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**SCOTTISH
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THE REFORM OF THE CHURCH AND WOMEN'S MINISTRY

Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda is a tag not often quoted by Evangelicals. With an economy that English cannot match it affirms that the church 'reformed', *i.e.* that has been reformed, is 'yet to be reformed', *i.e.* still stands in need of, and must ever be open to, further reformation. Evangelicals are too familiar with its citation in the interests of disengagement from some aspect or other of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It has come perhaps to exemplify the attitude of those who have too little time for 'having-been-reformed' and too much for 'ever-open-to-reform'.

This is regrettable, for the two words are linked by a profound logic of reform theology. *Reformata* must never be qualified by *eph'hapax*, 'once for all', for at least two reasons (quite apart from the linguistic mix!). In the first place, the Reformation does not belong to salvation-history (any more than, say, the Council of Nicaea does); it does not enjoy the ultimate and decisive significance of the exodus or the incarnation. Secondly, the church reformed, *i.e.* the church as renewed by the Reformation, is neither irreversibly reformed – immune from relapsing into its pre-Reformation condition – nor perfectly reformed, as though never needing fresh reform.

There emerges to view here a fundamental difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (and probably Orthodoxy too). While Catholics may confess the church to be *reformanda* – under the divine imperative to be reformed – their confession will always lack the credibility provided for Protestantism by the preceding *reformata*. For what is entailed in confessing *ecclesia reformata* is the full-blooded recognition that the church was and is vulnerable to such extensive corruption as to need root-and-branch reformation of the dimensions the sixteenth-century Reformers meted out to late medieval Catholicism. To declare the church to be *reformata* is to declare it to be an institution in need of reform – *reformanda* – in principle as much in every age as it was then, prior to the Reformation. The Protestant theology of the church's history has no place for the irreformability of any of the church's forms or acts, whether the Nicene Creed (*Filioque* can be added or removed) or

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the polity of the best Reformed Kirk. Lovers of the Reformation who gladly own the church *reformata* dare not therefore glory triumphally in being a Reformed Church, but should rather tremble that the church of Christ could become – and hence can ever become – so gravely deformed. By the same token the very fact that the Reformation took place should not lead to the church's being trapped in its status as once-for-all *reformata* (the Reformation captivity of the church?), but on the contrary should give Protestants both a marvellous sense of freedom in relation to what the church has become (it once needed drastic reformation – and got it! Why not again?) and an ever alert sensitivity to the continuing need for reform. The sons and daughters of the Reformation are the very people who should be most comfortable with *semper reformanda*. For if it is *reformata* that alone gives one confidence about *reformanda*, most assuredly we cannot claim to be *reformata* without being ready to be *reformanda*.

Women's Ministry

Perspectives like these are nowhere more needed than in reflecting on the persistently vexed question of women's ministry, on which publications continue to flow. Barbara E. Smith's privately published *Women, Saints and Servants* (Edinburgh, 1990; 48pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 9516218 0 7) is an irenic rambling discussion, based on wide, almost indiscriminate reading, dotted with fascinating bits of information and apparently in favour of women's ordained ministry. *Women Elders in the Kirk?* edited by A. T. B. McGowan (Christian Focus, Fearn, Ross-shire, n. d.; 111pp., n.p.; ISBN 1 871676 304), is quite different. Its title is somewhat unfortunate – as though the Church of Scotland has not had women elders for a quarter of a century, with new women elders outnumbering men in recent years. Its implied challenge to the very existence of women elders in the Kirk will surely distract attention from the aim of the book, which is to secure respect and recognition for conscientious objection to women's eldership.

We do not intend to engage in a review of the book's biblical and theological arguments, which are by now well-trodden ground. Ecclesiastically, it has, as Augustine might have said, received its reward, in the 1991 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. But one comment is called for: why the writers' preoccupation with ordination? Ordination is not the easiest thing to find in the New Testament. And if women ought not to be elders, what matters is not simply how to avoid being responsible for making them so but how to avoid all contact with them once made. To seize the force of this demur it has only to be applied to the parallel, but presumably more serious, issue of women as ministers of Word and sacraments.

One can perhaps keep one's distance from other congregations' women elders, but to have nothing to do with women ministers in a corporate church like the Church of Scotland....

Reform and Women's Ministry

How stands the question in the light of *reformata reformanda*? First we must note that this principle does not sanction the widespread unspoken assumption that all change in the church is for the better, *i.e.* that all change is reform. Such a notion could not be more unreformed. The pre-Reformation church was scarcely static! It had accommodated itself only too flexibly to developments in society. Change is often deformation, and the church is, alas, not evolving smoothly towards an ever closer approximation to perfection. To be dignified as reform change requires biblical justification, as Andrew McGowan and his fellow-writers forcefully argue – although we should not be suspicious of a rethink of scriptural teaching just because it was provoked by social movement. The outcome of such a review, not its occasion, is what must be tested at the bar of Scripture.

On the other hand, *reformata reformanda* must be allowed to question us on our openness to continuing reform. There is nothing discreditable in concluding that the church got something wrong for most of its history; there were certainly some things it did not begin to get right before the sixteenth century. Since the Reformation women have in practice enjoyed ever wider scope for Christian ministry, in ways the Reformers could never have countenanced. If the verdict remains firm that such extensive reform in no sense justifies the additional change of letting women serve as elders or ministers of Word and sacraments, let us be crystal clear on the grounds for that judgement, lest we be found the victims of an unreformed, because unreforming, allegiance to the church's tradition.

Perhaps, as Peter White hints in *Women Elders in the Kirk?*, we shall not be in a position to settle satisfactorily the place of women's ministry until we have further reformed our inherited patterns of church order. Which is to affirm that in the question, 'Should women be ordained as elders or ministers?', 'women' is not the only problematic term.

THE SCOPE OF REDEMPTION AND MODERN THEOLOGY

HENRI BLOCHER, VAUX-SUR-SEINE, FRANCE

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you' (John 14:27).

'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword' (Matt. 10:34).

'For he himself is our peace who has made the two one' (Eph. 2:14).

'Thus the people were divided (*schisma*) because of Jesus' (John 7:43).

Peace, fullness, health regained, all wounds healed, and the *sword*, that separates – these two terms evoke two series of texts and biblical themes associated with the message of salvation. It is hard to deny that they seem to be in opposition and that there is a paradox in their combination.¹ On the one hand, the 'total' vision of the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14), the repeated word 'all', the promise of universal reconciliation (Col. 1:20), the assurance of the final completion, *anakephalaiosis*, in Christ (Eph. 1:10). On the other hand, the announcement of judgment which separates some from others, on the left and on the right of the Judge, the revelation of God's free choice who calls his elect from among the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom. 9:23ff), the irreducible antithesis between good and evil, between life and death (Deut. 30:15ff), between the two ways (which oblige us to make a decision), and finally the warning concerning the narrowness of the door and of the way (Matt. 7:13ff; Luke 13:23ff). Those theologians who reflect on the scope of redemption, on the extent of the area where the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ is operative, necessarily begin with this scriptural duality and the theoretical structures they build are best understood as so many attempts to deal jointly with the two terms, with wholeness and decision, with peace and the sword.

Three Positions

The main competing proposals can be situated at the three points of a logical triangle. Universalism gives preference to the gift of 'peace'; whatever goes against this is made subordinate to it. Texts are so interpreted that, in the end, none is left on the reprobate side.

¹ Tony Lane, 'The Quest for the Historical Calvin', *EQ* 55 (1983), p.96 writes of a tension between universality and particularity both in the Bible and in Calvin (the topic is the 'limited' atonement).

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Thorough universalists teach the final restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all human beings without exception, and even, as Origen, of the devil and the demons. We also call 'universalists' those who do not go as far as that, but who seriously expect that hell will be 'empty', or that the greater part of those who have not believed in this life shall be included among the redeemed. Symmetrically, the strict Augustinians, Calvinists and Jansenists take their bearings first of all from the theme of the 'sword': 'all' must be understood to mean all the elect, all the believers who choose the narrow way leading to salvation. The universality is circumscribed by particularity, from where comes the name of 'Particular Baptists', taken in the seventeenth century by the Calvinist Baptists.

Then come thirdly the mixed solutions. The one which bears the name of Moyse Amyraut (1596–1664), 'Amyraldian', but which both Catholics and Lutherans before him had taught, namely hypothetical universalism, articulates with the first duality yet another: the duality of the times, of the cross and of the end. In the decisive achievement of the cross, it is the 'all' that prevails: Jesus Christ has atoned for the sins of all human beings indiscriminately; he has taken their place and paid their ransom whether, in God's counsel, they belong to his chosen people or to the reprobates; there is no distinction, then, in the reference of his work. In the final judgment, however, only the elect, who will have believed, shall be saved. With Karl Barth, another mixed solution has appeared, namely universalism which may be called dialectic (although he disliked the label when he touched on the topic) or Christo-inclusive: the Yes and the No, saving grace and damnation, election and rejection, are not aimed at different categories; they concern all men and women at the same time in Christ, first of all Jesus Christ (the only concrete man) and all in him. In Amyraut's teaching, it would appear that division and particularity gain the upper hand, after all: in the end, only some are saved – that is what counts. It is the opposite with Barth, for whom the Yes of grace prevails mightily (non-dialectically in this sense) – yet without abolishing God's No altogether.

What is the present shape of the age-long debate on the scope of redemption? This we would delineate. Needless to say, our survey of modern theological trends in the last fifty years, with which we shall begin, does not pretend to be exhaustive! We have lacked the resources for a deeper study. Dr Richard J. Bauckham has made a superb start with the work, and we would refer the reader to his well-documented article.² In the second part, we shall try to

² 'Universalism: A Historical Survey', *Themelios* 4/2 (Jan. 1979), pp.48–54. We say 'start' since the article devotes only its last three pages (most informative ones) to the twentieth century.

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ascertain which factors have favoured the rise of universalism all around us, before sketching, in a third part of our development, a few elements in a possible Evangelical reply.

Protestant Universalists

'Tremendous advances all along the front': that is the victorious communiqué that the headquarters of the universalist army could issue in our century. Pockets of resistance are to be noted only on the flanks.

The heirs of the old-style liberalism remain strongly attached to the thought of an all-inclusive reconciliation. Just as Schleiermacher, they cannot envisage in God a more restrictive sympathy than that which can be found in the most noble of men. For John A.T. Robinson,³ for the Swedish-American theologian and philosopher Nels Ferré,⁴ for John Hick, the main advocate of universalism in English-speaking countries,⁵ it is unthinkable that the God of all compassion would leave his creatures, so feeble, made nevertheless in his image, to be swallowed up in the oblivion of nothingness; it would be abominable for him to let them suffer without end. The perdition of some people would mean God's failure, and evil would be made an everlasting reality.⁶ Excluding the ways of salvation proposed by other religions, they feel, smells of an arrogance unworthy of the gospel, and is tantamount to idolatry: the idolatrous worship of the form of religion which we have inherited from the Bible. Those who follow the teachers of this first tendency are wont to quote the words: 'In my Father's house are many mansions' (John 14:2).

The Barthian revolution did, for a time, make hearts tremble anew before the Lord's majesty. In principle, it denounces the audacity of a theology which imposes on God a preconceived notion of his love. It has unveiled the unbelief which disguises itself in the religion of natural humanity. Under this influence, men such as Hendrik Kraemer, Willem A. Visser't Hooft and Lesslie Newbigin have fought against a syncretistic and relativist universalism. But Karl Barth did not come back to the classic division of humanity. On the contrary, his Christological concentration led him to include all in

³ *In the End God* (London, 1950).

⁴ *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York, 1951).

⁵ *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966); *Death and Eternal Life* (London, 1976); *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia, 1982).

⁶ So distinguished a writer as John Baillie, a very mild liberal indeed, would argue in this way: *And the Life Everlasting* (Oxford, 1934), pp.241ff.

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Jesus Christ. Double predestination, identical to the gospel, no longer separates humankind into two groups of individuals. Jesus Christ is the sole object: 'In the strict sense, only He can be understood and described as the "elected" (and "rejected"). All others are so in Him and not as individuals.'⁷ More precisely, 'God has ascribed to man the former, election, salvation and life; and to Himself He has ascribed the latter, reprobation, perdition and death', and 'when we look into the innermost recesses of the divine good-pleasure, predestination is the non-rejection of man. It is so because it is the rejection of the Son of God.'⁸ Barth combats all symmetry, all parallelism between the two parts, and stresses the transition from judgement to grace.⁹ What about the man who behaves as a rejected individual? 'He does it all in vain, because the choice which he thus makes is eternally denied and annulled in Jesus Christ'; he may place himself, with his like, under the threat, 'But it cannot now be their concern to suffer the execution of this threat, to suffer the eternal damnation which their godlessness deserves.... And this is the very goal which the godless cannot reach.'¹⁰

In tune with this interpretation, Barth never tires of repeating that every person is, in Christ, already justified and sanctified, whether he knows it or not. The town is liberated, all the inhabitants of the town are free, whether they continue to hide themselves in the cellars or whether they have discovered the reality common to all; so, among human beings, Christians are distinguished solely by their knowledge that all are free.¹¹ The *apokatastasis* seems therefore to

⁷ *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter *CD*) II:2, p.43. On the doctrine of election, one remembers that Barth had a forerunner in the person of his disciple Pierre Maury: he pays him a tribute in the preface to Maury's work, *La Prédestination* (Geneva, 1957), pp.5f.

⁸ *C.D.* II:2, pp. 163, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12f., 171, etc.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 319.

¹¹ Many, many, are the texts which affirm these things and the 'unreality' of the man of sin. To take one volume only, vol. IV: in IV:1, pp. 77, 92f. – how Christians differ, 148 – objectively all men, 316f.; 661f. – how Christians differ, 742, 747, – ontological necessity, 758 – faith only cognitive; IV: 3/1, pp. 180f. – the world justified, 301-466 – total and definitive determination, – the man of sin nothing but a phantom evoked capriciously, IV: 3/2, pp. 486f. – the Christian only sees what is there for all. Barth happens to say that all people are saved *de jure* (IV: 3/1, p. 278) or 'potentially' (IV: 3/2, p. 492), but the context shows that his meaning is not Amyraldian.

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be an unavoidable conclusion. Karl Barth, however, resists the temptation of drawing the same.¹² Does he suspend judgment, due to lack of clear information? Does he consider it as a possibility without certainty? The matter would appear to be more complex. Barth rejects above all this kind of assurance about the future from which is born the security of the owners of grace (*beati possidentes!*); he tries to protect God's freedom.¹³ But, on the positive side, he would not be happy to envisage the *apokatastasis* as a possibility, a mere eventuality. In speaking of the dam of blindness, of unbelief, that many people set up against grace, he writes his conviction: 'The stream is too strong and the dam too weak for us to be able reasonably to expect anything but the collapse of the dam, and the onrush of the waters'.¹⁴ Rather than being agnostic, Barth's position would appear to correspond to a restrained, ambiguous, if not embarrassed, universalism – all that said with the deference due to genius! It is not astonishing that most of the Barthians have come to profess universalism without reticence, even Jacques Ellul, who cares most for biblical conformity.¹⁵ Bruce Nicholls is of the opinion that 'the trend to universalistic thinking in Asia stems more from the influence of Barth than from any other source'.¹⁶

In the whole area of Barthian influence, Barth having purified himself only in part from this post-Kantian stereotype, theologians have been apt to oppose 'objective', theoretical information to the truths 'of faith'. Under the spell of this influence, Emil Brunner, though a sharp critic of Barth and a vigorous preacher of personal decision, managed not to exclude the possibility of universal salvation.¹⁷ Gerrit C. Berkouwer has distanced himself progressively

¹² *Ibid.*, IV: 1, p. 118; IV: 3/1, pp.461-78, especially 477f..

¹³ This is already his intention in his comments on *apokatastasis* in his monograph *Die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes* (1947) quoted by Heinrich Ott, *Eschatologie. Versuch eines dogmatischen Grundrisses* (Zollikon, 1958), p. 72.

¹⁴ *CD* IV: 3/1, pp. 355f..

¹⁵ *Un chrétien pour Israël* (Monaco, 1986), pp. 29f, with special application to Israel refusing to believe in Jesus.

¹⁶ 'The Exclusiveness and Inclusiveness of the Gospel', *Themelios* 4/2 (Jan. 1979) p. 63.

¹⁷ In *The Christian Doctrine of God* (*Dogmatics I*; London, 1949), pp. 346ff., Brunner severely criticizes the Barthian doctrine of election, but, pp. 352ff, he does not reject the *apokatastasis* (renouncing logical conclusions). He returns to this in *Dogmatics III* (*The Christian Doctrine of the Church...*, London, 1962), pp. 415-24 in a similar way.

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from traditionally orthodox positions. He has yielded to the same opposition between objectivity and faith, while showing leanings towards a Barthian (rather than Brunnerian) understanding of grace, laying stress on its all-determinative victory to which faith adds nothing. In 1953, as his views discreetly begin to change, he avoids entering the debate on the extent of Christ's substitution, even though the question belongs to his subject. He deals with the *apokatastasis*, with the relationship between the work of reconciliation and faith; he concludes that this relationship cannot be exactly analysed, but he is careful not to appear as a Barthian.¹⁸ In 1954, he explains more fully, in connection with the covenant promise, what function he gives to faith: it adds nothing, 'certainly not the application to one's life' (against Klaas Schilder).¹⁹ After his most evolutionary years, in 1961, Berkouwer ascribes a purely subjective import to the announcements of punishment: they are to be heeded as threats, they do not predict future events. As far as faith is concerned, if one imagines it as 'creating a situation that did not exist', it is a 'total misunderstanding'; he considers hell to have been exorcised through faith, and he declares his hostility to 'particularism'.²⁰

A new and less powerful revolution, of Hegelian inspiration just as the former was Kierkegaardian, has modified Protestant theology at the beginning of the 1960s. The thought of Jürgen Moltmann, the most representative in our opinion, surely the most influential in the *oikoumene*, also promotes universalism. At first somewhat hazy, it becomes more open in *The Crucified God*: since God, in Jesus, has identified himself with the poor, with criminals, with the ungodly (those without God), since the Son was abandoned of God, the ungodly *qua* ungodly are justified and integrated into his fellowship.²¹ Nothing indicates, in Moltmann's context, that he would deem faith a requisite to that end. On the contrary, he celebrates the abolition of differences including that 'between Christians and non-Christians' and refuses the idea of an 'enclave of redemption in an unredeemed world'.²² The third volume of Moltmann's famous trilogy is powerfully carried along by the hope of totalisation, of universal reconciliation, when all flesh *together*

¹⁸ *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1965), pp. 288–94.

¹⁹ *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids, 1969), pp. 157, 186.

²⁰ *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 409, 414ff, 408, 421, 409, 412.

²¹ *The Crucified God* (London, 1974), pp. 178, 248.

²² *Ibid.*, respectively pp.194f. and 101 (convergence with Ben-Chorin, 100).

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shall see the glory of God (Isa. 40:5, a verse often quoted there). Exalting the universality of the new covenant,²³ Moltmann states precisely in an important footnote that biblical particularism is subordinated to universalism.²⁴ The church, he claims, does *not* consist only of people having the same faith ('fellow-believers'), it cannot be defined as the 'community of the saved'.²⁵ He invites non-Christians to the Lord's Table, and he pleads that 'no religion (must be) extinguished'.²⁶ In his later works, Moltmann finds fewer opportunities to spell out his feeling; yet, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, he opposes the principle of judicial retribution: 'The guilt-expiation complex increases suffering and gives it permanence through the archaic religious idea of a world order that has been spoilt and has to be restored'; 'for love, there is only innocent suffering...'.²⁷ If Moltmann's caution, and eloquent use of biblical language in many parts of his writings, had left the shadow of a doubt on the reader's mind, these affirmations dispel it: the Tübingen theologian falls on the universalist's side.

Catholic Universalists

Catholic theology has, for a long time indeed, stressed universality. 'Universal' is one of the possible meanings of the word 'catholic' itself. Leonardo Boff well summarises the anthropo-cosmic interpretation of catholicity that is much in fashion today: 'The Christian faith... presents itself as the response to the totality of human aspirations and as the fulness of all the cosmic dynamisms working towards a final convergence.'²⁸ Used to cultivating the seeds of the *logos spermatikos* and to considering natural religions as a *praeparatio evangelica*, Catholic religion easily understands itself as the fulfilment and crowning glory of pagan hopes. The last decades have been marked by an evolution towards an even greater universalism. On non-Christian beliefs and modern unbelief, minds have changed at an accelerated pace; Hendrik Nys shows how in his *Saulchoir* (the most prestigious Dominican seminary in France)

²³ *The Church in the Power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London, 1977), p. 252.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375 n. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 293. Only on p. 230 can one read a sentence which seems to link justification to faith.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 246, 163.

²⁷ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London, 1981), p. 51.

²⁸ 'Mission et universalité concrète de l'Eglise', *Lumière et Vie* 27/137 (April-May 1978), p. 34.

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thesis, under the provocative title: *Salvation Without the Gospel*.²⁹ The publisher, we are told, suppressed a question mark which the author had added;³⁰ was the publisher a prophet?

Let us turn our searchlight to a few significant examples. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin surely worked in the universalist direction, he who loved to speak of 'pleromisation' and coined the adage: 'All that ascends converges.' He would foretell, e.g., a 'general convergence of Religions'.³¹ In 1926–27, he did maintain the reality of hell (was it to propitiate the censorship? He sounds quite sincere);³² in 1938–40 (in a text revised in 1948), he envisages as a hypothesis an ultimate 'ramification', that is to say, a division of humanity.³³ But in 1944, in a paper written without any hope of publication, when he wonders 'whether the salvific work (can) have a one hundred per cent profit', that is, if all shall be saved, he gives as his answer that 'Christianity will not decide that and does not deny it altogether'.³⁴

Since then, the doubt concerning the reality of hell has lessened! Such a distinguished theologian as Karl Rahner does not consider himself under any obligation, either by the doctrine of the church or by Scripture, to believe that 'at least some men are certainly damned'.³⁵ He is the most famous exalter of universal grace. Grace, as he is wont to say, is not 'rare'; grace so penetrates the world that it constitutes for all a 'supernatural existential', an ontological determinant of *Dasein*, the human condition.³⁶ 'All human realities, even when seen from their natural side, thus have in fact a "Christian soul"'.³⁷ 'God is the most inward dynamism of the world and of

²⁹ *Le Salut sans l'Évangile. Étude historique et critique du problème du 'salut des infidèles' dans la littérature théologique récente (1912–1964)* (Paris, 1966).

³⁰ This information comes from Bernard Bro, *Faut-il encore pratiquer? L'homme et les sacrements* (Paris, 1967), p. 415.

³¹ 'Comment je crois' (1934), *Oeuvres X* (Paris, 1969) p. 150 (cf. pp. 138–150).

³² *Le Milieu Divin*, (London, 1960), pp.140ff.

³³ *The Phenomenon of Man* (London, 1959), pp. 288f.

³⁴ 'Introduction à la vie chrétienne', *Oeuvres X*, p. 192.

³⁵ 'The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions', in *Theological Investigations IV* (London, 1966), p. 339 n. 15.

³⁶ Charles Muller and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner* (Paris, 1965), pp. 81, 83; Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 163ff.

³⁷ *Mission et grâce I: XXe siècle, siècle de grâce? Fondements d'une théologie pastorale pour notre temps* (Tours, 1962), p. 80.

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man's spirit.³⁸ Hence Rahner's assurance that we are surrounded by many 'anonymous Christians'; they are really Christians without knowing it if they sacrifice themselves for others, if they face death with serenity – even though they may deny God, Christ, and the church.³⁹ No appearance to the contrary will discourage Rahner's confidence here.⁴⁰ The statement that other religions have positive elements is left far behind; they have become legitimate options, and even *obligatory*, for 'man has the right and even the duty to realise his relationship with God *in* and *through* the religion which is offered to him in his concrete and historical situation'.⁴¹

After Teilhard and Rahner, we observe no reversal in the main tendencies of Catholic theology; many today repudiate the 'pessimistic' theology of Augustine and Jansen, and, of course, of the Protestant Reformers, and they acclaim an optimistic soteriology attributed to Irenaeus – with an explicit reference, sometimes, to Origen, to Gregory of Nyssa, whom they praise, and to *apokatastasis* as the hope they entertained.⁴²

Catholic universalism shows its defenders' skill: it is a fine, delicate, piece of work! It does not forsake Cyprian's dictum, which was, for centuries, the very formula of intolerance: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*; but now the church is universalised.⁴³ It does not discard tradition, and it proceeds with caution and reserve: Karl Rahner eschews any massive affirmation of *apokatastasis*, while he does allow (with Romans 11:32, he thinks) that we hope for it.⁴⁴ The threat of perdition still hovers over those who close their hearts to their neighbours: a residue, perhaps, of the need of works for

³⁸ *Le Courage du théologien*, dialogue with Karl Rahner published by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (Paris, 1985), p. 94.

³⁹ *Mission et grâce I*, pp. 79, 102, 158, 215, 223; *Mission et grâce III: au service des hommes. Pour une présence chrétienne au monde d'aujourd'hui* (Tours, 1965), pp. 22, 28; *Le Courage du théologien*, pp. 112, 183, 189, Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 264ff (234ff for Schillebeeckx).

⁴⁰ *Mission et grâce III*, pp. 61ff.

⁴¹ Nys, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁴² Cf. Jan-Hendrik Walgrave, *Un salut aux dimensions du monde* (Paris, 1970), pp. 90f, 93; although he is fairly conservative, the French Jesuit Gustave Martelet has written in the same anti-augustinian sense, *Libre Réponse à un scandale. La faute originelle, la souffrance, la mort* (Paris, 1986), pp. 44, 49, 73, 79f, 136; also 62: impenitent sinners only bring upon themselves God's mercy.

⁴³ *Le Courage du théologien*, pp. 141f.

⁴⁴ *Mission et grâce III*, p. 74.

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justification. And how subtle! Karl Rahner would deserve in his turn Duns Scotus's title of *doctor subtilis*! His argument makes the most of the complexity of human souls, of the hiatus which may obtain between levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. It detects the germ of implicit faith under strata of misunderstandings, of corrupted information, of emotional blockages. It follows a logic of gradation: it does not contrast the Yes and the No, unbelief and faith, but minuscule unconscious beginnings and final fullness, with the whole gamut to run in between. One of the most sober of all, himself, Yves Congar, admits of a faith before faith, such an embryo of faith that suffices for salvation and resides in the person's choice of values and the person's attitude to the neighbour – the 'sacrament of the neighbour'.⁴⁵

Opponents of Universalism

Resistance to universalism is to be found in two streams each far distant from the other. Some neo-liberal theologies (if that name be accepted) have scarcely any room for a general reconciliation at the end of time. Bultmannian theology, by disposing of all belief in the beyond as mythological, by reducing the *eschaton* to the *nunc* of the *kerygma*, brings into sharp focus the theme of decision: decision means division, and it is clear that not all arrive at authentic existence. The most radical among political theologies, gripped by the urgency of earthly combats leading to revolution, rediscover the need to take sides, as well as the relevance of judgment.⁴⁶ One can discern, moreover, in the surrounding culture, in reaction against totalitarian ideologies, a new mistrust of all-incompassing schemes, even of claims to universal validity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Vaste Monde ma paroisse. Vérité et dimensions du salut* (Paris, 1966), p. 142; the first edition included the phrase 'the sacrament of the neighbour' which was later suppressed.

⁴⁶ Georges Casalis, *Les idées justes ne tombent pas du ciel. Eléments de théologie inductive* (Paris, 1977), pp. 175f, 180; and 172 against 'tolerance shown to "another gospel" (Gal. 1:9)'.
⁴⁷ Henri Bourgeois, 'Jésus, l'universel du pauvre', *Lumière et Vie* 27/137 (April–May 1978), pp. 119, 122, has felt this well. The work of Pierre Gisel, *La Création. Essai sur la liberté et la nécessité, l'histoire et la loi, l'homme, le mal et Dieu* (Geneva, 1980), is significant in this respect. He preaches constantly for difference, otherness, rupture. On pp. 233ff, he mentions Calvin's doctrine of predestination positively because 'it shows that difference is paramount, that God is special, that he takes sides' (234).

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Evangelical theology, at the opposite corner, continues firmly to resist universalism. The concerns of evangelisation are close to its heart, as the statements emanating from great congresses or conferences prove (Berlin 1966, Amsterdam 1971, Lausanne 1974, Pattaya 1980, Stuttgart 1988, Lausanne II in Manila 1989). The Indian theologian Ajith Fernando's plea stands as a representative example. An important cleavage remains, however, in relation to hypothetical universalism. Rigorous Calvinists would fight against it, and defend the so-called 'limited' atonement.⁴⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield highlighted, at the beginning of this century, the solidarity of 'limited' atonement with the principle of *sola fide*, and with free access to God without any intermediary.⁴⁹ John Murray has gathered exegetical insights in a remarkable dogmatic synthesis.⁵⁰ Roger Nicole, the major authority on Amyraut in the world, has refuted him in his Harvard dissertation.⁵¹ James Packer has warmly commended John Owen's still relevant treatment.⁵²

On the other side, the advocates of the Amyraldian 'hypothesis' reject, in Calvinism, what, in their eyes, narrows and impoverishes divine grace.⁵³ With Fernando, Pinnock, and others, they feel that a horrible doubt is cast upon God's love for all people. They fear that the universal offer of salvation be deprived of its necessary foundation, and that the unbeliever should appear not as responsible for his fate, but as the victim of the obscure *fatum* of God's decree. Was Calvin himself, on this issue, a Calvinist? The controversy has started afresh recently concerning this point. It would seem difficult to overthrow Roger Nicole's demonstration, so closely argued and painstaking⁵⁴ – but each writer interprets Calvin as he does the

⁴⁸ The English phrase 'limited atonement' is less happy than the French 'expiation définie'. Contrary to the Calvinists' intention, it suggests an insufficiency in redemption, a lesser grace. The aim is rather to contest what is indefinite, and therefore weak, ineffective.

⁴⁹ *The Plan of Redemption* (Philadelphia, 1915).

⁵⁰ *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, 1955).

⁵¹ Unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard Divinity School, 1966.

⁵² Introduction to a new edition of John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648; London, 1959).

⁵³ See the symposium, Clark Pinnock (ed.), *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis, 1975). In Calvinist eyes, of course, Amyraldian and Arminian grace is limited: by the autonomous power of human free-will, which can frustrate God's grace.

⁵⁴ 'John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement', *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985), pp. 197–225; see EQ 55

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Bible, compelled carefully to weigh data quite diverse in a complex whole!

Analysis: Factors at Work

It is rare that a doctrine makes disciples in proportion to its merits (success, sometimes, is inversely proportional to its value!). Many non-theological factors play their part. We will not try to explain the favour that universalism enjoys today; rather, more modestly, to discern the motivations, orientations and connected choices of the *theologians* of universalism, in order to understand it better. As will surprise no one, the various factors that we will isolate are concretely combined, to different degrees, in the authors mentioned.

The sentimental, even the visceral, factor seems to push most people towards universalism. We speak of a moral sensitivity, and emotional attachment to *values*. A mutation has taken place in the attitude towards the sufferings of others, even sufferings that have been well-deserved, as R. Bauckham writes.⁵⁵ We quoted earlier Moltmann's eloquent statement to that effect. The law of retribution is shattered or denied, and, with it, the penal understanding of Christ's death on the cross.⁵⁶ The French Protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls for 'the preacher who would only

(1983), pp. 65-128, and Paul Helm, 'The Logic of Limited Atonement', *SBET* 3 (1985) pp. 47-54, mainly a reply to James B. Torrance. We have come across recently a passage which is not mentioned in Roger Nicole's full and careful review and would seem to be strongly in favour of hypothetical universalism: in his 28th Sermon on Deuteronomy, Calvin distinguishes between several loves of God for men; while God's third love, regenerating love, is only for the faithful, the first love 'extends to all men' and it involves Christ having been made a curse in order to reconcile us to his Father (*Opera Calvini*, XXVI, col. 216, as quoted at length by Pierre Marcel, 'L'Actualité de la prédication', *La Revue Réformée* no. 7 (1951), p. 53).

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Cf. the large-scale offensive launched by Paul Ricoeur, 'Interprétation du mythe de la peine', in *Le Conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris, 1969), pp. 348-69. The penal interpretation, that Bossuet preached, meets with an almost total hostility among Catholics today; cf. Martelet, *op. cit.*, p. 160; also Bernard Sèsboue, 'Equisse d'une théologie de la Rédemption', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 106 (1984), pp. 801-16 and 107 (1985), pp. 68-86. These authors are among the more moderate!

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utter a word of liberation, never a word of prohibition and condemnation'.⁵⁷ O Micah! You who did stand in front of the false prophets as the fearless denouncer of Israel's crimes, as the herald of judgment! *They* preached freedom, security, and prosperity, and *you* preached the coming of captivity and disaster! Woe to those who go on proclaiming 'Peace! Peace!', and there is no peace... And then, if the modern sense of love excludes punishment, another value reinforces the same effect: that of solidarity. It has ascended to the supreme rank. Under its influence, individualism is not only stigmatised as an intellectual error, but as unforgivable meanness. The poor in general are seen in 'the least of these my brethren' of Matthew 25 – other exegetical possibilities are simply ignored.⁵⁸ Hoping to be saved without all the others is deemed unworthy. To that can be added the education given, or fostered, by the ecumenical dialogue. It has become very bad taste to judge someone else, even to have hesitations about the legitimacy of his convictions or forms of worship. Regarding non-Christian religions, the weight is heavy also of the Westerners' bad conscience, as they recall shamefully the memories of antisemitism, colonialism, and imperialism.

The speculative interest, dear to theologians, counts more than many would imagine (it, too, corresponds to a feeling, an 'aesthetic' one). A writer such as John Hick would not be able to solve the problem he grapples with, namely that of theodicy, without the final restoration of all beings.⁵⁹ In Karl Barth's position, the desire systematically to magnify grace, the victory of Jesus, is evident. When he reduces faith to awareness, to cognitive apprehension, even to the status of *epiphenomenon*,⁶⁰ his concern is to block any detracting from the fulness of the *tetelestai* in John 19:30 – 'it is finished'. One can feel how disgusted he is with all forms of Pelagianism, including Bultmann's. This intention, however, would find expression in other ways were there not a propensity to play abstractly with humanity 'in himself' and humanity 'in Christ', with being and non-being (*das Nichtige*), with 'reality' and 'ontological impossibility', to say nothing of his decision to brand the *Logos*

⁵⁷ 'Religion, athéisme, foi', in *Le Conflit des interprétations*, p. 438.

⁵⁸ J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 126. The other exegesis, however, also finds supporters. Recently Jean Ansaldi has discerned that Jesus has 'believers' in mind, in his chapter 'Justice et paix dans la théologie et dans l'éthique', of *L'Agitation et le rire. Contribution critique au débat 'Justice, paix et sauvegarde de la création'* (Paris, 1989), p. 59 n. 3.

⁵⁹ Cf. R. Bauckham, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁶⁰ CD IV:1, p. 317.

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asarkos as 'abstract' (why so?). At times, Barth feels the strength of showing that all history since the creation, including evil, had to happen as it has done.⁶¹ His speculative passion conspicuously resembles, then, a gnostic *eros*. With Moltmann, the abstract handling of categories is also manifest. Salvation operates by the power of a Hegelian reversal: because God opposes himself to himself and undergoes God-forsakenness, rejection by God is abolished for all those without God. This dialectical logic seems to be more determinative for Moltmann's views than any cautious exegesis of Scripture. (Elsewhere, he is satisfied with the vaguer, and more metaphorical, notion of the incorporation of evil into the life of God.) That modern theology, in Catholic circles, that claims Irenaeus' patronage, unfolds a vast vision of ascending progress, from humanity's feeble infancy up to beatific vision; its appeal is there, with the twin speculative advantage of harmonising with evolutionary thought (including the sphere of palaeo-anthropology), and with the traditional doctrine of divinisation.⁶² This last theme finds no root in a theology which emphasises the tragedy of sin and discontinuities between the fallen and original states of man – this is why the Reformers did not retain this part of Augustine's inheritance.

A pastoral feeling has its part to play as well, made stronger by the contribution of human sciences (after the speculative, the empirical factor). In the reluctance to admit that an individual's eternal destiny would depend on the authenticity of his faith, there is the disillusioned 'wisdom' of the one who knows from experience the frailty, the complexity, the impurity, and the mediocrity, of the faith of believers. Where should the frontier of true faith be traced in the tangled web of drives, impulses, efforts, and reactions? We can sense how acute the problem is if we think, after so many disappointments with Christian believers, of admirable examples among unbelievers, or Jews, or Muslims!⁶³ When psychologists or sociologists get involved and start describing people moved by unconscious mechanisms, it is difficult to give a decisive role to conscious faith. Catholics, at this point, excel in bringing out the import of hidden, preconscious, intentions: they could imply an authentic faith in God, although embryonic, even in a self-declared

⁶¹ *CD* II:2, p. 142.

⁶² This skilful conciliation is what makes Martelet's book so seductive.

⁶³ Cf. Serge de Beaurecueil's experience in Afghanistan: 'Pas de frontières au Royaume de Dieu', *Lumière et Vie* 27/137 (April–May 1978), pp. 53–62.

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atheist... We listened to this language,⁶⁴ and it deserves to be heard. But the consequences are stupendous. Let anthropology add its word about personhood as shaped by culture, as a product of social intercourse and influence, and all religions will be legitimate: 'Man's nature requires the divine invitation as well as the human acceptance to have a social structure. God does not come to man, and man does not come to himself, except *in* and *through* the world and others'; therefore every established religion is *rightful* for those who are born within its sphere of influence.⁶⁵ If we take into account 'implicit' orientations and stress the collective dimension of human life, how easy it is to include, how difficult to exclude!

The condition whereby these different factors produce their universalist effect is the modern drift away from the ancient reception of Scripture. One must loosen first the sovereign authority of the canonical text. Richard Bauckham rightly insists: 'Thus the modern universalist is no longer bound to the letter of the New Testament.'⁶⁶ We know of no great theologian who has slipped towards universalism while maintaining a strictly orthodox attitude to Scripture (Berkouwer is no exception). Modern universalists put forward hermeneutical considerations (the weight of which they often tend to overestimate) to distance themselves from the text. Its cultural conditioning, the abundance of imagery, and especially its 'existential' intent, allegedly authorise a departure from the 'obvious sense'.⁶⁷ Origen already explained that Scripture should say 'many' and not 'all' by its desire to 'leave the simpler and slacker an incentive for striving for salvation'.⁶⁸ Universalists build their case on the *a priori* opposition between religious or biblical language, with its 'kerygmatic' mode and aims, and the language of objective information. This *a priori* is foreign to Scripture, and it works as a Procrustean bed when applied to biblical theology; it renders possible emancipation under respectful forms.

⁶⁴ Cf. Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 135ff, 153ff.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ This is what Karl Rahner develops with finesse and circumspection in the article quoted above (note 35). More brutal versions are to be found in the works of J.A.T. Robinson.

⁶⁸ Quoted by Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 406 n. 51.

Towards a Reply: Some Considerations

The noble task of framing an Evangelical reply to universalism exceeds the bounds of our present study. We shall content ourselves with making some remarks, which we hope will be relevant and that will deal in reverse order with the factors just outlined.

The attitude to Scripture, once again, decides the course that one will take. Without revisiting the issue of bibliology here, we would draw attention to the scientific quality of much material that was published in the last ten years or so, especially in symposia: they can sharpen our discernment, they dispel misunderstanding, they update arguments.⁶⁹

More specifically, the nerve centre in the universalist treatment of the Bible is the reduction of condemnatory prophecies to the category of mere threats and warnings (which will never come about). The primary response should be the exegesis of particular passages, such as 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10 and 2:10–12, to measure in detail the degree of adequacy or inadequacy of their suggested interpretation; the work that has already been done by orthodox scholars does not yield a favourable verdict. The coherence of the universalist logic should, then, bear scrutiny; Paul Helm's implacable analysis uncovers the flaws in the constructions of Hick, of Robinson (briefly), and it is convincing on what it calls *soft universalism*, universalism admitting of independent free-will.⁷⁰ Above all, those presuppositions should be brought to light which, uncritically (but not above criticism!), divide between objective information and kerygmatic or existential intent.

For instance, in Rahner's most skilful plea, we may note that his idea of humanity's historicity leads him abstractly to exaggerate the mysterious, hidden, character of the *eschaton*, to the benefit of pure unforeseeableness, and so to shut himself up in an alternative which is too hard and artificial: either a report on the future which no longer concerns our today existentially, or else: 'Man, even by revelation, only knows about this still absent future what he can, prospectively, decipher in his present state *from* and *in* his historic experience of salvation.'⁷¹ What a strange *Diktat*! Is it not possible

⁶⁹ D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids, 1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (1986); Paul Wells, ed., *Dieu parle! Etudes sur la Bible et son interprétation* (Aix-en-Provence, 1984).

⁷⁰ 'Universalism and the Threat of Hell', *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983), pp. 35–43.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 155. On the other points mentioned, pp. 148, 150f, 153 (n. 2).

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to know about facts to come that cannot be extrapolated from the present alone and which, nevertheless, do concern this present time? If someone discloses to me that my house will be on fire (because he knows of an arsonist's scheme, yet impossible to prevent), my present existence is affected indeed; I try to protect my belongings, I buy a fireproof safe, *etc.* If Scripture discloses that Jesus Christ is coming in glory to judge 'the quick and the dead', the knowledge of this fact, of this fact as an objectively certain fact, yet which we could hardly prognosticate from the mere deciphering of the present, urges us to make sensible choices today. Such a God-given knowledge is a guide for decision; it does not stifle decision-making. If everything were foretold, down to the smallest detail, with a complete time-table, both the full programme of eschatology and all historical events before, one could fear, perhaps, the asphyxiation of human freedom. But the wisdom of our God does not proceed in this way: although he does embrace in his Design all our moves – he *can* do so without wounding their true freedom owing to the radical interiority of his action – the Lord judges that our finite freedom, in order to work consciously, needs to know *enough* without knowing *all*. Rahner argues as if human freedom were infinite, and could only tolerate in front of itself a total vacuum, so as to create the future *ex nihilo*! Freedom is a creature; it receives its measure, and that is *the good* for freedom.⁷²

With regard to the appraisal of faith, studied empirically, we confess that the reply is difficult. The first step would be, perhaps, for Evangelicals, to recognise this difficulty and to learn a little more subtlety from those who would appear to have too much of it! We should recall, however, that Evangelical theologians are of diverse opinions, with various shades and nuances, on such an issue as the fate of those who have no access to the explicit gospel, in oral or written form.⁷³ We propose that God's general revelation, in creation and providence (*cf.* Matt. 5:45), provides *enough light* to enable men and women, if the Holy Spirit is at work (as in all conversions), to put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation – without knowing more about him than the humblest Old Testament believers.⁷⁴ This is in no way a concession to syncretist confusion. On the basis of Scripture, solid analyses have rightly exposed the

⁷² In the shaping of Rahner's thought, we would incriminate his philosophical idealism and the humanistic antimony Nature-Freedom.

⁷³ *Cf.* the competent survey by Malcolm J. McVeigh, 'The Fate of Those Who've Never Heard? It Depends', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 21 (1985), pp. 370–79.

⁷⁴ This comes nigh Sir J. Norman D. Anderson's view, *loc. cit.*

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dodging of major incompatibilities between religions.⁷⁵ On the delicate question of the role of faith in salvation, of this faith whose 'too human' reality does not seem to be able to bear such a great weight, the reply cannot but refer to the *divine* reality of faith. Only if faith is the gift and the work of God, creating a vital, organic, union with Christ, is it understandable that it makes all the difference.

The criticism of the major speculative schemata would require volumes. We would wish to underline two points particularly: the need for the unequivocal treatment of the problem of evil that brings out the historical character of evil, foreign to the first perfection of God's created work; and, then, the solidity of the Evangelical anchoring of the doctrine of penal substitution, so strongly attested in Scripture and so persistently attacked by modernist theologies.

What is the bearing, in our debate, of the historicity of evil? Denouncing evil as a historical intrusion is the original feature of the biblical account (of the 'Adamic myth', Paul Ricoeur says when he compares it with the myths of nations), and the church confessed it until the advent of modern rationalism. Nobody would have raised doubts, and alleged literary clues in Genesis, had it not been for the pressure of a rival discourse on origins. Only when another reconstruction of human beginnings swayed the minds of many did a symbolic, non-historical, interpretation of Eden gain much ground. If the Bible, then, does reveal a 'Fall' in space and time, at a second stage, what is the significance? It draws the distinction between evil and the metaphysical constitution of reality. If evil has arisen afterwards, it does not belong to being (or to the simple negation of being), it is not part of the human condition as such. Whosoever denies that, and disavows the real succession of blessed integrity, to start with, and inexcusable transgression, later, shall end with the ascription of a metaphysical, first-principle, character to evil. Under close scrutiny, all the speculative systems which we have mentioned verify this rule. *Now the cure corresponds to the disease.* To save us from an unpleasant metaphysical determinant, a metaphysical operation will be in order (and no longer the payment, once, of our debt to justice, the bearing of our sins by the Lamb that was slain, as the apostles preached). Atonement or redemption will be understood as the *assumptio* of the human by the divine, with divinising effects, or as the incorporation of the negative into God... Such operations will apply to human nature or condition as such, and therefore will

⁷⁵ Cf. the excellent article of Harold Netland, 'Religious Pluralism and Truth', *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985), pp. 74-87, esp. 82-86 refuting Hick; of Netland also: 'Exclusivism, Tolerance and Truth', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 12 (1988), pp. 240-60.

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affect equally *all* human beings. It is a universalist slope. Some may stop half-way, but one starts sliding as soon as one balks at confessing *as an event* that 'sin entered into the world'.⁷⁶

That the cross of Calvary was the punishment that brought us peace, because Jesus the Christ was thus bearing our sins on the tree of torment, that he thus paid our debt and ransomed us from the curse, is the primary meaning of his death for Evangelical theology. Since the Reformation, it is the privileged emphasis when salvation is preached, and it outshines other biblical aspects of the work of redemption. Its warrants in Scripture have been repeatedly set forth in scholarly studies;⁷⁷ even critics who refuse to subscribe to the doctrine have acknowledged its rootage: Bultmann, for instance, openly defines the New Testament understanding of the cross as a 'mythical interpretation' which 'is a mixture of sacrificial and juridical analogies'.⁷⁸ Bultmann rightly perceives what he dislikes indeed! While it has been largely misinterpreted or ignored by the incarnational theology of Catholic tradition, by the subjective choice of Socinians and of their Liberal posterity, by speculations of Hegelian style, the atonement effected by Christ's penal substitution is the heart of the message.

But what is the connection with the issue of universalism? It is easy to perceive the bonds of solidarity with the historical character of evil which we have just stressed, but does a vicarious atonement

⁷⁶ For fuller developments we may refer to what we have written elsewhere, especially *In the Beginning. The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, transl. by David G. Preston (Leicester, 1984), chapter VII; 'Evangile, mythe ou histoire?' in Henri Blocher and F. Lovsky, *Bible et Histoire* (Lausanne, 1980) for the confrontation with myths; *Le Mal et la Croix. La pensée chrétienne aux prises avec le mal* (Méry-sur-Oise, 1990) for a critical analysis of main theories.

⁷⁷ John R.W. Stott's synthesis, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, 1986), has been rightly praised as a most representative defence of the evangelical view; half of Leon Morris' admirable scholarly work, since *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London, 1955), is devoted to the same doctrine in the New Testament; a dense and rigorous demonstration is set forth by James I. Packer, 'What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution', *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974) pp. 1-45. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Work of Christ* (Exeter, 1969); G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*; and still Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, repr. 1950).

⁷⁸ In his famous 1941 lecture 'The New Testament and Mythology' in H.-W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth* (London, 1972), p. 35.

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for sin *exclude* that salvation, in the end, should actually reach all human beings?

The consequences of the biblical doctrine of redemption, as to its 'scope', cannot be drawn if we do not settle the question of *hypothetical* universalism. Even without becoming a Barthian (for Barth disowns the orthodox doctrine of substitution),⁷⁹ one can conceive of such a penal substitution that would efficiently secure the final justification of all. Since the biblical data furnish a superabundant proof that, alas! such is not the case, we must carefully reexamine the 'articulation' of redemption accomplished and redemption applied.

Amyraldian, hypothetical universalism raises some serious difficulties. It has, to be sure, important assets: it enables one to highlight two truly biblical 'universalities', that of the love of God, who does not want anyone to perish, and that of the offer of salvation, which is made to all, indiscriminately. But it stumbles over a first problem: if Christ *did pay* the judicial debt of a reprobate, God cannot condemn and punish this person: for God would be unjust! He cannot require twice the same price. It is not enough to reply that the reprobate refuses God's grace and that he condemns himself, for Scripture underlines that the judgment is *of God*, that punishment is inflicted *of him*. The popular comparison with a cheque that requires the payee's endorsement to bring about its effect cannot apply: for the precious blood of the divine ransom *has been shed*. Seventeenth-century Arminians, following Grotius, tried to solve the difficulty by toning down the idea of the debt paid; they retained only a solemn illustration (on Calvary) of the deserts of sin *generally*. But it was no longer strictly true that Christ *bore our sins*.

The second major obstacle in the way of hypothetical universalism is the *trinitarian* dissonance it implies: the Father chooses the elect, the Holy Spirit works in the same only the willing and doing of faith, and the reference of the Son's sacrifice would remain undefined. Moysse Amyraut, who claimed to be a Calvinist on election and the gift of faith, must have sorely felt the force of that point. But it is not lost on Evangelical Arminians, contrary to what some could expect: for Arminians do not deny election and the Spirit's work as particular; they only make them dependent on an independent human

⁷⁹ CD IV:1, p. 253: 'We must not make this [i.e. suffering our punishment] a main concept..., either in the sense that by His suffering our punishment we are spared from suffering it ourselves, or that in so doing He "satisfied" or offered satisfaction to the wrath of God. The latter thought is quite foreign to the New Testament.'

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decision (through foresight or passive foreknowledge in the case of election) without erasing the particular character. For them also, therefore, coherence would be greater if the Son had died for the same beneficiaries, whose faith God had foreknown! For them also (we may recall), it is infallibly certain, before the foundation of the world, it is unchangeably written in the book of God, that this man, John or Peter or Andrew, will harden himself to the end and be lost; it is true of all reprobates on Arminian premises, and hypothetical universalism cannot alter the fact. This somewhat harsh reminder suggests that Amyraldian universalism fails as a strategy for avoiding the 'hard' core of biblical teaching – and, so, is it worth paying the price of its difficulties?

The rejection of the so-called 'limited' atonement (non-indefinite atonement) often stems from misunderstanding, or from acquaintance with a mere caricature. Thus, the *sufficiency* of Christ's sacrifice for all human beings is not denied by true Calvinists; with Calvin himself writing on 1 John 2:2, they are able to say *sufficient* for all and *efficient* for believers only. One may render justice to 'universal' texts, to the biblical theme of peace, by considering humankind as an organic whole – although most Calvinists have sadly neglected that dimension and missed theological riches. The Lamb of God truly took upon himself, and took away, the sin of the world as a global entity. The New Adam does assume and save Humankind and, together with Humankind, the infra-human cosmos that depends on him. Abraham Kuyper was able to bring to light this universality of redemption, that lies too often hidden:

If we liken mankind, thus, as it has grown up out of Adam, to a tree, then the elect are not leaves which have been plucked off from the tree that there may be braided from them a wreath for God's glory, while the tree itself is to be felled, rooted up and cast into the fire; but precisely the contrary, the lost are the branches, twigs and leaves which have fallen away from the stem of mankind, while the elect alone remain attached to it.⁸⁰

All images have their limitations, and this one is not perfect: but it has the advantage of reminding us of the apostle's illustration of Israel: the olive-tree enjoys salvation (the organic aspect), while unbelieving Jews are cut off from the tree *individually*. To transfer this apostolic piece of symbolism as Kuyper does is all the more

⁸⁰ *E Voto Dordraceno* II, p. 178, as quoted by B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 336; Saint Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* XIV, 44, affirms of the elect: 'The whole human race is in them' (*omne genus hominum est in eis*).

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justified since Israel represents the entire human race, both in grace and in judgement – the key feature in Israel's mystery. Even apart from this global, organic view, Calvinists who hold to a particular atonement *can* add that Christ died, in some respects, 'for all human beings', even for the reprobates: he did not settle their judicial debt, but he secured for them the benefits of this earthly life (the reprieve which God grants to the 'old' sinful world logically depends on redemption), and his sacrifice validly grounds an offer of salvation which they could receive – *if only they wanted to*.

It is impossible here to review all the relevant biblical passages; it has been done elsewhere. The foregoing considerations enable us to harmonise Calvinism with a great number of those statements in Scripture which hypothetical universalists are wont to put forward; in most other cases, contextual hints favour, or, at least, allow, an interpretation different from theirs. On the opposite side, particularistic texts also abound. If the reference (scope) of Christ's substitution were simply universal, without any distinction, why would it be said so regularly 'for us' (believers), for the church, *etc.*? It is the seed of Abraham that he took on himself (Heb. 2:16). Far from any collusion with Calvinism, Albert Schweitzer deemed it to be historically established that Jesus thought he would die for a well-defined community, the community of the elect.⁸¹ The Qumran scrolls, which help us better to understand the language of the Gospels, provide us with a new piece of evidence. The Qumran Essenes, as we read in their *Community Rule*, loved to call themselves 'the Many' (1 QS, the rendering of most interpreters, including Dupont-Sommer): they borrowed the term from the Isaiah 52–53 prophecy, where *hārabbîm* is insistently repeated to designate the beneficiaries of the Servant's death. We cannot doubt that they gave the word a particularist meaning, for they passionately claimed to be, and they alone, the true Israel of God, the elect people; on the apostate nation, on the sons of Belial, they would call fire down from heaven. Now, Jesus uses the same term, as is obvious from its Greek equivalent, *hoi polloi*, when he also alludes to Isaiah 53 and tells of the gift of his Servant's life as a ransom substituted for 'the Many' (Matt. 20:28). This is a weighty argument. One more scriptural consideration opposed to hypothetical universalism: occurrences with 'all' are not found in any greater number in connection with the Cross than they are with the End; on Amyraldian terms, there should be a clear-cut disproportion! This element adds to the others and strengthens the suspicious feeling that an indefinite atonement might not turn out to be as biblical as it looked at first sight.

⁸¹ *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London, 1931), p.58.

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Ultimately, what convinces us relates to the concrete conditions of Christ's substitution. That a given individual should judicially 'pay' for another raises serious objections: is it not the typical denial of justice? As long as one affirms, in the abstract, that Jesus Christ bore the criminal's penalty instead of him, something of a scandal arises: 'The soul that sins, *it* shall die.' In biblical perspective, substitution is possible, is rightful, when we do not deal with isolated individuals: when communal bonds allow a transference of responsibilities, when the head of the community makes himself accountable for the deeds of his own or acts on their behalf, whether for good or for ill – all members shall bear the consequences, as the people had to bear them when David sinned. Jesus Christ achieved the work of redemption in such a capacity, and there was nothing undefined. He delivered himself concretely as the Shepherd for *his* sheep, as the King for *his* people, as the Master for *his* friends, as the Head for *his* body, as the Bridegroom for *his* bride, as the New and Last Adam for the *new* humanity, that is regenerate humanity. The community whose head is Christ, the new humanity, is constituted by all those who believe in his name: in the end, the elect.

Why the uneasiness of not a few with this doctrine? One source, we suggest, is the intermingling of two points of view that it is better to distinguish (without separating them). Let us beware of interference: either we consider things according to chronology, as they happen in time, as we experience them in history; or *sub specie aeternitatis*, but not both in mixed (mixed-up) fashion. In time, on earth, Jesus Christ makes atonement as the Man, the vicarious Sinner, the Head of a body yet to be built, whose members have not yet been determined *in time*. They will so determine themselves in coming to faith (the Holy Spirit working), and they will benefit from the work of their Head, the Servant, in joining themselves to him. It is offered them universally, with unequivocal sincerity. From the point of view of eternity (of which God's revelation grants us a few glimpses), the plan of salvation, as God conceived it, is a unified whole leading to the goal that God has set; God the Father chooses, out of the mass of justly condemned humanity, those whom he will redeem; he sends his Son that he may yield his life as a ransom for *them*, and his Spirit that he may generate in *them* saving faith, through the Word.

Why has not the Father elected all men and women for salvation, leaving none outside? The theologian's humble stance is borne out when he confesses his ignorance, when he consents to the mystery of such a free, sovereign, grace that dominates him absolutely. Theopneustic Scripture reveals the solemn truth of perdition; we would be foolish if we claimed to know better. It behoves us, as *viatores*, to add our 'alas!' – hoping that we shall not even remember

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it when we reach the fullness of Light... For the time being, we can only try to dispel misunderstandings: knowing that our affections, our sensitivity, are little permeable to argument, we can correct mental images and inadequate ideas of eternal punishment.

Scripture, for instance, never suggests the idea that it is a divine defeat, or that sin continues, that evil perpetuates itself in Gehenna. On the contrary, evil, vanquished and crushed by judgement shall no longer exist! Every tongue shall confess (Phil. 2:10f), all creatures shall be 'reconciled' (Col. 1:20): this must mean that *all* human beings, without any exception, in the blaze of that Day, shall see at last in truth. They will render to God the homage he requires: a sincere Amen assenting to judgement. The ungodly shall condemn their own ungodliness, in agreement with God; they will wish for nothing else than for punishment as they will *see* that punishment alone can right them with God; the consuming desire of their conscience shall be to satisfy the divine justice. It will be *good* for them to glorify God in and through their judgement; they will thus fulfil, in spite of a lost life, the essential calling of all creatures – to glorify the Lord – and they will know it. It might happen that this doctrine be more merciful, in the end, to them, than theories which have been framed to elude the clarity of biblical teaching.⁸²

Even if it is interpreted more accurately, the revelation of the destiny of impenitent sinners, lost for ever, will continue to grieve and to baffle our sense. Our limitations in this earthly pilgrimage, and the influence of the age make us vulnerable indeed. Only a biblical counter-culture and a devotional life soaked through in the fear of the Lord can make us strong to resist undue impulses. The sadness that will not subside, soundly so, will foster a true gospel zeal – knowing the fear of the Lord... the love of Christ constrains us (2 Cor. 5:11, 14) – and a sober mind, *sophrosune*, in theology. A sober theology acknowledges that it can discern only *en ainigmati* the things that are revealed; it moves ahead with the trust of forgiven sinners in God the Only Wise, and Love sovereign.

⁸² See further our article 'La doctrine du châtement éternel', *Ichthus* 32 (April 1973), pp.3–9.

PREACHING FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT¹

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Introduction

I greatly welcome the privilege of being able to give this Finlayson Lecture because it gives me the opportunity publicly to pay my own tribute to the memory of an outstanding Christian. My first acquaintance with the Christian witness of R. A. Finlayson was when he came to Aberdeen to speak at conventions organised by the Aberdeen Evangelistic Association somewhere around 1950. Thereafter I heard him on numerous occasions, both at the Keswick Convention and in various meetings of the Aberdeen University Evangelical Union and IVF conferences. His profound knowledge of Scripture and his lucidity in exposition made a great impression on me. He was doubtless not a popular preacher, for he assumed that his audience would pay heed to him without needing any devices to hold their attention, and with him every word counted. There was also a problem for hearers who could not cope with a strong West Highland accent. But the content was pure gold, and I would certainly rank him as the best Scottish preacher that I have ever heard. And, if I may with Paul descend to boasting and putting things in human terms, the best of Scottish preachers will stand comparison with the best from anywhere else.

It is, then, primarily as a preacher that I think of R. A. Finlayson, and it is therefore appropriate that I should use this occasion to say something about preaching, although whether he would approve of all that I am about to say is one of those questions that cannot be answered.

There are of course many discussions of preaching and how to do it. When I first began to preach myself, I longed for books that would help me with the actual task of constructing and writing sermons. It was one thing to see that a text or passage could be recognised as the spine of a possible sermon with three vertebrae; the problem was to put flesh onto those three vertebrae and to avoid putting on the same flesh each time. Eventually I found some help and much inspiration in the writings of W. E. Sangster, who is still unsurpassed in the study of 'how to do it' in terms of presentation,

¹ The Finlayson Memorial Lecture delivered at the annual conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society on Wednesday 10th April, 1991, at the Faith Mission Bible College, Edinburgh. The spoken form has been largely retained in the printed version.

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although he tended to discuss how to give variety in sermon structure rather than how to develop the content in detail.²

But our question today is the more fundamental one of the content of the sermon in relation to the NT, and it will inevitably be seen from the standpoint of the student of the NT. I am sadly aware that I do not give this topic the attention it deserves in the Divinity Faculty at Aberdeen where many of the students are preachers, but this lecture contains some of the things that I would like to share with them.

The Place of Preaching in the Church Meeting

We start by asking a question about what goes on when a congregation gathers in church. I suggest that there are three activities which go on simultaneously, although the emphasis may be more on any one of them at a given time.³

1. Service to God. The most usually used names for what is going on in a church meeting are 'worship' and 'service'. These express what the congregation is doing towards God, and their activity consists in the offering of prayer, praise (often sung) and their self-dedication. The person who is 'leading' the service acts as their spokesperson or representative in this activity. For example, he may say, 'Let us praise God in hymn 123', or he may voice the prayers on behalf of the congregation as a whole.

2. Addressing the congregation. What the term 'worship' does not bring out adequately is that God is also doing something to the congregation. He is communicating himself and his Word to them, words that may be of grace, judgement, encouragement, persuasion, comfort, challenge, instruction and so on. It is this Word to which the congregation responds in their worship and service. And in this activity various people or perhaps a single leader now act on behalf of God. Somebody reads the Word of God in Scripture to the congregation, and then the same person or somebody else delivers a sermon in which what God is saying to the congregation through the Scripture is made plain.

3. Fellowship. Both of these activities take place in the context of what I call fellowship. Fellowship is the mutual bond which arises between people who participate in a common object or concern. In

² W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon* (London, 1949); *The Craft of Sermon Illustration* (London, 1946); *Power in Preaching* (London, 1958).

³ See I. H. Marshall, 'How Far Did the Early Christians Worship God?', in *Churchman* 99 (1985), pp. 216-229; cf. D. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester, 1991).

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this case, the members of the congregation are united through their common participation in salvation and their common life in Christ. Bonds of love are established and expressed between all the people, and here the leader of the group is, as it were, just one of the congregation.

Now the significance of this brief discussion is to highlight two important facts:

1. The main activity. Since whatever God does is by definition more important than what we do, and since grace is prior to faith, it follows that the most important thing that takes place in the church meeting is the self-communication of God to the people. The reading of Scripture is the central and indispensable element in a Christian meeting. The sermon is a close second. But the fact that the congregational gathering is so often said to be for 'worship' or 'service' has the effect of obscuring this primary element and sometimes lead to rather grotesque efforts to justify the presence of a sermon in a church gathering. Rather, we should think of the church meeting as the occasion when, gathered together in fellowship, we listen to what God has to say to us and then make our response to his Word.

2. The preacher's responsibility. The person or persons leading the meeting have the difficult task of acting in three different capacities, the one which concerns us here being that of speaking on behalf of God as the people who proclaim his Word. This emphasises the great importance of the sermon or whatever we call it, and equally the heavy responsibility of the person who does the proclamation. Therefore 1 Peter 4:11 says, 'If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.' I believe that we can see something of this consciousness on the part of at least some of the New Testament writers, and it is also seen in some of those who spoke in God's name. the preacher today should have this same consciousness.

The Text and the Sermon

It follows from what we have just said that the task of the preacher is to proclaim the Word of God. For evangelical Christians that Word is heard today supremely in the Scriptures; we believe that Scripture is the Word of God. Now if that statement is true in a straightforward sort of way, then it is arguable that it should be quite sufficient for preachers simply to read the Scriptures to people. What more do they need? Why do we persist in preaching, and why do we insist that a service is incomplete if the Word is not preached

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(as well as read)?⁴ Clearly we need to explore the relation between the Bible and the sermon and ask what we are trying to do.

The basic answer, of course, is that the Word of God needs to be applied to the particular congregation, and the reason why this is so is because the congregation is not identical with the original recipients of the text of Scripture. Preaching is interpretation. And therefore essentially what we must now talk about is interpretation. I shall suggest that there are some five aspects of this in relation to preaching: the selection of the text; explaining the meaning of the text; interpreting the text; presenting the sermon; and applying the message.

1. The Selection of the Text

The first step logically is that the preacher selects a passage of Scripture as the basis of a sermon. Here there seem to be two main approaches.

On the one hand, there is the approach which might be summed up as: 'Is there a word from the Lord for next Sunday morning?' The preacher then has borne in upon his mind a passage of Scripture or a theme which contains what is believed to be the specific word of the Lord for a particular congregation on a particular occasion. From a human point of view this may seem to be an arbitrary, irrational way of selecting a theme. But from a Christian point of view it is a case of submission to the guidance of the Lord. It depends upon the Lord making his mind known through what is experienced as a divine prompting.

On the other hand, there is the approach which works systematically through a particular set of themes which may be short or long in extent. There are two main forms of this approach. First, the preacher may elect to give, say, a series on Mark or Ephesians; this method, then, involves systematic teaching on a biblical book over a period of time. Second, there is the use of a so-called 'lectionary'. This is usually a set of readings devised for a group of churches and often geared to the Christian year; it aims to give a systematic coverage of important themes or areas of Scripture in a way that is less complete than the former approach but which, taken over the whole period, gives a fair coverage of the 'whole counsel of God'.

Broadly speaking, the first method is typical of a more charismatic approach, while the two forms of the second method are typical of a more Reformed approach and a more mainline denominational approach respectively. If you ask me which approach I follow, I must

⁴ Here I note parenthetically that I side firmly with those who insist that you should not have a celebration of the Lord's Supper without including the preached Word.

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confess that I am a curious and probably inconsistent mixture at this point. Since I preach for the most part as an occasional preacher rather than a regular one, it is rare for me to be able to give a series to any particular congregation. Therefore what I preach on is a mixture of: 1. Using as a source for material whatever book of the Bible I happen to be working on academically, but not necessarily in a rigid manner.⁵ 2. Establishing fairly rationally what I think the congregation needs to hear – based partly on whatever knowledge I have of them and on what I have done on previous occasions. 3. Feeling ‘inspired’ to tackle a particular topic because it has become alive for me. Whatever route is followed, there needs to be the sense that the topic is a word from the Lord for that occasion. There are times in my experience when topics simply will not glow with life, and I abandon them; unfortunately this is not an easy option when you are faced with the same congregation twice a Sunday every Sunday! I am fairly sure that the average congregation needs a balanced spread of teaching, and therefore I am not tied to the view that only one topic can possibly be right on a given occasion. I think that the Lord gives us a lot of freedom.

It should be obvious that the two types of approach are not so very different. For myself I am least happy with the lectionary approach, since I find it difficult to believe that a distant committee can know just what my congregation needs on a particular Sunday, and equally I cannot believe that all congregations everywhere should get the same topic on the same day. Yet I would not want to say that a committee can never ascertain the guidance of the Lord for his teaching in a group of churches.

Even those preachers who insist that we should proclaim the whole counsel of God, and deduce from this that the whole of Scripture should be systematically expounded to a congregation, nevertheless have to choose in what order they shall do so; and even the preacher who tells me that he must preach on Revelation 15 next Sunday morning because he is engaged in a series and expounded Revelation 14 last Sunday has made a decision at some point that it would be Revelation that he tackled next with the congregation and not Philemon or Philipians. So there is an element of choice or seeking for guidance in order to ascertain what a particular part of Scripture is God’s Word for a congregation at some particular time. The two approaches which I have labelled charismatic and Reformed run into each other.

⁵ I recommend this as a good discipline for people engaged in academic study to keep them firmly rooted in the real world.

II. Explaining the Meaning of Scripture

The preacher teaches what Scripture says. By this I mean simply that at the very lowest level the preacher is making the congregation acquainted with what Scripture says. By reading the Scripture and telling the story again in his own words, he is making sure that the congregation know what is there.

This is probably the point to ask again what the sermon is trying to do. Here again there may be a very broad and fluid distinction between what I may call the charismatic and the Reformed approaches. For the charismatic, the aim of the sermon may well be primarily to convey a divine message or oracle, some word of Scripture that comes to fresh life as it is made the vehicle of what the Lord wants to say now to this set of people. On this view, the task of the preacher is primarily to let the Lord speak his Word for the present time for the specific people sitting there. For the Reformed, the purpose may be more to teach the congregation what Scripture says, and there may be a more timeless character to such a sermon. The sermon is now more consciously expository. It has the character of teaching.

It will be obvious that this attempt to distinguish two types of sermon is artificial. Rather, the sermon should have both characteristics. It should teach and it should be existentially relevant to the congregation. I can well believe, of course, that the Lord's message for a particular congregation may be a piece of solid teaching today and something of a different character next Sunday. But, even if the sermon is primarily teaching, it will still be presented as teaching that matters and that has an application. I stick to the basic belief that the purpose of preaching is not simply to instruct people but to change them. I emphasise, therefore, the need for a message from the Lord that is firmly based in biblical teaching, and the need for teaching of Scripture that is pointedly directed towards the congregation.

As part of the process of teaching Scripture, the preacher is manifestly also explaining what it means. As I said earlier, it is not enough simply to recite Scripture because our congregation is not the same as the original hearers or readers of the Word, and therefore some things need to be explained to them so that they can be put into the position of the original audience. It is a simple fact that although the message of Scripture is fairly plain, there are difficulties of all kinds in detail in understanding it. The variety of renderings in different translations, the existence of Bible encyclopaedias and commentaries – these all bear testimony to the fact that reading Scripture makes people ask questions about what the text means – what it is trying to say. Exegesis is unavoidable. And this is clearly part of the task of preaching. Much could be said about this if our

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primary interest in this lecture was in exegesis, but I confine myself to two comments in this area.

1. The 'text' of the sermon. The Scripture can be approached in several different kinds of unit.

i. The traditional unit is the text, usually a sentence or phrase. But it is inevitable that in discussing such a brief unit one will put it into its larger co-text – *i.e.* the longer passage of which it forms part.⁶ But some passages are of such a character that lifting out one brief unit does not make good sense, for the unit of meaning is larger. Thus a story, such as a parable, needs to be considered as a whole because the whole story is the bearer of the meaning rather than just a few words. Hence a paragraph or even a group of paragraphs may be a more appropriate unit for discussion, and the phrase 'expository preaching' is sometimes used in a rather narrow – and, in my view, undesirable – sense to refer to preaching based on a longer passage rather than a single verse.

ii. Even longer units can be profitably made the basis of a sermon. If the letter to the Colossians was written to the church to be read aloud to them in one sitting, then it stands to reason that a good way to preach on it is to examine the message of the letter as a whole. Some of the modern approaches to New Testament study such as narrative criticism and discourse analysis are concerned to demonstrate the light that is shed on familiar material when it is seen as a whole and the development of the whole story or argument is taken into account.

iii. I also want to say a word for other types of approach. There are certain words in Scripture which have acquired a rich theological content, and these are worthy of exploration. In practice this means that the sermon is based on multiple texts. For a simple example, one can learn quite a lot about the nature of Christianity by examining the three occurrences of the word 'Christian', in other words by seeing what is implied about the word and the concept expressed by it in the contexts in which it was used. I think that more can be done with using some of these important words of New Testament theology in our preaching.

2. Explaining the Text. Having defined a sense-unit, the preacher must explain what the original author was saying, so far as it is necessary to do so for the purpose of the sermon. Technical discussions are out, but any difficulties must be explained in the simplest way possible. Background material that may be unfamiliar to the congregation will need to be supplied. Some of this material

⁶ For the useful distinction between 'context' and cotext' see P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London, 1989), p. 16.

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may well be interesting in its own right, and may help to secure the interest of the hearers, but it should not be developed simply for its own sake. There will be occasions where a passage can be understood in more than one way, and in such cases the preacher may need either to admit that his explanation is only probable, or to indicate the possible different interpretations. It is manifestly at this level that the preacher must resort to commentaries and other works of reference so that as well founded an explanation of the meaning of the text as is possible can be given. Here the preacher has certainly an important responsibility in being the 'expert' in the congregation whose words are likely to be taken as true, and therefore he must measure up to that responsibility by being utterly fair to the text which he is interpreting. He is not to stand between the text and the congregation in such a way as to be a barrier to the truth getting across, but it is rather to be a channel through which truth that might not otherwise be perceived can be faithfully channelled.⁷

III Interpreting the Scripture

From exegesis we turn to interpretation. By the use of this somewhat ambiguous word I am trying to indicate that the preacher has to determine and convey what Scripture is saying to the people in front of him. What Paul wished to say to the Romans by means of the text that we have in front of us is not necessarily the same as what he wants to say to us, and we have to find what message for us comes out of what he said to them. If, for example, Paul devotes much of chapter 14 of Romans to discussing the problems that arose in the church over those who thought they could eat meat and those who disagreed for reasons connected with the Jewish religion and way of life, then it has to be said that this is not a problem in the average Highland congregation, though it may still be a problem for Christian Jews. Consequently, this is not direct teaching to us, although we may well believe that we can learn something for ourselves from seeing what Paul had to say to the Romans about their problem. But when we make this important move from the direct message of Scripture to the original audience to its indirect message to our contemporary audience, we are doing what I call interpretation.

There are basically two ways in which this may be done, and each of them is a legitimate approach. First, there is the method which begins with a passage of Scripture and proceeds from it to the modern

⁷ For help in this area see G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (London, 1983), and (a bit more technical) G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia, 1983).

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world. Secondly, there is the method which begins with some modern situation and asks what there is in Scripture which says something to it, and thus goes back to a particular passage or set of passages.⁸

To some extent the issue may be the question of where the preacher begins to prepare for next Sunday. He may begin from Scripture, and because he is dealing with 1 Thessalonians 5 the appropriate question to ask is: on what particular need(s) of a modern congregation has this passage something to say? Or equally appropriately the preacher may begin with a modern situation, let us say, the Christian response to issues that are being fought at an impending election, and ask what scriptural teaching is relevant to these issues. Whether the preacher moves from Scripture to the present-day or in the reverse direction is surely of little consequence in itself. It would be wrong in my opinion always to go in the one direction. I suspect that it is more necessary to go from Scripture to the modern world lest by unconscious selectivity we muzzle the Scriptures and do not hear what they have to say on issues that left to ourselves we were in danger of overlooking. But at the same time, if the preacher did not deal with subjects that are not tackled in Scripture – one thinks, inevitably, of problems of medical ethics – then Scripture is again being muzzled in a different kind of way.

I make this remark in the context of preparation for the sermon. It may be necessary to point out that actual delivery of the sermon may begin either with Scripture or the modern world, regardless of where the preacher's starting point in preparation was. Here is one of the places where variety in presentation is needed.

But now we must face the question of what is involved in interpretation. How do we bring out the meaning of a text for today? It is just at this point that the commentaries usually fail us. Some offer us exegesis, but make no attempt to ask what the message might mean for today. Others offer us a message of today that may well consist of sound, pious points but they are really not based on exegesis of the passage; the exegesis is faulty or non-existent. It may sound good, but it is not biblical preaching in the proper sense of the

⁸ I believe that it is also possible to have a sermon which tackles some contemporary topic without necessarily expounding a biblical passage but which is nevertheless faithfully based on biblical teaching and develops that teaching. The preacher is so immersed in the teaching of Scripture and in scriptural ways of thinking and dealing with problems that the sermon will be truly biblical even though no actual text is ever cited. I am sure that we should not exclude that kind of preaching on principle, although it may well be an approach that will be used more rarely.

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term. But commentaries which deal with the interpretation of the passage for today, based on careful exegesis, are not so common. Here I want to develop briefly three points which seem to me to be relevant.

1. Universality. Our first question in interpreting a text is whether its message is of universal applicability. Texts which tell us that 'all have sinned' or that 'God so loved the world' are clearly universal in that they apply to all people at all times. Other texts may not be universal in their reference. They may apply to a limited group, e.g. 'Husbands, love your wives', or they may apply to groups that do not exist today, e.g. 'Slaves, obey your masters'. In such cases, we have to treat the material in a different kind of way. Equally, the teaching or the commands may be universally true in that they could apply to every kind of person, but the actual content of the commands may be material which is applicable only in certain circumstances or times. Some material is given the form of narrative, and it may be a question whether the narrative is a form of authoritative teaching; this question arises for example with some of the accounts of the giving of the Spirit in Acts, where some Christians insist that a particular pattern there is normative for today. We have to recognise that some biblical material is not universalisable. However, it may still be useful for today. But where the material can be applied directly to all people in all places at all times, the preacher's task is that much easier.

2. Extensibility. Where the material is not immediately universalisable, we must then ask whether the teaching of a text can be extended to cover people and situations not originally envisaged. Philemon is given specific instructions on how to deal with a runaway slave, but surely Paul's teaching can be extended to cover other situations of various kinds. Here we are operating with the concept of analogy, and the argument is that the teaching of Scripture can be extended to deal with analogous persons or situations – but with the recognition that the teaching may require adjustment to cope with the new situation. It is the principle of *mutatis mutandis*. Here, then, we interpret in the sense that we recognise that what Scripture says today is not precisely what it said to its original readers. I should want to affirm that for the most part the message of Scripture comes into the category of what is universalisable. But I must also insist that the task of extending the meaning is often required.

It will be clear that the basic principle here requires that there be a real analogy between the persons originally addressed and the modern audience. An enormous amount of preaching depends upon the use of analogy, and it is essential that the analogy really exists and is not falsely constructed. The early Christians used something like this

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principle in their typological understanding of the Old Testament and I believe that this gives us a model to follow in our interpretation of the New Testament. However, very often the interpretation of the text requires us to consider not only the differences in the hearers but also the differences in the actual form of God's Word to them. This brings us to our third principle.

3. Reapplication. In extending the message, we are in effect reapplying the message of the text. The text gives the application to specific readers of certain basic truths, principles or commands. What we have to do is to distinguish these basic concepts from the particular form in which they are presented in the passage to the original readers and then to reapply the basic concepts to the new audience. Thus, if Jesus commands – quite specifically – that his disciples should wash one another's feet, and if we say, 'But that was for an audience of first-century Jews treading dusty roads in bare feet or sandals, for whom the washing of feet was a menial duty done by a slave; but we are different because we walk along comparatively clean streets wearing clothes and shoes that keep our feet clean, and because foot-washing would not have the same symbolic significance today' – then I believe that this justifies us in saying that on the surface the text is not universalisable. In such a case we have a duty to seek out the underlying principle – the readiness to serve one another humbly that Jesus illustrated in this way – and then to press home that principle and apply it in whatever ways are appropriate for ourselves today. That is a fairly obvious stock-example. Let it suffice to make the basic point. It is, however, of wide applicability.

It should be made clear that this is not to suggest that we can burrow beneath the surface of the New Testament to find a few basic principles and then ditch the New Testament in favour of the principles; that would be to place the authority for God's Word somewhere other than in the actual text of the New Testament. Rather, it is to suggest that the New Testament is the authoritative form in which God gave his Word to specific people, and our starting point is always that actual text.

IV The Presentation of the Sermon

We have now reached the point where we ourselves have some idea of what God wants us to say on the basis of a particular text to the congregation. We have not yet produced a sermon! We have still to discuss an important aspect of the process of composing a message which I call – again somewhat ambiguously – presentation. By this phrase I mean that the preacher must find the appropriate ways of expressing the interpreted message of Scripture for the congregation. That is to say, it will not do simply to read out, let us say, the words of a commentary that gets the meaning and the interpretation

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of the text right. We have to present the material in a way that will be palatable to our specific audience. We have to employ the tools of rhetoric to present the message well – for example, by devising a structure for our discourse that will be helpful to the hearers. Let me mention four of these.

1. Intelligibility. Here let me return to the example of R. A. Finlayson by repeating that he was probably not the preacher for everybody. It was not just that at the Keswick Convention the unfortunate English had problems with his accent. It was rather than his level of preaching presupposed a certain level of understanding on the part of the congregation. And this points to the important fact that the task of the preacher is to communicate in such a way as to be understood by the specific audience which is being addressed. Therefore the character of the spoken word, which I shall call the sermon, is in large part determined by the character of the congregation. For example, there is not much use in giving expositions of passages of the Bible to people who do not bring their Bibles to church or who do not have the intellectual capacity to cope with an elaborate discussion of a passage. Nor can you give fifty-minute sermons to people with a limited attention span. I ask you to think of a type of situation which I do not find easy, the occasion when you have a company of the Boys Brigade on holiday in your congregation – perhaps totally unexpectedly – and you want to reach them with your message, or when you have to give a brief talk at a youth club, or when you are taking a service in a mental hospital or an old people's home. Your message must be shaped by the nature of the audience so that they will understand what you are saying. Therefore intelligibility is of crucial importance.

2. Interest. But indeed there is something else which is even more important. Possibly your first priority is not to be intelligible but to be interesting. Naturally, if you are interesting you will also be intelligible, but it is possible to be intelligible without being interesting. If you do not attract and hold your audience's interest, then nothing will get across.

My father, who was a good and godly man, had his occasional blind-spots. He was a good speaker to children in his generation and a good preacher, but when he led the prayers in Sunday School, he was not on the wavelength of the children sitting there with heads bowed in front of him. And when we said to him, 'The children won't understand your prayers', his reply was to the effect that he was not praying to them but to God who would understand them, and somehow the idea that he needed to carry the children along with him if he was to speak to God on behalf of them and involve them in the prayer just did not get across to him. Equally, there are preachers who are just dull, be they ever so sound, and one of our problems is

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to make orthodoxy interesting. The thing that I want to stress and emphasise is that, if you fail at this hurdle, you need proceed no further, and what you have to say will do your audience no good because you did not grasp and hold their attention in the first place. That is why the textbooks on sermon-making insist that the beginning of the sermon is so important, and offer remarks such as 'If you don't strike oil in the first five minutes, stop boring!'

3. Simplicity and lucidity. This will be achieved by having a structure that is crystal clear and by using language that is on the level of the congregation. I am aware that if you make things too simple and easy you will quickly lose the interest of the congregation. You have to stretch their minds and give them the adventure of thinking. You will have to alter your approach for different types of congregation, for some will come more eager to learn and think than others. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that simplicity is of cardinal importance. Far too often we over-estimate what a congregation is capable of understanding.

4. Variety. It is important to achieve variety both between sermons and within sermons. Do not always present the material in the same way, and do not develop the passage in the same way. To some extent what you are going to do should be unpredictable, so that the congregation are kept wondering what you are going to say next.

V Applying the Message

I nearly called the previous point 'application', because what we are doing is taking the message of Scripture for the congregation and applying it to them in their particular situation. But on second thoughts I decided that this was unwise because there is one element of presentation that needs separate stress. This is the point that the congregation must be persuaded of what the preacher says. Our task is not simply to instruct but to press home the message, to challenge, to rebuke, to comfort – in short to evoke a response in the hearers so that they go away different people from how they came in.

Again, I go back to the New Testament where I find that recent scholars are discovering that much of the material was composed using the methods of the rhetoric of the time. Some of the letters resemble written speeches, and speeches were composed in order to persuade people. Preaching is very definitely speaking in such a way as to change people. And in my experience a very great deal of preaching contains little application. It is such a soft sell that nobody buys the product.

One can readily think of the kind of factors that help to get this point across. There must surely be the *enthusiasm* of the preacher which convinces the audience that he has something to say which is exciting and worth their attention, and which matters supremely.

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'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (I Cor. 9:16). There is *sincerity*, the fact that the preacher really believes in what he is saying and is not merely going through a form of words which do not matter one way or the other. 'We are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence' (2 Cor. 2:17). There is *passion* where the congregation glimpse the strong feeling that the preacher has about the supreme importance of accepting and heeding the Word. 'I am speaking the truth in Christ - I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart' (Rom. 9:1f). And there is *love*, whereby the audience grasp that the preacher is concerned for their eternal welfare and salvation and are stirred emotionally as well as intellectually. I have heard it remarked of R. A. Finlayson that whenever he came to speak of 'grace' there was a new light in his eyes and a fresh fire in his voice. Was not the title of Adam Burnet's book on preaching *Pleading with Men?* 'Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved' (Rom. 10:1). 'We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' (2 Cor. 6:1). That is an accent that we need to recover. New Testament preaching means recovering the passion and concern that the apostles had to influence and change their audiences. Let us not think of our subject as purely intellectual. It affects our hearts as preachers as well as our minds.

Conclusion

Here, then, are five elements that go into preaching from the New Testament and each one of them is essential. Some of them will be hidden from view in the actual delivery. The hard work done on exegesis - the debates between commentators as to the correct meaning of the text - will not be mentioned, but the preacher should have done his homework faithfully. Equally it is essential that the work of interpretation shall have been carried out with care. How much harm has been done to the church by inappropriate literalism. The presentation and the application are vital in the actual preaching, but we should remember the Latin motto *Ars est celare artem*: the secret of art lies in concealing the art. Or to put it more theologically, the preacher must hide himself but make Jesus as visible as possible. That requires both hard work and the development of a personal relationship with God that is nourished by prayer. My hope is that this occasion may help us all to be more effective in this, the highest - but surely also the humblest - of callings.

LIBERATION AND PROSPERITY THEOLOGIES

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Introduction

The title of this paper may seem strange. On the face of it, Liberation Theology and Prosperity Theology may seem to have little in common, even to be diametrically opposed to each other. A little thought, however, will enable us to see that the very fact of their stark contrast makes them suitable subjects for joint treatment. It is only where two entities have something in common that we may helpfully contrast them. If I were to be asked to contrast the Forth Bridge and three o'clock I would find the task difficult, if not impossible, for they have so little in common. Experience shows that often opposites have a meeting point. In practice, Fascist and Marxist totalitarianism may be equally unpleasant to live under. The effects of cold and heat on the body have some similarities.

Because both subjects are large, and each type of theology has a number of varieties and off-shoots, I propose to limit the scope of the paper. We will concentrate on the central objective features of each of the two theologies. For example, we will say more about Prosperity Theology's concept of God's purpose than its understanding of faith. We will consider first the nature of each type of theology, and then seek their theological and philosophical connections.

We will then endeavour to provide a biblical critique, first of all looking at elements the two have in common and then treating each separately. Finally we will indicate our conclusions on the basis of this study.

Nature of Liberation Theology

Fundamentally, Liberation Theology is a Latin American phenomenon. It originated there and the socio-political background of that vast area is the context for its development. It is true that its basic principles have been more widely applied, *e.g.* in the Black Theology of South Africa and the USA. Certain elements of it have also been appropriated by those who promote Feminist theology. It is clear in fact that there are features of it which have application to any group which might consider itself to be socially, economically or politically oppressed or exploited or otherwise disadvantaged. However, we will concentrate largely on the original Latin American phenomenon.

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Gustavo Gutierrez, who coined the term, describes Liberation Theology as 'a theological reflection based on the gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America. It is a theological reflection... born of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human.'¹

Liberation, deliverance, salvation or redemption (the last is the richest of these words) is obviously a concept of great importance in the Bible. Studies of the *kerygma*, whether of the New Testament or of the Old, always have to give it a major place. In discussions of the central theme of the Bible, many biblical theologians have identified it as the most central motif of all. This is the contention of the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation-history) school. Those too who think of theology as recital see that recital as very largely the declaration of the mighty acts of divine redemption in successive periods of the life of God's people, and finally in Christ.

Liberation, abstractly considered, can be a somewhat vague term. It needs definition in at least four ways. We have to ask who is the liberator, who the liberated, the nature of the bondage which constitutes the need for liberation, and the way in which that liberation is achieved. Traditionally, Christian theology has answered that the Triune God is the Liberator, that the people of God are the liberated and that the bondage is to personal sin, and also to Satan, to the world, to the violated law of God and to divine punishment, because these form a nexus or web of related realities. Liberation is effected objectively by divine justification which is grounded in Christ's atoning work and subjectively by the application of that work to the individual by the Holy Spirit.

It is freely admitted, of course, that this understanding of liberation applies to the New Testament but hardly, in terms of the nature of the bondage and the means of release, to the Old. There liberation is largely although not exclusively from something external,² whether physical danger or social, military or political oppression. Moreover, the liberation, when it comes, is effected either through direct acts of God's power or through the operation, under his sovereignty, of political forces.

Liberation Theology appropriates the Old Testament concept of liberation (which it also finds in some New Testament passages³)

¹ *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, 1973), p.209.

² Exceptions are to be found in Pss. 51:14; 130:8.

³ Chiefly in several passages in Luke 1-4, where, it is interesting to discover, it always occurs in poetry.

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and declares it to be of immense relevance today. Wherever there are oppressed people, God is concerned for their liberation and Christians must be also. They should cooperate with historical forces of social, political and perhaps military liberation. The gospel of spiritual liberation is not necessarily jettisoned but finds its place within a wider liberation theme. In social and political liberation, the cross of Christ functions as a powerful indicator that God is on the side of the oppressed, for Jesus himself was oppressed and died as an oppressed person, but God reversed society's judgement on him by raising Jesus the crucified from the dead.

Another important feature of Liberation Theology is the assertion that the purpose of theology is action. Theology is not a purely intellectual pursuit, like so many philosophies. If it is in any measure an attempt to understand, this is always and, in fact, exclusively, for the purpose of action, and the action in view is social, political and perhaps also military.

An important corollary is that only Christians prepared to give active support to movements on behalf of the oppressed have a right to engage in theology. Theology is for the committed, and commitment is not simply to Christ but to the poor and oppressed for Christ's sake.⁴

Nature of Prosperity Theology

Fundamentally, Prosperity Theology is a North American phenomenon. It originated there and the socio-political background of North America, and especially of the USA, is the context for its development. It has, of course, spread to other parts of the Western world. In the nature of the case, it has had little impact in the Third World, although it might have been thought that its message, if true, would have a special sphere of application in poorer countries.

Despite profound differences, Prosperity Theology has some similarities of outlook with a number of other movements, such as British Israelism, certain types of South African Dutch Reformed theology and also with Reconstructionism. All of these, of course, focus attention on the state, and they tend to link state prosperity with an observance of the Mosaic law by modern nation states. Limitations of space forbid our pursuing such similarities in this paper.

Termining Prosperity Theology a 'theology of success', A. B. da Silva has said, 'Generally speaking, [it] can be described as a degeneration and extreme radicalization of the charismatic

⁴ These themes find important place in Gutierrez (*op. cit.*) and the other main Liberation theologians.

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movement.⁵ It asserts that prosperity is God's will for every Christian. This may of course be conceived primarily in spiritual terms, for God provides all the spiritual resources we need. The distinctive feature of Prosperity Theology, however, lies in the claim that material prosperity and, usually, also perfect health are God's will for every Christian in this life, and that there are divine principles which, if followed, will guarantee this comprehensive prosperity or well-being.⁶

There is no doubt at all that prosperity is an important biblical theme. It is not as all-pervasive as liberation, especially in the New Testament, but its importance should not be under-estimated. There are a number of examples of prosperous godly people in the Old Testament, including not only Abraham but also Job, both before and after his experience of profound suffering. More significant, however, is the fact that a whole nation, Israel, was promised prosperity in a good land on condition of obedience to God.⁷

In fact, in Israel's experience, liberation and prosperity were the two sides of the same coin, for the God who brought them out – from Egyptian bondage – also brought them in – to a land flowing with milk and honey. From Deuteronomy onwards the twin themes of liberation and prosperity go hand in hand through the Old Testament.⁸

Ideological Links of Liberation Theology

It is important that theological systems should not be viewed in isolation. A theology is never a isolated phenomenon. It emerges and is shaped in an historical context. The theologian may react positively to ideas in the world he inhabits, as, in part at least, many of the Alexandrian theologians did to features of Platonic thought, or negatively, as Tertullian did, but he can hardly avoid producing a theology which bears in some ways the marks of the thought-world he inhabits.

This is true even of the theology of the Bible. We may reject, and rightly so in my judgement, the idea that the early chapters of

⁵ 'The "Theology of Success" Movement: a Comment', in *Themelios* 12 (1986), p.91.

⁶ See e.g. K. Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX, 1974) and Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa, OK, 1970).

⁷ Particularly in Deuteronomy, most notably in chapters 26-31, where it is the dominant theme.

⁸ E.g. in Josh. 23:4, 5; 24:5-13; Judg. 6:7-10; 1 Sam. 12:6-8; Ps. 105, etc.

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Genesis are the product of Near Eastern mythology or that the Old Testament doctrine of Satan owes its origin to Zoroastrianism. Yet the divine revelation was given in a particular religious context. It seems likely that early Genesis was deliberately anti-mythological and that the place of Ahriman, the Zoroastrian Satan, in the thinking of the Persian overlords of the Jews, made it necessary for fuller truth about Satan to be revealed at that time. In both cases the form of the revelation, but not its content, bore the marks of its religious environment.

– *Theological*

Liberation Theology belongs to the general movement in theology which owes much to Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann, in his epoch-making work, *The Theology of Hope*,⁹ engaged in vigorous criticism of previous theologies. Traditional theology, both Protestant and Catholic, Moltmann considered to be too much rooted in the past. It spoke much of the deeds of God, but these were always to be found well before our time. Its theology was an interpretation of historical events, and this tended to make it backward-looking.

Rudolf Bultmann encouraged theology to move in a different direction. His historical scepticism and his demythologizing combined to undermine both the history and its theological interpretation in traditional theology. His existentialism, gained from Martin Heidegger, caused him to focus on the present, on the one moment we have, the moment in which we live, with all its challenge. So he substituted a theology of the present for one of the past.

Moltmann regarded both approaches as inadequate. Traditional theology had its eschatology, but this had become as much a purely intellectual construction as had its other concepts. Bultmann used the language of eschatology, but in fact believed in no real future hope. For him, eschatological became a virtual synonym for existential.

Moltmann sought to construct a true Theology of Hope, an approach to the future which was not merely conceptual, but was a programme for action. The function of theology was not simply to interpret but to change, not just to understand but to call to action. The action in view was largely social and political. The kingdom of God is to be created on earth by the action of the Christian church, which should ally itself to the hopes of a more just society cherished and nourished by the working classes.

⁹ *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York, 1967).

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Knowledge of the history of theology will show that this is not a totally new idea. Reinhold Niebuhr in the USA, before he swung to the right politically, had called the church in Detroit to ally itself with the aspirations of the workers. Rauschenbusch and the social gospel movement were very influential, especially in the more liberal wing of Protestantism. Earlier still was the social emphasis of the Anabaptists. There are even some parallels perhaps with the zealotism of the New Testament period and the national liberation movement led by the Maccabean family.

– *Philosophical*

A great deal has been written about the relationship of Liberation Theology to Marxism. This has been most strongly asserted by its opponents and almost as strongly denied by some of its advocates. Two of the leading Liberationists, Miguez and Segundo (especially the former), have written extensively on the matter, and they take a partly positive and partly negative view of Marxism.¹⁰ What are the facts?

There can be no doubt that Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* was influenced by Marxism and that Moltmann's work itself gave great stimulus to the development of the Liberation Theologies, although Andrew Kirk and others have pointed out that the modern antecedents of this type of theology are at least a decade earlier than the first edition of Moltmann's book in 1965.¹¹

In the late 1950s Christian theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, had begun to enter into dialogue with Marxists, with a view to better mutual understanding. Moltmann's fellow university teacher, Ernst Bloch, was a somewhat unorthodox Marxist, with an interest in the Bible, in Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic, especially its this-worldly aspects, and in the Anabaptist movement in Germany. His *Philosophy of Hope*, largely written during the Second World War, but revised in 1959,¹² had a major influence on Moltmann's thought.

But what of Liberation Theology itself? Certainly it originated and developed in a society where politics of the left were under strong Marxist influence. Latin America was the territory of Che

¹⁰ See especially J. Miguez Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: the Mutual Challenge of Revolution* (London, 1976).

¹¹ J. Andrew Kirk, *Theology Encounters Revolution* (Leicester, 1980), p. 43. He traces its first stirrings to the work of Richard Shaull, *Encounter with Revolution* (New York, 1955).

¹² *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1959), ET 3 vols., Oxford 1986.

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Guevara and Fidel Castro, in which there would soon be the first freely elected Communist national leader, President Allende of Chile. But it is one thing to recognise this, and another to claim that the true motivation of the Liberation Theologians is Marxist philosophy. They may accept the Marxist analysis of history and critique of capitalism, but their true motivation could be love for the God whose very existence true Marxists deny.

It is not, of course, impossible that the motivation may itself be multiple. Moreover, Liberation Theology is not a monolithic theological stance, and its theological pace-makers do not agree about everything. It may well be that the demise of Marxism in its Eastern European heartland will serve to make clear in course of time what the deepest motives of particular Liberation Theologies really are. It is worth noting that there are real differences between Liberation Theology and orthodox Marxism. For example, as P. Berryman points out,¹³ Liberation Theologians do not identify with the genuine proletariat, the potential revolutionary class, but with the peasants and the urban poor, and they do so on Christian and not on Marxist principles.

We need to remember that the succession of theological schools that began with Schleiermacher and has continued to the present day has exhibited one consistent phenomenon of great interest. Each school has had two wings or at least exhibited two tendencies, the one more biblical and the other more philosophical. Two principles, at least partly if not wholly irreconcilable, have been contending for the mastery. The succession of schools has been largely due to philosophical changes. We should expect divergent tendencies within Liberation Theology too.

We should not, of course, forget Marx's own Jewish heritage. There is a touch of the prophet about his denunciations of the rich and likewise a touch of the apocalyptic preacher in his confident assertions of the triumph of the new society. In fact, a very broad definition of heresy could accommodate Marxism almost as easily as Islam. It is interesting, incidentally, that a book has recently been written entitled, *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation*.¹⁴

Of course Marxism itself has philosophical antecedents. It emerged as one of several reactions to Hegelianism, and, like most reactions, bears traces of the influence of its philosophical parent. In its totalitarianism, it has not altogether repudiated Hegel's idealist

¹³ *Liberation Theology* (London, 1987), p.33.

¹⁴ Marc H. Ellis, *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY, 1987).

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theory of the state, which, of course, is more fully represented in Fascism. The ultimate origins of this concept are found in Plato.¹⁵

Ideological Links of Prosperity Theology

- Theological

Prosperity Theology emerged from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Each of these is a complex phenomenon and has too often been the subject of sweeping generalisations. One of the surprises that faces the student of the history of the Charismatic movement is the fact that some highly responsible Pentecostal leaders have been very critical of the newer movement, and have particularly stressed the need for it to learn from the experience, and especially the mistakes, of the earlier Pentecostals.

These movements, with their teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, have inevitably put some emphasis on the healing of the body. Special healing meetings and also healing sessions during ordinary worship services have characterised most churches of a Pentecostal or Charismatic persuasion, if not permanently or consistently, at least for a significant part of their history.

Such an emphasis can easily give rise to extremes, and some teachers of both schools have maintained both that the use of medicine should be repudiated by Christians and also that no Christian should be ill, but should claim perfect health by faith. In the more recent 'Signs and Wonders' movement some have maintained these positions. Unfortunately neither the Pentecostal nor the Charismatic movement has been strong on theology, although its members have had very definite convictions on the distinctive emphases of their movements.

Prosperity Theology has only come to general notice in the past decade or so, but in fact its origins are much earlier. The writer of this paper first became aware of this kind of teaching in an extreme form over twenty years ago in the magazines of T. L. Osborn. Dave Hunt traces it ultimately to the teaching of E. W. Kenyon and also in some respects to that of Norman Vincent Peale,¹⁶ both of whom were promoting their views before the Second World War. Unlike Liberation Theology, it is not easy to find its earlier theological links. Some might perhaps claim that it is an extreme product of Pietism, especially of the Arminian variety, with its stress on faith as a human activity. Certainly a Calvinistic background does not seem

¹⁵ See C.E.M. Joad, *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics* (London, 1947), chapters 15-18.

¹⁶ *Beyond Seduction* (Eugene, OR, 1987), chapters 3 and 4.

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to predispose Christians to this teaching, with its highly Arminian-style slogans such as 'name it and claim it' and 'have faith in your faith'.

– Philosophical and Non-Biblical

These links are of several kinds. Politically, Prosperity Theology predisposes its adherents to move to the right, for it is a kind of elitism. Of course, American Evangelical Christianity as a whole tends to be to the right of centre politically, Republican rather than Democratic, conservative rather than liberal.

Then there is psychotherapy. There is much emphasis on positive thinking and positive confession in the Prosperity movement and this is very similar to the type of psychotherapy associated with the name of Carl Rogers,¹⁷ which abhors any form of negative thinking.

Aspects of Prosperity Theology's 'Positive Confession'¹⁸ remind us strongly of Christian Science, which is in some ways more like a philosophy than a theology. Christian Science refuses to face facts, affirming the illusory nature of pain, much as the more extreme Prosperity teachers do. The pragmatic temper of Prosperity Theology may not reflect the influence of philosophical Pragmatism so much as the general pragmatic ethos of American society.

Theological Appraisal

Here we will first of all look at the two theologies together in the light of Scripture and then look at each separately before giving an appraising conclusion.

General Considerations Affecting Both Theologies

i. **We need to begin with the New Testament rather than the Old Testament.** This must be the right approach. We are the people of the fulfilment, not of the promise, of the consummation not of the commencement, we are Christians not Jews. We accept the whole Bible as God's Word, but the New Testament must be our guide for interpreting the whole.

ii. **We need to emphasise what the New Testament emphasises.** There can be no doubt that the emphasis of the New Testament is on the gospel, the good news, of Christ crucified and risen and of forgiveness by grace through faith in him. C. H. Dodd showed very

¹⁷ See, for example, Carl Rogers, *A Way of Becoming* (New York, 1980).

¹⁸ A full presentation of this view from a leading prosperity teacher is Kenneth Hagin, *Having Faith in your Faith* (Tulsa, OK, 1980).

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clearly in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*¹⁹ that one great *kerigma* binds the whole New Testament together. Despite later attempts to refute this, a strong case can still be made out in support of Dodd's thesis. Salvation from sin through Christ is the main thrust of the New Testament gospel.

iii. The God of the Old Testament and New Testament is one God and the gospel is to be understood in the light of the Old Testament. This will balance our first point. The earlier stages of God's dealings with his people both were valuable in their own right and also pointed to the final revelation in the New Testament. Old Testament promises, types, symbols, terms and concepts are all employed in the New Testament with reference to Christ and so they enable us to interpret his significance. There is no doubt that both these types of theology make us take the Old Testament more seriously. This is a refreshing change from types of liberalism which greatly devalue the Old Testament.

iv. The central historical emphasis of the Old Testament is on the Exodus from Egypt and the Entry into Canaan. This great double act of God's grace corresponds for the Old Testament to the way the cross and resurrection provide the historical centre of the New Testament. This means then that the two themes of liberation and prosperity are central to the Old Testament. The people were delivered from the grievous bondage and oppression of Egypt and brought into a good land flowing with milk and honey.

They were called to trust and obey. As the God of the Exodus he was to be trusted, as the God of the land he was to be obeyed. So long as they were faithful to him the land with all its material blessings was theirs, but persistent disobedience and apostasy brought exclusion from these temporal blessings.

v. The social and physical values of the Old Testament are not negated but embraced in the ultimate salvation promised in the New Testament. The *eschaton* in both Testaments has a social as well as an individual dimension. There is to be a community of people redeemed from every consequence of sin, spiritual, physical and social, and therefore brought into the ultimately prosperous society. Our redemption draws near,²⁰ our salvation is nearer than when we first believed,²¹ and we shall enjoy all the good of God's holy city, into which the glory of the nations has come,²² and where Christ himself is the Light.

¹⁹ *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London, 1951).

²⁰ Luke 21:28.

²¹ Rom. 13:11.

²² Rev. 21:4, 24-26; 22:1-5.

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What all this will mean in actual experience we can only dimly discern but enough has been told us to make us realise that it is the transfiguration, not the denial, of human life in its totality, both spiritual and physical, both individual and social. Here is the ultimate fulfilment of the Old Testament, in which every scrap of its significance is gathered up and glorified in Christ.

vi. **The principle of realised eschatology would lead us to expect some anticipation of the fulness of liberation and prosperity in this present life.** The New Testament shows us the powers of the age to come at work through Christ, the King of that age,²³ and it uses salvation (*i.e.* liberation) terminology and prosperity (*e.g.* 'peace, well-being') terminology, applying it to those who experience those powers through Christ²⁴ and his apostles. For example, Paul advises slaves to accept freedom if they are offered it because this reflects their status as the Lord's freedmen.²⁵

vii. **We would expect the full realisation both of liberation and of prosperity to await the Second Advent.** This in fact is what we see in the Book of the Revelation. The ultimate society is free of anything that would bind the redeemed or limit their joy.²⁶ The heart of the ultimate state is spiritual, but its repercussions are extremely wide-ranging.

Liberation Theology and the New Testament

i. **Some of its criticisms of traditional theology are appropriate.** This has to be admitted. Theology has often been too abstract, too removed from the practical concerns of the church or of the ordinary Christian. Just as James Denney declared that he had no interest at all in a theology that could not be preached, so we need also to remember that 'sound doctrine' in the Pastoral Epistles is really healthy doctrine, *i.e.* doctrine that makes for healthy Christian living.

The writers of the New Testament were the first Christian theologians, and there can be no doubt that they were all fully committed to the truth they taught. Although theology is a serious academic discipline it should never be pursued in detachment from life. The theologian needs to relate to the truth of God with his whole being.

²³ Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20.

²⁴ *E.g.* in Mark 5:34, a literal translation would be 'Daughter, your faith has saved you; go into peace.' Here then liberation and well-being terminology are used together.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 7:21, 22.

²⁶ See n. 22 above.

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ii. **The New Testament shows God's continuing concern for the poor and oppressed.** The emphasis on God's concern for the poor and oppressed is particularly to be found in the Gospel of Luke,²⁷ but also elsewhere²⁸ and especially in a passage in James which might have come straight out of Amos or Micah.²⁹ The New Testament's emphasis on spiritual salvation should not cause us to overlook this.

Hans Kvalbein has, however, argued persuasively that the first two Beatitudes are both based on Isaiah 61:1-2, which he declares to be a programmatic text for Jesus. He says, 'When we look at the content and the wider context of Isaiah 61 it is evident that the promise refers to Israel as a whole. It does not refer to a limited group of economically poor within the people, nor does it refer to all the poor and the destitute in the world. These expressions describe the humiliation and the poor conditions in the Babylonian exile for the people of Israel and cannot be taken literally.'³⁰

iii. **The terminology of salvation is sometimes expressed in political or military terms,**³¹ yet this appears to be the use of the older language to express the newer concerns. A careful examination of the passages concerned yields this conclusion. Consider, for example, the words of Luke 1:77 and compare also Luke 1:47 taken in the context of the Magnificat as a whole. Zechariah and Mary may be saying that the Saviour God of the Old Testament who saved his people from their enemies and who turned society upside down has finally acted in spiritual salvation. On the other hand they may simply be using the old language actually to express the new acts by the principle of analogy. In either case, the main point is that the language does not appear to be employed literally of acts of God performed within the New Testament economy.

This language therefore serves for us to underline the links, spiritual and typological, between the Old Testament which gave birth to it and the New Testament which now employs it for salvation in a spiritual dimension.

iv. **Liberation Theology is very difficult to support from the New Testament.** From time to time a theology emerges which has certain attractive features, but which appears to have very little, if any,

²⁷ Luke 1:53; 4:18; 6:20-25; 12:33; 16:19ff; 19:8.

²⁸ Matt. 19:21; 25:31-46; Acts 6:1ff; 9:36ff; 11:27-30; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 16:1ff.

²⁹ James 5:1-6; cf. 2:15,16.

³⁰ 'Jesus and The Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion', *Themelios* 12 (1987), p.80.

³¹ Notably in Luke 1:68-73.

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express New Testament warrant. The 'vicarious penitence' view of the atonement is an example of this, and it has to be said that Liberation Theology is another.

v. **Its use of Scripture is often open to question.** It has been well said that it appears to find its gospel more in Exodus than in Romans, and, of course, it is in Exodus only if God's redemptive acts for Israel may be taken as a paradigm for other nations under oppression.

vi. **The New Testament encourages concern for the poor and oppressed but not in consequence the overshadowing of the gospel of spiritual liberation.** The Theology of Liberation movement is as open to the same problem as beset the Social Gospel – the overshadowing, almost at times to the point of exclusion, of the spiritual by the social. It may well be that the popular titles employed by each movement are unhelpful in this regard, for they tend to focus attention on the social dimension, thus encouraging Christians to place an emphasis which is not fully biblical.

Prosperity Theology and the New Testament

i. **The incarnation was an embracing of poverty and servitude by the Son of God.** He was born into a poor home. Carpentry was an honourable occupation, but the family could afford only the poor person's offering in celebration of the birth of Jesus.³² His life-style was the very opposite of prosperous,³³ and he called his disciples to a similar life-style in their service for him.³⁴ Moreover he embraced not only the office of a Servant to God (which he accepted gladly) but also lived in a society that was under the heel of a foreign oppressor.

ii. **Christians may be called to embrace poverty as Christ did,³⁵ while paradoxically, their obedience is to be rewarded by prosperity.³⁶** The two lines of teaching here are not easy to reconcile. The New Testament language forbids us to apply the promises only to life after death, but it may be that they are really promises of compensation, which is always true, whether or not it is strictly in terms of material prosperity.

This encourages the two spiritual dispositions of sacrifice and gratitude, both of which should find place in the heart of the

³² Luke 2:22, 23; cf. Lev. 12:8.

³³ Matt. 8:19, 20.

³⁴ Matt. 10:8-14.

³⁵ 2 Cor. 6:4ff; 11:27; cf. Heb. 11:32ff.

³⁶ Matt. 19: 27-30.

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Christian. It also encourages dependence and contentment,³⁷ for, whether we are poor or rich, we owe all our possessions to the goodness of God.

iii. **Divinely-given prosperity has in view our greater giving potential, both to the poor³⁸ and to Christian workers.³⁹** So the New Testament has an important emphasis on stewardship. We are not blessed for our own sakes, but for others who may benefit from what God has given us.⁴⁰

iv. **Motivation in our giving is all-important.** It is just here that the appeal of much Prosperity Theology literature is so untrue to the New Testament. There is, without doubt, an appeal to avarice and a desire for pampering. No matter how much the need for Christian giving is emphasised, the motive is usually seen to be the reaping of a bountiful harvest from the seeds planted through Christian giving.⁴¹ In fact, the New Testament teaches that we are to give as to the Lord, without hoping for return.⁴²

v. **Christians should seek heavenly rather than earthly riches.** This point is made emphatically in the teaching of our Lord.⁴³ We are in fact a colony of heaven,⁴⁴ regenerate men and women whose proper home is in the new creation but who are to demonstrate the triumph of the grace of God meantime within the context of the old creation. This will be done largely by showing new creation values in our life-style and motivation. In fact it is made clear that riches may impoverish us spiritually⁴⁵ while material poverty may in fact be a means of opening us to spiritual riches.⁴⁶

vi. **A society defiant of God and devoted to material values will come under his judgement.** In the Book of the Revelation, two cities appear, the new Jerusalem, owing its freedom and well-being

³⁷ Matt. 6:11, 25-34; Phil. 4:10ff. 1 Tim. 6:6-10.

³⁸ Acts 4:32-36; 9:36ff; 1 Cor. 16:1ff; Eph. 4:28.

³⁹ 1 Cor. 9:4ff.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 8,9 is a major passage focusing on this theme.

⁴¹ E.g. the contents page (the front cover) of the Oral Roberts book mentioned in n. 6 above includes chapters entitled, 'How two young men through applying the principles of seed-faith became Tulsa's third-largest builders' and 'How a friend got his dream job through applying the key principles of the blessing-pact'.

⁴² Luke 6:35.

⁴³ Matt. 6:19-21, 24; Luke 12:33; 18:18ff.

⁴⁴ Moffatt's translation of Phil. 3:20.

⁴⁵ Luke 12:13-21; James 5:1ff.

⁴⁶ James 2:5.

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to God's grace, and Babylon, given up to the pursuit of worldly values. This will experience the sharpness of judgement from God.

Conclusion

We have discovered that both Liberation and Prosperity Theology emphasise themes that are central to the Old Testament, and that in fact they represent the two sides of the one great historical fact in the Old Testament, for the Exodus is never separated from the promise of the land, or *vice versa*. The two facts are therefore not independent but interlocked, as are the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

It is assumed by both schools that the Old Testament events concerned constitute a paradigm for the church in modern society. The New Testament does not support this, although it recognises both that full liberation and full prosperity are eschatological realities and that their physical and social dimensions may have some realisation in the interim period between the advents.

Here we see that the most important theological task facing evangelical Christians today is to seek together a better understanding of the relationship between the two Testaments. Most of the major differences between us are due to different ways of conceiving this relationship.

The terms 'Liberation Theology' and 'Prosperity Theology' are themselves unhelpful, because they serve to underline aspects of truth which, for the New Testament, are subsidiary to the message of spiritual liberation and spiritual prosperity in Christ.

Evangelical Christians should incorporate insights from both schools into their outlook in a biblically balanced way, while continuing to emphasise the gospel and its fundamentally spiritual nature as these are indicated in the New Testament.

To close on a practical note, it is very important for us to realise that crucifixion and resurrection are not only in the New Testament the heart of objective Christianity, the preached message, but that they also constitute there the heart of subjective Christianity, the Christian life.⁴⁷ Here then is the life-style which glorifies God, and which will result in true freedom and prosperity, not only for the person who adopts it by grace, but also for those he or she serves for Christ's sake.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Luke 9:32; Rom. 6. The link between Christ's death and resurrection and our acceptance of this principle is strikingly brought out in John 12:23-26.

⁴⁸ 2 Cor. 4:7-12.

REVIEWS

Collected Writings of William Still, Vol. 1: Theological Studies
Nigel M. de S. Cameron and Sinclair B. Ferguson (eds.)
Rutherford House Books, Edinburgh, 1990; 340pp., £19; ISBN 0
946068 38 0

The influence of William Still's ministry in Aberdeen is well known. Many who are indebted to him will appreciate the gathering of these sermons and conference addresses within one cover and be prepared to pay the price. Others who have heard of his ministry from afar and noticed its effect on other preachers will welcome the opportunity to assess his message. They will also grasp something of the personality of the man. It is not just that the unique language of the preached word has been preserved. There is also an obvious joy and excitement as the truth is communicated. Critics, however, might feel that the editors could have been a little more severe when it came to publication.

The material in this, the first of three promised volumes, covers the period from 1967 to 1981. It includes series of sermons on the cross, the Holy Spirit and the devil followed by addresses given at U.C.C.F. conferences on the Second Coming and the Lord from heaven. Lastly there is a long chapter on law and grace which lacks the vitality of the rest of the book.

The material highlights some of the recurring emphases which characterised William Still's work during the period covered by the book.

His attitude to Scripture is all important. He obviously fully accepts it as God's Word but it is his insistence on the unity of the Bible which receives greater emphasis. His habit of 'sweeping through Scripture' points to a belief in the unity and coherence of revealed truth which is commendable, though sometimes, before the 'sweep' is finished, the reader will feel that the point has long since been made.

Mr. Still believes that the Trinity is foundational to all doctrine. His habit of beginning a discussion with an exposition of the place of three Persons of the Godhead is an object lesson for all who would root Christian truth in the nature of God.

One emphasis stands out above all others. The author would unashamedly claim it to be his distinctive. He returns, time after time, to his belief that there are three dimensions to the cross. Christ died to deal with our sins, that is, what we have done wrong. He also died to deal with our sin, that is, our natures which had gone wrong. Lastly, Christ died to deal with the source and author of sin, Satan himself. If there is much, on these writings, on the devil, there is also a great deal more on the cross, its power and its victory. The three-fold dimension of the cross is carefully and helpfully explained on several occasions and provides the chief value of the volume.

Of course there are passages which cause the reader to pause and question and in so doing he will join the noble succession of some who first heard these talks. There are areas where the author is less than convincing. In dealing, for example, with the gifts of the Spirit, William Still, though interesting, does not scratch where people are itching today and so what he says is largely

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irrelevant to the modern debate. Readers who know the author's detachment from Crusade evangelism will notice his bland assumption that everyone agrees with him that evangelism has to be seen in a teaching context.

Running through the book there is a concern for the edification of Christians. They will mature through familiarity with the Scriptures and as they live by the power of the cross.

James Taylor, Stirling Baptist Church

Statement of Faith

Scottish Theology Study Group of Rutherford Fellowship;
Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1991; 14pp., £1.

This Statement of Faith is the product of discussions between Evangelical theologians, mainly (but not exclusively) of a Presbyterian cast, who believe that an up-to-date statement (emphatically not a confession) of belief, related to current trends and issues, is needed to clarify where the sponsoring groups and others like them stand on the increasingly pluralistic spectrum of the modern church. It professes to have a special relationship to the Scottish situation, but as that turns out to be little different from conditions elsewhere, this document will have a far wider usefulness.

The authors of the statement would appear to have attained their major aims, and many sections of it are admirable résumés of the Evangelical position, put in modern language and with an eye to current debates. This is especially true of the more 'practical' sections towards the end of the statement, where the life of the believer and of the church are stated clearly and concisely.

It is in the earlier sections of the statement that the touch is less sure. Often this is mainly a question of language, as for example, when it is said that Jesus Christ 'existed with his Father from the very beginning'. We know what is meant, of course, but the theologian might well prefer to say something like 'who dwells with his Father in eternity'. The way it is expressed here does not exclude the possibility that God dwells in time, an idea which is also implicit in the use of the verb 'existed' (as opposed to 'was') – a point which ought to be recognised in an age of existentialist thought!

Occasionally things may be said inadvertently which, though true in themselves, leave questions in the mind. This is especially obvious in the description of God the Father as 'creator and upholder of the universe and sovereign over all; redeemer and lord of his chosen people'. This is true, but the statement can (and must) be applied equally to the Son and the Holy Spirit as well. We cannot restrict this kind of language to the person of the Father alone, without opening the door to a form of Arianism.

The section on the incarnation contains two curious phrases which suggest that the authors hold a curious kind of kenoticism. Jesus is said to have 'veiled his divine identity' and to have emptied himself by 'subjecting himself to the lowliness of human life', though the New Testament suggests something rather different from this. On the first point, John 1:14 makes it plain that 'we beheld his glory' *in the flesh*, which makes the concept of veiling a rather different one. In Scripture it is not Jesus who veiled himself, but God who

veiled the eyes of the Jews, so that they would not be able to see him. We must remember that Jesus blamed his disciples for not recognising the Father in him – something which would have been very unfair, to say the least, if he had deliberately veiled his divine identity. Likewise, Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, *i.e.* by adopting a new relationship to his Father, *not* by coming into the world. The incarnation was consequent on the self-emptying, and is not to be identified with it – an important point!

Working backwards slightly, the section on creation and the fall are unsatisfactory as they stand. Again, it is possible to see what is intended, but the language is imprecise to the point of being misleading. Human beings are said to bear the 'stamp' of God 'in their nature as persons'. It goes against the Christian theological tradition to confuse the words 'nature' and 'person' in this way; normally they are regarded as theoretical opposites (*e.g.* 'one divine person in two natures'), not as the same thing! Furthermore, the Bible says that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, not that we bear his 'stamp'. That word is used, if it is used at all, only of Christ (Hebrews 1:3). The fusion of Christ with Adam on the basis of the image is common nowadays, but it is not borne out by Scripture, at least not in the sense intended here. To say that Christ is 'the perfect pattern of human life' is both vague and potentially dangerous – are we all expected to be celibate carpenters in Nazareth?

This statement is especially curious in view of what comes next. To say that 'man and woman were created for each other, in the mutual fulfilment of heterosexual marriage and the family' is not only to ignore the teaching of Paul, but to condemn Jesus himself to the level of an unfulfilled human being! Of course we do not want to advocate a homosexual lifestyle, but it is not necessary to go to this extreme in order to achieve that aim! Furthermore, the Bible nowhere says that after the fall, God's image in man was 'spoiled', or that 'the fall has also blighted the natural order'. One ought to be careful even in saying that Adam and Eve's sin has been 'transmitted to all generations', as if it were a sexual disease!

For a document which gives such a high place to Scripture, it is disappointing not to find it used more often. Occasionally it is quoted without acknowledgement, and there are many places where it would be helpful to have a reference (not necessarily a 'proof text') in support of what might easily be seen to be controversial. Sometimes scriptural language seems to have been avoided quite deliberately, as when the resurrection is said to have taken place 'two days after the crucifixion'. The Creeds have always said that Jesus was raised on the third day, and it seem peculiar not to retain such a familiar phrase, with an explanation of its meaning if necessary.

Another peculiarity is that the statement is not numbered by section and paragraph, making it difficult to quote easily. This is an editorial matter, but such numbering is now customary in documents of this kind, and can even find support in the layout of the Westminster Confession (not to mention the Bible!).

The achievement of such a statement in the current climate of theological minimalism is not to be underrated, though the authors ought to go back to their text and iron it out a little further. That could produce a most helpful

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and succinct statement of Evangelical belief, which would be of service not only to the Scottish churches but to Reformed Protestants around the world.

Gerald Bray, *Oak Hill College, London*

The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically

Richard Bauckham

SPCK, London, 1989; 166pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 281 04402 3

This stimulating contribution to the ongoing discussion of the relation of the Bible to political life originates in a series of articles published in *Third Way* 1984-85, expanded and arranged to form the present volume. Prospective readers should not be put off by the rather unimaginative title; beginning from a consideration of methodological issues the book aims to develop an understanding of the political relevance of the Bible in a disciplined way and in so doing establishes some new approaches to these questions. It does not set out to be a summary of the political teaching of the Bible or a programme for Christian political action but is intended as 'a course in political hermeneutics'.

It is divided into ten chapters with the first forming both an introduction to the problems of method inherent in a political approach to the Bible and an outline of various hermeneutical principles which are then applied in the following nine. These chapters contain a thought-provoking juxtaposition of biblical material and particular political contexts and situations. For example, those entitled 'Wisdom for the Powerful', 'The Genesis Flood and the Nuclear Holocaust' and 'Taxing Questions: Jesus and Taxation' yield fresh insights into the political significance of the biblical material which provide a basis for further fruitful reflection on the part of the reader.

However, while Bauckham adequately addresses the difficulties of biblical interpretation in the context of Christian political thought, the other fundamental question remains less fully addressed. The ineluctable problem of a 'political hermeneutics' is that a specific hermeneutic implies a particular political stance to the extent that the one cannot be defined without the other. As the conflict in the nineteenth century between and Anti-Revolutionary party and the Christian Historical Union within the Calvinist political movement in the Netherlands classically illustrates, in Christian political movements differing biblical exegeses are closely related to distinctive political positions. Well written, with an admirable clarity in its handling of the basic hermeneutical issues, *The Bible in Politics* would need to be read with this in mind.

Ian Maxwell, St Ninian's Church of Scotland, Paisley

The Christian Story. Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World. A Pastoral Systematics, Vol. II

Gabriel Fackre

William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987; 366pp., £12.25; ISBN 0 8028 0276 1

The author describes himself as an 'evangelical ecumenical' seeking for 'a truly catholic theological method'. Evangelicals who may be put off by this claim to 'catholicity' need not fear in this a strident ecumenicalism. Rather the book is a model of how a theologian should meet and debate with other theologians and has much to teach any reader with settled convictions. The declared programme is not an empty boast: Fackre grapples heroically and fruitfully with the seemingly intractable diversity of theological hermeneutical method in modern scholarship.

The book opens with a most unusual autobiographical introduction of over 50 pages! British readers could find such personal reference inappropriate, but in fact familiarity with the author's wide theological, social and political activities primes us for the well-earthen and comprehensive study that follows.

Having competently summarised, compared and assessed most of the major options in modern hermeneutics Fackre offers his own basis for conversation between them, based on 'narrative systematics...the biography of God', settling for the following formula in the search for theological authority: 'Scripture as *source*, gospel as *substance*, Christ as *centre*, the church as *resource*, tradition as *guide*, the world as *setting*, gracious signs therein as *aid*, liberation/reconciliation, narrative, and ecumenicity as elements of *perspective*' (p. 157). The heart of the book is a development of the schema as a catholic basis for theological method and it skilfully challenges all the protagonists to take it on board.

Along the way there are many fruitful and challenging observations, for feminists as well as chauvinists, for liberationists as well as traditionalists, for sceptics as well as conservatives. One for evangelicals is the reminder that even those with the highest view of Scripture reserve a place, more than they care to admit, for the interpreting church (whether in the Fathers, the Reformers or the creeds). They too need a working 'combinationist' hermeneutic which they can properly justify. Throughout, we find judicious and uncompromising comment dispensed with fairness and sensitivity towards the dialogue partners.

Such a rich and ambitious book could not be completely watertight. One or two selective comments will have to suffice. The author, by his stress on the humanness of the Bible, seems to be left with a 'mixed' theory of it as authoritative source. It is doubtful if Christ as centre and the gospel as source can be extracted to serve as the proper normative authority. This weakness, however, is not central enough to spoil the book.

Again, the insistence on the Christian community, and not just the individual, as interpreter comes as an overdue corrective but raises a problem of circularity. What first *identifies* that community if not indeed an interpretation? Which then comes first, community or interpretation?

Lastly, in perhaps the only quirkish part of the book, Fackre revives the notion of a hearing of the gospel after death but rests too precariously upon the unclear 1 Peter 3:18,19 and the 'descent into hell' of the Apostles' Creed which Calvin explained so differently.

These controversial intrusions do not mar the book. Although sometimes wordy, it is a fine and instructive introduction to a formidable subject.

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Everyone doing serious theology would benefit by having first read such a book.

R. Kearsley, Glasgow. Bible College

The Christian Life – A Doctrinal Introduction

Sinclair B. Ferguson

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1990; 218pp., £3.50; ISBN 0 85151 5169

As one would expect from the pen of Sinclair Ferguson, here we have a profound but non-technical, highly practical discussion of doctrine. It is readable with good and illuminating exposition of biblical passages. The Christian life is considered under such sections as 'the plan of grace', 'born again', 'faith in Christ', 'justification', 'union with Christ', 'election' and others.

After my initial glance through the book I had two worries about it. First, in the introduction Sinclair Ferguson tells us the book is about 'The Application of Redemption'. Does he thereby imply that the Christian life is just a series of blessings applied to us because atonement has taken place? In fact I need not have worried. Much of his exposition, getting to the heart of the New Testament as it does, shows him interpreting the Christian life as flowing out of the heart of the incarnation and atonement.

Secondly, I noted that 'Union with Christ' in the table of contents seemed to be just one of the aspects of the Christian life. But the actual chapter shows it to be what it is, namely, the foundation of our justification, sanctification, election etc. Being true to the New Testament, Sinclair Ferguson interprets it not only as our 'faith union' with the Lord but, more fundamentally, a 'flesh union' with Christ. By his incarnation the Son of God took hold of our nature, so that 'our union with Christ is therefore based on Christ's union with us'. Here we have sound New Testament theology which is the basis for the rest of the book. I say 'New Testament' because my one *little* criticism of the book is the lack of Old Testament material and surely it is a great Reformed principle to believe in the unity of the Bible. At the back of the book there are nearly eight pages of New Testament references, but only one and a half pages of Old Testament. Following on from this point I feel the chapter on 'election' could have been even better. Although the author refers to the election of Israel in Old Testament times he uses this only to show that God is an electing God. If only he could tell us how both our Lord and Paul use the election of Israel as the means by which we understand all God's electing purposes (in mercy and hardening), then I think he would have written something even more profound.

Having said that, I highly recommend this book. Drawing on his love for Calvin and John Owen, Sinclair Ferguson has ably fulfilled his aim to bring together doctrine, experience and practice in a non-technical but profound way. Many people will be greatly helped by this book. There is much in the ample biblical material to help the preacher in his task to make a bridge from God's Word to the daily experience of the Christian.

Howard Taylor, St David's Church of Scotland, Glasgow

What Christians Believe – A Biblical and Historical Summary

Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber

Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989; 480pp., \$19.95;
ISBN 0 310 36720 4

Given the contents of this book, a more appropriate title would have been 'Christian Doctrine – A Biblical and Historical Summary'. It divides doctrine into the five sections, The Bible, God, Salvation, Church, and End Times. Each section has two main parts, 'Biblical' by Alan Johnson and 'Historical' by Robert Webber. They deliberately try to be fair to the pluralism of evangelical Christianity, respecting genuine differences on such subjects as election, sacraments and free will. The book is non-polemical, clear, very readable and not tied to any system other than the broad evangelical consensus.

Each 'Biblical Section' is really a history of the development of belief from the Patriarchs through Moses, the Prophets, Jesus and the New Testament church. I am not happy about this approach, but nevertheless Johnson gives much very helpful exposition which will be useful for any reader.

Each historical section deals with the development of these same doctrines in the early church fathers through Augustine, the medieval church, Luther, Calvin, the Baptists, Arminius, Schleiermacher, Barth, and Liberation and Process Theology. It is well written, but as is inevitable in an attempt to cover so much ground there is some loss of accuracy. For example the difference between Calvin and Zwingli on the Lord's Supper is blurred and the discussion of difference between Luther and Calvin on Christology is so brief as to be inadequate. Nevertheless Webber does give a very useful and readable summary for the beginner.

I have a deeper problem with this book. I do not think the authors are true to their own principles. In the Introduction, they tell us that they do not like theological systems such as Calvinism or Dispensationalism. Truth, they tell us, is not a particular system. Jesus is *the* Truth, and the whole Bible is the truthful written revelation of this person, Jesus Christ. So far so good. So why, I wonder, do they treat the Bible as if it were a history of doctrines (Moses to the N.T. church), rather than what it is, namely the true story of God's dealing with humanity (focused in Jesus Christ), out of which we learn doctrine. The significance of the history of Israel in obedience and disobedience is hardly touched upon, yet this is the subject of the Bible and is interwoven with our understanding of the incarnation and atonement. This is seen particularly in their section on the doctrine of God. I believe it would have been better to see Jesus in his life, death and resurrection as the self-revelation of God to humanity which enables us to understand the Old Testament more fully, rather than, as they do, seeing the Bible as a history of the development of understanding the attributes of God.

Nevertheless I do not want to be negative about the book. It does provide a very good and reliable overview for the theology student. Its biblical exposition is both profound and helpful and the whole book breathes a true love for God and his Word. It has a very good index.

Howard Taylor, St David's Church of Scotland, Glasgow

Truth and Social Reform

Vishal Mangalwadi

Spire (Hodder & Stoughton), London, 1989; 136pp., £3.95; ISBN 0 340 42630 6

This book is a striking and provocative attempt to apply Christian teaching to the political and social realities of the modern world. Vishal Mangalwadi is an evangelical Christian who has given himself to work among the poor in his native India in various types of programme. Working from the basis of an incident in the life and ministry of Jesus, he insists that truth and salvation have implications beyond the purely personal fact of justification by faith. He insists that the concern of Christ for the poor and oppressed was not some adjunct to his main teaching but rather fundamental to any proper interpretation of that teaching.

'Christ's compassion was prophetic. Instead of being a gut-level response to pictures of starving children, it grew out of a prophetic insight into the social and theological causes of suffering. In His response, therefore, Jesus went to the root of human misery and dealt with it.' (p. 3)

In successive chapters he demonstrates that the subjects of compassion, evangelism, sin and salvation, the Holy Spirit, the church and Christian hope all have a bearing on social reform.

The many illustrations he presents of practical situations he has faced in India give strength and body to his argument. His analysis of them in terms of the Christian gospel bears serious consideration, although one is sometimes inclined to the view that his 'politicisation' of Christianity goes beyond what can strictly be understood from the texts and principles he quotes to make his case. He does not, however, like some of the liberation theologians, accept the Marxist analysis uncritically.

'Karl Marx rightly understood that true compassion calls for dealing with the social context which makes men miserable. Marx, however, defeated his own purpose by trying to build a case for compassion on atheistic premises. If the individual man is merely the product of random chance in an impersonal universe, then there is no meaning in caring for him, especially when he is too weak and powerless to be of any use to us. But if man is a created being, then he is special to his Creator. If he is created as the image-bearer of the Creator Himself, he is even more special.' (p. 8)

Perhaps the most powerful section in the book is his study on the Ten Commandments, in which he shows their application to specific situations he faces in his country today.

One notable and perceptive area of the book is its concern to see the spiritual forces and demonic powers at work in the universe. In one revealing incident the author speaks of his failure in a particular situation because he had ceased properly to believe in such things: '...my secular education had really made me quite naturalistic.' (p. 28) This is a useful corrective to post-Enlightenment rationalism from which we in the West suffer most acutely.

The book, however, is not simply an academic discussion of poverty, development and injustice, it ends on a most practical note. Mangalwadi and others have formed a charitable trust to make capital grants and loans

available to poor Indian farmers. This is to enable them to avoid the poverty trap of high interest loans, and the oppressive injustice of those who would seek to deprive them of their land, or force them to sell their produce below the level of subsistence. Readers are asked to make loans or gifts towards this work.

It is rare for a book to provide stimulation, challenge and opportunity all at once. It is to be hoped that this challenge will be taken up by Christians in rich countries such as ours.

A. T. B. McGowan, Trinity Possil and Henry Drummond Church, Glasgow

The Christian Healing Ministry

Morris Maddocks

SPCK, London, 1990; 270pp., £8.95; ISBN 0 281 04462 7

This book is the second edition of a volume published in 1981. The author has left the text of the first edition intact and added a new preface and a new fourth section to the book as well as revising the bibliography. When he wrote the first edition, he was the bishop of Selby, but he is now the advisor for the ministry of health and healing to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The publishers claim that the book has now established itself as 'the classic work on the subject'.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part reviews the biblical basis of the healing ministry. Part two consists of a brief history of healing in the church of today and a description of its various features and organisation. The third part discusses the significance of health and healing in modern society, whilst the new part four describes developments since the first edition was published. An appendix gives an outline of a healing service from the booklet *Ministry to the Sick*, one of the Authorized Alternative Services of the Church of England.

The past two or three decades have seen an increasing interest in the healing ministry of the Christian church, and it is good to have an account of it in this readable book. Its first part gives a valuable review of the healing practice of our Lord and the apostolic church. Although this increase in interest has been seen in most of the mainline churches and the charismatic movement, the author confines his description of healing in the modern church mainly to the Church of England, giving only three or four pages to other denominations. In his new section he devotes a similar amount of space to the activities of John Wimber which he describes sympathetically but not uncritically.

Christian doctors and nurses will be disappointed that his presentation appears to find little place in the Christian healing ministry for their work. There is no mention of the establishment of church hospitals or the contribution to healing by countless medical missionaries who over the past century have practised the healing ministry using the methods and insights of western medicine. He describes as 'tragic' the polarisation between medicine and the church, but does not recognise that numbers of medical practitioners are church members. The polarisation is thus not between medicine and the

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church, but between those who practise medicine on the basis of secular humanism and those who practise it on a Christian basis. Doctors and nurses reading this book will be given the impression that the Christian healing ministry consists only of prayer, laying on of hands, anointing and reception of the sacrament, and has no place for the daily professional practice of Christian doctors and nurses at home and abroad.

However, the book is well worth reading as a well-written account of the healing ministry of the church today, its basis in the example of Jesus and the practice of the apostolic church, and how it might be practised in the church today.

John Wilkinson, Edinburgh.

The Promise of Health and Wealth

Dan R. McConnell

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1990; 195pp., £5.99; ISBN 0 340 52340 9

The subtitle describes this book as 'A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement'. It is an expanded version of a thesis for a master's degree in theology at the Oral Roberts University and is published with a commendatory foreword by David Tomlinson, a trustee of the C. S. Lewis Centre in London. In spite of its academic origin the book is very readable and even fascinating!

The term Modern Faith Movement is not very well known in Britain. It is used to describe a movement which has emerged in recent years from the independent charismatic renewal movement in the U.S.A., insisting that material prosperity is to be found in the atonement. It preaches a gospel of success and maintains that in the atonement through the death of Jesus Christ we are assured of forgiveness of sin, healing of the body in this life and spiritual and material prosperity. This is the gospel which is often associated with the U.S.A.'s so-called televangelists.

McConnell traces the origin of this teaching to a zealous and self-educated American preacher named Essex Thomas Kenyon (1867-1948), born and brought up near New York. He was converted as a teenager and ordained a deacon in the Methodist Church, but later became an independent Baptist. Over the following decades he came under various influences including unitarianism and the metaphysical cults which gave rise to New Thought metaphysics and Christian Science, with the result that he developed a unique syncretistic system which is difficult to classify, but has some affinity with classical gnosticism and also with the current New Age Movement.

Shortly before Kenyon died, the leadership of the movement he had founded was taken over by Kenneth Hagin (b. 1917), whom McConnell accuses of the wholesale plagiarism of Kenyon's writings and provides examples to prove his case. Hagin was originally ordained a pastor in the Assemblies of God in 1937. He has turned the Faith Movement into a virtually new pentecostalist denomination based on the teaching of the three-

fold effect of the atonement and on certain direct revelations he claimed to have had from Jesus Christ.

After this historical analysis, the author examines the theological doctrines of the Faith Movement in the light of the teaching of the Bible. The doctrines he discusses are those of revelation, redemption, faith, healing and prosperity. He has no difficulty in demonstrating that they make up 'A Different Gospel' (the title of the book when it was published in the U.S.A. in 1987). It is a gospel which people must find very attractive with its assurance of forgiveness, physical healing on demand and automatic spiritual and material prosperity, but the author shows that it is not the gospel which Paul preached or which his converts accepted. They certainly obtained forgiveness of sins, but not the promise of perfect health or abundant wealth.

The book is warmly recommended to anyone seeking an informed and biblical assessment, albeit polemical, of 'the gospel of prosperity'. An index to the book would have made it even more useful.

John Wilkinson, Edinburgh.

The Pastor's Opportunities

Edited by Cyril Rodd

T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1990; 256pp, £9.95; ISBN 0 567 29167 7

These twenty-four articles by seventeen authors were chosen from a series in the *Expository Times* by its Editor. The treatment is selective rather than systematic. There is no index. The chapters, for the most part practically rather than theologically orientated, are arranged under the heads 'Literature', 'Presentation', 'Caring', 'Outreach', and 'Friendship'.

The 'Literature' section starts with the use of poetry in sermons and public worship and suggests individual modern poets and anthologies. The next two chapters deal with the novel and biography and the pastoral value of wide reading. I found all three articles stimulating and they have sent me to the library to follow up their recommendations.

The first chapter in 'Presentation' deals with the importance and use of visual aids. Practical tips are given on how to ensure that they are aids, not hindrances. There is an address list of resources. 'Things that are Seen' speaks to other visual issues in worship, fellowship and mission. The final chapter deals with the parish magazine. These are all 'how to' articles, none of which set the heather on fire for me.

The 'Caring' section is perceptive throughout. The author of 'Mothers and Very Young Children' manages to include a short time of worship in which older toddlers participate. A fine chapter on the mentally handicapped child is followed by another on the hearing-impaired which every pastor should read, with much of insight and important tips on talking one to one as well as in public address. There is a sympathetic article on the confused elderly.

Any church could improve its performance through the ideas on welcoming the newcomer in the 'Outreach' section. 'Hospitality' helpfully discusses the balance between privacy and availability in the use of a pastor's

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home. 'The Church Family Week' is a useful guide to having a student team sharing the life and witness of a church.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin is thought-provoking on evangelism in the city. 'I know of only one real hermeneutic of the gospel: a congregation which believes it.' On the trend towards abandoning evangelism for dialogue alone in a multiracial society: 'It is, surely, a very peculiar form of racism which would affirm that the good news entrusted to us is strictly for white Anglo-Saxons!'

Those who have tried to produce professionally structured arrangements for sharing the work in a housing scheme church will be vastly encouraged by the radical rethink in 'Sharing Ministry On a Large Council Estate'.

Other articles in the 'Outreach' section deal with community involvement, 'Towards a Theology of Paid Employment', twinning between inner city and richer churches, social and political issues, and special occasions. There is some overlapping of material.

The 'Friendship' section discusses relating with people of other faiths, and with Jews. A final thoughtful chapter, 'Through Another's Eyes,' calls for real friendship and involvement rather than a judgemental spirit, without sacrificing Christian distinctiveness.

Chapters vary in quality but I cannot imagine anyone concerned about Christian mission and service regretting buying this volume. There is much to stimulate thought and action.

C. Peter White, Glasgow Bible College

Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision

William Storrar

Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1990; 255pp., £11.50/£6.95; ISBN 0 905312 44 9 (hb), 1 871828 01 5 (pb).

The brief Introduction to *Scottish Identity* calls for a reexamination of what it is to be human and to be Christian before 'deciding what it is to be Scottish'. Following Hugh MacDairmid's call, it says it is time to see Scotland in true scale to the Infinite. But it argues that the Scottish national identity requires that any change be grounded in first principles. Mrs Thatcher's 'Sermon on the Mound', albeit a professed Christian viewpoint, is seen as deeply flawed, being unduly individualistic, and is labelled a 'Monstrous Vision'.

The main part of the book is divided into three parts. Part 1 on 'Historical Identity' outlines the Catholic, the Reformed and the secular visions of the nation as respectively free, godly and moral. Part 2 discusses 'Theological Identity' (Christ and nation today) through the 'Ecology of Nations' (a biblical view of nationhood), nationalism (the modern Judas) and 'Incarnationalism' (a practical theology of nationhood). Part 3 then deals with 'Contemporary Identity', examining the human identity crisis (a common humanity), the Christian identity crisis (a confessing church) and the national identity crisis (a constitutional nationhood). Between Parts 1 and 2 a 'Prism' speaks of 'the Other Scottish Christ' - which seems to be the role of the minister, examined through three novels (by Grassie Gibbon, Fionn

MacColla and Robin Jenkins) and three ministries (MacLeod Campbell, Edward Irving and Patrick Brewster).

Written from a Reformed perspective the book represents an effort to relate the problems of nationalism and Scottish government to biblical principles. But I found it very difficult going. Others more familiar with the language used (an 'acoustic church' still defeats me) may profit from it. Those not inducted into the mysteries will find this book less than rewarding and are unlikely to persist with it. Mr Storrar has read a lot, but he does not synthesise his material adequately for the audience he would appear to want to speak to. There is no citation or reference given for the many thoughts and paraphrases of other writers, and, though some of the names quoted do appear in the bibliography, many do not.

F. Lyall, University of Aberdeen

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Noel Weeks

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988; 309pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 85151 523 1

This book is made up of two distinct parts – 'Basic Issues' (pp. 3–90) and 'Points of Contention' (pp. 93–298). They are quite different in character. The first, delightfully free of footnotes, is very readable. The second, packed with detailed footnotes, will prove demanding reading even for those well-versed in biblical and theological study. Some readers, identifying strongly with the general emphasis given in 'Basic Issues', may find themselves in greater disagreement with Weeks when he comes to more controversial areas of biblical interpretation. In introducing Part Two as 'quite heterogeneous material', some of which is 'tentative', Weeks acknowledges that he could have avoided controversy 'by refusing to enter into areas where there is no certainty. Nevertheless such refusal would be a disservice to the reader who wonders about the relevance of the thesis of this book to some of the other issues thrown up in the debate'. While agreeing with Weeks that the value of a general approach to Scripture requires to be proved through the careful exegesis of particular passages of Scripture, I wonder whether there is not room here for two separate books.

I can imagine some potential readers browsing through the complex discussion of Part Two, with its many footnotes, and laying the book aside as 'too heavy'. This would be a pity, for they would miss out on a most instructive discussion of the 'Basic Issues' involved in affirming faith in the sufficiency of Scripture. On the other hand, a smaller book – less than one hundred pages – attractive to a wider range of readers, might have served to whet the appetite for the larger book. In making these comments, I am mindful of the author's remarks regarding turning the tentativeness of the investigations in Part Two against the basic thesis of Part One: 'It is a familiar device in refuting a disliked argument, to pick upon a peripheral part of the thesis and to direct criticism against it.' My point is rather to

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emphasize the value of his discussion of the 'Basic Issues', which deserves the widest readership.

Weeks asks the question, 'Should we place all that the Bible says in the religious column and see it as irrelevant to the secular?' Observing that the purpose of Scripture is 'man's redemption' and stressing that the whole of human life needs to be redeemed, he insists persuasively that the range of Scripture's authority must not be limited, which would carry with it a limitation of 'man's... need for redemption' and 'the scope of the gospel's claim'. As a small part of a larger book, bearing such diverse chapter titles as 'The Worship and Government of the Church', "Rabbinic" Exegesis in the New Testament', 'Pseudepigraphy', and 'Bible Translation', I fear that this important discussion of biblical authority will not be as widely read as it should be.

Charles M. Cameron, St Ninian's Parish Church, Dunfermline

Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition

Thomas C. Oden

Asbury Press / Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1988; 233pp. \$16.95;

ISBN 0 310 75240 X

What Methodists Believe

Rupert E. Davies

Epworth Press, London, 1988; 89pp., £3.50; ISBN 0 7162 0450 9

Although the United Methodist Church in the USA has developed a reputation for liberalism in theology, there is a strong evangelical tradition within it, and this has been finding literary expression recently through a subdivision of the Zondervan Publishing House which is publishing books under an imprint which commemorates Francis Asbury, the great pioneer missionary of American Methodism. Professor Oden's book is addressed to current disputes in North America regarding the status of the doctrinal standards of Methodism. It is essentially the work of a historian, demonstrating that the 25 Articles together with (and not without) John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and his Standard Sermons constitute these standards and should continue to be accepted as such. The content of the Notes and the Sermons is briefly illustrated and summarised, and the relation of the Articles to the Anglican 39 Articles is carefully tabulated. The doctrinal standards of the different Methodist bodies in North America are also tabulated in detail. This is a work which is unlikely to be read by many people outside North American Methodism, but it is of importance as indicating the essential evangelical foundations of the Methodist Church and reaffirming them over against pluralism in doctrine. It is gratifying to see that Methodist evangelicals are standing firm for the truth of the gospel.

Rupert Davies wrote his short and simple account of *What Methodists Believe* in 1976, and it is now reissued in an updated version. He rightly devotes the bulk of his book to showing what Methodists believe in common

with most other Christians before discussing briefly their characteristic emphases and stressing their desire for fuller organic unity in the whole church. It is of course one person's interpretation of Methodism and it lays less emphasis on the importance of evangelism, evangelical conversion and scriptural holiness than many Methodists would wish to lay. The shape of the book in fact plays down the distinctive elements of historical Methodism, and this may well be connected with the author's great longing for the end of denominationalism. This is not the best of introductions to 'What Methodists believe'; the author's own Pelican book on *Methodism* (1963) does a better job at greater length in conveying the ethos.

I. Howard Marshall, Faculty of Divinity, Aberdeen

Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement

Ruth A. Tucker

Academie Books (Zondervan), Grand Rapids, 1989; 462pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 310 40440 1

Big books on 'cults' have not been very common recently. Partly this is because the world of alternative religions is such a shifting, bewildering mosaic; factual details date rapidly; even doctrinal analyses become obsolete within months.

And so one opens Ruth Tucker's 462 pages of double columns with some foreboding. It is certainly a monumental work – massive bibliographies, extensive notes, appendices and index – but will it last?

The research has been painstaking. She has visited the key centres of all the movements she has studied, made friends of members, and read impressively widely about most aspects of her subject.

She picks her way surefootedly through tricky country. She is admirably clear on the Spaulding controversy in Mormonism, dispassionate in her assessment of Victor Paul Wierwille, unexpectedly warm towards Charles Russell, Sun Myung Moon, Joseph Smith. It is good to hear the author of a book like this insisting that 'cult members' are people and must be treated with dignity; and that the Christian cause is not served by vilifying heretical leaders. (It is true that after saying this she goes on to regurgitate most of the standard details of scandals usually quoted in evangelical books – from Russell's Miracle Wheat to Garner Ted Armstrong's adulteries – but she discounts some of them, excuses others, and fails even to mention the petty ones, such as Russell's false claim to know Greek.)

She is good at detail, weak at theory. The chapter attempting bravely to disentangle the meanings of the words 'cult', 'sect', 'denomination' and 'world religion' is a naive, clumsy failure. She has a habit of laying down facts alongside one another, without comment, leaving the reader feeling that all this detail should lead somewhere – but it never does. The chapter on fringe religions in history, for example, cries out for a few interpretative comments; but in vain. And she simply reports the conspiracy theories of Constance Cumbey without demolishing them – strange indeed.

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The sketches of the history of major groups, and especially the reporting of their present state of health, is superb; but the analysis of their doctrine, which concludes each section, is partial and often confusing.

Ruth Tucker has produced a book for the lay reader, or the busy minister, which will give an excellent introduction to the 'feel' of any of twelve major groups surveyed. (Not counting the New Age, which – despite the book's title – receives only 37 pages, 5 of them given over to a discussion of astrology, which is not really the same thing.) But her coverage is partial and peculiar (strange to see Transcendental Meditation relegated to 'Lesser-Known Cultic Movements', or Spiritualism as a one-page excursus in the New Age chapter) and provides little guidance about how best to engage in discussion with group members.

A worthwhile book, then, but limited; very American (do we really need two pages on astrology and the Reagans? and is it true that in the mid-nineteenth century anything non-Anglican was seen as a 'cult' in England?); and cursed with a short 'sell-by' date. It will be useful this year, and next. After that, who knows?

John Allan, Exeter

How to Play Theological Ping Pong

Basil Mitchell (edited by William J. Abraham and Robert W. Prevoist)

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1990; 218pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 340 51383 7

Basil Mitchell was Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford from 1968 until his retirement in 1984. Two of his former students have brought together a number of his essays on the topic of faith and reason, which clearly preoccupied him over many years, and which he treated at book-length in *Faith and Justification*.

Although sandwiched between the other papers, the title paper, 'How to Play Theological Ping-Pong' sets the tone for the remainder. It is a masterly put-down of some of the contorted dialectics of the theologians, particularly continental theologians. The treatment is all the more devastating because it is delivered in a deliberately witty way, conveyed in a manner that is calculated to make the teutonic theological brain wince.

A quotation from that paper will serve to reveal how typical it is of the remainder, in mood if not in style: 'This very fascination [of the game of theological ping-pong] this very challenge to virtuosity, means that people are tempted to play it when they would be wiser not to, when a quiet walk along one or other of the everyday paths of reasonableness would be more rewarding, though less exciting' (p. 183). This is, in effect, what the reader gains from the remainder of the essays, a series of quiet walks displaying everyday reasonableness in matters of faith and reason.

The essays struck me as being archetypically English; there is little or no display of learning, the language is for the most part that of everyday life, the tone is reasonable, modest, thoughtful and cautious; conservative in the best

sense, being distrustful of innovation, including intellectual innovation, and of the extremes of both rationalism and irrationalism. Not for Mitchell the flights of continental irrationalism, nor yet the careful and yet bold modalisings of an Alvin Plantinga. For all that I reckon that this material hides a considerable amount of intellectual spadework and even of agonising.

The starting-points of the papers are varied: apologetics, ethics, the law and politics, commitment and neutrality, and the idea of man as a reasonable being. Yet the doctrine remains the same throughout. It can be expressed as a series of theses which, according to Mitchell, ought not to be surrendered whatever else is captured: that there is objective truth; that, while the claims of the Christian religion are not susceptible of apodictic truth, reason nevertheless has a crucial part to play in sifting those claims and rebutting simplistic objections; that in the rational assessment of matters of faith, history and tradition cannot be discounted; that academics are no freer from fashion and prejudice than the rest of humanity; and finally, that most issues in religion are more complex and more ramified than at first they seem.

Taken individually, most of the papers appear fairly slight, but they carry cumulative force; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Two topics, in particular, seem to be illuminated by Mitchell; the relation of law and politics to the Christian religion, and the tension between personal commitment and intellectual detachment. Both the novice and the hardened practitioner could not fail to benefit from Mitchell's sage advice on these topics, as indeed on much else in this rewarding set of essays.

Paul Helm, University of Liverpool.

Coping with Illness

Roger Hurding

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1988; 150pp., £1.95; ISBN 0 340 41591 6

This book is the first title in a new 'Christian Doctor' series, which will examine medically-related topics from a Christian pastoral perspective. It is a symptom of the current interest in medical topics, especially medical ethical issues. However, this first book of the series is not concerned with any particular ethical issue, but with the practical problem of how to cope when illness strikes.

Its author writes out of personal experience of illness and practical experience of counselling others. Being a doctor himself, though no longer able to practise clinical medicine, he can view the situation from both the personal and professional aspects. He aims to help not only the sick person, but also those friends and relatives who care for him in his sickness.

The book is a tapestry in which stories from the author's own experience are interwoven with discussion of the questions raised by the incidents he records. This discussion covers the meaning of illness, the Christian response to illness, and how God heals those who are ill by many means and in many ways. Dr Hurding also takes up particular subjects which arise out of his accounts of illness and treats them helpfully and biblically – such subjects as

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anger, anxiety, depression, handicap, weakness, suffering and the response to dying. He treats the latter subject in terms of Kubler-Ross's well-known five stages of the reaction to dying and loss. He suggests that a helpful way to express human reaction to dying may be found in the use of the Psalms of lament in the Psalter. In these Psalms, which compose over a third of the book of Psalms, he finds the four elements of complaint, petition, assurance and praise which are all relevant to a Christian reaction to dying. The last chapter takes up the subjects of suffering and healing, and examines them in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ. The cross meant weakness and shame to him, as sickness may mean to us in this present life. His resurrection meant power and glory, as our rising again will mean for us when we are made completely whole in the life that is to come. That will be our complete healing in Christ.

This book is very well-written and is very easy to read. It is a pleasure to be able to recommend it wholeheartedly as an important contribution to the current literature on care and counselling in the face of illness. It has set a high standard for the new series of books it initiates.

John Wilkinson, Edinburgh.

Mysterium Paschale

Hans Urs von Balthasar. Translated by Aidan Nichols.

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990; 297pp., £19.95; ISBN 0 567 09534 7.

The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Edited by John Riches

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1986; 239pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 567 09351 4.

The process of translating the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar into English must say something about the agenda of English-speaking theology. Whereas, for example, the major works of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner were translated relatively quickly, the translation of Balthasar's major works has only recently begun (T. & T. Clark began publishing the seven volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* in 1982). Yet he was certainly a theologian of equal stature with Barth and Rahner. In some ways he could be seen as the Roman Catholic equivalent of Barth: constantly reappropriating the riches of the theological tradition which he knew exceptionally well, conservative in a highly creative way, concerned not with the apologetic movement from humanity to God but with the revelation of God's love for the world in Christ, opposed therefore to anthropocentric tendencies in modern Roman Catholic theology, above all thoroughly Trinitarian and Christocentric, his theology concentrated almost as rigorously as Barth's on the salvific and self-revelatory act of God in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

For this reason, Aidan Nichols' excellent translation of *Mysterium Paschale* (the original German first appeared in 1969) would be a good place for would-be English readers of Balthasar to start. It takes the form of a concentrated theological meditation on the events of the *triduum mortis* (the three days: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter). By means of this form,

Balthasar turns away from the tendency of traditional theology to deal with soteriological themes in the abstract and focuses instead on the concrete person of Jesus the incarnate Son in the concrete salvific events of his passion, descent to hell and resurrection. In other words, Balthasar takes up the liturgical and devotional tradition of contemplating Christ as Saviour in the Gospel narratives of his passion and resurrection, and attempts a rigorous theological deepening of this tradition. The book is therefore notable for taking the Gospel narratives more seriously than theology is apt to do (though perhaps not yet quite seriously enough) as well as for consistently exploring the Trinitarian dimension of the paschal history. The scheme of the three days also allows Balthasar scope for his original interpretation (which owes much to the visionary Adrienne von Speyr, his close friend, collaborator and inspiration) of the descent into hell as 'the being dead of the Son of God': the necessary final point of the Crucified's solidarity with sinners in the 'second death' of abandonment by God.

Some Protestant readers may be surprised to find that it is this most traditional of the great modern Roman Catholic theologians who can write very appreciatively of Luther's theology of the cross and make frequent reference to Barth as he expounds the crucified Christ's substitutionary solidarity with sinners under the judgment of God. Differing sharply from the debilitated interpretation of the cross in such Roman Catholic theologians as Rahner, Küng and Schillebeeckx, he insists that the incarnate Son of God entered the furthest depths of sinful humanity's alienation from God so that sinners need not do so, and that only the Trinitarian form of the divine love enables this to be fully understood. He reminds us, if we had forgotten, that the Protestant tradition does not have a monopoly on the theological resources for understanding the radical paradox of the cross, and while his treatment of these themes runs in many respects parallel to those of Jüngel and Moltmann, his rootedness in the patristic and scholastic traditions makes it at some points more satisfactory than theirs. Those who are uneasy with the way Moltmann relates the economic and the immanent Trinities may well prefer the way Balthasar retains a more traditional doctrine of God while insisting that God in himself truly corresponds to his radical self-giving and self-abnegation in incarnation and cross. Balthasar's distinctive treatment of the *kenosis* theme should be regarded as one of the more significant recent contributions to Trinitarian theology.

Many of the essays on Balthasar in the useful volume edited by John Riches are by members of the team of translators of *The Glory of the Lord* and so tend to focus, though not exclusively, on that work (itself the first part of Balthasar's great trilogy, the translation of the second and third parts of which – *Theodramatik* and *Theologik* – has not yet begun). I mention just those essays which are most valuable for a general understanding of Balthasar's theology. Rowan Williams compares Balthasar and Rahner, expounding very helpfully the important philosophical difference between them and then rightly focussing on the key Christological difference. John Riches shows how Balthasar uses the analogy of aesthetic judgment to understand the act of faith in divine revelation. Brian McNeil defends Balthasar's hermeneutic (often dismissed as simply pre-critical). He calls it 'iconographic' (aiming to mediate the truth of Christ embodied in Scripture)

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by contrast to the 'photographic' method of historical-critical exegesis, which Balthasar by no means ignores. Andrew Louth's account of the early work *Heart of the World* stresses, among other things, Balthasar's large theological debt to Adrienne von Speyr. It is a pity that the volume contains no very sustained explanation of Balthasar's idea of a theological aesthetics, which is essentially what *The Glory of the Lord* is and which is easily misunderstood by those who have not read him.

It does, however, end with two reflections on his own work by Balthasar himself (first published in 1965 and 1975), which are illuminating on the way he perceived his own writing career as a whole and in particular the great theological trilogy with which he concluded it. The 1965 reflection includes one of his attacks on the theological trend which he saw as epitomized in Rahner's idea of 'anonymous Christianity', the movement to baptize the secular – 'this wholesale method of supernaturalizing what is worldly' – and expresses his alternative: 'the true, undiminished programme for the church today must read: the greatest possible radiance in the world by virtue of the closest possible following of Christ.'

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Book Note

Yet another addition to the medium-weight literature on baptism is David S.M. Hamilton's 1987 Croall Lectures, *Through the Waters: Baptism and the Christian Life* (T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1989; 136pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 567 29178 2). Recognizing how far removed are popular notions surrounding infant baptism from a biblical understanding, the book substitutes good images – washing, deliverance, birth – for bad. It has some sensitive pages on making baptism a basis for teaching and on coping with aspirations for a new (i.e. genuine, if second) baptism, but unhappily leans towards an open baptism policy which will infallibly multiply these aspirations. We will not grapple realistically with the sad shadow of NT baptism that many of our baby-baptisms represent until we abandon the confusing language of unconditionality and let Scripture radically question tradition.