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**SCOTTISH
BULLETIN
OF
EVANGELICAL
THEOLOGY**

Volume 13 Number 1

Spring 1995

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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

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The *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is indexed in *Elenchus*, *Cerdic* and *IZBG*.

Subscriptions should be addressed to: Rutherford House, 17 Claremont Park, Edinburgh EH6 7PJ. They run for the calendar year, and new subscribers will therefore receive the issues for the year in which they subscribe. Please note also that, in common with other periodicals and in the interests of the majority of our readers (who wish to re-subscribe each year), subscriptions run until cancelled.

Rates: £11.50, students £5.50 Overseas airmail £17.00.

ISSN 0265-4539

Single issue £7.00

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EDITORIAL

CHURCH: THEOLOGY AND EXPECTATIONS

One of the singular blessings of theology is its ability to help one come to terms with reality. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War reminds us that the most unspeakable horrors of this century were perpetrated by the culturally most advanced nation of the day. Before the massive human carnage of both world wars, theologies wedded to the onward and upward progress of human civilization were exposed in all their nakedness. Nor have genocide and large scale liquidations of innocent men and women ceased in the post-1945 decades.

Yet this century has witnessed technical achievements of breathtaking sophistication, many of them in the service of healing the ills of human life. There seems no limit to the capabilities of *homo scientificus*, who at times appears truly godlike in the majesty of his dedication to improving our human lot. A theology which does not know both the divine and the demonic in history and present experience cannot cope with the way things are. A theological anthropology which does not recognize in humankind both a sovereignly competent creativity, spent so often in generous altruism, and the malicious ingenuity and heartlessness of depravity, two elements of which the twentieth century has been such a baffling compound, will not be equal to making sense of the world.

Nor is the need for a theology that can bear to contemplate the truth of existence any less urgent when ecclesiology is the issue. If one's beliefs about the church derive mostly from the era of Christendom, one can expect difficulties in living and working with a church stripped of serious public and national recognition. If one's dominant model of the church reflects the millennium and a half during which the civil and religious communities in Europe were roughly co-terminous with each other, one is likely to be ill-equipped to face the demands and pressures of being a minority church – increasingly disenfranchised or despised or – worst of all – simply ignored. And if one's training and expectation are predicated on the assumption that the local population, whether natural

community or official parish, wants the church and owes it a hearing and a living, one is theologically ripe for disillusionment. Except as an area of inescapable missionary responsibility, the parish has no theological status whatsoever.

It is more than a irony – a perceptive commentary on how church history has treated Scripture – that the Greek word from which ‘parish’ ultimately derives, *paroikia* etc, in the New Testament denotes Christians specifically as temporary residents in an alien environment. This essentially pre-Constantinian perspective on the church’s relationship to the wider world cannot, of course, be transplanted to a post-Christendom context without anachronistic contortions. Yet it is salutary to remember with increasingly relevant attentiveness an era in which the church not only survived but grew and matured while utterly devoid of status, privilege and even legal protection. A theology that views the church as intrinsically distinct from the surrounding population, with possible consequences ranging from misunderstanding to persecution, promises to make much better sense of third-millennium realities.

The alternatives are worth recording. One is the hand-wringing dejection of the minister and members whose church is no longer appreciated as it should be by the people at large. A marginalized minority with no natural right to be loved and supported has no place in their ecclesiological self-consciousness, and hence their sense of hurt bewilderment. And such offended sensibilities will scarcely put them in the best mood to embark on evangelizing the parish.

The other response is the reverse of such resignation. It is in fact the perpetuation of an imperialistic Christendom mentality in maintaining the identification of the church with the broader community at the cost of the distinctiveness of Christian faith and life. Such a response to galloping church decline is a deeply insidious temptation for a national church that remains so only in name. It is no less than the aspiration to retain the church’s national character at the expense of its church character. If given its head, it will persuade the church to revise its ethical and disciplinary and even doctrinal standards in the interests of ‘keeping in touch with’ society.

Such a motive may rarely be spelt out in so many words. Most revisionists would vehemently disown any objective of

‘swimming with the tide’. But the experience, over hundreds of years of history, of being a church whose identity and fortunes have been inseparably tied up with the nation, is so deep-rooted in the ecclesiastical psyche that it instinctively reacts to preserve this bond whenever it is threatened. In both England and Scotland churches whose national appeal is but a shadow of its status on paper are struggling with issues of marriage and sexuality in arguments that often obscure the critical dimension of ecclesiology – often but not always, for the Archbishop of York openly asserted that unless the Church of England changed its attitudes towards divorce, it would lose touch with the people.

Within the context of similar debates in the Church of Scotland, similar inclusivists considerations lie just beneath the surface. The traditional Christian ethic that sets sexual intercourse solely within heterosexual monogamy is so widely ignored that (so the reasoning goes) unless the Church becomes more flexible, hardly anyone will be listening to it. It is the argument of this editorial that the factors undergirding such thinking include the ecclesiological assumption, perhaps in part unrecognized, that remaining the church of the Scottish people must take priority over fidelity to the church’s apostolic credentials. And so by hook or by crook the endeavour is on to baptize sub-Christian morality.

But the implications of freeing your doctrine of the church from the tenacious associations of Christendom or the Christian commonwealth are far-reaching in many directions. They impinge on the discipline of administering baptism, and on the determination of priorities in managing money, personnel and property. Activities and organizations and structures and expenditures that may have been highly appropriate in a church serving a Christian population may be no less incongruous in a minority church. The latter is likely to be a church stripped down for mission; the former, in a tireless quest to remain relevant and loved amid a largely non-Christian population, may find its energies and resources channelled increasingly into anything but local-church-based evangelism. It will mainly depend on our doctrine of the church.

MARCUS DODS, JOHN McLEOD CAMPBELL AND THE ATONEMENT

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John McLeod Campbell was an important figure in theological thinking on the atonement in nineteenth-century Britain. He exerted an influence on a number of later writers, amongst them several New Testament scholars. Marcus Dods was one of these. Dods was a leading figure in New Testament scholarship in the Free Church of Scotland in the late nineteenth century who stood at the forefront of theological controversy. His use of Campbell's theology has not been appreciated in scholarship.¹ Dods' papers, held in the library of New College, Edinburgh, are of immense value for the study of his theological thought. They reveal a dependence on the thought of Campbell on the death of Christ, and help to show how Dods progressed from Calvinism to what may be termed a mediating or liberal position. The influence of Campbell can be discerned within this gradual progression.

Dods' earliest writings contained a conservative penal substitutionary view, which reflected the theological heritage of the Free Church in which he was trained. A sermon dating to April 1860 illustrates his early thought. Our sins, Dods said, were imputed to Christ. Christ was 'punished with the punishment due to us.... He was our substitute and for that very reason, His punishment was no substitute for ours but the very punishment itself.' This punishment received by Jesus was the divine infliction due to us. 'The Lawgiver punished not the sinner but a substitute.' Dods used the language of Calvinist doctrine. 'No alteration of the law was

¹ Dods was the subject of a study by E.J. Sterling, *Marcus Dods: With Special Reference to His Teaching Ministry* (Edinburgh, PhD thesis, 1960), especially pp. 156-9, which misrepresents Dods on the atonement. Likewise the influence of Campbell on Dods has not been perceived by Campbell scholars. For a good general summary of Dods, see the entry by K.R. Ross in N.M. de S. Cameron *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 250.

made, no alleviation', he declared. The death of Christ was 'a true and real equivalent' for the penalty due to us.²

Dods' Movement of Thought

Dods moved away from this Calvinist position. He became keenly aware of contemporary trends in theology. These were years of controversy over Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) and over *Essays and Reviews* (1860), a work which Dods, several years later, described as having been of profound importance in Britain.³ At the time, reading the controversial work of Bishop Colenso, he predicted that 'our views of inspiration will be greatly altered in future years. Indeed mine are very different from those I received from Gausson twelve years ago.'⁴

Evolutionary theory and higher criticism were then influential currents of thought which encouraged belief in a progressive development in theology. Dods came to accept that theology ought to develop.⁵ This belief was also espoused by Robert Rainy, minister of the church which the Dods family attended, and a man whom Dods admired.⁶ Dods read works which moved away from strict orthodoxy. In an early venture in scholarly writing, he contributed editorial notes to Lange's *The Life of the Lord Jesus*. These testify to a growing acquaintance with continental biblical scholarship.⁷

As a result of all this, his own views were beginning to change. In 1863, referring to Calvin, Dods wrote to a

2 New College MSS, Dods MSS, 'Sacrifice I, April 1860'.

3 Dods MSS, 'The Development of Biblical Interpretation in Britain in the 17th and 18th Centuries' (c.1906), p. 4.

4 *The Early Letters of Marcus Dods* (London, 1910), p. 266. Louis Gausson's book, entitled *Theopneustia, The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, first published 1841, was a standard work reflecting the conservative position.

5 Dods, *Erasmus And Other Essays* (London, 1891), p. 237.

6 *The Early Letters of Marcus Dods*, p. 334; R. Rainy, *The Delivery and Development of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh, 1874).

7 J.P. Lange, *The Life of the Lord Jesus*, ed. Dods (Edinburgh, 1864). More generally, on his wide reading, cf. Dods, 'Books Which Have Influenced Me', *British Weekly*, 4 Feb. 1887.

correspondent that 'he has put me further wrong than I was before. He is far more lax than Dr Arnold.' He had evidently noticed the distance between Calvin and scholastic Calvinism.⁸

Despite drawing occasionally on more progressive thinkers in sermons, his book on the Revelation of John published in 1867 was still conservative.⁹ His sermons and addresses from this period, however, reveal a rewriting of the atonement theology in the vein of Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement*.

Thus, speaking of the sacrifice of Christ, Dods stressed that in the atoning act, Christ 'said Amen to the condemnation pronounced on sin, as He bowed his head to the punishment, acknowledging thereby its justice, the exceeding evil of sin'.¹⁰ This is reminiscent of Campbell, who spoke of 'a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgement of God on the sin of man'.¹¹

Later, in 1870, when some of his congregation were finding the doctrine of the atonement difficult, Dods decided to present his own version of the orthodox view, suggesting that this might perhaps help to allay some of their difficulties. He now placed emphasis upon the attitude in which Jesus accepted his sufferings rather than the infliction of sufferings or the punishment itself as the essence of atonement. Dods wrote that 'Christ's pain was not in itself a pleasure to the Father but it was infinitely pleasing to Him to find in Humanity "a broken spirit" about sin'.¹² His language was again reminiscent of Campbell's conception of 'a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sin of man', and his offering as a 'holy sorrow', which was 'due on our behalf though we could not render it'.¹³

Both Campbell and Dods conceived of the atonement as a representative acceptance of the Father's mind. Echoing

⁸ *The Early Letters of Marcus Dods*, p. 195.

⁹ Dods, *The Epistles of Our Lord to the Seven Churches of Asia* (Edinburgh, 1867).

¹⁰ Dods MSS, 'Sacrifice, II' (1866).

¹¹ J.M. Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (London, 1856), p. 134.

¹² Dods MSS, 'Lecture on the Atonement', Jan. 1870.

¹³ Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 134, 138.

Campbell, Dods spoke of it as a 'spiritual sacrifice': the legal relationship had disappeared. Christ offered a representative acceptance of God's judgement upon sin.¹⁴ 'He accepted with a holy, reverent submission all the appointments of Divine justice...he agreed perfectly with God about what is merited', Dods added. It was a good paraphrase of Campbell. It is true that the themes of Christ's self-surrender, submission to God's wrath and acknowledgement of its validity as constituting the atoning act feature also in the thought of F.D. Maurice. Dods, however, was rather critical of Maurice as a theologian, and his own views seem closer to those of Campbell.¹⁵

By the 1880s Dods was becoming more public in his pronouncements. In *Christ's Sacrifice and Ours* he argued that the essence of the atoning act was not the suffering but the submission of Jesus. In his description of the atoning act Dods is particularly reminiscent of McLeod Campbell. It was, 'in humanity, a *perfect* response to His own feeling against sin, and a perfect return to Him.... In Christ there was a perfect hatred of the sin for which He made atonement, a perfect conformity of spirit to God's judgement regarding sin.'¹⁶

Dods also spoke of the Christian's participation in sacrifice, drawing on a theme in more recent discussions.¹⁷ His thought was to diversify, and Dods took ideas from writers other than Campbell, but still remaining true to much of Campbell's theology.

Dods' Later Work

This continuing similarity to Campbell's theology is seen in Dods' later work after 1889, when Dods was Professor of New Testament at the Free Church College in Edinburgh,

¹⁴ Dods MSS, 'The Desolation on The Cross' (1870).

¹⁵ F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (Cambridge, 1854), pp. 132-44. On Dods' views of Maurice, see his essay on Maurice, in Dods, *Erasmus And Other Essays*, p. 229.

¹⁶ Dods, *Christ's Sacrifice and Ours* (Edinburgh, 1883), p. 10.

¹⁷ H. Scott Holland, *Logic and Life* (London, 1882), S.D.F. Salmond, 'The Christian's Sacrificial Service in Terms of the Mosaic', *Homiletic Quarterly* 5 (1881), pp. 410-16.

which became the United Free Church College with the church union of 1900.

For example, in his lectures on the theology of Paul, Dods followed Campbell's idea of Christ providing a penitential confession. In the lectures he talked of a representative penitential acknowledgement and return to God in which we partake in union with him. He described it in these words:

Christ became one with us, not only by assuming a human nature, but by entering into a true and perfect sympathy with us, so that he felt ashamed for our sins, grieved over them... acknowledged the righteousness of the law in inflicting death as their penalty... (and) uttered to God a perfect human penitence.¹⁸

This had validity, Dods argued, as we accept this act as our own. In union with Christ we adopt Christ's spiritual submission to the just penalty. 'We must in our own spirit pass through an experience parallel to that which Christ passed through on the cross... by having something of the hatred of sin, something of the acceptance of its penalty.'¹⁹

Dods made a similar observation in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* on John 6:55ff., on the theme of feeding on the body and blood of Christ.

Not the external sacrifice of His body, but the spirit which prompted it was efficacious. The acceptance of God's judgement of sin, the devotedness to man, and perfect harmony with God, shown in the cross, is what brings life to the world, and it is this Spirit men are invited to partake of.²⁰

This is not all that far from Campbell's position. According to Campbell, we participate in all that Christ's death means, as a death to sin and as a homage to God's law. The atonement was 'a transaction in humanity, contemplating results in man, to be accomplished by the revelation of the elements of that transaction to the spirit of man, and in a way of participation in these elements on the part of man'.²¹

Campbell also held that Christ honoured the law of God in submitting to death. 'For thus, in Christ's honouring of the righteous law of God, the *sentence of the law* was included,

18 Dods MSS, 'Paul, The Work of Christ' (1904), p. 470.

19 Dods MSS, 'Paul', p. 468, on Gal. 2:20.

20 Dods, 'The Gospel of John', *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (London, 1897), p. 759.

21 Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, p. 373.

as well as *the mind of God* which that sentence expressed.’²² Dods followed Campbell in this, suggesting that it was not simply penitence that mattered, but an acknowledgement of the claims of law on sin in death. Christ’s death was itself a homage to law, he said, adding that ‘we die to sin in Christ’s death in the sense that we allow the law to inflict upon us this penalty’.²³

Some of what Dods was saying remained more or less in tune with the earlier teaching of Campbell. However, much of it reflected more recent writings which he himself used. When, for example, Dods said that the idea of union with Christ in his death was the key to Pauline soteriology, his remark was not foreign to the thought of Campbell, but he was reflecting what a number of scholars were saying. Reuss’ study, which he used, had pointed in this direction.²⁴

Dods drew on the idea of the representative second Adam who exemplified an ideal response in death. In union with him, sin is condemned and annihilated. We share in this representative death to sin. This idea can be found in Campbell, but Dods was following later nineteenth-century biblical scholarship.²⁵

Dods’ understanding of the central passage at Hebrews 2:10-17 is a further case of this. On Hebrews 2:17, *hilaskesthai*, ‘propitiation’, Dods, quoting Westcott, noted the present infinitive form and said that this suggested the ongoing cleansing or removal of that which offended God. Campbell had made the same point. Dods also used William

22 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

23 Dods MSS, ‘Paul’, p. 468.

24 Dods MSS, ‘History of Criticism’, 4 (c.1904), p. 12, where Reuss receives a warm recommendation. Cf. E. Reuss, *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age* (London, 1874), II, p. 149 and *passim*: D. Somerville, *St Paul’s Conception of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1897), p. 101.

25 ‘Paul’, pp. 472-3, Rom. 6:12-13, Rom. 8:3, with a quotation from Pfleiderer. Cf. F.C. Baur, *Vorlesungen über Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Leipzig, 1864), p. 161, R. Schmidt, *Die Paulinische Christologie* (Göttingen, 1870).

Robertson Smith who had a similar understanding.²⁶ By the same token, Dods was following a line of thought which can be traced through all three writers when he stressed the meaning of priesthood and sacrifice in terms of keeping us in covenant fellowship. This is seen in his comment on Hebrews 10:11, 'In the one sacrifice of Christ', he wrote, 'there is cleansing which fits men to draw near to God, to enter into covenant fellowship with Him, and there is also ground laid for their continuance in that fellowship.'²⁷

Going Beyond McLeod Campbell

In some respects, however, Dods went wholly beyond anything Campbell said. For example, in a passage in his earlier commentary on the Fourth Gospel he described Christ as having taken into himself the curse so exhaustively so as to have virtually become it (Gal. 3:13). Christ had so identified himself with sin in his death (2 Cor. 5:21) that sin itself was slain: 'All the virulence and venom of sin, all that is dangerous and deadly in it, our Lord bids us believe is absorbed in His person and rendered harmless on the cross.'²⁸

This is an important remark, which suggests an emphasis other than the removal of guilt by satisfaction. It looks forward to the kind of interpretation of Pauline soteriology recently advanced by J.D.G. Dunn, who using a medical analogy argues that the death of Christ has the capacity to immunise us against the malignant effects of sin.²⁹ Dods probably found the inspiration for his idea in continental scholarship. Baur and Schmidt held that Christ identified himself with sin, and that sin was slain in his death. The French scholar Sabatier was close to this when he suggested that sin was taken into Christ's person and exhausted in his death. 'Christ resumes humanity in himself and allows this

26 Dods, 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (London, 1910), p. 270, 264ff.; Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 191ff.

27 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', p. 344.

28 Dods, *The Gospel of St John* (London, 1891), I, p. 124.

29 J.D.G. Dunn, 'Paul's understanding of the Death of Jesus', in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. R. Banks (Exeter, 1974), p. 139.

fatal development of the life of sin... to be reproduced and exhausted in his person.'³⁰

Diversifying further from Campbell, Dods recognised a number of other soteriological themes in Paul, including a form of penal substitution, but felt it important to remember that 'this theory of Paul needs guarding'.³¹ In line with many exegetes he emphasised the theme in Romans 3:25 of a necessary demonstration of God's righteousness as an illustration of God's utter hostility to sin.

A further divergence from Campbell's theology concerns the manner of construing union with Christ. In Campbell the idea of participation is linked to a close fellowship, but for Dods union with Christ is more definitely a moral identification. The relationship with Christ tended to be seen as external. 'To abide in Christ', Dods wrote, 'is to abide by our adoption of His view of the true purpose of human life.'³² Dods saw this in moral terms. Unity with Christ was a unity of moral purpose, and was achieved by allowing our moral nature to be 'penetrated by His Spirit'. It was achieved, he said, 'only by adopting His aim in life, and by nourishing your spirit on His'.³³

The rejection of mystical union reflects the teaching of a number of scholars, including Ritschl. There are echoes of Ritschl's teaching on the Christian community and the work of Christ in Dods' teaching in the 1890s. Christ, Dods said, founded 'an invisible community and we receive the benefits of Christ's death no otherwise than as we are members of this people or family'.³⁴ This was Ritschl's view. He had suggested that the forgiveness of sins could be appropriated by the believer only by faith, trust, and 'the intention to connect himself with the community of believers'.³⁵

30 A. Sabatier, *L'Apôtre Paul* (Paris, 1882), p. 280.

31 Dods MSS, 'Paul', p. 385.

32 *The Gospel of St John*, II, p. 190.

33 Dods MSS, 'John 13 and 15, Footwashing and Vine', c.1904, p. 20.

34 Dods, *The Gospel of St John* (Expositor's Bible, London, 1891), I, p. 386.

35 A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (English translation, Edinburgh, 1900), p. 111.

As a consequence of his understanding of moral union with Christ, Dods attributed great importance to the fitness of Christ's work to exert a sufficient influence on us to cause us to repent and to adopt as our own his principle of self-sacrifice. Dods' teaching was generally characterised by a strong moral emphasis, which had been remarked upon some years earlier.³⁶

Dods moved towards a theory of moral influence. When we see Christ suffering the penalty for sin, he said, we are moved to repent, and to adopt as our own Christ's representative attitude and surrender. The cross produces penitence and a healthy moral attitude which makes it safe for God to forgive. Dods was to make a great deal of these ideas in his contribution to a series of essays entitled *The Atonement and Modern Religious Thought*. He argued that the cross produced adequate penitence and respect for righteousness.

If it is inconceivable that God should forgive the impenitent, it is equally inconceivable that He should not forgive the penitent... true penitence is, in short, irresistible.³⁷

It needed Christ to enable such penitence to occur. 'Repentance can never be adequate until the perception of God's righteousness is adequate', he wrote.³⁸

This theme was central for the later Dods. His lecture material reflects this approach. 'Proclamation of universal pardon without any accompanying exhibition of the sacredness of law and the holiness of God must have resulted in a lowering of all sense of right', he suggested.³⁹ Thus the atonement was a matter of ensuring the necessary public respect for law. This was reminiscent of some of the concerns of the school of governmental Calvinism, though Ritschl also

36 This was noted by a hearer of one of his sermons: see 'Here and There Among the Churches', *British Weekly*, 20 May 1887, p. 37.

37 *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought* (London 1900), pp. 182-3.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

39 Dods MSS, 'Salvation and Christ's Death – Its Necessity', (c.1900).

used the idea of God ruling according to public moral interests.⁴⁰

In line with this development, in his commentaries on John and on Hebrews, Dods showed that the cross had the necessary power to attract believers, and draw them into the spirit of self-sacrifice.⁴¹ The ignominy of the cross of Christ added to this. 'The utmost that man inflicts upon criminals he bore. He was made to feel that he was outcast and condemned. But it is this which wins all men to Him.'⁴²

Despite this change of emphasis, there was nonetheless some similarity to Campbell. Campbell had argued that an important feature of Christ's death was its ability to influence us towards a correct filial response and draw us into the divine self-sacrifice. Campbell wrote that 'the virtue required in the blood of Christ is seen to be necessarily spiritual – a power to influence the spirits washed in it by faith... to cleanse our spirits from that spiritual pollution which defiles rebellious children'.⁴³ What for Campbell was but one aspect of the atonement became for Dods a feature of vital importance.

Conclusion

If we take the evidence as a whole, Dods' use of Campbell, particularly in the early stages, was marked. The idea of an expiatory confession and submission to God's judgement in which we participate was particularly important to both writers. Given all this, Dods' failure to refer directly to Campbell's book is surprising. In earlier years Dods perhaps sought to appear orthodox both in the pulpit and in the ecclesiastical world, where he faced considerable hostility from the traditionalist wing in his church. Even among his own flock, there might have been reason to guard against

40 J. Gilbert, *The Christian Atonement* (London, 1854), p. 237. This was a book which Dods had read. Cf. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 89ff.

41 Dods, *The Gospel of St John* (London, 1891), 'The Gospel of St John', *Expositor's Greek Testament* (London, 1897), cf. particularly p. 844; 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', *Expositor's Greek Testament* (London, 1910).

42 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', p. 378, on Heb. 13:12 and 12:2.

43 *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 182-3.

appearing to endorse Campbell, the known 'heretic'. Campbell was for many years the pastor of a small independent chapel in Glasgow, not very far from Renfield Free Church, where Dods was minister. Campbell's name would certainly have been familiar, whether or not he was regarded sympathetically. Later, when Dods taught New Testament, reference to Campbell was perhaps less appropriate, and more recent books represented many of the things he was saying.

It is clear that Dods' own theological development had been very pronounced. In later years Dods seemed to pass through a crisis of faith, in which his beliefs were subjected to some questioning. He confided particularly in his female correspondents. On one occasion he wrote:

One who can believe in God should be very thankful. Very often, I may say commonly, I cannot get further than the conviction that in Christ we see the best that our nature is capable of, and must make that our own.⁴⁴

However, Dods recovered his sense of faith, and his mature thought has a consistency of its own. His teaching on the atonement suffers from a moralistic emphasis which is not altogether satisfactory. Nonetheless, Dods made a very significant attempt to get at the heart of the biblical doctrine. Both he and Campbell used biblical study to redefine the theology of the atonement. Spurred on by Campbell's book, like several other writers of the period, Dods believed the key to the atonement to be a spiritual attitude which we find in Christ.

⁴⁴ *The Later Letters of Marcus Dods* (London 1911), pp. 101-2 and *passim*. The anonymity of these correspondents was maintained.

A THEOLOGY OF MISSION OR A MISSIONARY THEOLOGY? A BURNING QUESTION FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

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In 1965 I completed a three-year course in a British Bible college and began pastoral ministry in the university city of Cambridge. I have very many reasons to be thankful for my training, not least because it convinced me of the central importance of expository preaching and gave me an excellent biblical foundation for such a ministry. However, in one area in particular my training seemed sadly deficient: mission was absolutely marginal within the course, confined to occasional visits by people called, rather curiously, 'missionary statesmen'.

Recently I came across some words of Alexander Duff in which, reflecting on his preparation for ministry, he identified similar weaknesses in theological education in nineteenth-century Scotland. Like me, Duff was profoundly grateful for the blessings he experienced at his Alma Mater: it was said that he could never speak of Saint Andrews 'except in terms approaching sheer rhapsody'. However, addressing the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in 1867 on the occasion of his election to the new chair of evangelistic theology, Duff noted one glaring omission from the theological curriculum during his student days:

I was struck markedly with this circumstance, that throughout the whole course of the curriculum of four years not one single allusion was ever made to the subject which constitutes the chief end of the Christian Church on earth. I felt intensely that there was something wrong with this omission. According to any just conception of the Church of Christ, the grand function it has to discharge in this world cannot be said to begin and end in the preservation of internal purity of doctrine, discipline and government. All this is merely for burnishing it so as to be a lamp to give light not to itself only but also to the world. There must be an outcome of that light, lest it prove useless, and thereby be lost and extinguished. Why has it got that light, but that it should freely impart it to others?¹

¹ Quoted by Colin Chapman, 'Mission and Theological Education'. Unpublished paper read at the inaugural conference of the British

The professorship to which Duff was inducted after this speech was intended to remedy the neglect of mission studies in the theological curriculum. It was the first chair of mission in Europe and represented a bold and innovative step in theological education.² Yet the experiment scarcely survived Duff's death in 1878 and mission studies has had a difficult time finding a home in the theological faculty ever since.

However, there are reasons to believe that the question of the relationship between theology and mission has now become an urgent and unavoidable one. In the first place, theological study on a traditional Western model faces a crisis of confidence. Among the many voices raised in protest against traditional patterns of theological education, we may note the words of a former Archbishop of Canterbury. Present patterns of training, says Robert Runcie, 'are either too academic or too influenced by university models'. He continues,

The unsatisfactory aspects of the theological college syllabus are largely due to the fact that they are a boiled down version of an academic, university syllabus which is itself inadequate as Church theology.³

At the same time, the traditional Western approach to theological education has been widely rejected elsewhere in the world. By now we are all familiar with the critiques developed in South America, but elsewhere around the globe voices are raised against an approach to theology that is perceived to be too academic, too abstract and too remote from the actual tasks of mission and witness in a religiously plural world. Thus, some years back John Mbiti observed that the curricula used in theological seminaries in Africa showed them to be 'very much out of touch with the realities of African culture and problems'. Mbiti asked,

and Irish Association for Mission Studies, Edinburgh, July 1990. I am grateful for the stimulus to my thought provided both by this paper and through conversation with the author on this subject.

² The *first* chair of mission was that occupied by Charles Breckinridge at Princeton Seminary in 1836. See David Bosch, 'Theological Education in Missionary Perspective', *Missiology: An International Review* 10 (1982), p. 14.

³ Quoted by Michael Griffiths, 'Theological Education Need Not Be Irrelevant', *Vox Evangelica* 20 (1990), p. 8.

A THEOLOGY OF MISSION OR A MISSIONARY THEOLOGY?

Have we not enough musical instruments to raise the thunderous sound of the glory of God even unto the heaven of heavens? Have we not enough mouths to sing the rhythms of the Gospel in our tunes until it settles in our bloodstream? Have we not enough hearts in this continent, to contemplate the marvels of the Christian faith?... Have we not enough intellectuals in this continent to reflect and theologize on the meaning of the Gospel? Have we not enough feet on this continent, to carry the Gospel to every corner of this globe?⁴

Mbiti's words clearly imply that Christian theology developed in Africa will be inextricably bound up with mission. Indeed, they reflect an awareness that a fundamental shift has occurred by means of which the real centres of spiritual vitality and missionary expansion are now located in the Southern hemisphere. Consciousness of this change is widespread in the Third World, and theologians in Africa, Latin America and Asia increasingly ask whether the churches in the West have yet awoken to the reality of this new era in Christian mission. For example, Choan-Seng Song notes that predictions concerning the growth of the Christian population in Asia, Africa, Oceania and South America, will mean that believers in the West will need to ask themselves some heart-searching questions.

What will the future of Christianity be in their own lands? How are they going to recapture the power of the gospel, especially in those countries where there is increasing indifference to the church? And how are they going to relate to Christians in the Third World who will surpass them in numerical strength?⁵

This statement by an Asian theologian leads directly to the second factor which compels us to place the subject of mission at the top of the theological agenda today. When Duff spoke in 1867, very few of his contemporaries discerned the forces at work within the Victorian age, which even then were beginning to undermine faith and would result in the radical secularization of British culture. So far as they were concerned, mission was something done on a distant shore, among peoples unfortunate enough to live beyond the sphere of Christendom in lands benighted by the influence of

4 John Mbiti, 'Christianity and Culture in Africa' in *Facing the New Challenges – the Message of PACLA* (Kisumu, 1978), pp. 275-8.

5 Choan-Seng Song, *The Compassionate God – An Exercise in the Theology of Transposition* (London, 1982), pp. 6-7.

'paganism'. Today the picture has changed completely; Christianity has ceased to be a European phenomenon and has become a world faith. Speaking of this development, Andrew Walls comments that signs of Christianity's decline in Europe became evident 'just as it was expanding everywhere else'.⁶ This decline of faith in Europe has led to a situation in which a leading Christian thinker can argue that the most urgent missiological question today is *whether the West can be converted?* In this situation the subject of this paper would appear to be of critical importance; mission studies, so long left homeless, must be admitted to the seminary, not as a condescending act of compassion, but because this excluded and marginalized subject may be capable of revitalizing theology and offering the Western church a way to genuine revival.

Historical Perspectives on Mission Studies

In a series of writings the late David Bosch helpfully surveyed the history of theological reflection on the Christian mission.⁷ It is not possible within the limits of this paper to discuss Bosch's survey of the different historical paradigms for mission. He observes that in the earliest period, mission appears to have been the natural expression of the life of the church. Witness to the world through words and deeds which reflect the truth and values of the kingdom of God was not something debated or discussed. Rather, Christians lived as strangers and pilgrims in an alien world and took it for granted that they were called to act as salt and light. In a context of cultural and religious pluralism, mission was neither an option nor a duty, but simply an integral part of what it meant to be Christian. Commenting on the unself-consciousness of the early church, one observer has concluded that ecclesiology is of little interest in periods of revival and missionary advance; in the 'first generation' the

6 Andrew Walls, 'Christianity' in John Hinnells (ed.), *A Handbook of Living Religions* (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 67.

7 See *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London, 1980); 'Theological Education in Missionary Perspective', in *Missiology* 10/1 (1982), pp. 13-33; *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (New York, 1991).

absorbing interest is Christology and life becomes a doxology.⁷

David Bosch regarded the conversion of Constantine as the crucial turning point in the church's perception of its role within the world. Growing institutionalisation removed the sense of being a pilgrim people and mission became equated with church extension. For well over a thousand years mission was to be understood in relation to the *corpus christianum*. Bosch identifies certain key biblical texts which have been influential in each successive era of mission; he suggests that Luke 14:23 ('compel them to come in') sums up the missionary paradigm of the medieval church and that an attitude of superiority to those outside Christendom persisted well into the present century. Indeed, it is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which the ideology of Christendom influenced the churches in Europe. Even today, living amid the ruins of past ecclesiastical power, the mentality of the *corpus christianum* clings to us in all kinds of ways and continues to shape our thinking about mission.

However, within the last one hundred years mission studies (or, as our American friends prefer, missiology) has made its appearance and has sought entry to the divinity faculty. This very fact reflects a deepening awareness that the challenge of the task confronting the church in a pluralist world requires serious biblical and theological reflection on the nature of mission. In Bosch's words,

the Christian church in general and the Christian mission in particular are today confronted by issues which they have never even dreamt of and which are crying out for responses which are both relevant to the times and in harmony with the essence of the Christian faith.⁸

Relationship between Theology and Mission

If the need for theological reflection on the task of mission in the modern world is increasingly recognised, there is no consensus as to how this laudable objective might be achieved. The problem is, where can this johnny-come-lately be accommodated? Traditionally the theological curriculum has been divided into three or four major subject areas. Biblical studies, dogmatics, and historical studies have formed the indispensable core of divinity courses, with

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 188.

practical (or pastoral) studies added during the nineteenth century. It is not at all clear how these areas relate to each other, nor is it obvious how additional subjects (worship, for instance, or ethics) might find a place in such a system. Moreover, the approach to theological studies has tended to be highly academic. Colin Chapman has likened traditional courses in divinity to the first two years of pre-clinical medicine, with the critical study of the Bible, dogmatics and Western church history being comparable to courses in the basic sciences, anatomy and physiology. Introducing mission studies into this setting would seem to have as little hope of success as asking an order of monks committed to silence to accommodate an extreme charismatic.

This dilemma is reflected in the question which forms the title of my paper: 'A theology of mission or a missionary theology?' Of course one must be thankful that increasing attention is being given today to the theology of mission. In North America 'Schools of World Mission' have been founded in many leading seminaries and missiology is a high-profile subject. American missiologists such as Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, Harvie Conn, and David Hesselgrave have produced work of very high quality and have offered considerable assistance to men and women called to communicate the message of the gospel across cultural boundaries.⁹ However, the great disadvantage of this approach is that it leaves the study of mission isolated from the rest of the theological curriculum, perpetuating the impression that this is, after all, an optional concern likely to be pursued by enthusiasts. Worse still, this approach inoculates theological studies as such against the challenge and disturbance that will inevitably occur when missiological questions begin to be raised at the heart of the divinity school. Doubtless missiologists, who are inclined to employ insights from the social sciences in order to suggest more effective methodologies in cross-cultural communication, do need to

⁹ See Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Pasadena, CA, 1990); Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (New York, 1980); David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, 1978); Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds* (Grand Rapids, 1984).

listen to the questions raised by theologians; but equally, given the condition of the world at the close of the twentieth century, theology simply cannot be done today without reference to the new era of world mission in which we find ourselves.

As long ago as 1948, H.P. van Dusen delivered a notable lecture in which he demanded that mission studies be given centre stage in theological education. His words appear to me to have a prophetic ring to them and they are worth quoting at some length.

Christian mission which now holds an incidental and precarious position in so many seminary curricula, an addendum to the main subject matter, should move to a place of unchallenged centrality. It should be presented as the key to Church History, the seedplot of Christian Ecumenics, and the growing edge of Christianity's most vigorous and vital impact on the world of today and tomorrow, making far more urgent demand upon our attention and our devotion than homiletics, pastoral theology, religious education, or any of the other traditional instruments of perpetuating our familiar parish activities.¹⁰

Van Dusen's passionate plea leads us to consider what a genuinely missionary theology might look like today. At the risk of appearing presumptuous, let me suggest some of the likely consequences were missiological objectives to be allowed to shape the subject areas of divinity courses mentioned earlier.

The Challenge to Biblical Studies

It scarcely needs to be said that biblical studies would be released from captivity to an arid, purely technical approach to the text of Scripture. Such an approach, says Walter Wink, is bankrupt simply because it is incapable of making the Bible come alive so as 'to illumine our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation'.¹¹ By contrast, a missiological reading of the biblical text would reveal how the witnessing activity of the church is founded upon the *missio Dei* and it would shed new light on the manner in which *all* Scripture is useful in equipping the man or woman of God 'for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16). For

¹⁰ Quoted by Chapman, 'Mission and Theological Education', p. 14.

¹¹ Quoted by Griffiths, 'Theological Education Need Not Be Irrelevant', p. 7.

example, I simply do not know how to avoid the missionary implications of the Song of Songs in a culture which has forgotten the meaning of pure love; nor can the apologetic value of Ecclesiastes be overlooked in an age of nihilism; while the message of Job leaps from the page with extraordinary relevance in a century that has witnessed the sufferings of Auschwitz and Belsen. When one moves to more familiar territory, say, the book of Psalms, or the prophets, not to mention the parables of Jesus, we have our hands full of material which is spiritual dynamite in post-modern culture.

Of course, a missiological reading of the Bible requires an openness to interpretations of the text from brothers and sisters who read Scripture from socio-cultural contexts different from ours. Let me cite just one example. Jeremiah's assault on what scholars have come to call the 'royal-temple ideology' was illumined for me recently when I read Kosuke Koyama's book *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*.¹² Here is an Asian Christian attempting to understand what happened to his country and his people and discovering exact parallels between the temple liturgy denounced by the biblical prophet and the cult of the emperor in pre-war Japan. I now ask students to read Koyama as a modern interpreter of Jeremiah's temple sermon and then to reflect on the continuing danger posed by religious ideologies of various kinds in the modern world.

The Challenge to Dogmatics

In a similar way, opening up dogmatic theology to missiological perspectives and questions offers exciting possibilities for the revitalization of the subject. Bosch asks the question, 'How can so much of systematic theology remain blind and deaf to the fact that the total situation of the Christian church in the West and elsewhere is today a missionary one?' He quotes Martin Kahler as saying that theology is a 'companion of the Christian mission... not a luxury of the world-dominating church'.¹³ The recent work of Lesslie Newbigin has been refreshing and stimulating,

¹² Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* (London, 1984).

¹³ David Bosch, 'Theological Education in Missionary Perspective', *Missiology* 10/1 (1982), p. 27.

precisely because, I suggest, it has offered a missiological response to modern culture. In *Foolishness to the Greeks* Newbigin commented on the inadequacy of the North American approach to mission in these words,

The weakness... of this... missiological writing is that while it has sought to explore the problems of contextualization in all the cultures of humankind from China to Peru, it has largely ignored the culture that is the most widespread, powerful and persuasive among all contemporary cultures – namely, what I have called modern Western culture.... It would seem, therefore, that there is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than to ask the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this modern Western culture.¹⁴

I would want to change only one word in this statement, replacing the American term ‘missiologists’ with the word ‘theologians’. The encounter between the gospel and post-modern culture for which Newbigin so eloquently pleads, is surely a task so absolutely vital, yet so demanding and difficult, that it should be at the top of the agenda of every theological faculty and seminary.

However, it is important to add that this focus on the missionary challenge of the West, important though it undoubtedly is, should not blind us to the truly ecumenical dimensions of a genuinely missionary theology. We have a greater opportunity now than at any previous point in Christian history to discover the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ ‘together with all the saints’ (Eph. 3:17). Indeed, theology will be better equipped to meet the challenge of mission in the West if it draws upon the insights into the meaning of the gospel provided by the churches of the Southern hemisphere.

The Challenge to Church History

Finally, what about the third main subject area of traditional theological studies, Church History? What would be involved in looking at the history of Christian expansion over the centuries from the perspective of mission? Andrew Walls, who has thought deeply on this matter over many years, suggests that ‘the whole history of the church belongs to the whole church’. He writes, ‘The global transformation of

¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks – The Gospel and Western Culture* (Geneva, 1986), p. 27.

Christianity requires nothing less than the complete rethinking of the church history syllabus.¹⁵ Here once again, the history of the expansion of Christianity across cultures during the past several hundred years is of enormous relevance to the missiological task now facing the church in the modern West. Moreover, the study of the history of the first evangelization of Europe is pregnant with lessons of vital importance to a church which now faces the challenge of the re-evangelization of the continent. Every morning as I walk to work at Northumbria Bible College, I catch a glimpse of the island of Lindisfarne along the coast. I am more and more struck by the fact that the missionary movement once centred on that island is not just of antiquarian interest, but offers us examples and principles that are of great practical value in relation to our task today.

Conclusion

The suggestion in my title that the place given to mission in modern theology is a burning issue is a none-too-subtle allusion to Emil Brunner's frequently cited statement that the church lives by mission as a flame lives by burning. If we take Brunner's words seriously and recognise that mission belongs to the very essence and nature of the church, then we are surely bound to conclude that we need not merely a theology of mission, but a *missionary theology*. We simply cannot afford the luxury of regarding mission as an addendum, something added to the existing curriculum in order to guarantee respectability. In a post-Christendom, pluralist world, we must recover the apostolic understanding of the church and its calling and recognise mission as inseparable from a life of obedience to Jesus as Lord. As Newbigin puts it, 'The word "You shall be my witnesses" is not a command to be obeyed but a promise to be trusted.' Only then will the church in the modern West rediscover its true nature and identity, recognising that it 'can never in any respect be an end in itself' but that 'it exists only as it exercises the ministry of a herald'. As Karl Barth puts it, 'Its mission is not additional to its being. It *is*, as it is sent and

¹⁵ Andrew Walls, 'Structural Problems in Mission Studies', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15/4 (1991), p. 146.

active in its mission. It builds itself up for the sake of its mission and in relation to it.'¹⁶ In such a church theology and mission become almost indistinguishable.

¹⁶ Quoted by Bosch, 'Theological Education in Missionary Perspective', p. 22.

DEACONS AND ELDERS

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Starting Points

There are two obvious starting-points for any Reformed discussion of the nature and functions of deacons and elders. First, there are the debates which have occurred within the Reformed tradition itself. These have taken place mainly within American Presbyterianism and have involved some of its greatest theologians – Miller, Thornwell, Dabney and Hodge.¹ They debated such questions as whether the ruling elder occupies an office distinct from the preaching elder; whether ruling elders may preach; whether ordination to the eldership should take the same form as ordination to the ministry; and whether ruling elders should participate in the laying-on of hands at ordinations of teaching elders. To a limited extent these same issues have also been discussed outside the United States, notably by the Irish Presbyterian, Thomas Witherow,² and by the Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine (which presented a Report on the Eldership to the General Assembly in 1964).

The other obvious starting-point is the New Testament vocabulary on the subject. Four words are especially important: *presbuteros*, *episcopos*, *poimen* and *proestos*. These terms have a rich background in secular Greek, in the Septuagint, in the synagogue and in the New Testament, and their meaning has been thoroughly investigated by New Testament scholars, the classic treatments being those of the Anglicans, F.J.A. Hort, J.B. Lightfoot and Edwin Hatch.³

¹ See Samuel Miller, *The Warrant, Nature and Duties, of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (Glasgow, 1835); *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond, VA, 1871-81), vol. 4, pp. 4-142; R.L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (Richmond, VA, 1890-92), vol. 2, pp. 119-157; Charles Hodge, *The Church and its Polity* (London, 1879), pp. 118-33, 242-300.

² *The Form of the Christian Temple* (Edinburgh, 1889), pp. 66-143.

³ Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London, 1897), pp. 189-217; Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (4th edition,

More recent studies, as reflected for example, in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, have added little to the conclusions of this distinguished trio.

These are the obvious approaches. Unfortunately, they lead nowhere, and one is inexorably driven to suspect that both the theologians and the philologists are asking the wrong questions. The latter approach is by far the more promising. But a church order derived from word-studies alone would be full of confusion and inconsistency. Furthermore, however it might resemble the church of the New Testament in certain details, it would differ from it frighteningly in its overall ethos and organisation. Above all, it would be devoid of any proper ecclesiology of preaching. There is no road from *presbuteros*, *episcopos*, *poimen* or *proestos* to the preacher. Indeed, if this nomenclature exhausts all the church officers available to us today we have no one at all called to the distinctive ministry of the Word. It is impossible to reconcile this with the paramount importance of preaching as reflected in, say, the writings of Paul, and this fact itself should alert us to the possibility that the whole approach is wrong. We are not simply coming to the wrong conclusions. We are asking the wrong questions.

The alternative is to look beyond our inherited church polities and even beyond the lexicographical studies of outstanding New Testament scholars and survey, instead, the basic patterns of organisation and ministry to be found in the apostolic literature.

Preliminaries

Before we do so, two preliminary comments may be appropriate. The first relates to the word 'office'. This term is often used in discussions of church polity and it suffers from being associated in English with the word 'officer', which in turn suffers from its militaristic and aristocratic overtones.⁴ It

London, 1879), pp. 181-269; Hatch, *The Organisation of the Early Christian Churches* (London, 1909), Lectures II and III.

⁴ Cf. Eduard Schweizer: 'The concept of "office" is today even fuller than in New Testament times, and is laden with the content that it has acquired in the secular sphere. Of course, in New Testament times too such ministries have to have definite names; but no comprehensive term "office" was adopted, and even the special designations of individual ministries were by no means uniform' (*Church Order in the New Testament*, London, 1961, p. 206).

is worth remembering that the word entered English-language theology through Latin and that in Latin *officium* commonly means 'duty'. A church-officer is not a member of a Christian elite. He is someone charged with a responsibility. He has a job to do and he is expected to labour at it (1 Tim. 5:17).

Secondly, a similar comment requires to be made on the word 'ordination'. This word, too, came into English *via* Latin and has even more unfortunate associations. The word *ordo* meant 'rank' and easily leads to the assumption that the 'ordained' person holds a higher rank than the ordinary Christian.⁵ While the New Testament certainly insists on careful selection of those assigned to certain tasks and even, in some instances, on solemn induction, it cannot tolerate the idea that there is a special class of 'ordained' persons who, as such, have special powers and are entitled to lord it over the flock. A Protestant minister is neither priest nor Christian leader. The only Leader is Christ; and the true deacon, preacher or elder is great only in his service and in his incessant toil. He will never assume that simply because he is a 'clerical' person ordinary Christians should salute him. Nor

5 As Colin Gunton points out, this would not have happened if Christians had taken seriously the idea that the church is a community, reflecting the relationships between the distinct, but co-equal, persons of the Trinity: 'At the very least, it must be seen that the ecclesiology of community relativises, and not before time, the whole question of an ordained caste... should we not consciously move towards an ecclesiology of perichoresis: in which there is no permanent structure of subordination, but in which there are overlapping patterns of relationships, so that the same person will be sometimes "subordinate" and sometimes "superordinate" according to the gifts and graces being exercised?' (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 80). Cf. Eduard Schweizer: 'we have to ask whether there is ordination in the New Testament, and if so, what kind of meaning it is likely to have' (*op. cit.*, p. 207). Schweizer concludes that 'Paul does not know it', but this depends on his restricted view of the Pauline corpus. On the other hand, his claim that other sections of the New Testament church did know it arises from his equating ordination with 'a special action to assign a particular ministry'. He has in view, of course, the laying on of hands, but it is one thing to admit that this action was practised and quite another to regard it as an elevation to a special *ordo*.

should the church itself fall into the trap of drafting elaborate rules to demarcate the prerogatives of the ordained. There is no clear cut-off point between what a church-officer does and what a non-church-officer does. The idea that someone, whether male or female, should be forbidden to teach or to evangelise or to pass the Communion bread simply because he or she is un-ordained, is from the standpoint of the New Testament simply preposterous.

Serving Tables

When we look at the broad patterns of church organisation in the New Testament, the first thing that strikes us is a clear distinction between those who 'serve tables' and those who give themselves to the ministry of the Word. This distinction appears as early as Acts 6. At first, the apostles did everything: the teaching, the administration and the pastoral oversight. But as the church grew, the pressure became too great and the apostles protested that it was inappropriate for them to let the distribution of relief encroach on the time needed for the ministry of the Word. This led to the appointment of the first deacons.

The term *diakonos* itself had an honourable pedigree. It is true that in secular Greek it normally indicated humble and even menial service such as waiting at table. But both Jesus and the apostles dignified it by using it to describe their own roles. For example, in Mark 10:45, Jesus used it not only to define the thrust of his own ministry, but also to establish the tone of Christian discipleship. 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.' Consequently, greatness in the kingdom of God means being the servant of all. Similarly Paul defined what God had committed to him as the ministry (*diakonia*) of reconciliation, described himself as a deacon of the church (Col. 1:25) and referred to his apostleship as a diaconate (Rom. 11:13). Such passages justify J.N.D. Kelly's observation that 'every kind of service in the propagation of the gospel is in the NT described as a *diakonia* or ministry'.⁶

There is equally clear evidence, however, that the word 'deacon' was used from a very early period to denote a

⁶ *The Pastoral Epistles* (Black's New Testament Commentaries), London, 1963, p. 80.

particular class of functionaries with clearly defined responsibilities. In Philippians 1:1, for example, deacons are singled out for special mention along with the *episcopoi*: a clear indication that they formed a class as recognisable as the bishops or overseers. They are also associated with the *episcopoi* in 1 Timothy 3, where verses 1-7 describe the qualifications of a bishop and verses 8-13 those of a deacon. This suggests that by the time Paul wrote the Pastorals deacons were as well established as bishops or elders. It appears, too, that their work was equally demanding: the scrutiny to be made before appointing them was at least as rigorous as that demanded in the case of elders.

In the sub-apostolic literature the existence of deacons is taken for granted. In Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians*, for example, we read: 'In like manner deacons should be blameless in the presence of his righteousness as deacons of God and of Christ and not of men; not calumniators, not double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all things, compassionate, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord who became a *deacon* of all'(5). Deacons are also an essential element in Ignatius' concept of the three-fold ministry. In his *Epistle to the Magnesians* he refers to 'the bishop presiding after the likeness of God and the presbyters after the likeness of the council of the apostles, with the deacons also who are most dear to me'(6). There is a similar reference in his *Epistle to the Trallians* where he writes that 'nobody who does anything without the bishop and the presbytery and deacons is clean in his conscience'(7).

Not all agree that the origin of this order of ministry is described in Acts 6. J.N.D. Kelly,⁷ for example, denies it, both because the Seven are not called deacons and because they did not perform the tasks usually associated with 'deacons as a regular order of ministers'; that is, the Seven were not deacons because they were not assistants to the bishops. This merely reflects the peculiarly Anglican understanding of the diaconate. As for the fact that they are not designated 'deacons', it is surely a sufficient answer that they performed a task which is clearly distinguished from the

⁷ *Op cit.*, p. 81.

ministry of the Word and precisely defined as 'serving tables'.⁸

Whether these tables were tables from which money was disbursed or tables from which food was distributed it is now impossible to say. Either way, the function of the Seven was to administer the church's ministry of compassion, particularly its ministry to widows. Assuming that apostolic example is binding on the church this clearly indicates that it is always her duty to make specific arrangements for caring for the poor. From the very earliest days, Christian believers saw to it that none of their number was in need (Acts 4:34). What Acts 6 makes clear is that this ministry was not left to individual whim or to spontaneous charity. There were clear, specific, dedicated arrangements to ensure that the poor did not suffer by default, and the responsibility for seeing to it that the arrangements worked efficiently was originally assumed by the apostles. When this became impracticable, they did not abandon the arrangements: they simply put them in other hands and instituted an order of ministers charged specifically with looking after the destitute.

'Distribution'

This is what led the second generation of Scottish Reformers to include 'distributions' among the 'notes' of the church (along with the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments): see the *Second Book of Discipline* II:2. The same perception drove Thomas Chalmers to tackle the pauperism of his Glasgow parish in the 1820s. Indeed, Chalmers revived the order of deacons specifically to ascertain the extent of this problem and to devise and administer ways of dealing with it.⁹ These deacons were in

⁸ Such early Fathers as Irenaeus clearly understood Acts 6.1-6 to refer to deacons. For example, he describes the Nicolaitans as 'the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles' (*Against Heresies* 1:26:3); and he refers to Stephen as the one 'who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles' (*Ibid.* 3:12:10).

⁹ See Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1854), vol. I, pp. 568f., 576-92. Cf Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 129-51; and A.C. Cheyne (ed.), *The Practical and the Pious* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 115-29.

many respects the precursors of modern social workers and this raises the question whether churches should not have full-time deacons / social workers as well as full-time pastors. If the *Second Book of Discipline* is correct, no church is a true church which does not minister to the poor; and if the pattern of Acts 6 is to be followed, every church should have office-bearers whose designated responsibility is to distribute food and money to those in need.

The operation of such a ministry would obviously be influenced by the fact that today the state assumes a significant degree of responsibility for widows, the sick, the unemployed and the elderly. This is gratifying to the extent that such arrangements bring the state into line with the model offered in the Old Testament theocracy, with its manifest bias towards the poor, the widow and the stranger. It would be quite unwarrantable, however, to make the Welfare State an excuse for the church's neglecting its own diaconal responsibilities. Every congregation remains under obligation to make sure that all the needs of its members are met, and this requires a ministry of tables as well as a ministry of the Word. It is also our responsibility to remember the needs of Christians in other lands and to take steps to meet them. This is why Paul, for example, asked the churches of Macedonia and Achaia to arrange a collection for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. But our responsibilities do not end even there. There is still the Good Samaritan principle. The church may at any time suddenly stumble upon a problem, and when it does so it has absolutely no right to walk by on the other side. It certainly has no right to argue that this is not on its agenda or within its budget or in its forward planning. If God puts it in our way it becomes our responsibility and we simply must find ways of dealing with it.

The story of the appointment of the Seven also makes plain that those involved in organising this ministry of social responsibility have to be specially gifted. In his instructions to Timothy Paul reinforces this point, making it clear that deacons are to be appointed only after careful scrutiny of their character, their past lives, their families and their theology (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Taken in conjunction with Acts 6:3, 5 this leads to a formidable list of qualifications. Deacons had to be Christians; they had to be of good standing in the community; they had to be well grounded in Christian truth; they had to

have clear consciences; and they had to have well-disciplined families. But above and beyond all this, they had to be select: '*choose* seven men from among you... they *chose* Stephen...'. This applied in three specific areas: they had to be full of faith, full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit. This last probably sums up what the apostles looked for: men whose entire lives were under the control of the Spirit of Jesus, who not only had once been filled but who had been filled again and again and who, abiding in Christ and refraining from grieving the Spirit, were habitually 'spiritual'.

Nothing could more dramatically underline the importance of the church's ministry of compassion than the insistence on such a formidable list of qualifications. The ministry of tables, reaching out to the poor, required the church's most gifted members, possessing not only administrative skills but vision and wisdom and indomitable faith. It is interesting that two of the Seven went on to what we today might see as 'higher things': Stephen to become a great apologist to whose arguments the Jews had no answer, and Philip to become an evangelist whose labours were greatly blessed. This suggests that sometimes one ministry may be a gateway to another; and even that people may sometimes have to be proved in one sphere of service before being moved to another. On the other hand, it is equally clear that in New Testament times those in high office (even apostles) would not deem diaconal tasks beneath them. Years later, Paul, at the height of his labours, sees no threat to his dignity in initiating and organising a collection for the impoverished saints at Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8: 1-9:15). He not only publicised the need: he appealed for the money, he personally carried it to Jerusalem and he personally selected those who were to accompany him. Today, as the need arises, Christian leaders, whatever their eminence, must be prepared to show the same mentality. The Lord, after all, washed feet. Why should we not clean drains?

Good Administration

In describing the arrangements for his collection Paul also indicates the importance of good administrative procedures. The apostle was not squeamish about appealing for money nor even about bringing considerable theological and spiritual pressure to bear on those who were in a position to part with it. The arguments he uses in 2 Corinthians 8:1ff. are still the

perfect model in this respect. But the passage also makes clear how meticulous Paul was about handling money: 'We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift, for we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in human eyes (2 Cor. 8:20f.). Hence, the people were fully informed as to the use to which the money was to be put; they were assured that they were not being asked to carry an unfair share of the burden; and they were made to feel that the whole transaction was open to their scrutiny. Paul would not carry the money to Jerusalem unaccompanied, and thus leave himself open to the charge of misappropriating it. Instead, he would be accompanied by Titus; by the brother 'who is praised by all the churches' and who was chosen by the churches themselves to accompany their offering; and by a brother who had often proved his zeal. These brethren, Paul assures the Corinthians, were 'representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ' (2 Cor. 8:23).

The need for sound administrative procedures is brought out even more fully in 1 Timothy 5:3-16. It is clear from this passage that the church by this time had a well-organised ministry to widows. There was an official list of those to be helped and Paul lays down stringent guidelines as to who should be on it: only those over sixty, who had been faithful to their husbands, were alone in the world and were known for good deeds (vv. 9ff.). These regulations suggest that such widows were fully maintained by the church, and this explains Paul's apparently severe attitude towards younger widows: 'As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their devotion to Christ, they want to marry.... Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house' (vv. 11ff.).

The important point here is not the details of the guidelines themselves but the fact that there were guidelines at all. It was imperative that the church's meagre resources should be distributed to those in greatest need. It was also imperative that the ministry of compassion should not be counter-productive. If, for example, it encouraged Christians to neglect their needy relations, it would produce a community who were worse than infidels (v. 8). It would be equally disastrous if the ministry of compassion produced a class of

idle young widows given to sensuality and gossip. This is the dilemma which has faced the social work of the church in all ages. How can we reduce poverty without producing paupers? And how can we provide relief without demoralising its beneficiaries? This is not the place to attempt an answer, but Paul was clearly aware of the dangers and of the need to organise the diaconate in such a way as to minimise the risk of abuse. There is something deeply moving in the spectacle of the man who penned the sublimities of Ephesians stooping to pen a memorandum on procedure.

What is the significance of the enigmatic reference to women in 1 Timothy 3:11? It is difficult to see why Paul should interject a directive to women simply as such into a passage dealing with the duties and qualifications of deacons. Nor does it seem grammatically possible to translate *gunaikas* as 'their wives' (that is, the deacons' wives). There is no reference to wives in the corresponding treatment of elders; and *gunaikas* without either definite article or possessive pronoun can scarcely be narrowed down to 'their wives'. The rendering 'women deacons' (J.N.D.Kelly) is as tenable as any, not least because the use of 'likewise' leads us to expect a group similar to the deacons introduced by the same connecting particle in v. 8. Whatever the uncertainties of 1 Timothy 3:11, however, there can be no dispute with regard to Romans 16:1: 'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a *deacon* of the church at Cenchrea.' The reason she is called a deacon rather than a deaconess is simply that Greek had no distinct word for the latter. It is hardly likely that she was merely a servant of the church in some vague general sense. Paul directs his readers to give her any help she needs (as if she had a specific commission), adding, 'she has been a great help to many people, including me.' The work of a deacon did not, as such, involve any teaching or the exercising of authority over men and would therefore not breach Paul's restriction on women's ministry (expressed, for example, in 1 Timothy 2:12). From its very nature this is work which women could perform admirably. There is certainly nothing to preclude women possessing the essential qualifications. They are as likely as men to be full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3).

The idea of a special appointment to the diaconate is only implicit in 1 Timothy 3:8ff., where the listing of qualifications

is obviously related to formal processes of selection and installation. In Acts 6:1ff., however, there is an explicit account of 'ordination'. The selection was made by the people, but the formal induction was conducted by the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on the Seven. This clearly sanctions the practice of formal selection and installation, but it does not sanction the conclusion that there is some grace inherent in the act of 'ordination' itself. The very idea of a magical infusion is alien to the thought of the New Testament; and even though it is just possible that the apostles had some special power to convey gifts in this way, that is no proof that later generations of 'clergy' are similarly endowed. In any case, in the New Testament possession of the gifts is a condition of 'ordination', not a consequence. Prayer was natural in the circumstances; and the laying on of hands was probably an act of benediction. This is not to say that it was, or is, otiose. When the church blesses in the name of Christ it has good ground to expect that divine acknowledgement will accompany the ensuing ministry. Beyond that, a solemn act of induction is a reminder to both those appointed and those appointing that their work is one in which the whole church is involved and which will be conducted to the accompaniment of its prayers and with its benediction.

Some further points merit a brief mention before we leave the subject of deacons. First, it looks as if the church in Acts 6 showed considerable tact in its election of men for this office. The original problem was the complaint of the Greek-speaking Jews that their widows were being neglected. From the list of names in Acts 6:5 it seems as if all those elected were Greeks. If this is so (the argument is not completely watertight since Greek names such as Philip and Andrew were also in common use among the Jews), it represents an example of deliberate pastoral tact and contextualisation. Maybe in some of our British churches we should deliberately choose deacons who are Asian or West Indian. We should certainly try to relate church officers to the communities they are expected to serve. A spiritually gifted white graduate of Oxbridge may not be the ideal deacon for Bradford.

Secondly, we should be careful not to obliterate the distinction between deacons and elders. The very reason for the original appointment of deacons was that those called to a

ministry of the Word should not be distracted by the ministry of tables. Unfortunately, churches of all traditions have found it extremely difficult to keep the two roles distinct. Presbyterian elders often find themselves enmeshed in the work of the diaconate; and Baptist deacons often find themselves carrying the burdens of spiritual oversight.

Thirdly, we must avoid the temptation to equate diaconal responsibilities with looking after buildings and finance. Under present conditions, unfortunately, a huge proportion of church income goes towards the maintenance of buildings, and some deacons do little besides counting money, putting it in the bank and meeting builders. In the New Testament, money and deacons were primarily for the poor.

The Ministry of the Word

But alongside the ministry of tables there was from the beginning a ministry of the Word, involving both the instruction of those inside the church and the evangelisation of those outside. This ministry clearly required two things. First, that a person give himself wholly to it. This was why the apostles did not want to become involved in the problems of administration. They wanted to 'give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). It is important to note that the precise business with which the apostles did not wish to be entangled was ecclesiastical. Not even the work of the diaconate should be allowed to distract a preacher of the gospel. How much more does this apply to secular pursuits! According to such a perspective it is impossible to engage in an effective preaching ministry if people have to snatch their moments of preparation from the demands of business, trade, politics or the caring professions. They must give themselves wholly to these matters, devoting themselves single-mindedly to reading, teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 4:13f.) and prayer (Acts 6:4). They must fan into flame the gift God has given to them (2 Tim. 1:6), making it their foremost determination to be workmen who do not need to be ashamed, correctly handling the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). How else can they be prepared to preach the Word in season and out of season, correcting, rebuking and encouraging (2 Tim. 4:2)?

There may, of course, be times in the history of the modern church, as there were in the days of the apostles, when

circumstances force preachers into a part-time ministry. But this is not the biblical pattern. Preaching is no exception to the dictum, 'No man ever did anything well to which he did not give the whole bent of his mind.'

The second biblical prerequisite for effective preaching is proper training. This is not highlighted as clearly as the need for total dedication. Yet the emphasis is plain enough. Paul directs Timothy to impart his message to believing and reliable men who will be able to teach others (2 Tim. 1:2). The Twelve were trained by three years' companionship with the Lord. Paul was taken to 'Arabia'. Silas, Mark, Timothy and Titus had Paul himself for their mentor. Preachers are not born. Nor are they the products of mere professional training. Certainly, they must have the gifts (*charismata*) necessary to effective proclamation: gifts such as knowledge, utterance, wisdom and courage. But even those with *charismata* need to be trained, learning the message and emulating the methods of their seniors. The precise form which such training will take in particular traditions is a matter of Christian prudence and hence of adjustment to local circumstances. It would be absurd to argue that a university or college training is theologically necessary to valid ordination.

Mobility of Preachers

One interesting feature of New Testament patterns of teaching ministry is the astonishing mobility of the preachers of the Word. At first, the preaching was confined to Jerusalem, but after the death of Stephen persecution scattered the church and the believers went everywhere 'preaching the word' (Acts 4:8). The most notable figure in this movement was Philip, referred to in Acts 21:8 as 'the evangelist'. His ministry was obviously a highly mobile one. One moment he is planting a church in Samaria (Acts 8:5). The next, he is directed by the Lord to go to Gaza. Afterwards, he is found in Azotus and in every city between there and Caesarea. Paul and his companions (Barnabas, Silas, Luke, and John Mark) clearly itinerated equally widely, moving as the Lord directed them into areas where the gospel had not gone before and deliberately avoiding building on other men's foundations (Rom. 15:20).

Too often the question of an outreach, or missionary, ministry becomes bogged down in debate as to the meaning of

‘evangelist’ and in argument as to whether this ‘office’ was meant to be permanent. Such discussion is irrelevant to the main issue. There can be no doubt as to the biblical validity of a missionary, church-planting ministry. Nor can there be any doubt as to New Testament precedent for highly mobile, itinerant evangelism. Whatever the nomenclature, an itinerant ministry of the Word was clearly integral to the New Testament church.

The relation of these itinerant preachers to the local church is an interesting one. Whenever the idea of setting up such a ministry is mooted in Reformed churches today, our immediate reaction seems to be to take steps to safeguard the proprieties of church order. Before we know where we are the evangelistic function is so shackled and fettered that no self-respecting person would take it on. Nor would he be any use if he did. In the New Testament, by contrast, the controls are minimal. Certainly the local church commissioned Saul and Barnabas (although we cannot be sure that Philip was similarly commissioned). But it is perfectly clear from that point onwards that they were very much on their own. They did not require the permission of ‘the sending church’ for their movements. With the wisdom given to them by the Holy Spirit they made their own decisions on the spot.

Are we too inclined to define leadership in a restrictive sense – exercising control, maintaining order, keeping people in their place? We must learn, instead, to see it as something creative and dynamic, inspiring and liberating people to serve, so that no talent and no enthusiasm in the body of Christ goes unused. Only to a very limited extent should one person (or group) interfere with another in the spontaneity of his Christian service.

It was not only church-planting missionaries who itinerated, however. In the New Testament many of the church’s teachers were also highly mobile. This was not, of course, true of them all. The elders appointed by Paul in Galatia were, so far as we can see, local men engaged in a settled ministry. So were those referred to in Acts 20:17ff. and 1 Timothy 5:17. But Timothy and Titus were sent to Ephesus and Crete respectively to teach and organise the churches already settled there. It is also clear that in the apostolic period prophets and teachers circulated freely, requiring not only hospitality (Rom. 12:13) but also judicious

scrutiny (1 John 4:1). It is clear from the *Didache* that this situation continued into the second century:

Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not remain more than a single day, or if there is need, a second also; but if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departs let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he finds shelter; but if he asks for money, he is a false prophet. (11)

The same mobility should be evident, presumably, in the church's teachers today. They must be prepared to move anywhere within the world-wide body of Christ according to the leading of the Spirit expressed not in our own private judgements but in the collective wisdom of the church.

Before leaving this point it is worth noting that no hard-and-fast distinction can be drawn between an itinerant and a settled ministry. Itinerants such as Paul sometimes settled in particular places for extended periods (Acts 9:10); and sometimes (again like Paul and his associates, Timothy and Titus) they exchanged their church-planting roles for church-building ones. The evangelist sometimes became the pastor. Mobility involved flexibility in function as well as in location.

The Preachers not Presbyters

A still more fascinating aspect of early church organisation is that its great preachers were not characteristically elders or presbyters. Some, like Peter and Paul, were apostles. Stephen and Philip belonged to the 'Seven'. Apollos has no official designation. Neither has Titus. Timothy does the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Preachers are described in a quite independent nomenclature as heralds, stewards, witnesses and ambassadors, and any attempt to link preaching indissolubly with the presbyterate is doomed to failure. There is no hint that all preachers must be presbyters or that all presbyters must be preachers. In fact, the church never depended entirely on the ministry of 'elders'. It always enjoyed a distinctive ministry of preaching engaged in by men who were highly mobile, specially gifted and trained, and totally dedicated to proclaiming the gospel. From this point of view, argument about the distinction between 'ruling elder' and 'teaching elder' leads us down a blind alley.

But this must not lead to a depreciation of the eldership. Presbyters were closely associated with preachers from a very early stage in the history of the church. Paul appointed some

in Galatia (Acts 14:23), addressed them at Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff.) and directed Titus to establish them in Crete. Their responsibility is broadly defined in the words *episcopos* and *poimen*. The former means 'overseer' and the latter 'pastor'. The elders' functions, therefore, were to exercise oversight and to engage in pastoral care. They were not always preachers, but they were always bishops and pastors.

This involved several different responsibilities. Primarily, they were the leaders or rulers of the congregation. In this respect, they were authority figures, set over the flock (1 Thess. 5:12). They were the ones who took the initiative, standing in the van of the church's forward movement, leading by example and taking the flak when their policies were unpopular or simply dangerous.

Again, they were the counsellors, warning, advising and comforting in the light of their own experience and the teaching of Scripture. This is the directive Paul gives to Timothy: 'correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction' (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV). Today, members of the church take their emotional and behavioural problems to professional psychiatrists, not as a last desperate measure but often as a first resort. Does this reflect incompetence on the part of the eldership, or a flouting of New Testament patterns by the membership?

It is also the function of the elders to protect the flock. This is particularly clear in Acts 20:29: the elders must take heed to the flock because grievous wolves threaten them. The peril is both internal and external. Inside, there are false prophets, lying in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14). Outside, there is the whole range of hostile religion and philosophy. The elders must be able to protect the church from all such perils. This is especially true of the internal threat. Paul's charge to the elders at Ephesus refers particularly to a peril which will arise from 'among your own selves'.

Another element in pastoral care is the need to seek out lost members of the flock. People fall by the wayside for all kinds of reasons: persecution, the cares of this world, personal backsliding, apathy and misunderstanding. Such people constitute only a tiny fraction of the church as a whole but they need a quite disproportionate amount of attention. Like the Good Shepherd himself, the Christian elder / pastor will leave the ninety-and-nine and go to look for the one lost

sheep. In theory, it may seem fair enough to promise every single member of the flock an equal degree of care. In practice this would be absurd. The lame, weak, the wounded and the stray always clamour for attention and it becomes as impossible to run a church to a timetable as it would be to run a medical practice.

Paul also stipulates that elders are to be 'given to hospitality' (1 Tim. 3:2). In its simplest form this means that all Christians are welcome in the elders' homes. If need be, the local church can even hold its meetings there, as it did in Chloe's house (1 Cor. 1:11). But the real point of Paul's principle is probably more specialised. As we have seen, the church was both nourished and propagated through the ministry of a highly mobile band of preachers who in their journeyings would naturally require accommodation. Paul expects that the responsibility for providing it would gladly be assumed by the elders. It would be a mistake, however, to think that it devolved on them alone. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers to entertain strangers, and even holds out the inducement that by making a general rule of this they may some day entertain angels unawares (Heb. 13:2).

Another major part of the elder's responsibility is prayer. In Acts 6:4 this is clearly defined as an apostolic responsibility and as one of the reasons why men must be free from involvement in serving tables. Elsewhere prayer is the clear responsibility of all Christians. For example, in Ephesians 6:19 Paul makes it clear that everyone engaged in spiritual warfare must 'keep on praying'. What is the duty of all must be in a special sense the duty of elders as they take heed to the flock. As watchmen, they must pray for all the saints, for the preachers of the Word (Eph. 6:10) and, above all, for the members of their own congregations.

It is more difficult to evaluate the function indicated in James 5:14: 'Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.' The meaning of the reference to oil is, to say the least, obscure. But the general sense of the passage is clear: it is the responsibility of elders to minister to the sick and the precise form of their ministry is to pray for them. It is not the oil that heals but believing prayer (v.15). The stipulation that the sick person should 'send' for the elders should not be abused. To claim the

excuse, 'We were not sent for!', would be contrary to the whole spirit of the gospel.

Elders and Teaching

To what extent was teaching an inherent function of the eldership? Paul makes it plain in 1 Timothy 5:17 that not all elders laboured in the Word and in teaching. The background to this is probably the sentiment we saw in Acts 6:2: an effective ministry of the Word can usually be engaged in only by someone who lays aside every other responsibility and devotes himself to the Word of God and prayer. This was clearly not expected of all elders.

On the other hand, they were all expected to be 'apt to teach' (*didaktikos*), and in Ephesians 4:11 pastoral care and teaching are closely linked. We should not read too much into this, however. Neither the gift of teaching nor the responsibility of teaching was all that distinctive. Deacons, too, must hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9). Older women are to 'teach' younger women (Tit. 2:4), and the whole congregation are to 'teach' one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). The responsibility of all mature Christians towards the immature is clearly illustrated in the way that Priscilla and Aquila looked after Apollos, teaching him the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:26). Every Christian must confess his faith (Rom. 10:9, Heb. 4:14) and be able to give everyone who asks a reason for his hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Indeed, the very significance of Pentecost is that, at last, all the people are prophets (Acts 2:17), witnessing to Christ (Acts 1:8) and proclaiming the virtues of the One who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

All this suggests that aptness to teach was a widespread gift in the apostolic church and was certainly not enough in itself to constitute a man an elder. It had no more weight in this connection than any of the other qualities referred to by Paul (1 Tim. 3:1ff.). To put it bluntly: a man has no more right to be an elder simply because he can teach than he has because he is the husband of one wife. The indispensable teaching gift that Paul was looking for probably amounted to no more than an ability to bear a close personal witness to Christ, to answer objectors and to give adequate pastoral counsel. What was desirable in all Christians was indispensable in an elder; or, as

George Gillespie put it, he does 'by authority that which other Christians ought to do in charity'.¹⁰

There is no special significance in the fact that elders are required to be apt to 'teach' rather than apt to 'preach'. The New Testament does not regard preaching and teaching as technically distinct. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, is regarded as teaching: 'Jesus opened his mouth and taught them' (Matt. 5:2). Similarly when the Lord commissions the disciples to evangelise the nations, he directs them to 'teach' all the things he himself has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Whether in a pastoral or in an evangelistic setting, therefore, preaching must be didactic. For the pulpit to neglect doctrine is calamitous. On the other hand, preaching is not defined in the New Testament as a special method of communication. The content of the preaching (the *kerygma*) is indeed special. But that *kerygma* may be put across in an almost infinite variety of ways: in one-to-one conversations, to small groups or to huge gatherings; by speaking, by announcing, by reasoning, by arguing, by proclaiming and by writing. It is entirely inappropriate to identify a preaching ministry with a pulpit ministry. Preaching means putting the *kerygma* into the public arena by any means in our power.

Two points of more general interest deserve a brief notice. First, elders were supported by their local congregations. This was plainly so in the case of those who were not only elders but also preachers. It also applied, however, to at least some of those who were simply elders. According to most scholars, when Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:17 that the elders who rule well should receive double 'honour' he is probably referring to double remuneration. Certainly, the primary meaning of the Greek word used (*time*) is 'price' or 'value' and the meaning 'honorarium' is well established. The interesting thing in 1 Timothy 5:17, however, is that Paul is speaking primarily not of preachers, but of those who 'rule well'. It is they who are to be counted worthy of double remuneration. We have already seen that a good case can be made out for a full-time paid diaconate. An even stronger case can be made for maintaining some elders in a full-time ministry.

¹⁰ *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*, I. II (The Works of Mr George Gillespie, Edinburgh, 1846, vol. I, p. 13).

Elders and the Wider Church

Secondly, the authority of elders was not confined to their own local congregations. This has been the main area of debate between Presbyterians and Congregationalists, the former maintaining that particular churches should be united under a common presbyterate and the latter arguing that each local church is an autonomous, self-governing entity whose elders have neither authority nor responsibility beyond their own congregations.¹¹ This division of opinion runs right through Evangelicalism, affecting such bodies as the Evangelical Alliance and the British Evangelical Council, and at this stage of the discussion neither outlook has much hope of convincing the other. It is, however, too important to ignore.

Bearing in mind that I bring to this enquiry my own Presbyterian prejudices, the obvious starting-point is Luke's account of the so-called Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:5-29. The agenda was set by a dispute which first appeared in Antioch, but which was of general interest to the whole church: on what terms were Gentiles to be admitted into membership? Did they have to be circumcised? And did they have to keep the Jewish laws? The answer given to this question would have repercussions for all the churches, especially those established in the course of the missionary journey just completed by Paul and Barnabas. Looking behind the details, the precise precedent being laid down is that questions of common interest should be matters of consultation and agreement between all the churches.

The church at Antioch was a superbly endowed church, probably better equipped than any other in history to resolve such questions by itself. Yet it decided that such unilateral action would be inappropriate. Hence the decision to send Paul and Barnabas and some others to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders. Was this simply a case of deferring to the superior wisdom, experience and authority of the church in Jerusalem? Hardly! It is clear from Galatians 1:11-2:14 that Paul was not at all disposed to regard his apostleship as inferior to that of Peter, James and John, even though they were deemed to be 'pillars' (Gal. 2:9). The matter

¹¹ See, for example, R.W. Dale, *Congregational Church Polity* (London, 1885), particularly Book I, ch.V.

was referred not to Jerusalem as such, but to the wider church, to the body of apostles (including Paul and possibly Barnabas) and to the elders (including those from Antioch). This explains the form of words used in Acts 15:22: 'It seemed good to the apostles and the elders and the whole church'. Had it been expedient to resolve the matter by apostolic decree Paul's own word would have sufficed. Instead, it was resolved in a way that underlined the coherence of the world-wide body of Christians and the interdependence of all local churches. This is why the decree (*dogmata*) of the Council had to be 'kept' (*phylassein*, used of keeping a law) not only by the churches at Antioch and Jerusalem, but also by those at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and the other churches of Phrygia and Galatia. It is also why the decree to impose 'no other burden' on Gentile converts is binding on all churches down to the present day.

But the issue cannot be limited to the meaning of this particular text. The fundamental question is whether the New Testament indicates that the elders of a local church should settle all matters without consulting the elders of other churches; and this rests on the further question whether local churches should function without reference to each other, rather than in submission to the wider body of Christ. Only if local churches are self-sufficient, autonomous and purely self-regarding bodies can we argue that their elders have no responsibility for any church but their own and that their decisions cannot be reviewed by anyone but themselves.

Presbyterians argue that this is not the pattern we find in the New Testament. In the early church each congregation was clearly not a law to itself. Apart from all else, all the churches were subject to the authority of the apostles, who gave clear guidance not only on matters theological but also on a wide range of practical details, and obviously expected a common approach on many matters of order and worship as well as on fundamental doctrine. For example, on the matter of their women praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered, Paul appears to rebuke the Corinthians precisely for being out of step with the other churches: 'If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God' (1 Cor. 11:16). Similarly, when he enjoins the women to keep silence in the churches, he refers to this as the practice in 'all the congregations of the saints' (1 Cor.

14:33); and when he comes to the matter of the collection, he contents himself with saying, 'Do what I told the Galatian churches to do' (1 Cor. 16:1). Clearly the range of uniformity in the apostolic churches extended beyond matters of essential doctrine. Equally clearly, as Bavinck points out, 'The apostles did not function simply as the local consistory of the Jerusalem church but were at the same time overseers of all the churches.... An objective organisational tie may have been absent but a living and personal bond was present for all churches through the office of apostle itself.'¹²

The question is whether the demise of the apostles transformed the whole situation, putting each church, for the first time, on a footing of total autonomy. Apart altogether from the evidence to the contrary in, for example, the Apostolic Fathers, such a development is inherently implausible. It would have meant a revolution not only in inter-church relations but in the nature of the churches themselves. Certainly, in one sense there was no apostolic succession: they left no infallible plenipotentiaries to take their place. But in other senses they clearly left successors. For example, deacons are their successors from the point of view that they now do a job which apostles used to do. Presbyters, too, are their successors ('the presbyters among you I exhort, who am also a presbyter', 1 Pet. 5:1); and so, too, are evangelists and missionaries. Obviously no single individual could ever again wield the authority of a James or a Peter or a Paul. But all the churches of Jerusalem, Corinth and Ephesus could continue to exist under a common eldership; as could the church (singular) throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31). In this respect the eldership as a body provides the apostolic succession. From this point of view, the Council of Nicea is the legitimate successor of the Council of Jerusalem.

Other details in the New Testament clearly indicate that particular churches did not behave as isolated units. As Bavinck wrote,

the spiritual fellowship that existed between the various churches was more intimate than that of many later churches that are organisationally united in a classis or synod.... It is, in fact, almost

¹² From an article, 'The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church', reprinted in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), p. 225.

unthinkable that this spiritual bond among the early churches should have been absent. The unity and catholicity of the church is a constantly recurring theme throughout the New Testament. It follows directly from the unity of God Himself, from the unity of the Spirit, from the unity of truth, from the unity of the covenant and the unity of salvation.... This catholicity of the church, as the scriptures portray it for us and as the early churches exemplify it for us is breathtaking in its beauty. Whoever becomes enclosed in the narrow circle of a small *kerkje* or conventicle, does not know it and has never experienced its power and comfort.¹³

But how did this work in practice? For one thing, local churches supported the work of church-planting in other areas and maintained close links with the churches established through such efforts. The Philippians provide an instance of this, supporting Paul during his ministry in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16). Similarly, the church at Antioch initiated (under the Holy Spirit) the mission to Galatia (Acts 13:1ff.), received the missionaries on their return (Acts 14:27) and acted in the interests of the new churches by referring the problems posed by the Judaisers to the apostles and elders gathered at Jerusalem. The churches even felt an economic responsibility for each other. This is why the disciples at Antioch decided to send relief to the brethren in Judaea (Acts 11:29) and why the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia made a contribution towards meeting the needs of the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

But such interaction also took place on the spiritual plane. For example, when the church at Jerusalem heard of the thrilling developments at Antioch (11:22ff.) they promptly dispatched Barnabas to supply the new converts with proper teaching; and when Barnabas himself found that the task was beyond any one man he sent to Tarsus requesting the services of Saul.

There is a real danger that in focusing on particular texts and even on particular words and offices we disable ourselves from seeing the overall pattern of New Testament ecclesiology. The church of these days was a body, and it defined the church as a body for all ages to come: one body, not hundreds of thousands. This means that no one cell in the body has a right to operate without regard to the whole. Equally, however, it means that no local eldership has a right

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 226ff.

to disregard the body as a whole. Local churches and their elderships are dependent on the whole body of Christ; and responsible to and for the whole body of Christ.

Two modern analogies may be helpful here. The first is from medicine. A cancerous cell is one which mutates and develops without regard to the body as a whole, eventually destroying the very life on which it depends.

The other analogy is from Chaos Theory, particularly from the so-called 'butterfly effect': a butterfly in Peking may cause a storm in Chicago the following month. More prosaically, small fractional changes can have decisive significance for major events. This is as true for the church as for any other system on earth.¹⁴ Decisions taken by elders in the Shetlands can radically affect the church in St Albans. Indeed, they affect the church all over the world. Who can deny it, if the efficient working of the body depends on every part being joined and knit together and doing its job properly (Eph. 4:16)? From the very beginning the church had a unified, collegiate leadership extending to all its congregations. That leadership was directly involved and consulted at every critical point in the development of the emerging people of God: the reception of the Samaritan church (Acts 8:14), Peter's mission to Cornelius (Acts 11:1ff.) and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). The idea of totally isolated, autonomous churches is wholly alien to the New Testament. The church is the body of Christ, one in the vision of God and one in its visible expression. Each member is united not only to the Head but to each other member. The only alternative is thorough-going ecclesiastical chaos through the multiplication of innumerable detached and self-regarding cells.

Conclusion

We return, then, to our basic perspective. The New Testament applies a wide variety of designations to the various functionaries of the church. Some are technical, but most are not, and few, if any, are used with elaborate precision and

¹⁴ The larger the system, the greater the effect of minute changes. Cf. John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief* (London, 1994), p. 26: 'exquisite sensitivity implies that the smallest trigger from the environment can have large effects, so that there is an essential holism built into the nature of chaotic dynamics.'

accuracy. There are certainly not as many ministries as designations, and it is quite impossible to deduce any clear idea of church-structures from the terminology alone. The truth can only be found by trying to identify the various ministries enjoyed by the apostolic church. These were three-fold: a ministry of tables, a ministry of oversight and a ministry of preaching. All of these transcended local churches; representatives of all of them might be fully maintained; and the preachers were expected to be highly mobile.

GEORGE GILLESPIE AND THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY: THE DEFENCE OF PRESBYTERIANISM¹

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Introduction

George Gillespie is frequently referred to as one of the most prominent of the Scottish Commissioners at the Westminster Assembly, yet in comparison to Samuel Rutherford and Alexander Henderson, Gillespie has received little scholarly attention. In his short life,² however, he made a significant contribution to Presbyterian ecclesiology, in addition to his active participation in the Assembly debates (167 speeches, cf. Rutherford, 148 speeches, Henderson, 83 – by November 1644). This study will consider Gillespie's writings against the background of the Assembly.³

Gillespie was born in Kirkcaldy, in Fife, probably in 1613, a son of the Revd John Gillespie who was minister in the town. Wodrow gives his date of birth as 21 January, but the Session Register of Births and Baptisms for the relevant period has been lost, so certainty is impossible.

¹ This material was first given as a lecture to the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland on 18 November 1993. A full consideration of Gillespie's views of church government will be found in the author's *Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie: An Ecclesiastical Republic* (forthcoming).

² For an outline of Gillespie's life see William Hetherington's 'Memoir' in *The Works of George Gillespie*, in *The Presbyterian's Armoury*, 2 volumes (Edinburgh, 1846). All quotations are taken from this edition.

³ Standard works on the Assembly are: W.M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh, 1856); A.F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly, its History and Standards* (Edinburgh, 1883); and B.B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (New York, 1931). Apart from the manuscript Minutes, the basic source for the Assembly debates is A.F. Mitchell and J. Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines while engaged in preparing their Directory for Church Government, Confession of Faith and Catechisms (November 1644 to March 1649)* (Edinburgh, 1874).

Nothing is known of his early life, but in 1629 (aged 16), he began studies at the University of St Andrews. After university he could not enter the gospel ministry because of his refusal to be ordained by a bishop, but he did serve as domestic chaplain to Lord Kenmure until 1634, and then in the same capacity in the household of the Earl of Cassilis.

In 1637 Gillespie published his first polemical work in the midst of the ferment leading up to the signing of the National Covenant. Entitled *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*, it immediately brought his name to public attention. In defiance of the Episcopalian Establishment he was ordained to the parish of Wemyss by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy on 26 April 1638, before the momentous General Assembly in Glasgow that year, at which he was selected to preach.

In 1640, Gillespie, along with Henderson, Robert Blair and Robert Baillie, accompanied the Scottish Commissioners negotiating peace with Charles I in London. He successfully resisted a call to Aberdeen, but in 1642 the General Assembly accepted an application from the town of Edinburgh to have him translated to the city's New (or High) Kirk. Appointed one of the ministerial commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, from 1643 onwards Gillespie took an active role in the work of the Assembly, especially in the debates on church government.⁴ He had set out his basic position in 1641 in *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*, and during the Assembly he defended his views in pamphlets written in reply to the Erastian, Thomas Coleman, namely *A Brotherly Examination, Nihil Respondes* and *Male Audis*, all written in 1645.

Gillespie also preached 'Fast Day Sermons' before the House of Commons (27 March 1644) and before the House of Lords (27 August 1645). His most influential work, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, was published in 1646. In 1647 he

⁴ See R.S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh, 1985) for a comprehensive and original examination of the debates on church government. For a detailed study of Scottish input to the *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* see Wayne Spear, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: the Influence of the Scottish Commissioners upon the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly* (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1976).

appeared with Baillie before the General Assembly to present the results of the Westminster Divines' years of work (although it was not until 1846 that the surviving two volumes of Gillespie's notes of the Assembly debates were published). His health broken by consumption, Gillespie died on 17 December 1648, and was buried in Kirkcaldy.

The Sources of Gillespie's Ecclesiology

1. Scripture. It is entirely unsurprising to find that Scripture is Gillespie's fundamental authority in formulating his ecclesiology. As the inspired Word of God, Scripture is binding on the church, and this is the case with regard to government as much as in relation to doctrine or life.⁵ This is the foundation of his principle of the 'Divine Right' of Presbyterian church government.

Generally, the authority of Scripture is an unspoken assumption in Gillespie's writing, but its power is clear from the copious exegetical support which is provided for each aspect of Presbyterianism. Many texts and passages are examined, sometimes in considerable detail, to establish the point at issue. Thus with regard to graded courts, Acts 15 is examined carefully and alternative interpretations are refuted.⁶

In his one explicit consideration of scriptural authority in *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions* (1649), Chapter 20, Gillespie seeks to prove

That necessary consequences from the written Word of God do sufficiently and strongly prove the consequent or conclusion, if theoretical, to be a certain divine truth which ought to be believed, and, if practical, to be a necessary duty which we are obliged unto, *jure divino*.⁷

The heat of polemical exchanges, however, meant that on occasion all sides tried to extract from biblical passages more

⁵ This is the burden of Gillespie's case in *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*. The power of the church in relation to worship and ceremonies (the 'diatactic' power) is especially in view in the Third Part, 'Against the lawfulness of the ceremonies'.

⁶ Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*, Pt. 2, ch. 8. See also the examination of Matt. 18:15-17 in *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, Bk 3, ch.2-6, and, for the Assembly debate, *Notes*, pp. 37-42.

⁷ Gillespie, *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions*, Ch. 20, p. 100.

than was there. The danger of eisegesis – of finding what one had already decided must be there – was not always avoided, and Gillespie could eisegete as well as any. Thus both Presbyterians and Independents could argue fiercely that Matthew 18:17 (tell it to the church) was proof of their ecclesiology.⁸ Given their assumption that the New Testament taught only one system of church government, no concessions could be made to the views of opponents.

2. Natural Law. Although the concept of natural law is most readily associated with Roman Catholic theologians, it also has a long history in Reformed circles. Gillespie, Rutherford and others had therefore no qualms about an appeal to natural law in support of their ecclesiology. They believed that God had so formed his creation that certain principles of order, hierarchy and government could be discerned by the human mind.⁹

When Gillespie argues in his *Assertion*, that the institution of synods is by 'Divine Right', his first argument draws on 'the very light and law of nature'.¹⁰ This he couples with his desire to provide arguments from reason as well as Scripture. Although the Word of God is the fundamental authority, the same basic principles of government can be discerned by the light of nature.¹¹

8 *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch.1.

9 For Scottish views of natural law in relation to civil government, see Samuel Rutherford, *Lex Rex* (1644) Q2, and George Buchanan's *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos* (1579). Both works are to be found in *The Presbyterian's Armoury* (Edinburgh, 1846), reprinted in 1980 by Sprinkle Publications.

10 *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch.5, p. 51.

11 Gillespie states that as the church is a company of Christians subject to God's law, 'so it is a company of men and women who are not the outlaws of nature, but the followers of the same' (*Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch. 5, p. 51). In the same vein are Rutherford's words: 'If we once lay the supposition, that God hath immediately by the law of nature appointed there should be a government, and mediately defined by the dictate of natural light in a community, that there shall be one or many rulers... then the Scripture's arguments may well be drawn out of the school of nature....' (*Lex Rex*, Q2, p. 3).

Gillespie does not, however, provide any indication of how to discern the limits of what is revealed in the natural law, an issue on which there is a wide range of views, and it is surprising to find a Calvinist theologian making no reference to the effects of sin on our perception of this law.

3. Reformed Theologians. Gillespie generally supports his views of church government and his exegesis of specific texts by appeal to a multitude of scholars – Lutheran and Reformed, especially to Calvin. His knowledge of continental theology is extensive – reminding us that Scotland at that time was no isolated parochial realm.¹² Gillespie, however, calls no one master and is willing to hold a minority viewpoint if convinced that it is biblical (*e.g.* his belief that the mediatorial reign of Christ will end).¹³

The Headship of Christ

The central issue in the struggle between the Covenanters and the Stuart monarchs during the Second Reformation in Scotland was the headship of the church. Rutherford, Gillespie and their associates held that the church is under the headship of Christ alone and free from any form of state control, and they defended what has become the usual Presbyterian view that God has instituted two separate, coordinate spheres of authority, church and state, which are not to exercise control over each other.

Gillespie's views on the subject are expressed in three pamphlets written to refute the Erastian Westminster divine Thomas Coleman. On 30 July 1645, Coleman preached a sermon before the House of Commons entitled *Hopes Deferred and Dashed*,¹⁴ in which he defended the basic tenets

¹² This is reflected in Gillespie's belief in the value of 'oecumenical synods', drawing together representatives of Reformed churches in a number of nations to deliberate on significant theological and moral issues. See *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions*, pp. 36-8.

¹³ See *A Brotherly Examination*, p. 12, and *Aaron's Rod*, Pt. 2, ch. 5, p. 91. In contrast see H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, translated by G.T. Thomson (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 484.

¹⁴ Thomas Coleman, *Hopes Deferred and Dashed: a Sermon preached from Job xi. 20 to the Honourable House of Commons in St*

of Erastianism. Among other things, he asserted that *all* government has been given to Christ as Mediator and that magistrates serve as vicegerents of Christ as Mediator, so that they have authority in the church. The exchange of pamphlets ended with Coleman's death at the end of March 1646.

In relation to the headship (or kingship) of Christ, two principles emerge from Gillespie's contributions to the debates, especially from *A Brotherly Examination*:

1. Christ is the sole Head of the church. This doctrine, the keystone of Presbyterian ecclesiology, was shared with most of the Westminster divines. In *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* Gillespie refers to 'the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, the only monarch of the church'.¹⁵ This King gathers, preserves, builds, instructs and saves the church and all authority exercised within it derives from him as Head.

2. Christ exercises a twofold kingship. As eternal Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he exercises authority over all things. As the incarnate Mediator he exercises authority over the church alone.¹⁶ His kingship over the nations is as Son, and it is under Christ as God that magistrates are to rule. This contrasts sharply with Coleman's position that it is as Mediator that Christ rules the nations, and it may be partly in reaction to Coleman's Erastian conclusions

Margaret's Church, Westminster, July 30th 1645 (London, 1645). Biographical details of Coleman (1598-1646) will be found in *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* by James Reid (Paisley, 1811), vol. 1, pp. 236-50. Coleman's other contributions to the debate were *A Brotherly Examination Re-Examined: or a clear Justification of those Passages in a Sermon against which Mr Gillespie did both preach and write* (London, 1645), and *Maledicis, Maledicis: or a Brief Reply to Mr Gillespie's 'Nihil Respondes'* (London, 1646).

¹⁵ *Propositions*, p.100.

¹⁶ See for example *Aaron's Rod*, 2:5. This view is shared by many of Gillespie's European contemporaries. See for example Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* (1626), ch. 17, in J.W. Beardslee (ed.), *Reformed Dogmatics. Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology Through the Writings of Wollebius, Voetius and Turretin* (Grand Rapids, 1977).

that Gillespie (like Rutherford and others) rejected this view.¹⁷ Gillespie is also concerned to hold together Christ's three-fold office as Mediator – Prophet, Priest and King, and he thinks of the 'kingdom' in terms of a realm, namely the church.¹⁸

The Courts of the Church

From Christ the Head of the church is derived the church's authority. Gillespie is at pains to point out that

the ecclesiastical power dealeth spiritually, and only in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by authority intrusted or received from him alone: neither is exercised without prayer or calling on the name of God; nor, lastly, doth it use any other than spiritual weapons.¹⁹

In common with his Reformed contemporaries, Gillespie divides ecclesiastical power into three aspects:

- (i) Dogmatic: interpreting the Word and formulating articles of faith;
- (ii) Diatactic: dealing with the external circumstances of worship;
- (iii) Critic: spiritual censures such as deposition and excommunication.²⁰

This power is to be exercised through a series of graded 'courts' such as we find in Presbyterianism. In Gillespie's view, the most basic justification of this system is that it is commanded by God – hence the term 'Divine Right Presbyterianism'.²¹ This was the position defended by the

17 Rutherford describes the view that the magistrate is a vicar or deputy of Christ as Mediator as 'the heart and soul of Popery' in *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London, 1646), ch. 27 (Q23), p. 601.

18 Thus Gillespie speaks in terms of subjects, laws, officers *etc.* See *Male Audis*, ch. 8. The modern dynamic understanding of 'kingdom' as 'reign' is well set out by Herman Ridderbos in *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Nutley, NJ, 1962), pp. 24-7, with appropriate cautions.

19 *Propositions*, p. 62.

20 *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch. 4. This scheme is taken up by *e.g.* James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (1869; r.p., Edinburgh, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 225-8.

21 In view of the efforts of some to deprive synods of their lawful authority, Gillespie says that orthodox churches must 'know,

Scots (and others) in the Assembly, not only against the Independents but also against those who could be termed 'pragmatic Presbyterians'.

Gillespie is prepared to offer a range of arguments in defence of his polity, however. In *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions*, for example, he argues that higher courts are needed to deal with erring congregations, to rectify unjust treatment of cases and to attend to general matters common to several churches, in order to strengthen each other, so that the church may be 'as a camp of an army well ordered'.²²

On the basis of both scriptural and pragmatic arguments, Gillespie also seeks to make a case for representative church government. He cites biblical passages which indicate a difference between rulers and ruled in the church – Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Ecclesiastical power is not to be exercised by the whole congregation, but by the elders set apart for this task. At the pragmatic level, Gillespie argues that the majority of members in a congregation are not fit to exercise such jurisdiction, especially with regard to the examination of a minister's doctrine and abilities.²³ In imagining the exercise of government by an entire congregation, Gillespie speaks of 'the rudeness of the vulgar sort, who, if they should all speak their judgement, what a monstrous and unavoidable confusion should there be?'²⁴

What of Presbyterianism *jure divino*? On 19 January 1644, the First Committee reported two propositions to the Assembly which were passed without discussion, although there may have been some opposition to the second:

The Scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church.... A presbytery consisteth of ministers of the word, and such other public officers as have been already voted to have a share in the government of the church.²⁵

defend, and preserve, this excellent liberty granted to them by divine right' (*Propositions*, p. 35).

22 *Propositions*, p. 31.

23 All of these are considered in *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch. 1.

24 *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch. 1, p. 40. This 'rudeness', however, does not disqualify church members from deciding which ministerial candidate is best suited to minister to their congregation (see *Miscellany*, ch. 2, p. 13).

25 *Notes*, p. 6.

The Independents could accept these statements because the term 'presbytery' could be applied to minister and elders in a local congregation. The real debate was over 'classical' presbyteries, central to the Scottish model. After the Independents had been allowed three weeks (February 2-22) to put their case, their arguments were voted down.²⁶

The key elements in Gillespie's case for Divine Right Presbyterianism are set out in a memorandum which he wrote during this period and included in his *Notes* between 9 and 10 May.²⁷ He defends the association of churches in presbyteries on these grounds:

- (i) Christ's institution: citing Matthew 18:17, 'tell it to the church';
- (ii) the apostolic pattern of such association of congregations;
- (iii) the general rules of Scripture: *i.e.* two witnesses are better than one;
- (iv) the light of nature which applies to church and state;
- (v) the law of necessity, *e.g.* regarding a tribunal for appeals;
- (vi) that if people were allowed to choose regarding association, many would 'despise the fellowship of their brethren, and not join with others in common counsel'.²⁸

In practice, Gillespie places greatest weight on evidence regarding the New Testament church. Presbyteries, he argues, 'have a certain warrant from the pattern of the apostolical churches'.²⁹ Much attention is given to the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost, although Ephesus and other centres are considered.

Gillespie's case can be summed up in four propositions:³⁰

- (i) in many cities where the apostles planted churches there were more Christians than did or could meet for worship in one place;
- (ii) in those cities there was a plurality not only of ruling elders but of ministers of the Word;
- (iii) nevertheless the whole number of Christians in the city was one church;

²⁶ See Paul, *Assembly of the Lord*, pp. 249ff.; Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, pp. 180ff.

²⁷ *Notes*, pp. 61-2.

²⁸ *Notes*, p. 62.

²⁹ *Assertion*, Pt.2, ch.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

(iv) the whole number and several companies of Christians in one city were all governed by one common presbytery.

Some of the evidence which Gillespie assembles does serve to support his case, for example the numbers converted at Pentecost in Jerusalem and their having to meet in private houses. At times, however, we simply do not know enough about the shape of the church in centres such as Ephesus, although Gillespie is very reluctant to admit this. As a result Gillespie's account of the New Testament church sometimes bears a remarkable resemblance to the Presbytery of Edinburgh or Glasgow.

In the *Assertion*, Gillespie goes on to argue at length for the divine institution of synods and the subordination of presbyteries to them. Arguments are drawn from the light of nature, Christ's institution, the Jewish church and Acts 15, as well as from geometrical proportion and necessity.³¹ As far as Christ's institution is concerned, Gillespie argues that, as Prophet and King, Christ has provided for every necessity in the church, and that this includes the establishment of synods and presbyteries to remedy abuses, hear appeals, examine ministers, *etc.*

The two key passages of Scripture for Gillespie's case are Matthew 18 and Acts 15. In his view the meaning of Matthew 18 is determined by the Jewish ecclesiastical system of Jesus' day, a view shared, for example, by Calvin.³² Acts 15 was discussed at length in the Assembly (12-13 March 1644),³³ with the Presbyterians using the passage to defend both presbyteries and synods. Gillespie argued that it was a synod, with representatives from Antioch being on an equal footing with those from Jerusalem, which issued a decree that was binding on the churches represented (a narrower view than that of other divines).³⁴

In spite of his detailed exegetical work in defence of presbyteries and synods, Gillespie states that in his view

³¹ *Ibid.*, chs. 5-10.

³² John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke* (1555), translated by A.W. Morrison (Edinburgh, 1972), *ad loc.*

³³ See Gillespie, *Notes*, pp. 39-42. The printed Minutes do not cover this early period.

³⁴ *Assertion*, 2: 9, p. 59.

the several sorts of these assemblies are not particularly determined in Scripture, but left to be particularly determined by the church, conform to the light of nature, and to the general principles of the word of God.³⁵

His thorough defence of the Scottish model of Presbyterianism, however, does suggest that the scope for variation to which he refers would in practice be quite limited.

The Office of Minister

Gillespie distinguishes three types of elders: 1. preaching elders / pastors; 2. teaching elders / doctors; 3. ruling elders.³⁶ The category of ruling elders will be considered below. The doctor dealt with scriptural interpretation, but unlike the pastor he did not have responsibilities relating to discipline or the sacraments. The pastor (or minister) dealt with all these areas of church life.

In reply to some Erastians, who held that there was no longer a special sacred calling to the ministry, and to the Seekers, who held that there had been no true ministers for many centuries, Gillespie speaks of the ministry as 'a perpetual standing ordinance of Christ in his Church to the end of the world'.³⁷ This view he supports from biblical passages such as Matthew 28:19-20, which Gillespie applies only to preachers, and Ephesians 4:11-13, with its reference to God's gift of 'pastors and teachers'.

It is Gillespie's contention that there always have been and always will be lawfully ordained ministers in the church of Christ. Reformed theologians in maintaining this position had to face the question of the validity of the ordination (at Roman Catholic hands) of the first Reformed pastors. The approach of Gillespie is to say that, in spite of its evident corruptions, Rome before the Reformation 'was even then a church'.³⁸ Hence he concludes

that those who were ordained in the church of Rome before the reformation, in so far as they were ordained in the name of Christ, by those who had been themselves ordained presbyters as well as bishops,

35 *Ibid.*, ch. 6, p. 52.

36 *Ibid.*, 1: 2.

37 *Miscellany*, ch. 1, p. 1.

38 *Miscellany*, ch. 4, p. 27.

and authorised to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, this far they were true and lawful ministers, truly and lawfully ordained.³⁹ Although continuity in ministry was not held to be essential, Gillespie argues that it did in fact exist. In this he reflects a strong commitment by Scots Presbyterians to a kind of 'apostolic succession'.⁴⁰

As we would expect, Gillespie denies that Reformed ministers form any kind of priesthood. Where, in his view, prophetic passages such as Isaiah 66:21 refer to priests in the New Testament era, they designate ministers 'for their offering up of the Gentiles to God by the preaching of the gospel'.⁴¹

It is also significant that Gillespie equates 'bishop' in the New Testament with 'pastor', so that he argues, for example, that in Acts 20 Paul is meeting with 'the bishops or pastors of the church of Ephesus'.⁴² The same argument is to be found in Alexander Henderson's *The Unlawfulness and Danger of Limited Prelacie* (1641).⁴³

Two vital issues with regard to the office of minister are considered at length by Gillespie, election and ordination.

39 *Ibid.* It is interesting to note that when John Knox was challenged regarding the status of his ministry, he argues on the basis of an extraordinary call of God. In debate with Quintin Kennedy of Crossraguel in 1562 Knox argued that Protestant ministers received their ministerial authority direct from God and that, due to the corruption of the Roman ministry, God had temporarily suspended the usual order of calling ministers. See John Knox, *Works*, edited by David Laing (Edinburgh, 1854), vol. 6, pp. 191-2, and the discussion in Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp. 72-5.

40 This is helpfully discussed by James Walker in *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* (1888; r.p., Edinburgh, 1982), ch.7.

41 *Miscellany*, ch. 1, p. 3. Cf. Rom. 15:15-16, the source of this idea.

42 *Assertion*, Pt. 2, ch.3, p. 48.

43 Henderson, *The Unlawfulness and Danger of Unlimited Prelacie, or Perpetual Presidencie in the Church, Briefly Discovered* (London, 1641), p. 4.

1. Election of ministers. Scottish Reformed theology has always put great stress on the right of the people to elect their own minister: in the *First Book of Discipline* (1560), the Fourth Head on the lawful election of ministers is longer than those on the sacraments and on abolishing idolatry.⁴⁴

Gillespie too asserts the need for the consent of the people to be obtained in the election of a pastor. He has no truck, however, with Brownist or Anabaptist ideas about ecclesiastical government being in the hands of the whole congregation: he believes it is necessary for only the eldership to vote, although any member may bring forward objections against the candidate, and he maintains the rights of the presbytery regarding the examination and ordination of the candidate.⁴⁵

Gillespie assembles a wide range of arguments from Scripture, the history of the early church, Protestant writers and churches, 'sound reason' and the 'confessions' (*i.e.* admissions) of opponents. Greatest weight is placed on Acts 14:23, set during the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, which contains the words 'when they had ordained them elders in every church' (KJV). Gillespie argues at length that *cheirotoneo* really indicates 'election by raising of hands'.⁴⁶ Much has to be inferred from the available evidence, and the influence of Reformed tradition is evident in his conclusion:

[liberty of consent] we ascribe to the whole church, without whose knowledge and consent ministers may not be intruded; [counsel or deliberation] to the ablest and wisest men of the congregation, especially to magistrates, with whose special advice, privity, and deliberation, the matter ought to be managed; the third, which is the formal and consistorial determination of the case of election consisteth in the votes of the eldership.⁴⁷

44 *The First Book of Discipline*, edited by J.K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972).

45 All of these issues are discussed in detail in *Miscellany*, ch. 2.

46 For a consideration of the meaning of *cheirotoneo* see standard lexicons such as Arndt-Gingrich-Danker and G. Abbott-Smith. The patristic development of the term is described by George Every in 'Cheirotonia and Ordination' in *SJT* 9 (1956), pp. 175-82.

47 *Miscellany*, ch. 2, p. 11.

2. Ordination of ministers. In this matter, it is Gillespie's concern to insist, in opposition to Independents and Anabaptists, that ordination is essential to a valid ministry, and is not merely the ratification of the call of the congregation. It is lawful ordination, after proper election, that constitutes a person a minister.⁴⁸ Ordination is 'the solemn setting apart of a person to some publick church office'.⁴⁹

The laying on of hands is not considered necessary to ordination: it is not part of the 'substance, essence and formal act of ordination'.⁵⁰ It may, however, be used, following the example of the primitive church, as long as it is not considered to be a 'sacred significant ceremony'.⁵¹

Copious scriptural arguments are mustered in the *Dispute* and the *Miscellany* in support of the necessity of ordination for ministers, including Romans 10:15 ('how can they preach unless they are sent?'). His conclusion regarding the act of ordination is this:

To the whole presbytery, made up of those two sorts of elders, belonged the act of ordination, which is MISSION; howbeit the right, which was impositions of hands, belonged to those elders *alone* which laboured in the word and doctrine.⁵²

The Office of Ruling Elder

From the Reformation onwards, Reformed churches have generally had two kinds of elders: those who preach, teach and exercise oversight of the congregation and those who exercise oversight only (ruling elders or, simply, elders). There has, however, been great diversity in understanding the nature of this second office.⁵³ Do ministers and elders hold

48 *Ibid.* See also Henderson, *The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1641), p. 5.

49 As defined in the Westminster Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*.

50 *Miscellany*, ch. 3, p. 15.

51 This phrase is used in Gillespie's discussion of the issue in *Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*, Digression 1, pp. 160-68.

52 *Dispute*, p. 167.

53 A useful survey of the debate about the eldership in American Presbyterianism in the middle of the nineteenth century, involving

entirely separate offices or is the eldership one office with two different functions? How is the ruling elder related to the *presbuteros* in the New Testament?

This diversity was reflected in the members of the Westminster Assembly.⁵⁴ The Scots, together with the Independents and others, argued that ruling elders were explicitly warranted by Scripture and so their office was *jure divino*. Others of the English were very reluctant to accept such a position and some had serious reservations about the whole concept of ruling elders. The debates were inconclusive and the matter was remitted to a committee. The resulting statement in the *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* does little to clarify the office of those who are 'when called thereunto... to join with the minister in the government of the church'.

Gillespie argues strongly in the first part of his *Assertion* that Scripture warrants the office of ruling elder, which is distinguished from that of the pastor by its lacking the power of order, by which a pastor preaches, administers the sacraments, prays in public and performs marriages.⁵⁵

The arguments produced by Gillespie are as follows:⁵⁶

(i) **The example of the Jewish church.** His basic premise is: 'Whatsoever kind of office-bearers the Jewish church had, not as it was Jewish, but as it was a church, such ought the Christian church to have also.'⁵⁷ On this basis Gillespie argues that the priests, Levites, doctors and elders of the Jewish system have parallels in the Christian church. This, however, does not deal adequately with the function of priests, which Gillespie reduces to teaching and governing,

such theologians as Samuel Miller, R.J. Breckinridge, J.H. Thornwell, Charles Hodge and Thomas Smyth, is provided by Iain Murray in 'Ruling Elders – A Sketch of a Controversy', *The Banner of Truth* 235 (April 1983), pp. 1-9.

54 The debate lasted from 22 November to 7 December 1643, without reaching agreement. See the full account in Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-74. See also John R. de Witt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (Kampen, 1969), pp. 78-86.

55 *Assertion*, Pt. 1, ch. 2.

56 See *Assertion*, Pt. 1, chs. 3-7.

57 *Assertion*, Pt. 1, ch. 3, p. 13.

and there is a blurring of the Temple and (later) synagogue systems.

(ii) **Matthew 18:17: 'Tell it to the church'**. In this instance Gillespie argues that the eldership in the New Testament is representative. This, however, has to be proved on other grounds, and brings us back to the case made for Presbyterian polity in general. The verse itself is not proof of the office of ruling elder.

(iii) **Romans 12:8: the use of spiritual gifts**. Gillespie argues that in fact Paul is making reference to ecclesiastical *offices*, so that 'he that ruleth' indicates ruling elders. In Gillespie's view Paul is *not* speaking of gifts given to the whole body of Christ. Unfortunately he has to propose a new office of 'visitors of the sick' and must translate *praxis* (v.4.) as 'office' (as KJV does), in spite of the lack of linguistic support.⁵⁸

(iv) **1 Corinthians 12:28**. Again Gillespie believes that offices rather than gifts for the whole body are in view, and so he applies 'governments' to ruling elders. They may well be in view in the verse, but the danger is of proving too much from the available evidence. Other texts must show who actually exercises 'government'.

(v) **1 Timothy 5:17: teaching and ruling elders**. Although the Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* makes no reference to this text, it was widely used by the Scots and by other English Presbyterians outside the Assembly.⁵⁹ Like his fellow-countrymen, Gillespie wants to identify contemporary 'elders' with those formally given the title in the New Testament. He believes that his argument 'riseth from the plain text, than which what could be clearer?'⁶⁰ It is clear that Gillespie was a strong proponent of the 'presbyter theory' of the eldership, although his case is

58 Modern commentators, including conservative Presbyterians, do not share Gillespie's exegesis of this passage, See e.g. William Hendriksen, *Romans* (Edinburgh, 1981), *ad loc.*

59 Examples are cited by Mitchell in *The Westminster Assembly, its History and Standards*, Note G, pp. 487-90.

60 *Assertion*, 1: 7, p. 21.

hampered by an unwillingness to equate *presbuteros* and *episcopos*.⁶¹

The Scots in general had a high regard for the role of ruling elders. Thus in the courts of the church they have an equal voice with ministers, as Gillespie believes happened at the council of Jerusalem. A court is not properly constituted unless it represents the 'hearers' of the Word as well as the 'teachers'. As those designated in Scripture 'rulers' and 'governors', ruling elders should vote and judge in cases coming before them.⁶²

This regard for ruling elders is perhaps undermined by a lack of attention to their ordination, in contrast to that of ministers. Gillespie does insist that ordination is necessary: there is to be a 'deputation of them unto their presbyterial functions, together with public exhortation unto them, and prayer in the Church for them',⁶³ but no further details are given. The Assembly's documents have, however, even less to say on the subject.

Sacramental Discipline

Gillespie devotes a large portion of *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* to defending the Presbyterian view that the church has authority to excommunicate unrepentant 'scandalous' offenders and also that prior to being excommunicated such offenders may be suspended from the Lord's table.⁶⁴ He thus opposes the Erastians, who held that all discipline should be in the hands of the civil magistrate, and argues at length against the views of William Prynne, a Presbyterian who nevertheless believed in the supremacy of the state over the church, who had recently denied the practice of suspension.

In speaking of discipline Gillespie is careful to stress that this power is in the hands of the eldership, not of any

61 The direction of Calvin's thinking on this issue is helpfully examined in R.E.H. Uprichard, 'The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin', *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989), pp. 21-37. Important discussions will be found in T.M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London, 1902), and J.B. Lightfoot, *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age* (London, 1892).

62 *Assertion*, Pt. 1, ch. 13.

63 *Ibid.*, ch. 14, p. 38.

64 *Aaron's Rod*, Bk. 3, pp. 156-276.

individual, and that 'their power is given them to edification, and not to destruction'.⁶⁵ Only ecclesiastical offences are in view, not civil matters such as debt, and Gillespie underlines that suspension and excommunication relate to 'scandalous sinners', not to those committing 'such sinful infirmities as all the godly in this life are guilty of'.⁶⁶ In the exercise of discipline, as described by Gillespie, there is to be both warm pastoral concern, which does no harm to weak or doubting Christians, and holy zeal, which seeks to preserve the sanctity of the Lord's supper. As he expresses it:

God forbid we be censorious, peremptory, and rigid in our judging of men's spiritual estate; where there is any thing of Christ, it is to be cherished, not quenched. But again, God forbids that we shut our eyes to call darkness light, or black white.⁶⁷

To support his view of sacramental discipline Gillespie puts great weight on two passages of Scripture:

(i) **Matthew 18:15-17**. This passage Gillespie relates to sins rather than to personal injuries. He believes that Jesus is setting out the procedure to be followed by the church in dealing with such cases, culminating in excommunication, described as treating the offender 'as a heathen man and a publican'. Such a sentence is to be passed only for the 'public scandalous sin'⁶⁸ of refusing to listen to the church. This passage is exegeted in great (if not always convincing) detail and a wide range of opposing interpretations refuted.

(ii) **1 Corinthians 5**. The phrase 'Let us keep the feast' (v. 8) is used by Gillespie to justify an application of this passage to the Lord's supper. Particular attention is given to Paul's instruction in verse 5, 'deliver such a one unto Satan' and also to the words 'no, not to eat' (v. 11), which Gillespie is convinced include a reference to the Lord's supper.

One argument against keeping unrepentant sinners from the Lord's supper, which was used by Prynne, was the alleged presence of Judas at the Last Supper. Gillespie considers the matter thoroughly in order to prove that Judas had left before the institution of the supper, although he creates problems for himself by proposing that there were two suppers that

65 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

night.⁶⁹ More satisfactory is Gillespie's careful argumentation against the Lord's supper being viewed as a 'converting ordinance'.⁷⁰

Contemporary Relevance

A review of modern evangelical writing on ecclesiology might suggest that Gillespie's seventeenth-century polemics have no relevance to the contemporary church.⁷¹ Considerations of the sociology of the early Christian movement⁷² or of how the concept of 'community' is to be understood⁷³ are of much greater interest than arcane exegetical debates regarding the intricacies of Presbyterianism. At first sight, Gillespie appears to inhabit an entirely different world from present-day writers.

The issues which Gillespie addresses, however, are of perennial relevance and the core of the Presbyterian model which he defends embodies principles which must be taken into account in any ecclesiology which claims to be biblical. These are not vitiated by Gillespie's eisegesis or his tendency to see seventeenth-century Scotland mirrored exactly in the New Testament. The following principles are of particular importance:

(i) The church is a structured institution. Is the church to be thought of as an organism or an institution? A diversity of models of the church have been proposed⁷⁴ and in recent years, in reaction to undue stress on institutional models, the focus has been on the church as an organism, giving rise to such ideas as body-life and every-member

69 *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, chs. 8-10.

70 *Ibid.*, chs. 12-14.

71 A useful sample of modern discussion can be found in the essays in the two WEF-sponsored collections, edited by D.A. Carson, *Biblical Interpretation and the Church. Text and Context* (Exeter, 1984) and *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Exeter, 1987).

72 E.g. Derek Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament* (Exeter, 1983).

73 E.g. Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Exeter, 1980).

74 A wide-ranging discussion from within Roman Catholicism is Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1987).

ministry. Institutions tend to be thought of as inflexible and lifeless.

A balance is needed, however, if an ecclesiology is to be faithful to all that Scripture says about the church. As well as being a living body, the church is also a building (still growing), an organisation with a definite structure and order. This perspective is well set out by Gillespie. The description which he gives to the church on several occasions, 'an ecclesiastical republic', makes the point well. Any movement which exists over a period of time inevitably develops structures of some kind: Gillespie's ecclesiology is a reminder that such structures should be formulated in the light of Scripture rather than developing in an *ad hoc* manner.

(ii) Church leaders are a gift from God. Although Gillespie is careful to maintain the right of the people to elect their church office-bearers and the duty of the church to test those called to office, he thinks of the ministers and elders as the gift of the reigning Christ to his church for its spiritual welfare. Gillespie stresses that Christ has provided for every need of his people, and a pre-eminent part of that provision is spiritually-gifted and duly-ordained leaders. Ordination is a recognition by the church of the gift that God has given.

(iii) Ruling elders are an essential element in church government. As already noted, Gillespie in his writings and in his contributions to the Assembly debates contended vigorously for the Scots Presbyterian institution of ruling elders, in spite of a measure of English resistance. In doing so he was maintaining the New Testament pattern of placing the government of the church in the hands of a group not made up exclusively of preachers. Elders elected from within the congregation are to be set apart by ordination to exercise leadership along with the minister. The leadership of the church is to be corporate and not confined to a professional 'clerical' caste. Presbyterians have always been sure that this was the scriptural way, although they have differed widely regarding the precise standing of ruling elders and their practice has often failed to match their theory. The basic commitment to having leaders chosen from among the people is nevertheless sound and carefully defended by Gillespie.

(iv) Ecclesiastical authority is to be exercised at several levels. Gillespie assembles sufficient evidence to indicate that in the New Testament church the eldership of a local congregation was not the only locus of authority. Assemblies representing wider areas, such as the council of Jerusalem, were able to issue authoritative decisions on matters concerning a number of congregations. The Independents' explanation of these assemblies as being solely consultative does not do justice to the evidence.

It is not necessary to find an exact representation of the Scottish variety of Presbyterianism in the New Testament for the principle to be accepted. One expression of the church's identity as the body of Christ is the concern and responsibility that the parts have for each other, expressed in part by the exercise of authoritative oversight by assemblies representing increasing numbers of congregations. At a time when authority in different spheres is often flouted and when many have little conception of church authority, Gillespie expounds important truths regarding the authority of church assemblies, including their responsibility for pastoral oversight of congregations under their jurisdiction.

(v) The Lord's supper is to be kept holy. Underlying all that Gillespie says about sacramental discipline is a deep concern to preserve the sanctity of the ordinance. It is not enough for the church to leave the matter of coming to the table to individual consciences. Where there is flagrant sin, without any sign of repentance (and only in such cases), the elders are to act in order to keep the sacrament from being profaned. Gillespie's position is very far from contemporary attitudes to the Lord's supper among many church members, yet his concern is biblical, and is not devoid of warm pastoral concern.

Gillespie, like many of his contemporaries, had a big vision of the church. He thought of the Reformed church in European terms and longed for greater cooperation among those who shared his convictions. As barriers of all kinds come down throughout the Europe of the 1990s and beyond, such a vision for unity in the truth is again a challenging possibility to be pursued.

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church

Pontifical Biblical Commission, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 1993; 130pp., £4.99; ISBN 88 209 1927 3

This small paperback contains two items. The major one is a document produced by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church', but it is preceded by an address given by the Pope on 23rd April, 1993, on the occasion of the official presentation to him of the document and simultaneously of celebration of the earlier encyclicals '*Providentissimus Deus*' and '*Divino Afflante Spiritu*', both of which were devoted to the same theme.

The present document and the two encyclicals are all concerned to encourage the study of the Bible as Sacred Scripture. The Pope's address highlights what he considers to be permanently valid elements in the earlier documents. Catholic exegetes were exhorted to counter liberal exegesis, not by retreating from biblical criticism, but by becoming better at it than their adversaries. They were to seek for the spiritual message, not as a separate exercise but by means of exegetical science. The inspiration of the Bible was understood by analogy with the incarnation: 'so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error'. Nevertheless, 'historico-critical' study was commended. The sacred books 'have been dictated by the Holy Spirit himself', and therefore the guidance of the Spirit is necessary for their interpretation. At the same time right interpretation necessitates fidelity to 'the Church'. The Second Vatican Council stated: 'All that has been said about the manner of interpreting the Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the word of God.' Consequently biblical interpreters should remain close to the preaching ministry, participating in it themselves and maintaining relations with others who exercise it. The ultimate goal of the Scriptures is indeed 'to put believers into a personal relationship with God'.

Commenting on the new document, the Pope commends the use of all the new methods of study but 'with the historico-critical basis freed from its philosophical presuppositions or those contrary to the truth of our faith'. We must concentrate neither on the human aspects of revelation (the mistake of the historico-critical method) nor on the divine (the mistake of fundamentalism). The Bible needs to be translated and inculturated for different peoples. May the Catholic scholars, then, be guided by Jesus Christ, and may the Virgin Mary serve as a model to them.

All this is a surprising mixture of languages to say things that many a conservative Protestant would say and indeed could hardly express any better, and things that are typically Catholic in their stress on the role of the Church (I suspect that only one denomination is seen within this horizon!).

The actual document itself fills out the summary given by the Pope (who had confessedly read it before it was presented to him). It emerges that the occasion for the document is the rise of new synchronic methods of biblical criticism alongside the traditional diachronic historico-critical method.

The first main section is intended to be descriptive of the various methods. It regards the historico-critical method as indispensable, but notes that sometimes it did little more than dissolve the text into sources and ignored the message of the final form of the text. More recently, it has paid more attention to 'an analysis of the editorial process' which enables us 'to understand far more accurately the intention of the authors and editors of the Bible, as well as the message which they addressed to their first readers'. In itself the method should be objective and neutral with no *a priori* principles accompanying it. It can accommodate synchronic as well as diachronic approaches.

The document moves on to consider briefly the characteristics of rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis and semiotic analysis (structuralism), indicating the value and the possible limitations of each. It discusses the 'canonical' approach (distinguishing the approaches of Brevard Childs and Sanders), the light thrown by study of Jewish interpretative methods, and the light thrown by a study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text (*i.e.* the history of its effects on subsequent readers and their interpretation of it). Illumination of the text can also be gained by sociological, cultural anthropological, and psychological methods. And people coming at the text from their own context, as in liberation theology and feminist approaches, have also something to contribute. The danger of tendentiousness in both of these contextualised approaches is stressed. Finally, there is a section on the Fundamentalism which tends 'to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit' (where have we recently heard that before from a somewhat authoritative source?) and refuses to accept that the Word has been expressed in human language 'by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources'; consequently it 'places undue stress upon the inerrancy of certain details'. And, of course, it 'separates the interpretation of the Bible from the Tradition'.

The next sub-section deals with 'hermeneutical questions', and recognises that some theories (*e.g.* Bultmann's) are inadequate. The literal, spiritual and 'fuller' senses of Scripture are discussed, rather too briefly to be helpful.

The third section discusses 'characteristics of Catholic interpretation'. Inevitably this is about the relation of biblical interpretation to tradition;

the Bible itself contains much reinterpretation of tradition. The important place of the Fathers of the Church in establishing the main lines of interpretation is discussed. A place is found for 'all the members of the Church' in interpretation, but it is pretty weak.

In the fourth section, on 'interpretation of the Bible in the life of the church', it is stressed that exegetes do not have a monopoly. The message of the Bible is actualised in the church. There follow some notes which could be guidelines for a Bible study group – determine the literal sense accurately; interpret Scripture by Scripture; find what Scripture is saying to the present situation; avoid tendentious interpretation which may be based on theoretical principles at variance with the Bible or which are contrary to 'evangelical justice and charity' (e.g. racism).

In attempting some general evaluation of the document, we would comment, first, that the earlier impression of an extraordinary mixture of technical scholarship, Catholic dogma and practical down-to-earth advice on Bible study is confirmed. Maybe it seems extraordinary only to an outside, Protestant observer. One also gains the impression that rather too much ground is being covered in a short compass with the result that some topics are covered too quickly to be really helpful.

Second, the document does not really explain how to interpret an actual text. It has a lot to say about critical methods, and clearly a major concern is to justify the most recent methods to scholars, warning rightly against their misuse and commending, again rightly, their positive uses. However, critical methods of the sort described are not what people primarily use when they are explaining a text. When the document does get down to the exegesis and application of a text, it descends to a rather simple level.

Third, without being patronising, surely we can welcome and approve of the thoroughly positive attempts that are being made here to allow the Bible to speak and to free it from liberal exegesis. Unfortunately, it is precisely at the point of how one practises the historico-critical approach without the alien presuppositions that made the liberal interpretation of Scripture so innocuous and weak that the document gives us very little guidance. Perhaps all of us who try to do so find ourselves setting off to walk a tightrope with no very clear instructions on how to survive till we reach the other side.

Fourth, the Protestant is puzzled by the continuing subordination of biblical interpretation to the Church and the Tradition. One cannot see how a Luther or a Calvin should have arisen and survived in this context ('Are you alone right?' they are said to have asked him. Well, yes, he was right, but they had forgotten the legions on his side.) The role of the Bible in challenging the Tradition somehow does not get a proper hearing.

Fifth, it is the Fundamentalists who get the most stick, despite the fact that the present Pope himself cites approvingly those parts of the earlier documents which give them most support. Who are these

Fundamentalists? Apparently the Protestants who defended the Fundamentals in 1895 and their successors. We are given blanket descriptions of these people and their errors which certainly fit some contemporary Christians, but which are by no means true of all and emphatically not of those excellent men who stood out against liberalism in 1895. If the truth be told, although Fundamentalism is here attacked most strongly, it is the Fundamentalists who have stood closest to the truth of the Gospels when liberals and Catholics between them have succeeded in hiding and misunderstanding it.

But, finally, one cannot but be heartened by the tone of many remarks in this little book which so emphasise the importance of Scripture, of understanding it aright, and of reading and studying it diligently in the church. Ultimately, we may believe, not even the Tradition of the Church can muzzle the lion itself. Equally, however, we must confess that Protestants – including the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals – all try in our own ways to muzzle that same Word of God and must also learn to submit to it.

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Editor's note: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* has now been published also by SCM Press (London, 1995; 176pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 334 02589 3), ed. J.L.Houlden, with comments.

REVIEWS

Integrative Theology: vol 2: Our Primary Need: Christ's Atoning Provisions

Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990; 574pp., \$34.99; ISBN 0 310 39240 3

The authors of this very substantial work claim 'a new and distinctive approach to theology' which starts with a defined problem, surveys alternative solutions, reviews biblical material, in consequence formulates a doctrine, defends it and finally applies it. In fact, the novel element over against standard conservative works consists only in the first two steps. Whereas standard treatments start with the general and draw in particular problems, this approach starts with a problem and progresses to the general. The method of course mimics doctrinal history. It also runs the risk of a self-imposed selectivity. However, it enjoys the virtue of being educationally sound by 'scratching where it itches'. It also avoids the sanitised detached calm of much traditional doctrinal theology. It has recognised that most people do not hunger for systems but nearly everyone poses problems and asks questions. As a response to this challenge the book is a success. It captures the interest through posing problems and holds it by surveying solutions. It does not lack courage in seeking integration of varied views where it can and defending a moderately conservative position where it cannot do other. But the programme seems too ambitious. It attempts too many tasks at once, a trap facing all who attempt to treat doctrine 'in the round' today.

The result can be too hurried a handling of quite complex matters. Even the problem or question at the head of a section can be too naive or oversimplified. Christology begins with the heading 'The Statement of the Problem'. But there is more than one problem in Christology. If the title is a reference to the so-called 'Christological Problem' then stating it in the form, 'How could the Eternal Word of the divine Spirit become a temporal child of human flesh?' is not enough. The 'Christological Problem' is much more complex and nuanced than that. The next chapter, 'The Messiah's Divineness and Humanness', is nearer to it. This is only one example of what seems an oversimplistic approach that will not help the defence of orthodox views which the authors seek to justify. This raises the problem of the book's purpose. It is very readable and practical and has an entry-point character, setting out mainly basic material. This suggests it is written for the theological student or thoughtful non-professional. Yet terms like 'Whiteheadian', 'relationist', 'Functionalist' are introduced without explanation. Another, though less damaging, symptom is the introduction of important names without background, initials or references.

In the end, the ultimate challenge which proves too much is the book's own ambitious programme. It simply is not possible to follow through all the set stages with the required thoroughness and carefulness that an academic work requires. It is not even possible to do this with the biblical texts alone if the treatment intends to be critical. Imagine how long a book would be that had the title *Christ in the Bible: a Critical Consideration of All the Texts!* A book with a broader task can only hope to serve as an introduction and cannot therefore claim to settle too many problems, quite a difficulty for a book that claims mainly to address problems. In that case, it should not assume too heavy a mantle. A better title might have been *Introductory Theology – an Integrative Approach*. If the reader approaches it in this way and does not worry too much about some oversimplifications there is much to be gained. The summary of the main issues over evolution and creation, for instance, is excellent. The book has the supreme merit for non-theologians of not being too compressed. Nor is it arid in style. A theological student would certainly find it useful though lengthy. Verdict: a courageous assault on the impossible.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination

Walter Wink

Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992; 424pp., \$18.95; ISBN 0 8006 2646 X

In a world dominated by multi-national corporations, banks and political systems, Walter Wink has brought prophetic insight to how the church should fight the good fight. Following his previous works, *Naming the Powers* and *Unmasking the Powers*, the final book of the trilogy investigates how faith relates to the biblical concept of 'the principalities and powers' in the world today. He challenges us to discern, engage and resist the powers which all too often have captured the church as an institution.

In this volume, Wink presents the powers as propping up systems which dominate all human life. He analyses the violent nature of domination systems from the Ancient Near Eastern creation myths, Old Testament sacrifice and the meaning of the cross to the Nazi holocaust. The thesis thread through is about a myth of redemptive violence which has been pre-eminent throughout human history. Today it is alive in foreign policy, nationalism, militarism, the media, comics and cartoon shows. Wink is critical of Frank Peretti's best-selling novel *This Present Darkness* for failing to relate evil spirits to the systemic evil of racism, sexism and political patronage.

Wink's insight into the principalities and powers is basically a Reformed one. (Thomas McAlpine's *Facing the Powers* provides an overview of different theological perspectives.) The powers were created good, but they have fallen and demonstrate a tendency to evil. However, they are reconcilable and able to be redeemed. Following G.B. Caird's work (*Principalities and Powers*), we understand that the vocation of the powers is to worship the Lord as they did at creation (Job 38:4-7). But far from praising the Lord of creation and establishing order, the powers are at work to undo creation. Under the guise of the social, economic, religious and moral order they make for chaos and corruption. Their power is the power of death, but along with creation they will ultimately be reconciled to Christ (Col. 1:20). 'The goal is not only our becoming free from the Powers, however, but freeing the Powers: not only reconciling people to God despite the Powers, but reconciling the Powers to God.' The transformation will extend to the basic structures of the world and 'every aspect of reality, even the social framework of existence'.

In my view, some of the biblical interpretation rests far too heavily upon methods of redaction criticism, which is unsatisfactory because it is basically unverifiable and speculative. Further critical study is required to examine whether the ethic of non-violence can be supported. I particularly appreciate his exposition of an integral world view which takes us beyond the paradigms of the Enlightenment and the divisions of spiritual / material, sacred / secular, supernatural / natural. Wink applies God's dominion-free order to racism, the family, law, women and children, healing and exorcism, but I am surprised at the lack of attention given to the environment and our relationship to the planet. How is the environment a fallen power? What does this mean for the ozone layer, fishing and farming, destruction of rain forests, waste disposal and recycling? Is there an interpretive framework here for understanding the mystery of creation's 'acts of God'? The last section considers the place and power of prayer in the spiritual battle with evil systems in today's world. 'History belongs to the intercessors... Recognition of the role of the Powers in blocking prayer can revolutionise the way that we pray.'

I believe that this is a book which we must read. Its subject is one which we cannot ignore and should not trivialise. Understanding the principalities and powers is of missiological significance for the church and the world.

Robert Calvert, St Mark's Church of Scotland, Drumchapel, Glasgow

Worship: Adoration and Action

Edited by D.A. Carson

Paternoster, Carlisle, 1993; 252pp., £13.99; ISBN 0 835364 523 X

This is the fifth and final volume of a series produced by the Faith and Church Study Unit of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Previous volumes dealt with biblical interpretation, text and context, prayer and justification.

The Study Unit under Carson's direction aimed to produce a volume which would not merely look at the mechanics of worship, but pay greater attention to establishing a biblical and systematic theology of worship and at the same time offering some theologically based critique of current worship practices. Carson freely confesses in the introduction that the book falls short of achieving these goals and that 'the disagreements of the Study Unit have not been papered over'. It may well be that the strength of this volume lies in its disagreements rather than in an unrealistic offering of conformity.

It consists of basically four sections. The first contains two long papers under the heading 'Toward a Biblical Theology of Worship'. Yoshiaki Hattori offers a 'Theology of Worship in the Old Testament' and draws an historical line from creation to late Jewish history in the period before Christ, pointing out the development of theological thinking about worship as time and the historical situation (e.g. the exilic period) of the Israelites progressed. While some may find this overview helpful, many will regret that Hattori fails to draw attention to any major underlying theme and offers us a summary of different Old Testament approaches to worship rather than a directive approach. I suspect that a more unified approach could have been argued for.

In contrast to this, David Peterson's chapter on 'Worship in the New Testament' may be criticised by some for being not open enough to different approaches. Peterson moves beyond thinking about worship in terms of prayers and songs and examines it in the theological context of Jesus as the object of worship. Worship is our life lived in submission and service to him. This is a majestic chapter, quite worthy of publication in its own right.

The rest of the book – examining worship in the heritage of the Magisterial Reformation and in some 'Free Church' traditions, as well as from a systematic perspective – varies in value according to the contributor and the perspective of the reader. One doubts, for example, if all within the Presbyterian tradition would agree with Edmund Clowney's solemn chapter, which reads more like a lecture from church history than a paper on worship. There are moving accounts of worship from the Reformed to the charismatic, from Bolivia to Guatemala.

As readers close the book they may feel no further forward in their search for the answer to the question 'What is worship about?', for they will have been given not only one but many answers. Yet this 'failing' that Carson mentions in the introduction is the strength. Are we not enriched as we learn from each other and share in different worship traditions?

The book has indexes of names and Bible passages. There are extensive notes for each chapter.

Ian G. Yule, Kirkintilloch Baptist Church

Orthodox Perspectives on Mission

Aram Keshishian

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, 1992; 138pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 7459 2685 1

This is a concise and clear treatment of several topical themes, written by the author for different contexts between 1978 and 1992. Keshishian is the primate in Lebanon of the Armenian Orthodox Church, and currently moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. In each article or transcribed talk he presents the Orthodox understanding of theology and human life, and how his Confession's views can contribute to, and in some cases correct, traditional Western and WCC thinking.

Justice, Peace and Creation. Justice is the gift of God, his mercy and love towards humankind – not a human achievement. Western theology introduced a dichotomy between God and humanity, and creation; for the sake of human progress, the latter had to be exploited; in contrast, Orthodox theology maintains a dynamic unity between humanity and creation. The first two chapters have excellent biblical word-studies on the three topics, and assert the importance of a theocentric, rather than a christocentric, understanding of human endeavour. In the following two chapters, Keshishian brings in the eucharist, and presents it as central to mission – perhaps in contrast to Protestant views which would normally see baptism as the marketplace sacrament, and Communion the sacrament of the upper room. During an interesting look at anthropology, this ecumenical statesman manages to quote Tillich, Barth and Athanasius all in one paragraph! He insists that the anthropological dimension is essential for Christian theology, for otherwise the latter is reduced to metaphysics.

The Holy Spirit. Chapters 4 and 5 were written in preparation for the Canberra WCC Assembly. The treatment is congenial and non-controversial – which means that readers will not find the answers to most of their questions! Keshishian takes a high view of baptism ('a personal Pentecost'). He raises two pivotal questions for the WCC: a)

how will it deal with 'renewal' movements and new forms of Christian life? b) how can mainline churches 'come out of the ghetto'? This section includes some interesting comments on the Middle East, which should be read along with an earlier paper delivered in Hungary in 1989 and included later in the book. He cites Pope Shenouda, 'Christian division started in the Middle East. Christian unity must start from the Middle East.'

Authority, Unity and Mission. First a critical introduction to Vatican I, and a look at infallibility – Evangelicals and the Orthodox are at one here. He goes on to discuss the papacy, and is happy to concede a 'primacy of honour', but not of authority. In the Middle East, he sees mission primarily as dialogue without compromise, and disavows 'the conversion of Islam' as a goal of mission. Keshishian presents Orthodox theology as a living ingredient in the WCC, not as a 'sort of flavour in the overwhelmingly Protestant structures', and lists the influence he claims his communion has had on the WCC in eight areas.

The Orthodox Church is much better known than it used to be, and books like this will help. Evangelicals will no doubt warm to its spirituality and its insistence on the priority of God, and note that it easily embraces former Protestants like Andrew Walker and George Dragas in Britain. They will remain perplexed by the now well-publicised scale of intrusion by the secular powers into the Orthodox Churches of former Eastern Europe. This publication is an excellent and economical way of finding Orthodox theology expounded by a church leader living in a far more dangerous place than most of us.

Jock Stein, Carberry Tower, Musselburgh

The Life of St Augustine

F.W. Farrar, edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993; 189pp., £5.99; ISBN 0 340 57773 8

The Life and Letters of Martin Luther

Preserved Smith, edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 340 57772 X

These are the launch titles in the series 'Spiritual Lives', which aims to provide 'challenge and inspiration from Christian greats of the past drawing on acknowledged autobiographical and biographical classics'. That Augustine and Luther qualify is beyond question. Farrar was a public-school headmaster and prominent Anglican of broad evangelical sympathies, best known for his lives of Christ and of Paul. His Augustine comes from his two-volume *Lives of the Fathers* (1889), here

shorn of the scholarly apparatus of footnotes (which has left unidentified some of the Victorian verse Farrar likes quoting). It is reliable (within the limits of Augustinian study in his day), seriously readable and inclined to moralize, but I doubt if it comes near to qualifying as a 'classic'.

Preserved Smith was a distinguished American historian of the Reformation who ended his career as Professor of History at Cornell. His *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, first published in 1911 (and similarly abridged by the series editor), has deservedly achieved a longer shelf-life than Farrar's Augustine because of its extensive quotation from Luther's correspondence, and occasionally from his table-talk. This prominent thread gives the account a lively immediacy that Farrar cannot match. It also distinguishes this biography of Luther from others on the market and justifies this reprinting. I would not myself have called the book a classic, but readers familiar with Bainton's *Here I Stand* or other commonly available biographies will find a freshness in the direct encounter with Luther's letters.

D.F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

An Evangelical Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

Edited by Paul Schotenboer

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1992; 60pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 85364 513 2

The World Council of Churches Faith and Order paper *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* has been more widely discussed than any comparable modern document. Better late than never the World Evangelical Fellowship has produced a 20-page response, here published together with the full text of *BEM*. It is always courteous, acknowledging the strengths of each section of *BEM* before advancing criticisms. It makes no reference to other evangelical assessments (such as the Rutherford House Forum Paper by the present reviewer published in 1984).

It has clearly not been an easy task for a body as diverse as WEF (whose membership includes some who do not hold to baptism or eucharist at all) to formulate an agreed response. At several points its comments make explicit the lack of a common mind among its constituency. Its main complaint against *BEM* is its 'sacramentalism', which seems to mean a belief that 'sacraments are efficacious signs, conveying the grace that they contain, and that grace is communicated by virtue of the rite'. This is not a wholly happy definition (in respect of 'contain' and 'by virtue of the rite'), but the general contention is clear enough.

Of the three sections, I judge the response to *BEM* on ministry the strongest, and that on baptism the weakest. The latter reveals the almost endemic evangelical inability to take Scripture at face value on baptism, e.g. in denying that 1 Corinthians 12:13 has anything to do with baptism, and in claiming that 'to base unity on the rite of baptism is entirely foreign to Scripture'. What about Ephesians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 1:13 (and, of course, 1 Corinthians 12:13)? A major difficulty here is the response's rejection of the role of sacraments as 'effective signs', which distances it from almost all the sixteenth-century Reformers. So be it; the Reformers were but interpreters of Scripture. On this point, however, I will side with them rather than with much of twentieth-century Evangelicalism.

D.F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Sermons on 2 Samuel

John Calvin (translated by Douglas Kelly)

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1992; xvii + 678pp., £19.95; ISBN 0 85151 578 9

One of church history's greatest scandals since the Reformation must be the fate that befell the manuscript copies of Calvin's sermons. The library of Geneva sold them off in 1806 as scrap paper! Some of the lost manuscripts were salvaged later, but sadly many are probably lost for ever. Thankfully the series on 2 Samuel were among those recovered. This series comprises a total of 87 sermons of which we have 43 translated into English from Calvin's French in the present volume. Calvin preached these sermons during 1562 and 1563 – in other words towards the close of his ministry and of his life (he died in 1564). These sermons, then, represent Calvin in full maturity. Moreover, they are especially valuable because Calvin produced no commentary on 2 Samuel.

Professor Kelly has given each sermon a title. This is helpful, but could be misleading to those unfamiliar with Calvin's style of preaching. Calvin did not preach on topics, but worked his way through biblical books, expounding them sentence by sentence. Thus one sermon could touch on a number of topics, depending on the portion of Scripture used. One thing that would have been helpful would have been to have had the Scripture texts printed in bold, as Calvin frequently refers to them during his exposition. This would not have been out of character with Calvin's method of giving running expositions and it would have given the book added value as a commentary. These, however, are minor quibbles and we are most grateful to have this volume available in English. We must congratulate Professor Kelly for producing a very readable translation. This is clearly a labour of love on his part! There is a brief, but useful

introduction that gives some helpful background to Calvin's preaching and to these sermons in particular.

As we glance through these sermons what strikes us at once is the diversity of subjects they cover. Calvin's subjects range from the inner spiritual life (*e.g.* the nature of true prayer, Sermon 26) to the nature of a just war (Sermon 30) and God's judgement on murderers (Sermon 11). This will strike many modern ears with some disparity. Those who advocate a shrunken form of Christianity and seek to limit their faith and the authority of Scripture to the inner spiritual life will find little profit here. For Calvin true prayer and just wars were not unrelated because he believed in a Sovereign Lord who claims every area of life and who, in Scripture, has revealed a comprehensive plan relating to the whole of reality. Expository preaching is the best antidote for narrow pietism. The expository preacher can duck no issue, but must relate Scripture to the whole of life – because Scripture relates to the whole of life. These sermons remind us of this and though we may not want to copy Calvin's style we must follow his goal.

My advice: if you have Calvin's commentaries make room on your shelf (between Joshua and the Psalms) for this volume; if you do not have his commentaries – shame on you!

Tony Baxter, Sheffield

Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics

Alister McGrath

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1992; 286pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 85110 969 1

This is a book characterised by both courage and humility. There is the courage which takes seriously the demanding task of building bridges between the gospel and the world. There is also the humility which acknowledges that such 'points of contact are not in themselves adequate to bring people into the kingdom of God'. McGrath stresses that 'Apologetics is at its best when it is aware of both its goals and its limitations.... Apologetics aims to create an intellectual and imaginative climate favourable to faith; it does not itself create that faith.'

McGrath is concerned with apologetics that is both effective and Christian. The Christian content of apologetics must not be lost. Our goal is 'to bring people to a specifically *Christian* faith'. We may not settle for a 'natural knowledge of God'. This may be 'a starting point... (of) real potential and value'. Nevertheless, without the Christ-centredness of the gospel, it remains 'a distorted knowledge of God'. This concern to keep Christ at the centre of apologetics may be seen in McGrath's discussion of suffering and pluralism: 'To discuss suffering without reference to the suffering of Christ is a theological and spiritual

absurdity'; 'It is... not Christianity which is being related to other faiths; it is little more than a parody and caricature of this living faith.'

In stressing the importance of *effective* apologetics, McGrath displays a good deal of sound commonsense, together with a deep-seated awareness that this is a spiritual task and not merely an intellectual game. He emphasizes 'the need to listen carefully, in order to maximise the effectiveness of apologetics to its potential audience'. He stresses that 'the general question [What stops people becoming Christians?] needs to be particularized: What stops *this* person coming to faith?' Emphasizing that 'effective apologetics is oriented towards individual situations', he insists that 'the apologist cannot be content to mumble vague generalities about the gospel, adopting a "to whom it may concern" approach which blunts the force of the gospel.' This work is much more than purely academic debate: 'dialogue may be long and difficult, involving patience as much as intelligence, and loving care as much as argument'.

This book is written in a popular style. It is very readable. It will not go over the heads of its readers. Nevertheless it should be pointed out that a great deal of learning is hidden in the background. McGrath's grasp of history, philosophy, theology and science is impressive. There are over 250 wide-ranging endnotes. Together with the list of books for further reading, these will prove a useful resource for those who wish to pursue certain matters further.

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

The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination, vol. 1: Theological Currents, the Setting and Mood, and the Trial Itself

Philip C. Holtrop

Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 1993; xxviii + 1033pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 7734 9248 8 (Book 1), 0 7734 9250 X (Book 2)

These two books constitute the first volume of a projected two-volume work on the controversy between Calvin and Bolsec (a projected second volume will contain translations of the relevant primary literature). Massive in terms of both size and scholarship, it will no doubt be a standard resource for future students of Calvin and the Reformed tradition.

Holtrop's work stands firmly in the tradition of Heiko Oberman (who, incidentally, writes the introduction). Attempting to resist the temptation of an ahistorical abstraction of theology from history, he analyses this most theological of disputes in terms not only of doctrine but also of social, political and personal tensions within and without Geneva. Calvin's pursuit of Bolsec is shown to be motivated not simply by his

desire for doctrinal purity, but also by his need to assert his power in the political realm. In the process of doing this, Holtrop attempts to show that Bolsec was not heterodox by the standards of Reformed orthodoxy at the time, and was not really that far removed from the position of other major Reformers, such as Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich.

While Holtrop's scholarship is exhaustive (the bibliography takes up 55 pages!), the work is vulnerable to criticism on two fronts. First, the sheer size of the work makes it a most intimidating read, and the blow-by-blow accounts of exchanges of letters and legal proceedings make the book ungainly and overlong. Furthermore, the vast number of endnotes (543 in chapter 1 alone) impede progress and serve to break the flow of otherwise coherent arguments. Many of these notes do contain very interesting and important material, but a different editorial policy might have made reading easier. Perhaps these drawbacks are a small price to pay for such a rich mine of information.

The second area of criticism is theological. Holtrop's work is throughout flavoured by his own theological agenda. He is quite open about the 'personal concerns' that led him to write the work: originally a scholastic Calvinist, he has since come to hold a position on election which, as far as I am able to judge, is very similar to that of the eminent Dutch theologian G.C. Berkouwer. It just so happens that Holtrop regards Bolsec as an early advocate of substantially the same position, and so the scene is set for the traditional use of church history as a polemical tool for the theology of today. The reader is left in no doubt that Bolsec's 'Christological' position represents the truth, while Calvin's 'theological' position is seriously deficient.

Church history must inevitably play an important role in the theology of today, but the historian must attempt as far as humanly possible to present historical theology in terms of its own historical context and not that of twentieth-century concerns, whether scholastic or neo-orthodox. In a way, this is what Holtrop has done, with his close analysis of social and political forces underlying the Bolsec debate. However, his openly partisan stance on the dogmatic issues involved make it impossible for the reader to assess the evidence presented dispassionately: if the book is, in part, aimed to alter the views of scholastic Calvinists, it is unlikely to do more than irritate them. It remains vital for those who wish to inject a dogmatic agenda into historical theology to engage in solid biblical exegesis. If, like Holtrop, they fail to do this, they are themselves vulnerable to the same criticism which they level at others: that they have a doctrine of God based on their own philosophical concerns rather than on revelation. This is not to pass judgement on Holtrop's views, with which I myself have some considerable sympathy, but simply to say that, while his excellent historical research has been exhaustive, he has left his self-imposed dogmatic task unfinished. The only way to convince others of the truth of his position is to show them that it

coincides with what divine revelation teaches, not with what Bolsec, Bullinger or any other fallible theologian, past or present, taught.

Carl R. Trueman, Department of Theology, University of Nottingham

The Doctrine of God

Gerald Bray

IVP, Leicester, 1993; 281pp., £12. 95; ISBN 0 85111 890 9

Gerald Bray's impressive work here is the first volume of a series entitled *Contours of Christian Theology* of which he is also the general editor. The contributions on major doctrines aim to complement the existing textbooks and to tackle contemporary issues. The series looks not only to defend but also 'rework' evangelical orthodoxy, yet in a style that is understandable to ministers, theological students and educated non-professionals.

Gerald Bray has certainly given us a very fine work. He has packed into a small space many needed clarifications, visions and delicious myth-breakers, all of this with a commitment that goes well beyond the cerebral. A typical example is the formidably informed discussion of early Christianity and classical culture: Christian thought led to pressure on Neoplatonism, not the other way round! On the other hand the fearless and unfashionable claim that we should regard 'omnipotence as God's fundamental attribute' will rustle a few feathers in evangelical nests too! We meet bold innovation all the way. Bray blazes his own trail whatever the subject: the divine attributes, the relation of time to eternity, election and reprobation, Islam and Christianity, Judaism and Christianity, or hermeneutics. One cannot always follow. Although otherwise excellent on Tertullian, he surely exaggerates when calling him a unitarian! No unitarian could have Tertullian's Christology.

Bray's most impressive contribution, though, is his case for seeing in the Reformers, especially Calvin, a way forward on the doctrine of the Trinity. It is superior to, though indebted to, the traditional Cappadocian and Augustinian approaches. His main contention is that formulations have fallen down by allowing a dominance to divine 'substance', so undermining the full integrity of the persons. We would do better to follow Calvin in respecting the limits of human knowledge of the divine 'substance' and rather focus upon the divine community of persons revealed in the gospel. This involves varied patterns of order but unity of operation. In this way, Bray follows through for Evangelicals the modern re-visiting of Trinitarian Christianity. As a bonus, he leaves us with a splendid summary of the doctrine's chequered history, an account of its centrality to all doctrine and a convincing case for its place at the heart of Christian spirituality.

However, this wide-sweeping and erudite treatment of the doctrine of God constitutes the main difficulty in relation to the brief for the series.

To be both primer *and* pathfinder is a tall order for a series, and for a topic such as this in particular. I wonder if all student and non-professional readers will persevere to the end of the book. They *ought* to, if only because of its sheer learning and swashbuckling confidence. Many parts of the book do meet the accessibility criteria. However, the faint-hearted may be tempted to turn back when they meet unexplained terminology such as 'absolute substance', 'theories of relativity', 'random energy', 'realistic narrative' and 'eternity-in-time'. In the same way the author dwells rather selectively upon matters sometimes technical (for example the Greek culture and terminology) just long enough to lose the marginally motivated. Teachers of theology will certainly lap up this invaluable resource but it would be a great loss if their students could not be persuaded to do the same.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

Christian Liberty. A New Testament Perspective

James D. G. Dunn

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1993; 115pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 85364 528 0

This book had its origins in the Didsbury Lectures delivered at the British Isles Nazarene College in Manchester in 1991. After an opening discussion of the nature of liberty, chapters deal with 'Jesus and Authority', 'Liberty and the Self' and 'Liberty and Community'. The last is a discussion of Romans 14:1-15:6, in terms of 'the more conservative' and 'the more liberal', with some helpful comments on the indispensability of diversity to unity. The main interest of 'Liberty and the Self' lies in its summarising the fruit of Dunn's extensive recent writings on Romans and Galatians and contributions to the ongoing debate about Paul and the law. In these terms, 'freedom from the law itself' means 'freedom from those specific laws which expressed and maintained Israel's difference and distinctiveness from the other nations'. On such an interpretation, and its undergirding, the jury is still out.

The chapter on Jesus stresses that he worked within, rather than in defiance of, the political authorities of the time. His freedom in relation to the Torah is identified as freedom *within* it rather than from it. This chapter, too, reflects recent scholarly discussion, *e.g.* of the place of the Pharisees within the religious spectrum of contemporary Judaism.

The balance of this book is indicated by its concluding quotation of John 8:31-2: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'

D.F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Called to Account

Richard Higginson

Eagle, Guildford, 1993; 266pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 86347 074 2

Richard Higginson's self-declared aim is 'to bring together Christian theology and business practice in an exciting way'. As Lecturer in Christian Ethics at Ridley Hall Cambridge and Director of its Foundation for the study of 'faith and work' issues, he is well qualified for this task and brings to it a considerable wealth of observation and contact.

The conjunction of theology and business is attempted by a series of chapters each considering the relevance to business practice of a different major doctrine. Thus the gap between 'believing that...' and 'being committed to...' is bridged by an album of snapshots that do not declare a common perspective or theme, such as other titles may. Nevertheless the direct application of a doctrinal truth to working practice is both invaluable and stimulating. God installed a sound structure before introducing his crowning innovation... in the Fall there is arrogance, distortion of relations between the sexes and buck-passing... Jesus' (management?) style combined accessibility, empathy and the capacity to challenge... eschatology includes the audit of judgement as well as the prospect of bliss. And there is a recurrent suggestion of the concept of 'adding value to the original resource', uniting both service to the consumer and gain for the producer - though perhaps easier to apply to some enterprises than others.

Much of this may simply make explicit what a biblically oriented mind might sense as 'instinctive'. Where this is the case, Higginson at least provides the valuable service of making the connections explicit. And where such connections are not yet even subconsciously made, the service rendered is correspondingly greater. It is eminently readable, liberally sprinkled with actual or at least 'true-to-life' illustrations. Many of the examples may be only too familiar: the workaholic whose style reflects a 'taskmaster' God, the conscience wrestling over whether or not it is facing a resignation issue. But such is the range of observation and contact available to the author that he extends the understanding of most of his readers as he generally avoids potted solutions in favour of numerous valuable pointers to decision.

An 'odd chapter out' is that on 'Pulling It All Together': a 'method for moral decision-making' that broadly compares with David Cook's in *The Moral Maze*. Here Higginson confesses to being less optimistic for a 'hierarchy of duties' than he did in, say, his own *Dilemmas: a Christian Approach to Moral Decision-making*. The final chapter repeats the plea that the church cease to ignore the business life of its members.

Most readers seeking to relate their business practice to their faith will find this a rewarding read and themselves challenged to take the exercise further. Nor must it go unrecorded that many of the 'connections' made in the process have their application to areas of life far removed from the

world of business. Are there not indicators here for a more satisfying approach to Christian ethics in general?

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**Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 20:
Daniel 1 (Chapters 1-6)**

Translated by T.H.L. Parker

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1993;
300pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 8028 0750 X, 0 85364 573 6.

A very warm welcome indeed from the pulpit ministry to the first of these Rutherford House Translations of Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries. They follow in the wake of the now well established New Testament Commentaries of post-War publication. The first of this second series is a tribute to its translator, the veteran Calvin scholar Dr. T.H.L. Parker.

Dr. Parker has given us a distinctive presentation of Calvin's lectures on the Book of the Prophecies of Daniel, taken down by the effort and industry of Jean Budé and Charles Joinviller, originally published in Geneva in 1561. Written in a clear and pleasantly smooth-flowing style the translation is well fitted for the late twentieth and twenty-first century reader of serious theology, a fair distance away from the somewhat stilted language of the Calvin Translation Society's nineteenth-century version, with which most readers of Calvin have hitherto had to be content.

A further difference from the CTS version is to be found in the presentation of the biblical text under review. Instead of the familiar Latin passage side by side with the AV (KJV) text, Dr. Parker has given us, in English, the 'on the spot' translation from the original which Calvin made spontaneously during his lectures, together with Calvin's variants and own preferences printed in bold in the midst of the text and set out in italics. It is, however, a little irritating for the reader to have to try to sort out the text at the beginning of each section before moving on to the exposition.

The form of commenting, although presented as lectures, is near enough to that used in the expositions of the New Testament. Calvin moves in his customary manner systematically through the book from unit of thought to unit of thought. The main difference is that it is presented in lectures (which take no notice of biblical chapters); thirty-one in all, each beginning with a reference to the exposition of the previous day and ending with a prayer in the form of a collect, that the message of the lecture may be suitably applied to the hearers' (or readers') own circumstances.

After a brief but sufficient consideration of the background, Calvin concentrates his comments on the attitude and actions of the One who is the principal participant in the drama, that is, emphatically, God himself,

in his dealings with mankind, redeemed (warts and all) and unredeemed, expounded through the activities of the principal characters of the narrative.

Daniel is assessed by Calvin to be one of the three greatest saints of the Old Testament. While the kings exhibit all the traits of unredeemed human nature, they show no recognition that it is God who sets kings up - and casts them down! They readily forget the fate of their forbears and arrogantly place themselves above the laws of man and God. Even when his judgement falls upon them or they see his incredible deliverance of Daniel, they come to no true understanding of him. Admittedly, they place him above all the gods, yet still hold on to their own lesser deities. 'God will have no associates,' Calvin remarks.

There is no doubt in the mind of Calvin that the fourth person in the furnace with Shadrach, Misach and Abednego was Christ himself in a pre-incarnation visitation, sustaining them and protecting them from instant extermination. Nor is there any question for him that the rock which destroyed the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was to be the kingdom of Christ, standing supreme against all great empires of time, particularly those of the ancient world.

Calvin's scholarship, not only in biblical literature but in other disciplines, is inevitably outdated by modern standards. His lengthy refutation of Rabbi Barbinel's six arguments against the fifth kingdom being the kingdom of Christ is tedious and of little interest to the modern reader, although it occupies almost the entire eleventh lecture. Again, he knew nothing of modern psychological research and, in his discussion of dreams, can only appeal to the opinions of classical philosophers.

Yet because of his theological stance, it would have made no difference to him if he had had such knowledge. Nebuchadnezzar's dream and that of Belshazzar, together with his vision, were unique; as far as Calvin was concerned, they came down from God himself and belie all theories.

Dr. Parker's translation does not smooth out the occasional polemic or aptly abrupt remark which is so familiar to Calvin's style. Nor yet does it entirely rid it of a certain dourness more evident in his commentaries on the Old Testament than the New, which strike a melancholy note in his otherwise bold and heart-warming theology. Could it be that his Old Testament studies made him more 'frightened by God's threats' than 'drawn by his sweetness'? Compare his prayer at the end of Lecture 19 (p.175). Whatever the reason, Calvin repeatedly points to a safe way along the reader's perpetually threatened pilgrimage, both in his comments and prayers that they 'take heed' and 'consecrate themselves entirely to his obedience'.

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