more developed concerns gladly follow Carson along the journey. Nevertheless, in at least one area this otherwise minor weakness becomes more significant. Despite its supposed centrality in the discussion, Carson's own biblical-theological reflections are underdeveloped. The topic repeatedly re-appears, to be sure, and always at the right place at the right time, but the depth of analysis is uneven. With the notable exception of the second chapter, the biblical theology in the book seems more a catchy slogan than an extended development, returning in fits and spurts, but usually as a kind of formulaic introduction or addendum to Carson's own insightful treatment of this or that topic.

Despite this deficiency, the book is still of great worth. Carson has applied his breadth of knowledge and clear thinking to a particularly convoluted knot, succeeding finally in untangling it for the benefit of the church. He does not, to be sure, knit the resulting thread into a final synthesis, but that is not his goal. In the end, Carson leaves the reader with a series of tensions, and while such lingering loose ends may fail to satisfy our need for final resolution, they nevertheless succeed in providing a balanced framework for further discussion.

*Thomas Keene, Westminster Theological Seminary, USA*

## **Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace**

Iain H. Murray

Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2008, 275pp, £16.00 ISBN 9780851519753

The Lord Jesus Christ has gifted his church with teachers and preachers in the past and for that we are truly grateful. One, whose writings I first came into contact with twenty-two years ago, was the late Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Upon acquainting myself with his *Preachers and Preaching* and several of the volumes in his sermon series on *Romans*, I was bitten by the 'Doctor's' doctrinal preaching. His was a powerful evangelical voice in the United Kingdom. John Stott, writing an obituary in *The Times* in March of 1981, noted that, 'With the death of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones the most powerful and persuasive evangelical voice in Britain for some 31 years is now silent.' Mark Dever, pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. has more recently said, 'Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one of the men I admire most from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the longer time goes on, my admiration of him increases. He had a more

profound spiritual vision than anyone else I know' (from the inside front flap of the dust jacket).

Rev. Iain Murray tells us that he wanted to deal with three areas of major significance in this book. The first is the nature of true preaching. The second is the place of full assurance in the life of the Christian. The third area is a fresh consideration of Lloyd-Jones' understanding of the New Testament church. All three topics come in for fascinating discussion and stem from what Murray calls in the first chapter, the 'legacies of Lloyd-Jones'. These, according to the author, are: (1) Lloyd-Jones was an example of what a Christian minister ought to be; (2) the truth that Christianity is God-centred religion; with subsection (a) understanding what this truth means will change a person's whole viewpoint and (b) Lloyd-Jones also regarded what is called 'Calvinism' as essential to his spiritual peace; (3) the local church is always the primary means of evangelism; (4) true preaching of the Word has life-changing power; (5) the key to the times is the state of the church; and (6) the growth of the church depends upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In the second chapter the author discusses ML-J's views concerning the importance of the unction or anointing of the Holy Spirit. Preaching that would be used of God must be bathed in the power of the Spirit of God. Murray organises the chapter under three headings: unction and the pew, unction and the preacher, and preparation for preaching. Under the first heading, ML-J would want us to know that Holy Spirit anointed preaching brings with it a sensitive awareness of God. He would also remind us that where preaching operates in the power of the Holy Spirit, minds are not prone to wander and children are more likely to pay attention too. In a nutshell, Spirit-empowered preaching results in changed lives. Under the second heading, Murray notes that ML-J would point out the fact that Spirit-directed preaching is not something under human control. And Spirit-directed preaching takes the preacher's mind off of himself and his work. Under the third heading, Murray tells us that ML-J believed that Spirit-directed preaching will be truth which the Spirit can honour. It was also mentioned that the life of the preacher cannot help but be part of the sermon. The preacher who experiences the unction or anointing of the Spirit is one who continually depends upon the Spirit for assistance. Strikingly, ML-J would argue for preaching that evokes awareness that Christianity is 'both a body of truth and doctrine, and a life to be experienced' (50). Finally, preaching under the ministry of the Holy Spirit is preaching that points to and terminates on Christ.

Many readers will be interested to learn that Dr. Lloyd-Jones preached evangelistic sermons from the Old Testament. This was as unusual in his day as were his doctrinal sermons. Murray notes that ML-J is often

thought of today as a teaching preacher, but his wife, Bethan Lloyd-Jones, considered her husband to be first and foremost an evangelist (55). This contemporary misapprehension may simply be due to the sermons that have been published as over against those which have not been released to the public in print. The assumption of publishers was that Christians would make up the lion's share of his readers, so the sermons that went to press were ones that it was thought were more geared to believers already in the way. But Murray points out that in reality, 'more than half' of Lloyd-Jones' preaching was evangelistic. As already noted, the 'Doctor' often used Old Testament texts in his evangelistic sermons and this was because he saw the 'neglect and near disappearance of the Old Testament as exercising a detrimental influence on contemporary Christianity' (61). Unfortunately it seems the problem is still with us these many years later. ML-J also thought that the disuse of the OT would have serious practical consequences. For these reasons ML-J used the Old Testament for evangelistic purposes. The benefit of using the OT in this context involved the fact that as Scripture, the OT was effective in revealing sin in all its true colours. It also pointed to the fact that a life lived without God was futile. Ultimately Lloyd-Jones preached evangelistically from the OT because it was a 'book about God' (76).

Chapters four through six discuss Lloyd-Jones' sermon notes, provide an outline of a 'memorable address' delivered at the Westminster Fellowship on October 9, 1968 after he had officially retired as pastor of the church due to serious illness but had subsequently recovered, and provide an informative comparison between David Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Charles Spurgeon. Chapter seven discusses ML-J's book *Joy Unspeakable* at some length. Here ML-J's concern that Christians experience the assurance of salvation is discussed in the context of the rising charismatic movement (130-135). Clarity is important here since ML-J equated full assurance with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because of this he is sometimes thought to be amenable to charismatic or Pentecostal teaching. It is clear from the discussion here that ML-J was no charismatic in the popular sense of that word.

Firstly, ML-J understood that the office of apostle had ceased and so the giving of the blessing of the Spirit could not happen by the laying on of hands. Secondly, ML-J refused to equate baptism of the Spirit with tongues-speaking. And thirdly, he believed that the baptism of the Spirit often came to mature believers after a period of patient waiting. This highlights that Lloyd-Jones was not sympathetic to charismatic concerns as is sometimes alleged. Rather, ML-J was concerned that many believers did not experience the joy of a full assurance of salvation. He realised that all Christians enjoy the ministry of the Holy Spirit at conversion and

so possess some measure of assurance. Since the Holy Spirit is present in the life of the believer from regeneration forward there are not two classes of Christians as is sometimes taught in some quarters of the evangelical world. However, ML-J did not agree fully with John Stott either. In his booklet *Baptism and Fullness* Stott taught that the baptism of the Spirit occurred for every believer at regeneration. ML-J thought this teaching, standard evangelical teaching that it was, would lead believers into complacency. ML-J read the portions of Acts where the Holy Spirit is given on several different occasions (Acts 8:14-17, 10:44-46, and 19:6) as reason to encourage present day Christians to seek the experience of repetitive baptisms. ML-J closely tied these baptisms with Christian assurance. In brief, Murray notes that Lloyd-Jones held that Christian assurance is grounded in three things: (1) the promises of God; (2) the changes in the life of the Christian as a result of growth in grace (i.e., sanctification); and (3) the direct witness of the Holy Spirit to the believer that he is a child of God.

Murray offers an extensive critique of his mentor's views on this subject (142-163) that is worth pondering. These comments ought to be considered carefully as they come from a man who highly esteems the good doctor. The criticism is not offered lightly or glibly. There is no specific incident described as *the baptism with the Spirit*. All work of the Spirit is under the mediatorial work of Christ (142). Is not all real assurance the work of the Spirit? ML-J was concerned to uphold the extraordinary work of God in the church. However, Murray is correct to note that God gives his Spirit in varying degrees. ML-J was not warranted to label one work of the Spirit as *the baptism of the Spirit*. ML-J was wrong in encouraging people to long for some special spiritual experience. The tendency is for Christians to long for some special spiritual experience now rather than waiting on God to grant special seasons of blessing in his own time. While I would not want to deny that God can exercise extraordinary providence in his world at his own discretion, I am afraid that encouraging Christians to long after these things is to undermine the ordinary means of grace that God has said he will honour.

The third major topic Murray discusses, in chapter eight of *Messenger of Grace*, is the disagreement that occurred in British evangelical circles in 1966 when ML-J was perceived to have called for Christians in mixed denominations to come out from them and align themselves with their more consistent evangelical brethren in independent churches. At the Evangelical Alliance-sponsored National Assembly of Evangelicals held on October 18, 1966 at Central Hall in London, Lloyd-Jones addressed the topic of Christian unity and set off a chain of events he could not have envisioned (or, it seems, intended). Murray provides counter-balance to

the story oft-told in the stories of J. I. Packer and John Stott. Stott's counter response at the conclusion of ML-J's address (Stott was the chairman of the conference), may have made matters worse than they might have otherwise been. Even so, the divisions among British evangelicals were probably already present before the congress and may simply have become more visible. Later developments arose over how evangelicals should handle the ecumenical movement. After the publication of *Growing Into Union*, a call for Anglican unity co-authored by J. I. Packer, ML-J called for the dissolution of the Puritan conference. Even with all these disagreements, ML-J still held Anglican evangelicals in high regard. It should be remembered that before the EA congress, ML-J even asked Stott to become his successor at the Westminster Chapel and later encouraged Gerald Bray in his pursuit of Anglican ordination.

Chapter nine is comprised solely of the letter ML-J composed to J. I. Packer calling for the suspension of the Puritan conference. In chapter ten Murray provides a topical summary of ML-J's views on such things as God, assurance, the Bible, the Christian, church unity, death, the devil, disunity, doctrine, evangelism, and a host of other items. In chapter eleven Murray discusses ML-J's sermons and in chapter twelve he provides a statistical analysis of the Ephesians sermons. As an added bonus Murray includes his own review of the Noll/Nystrom book *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. This might seem like a strange addition, but it makes eminent sense in light of the discussion of ML-J's so-called 'Come Out' address and it shows that the issues involved in the 1966 dispute within British evangelicalism are still with us and, quite honestly, have intensified and spread around the world.

As I noted at the beginning of this review, I first encountered David Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 1986 and was captivated by his preaching and have been interested in his publications ever since. Iain Murray has done us a great service in bringing ML-J to the forefront of our minds again. *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace* makes a fine companion to Murray's mammoth two-volume biography and Lloyd-Jones's own publications. There are a few items that I should like to address. The first two comments are about ML-J himself and the third is about both ML-J and Murray. While I am pleased that ML-J preached from the Old Testament, and especially that he preached evangelistically from the OT, I am less thrilled with his use of the materials in the examples provided in this book. ML-J jumps from the OT text right into the contemporary Christian context without significant consideration of the redemptive historical shift that occurred with the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. There is little to evince familiarity with typology and how persons, events, and in-

stitutions in the OT pointed to and found their fulfilment in Christ. Now undoubtedly ML-J would agree that Christ fulfils the OT, but his exegesis and hermeneutic appear to ignore this. And I would have liked to see how the Christian is called to imitate an OT hero via the believer's union with Christ, who is the antitype to all the heroes of the OT. Nevertheless, I must admit that the sermon form was simple and powerful and apparently effective.

I must also say that I would have to side with John Stott over against ML-J on baptism with the Spirit and I wonder whether ML-J's concern for the third element in his understanding of the foundations of assurance wasn't problematic as well. Clearly the risen Lord's pouring out of his Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost was closely and organically connected with his work in life, death, resurrection and ascension. In other words, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is part of that series of events connected with our Lord's life and ministry that cannot be repeated and ought not to be expected to be replicated in the individual life of the Christian. Does that mean that the Holy Spirit is not active in the life of the believer or the church as a whole? May it never be! But we do need to properly understand how the Holy Spirit works among the people of God and what we can expect in our Christian experience. Also, assuredly the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are children of God. But ought we to expect some mystical direct encounter apart from the Spirit's witness in the Word and in sanctification? Clearly there is room here for further reflection.

What I especially appreciated was further discussion of the 1966 EA assembly. For the longest time I was familiar with the events surrounding this affair, but only from the perspective of John Stott and J. I. Packer. Murray has provided a corrective (both here and in his previous work *Evangelicalism Divided*) that is beneficial, especially to those like myself who were too young to appreciate then what was going on in the UK. Disagreement among brothers is always unfortunate in terms of personal relations. However, the truth must be upheld. Murray goes out of his way to show that ML-J was probably misunderstood and did not in fact call for Christians in mixed denominations (i.e., denominations not uniformly orthodox) to withdraw from their churches. Lloyd-Jones, was, however, asking his Anglican evangelical friends especially to consider what they were trying to do. Did Anglican evangelicals really want a place at the ecumenical table where orthodoxy was played down? It seems to me that in light of recent events, such as the controversy over the doctrine of penal substitutionary doctrine in the UK and the fragmentation of the worldwide Anglican communion over, among other things, scriptural authority and homosexuality, that ML-J was not far from the mark, whether

he called for Christians to come out the Anglican church or not. Things have gotten so bad in the US and Canada that J. I. Packer resigned from the Anglican Church of Canada and brought himself under the oversight of a primate in another part of the world. At least the Anglican churches in the two-thirds world are standing for the truth.

All of this is to say that the more things change the more they stay the same. Though Dr. Lloyd-Jones is with the Lord he still speaks through his sermons and books. Iain Murray has made ML-J much more understandable and for that we can be thankful.

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### **A note on recent commentaries and theologies**

The publication of new academic reference works and commentaries goes on apace, and some significant titles have appeared recently. John L. Mackay's anticipated commentary on *Isaiah* (Vol 1: chapters 1-39: Evangelical Press, 2008, 864pp, ISBN 0852346565) has been long awaited and will be welcomed as a thorough and helpful treatment of Isaiah's prophecy. The God-given message of the prophet is set against its historical context and the threat of the Assyrian Empire. Each portion of the commentary concludes with a 'Reflection', and the application of the biblical material is evident throughout. The completed commentary will be an indispensable tool for preaching from Isaiah.

In the Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series, David G. Firth has published a commentary on *1&2 Samuel* (Apollos/IVP, 2009, 614pp, ISBN 9781844743681). The Introduction includes discussion of genre, composition, structure and themes. The commentary is in sections, with each section providing translation, notes on the text, discussion on form and structure, and detailed comment. This publication follows commentaries in the series on Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Daniel. The series has already demonstrated the twin concerns of faithfulness to the text and relevance to the contemporary reader.

IVP has also expanded its reference series with the publication of the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (eds. T. Longman III and P. Enns, 2008, 966pp, ISBN 9781844743063). This compendium of articles covers subjects as diverse as feminist interpretations, floral imagery, chaos and death, and wisdom and covenant. With a comprehensive introduction to the Old Testament books of wisdom and poetry, this volume will join the other Dictionaries in the series as a reference book of great value and scope.

Two recent additions to the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament have been commentaries on *Mark* by Robert H. Stein (Baker

Academic, 2008, 864pp, ISBN 9780801026829) and on *1-3 John* by Robert W. Yarbrough (Baker Academic 2008, 464pp, ISBN 9780801026874). The commentary on Mark interacts with the Greek text and follows a familiar pattern of introduction, exegesis and exposition, summary and additional, technical notes on the text. Yarbrough explores the relationship between the Johannine epistles and other writings, often bringing important sociological and historical aspects to bear on the interpretation. These are first rate helps to the exegesis of the Greek text of the New Testament.

Christian Focus Publications have also published a new Mentor commentary on *Galatians*, by David B. McWilliams (2009, 240pp, ISBN 9781845504526). McWilliams highlights the great missionary importance of Galatians as the epistle of the liberating Gospel. Issues of law and gospel continue to cause debate and division among evangelicals, and McWilliams' commentary is a helpful guide in exploring the contribution of Galatians in this area.

Finally, two useful works for New Testament studies have appeared in Thomas R. Schriener's *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (2008, 990pp, ISBN 9781844743094) and James D.G. Dunn's *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Eerdmans, 2009, 1347pp, ISBN 9780802839329). The first is a comprehensive overview of New Testament thought, focussing on the concept of God's saving promise. This thematic centre develops into the four parts of the theology: the fulfilment of God's promise (inaugurated eschatology in the Gospels), the God of the promise (the saving work of Father, Son and Spirit), experiencing the promise (reflections on sin, faith, obedience and the law) and the people of the promise. Schreiner's appendix on Reflections on New Testament Theology is also a useful guide to the field.

Dunn's work continues his historical treatment of the rise of the Christian faith, which began with volume 1 of 'Christianity in the Making', *Jesus Remembered*. The second volume, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, covers the rise of the Christian faith in the generation after Jesus, and makes comprehensive use both of the New Testament and of extra-biblical material. In the words of one of the commendations, this is a 'megastudy of earliest Christianity'. Magisterial in scope and attentive to detail, no study of the New Testament or of Christian origins can ignore it.

*Rev Dr Iain D. Campbell*



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