

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbct-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php)

## EDITORIAL

If the Lord opens the way, as we trust he will, I expect to write my next Editorial from the Eastern Cape of South Africa. My family and I are excited, if somewhat awed, that the Lord has called us to serve in Dumisani Theological Institute, with a particular emphasis on training and equipping the Xhosa-speaking churches of the Eastern Cape. I am pleased to say that, despite this unexpected relocation, I expect to be able to serve as Editor of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* for at least one or two more years and I hope that my new location will help to draw new contributors and fresh insights to the *SBET*.

The prospect of living, teaching and worshipping in an African context has heightened my awareness of the diversity of the Christian church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Philip Jenkins' provocative book, *The Next Christendom*,<sup>1</sup> has highlighted the distinct shift in the centre of gravity of global Christianity to the south and the east, to the 'majority world' (to use a currently-favoured term). This should not surprise 'minority world' Christians (though I fear it does) since every human being is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), stands under the same just condemnation because of sin (Rom. 5) and needs to hear the same Good News of liberation in Christ Jesus. In the light of these universal realities, the Lord Jesus reveals to John that a great multitude 'from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages' will ultimately stand before the throne giving praise to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10).

As my family and I go to South Africa, we will be described as 'missionaries'; a word which carries a whole host of connotations, both good and bad, depending on the experience of the one who hears it. Yet, in our present global situation, the church in the privileged 'minority world' must take account of the fact that our nations are not simply mission bases but also mission fields. The task of harvesting these fields is not simply that of the home churches either. 'The new global mission', in the words of the title of Samuel Escobar's recent book, is 'the gospel from everywhere to everyone'.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003.

When we read of the numerous nations (Acts 2:9-11) represented by those who listened to Peter's sermon on that day when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, we recognise that this was not the beginnings of the 'Gentile mission' – for the crowd were indeed all Jews – but we cannot help but wonder how many of the three thousand who were added to the church on that momentous day returned to their own homes with a burning desire to share the news they had come to understand. Likewise, what did the Ethiopian official have to say when he returned to his duties in Africa following his life-changing encounter with Phillip (Acts 8)? It would seem that right from the earliest days of the Christian church, the Lord used the people of the nations to reach the nations.

Yes, the words of the risen Jesus which we now know as 'the Great Commission' were originally spoken (probably in Aramaic) to Jews who were faced with the astonishing task of making disciples of 'all nations', yet with the astonishing promise of the presence of the risen Jesus with them all the way. Now, however, when these words address the people of God in French or Korean or Portuguese or Chinese or Afrikaans or Xhosa or in whatever translation, they call all of the Lord's people of the twenty-first century, of whatever nationality, to make disciples of all the other nations, and they offer exactly the same promise: that the personal presence of the risen Jesus will be with them as they go.

So my family and I look forward expectantly to 'going', but we go (I trust) not from a position of 'strength' to help those in 'weakness' but as participants in the global mission of the missionary God; fellow workers with those 'missionaries' from every nation where the Lord has his people who are called to make disciples of all other nations (including the post-Christian nations of Europe), with a sense of anticipation of standing around that throne and sharing in the multi-national, multi-lingual praise.

### *In this number*

The opening article is by Professor Paul House of Beeson Divinity School, Alabama, whose previous publications have revealed his interest in the theological message of the OT Scriptures in their canonical shape. In this article, he examines the way in which the revelation of the character of Yahweh resonates throughout the OT.

Moving into the NT, Grant Macaskill, a Ph.D. student at the University of St Andrews, calls us to read Jesus' words in Matthew in a new light, against the backdrop of thought expressed in Jewish literature of the day and mindful of the present experience of many of the Lord's people in the modern world.

The writings of Dr N. T. Wright, the present Bishop of Durham, continue to stimulate reflection and debate. In our third article, Dr J. V. Fesko, an Orthodox Presbyterian Church minister and a visiting lecturer in Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary's Atlanta campus, examines Bishop Wright's view of the function of faith in Christ. We trust that this article will contribute to an ongoing respectful debate with Bishop Wright which will lead us all closer to understanding Paul aright.

Our fourth article is a historical study of George Barclay of Irvine, written by Dr Brian Talbot, Minister of Cumbernauld Baptist Church. In this study, Dr Talbot draws attention to the significance of Barclay as a pastor, as an enthusiast for mission at home and abroad and as a driving force for theological education and a Baptist Union.

Finally, Dr Tim Trumper contributes the first part of a two-part study which seeks to draw out the benefits of renewed attention to and appreciation of the Pauline doctrine of adoption.

I am grateful to these authors who have submitted their work for publication in *SBET* and to others like them whose work will appear in the future. I trust that these articles will not only prove interesting and stimulating but will also contribute to the strengthening of the church of Jesus Christ in Scotland and throughout the world.

*Alistair I. Wilson*

# GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE WHOLENESS OF SCRIPTURE

P. R. HOUSE, BEESON DIVINITY SCHOOL, ALABAMA

Great unified narratives include the consistent portrayal of characters, and one of the chief evidences for the wholeness of Scripture is its writers' consistent witness to the wholeness of the Bible's main character, the one God, the living Lord. Any biblical-theological discussion of that character ought to be grounded in a biblical text or texts that span the canon. Thus, this article focuses on the character of Yahweh in Old Testament theology based on Exodus 34:6-7 and some of the many subsequent texts that cite or reflect the themes found in that text. This choice of a passage is hardly astounding, given the fact that interpreters as diverse as Phyllis Trible, Brevard Childs, Walter Brueggemann, Walter Kaiser, and Scott Hafemann consider the text pivotal for biblical theology as it relates to the nature of God as depicted in the Scriptures. The fact that this passage relates aspects of God's nature that may seem contradictory at first also makes the passage a foundational text, as does the fact that it is referenced in the Prophets, Writings and New Testament.

## A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF EXODUS 34:6-7

Exodus 34:6-7 occurs within the context of the giving and receiving of the Sinai covenant. More specifically, it falls within Exodus 32-34, a narrative passage that relates Israel's disobedience in the molten calf incident. Moses meets with Yahweh for a lengthy period of time. The people make and worship an image in the meantime. Thus, Yahweh tells Moses that he will destroy the nation and begin anew with Moses. Moses, Yahweh's friend, intercedes and Yahweh relents. The people have vacated the covenant, so Moses smashes the covenant stones that symbolize that covenant. God punishes the people and threatens to withhold his presence, and Moses seeks to renew the covenant. To this end he prays that the Lord will forgive the nation and once again be in Israel's midst and lead them towards their new land. Thus, the context includes a covenantal relationship, disobedience by one covenant partner, intercessory prayer, and a sorrowful, penitent people.

In 34:1-5 Yahweh accedes to this intercessory request. He will forgive the people. He will not destroy them and start over with Moses. But why does he do so? On what basis does he forgive, punish or seemingly do nothing? The answers to these questions are crucial, since they indicate the bases upon which the Israel-Yahweh relationship, which is likely to be marred by sin in the future, may be restored. It also gets to the heart of how Israel may understand how Yahweh acts. Is he unstable? Is he capricious? Or are there some bedrock qualities to his character? In other words, Moses wants to understand why Yahweh put some of the people to death, listened favourably to Moses' intercession, and forgave the nation as a whole in the end.

Yahweh responds in two basic parts. He states that he is 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and sin...'. At the same time, he 'will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation' (34:6-7). It is on the basis of this self-characterization that Yahweh re-establishes the covenant with the people (34:8-28).

Scott Hafemann summarises this two-fold characterization by writing, 'As his dealings with Israel after the golden calf illustrate, God is both compassionate and patient with his people, yet he will not compromise his own righteousness by disregarding their sin. Moreover, the renewal of the covenant demonstrates that it is YHWH's mercy which prevails over judgment when it encounters those who have "found favor in his sight" (cf. again 34:9).'<sup>1</sup> What of the severity of the punishment? Hafemann adds, 'Indeed, YHWH's mercy cannot be compared to his judgment in terms of its scope and impact, as the comparison between the "thousands" and the "third and fourth generation" in 34:7 illustrates.'<sup>2</sup> It is natural to consider the justice of one generation suffering because of the sins of their predecessors, as I will discuss later, but this concern must be tempered by the awareness of God's even greater compassion.

The adjectives in Exodus 34:6-7 are significant. According to Mike Butterworth, the terms 'compassionate and merciful' appear together eleven times in the Bible. Thus, together they form a liturgical formula based on

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1995), p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

common understandings of the two words.<sup>3</sup> ‘Compassion’ comes from a root used for ‘womb’ and in usage includes motherly compassion (see 1 Kgs 3:26). It is a term used to describe emotions, such as God’s unwillingness to give Israel up (Hos. 11:8). John Mackay summarizes the term by writing, “‘Compassionate’ recalls a mother’s love for her child, with a deep understanding of its weakness and need, keeping looking after it whatever its behavior or thanklessness. This is not a response to human merit, but a display of divine sympathy which shows favor when punishment might well have been expected.”<sup>4</sup>

The instances of ‘merciful’ in the Old Testament likewise indicate a context of grace. H. J. Stoebe asserts that the word originated in courtly language, and originally indicated unexpected or unearned favour shown to a servant by a kind king. As time passed, the word became more static, and then came to mean kindness of any type.<sup>5</sup> Robert Dentan observes that Proverbs 14:21, 31; 19:17; and 28:8 use the term to describe someone’s kindness to the poor.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the term denotes how a person helps another out of decency and kindness.

Further, the Lord is ‘slow to anger’. Yahweh is longsuffering with sinners, as his patience with Israel to this point in Exodus signifies. Next, the passage states that Yahweh is ‘full of steadfast, covenant-type love and faithfulness’. Though the word *hesed* appears in several covenantal texts, it does not always do so. In fact, Dentan again notes the term’s presence in Proverbs 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; and 20:28, none of which are in a specifically covenantal context.<sup>7</sup> Still, the covenant context is part of the word’s usage, so it is likely that non-covenantal texts have something like ‘covenant-type love’ in mind. The term is flexible enough to cover any situation in which solid loyalty is necessary. Similarly, ‘faithfulness’ indicates the durability of God’s loyalty. It highlights God’s unshakable commitment to his promises.<sup>8</sup> God is every bit as loyal and faithful as he is kind and

---

<sup>3</sup> Mike Butterworth, ‘*rhm*,’ in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Volume 3*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p. 1094.

<sup>4</sup> John L. Mackay, *Exodus* (Mentor Commentary Series; Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), p. 563.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Stoebe, ‘*hnn*, to be gracious,’ in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 1*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 442-3.

<sup>6</sup> Robert C. Dentan, ‘The Literary Affinities of Exodus 34:6f.’ *VT* 13 (1963), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Mackay, *Exodus*, p. 563.

helpful. As Nahum Sarna explains, the term 'encompasses reliability, durability, and faithfulness. The combination of terms expresses God's absolute and eternal dependability in dispensing his benefactions.'<sup>9</sup> The word also denotes truthfulness and trustworthiness.<sup>10</sup> So the term describes a person whose truthfulness and trustworthiness endure dependably.

The next phrase highlights the scope of God's kindness, grace, and faithfulness. God guards his loyalty for thousands. If Deuteronomy 7:9-10 may be read as explanatory of this verse, then thousands of generations, not persons are meant.<sup>11</sup> The contrastive nature of the second part of the verse also points in this direction. Again, whatever one decides about the nature of the third and fourth generations of the punished, one has to note the greater scope of the kindness.

Finally, the text claims that God forgives, or 'carries', sins of all varieties. Mackay comments, 'The whole range of human disregard of the Lord may be met with forgiveness.'<sup>12</sup> God bears the sins of sinners. He also reveals ways that sins may be covered. For instance, Victor Hamilton observes that the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:12 also bear sins.<sup>13</sup> God's willingness to forgive is as thorough as his other traits.

God's righteousness is just as dependable as his kindness. He will by no means clear the guilty. He does not treat as innocent those who are not innocent. Of course, at times it seems that he does just that, as texts that discuss theodicy issues attest. Indeed God's slowness of anger might cause some persons to call his righteousness into question, so this phrase offers a good corrective.

Now one of the more controversial portions of the text unfolds. The passage states that God visits, or judges, the sins of the fathers on the third and fourth generations. As is well known, Ezekiel 18:17-20 claims that God only punishes people for their own sins. Or does it? The passage states that the exiles cannot blame their parents for their situation, for they

---

<sup>9</sup> Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 1*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 68-9.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 343.

<sup>12</sup> Mackay, *Exodus*, p. 564.

<sup>13</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, 'ns,' *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p. 163.



have sinned as well. Thus, Ezekiel does not state that people never suffer for the sins of others. Such a claim would contradict Ezekiel's own experience as a faithful person taken into exile. The same may be said of Jeremiah's kidnapping to Egypt. Rather, it tells a rebellious generation to stop blaming others, for they have themselves sinned against God. Further, parallel texts that use the phrase 'sins of the fathers', such as Leviticus 26:39-40, Isaiah 14:21, Nehemiah 9:2, etc., all use the term in the context of when both fathers and sons have sinned. Finally, Exodus 20:5 uses the phrase found here with the important inclusion of the infinitive construct 'of those who hate me'. As Walter Kaiser asserts, it is important to note this qualifier, since it is likely that it is to be understood in Exodus 34.<sup>14</sup>

Such is the character of God. These are the reasons why he both judges the instigators of the golden calf incident who will not repent and yet carries the sins of the nation as a whole. This God is at heart merciful, gracious, kind, and steady. These are his primary traits. Yet he is also strong in his unwillingness to leave sin unchecked or unpunished. He explains these complementary characteristics at a crucial juncture in Israelite history. Such self-revelation is not the act of an unstable person. It is the act of an honest, consistent character. Yet as the Bible unfolds it is also increasingly the act of a complex character.

#### SOME USES OF EXODUS 34:6-7 IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Several significant passages reflect application of Exodus 34:6-7. This reflection begins as soon as Numbers 14:18-19, when Moses uses phrases from Exodus 34:6-7 to intercede for sinful Israel. It is impossible to discuss all of these in detail, so some selected ones that relate to forgiveness and judgment in particular will be highlighted. Texts that quote extensively are particularly important, since they are more likely related to the passage than texts that may just allude to it. Though other passages could be selected, this section of the paper highlights Joel 2:12-13, Jonah 4:2, Nahum 1:3 and Lamentations 3:19-38. As Brevard Childs indicates, taken together these and other texts like them provide 'an eloquent testimony to the centrality of this understanding of God's person'.<sup>15</sup>

Joel is notoriously hard to date with anything approaching scholarly consensus. Nonetheless, the book's message is fairly clear, particularly in

---

<sup>14</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, "Exodus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 486.

<sup>15</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 612.

the opening stages. Yahweh declares the need for Israel to fast, pray, and return to him. A terrible locust plague has occurred or will occur, and the prophet compares this plague to a great army swarming over the land. For Israel to 'return' to Yahweh means changing the path they are currently treading. Because sin is probably the thing they must turn from, the concept is normally translated 'repent'.

Joel bases his exhortation on the nature of God. He repeats the Exodus 34:6-7 statement as a statement of faith. The people may and should return to the Lord, for God is merciful and compassionate (the two terms trade places here from the Exodus formula), slow to anger, and filled with covenant loyalty and graciousness. If these things were not so, Joel seems to argue, the Lord would not have sent a prophet or a plague to warn them. If these things were not so, then the Lord would have punished their sins already. God's patience and compassion mean that time for change has been offered, yet because the Lord does not clear the guilty, which seems to be understood here given the preaching of judgment and repentance, the people must indeed turn from their sin and return to their God. They cannot presume upon Yahweh's patience.

The passage continues by adding a logical entailment of what has been professed thus far. Joel asserts that Yahweh 'relents from [sending] disaster'. God, who will not clear the guilty, has some means in mind of punishing the guilty. He has some established ways of judging right and wrong and levying punishment. The existence of the Mosaic covenant makes this point clear, as does the history of God's dealings with Egypt at the time of the exodus. God knows how to punish sin, as sinners since Adam and Eve have discovered. At the same time, his compassion means that this knowledge and willingness does not mean that he takes joy in this process of punishing. Rather, the Bible speaks of God's grief and sorrow over such things (Gen. 6:5-9). The prophet concludes with the observation that 'who knows, he may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him'. As has been stated, for the people to return to God they must turn from the path of sin. For blessing to occur the Lord must turn from his path of punishment. The prophet indicates that the people's turning from their unjustified paths/acts of sin may well (it is up to God) result in the Lord's turning from his justifiable plans to send punishment. God may relent 'from doing harm' in the sense of not sending disaster, as John Barton accurately translates and interprets the phrase.<sup>16</sup> Two turnings are needed,

---

<sup>16</sup> John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 76, 81.

then, but only one of them requires turning from sin, and that is the turning *the people* must do.

If this reading is accurate, then what of the traditional English translation of *niham*, which is 'repent'? First, it is important to note that this is not the typical word translated 'repent'. That word is *shuv*, and it means 'turn, return', as has already been noted. Further on this point, 'repent' is a theological summary word for what 'turn' means when one turns from sin, which is not the meaning of the word in question. The moral force of the term must be determined from the context. In other words, one only knows if *shuv* means 'turn' or 'repent' based on context.

Second, the normal meaning of *niham* in the Piel stem is 'take comfort, take encouragement from'.<sup>17</sup> H. W. Wolff adds that it basically means 'an emotional act of spiritual relief'.<sup>18</sup> In other stems it can mean regret or sorrow, or it can mean the changing of one's mind, depending on the context. In the present context, a more literal meaning of the verse might be that when repentance occurs the Lord 'takes comfort (in the sense of "spiritual relief") concerning the disaster' he had thought to send. In other words, the Lord comforts himself with the fact that judgment is not needed. The opposite of such comfort appears in Jeremiah 31:15, where Rachel refuses to be comforted because of her children's terrible situation.

Third, this verb has always presented a problem in English translations because it is basically an internal emotion. So if one translates it as 'regret' one has to decide if 'regret' implies a mistake or outright wrongdoing. Even from the beginning of English translations the verb has been treated as an anthropomorphism, in other words as a term of sorrow that communicates with human readers, but which may not literally apply to God. William Tyndale offers the following marginal note on the verb when it appears in 1 Samuel 15: 'The repentance of God is...attributed to God after the manner of speech...for men cannot otherwise speak of God.'<sup>19</sup> Also, as long as 'repent' had its fluid sixteenth-century meaning that included all sorts of sorrow, instead of the sole meaning of moral

---

<sup>17</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, et al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 1*, pp. 688-9.

<sup>18</sup> H. W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), p. 154.

<sup>19</sup> William Tyndale, *Tyndale's Old Testament: Being the Pentateuch of 1530, Joshua to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 400. For a discussion of Tyndale's work on Old Testament narratives see David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 333-57.

culpability that it has today, this rendering was more meaningful, though perhaps better translations could have been made even then.

Fourth, as is true of *shuv*, context must decide the nature of the taking comfort. Thus, it is simply incorrect to treat this text as teaching that 'God repents' as if the normal word or a suitable synonym appears in the passage. God's taking comfort in this case represents a justifiable relenting from a justifiable action, as in Jeremiah 42:11, though in that case the relenting is from judgment already begun.

What of the word usually translated 'evil'? This word (*ra*) is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament to designate everything from bad food to moral evil. Its numerous uses in numerous contexts make it necessary to determine how to translate it in each individual context. Here the term most likely means 'disaster' in the sense of the plagues God had threatened to send, as Barton and Baldwin argue. In context the 'bad' equals what God was going to send. Since the people were sinning and in need of turning, it is hardly wrong for the God who does not clear the guilty to plan a plague. Joel interprets what it meant for the Lord to turn from punishing Israel after Exodus' golden calf incident, and this same type of interpretation/application is apparent in later texts. What was coming was a disaster, and that was certainly 'bad' from the people's standpoint. It was not a moral wrong on God's part according to the Torah, nor was it a moral wrong to relent from sending the disaster based on being comforted by real repentance.

Joel 2:12-14 indicates that Yahweh is still willing to forgive people when they turn, as some of the Israelites did in Exodus 32-34. God's character remains consistent. The Exodus 34 passage is paradigmatic, not a one-time offering of kindness. It provides insight into how later writers can and should portray Yahweh. Israel can count on the permanent nature of these traits centuries after they were first declared.

The next quotation and application of Exodus 34:6-7 moves beyond Israel to include the Gentiles, in this case the Ninevites. Jonah has long been considered a fascinating narrative with many interpretative possibilities. The book's quotation of Exodus 34 is one of those intriguing aspects. Once Jonah finally preaches to Nineveh the people respond with the sort of fast called for in Joel 1-2. Upon entering into the fast the king of Nineveh says, 'Who knows? The God may turn and take comfort/relent. He may turn from his burning anger we may not perish' (3:9). The narrator adds, 'God saw their deeds – that they turned from their bad/disastrous paths, and he was comforted concerning the bad/disaster that he spoke (through Jonah) to do to them, and he did not do it' (3:10).

The king's statement mirrors Joel 2:12-14, while the narrator's statement about the Lord mirrors the result Joel had promised the people. Once again, the Lord turned from a justifiable path, while the people turned from an unjustifiable path. They turned, and God took comfort that the warning had its desired effect: they turned, which in this context means they repented. God was committed to eradicating sin from them, and he could either do so through judgment or through their turning. God's purposes were thereby fulfilled in this case without punishment. But he was comforted that such was not needed. He can revoke the threat out of compassion without clearing the guilty.<sup>20</sup>

Jonah 4:2 also cites and applies Exodus 34 concepts.<sup>21</sup> Jonah complains that the Lord has forgiven Nineveh, though the text does not state why the prophet is angry. He declares that the reason he did not want to go to the city in the first place was that he knew Yahweh is 'merciful and compassionate [the Joel order of the words], slow to anger and full of covenant-type loyalty, and takes comfort/relents concerning disaster/bad'. In other words he knows that what Joel 2:12-14 asserts is true, and he did not want these traits to be applied to Nineveh. But God does apply his character to Nineveh. He has pity for them because of their sin (4:10-11).

The book of Jonah indicates that God's characteristics do not just apply to his covenant people Israel. They apply to a Gentile nation as well. Thus, they are truly consistent traits. The Lord vastly prefers that sin be removed through turning to him by obeying the word he sends through his messengers. This grace is open to all that hear and respond appropriately.

Perhaps Jonah's problem is that he doubts that Yahweh truly refuses to clear the guilty. After all, he may reason, if Nineveh is not guilty, regardless of the era in question, then who is? As Tyndale translates 4:2, Jonah tells God he resents the fact that 'thou...repentest when thou art come to take punishment' (p. 643). As Joyce Baldwin writes, 'The people of Nineveh have been quick to acknowledge their guilt and to stake their hope on God's mercy. But in Jonah's eyes they deserve all that is coming to them. As soon as they have been spared will they not be as bad as ever?'<sup>22</sup> Of course, this is not Jonah's business. He is God's messenger, not God's judge. Still, God takes time to explain his mercy to Jonah in

---

<sup>20</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> See James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 154.

<sup>22</sup> Joyce Baldwin, 'Jonah' in *The Minor Prophets, An Exegetical and Expository Commentary: Volume 2*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 584.

4:10-11. By now the prophet should understand that the God who went to such lengths to send him to Nineveh is serious about mercy-induced turning from sin that leads to the elimination of the need for judgment.

In Nahum 1:2-8, however, the Lord proves that Jonah's concern that Yahweh is unwilling to clear the guilty is unfounded. Over a century after Jonah's ministry the Lord's prophet Nahum delivers a different application of Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>23</sup> In 1:3 he states that the Lord is 'slow to anger', the same term that appears earlier. But now the phrase 'but he will absolutely not clear the guilty' reappears. Slowness to anger does not mean an unwillingness to judge, even if such seems the case. God does send devastating punishment on this later generation of Ninevites. Neither Israel (see Joel) nor Assyria (see Jonah) maintained their repentance and renewal, so both the covenant people and the great conquering Gentile nation faced the Lord's wrath. Yet this wrath was indeed slow, for it did not emerge until decades, even centuries had passed. Still, it did emerge, so God's longsuffering kindness cannot be presumed upon forever. Nahum's application of Exodus 34:6-7 thereby emphasizes Yahweh's faithfulness to his word, to his people, and (in an ironic fashion) to the nations.<sup>24</sup>

The Writings segment of the Hebrew canon likewise testifies to the importance of Exodus 34:6-7 principles. Psalms 86:15; 103:8; and 145:8 cite the terminology in order to pray for preservation, thank the Lord for all his benefits, and express God's greatness respectively. Thus, in worship the concepts are used in new and appropriate settings. Nehemiah 9:17 cites the passage as evidence of God's kindness to rebellious Israel. Any or all of these texts would reward careful analysis and explication. But this part of the paper will focus on Lamentations 3:19-24, where the concepts are used to help bring comfort in the most devastating of circumstances.

Lamentations 1-2 declares that God has punished Israel. In fact, they have been recipients of the day of the Lord, the day of Yahweh's punishment. Thus, the people suffer greatly, admit their sin, and pray for

---

<sup>23</sup> Some scholars consider the quotation from Exodus 34 a gloss to soften the harsh rhetoric, but Tremper Longman III correctly argues that the presence of other Exodus imagery probably indicates that the quotation is original. See Tremper Longman III, 'Nahum' in *The Minor Prophets, An Exegetical and Expository Commentary: Volume 2*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 788-9. For an older work that considers the quotation a gloss, consult J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Micah, Zephaniah, and Nahum* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), pp. 288-9.

<sup>24</sup> See Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Volume 2* (Berit Olam; Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 428.

release. God has certainly proven able to refuse to clear the guilty. God has definitely been through in the visitation of iniquity. But what has become of God's mercy, compassion, and willingness to turn from the path of punishment now? A person identified only as 'the man' (3:1) steps forward to instruct the people. He details his own horrible pain and loss of hope in 3:1-18.

Having stated that he has seen 'affliction' in 3:1 and has been fed 'wormwood' in 3:15, the speaker asks God to 'remember' these facts (3:19). God's ability to remember his relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob results in national deliverance through the exodus in Exodus 2:23-25. Apparently the speaker desires this sort of salvation again, and the circumstances certainly call for something extraordinary on God's part. Next, the speaker professes confidence that the Lord 'will indeed remember' this sorrowful situation, with the result that God will 'meditate' on what to do to help (3:20). How can he be so sure? Has not the Lord only recently treated him harshly? Has not the speaker just stated God's meanness, if not outright cruelty, in 3:1-18? Does such a statement simply indicate that his 'mental state is anything but stable'?<sup>25</sup> Is this statement the last gasp of an injured soul?

Rather than focus further on the situation itself, the speaker digs deep to the bedrock of his faith. He attempts to make contact with that which must be true if anything is true. Thus, he causes something to return to his heart/mind. This something is what brings him hope, the very hope he admits having lost in 3:18. He believes God will deliver in response to his prayer.

God's character provides the basis for this hope. God's character is what the speaker calls to mind. God's 'covenant-type mercies', the acts of kindness he does because Israel is his beloved nation, 'never cease' (3:22a). What is more, his acts of compassion 'never end' (3:22b). The words for 'covenant mercies' and 'compassion' also occur in Exodus 34:6-7, where the Lord forgives Israel and restores his covenant with them after the golden calf incident and Moses' resulting intercession on their behalf.<sup>26</sup> The earlier passage also states that God is 'slow to anger' and that he forgives 'iniquity and transgression and sin', yet does not fail to punish the guilty. If Exodus 34:6-7 is the background for the speaker's confession, then the speaker has come to realize that God's immense capacity for

---

<sup>25</sup> K. M. O'Connor, 'Lamentations' in *New Interpreter's Bible: Volume 6* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), p. 1049.

<sup>26</sup> See D. R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (Anchor Bible 7A; New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 128.

kindness, compassion and forgiveness may indicate that Israel's sin left the Lord little choice but to exercise judgment. After all, God is willing to punish if the need arises.

Exodus 34:6-7 also depicts God's judgment as nearly as thorough, or perhaps every bit as thorough as his kindness. The inevitable conclusion that the speaker must draw from this passage and from his own experience is that God's lack of kindness or covenant memory is not the problem. The problem must lie elsewhere, and in the context of the whole of the book of Lamentations it must reside in the sins of the covenant people.

Indeed, God's covenant mercy and compassion are 'new every morning' (3:23). They cannot be exhausted, though sinners must not take them for granted. Again, as the whole of Lamentations and Exodus 34:6-7 indicate, the Lord punishes those who prove themselves unfaithful.

Given the fact that God answers prayer (3:19-20), exhibits covenant mercy and constant compassion, and renews these traits each morning, the speaker is able to make a further twofold confession. First, he claims that the Lord is his 'portion' (3:24a). This same word appears in Numbers 18:20 to assert that the Lord is the Levites' 'portion' of Israel's inheritance. It also occurs in Psalm 73:26, where the poet professes that the strength he has for living in difficult days stems from the fact that the Lord is his 'portion'. Such confessions mean that those who make them have nothing in the world but the Lord, and that this one possession is enough to sustain them, even in the most trying and horrible of times. Second, the speaker asserts that he will 'hope in him' (3:24b). Therefore, the hope reported lost in 3:18 has now been restored.

The speaker makes one more profound statement. Having discussed what it is 'good' to do in such circumstances, he asserts that Yahweh 'does not afflict from his heart' (3:33). God's first instinct is to bless and forgive, not to 'grieve the sons of men' (3:33). God's heart is not in such activity, though he is well able to judge as needed, as Lamentations proves. If Yahweh prefers not to punish, then the hope is that he will return to compassion, which 3:22 and 3:32 strongly imply is the substance of his heart. Afflicting and grieving surely must come to an end if repentance is present. Norman Gottwald considers 3:33 the high point of Lamentations' theology. He writes, 'The angry side of his [Yahweh's] nature, turned so unflinchingly against Jerusalem, is not the determinative factor in the divine purposes. Begrudgingly, regretfully, if there is no other way toward his higher purposes, he may unleash the forces of evil, but



“his heart” is not in it.’<sup>27</sup> The same thing could be said of all the passages influenced by Exodus 34:6-7.

Lamentations 3 claims that whatever hope there is in such a situation resides in the high level of the Lord’s character. At the core of his being Yahweh nourishes unflinching kindness and willingness to forgive. If such were not the case there would be no future for the speaker or any other recipient of the day of the Lord, the day of wrath described so fully in Lamentations 1-2. As it stands, however, there are grounds for hoping anew. These hopes begin and end with the God who has the qualities the speaker highlights.

### CONCLUSION

Can these traits exist harmoniously in the Lord, or are these contradictory qualities? Walter Brueggemann believes they are contradictory and therefore writes, ‘While some interpretative maneuverability is possible in relating the two statements to each other, in the end I suggest that these two characterizations of Yahweh are in profound tension with each other, and they finally contradict one another. Moreover, if we take these statements as serious theological disclosures, then the tension or contradiction here voiced is present in the very life and character of Yahweh.’<sup>28</sup> He thinks the tension lies in the fact that Yahweh cannot be for himself, or true to himself, yet be for Israel, in the sense that he can always forgive them. So he concludes, ‘There is no one like Yahweh, who while endlessly faithful, hosts in Yahweh’s own life a profound contradiction that leaves open a harshness toward the beloved partner community.’<sup>29</sup>

Of course, what Brueggemann calls harshness the text calls ‘not clearing the guilty’. All judgment texts are hard to accept, in part because one grows so used to God’s patient mercy. Nonetheless, God declared his full character at the start of Israel’s history. Old Testament writers who use this text to call for repentance, repent, worship, confess, and ask for help in extreme circumstances, testify that these are not contradictions but the known and tested qualities of a deity whose person is constantly intact through evident integrity. They are the qualities of a character ready for the full range of human actions. They are the qualities of a character ready to offer grace yet not to clear those who remain in their sin. Those who trust

---

<sup>27</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, rev. edition (SBT 1/14; London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 227.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

## GOD'S CHARACTER

in God and confess these aspects of God's character may do so knowing that God does not judge from his heart. His first impulse is patience. This impulse means that the gospel is at the heart of God, for at its heart the gospel provides redemption for persons bound for a judgment wrenched from the hand of God, who desires repentance instead.

# MATTHEW 6:19-34: THE KINGDOM, THE WORLD AND THE ETHICS OF ANXIETY

GRANT MACASKILL, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

The material found in Matthew 6:19-34 contains some of the strongest teaching in the New Testament on the attitude towards possessions that should characterise the follower of Jesus. It also contains language commonly understood by contemporary western Christians as promising God's providential care for his people (6:25-33) and thus bringing great comfort. In particular, the imagery of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field is often understood as teaching that God will provide for the basic needs of his people within this life if they give priority in their lives to his kingdom. Such a view, however, requires that this meaning of this section be reduced to that of an exception-riddled generalisation: every starving or naked Christian forces us to qualify the teaching. Indeed, once the experiences of non-western, non-first world Christians are taken into account, the qualifications begin to overshadow the teaching itself.

If, however, the material is interpreted in the light of a particular stream of thought within Judaism and Semitic Christianity, one which focused on the idea of the recovery of the glory of Adam as part of the eschatological blessing, then a fresh dimension to the teaching begins to emerge. This dimension allows us to see the promise of provision as essentially eschatological, even though the ethical standards attached to the promise are concerned with the here and now. The purpose of this article is to examine Matthew 6:19-34 as a whole, with an awareness of the relevance that this trend in ancient thought, which will be outlined below, may have for our understanding of verses 25-34.

## 1. EARTHLY GOODS, THE KINGDOM AND THE RESTORATION OF THE CREATOR-CREATURE RELATIONSHIP

Two sub-sections within the pericope are linked by the subject matter of earthly goods and the kingdom (6:19-21; 25-34). This fact should caution the reader against seeing the latter section as *simply* a discussion of anxiety (the subject matter of many a sermon on these verses); it indicates that what we are actually dealing with is a discussion of what true kingdom-

centredness<sup>1</sup> (see 6:21) looks like and of the implications that such a centredness should have on one's attitude to earthly goods.

Sandwiched between the two passages concerned with earthly goods is the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body (6:22-23), which Matthew has relocated to this point in the Sermon.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, these verses seem to interrupt the flow of the material, but a closer examination reveals that they serve an important function within the whole unit. Although the terminology is, in my view, far too vague, Brooks' argument that what we are dealing with here is 'apocalyptic paraenesis' (in which the light and darkness imagery reflect inner moral dualism), is a strong one.<sup>3</sup> Betz<sup>4</sup> and Allison<sup>5</sup> have both advocated the idea that the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body reflects the idea of *extramission*<sup>6</sup> of light rather than *intromission*,<sup>7</sup> which only became standard after the fifteenth century. Allison in particular has drawn on the Jewish background to this and suggested that the stress is on one's inner nature of light or darkness as something that is transmitted to the world through the eyes. Davies and Allison also provide a convincing argument against assuming that the condition of the protasis ('if your eye is good') is fulfilled in the apodosis ('then your whole body will be full of light'), citing Matthew 12:28 ('If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of heaven has come upon you') as an example of a 'conditional

---

<sup>1</sup> 'The "treasure" makes clear where the person's "center" is located and what is most important to him or her.' Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> The parallel occurrence is in Luke 11:34-36.

<sup>3</sup> S. H. Brooks, 'Apocalyptic Paraenesis in Matthew 6:19-34', in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Louis Martyn*, edited by Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, JSNTS 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Dieter Betz, 'Matthew 6:22f and Ancient Greek Theories of Vision', in Ernest Best and Robert M. Wilson (eds), *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 43-6.

<sup>5</sup> D. C. Allison, 'The Eye is the Lamp of the Body (Matthew 6:22-23 = Luke 11:34-36)', *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), pp. 61-83.

<sup>6</sup> That is, the idea that sight involves light leaving the body through the eyes.

<sup>7</sup> Intromission is the idea that sight involves the entrance of light into the body through the eyes. This, of course, parallels modern understandings of the phenomenon of vision, which are so much a part of our own knowledge that we can be apt to forget that the ancient world did not conceive of sight in the same way.

sentence in which the causal condition is found not in the protasis but in the apodosis, and in which the protasis names the effect'.<sup>8</sup> The use of the future tense (*estai*), which is not sufficiently discussed by Davies and Allison, may serve a paraenetic function: strive towards attaining a state of inner light in the future by which one's eye will be good. The sense then would be: 'when your whole body is full of light, *then* your eye is good'. Contextually it seems that *haplous* ('good') should be given an ethical sense.<sup>9</sup> Contrasting the picture with that of the 'evil eye' in the Ancient Near East<sup>10</sup> (symbolic of greed), and relating *haplous* to the use of the cognate adverb *haplos* in James 1:5, where it bears the sense 'generously',<sup>11</sup> Hagner suggests that the image is of 'an eye that is not attached to wealth, but is ready to part with it'.<sup>12</sup>

If this understanding is correct, then the text reflects a light/darkness dualism similar to that seen in certain Qumran manuscripts, notably The Rule of the Community (1QS) III-IV, often referred to as the Treatise on the Two Spirits, where the stress also falls on the service of two masters: the Prince of Lights and the Angel of Darkness. It is interesting to note that in this text the establishment of a righteous community and the transformation of that community into one of light is depicted as the restoration of Adam's glory, a restoration made possible by the understanding of the 'wisdom of the sons of heaven' (1QS IV, lines 22-23).<sup>13</sup>

The section in Matthew 6:22-23 is linked closely to 6:19-21 in two ways: first, a dualism runs through both sub-sections, between those who store up treasures on earth and in heaven, respectively, and between those whose inner natures are light and darkness, respectively. Second, the stress on the 'heart' in 6:21 leads into the discussion of the eye – presumably what the eye is fixed on, the focus of its attention – as revealing one's inner state (symbolically, one's heart). Thus, one's attitude to earthly goods reflects one's inner nature, whether it be light or darkness. Matthew

---

<sup>8</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Volume 1*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p. 637.

<sup>9</sup> R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco: Word, 1982), takes the good/bad distinction as referring to 'health' and 'disease', but this is to ignore the strong ethical thrust of the passage as a whole.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Harder, *TDNT* 6:555-6.

<sup>11</sup> This sense is also advocated for *haplous* by H. J. Cadbury, 'The Single Eye,' *HTR* 47 (1954), pp. 69-74.

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Waco: Word, 1993), p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew: *Hokmah biny shamayim*.

6:24 drives the dualism home in a way that stresses what is to be rejected: 'you cannot serve both God and Mammon'<sup>14</sup> and emphasises that the dualism relates to an improper elevation of the things of this world to the status of 'master'. Matthew 6:19-24, then, warns of the need for a proper attitude towards the earth and its goods in the context of an absolute dualism.

Moving into 6:25-34, however, the emphasis shifts onto the disciples' anxiety over earthly goods. In urging his disciples to have the correct attitude to earthly possessions, Jesus points them in the direction of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Clearly the primary function of this is to teach the disciples the nature of God's fatherly care,<sup>15</sup> yet there is also an important sense in which the birds and the flowers model a proper harmony of Creator and creature for the disciples.<sup>16</sup> There is, perhaps, an intentional irony in the text: the birds do not sow or reap, yet they are fed by the Heavenly Father; the flowers do not labour or spin, yet they are clothed by the Heavenly Father; but the pagans 'run after these things', elevating Mammon to the position of master (a position that only God should occupy), and as such have no promise that 'these things will be given' to them by a Heavenly Father.

Several points should be noted. First, while commentators have sought to find a background to this passage in Proverbs 6:6-11,<sup>17</sup> the emphasis on God's fatherly care and provision for the birds and flowers bears more similarity to Job 38:39 – 39:30, where also it is the non-domestic species that are the objects of consideration. This accords also with the paraenetic function of the passage in Matthew: not to encourage activity, as Proverbs does, but rather to encourage trust in God's fatherly provision. The focus on the non-domestic species in Job 38:39 – 39:30 has been seen by William P. Brown as intended to challenge Job's depiction of these same

---

<sup>14</sup> On the word 'Mammon,' see J. Dupont, 'Dieu ou Mammon, (Mt 6:24; Luke 16:13)' in his *Études sur les Évangiles synoptiques* (BETL 70; 2 vols; Leuven: Peeters and Leuven University, 1985), 2.551-67; R. T. France, 'God and Mammon', *Evangelical Quarterly* 51 (1979), pp. 3-21. Differently, B. A. Mastin, 'Latin Mam(m)ona and the Semitic Languages: a False Trail and a Suggestion', *Biblica* 65 (1984), pp. 87-90.

<sup>15</sup> Note the language of fatherhood in 6:26, 32.

<sup>16</sup> See J. F. Healey, 'Models of Behavior: Matt. 6:26 (// Luke 12:24) and Prov. 6:6-8', *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 497-8.

<sup>17</sup> See Healey, 'Models', for this approach. John N. Jones, "'Think of the Lilies" and Prov. 6:6-11', *HTR* 88 (1995), pp. 175-7, argues that the passage in Matthew deliberately inverts the meaning of Proverbs 6:6-11, which is certainly consistent with the point made in this article.

animals as symbolic of his own outcast and derelict status:<sup>18</sup> by stressing God's providential care of the animals and, just as importantly, their inherent dignity, God challenges Job's self-image and his perception of his own status.<sup>19</sup> In illustrating its point by means of non-domestic species of plant and animal, Matthew 6:25-34 may reflect similar concerns: the reader is not to be concerned with chasing after the things the pagans pursue (might clothes and food represent status?), for what is needful will be given by God (6:32) in his capacity as Father. Thus, the 'status' of the reader, an issue of some importance to a Jewish-Christian readership in possible conflict with a Jewish parent group, is not to be a source of anxiety.

Second, this advice is not a universal lesson drawn from Creation, but is a specific eschatological teaching to the elect reader. It is those who 'seek first the kingdom and his righteousness' (6:33) that can rest in the knowledge that what is needful will be given to them. Both of these elements take us back to the opening sections of the Sermon on the Mount. In the beatitudes, the 'kingdom' (*basileian*) is presented as the eschatological possession of the remnant, and 'righteousness' is one of their characteristics, indeed, it is something that they thirst for.

### *Righteousness and Creation*

On a very basic level, such a righteousness may be understood as fidelity to the teaching of Jesus – this is surely the importance of the references to 'these words of mine' in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (7:24, 26), a section that only serves to make explicit the presupposition of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount: that Jesus' words are the benchmark for

---

<sup>18</sup> W. P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: the Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 317-77

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that 6:27 is concerned with *stature*, depending on how one understands *elikian*. Luz (*Matthew 1-7*, p. 406) takes this as a reference to height as does, with some caution, Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Leicester: IVP, 1992], pp. 158-9). Against these, however, Davies and Allison and Hagner take the noun as referring to 'age' and thus life-span. Luz's argument that, when referring to age, *elikian* always refers to a definite quantity of age, rather than an open-ended idea of *life-span* (thus, in the present context, favouring his view that the term here refers to stature) is not answered by any following the alternative interpretation. While Luz's understanding of *elikian* would reinforce my suggestion that status is in view in Matthew 6:27, it remains the case that the noun more normally refers to age. This does not mean that status issues are not operative in the context; it simply means that they are not the point of this verse, about which more shall be said below.

true righteousness. But a case can also be made that this righteousness is a fidelity to the patterns of behaviour inherent in the design of Creation itself. There is not space to fully develop this idea in the present context, but several elements within the Sermon on the Mount may be noted as pointing in this direction. These elements arise specifically from the so-called 'antitheses' in 5:21-48, in which Jesus cites regulations from the Torah with the words 'you have heard it said ...' before providing his own, more intense moral position with the words 'but I say unto you ...'. Some have seen this as simply reflecting the cut and thrust of rabbinic debate, so that the citation formula refers to the interpretation of Torah taken by Jesus' opponents (and not the Torah itself).<sup>20</sup> The problem with such a view is that what is actually cited is, with the exception of a single clause,<sup>21</sup> Torah. The inference of the antitheses seems to be that it is Torah itself that is inadequate and needs to be intensified, rather than the Pharisaic interpretation of it. This point may be reinforced by 5:20, which requires a righteousness that exceeds that of 'the Pharisees and the teachers of the law', the two groups most widely identified as being exemplars of Torah-faithfulness.<sup>22</sup> This does not imply a rejection of Torah (as 5:17-19 make clear), but rather an acknowledgement of its inadequacy.<sup>23</sup>

What is striking about the antitheses is that, with the exception of the final antithesis, no rationale is provided for the intensification of the requirements of Torah: Jesus simply heightens the moral requirements of the regulations and warns of the consequences of transgression. A rationale for each may, however, be found in the design plan of Creation. This is most easily demonstrated in the case of the two antitheses dealing with

---

<sup>20</sup> So Hans-Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 200-14; also Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, pp. 111-12. Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 124-64, also takes this approach, but fails to deal with the issues that are outlined here. In fact, it is a striking omission from his work that he fails to interact with the *antitheses* unit as a whole, particularly the importance of the contrast established between Jesus' words and those of Torah by the structural arrangement.

<sup>21</sup> 'and hate your enemy' (5:43). Even here, however, we might note the closeness of the sentiment to Psalm 139:21-2 before writing it off as unbiblical.

<sup>22</sup> We might paraphrase this verse: 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the best law-keepers, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:3



marital ethics (5:27-30 and 5:31-2). The reader of Matthew's Gospel as a whole will be struck by the fact that when Jesus returns to the subject of marital ethics in 19:3-12, his moral position is entirely based upon the Creation narrative (19:4-6) and is critical of the Mosaic provision for divorce (19:7-9). Thus, the Creation provides the true paradigm which the Torah reflects imperfectly. Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, the same reader would surely read these two antitheses as reflecting Jesus' understanding of the ethics inherent in the design of Creation. What, though, of the other antitheses?

The final antithesis, concerning love for enemies (5:43-48), is the only one to carry an explicit rationale: 'that you may be sons of your father in heaven'. The function of this clause is to root behaviour in the imitation of God, 'who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous'. Essentially, the believer is being called to deliberately *resemble* God or, to put it another way, to be his *image*. The son/father imagery is highly suggestive here of the *imago dei* of Genesis 1:26, particularly where that image is understood as functional and not simply ontological. Conceptually, this section seems closely linked to the previous one, which concerns non-retaliation (5:38-42); it seems legitimate to suggest that the *imago dei* rationale governs both of these pericopae. Although not so immediately obvious within the biblical text, a similar rationale may be operative in the first antithesis, concerning murder and contempt (5:21-22). Conceptually, the discussion is similar to material found in 2 *Enoch* 44, where the sinfulness of treating another human with contempt lies in the fact that God has made man 'in a facsimile of his own face'.<sup>24</sup> That such a concern is at work here may be supported by the reference to worship in 5:23-24, to which we may compare James 3:9. Again, therefore, the ethical expectations of Jesus in these antitheses seem to stem from the very pattern of Creation itself, specifically the respect required towards all who bear (or function as) the image of God.

This leaves unexplained only the antithesis concerning oath-taking (5:33-37). Davies and Allison note that the oaths under consideration in 5:33-37 may not be promissory vows, but rather oaths related to the truthfulness of one's speech.<sup>25</sup> This certainly seems consistent with the 'yes, yes' and 'no, no' reference. Kennedy has argued that the *hoti* clauses

<sup>24</sup> 2 *Enoch* 44:1. The translation is Francis Andersen's in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, volume 1*, edited by James Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), p. 171.

<sup>25</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:535-6.

do not provide justification for Jesus' prohibition, but rather introduce the reasons for the oath-taker swearing by a particular thing.<sup>26</sup> Taking these together, it may be suggested that the point of this antithesis is not to prohibit the taking of vows, but rather to encourage a transparent truthfulness that needs recourse to no oaths.<sup>27</sup> Given that one of the great characteristics of God is his truthfulness (cf. Tit. 1:2), it is at least possible that such honesty is required because it should be a characteristic of those who are God's image and representation on earth. The need to go beyond such transparent truthfulness is portrayed as being from 'the evil one' (5:37). While no final case can be made for the *imago dei* being the rationale behind the antithesis on oath-taking, it remains a possibility; one that would seem to be consistent with the context.

To return, then, to an earlier point: the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees is one that reflects a true fidelity to the ethos of Creation. To return to Matthew 6:25-34: those who display such fidelity to God's Creation enjoy security *within* that Creation because of their relationship with its Creator.

In drawing this together, the point of Matthew 6:19-34 is that the disciple is to have the correct attitude to worldly goods, and that this attitude should involve complete trust in God and prioritising of the ethical requirements of the Kingdom rather than of worldly sensibility. The birds of the air are held up as an example of the correct attitude and behaviour and are thus depicted as being in proper harmony with their Creator and Provider. Against this, those who 'run after these things' are centred in the wrong place: their fixation on earthly things demonstrates that they are disjoined from the care of the Creator of that earth. The point of the image, therefore, is of a properly restored relationship with the Creator.

---

<sup>26</sup> G. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 56. The point of course fits with the fact that otherwise in the antitheses, no argument is provided for patterns of behaviour until the 'that you might be sons' statement.

<sup>27</sup> So Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:536. Note that R. Bauckham's discussion of James 5:12, a text which clearly draws upon this, argues for the same kind of understanding. See his *James: Wisdom of James, the Disciple of Jesus the Sage*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 101.

## 2. AN ESCHATOLOGICAL SUB-TEXT

This much lies on the surface of the text. However, it is possible that there is a dimension to this passage that tends to be overlooked by scholars and preachers alike. This dimension is only appreciated when one acknowledges the presence of certain logical problems in the very structure of the argument; problems that, I would suggest, are intended to cause the reader to reflect upon more subtle aspects of Jesus' teaching.

There are two such problems. First, as Luz notes, 'every "starved sparrow" refutes Jesus'.<sup>28</sup> This brings us back to the point made at the beginning of this article: outside of the comfort of the West, there are many Christians who continue to experience nakedness, hunger and homelessness. Second, and more important, the flow of the part of the argument concerned with the 'flowers of the field' is logically problematic if it is understood as referring to any kind of present-time clothing with glory. The argument suggests that Solomon's greatest splendour is less than that of the flowers' clothing and goes on to argue from lesser to greater: 'if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more you, oh ye of little faith?'<sup>29</sup> Yet it is quite obvious that none of Jesus' hearers and, surely, of Matthew's readers would possess clothing that exceeds the thing that exceeds the splendour of Solomon.

Three possibilities present themselves. (1) The argument may be superficial or general and, therefore, to modern sensibilities at least, flawed. (2) The argument may reflect some idea of 'moral' clothing, roughly corresponding to language found elsewhere in the New Testament. (3) The argument may suggest some idea of future clothing with glory at the time of the eschatological reversal.

I want to offer the following arguments in support of the third possibility:

1. The context provided by 6:19-21 suggests that the reader is to be concerned with what lasts; that is, with heavenly treasures that will never succumb to moth, rust and thieves. Thus, the emphasis is on a realm that, unlike this transient earth, is eternal.
2. The context provided by 7:1-2 is one of judgement. While this is not necessarily a reference to the Great Judgement, the reader of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole – even more so the reader of Matthew as a whole –

---

<sup>28</sup> *Matthew 1-7*, p. 402. His point draws on J. Weiss, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. SNT 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1907), p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Translation follows Davies-Allison, *Matthew*, 1:651.

would surely see some kind of allusion being made to the final judgement, even if only on a secondary level. Thus on both sides, the passage is set in a context of future eschatological events.

3. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the idea of a future clothing in glorious heavenly garments is found. The most notable examples are 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 and Revelation 3:4-5.

4. This imagery of a future clothing with glory reflects an idea that is well-attested in Judaism and in the more Semitic forms of Christianity: that those who are redeemed by the Lord will have restored to them the glory lost by Adam at the fall.

Of the four arguments presented above, the only one to require some expansion is that concerning the recovered glory of Adam. Alexander Golitzin has examined this idea in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Syriac Christian mystical writings from the fourth century,<sup>30</sup> noting the presence in each group of texts of a cluster of ideas associated with Adamic glory. These ideas include the restoration of the divine glory, the fellowship of the redeemed with the angels, the bestowal of garments of glory or light and the vision of the divine glory. Some citations from the Rule of the Community (1QS) may help to illustrate how they operate:

These are the counsels of the spirit for the sons of truth in the world. And the visitation of those who walk in it will be for healing, plentiful peace in a long life, fruitful offspring with all everlasting blessings, eternal enjoyment with endless life, and a crown of glory with majestic raiment in eternal light (1QS IV, 6-8).

In this way the upright will understand knowledge of the Most High, and the wisdom of the sons of heaven will teach those of perfect behaviour. For these are those selected by God for an everlasting covenant and to them shall belong all the glory of Adam (1QS IV, 22-23).

Such language and imagery is frequent in the Scrolls and in the Syriac writings. A key point in Golitzin's argument is that this cluster of ideas related to the glory of Adam was mediated to Syriac circles not by Christian transmission but by common Semitic culture. The similarity of

---

<sup>30</sup> See Alexander Golitzin, 'Recovering the Glory of Adam: Selected Themes from the Dead Sea Scrolls Present in the Macarian Homilies and Other Christian Ascetic Writings of Fourth Century Syro-Mesopotamia', in James R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St Andrews in 2001* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

the light/darkness imagery in Matthew 6:22-3 with 1QS III-IV, the passage cited in part above, has already been noticed. The fact that we have in Matthew 6:19-34 a reference to being clothed with splendour, in the context of a light/darkness dualism that runs through the whole section, seems to suggest that we are in the same thought world as that found in 1QS III-IV and studied more widely by Golitzin. To sum up: the eschatological context and the conceptual similarity with 1QS III-IV, increased by Matthew's insertion of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body at this point in the material, may suggest that something similar to the concept of 'the glory of Adam', seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2 Enoch and Syriac Christian writings, undergirds this text.

Such a reading, or hearing, of the words of Jesus, especially in 6:29, would be easily and naturally taken by his contemporaries. When this reading is configured into the passage as a whole, the effect is to cast the whole passage into a fresh eschatological light and to explain some of the more subtle aspects of its language. Specifically, the Greek of the last part of 6:25 is literally 'Is not life more than (*pleion*) food and the body [more than] the garment?' The NIV rendering of this ('is not life more important than ...') interprets *pleion* as implying the word 'important' and inserts the word into the text. Yet, if the parallel argument, concerning the lilies of the field (6:28-30), is understood as referring to an eschatological clothing with glory, the more literal translation of verse 29 makes perfect sense: life is indeed more than food and the body more than clothing, for both of these things are part of the present world and each person's horizon extends beyond that world and into eternity. Similarly, the warning of verse 27, 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?',<sup>31</sup> now links much more closely with 6:19-21: since worrying cannot add to the span of one's life, it is all the more important to be ready for, and aligned with, the eternal kingdom of God. Finally, the promise 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well', now connects much more closely with both 6:19-21 and the rest of chapter 6, in which the idea of the 'reward' is so dominant.

## CONCLUSION

Matthew 6:19-34 does indeed contain strong teaching on what one's attitude to the things of this world should be. At its heart, it suggests that

---

<sup>31</sup> There is, of course, a translation issue with this verse, which can also be rendered as 'add a single cubit to his height'. A brief discussion of this issue is given above, footnote 19.

a properly restored relationship of creature with Creator will cause the believer to be less anxious over the things of this world and to cease 'running after them'. Yet, an important element of this changed attitude is an awareness that, in its present state, the world is transient and subject to decay; only the Kingdom, and the blessings of that Kingdom, will be eternal. Thus, the believer is comforted by the thought that he or she will one day be clothed in a splendour greater than that of Solomon himself, even though here and now that believer's experience may be one of nakedness or hunger. Such an understanding of the text, particularly of the elements within it intended to alleviate anxiety, seems to me to be better than the rather trite interpretations often made of this part of Jesus' teaching in the well-clothed, well-fed West.

# N. T. WRIGHT AND THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

J. V. FESKO, REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

## INTRODUCTION

Within the field of New Testament (NT) studies, scholars identified with the so-called 'new perspective on Paul' (NPP) have challenged the traditional understanding of many aspects of Paul's theology. Advocates of the NPP have argued that, with a proper understanding of the historical context in which one finds the teachings of Christ or Paul, a radically different picture emerges from the pages of the NT. Based upon the spadework of E. P. Sanders, scholars associated with the NPP have argued that legalism, or works-righteousness, was not common to first-century Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Now, one should keep in mind that the NPP is a variegated theological movement and those writing from this perspective have not produced a homogeneous body of literature. Nevertheless, with the first-century historical data, N. T. Wright, an important contributor to the discussion, argues that Paul's struggles at Galatia were not against legalistic Jews but about the question of 'whether Jewish Christians were allowed to eat with Gentile Christians'.<sup>2</sup> Wright's contention is that the Jewish Christians were trying to protect the integrity of the covenant boundary markers, circumcision, kosher food laws, and Sabbath observance, which had been so intertwined with the covenant and their own national identity. Central to Wright's claim is the contention that circumcision was the sign of the covenant and that it was being replaced by a new sign of the covenant, faith in Christ. This essay will investigate Wright's argument and demonstrate that his claim is incorrect. The essay will proceed by: (1) setting forth Wright's argumentation to support the claim that faith in Christ replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant; (2) a critical engagement of Wright's key arguments; and (3) a positive argument that baptism is the new sign of the covenant, not faith in Christ. Let us therefore proceed to the first part of our investigation.

---

<sup>1</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *What St Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 158.

## WRIGHT ON THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

According to Wright, central to the identity of first-century Judaism was their possession of the covenant, God's promised blessing upon Abraham and his descendants. God's covenant with Israel, however, did not arrive absent of those covenant identification badges that distinguished members of the covenant from outsiders, namely the Gentile pagans. Wright argues that,

at a time when Judaism's distinctive identity was under constant threat, Torah provided three badges in particular which marked the Jew out from the pagan: circumcision, sabbath, and the kosher food laws, which regulated what food could be eaten, how it was to be killed and cooked, and with whom one might share it. In and through all this ran the theme of Jewish 'separateness'.<sup>3</sup>

It was these three covenant badges that the Jews saw as those signs that distinguished them as belonging to the covenant. Wright sees an interconnected relationship between the possession of the Torah and the three covenant badges as boundary markers, or more specifically signs of the covenant. It is the possession of the Torah that separates the Jews from the Gentiles, but the Torah is most noticeably and visibly manifest in the three covenant badges.<sup>4</sup> Now, for the average first-century Jew who lived in the shadow of the Herodian temple, it was unthinkable that God's people would ever be left without these distinctive signs of God's covenant. It is this mindset, argues Wright, that was the source of great conflict in the early church.

The Jews did indeed receive the Torah and the three badges as signs of the covenant, but what they did not realise is that with the advent of Christ, things were going to change. Wright argues that the Torah and its three badges were never intended to be ends in themselves but served as temporary markers until the advent of Christ:

The Messiah is the fulfillment of the long purposes of Israel's God. It was for this that Torah was given in the first place as a deliberately temporary mode of administration. In the Messiah are fulfilled the creator's

---

<sup>3</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 214; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 384-8.



paradoxical purposes for Israel and hence for the world. He is the climax of the covenant.<sup>5</sup>

With the advent of Jesus, the people of God, therefore, would no longer be defined by the Torah and its attendant badges but by faith in Christ. Wright contends that,

what matters is that *faith is a crucial part of the definition of Israel at her time of great crisis*. Jesus' call for 'faith' was not merely the offering of a new religious option or dimension. It was a crucial element in the eschatological reconstitution of Israel around himself.<sup>6</sup>

No longer were the people of God to be defined by possession of the Torah, circumcision, kosher food laws, or Sabbath observance. They were now to be defined by their faith in Jesus. Wright argues that 'a flag was quietly being run down, a story given a new ending'.<sup>7</sup> Let us turn to a critical engagement of Wright's claims.

#### CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WRIGHT'S CLAIMS

Wright's argument turns on the key question, Does faith replace the covenant boundary markers as *the* covenant sign? This requires us to examine the place of the covenant boundary markers but especially circumcision, the place of faith in both the Old Testament (OT) and NT, and the role of baptism in the NT.

#### *The sign of circumcision*

When one examines Wright's covenant boundary markers, it is undisputed that the OT and second temple Jews saw the Torah as a boundary marker that separated Jew from Gentile (Mic. 4:2; 1 Macc. 1:41-49; 2:23-26, 49-50, 64, 67-68; 2 Macc. 6:1-19).<sup>8</sup> Certainly Wright is correct to state that the covenant boundary markers of circumcision, Sabbath, and the kosher food laws separated Jew from Gentile, as is evident in the conflict at Galatia. Moreover, Wright is also correct to state that the Torah was a temporary mode of administration that looked to the fulfilment of the covenant with the advent of Christ.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, question regarding

---

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *Covenant*, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *Victory of God*, p. 261.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *People of God*, p. 241.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Victory of God*, pp. 385-7.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *Covenant*, p. 241.

the role that Wright assigns to circumcision, specifically in how it is supposed to be replaced by faith in Christ. The crux of Wright's argument comes in his analysis of Romans 4:11a: 'He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.'<sup>10</sup> Wright correctly contends that circumcision 'was a "sign or seal" of the "righteousness" that was Abraham's on the basis of the faith he had while still uncircumcised'. He then goes on to state that,

By designating circumcision as a sign or seal of Abraham's status of faith-demarkated righteousness, Paul reclaims it rather than renouncing it: Faith is the indication of covenant membership and circumcision was supposed to be a pointer to that status and, apparently, to that mode of indication.<sup>11</sup>

This, however, is not an accurate interpretation of Romans 4:11a.

Circumcision is indeed a sign or seal 'of the righteousness that he had by faith'. It is not, as Wright attempts to make it, a 'faith-demarkated righteousness'. Rather, it is a circumcision-demarkated righteousness and faith. Abraham's faith is not the sign or seal but the means by which he obtains the righteousness and the reason for receiving the sign of the covenant. This is indicated by the use of the genitive of source, *tes pisteos*.<sup>12</sup> This conclusion is also supported by Genesis 15:6: 'And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.' Here Abraham receives righteousness on account of his faith. His faith here is not the sign and seal of his righteousness or an indication of his covenant membership but the instrumental means by which he receives the righteousness.<sup>13</sup> This is the whole point of Paul's argument in Romans 4, namely that Abraham did not obtain his righteousness through his circumcision but by faith. As Cranfield notes, 'The words imply that Abraham's circumcision, while it did not confer a status of righteousness on him, was nevertheless valuable as the outward and visible attestation of

---

<sup>10</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, *Romans*, (NIB; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), p. 494.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 269, n. 17; also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, (WBC, vol. 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988), p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, 'Genesis 15.6: New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text', *Westminster Theological Journal* 42/2 (1980), pp. 264-5, 267; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1987), p. 330.

the status of righteousness which he already possessed.’<sup>14</sup> Nowhere do the Scriptures refer to faith functioning as a sign or seal of covenant membership or righteousness. Rather, historically signs and seals are visible symbols of invisible realities, such as God’s grace or faith. This is why the Westminster divines state that: ‘Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word’ (WCF 27:1).<sup>15</sup>

Wright would undoubtedly grant this point, namely, nowhere is faith explicitly mentioned as a sign or seal, but he might argue that it is implicitly identified as such when the Scriptures speak of circumcision of the heart: ‘And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live’ (Deut. 30:6). In this context the circumcision of the heart is implicitly identified with faith, whereas in other places it is identified with obedience (cf. Deut. 10:16).<sup>16</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to identify the circumcised heart as a sign and seal of covenant membership. Rather, the circumcised heart is the invisible reality to which circumcision visibly points. This interpretation is evident from the examination of a key text that explains the function of both circumcision and its replacement, baptism.

### *Circumcision and Baptism*

The key text for examining the function of circumcision and its replacement, baptism, is Colossians 2:11-12:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

---

<sup>14</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, (ICC, vol. 1; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> Also see, e.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (1932-38; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 617-18.

<sup>16</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 364.

Now, to be sure, Paul metaphorically uses circumcision in this context, indicative by the fact that it is 'a circumcision made without hands'. Nevertheless he uses the imagery of the rite of circumcision, namely cutting away the foreskin. In his metaphorical use of circumcision, we see the function of circumcision as a sign, the removal of the foreskin represents cutting away 'the body of the flesh', or the body of sin (so NIV).<sup>17</sup> This is parallel with v. 12 and being 'buried with him in baptism'. Baptism, according to Paul, is putting to death the old man (Rom. 6:1-6), or the burial of the body of the flesh, the body of sin. There is then a parallel between the function of circumcision and baptism: they both symbolize the cutting away or burial of the body of sin (cf. Col. 3:5-9).<sup>18</sup> Circumcision and baptism both point to the work of Christ; circumcision looks forward and baptism looks back to the work of Christ.

Now, it is important to notice that the circumcision of the heart, what is visibly signified in circumcision, and the burial of the body of sin, what is visibly signified in baptism, occur *dia tes pisteos* ('through faith'). When the preposition *dia* is combined with the genitive it conveys the idea of 'by means of' or 'through'.<sup>19</sup> In other words, faith is the instrumental means, not the visible sign or seal, by which the believer

---

<sup>17</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980), p. 164; also John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*, (CNTC, Vol. 11, eds. David F. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 332. This is a highly contested verse and there are various interpretations. Wright contends that cutting away the body of flesh represents a disassociation with one's previous life, the old body, and joining a new body, the church (N. T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, [TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], p. 106). O'Brien and Dunn argue that it refers to the crucifixion of Christ (Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, [WBC; Dallas: Word, 1982], 117; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], p. 158). Given the parallel between baptism and circumcision and Paul's use of similar imagery (Col. 3:5-9; Rom. 6:4), Wright's interpretation appears to be the most out-of-place. Dunn and O'Brien's interpretations are not in conflict with what I have suggested. The believer is crucified with Christ through his union with him (Rom. 6:5).

<sup>18</sup> Robertson, *Covenants*, p. 166; also Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 47; similarly Dunn, *Colossians*, p. 212; O'Brien, *Colossians*, p. 176.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 368-9, 432.

enters the covenant and receives the righteousness of Christ. That Paul places circumcision and baptism in parallel, means they perform the same type of signatory function. This is something that even Wright acknowledges:

For Paul, baptism in some ways at least plays the same role within the establishment of the Christian covenant people that circumcision played within the Jewish family, i.e., that of marking out the covenant people with the sign that spoke of their unique identity.<sup>20</sup>

Just as OT Israelites and proselytes received the sign of the covenant, so NT converts and those born within the church receive the new sign of the covenant. Contra Wright, therefore, circumcision has not given way to faith but to baptism. To confirm further this conclusion, we must examine the function of faith as it specifically relates to the signs of the covenant, circumcision and baptism.

### *The function of faith*

Wright explains that faith functions as the new covenant boundary marker. To support this claim he argues that whenever Israel has been in a period of distress, in exile for example, the prophets have stressed the need for the people to be marked by faith: 'If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all' (Isa. 7:9b), and, 'Whoever believes will not be in haste' (Isa. 28:16b). Wright contends that,

the well-known passage in Habakkuk contributes the same idea. When all other boundary-markers disappear in the great moment of judgment, the people of YHWH will be marked out by their faith: 'Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them; but the righteous live by their faith' (Hab 2:4). 'Faith', as far as these texts is concerned, is not simply to be understood as a single, miscellaneous religious quality, 'virtue', or attribute. It is the distinguishing mark of the true people of YHWH at the time of crisis.<sup>21</sup>

In one sense, Wright's statement is certainly true, the people of God should always be marked by faith in both times of peace and distress. However, the Scriptures do not assign faith the function of a sign or seal, or boundary marker, such as circumcision or baptism. Or, to use the nomenclature of systematic theology, the Scriptures do not assign faith a

---

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *Romans*, p. 495.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *Victory of God*, pp. 259-60.

sacramental function as it does circumcision and baptism. It is this sacramental function that one must contrast with Wright's view.

When we examine the relationship between faith and the signs of the covenant we see that there is an important connection between the two. We see that Paul explains that circumcision is not only a covenant boundary marker, a sign that members of the covenant receive, but that it can also be a sign of being cut off from the covenant community. The cutting off of the foreskin either symbolized the cutting away of the body of sin or being cut off from the covenant community.<sup>22</sup> This is evident, for example, when Paul explains what happens to the person who does not fulfill the obligations of the law: 'For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision' (Rom. 2:25). For the one who breaks the law, his circumcision is no longer a sign of covenant membership but of covenant curse – he is cut off from the covenant.<sup>23</sup> It was the uncircumcised man who was cut off from the community and the covenant: 'Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant' (Gen. 17:14). Of course, every single circumcised Israelite broke the law; this did not mean that they were all cut off from the covenant. The difference between the one who was blessed and cursed was the presence of faith: 'For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God' (Rom. 2:28-29). The presence of faith, ultimately in Christ, determined whether circumcision was a sign of covenant blessing or of curse.<sup>24</sup> The same relationship between faith and baptism holds true.

We see in the NT explanations of the significance of baptism, especially as it relates to its OT types, the symbolization of the dual aspects of covenant blessing and curse. Paul, for example, calls the Red Sea crossing a baptism: 'All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor. 10:2). Peter explains that the waters of the deluge were a type and that baptism is the antitype:

---

<sup>22</sup> Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 169; similarly Wright, *Romans*, p. 448; cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 172; Dunn, *Romans*, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 176; Calvin, *Romans*, pp. 56-7; Wright, *Romans*, p. 449; Moo, *Romans*, p. 174; cf. Dunn, *Romans*, p. 127.

when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you [*ho kai humas antitupon nun sozei baptisma*], not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

Now in these two typological examples of baptism, what made the difference between those who passed through the Red Sea and those who entered the safety of the ark unharmed and those who drowned in the flood and in the Red Sea was faith in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; Heb. 11:7).<sup>25</sup> If one may paraphrase Paul, a person's baptism can become 'unbaptism' if it is not joined by the presence of faith in Christ.<sup>26</sup> Baptism either symbolizes the forgiveness of sins, participation in the new covenant, and being part of the new creation, or drowning in the waters of God's judgement and wrath. The difference between covenant blessing and curse lies in the presence or absence of faith.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have examined Wright's claim that faith is the boundary-marking sign of the new covenant and have rejected it for several reasons. First, it gives the impression that faith was somehow secondary and that circumcision was primary. While this may have been true of second temple Judaism, it is not true of the Scriptures. The evidence shows that faith has always been primary in both the OT and NT as the eleventh chapter of Hebrews makes so clear. Second, it is correct that circumcision gave way to a new sign of the covenant but it was not faith. Rather, the new sign of the covenant is baptism. Baptism serves the same function as circumcision, symbolizing the cutting away or burial of the body of sin for the one who unites the sign with faith, or symbolizing being cursed in the waters of God's wrath or being cut off from the covenant community. Third, Wright fails to recognise the role and function of the sacraments in both the OT and NT.

---

<sup>25</sup> Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, pp. 65-70; see also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 724-5; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), pp. 213-18; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, (ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993 [1978]), pp. 265-8.

<sup>26</sup> Similarly John Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, (CNTC, vol. 8, eds. David F. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1960]), p. 55.

## THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

The sacraments, circumcision and baptism, are visible signs that point to invisible realities, such as grace and faith. While one should never deny the important truth that the people of God must always be marked out by faith in Christ, and that this faith in Christ will separate the covenant community from the unbelieving world, at the same time one must recognise the difference between faith as the instrumental means of participating in the covenant and the visible signs of the covenant, circumcision and baptism. The people of God have always been marked by their faith in Christ, but now the sign and seal of their faith has changed from circumcision to baptism.



# 'FORGOTTEN IN THE GLORY OF GOD': THE VISION OF GEORGE BARCLAY OF IRVINE (1774-1838)

BRIAN TALBOT, CUMBERNAULD BAPTIST CHURCH

## THE EARLY YEARS

George Barclay was born on 12 March 1774 in the small village of Kilwinning, Ayrshire. This small community was then three miles north of the much larger town of Irvine. His parents were described as being in humble circumstances, but with a reasonable standard of living within their community. This was an enthusiastic evangelical family who belonged to the Antiburgher branch of Presbyterianism in Scotland. This denomination was very rigid in its opinions, for example, in 1798 it declared its opposition to members attending lay-preaching and Sabbath-evening schools, 'saying that no Antiburgher could attend such without being subject to discipline'.<sup>1</sup> The significance of these prohibitions against new forms of Christian service in Scotland was indirectly to ensure that Barclay would be forced to go against many of the standards of his church in following the call he believed God had given him as a young man. In his earlier youth, though, the family in which he grew up was content to follow the standards of their denomination. The minister of their local church in Kilwinning, William Jameson, was the brother of George's mother. Jameson, who had been ordained on 6 April 1763 in the presence of the 112 members of the church, was the first minister of this new congregation in Kilwinning. A contemporary Antiburgher minister, Dr John Mitchell from the Wellington Street Church, Glasgow, described Jameson as a man with 'a patriarchal appearance. His voice was soft and sweet, and unaffectedly musical in its tones. His manner was grave and affectionately kind'. He died aged fifty-seven in the thirtieth year of his ministry in the one charge.<sup>2</sup> In this congregation George Barclay received a

---

<sup>1</sup> D. C. Lachman, 'General Associate Synod', in N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 354-5.

<sup>2</sup> 'Kilwinning (Antiburgher)', in R. Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900* (2 Vols; Edinburgh:

firm grounding in Reformed theology which was retained throughout his life.

The sad loss of his mother when he, the only child, was seven months old deprived George Barclay of a potential maternal influence. According to John Leechman, Mrs Barclay had been 'an amiable disposition, obliging in her manners, kind to the poor, and her death was much lamented'.<sup>3</sup> His father married again when his son was six years old and George's stepmother did her utmost to care for him as for her own children. She diligently assisted with his education in reading and writing and it was said that he could read the Bible when he was four years old. In his childhood George Barclay was reported to have spent much time in secret prayer and been most diligent in attending 'the sacramental services of the church' and in reading biographies of eminent Christians of earlier generations. However, it was also evident that 'the fear of God was not before his eyes' and 'those evils which prove us to be "transgressors from the womb" began to bud and blossom and bring forth fruit, even at that early age; and soon it became evident that he had entered the wide gate, and was treading the broad road that leadeth to destruction'.<sup>4</sup> Readers of this narrative could be forgiven for assuming that this description included comments about this young man in his teenage years, instead of a child who had barely attained the age of six. It must, though, be stated that this description here was not untypical of the standards expected of children in Reformed households in this era. James Haldane's little booklet, *Early Instruction Recommended in a Narrative of the Life of Catherine Haldane, with an Address to Parents on the Importance of Religion*, told the spiritual journey of his young daughter Catherine prior to her death aged five or six, and commends a similar intensity in religious exercises.<sup>5</sup> It may be

David M. Small, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 281-2. Details of Mitchell's life are given in Small, Vol. 2, pp. 44-5.

<sup>3</sup> J. Leechman, 'Memoir of the Late Rev. George Barclay', *Baptist Magazine*, 29.1 (January 1839), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Haldane, *Early Instruction Recommended in a Narrative of the Life of Catherine Haldane* (Sydney's Press, N. P., 1820). A copy of this booklet is held in the Scottish Baptist History Archive, Glasgow. Another contemporary example concerned a daughter of Andrew Fuller, whose spiritual experiences were recorded prior to her death aged six years. A. G. Fuller, 'Memoir of Rev. Andrew Fuller', in J. Belcher (ed.), *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (3 Vols; Harrisonburgh, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988 [1845]), Vol. 1, p. 52. More examples of such precocious piety are found in H. Sprange, *Children in Revival: 300 Years of*

possible that there was an expected and idealised pattern of behaviour required from the children of Christian homes in this period.

George was fairly average as a pupil in his local school and appeared to drift through school rather than applying himself to his studies as his family had expected. He in later life often referred 'with much contrition and considerable severity to his youthful follies', but an outgoing personality and an eye for a practical joke probably accounted for most of these events. John Leechman, his son-in-law, hinted that Barclay's later self-criticism was excessive when he noted that 'few are so faithful in diving into the depths of their depravity and bringing up thence reasons for penitence and humiliation as ... [George Barclay]'.<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that these comments refer to the time prior to Barclay's leaving school on his thirteenth birthday to enter the world of employment. There is no reason to doubt that George was probably a normal, well-adjusted young person who grew up very familiar with the tenets of his Presbyterian faith. In these early years there was a clear acceptance of the standards expected by his family and local community and he was probably typical of many of the Protestant young people growing up in Kilwinning in the 1780s.

On his thirteenth birthday George was apprenticed for seven years to a local cabinet-maker. He was, apparently, a diligent worker<sup>7</sup> who completed his contract by the age of twenty. According to Barclay's own recollections of his youth he was not particularly interested in matters of faith from ages thirteen to sixteen, though he still attended the services in his local church. An event that was to have a marked impact on him was the conversion of one of his closest friends, who was also his cousin. After his friend had professed faith before the church in the winter of 1790, George's father urged his son to consider applying to join the church at the next communion. This advice was followed and because this young man was able to affirm the theological views of his denomination he was received into the membership of this local congregation. It is ironic that this step of commitment caused much concern in his conscience. The teenager realized that he had not exercised 'repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ', which was 'an indispensable pre-requisite to church

---

*God's Work in Scotland* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2002). A fuller examination of a similar lifestyle in two Baptist families in Wiltshire, England, in this era is found in M. Reeves, *Sheep Bell & Ploughshare: The Story of Two Village Families* (St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1978), pp. 25-72.

<sup>6</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> G. B. Hossack, 'George Barclay of Irvine', *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 90.4 (April 1964), p. 6.

membership'.<sup>8</sup> He was led to spend much time in spiritual reflection and prayer that caused him to alternate between moods of elation and despair, before he finally attained a sense of assurance. The struggles through which he passed in these years and the joy caused by the blessing of Christian assurance that followed, led him in turn to preach much on the subject of assurance in his later ministry.<sup>9</sup>

A significant cause of Barclay's spiritual problems was the apparently High Calvinistic theology of his uncle, which contained inadequate preaching of the law of God.

His ministry though earnest and impressive, was deficient in proving the souls of men to be under sin, guilty, condemned and helpless, and as such directing them clearly and definitely to the dignity and death of the Son of God, as the only refuge from the wrath to come. It was, therefore, little calculated to arouse and convict the sinner, or to undeceive and unshelter the self-righteous[sic].<sup>10</sup>

There had been considerable debate in the eighteenth century over what had been called 'the Modern Question'. At the heart of this debate was the following question: Do the unconverted have a duty to believe the gospel? The problem here arose out of the logic of High Calvinism. It was argued that the belief that Christ died for the elect alone seemed to demand as a corollary that none but the elect alone have the power to repent and believe; and if not the power, then the duty to do so. Yet, on the other hand, the Bible appeared to commend the practice of seeking to convert the unbeliever by preaching the gospel, and experience indicated that on some occasions it achieved this end. This result came about following the demand to the unconverted to believe, assuming that they had the power to do so, or at least the duty.<sup>11</sup> Andrew Fuller, a leading Particular Baptist theologian, in his 1785 work, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, convincingly proved to many Christian leaders that a biblical understanding of God's grace does not diminish man's responsibility in any way. The

---

<sup>8</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', *Scottish Baptist Yearbook*, 1902, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Details of the debate on this issue can be found in G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and The Modern Question', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 16.5 (1965), pp. 101-123; and within Particular Baptist circles in R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), pp. 72-6, 91-5.

struggles that both Andrew Fuller and George Barclay experienced over these difficult theological issues<sup>12</sup> provided common ground for their later partnership in evangelistic endeavours, both at home and overseas. The early 'English' Baptists in Scotland, and George Barclay in particular, would see Andrew Fuller as a mentor and friend.

Over a period of about four years Barclay wrestled with these weighty theological truths. He came to a place of full assurance of faith around the time of the completion of his apprenticeship at the age of twenty. He stated:

Now I began to enjoy God, and truly my fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Strict justice, as well as sovereign reigning grace, I contemplated in my redemption, and confided in it with equal comfort. God on the throne of his glory was as much the object of my trust and boast, as Jesus dying on Calvary. I think I may say with confidence, that the satisfaction of divine justice, and the security and shining of the divine glory in the salvation of sinners, through the sacrifice of the Son of God, have given me equal or superior satisfaction to what I ever enjoyed in the hope of my own salvation. It so arrested my attention – absorbed my thoughts, and satisfied my soul, that I have, for a season, as it were, forgotten myself in the glory of God.<sup>13</sup>

It was no surprise that one so thrilled with his faith desired to share it with other people. A new chapter was about to open in the life of George Barclay as he began to consider the possibility of serving as an evangelist or congregational minister.

#### TRAINING FOR MINISTRY

The desire to train for the pastoral ministry was made a matter of much prayer and fasting by this young man, as well as a time of serious self-examination. He was aware that his denomination required a full seven years of study for this vocation and the costs associated with such a decision were considerable. His cousin, whose profession of faith four years earlier part way through his studies had made such an impression upon George, had completed his training and was now about to enter upon his first pastoral charge. It was this relative that was the most influential person in encouraging George Barclay to commit himself to the preparation necessary for the Christian ministry. After consultation with

---

<sup>12</sup> Fuller, 'Memoir of Andrew Fuller', pp. 5-10.

<sup>13</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 3.

his Antiburgher minister he moved to Paisley to start his studies for this new career, but due to financial difficulties he was compelled to withdraw from the course. His responsibilities towards his wife Janet, whom he had married in December 1796, the daughter of a Kilwinning farmer Robert Speirs, ensured that the traditional path to Antiburgher ministry had now closed for him. A new avenue for sharing his faith unexpectedly arose when he was invited to work with the Paisley Sabbath School Society. Training for a few weeks was deemed sufficient prior to this young man being placed as a teacher in one of their schools. This work was challenging, but also very enjoyable, especially now that Barclay had given up thoughts of Antiburgher ministry due to his financial constraints. He had retained, though, his passion for mission, avidly reading reports of mission work overseas, such as the BMS work in India,<sup>14</sup> and also concerning home missionary activities, in particular that organised by Robert and James Haldane in Scotland.<sup>15</sup> The breadth of his reading led Barclay to begin to question some of the narrow and rigid principles upon which the church of his youth was grounded, and fellowship with Christians from other traditions opened his eyes to recognise other valid forms of church life and practice.<sup>16</sup>

The proofs of godliness which he saw in persons of other denominations, and the accounts he read of their faith, and fruitfulness, and united exertions for the good of men, and the glory of God, freed his heart from a party spirit, and determined him to 'walk at liberty, and keep God's precepts'. At this period, too, his mind began gradually to recede from Presbyterian

---

<sup>14</sup> *The Periodic Accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* were published regularly after 1800 by John Morris of Clipstone, England, but the *Missionary Magazine* edited by Rev. Greville Ewing, the assistant minister of Lady Glenorchy's Chapel, Edinburgh, was the main source of mission information to Scots in the late 1790s. J. J. Matheson, *Memoir of Greville Ewing* (London: John Snow, 1843), pp. 81-6.

<sup>15</sup> For example, *An Account of the Proceeding of the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home from their Commencement, December 28, 1797, to May 16, 1799* (Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1799).

<sup>16</sup> One of the founder members of Kilwinning Baptist Church, James Neil, had attended Kilwinning Antiburgher Church as an adherent for several years, but would not join them due to their rigid rules, especially the prohibition on hearing preachers from other denominations. G. Barclay, *Memoirs of the late Mr James Neil, Shipmaster, Irvine* (Greenock: William Scott, 1822), pp. 47, 65-6, 79-81, 86-9.

principles and to embrace those denominated Independent or Congregational.<sup>17</sup>

The seeds of change in Barclay's ecclesiological views were to coincide with a new opportunity to train for Christian ministry, in the classes of Robert Haldane's Theological Academy.<sup>18</sup> The initial suggestion of a friend that he should apply to Robert Haldane was rebuffed in early 1799, but following a three month illness in the autumn of that year there was a change of heart, which resulted in the acceptance of a place in the second class of students, following an interview with Greville Ewing, minister of the Glasgow Tabernacle Church.<sup>19</sup>

In December 1799 Barclay moved to Dundee to commence his studies under the supervision of the Dundee Tabernacle minister William Innes. He remained there until November 1800. There were regular opportunities for preaching, following his first public sermon at Dunkeld, Perthshire, in April 1800, that were perceived by this young man as a welcome break from his more formal academic studies. After fifteen months of further preparation under Greville Ewing in Glasgow he was appointed to work with the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home (SPGH) for the following year. Two offers of employment were open to him from Cambuslang and Kilwinning congregations. Barclay felt led to preach the gospel in his home district and accepted the call to the Kilwinning Independent cause in April 1802. Much to his disappointment this ministry saw little in the way of success. The size of the congregation steadily declined despite his most earnest endeavours. The next stage in his theological journey began when a friend expressed some doubts over the propriety of infant baptism. Intensive reading of various books and conversations with friends in different denominations led Barclay to conclude that 'believers in Christ are the only proper subjects, and immersion the only proper mode of Christian baptism'.<sup>20</sup> True to his

---

<sup>17</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Information on this theological academy can be found in R. F. Calder, 'Robert Haldane's Theological Seminary', *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, 13 (1937-39) (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprints, 1969), pp. 53, 59-63; *The Jubilee Memorial of the Scottish Congregational Churches* (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton & Co., 1949), pp. 67-72; W. D. McNaughton, *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794-1993* (Glasgow: The Congregational Union of Scotland, 1993), p. 283.

<sup>19</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 46. By contrast to Leechman's account, James Scott declares that Barclay, in his time as minister of the

convictions Barclay was baptised in October 1803 by Dr Charles Stuart of Edinburgh, a decision that was to lead to his resignation shortly afterwards from his Kilwinning congregation. It is important to note, however, that his baptism was not in one of the existing Scotch Baptist churches in Scotland, because the Kilwinning minister, like his later colleague Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh, was not convinced of the appropriateness of their form of church government or the sufficiency of their zeal for mission.<sup>21</sup> His preparation for ministry had been completed, but it was neither Antiburgher nor Independent causes that he would serve. Instead, a new congregation began that would be one of the very first 'English'-style Baptist churches in Scotland with a 'pastor and deacons' model of leadership, in contrast to the plurality of elders found in the Scotch Baptist churches in Scotland. This decision was the first of a number of new initiatives undertaken by the Kilwinning Baptist minister, the pioneer of a new form of Baptist witness in Scotland.

#### KILWINNING/IRVINE BAPTIST CHURCH

There were twelve people that united together to form a Baptist church in Kilwinning on 12 December 1803. On that day George Barclay stated:

We met for prayer and fasting, with a view to this solemn and important matter. After spending some time in devotional exercises, several truths essential to be known, believed and experienced, in order to personal Christianity, were stated. We each of us professed our faith in these. We adopted this single and simple principle as the basis of our union – that the Bible contained the whole of religion, and that we determined to follow it wherever it might lead us. On this profession and mutual agreement, we gave to each other the right hand of fellowship, and agreed to walk together as disciples of Jesus, and as a church of God.<sup>22</sup>

The last item of business conducted was the decision to look within the fellowship for individuals who were qualified to hold the offices of pastors

---

Independent congregation in Kilwinning, 'had no complaint to make concerning the attendances, for these had steadily increased, but no one had made an open confession of Christ' (J. Scott, 'Baptist Stalwarts of the Past: George Barclay', *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 65.8 [August 1939], p. 4). It is difficult to assess the accuracy of Scott's opinion as no primary source was given for his assertions.

<sup>21</sup> B. R. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp. 115-17.

<sup>22</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 47.



and deacons. On 31 December George Barclay was formally set apart to the pastoral office, with another unknown person appointed as a deacon.<sup>23</sup> This body was duly constituted on Sunday 1 January 1804, the occasion of their first celebration of the Lord's Supper. This was a group of dedicated individuals who knew that the path they had chosen would be a hard one to follow, but who were determined to go where their settled convictions had led them.

Although small in number this body of people showed great zeal in their determination to promote the gospel they professed. Evangelistic meetings were held in a variety of hired premises in the district to allow as many people as possible to hear their message. Barclay spoke frequently in the open air and conducted various preaching tours wherever a potential congregation could be found. From the start of this new body in Kilwinning one of the two Sunday services was held in Irvine, the neighbouring town, due to its greater population and because some of the older church members lived in that place.<sup>24</sup> A decision was taken in 1822 to move the church to Irvine, where they worshipped in 'The Albert Rooms', a building later used as an Artillery Hall, and then in the twentieth century as the 'Tivoli' Cinema. The congregation grew slowly but steadily throughout Barclay's ministry with up to 200 members added during his thirty-six year pastorate.<sup>25</sup> From these small beginnings small shoots of growth began to emerge elsewhere in Scotland. In 1805 Barclay met with a small group of Baptists meeting in the Cordiner's Hall, Edinburgh. This congregation had arisen from the contacts between English Baptist students at Edinburgh University and members of James Haldane's Tabernacle Church. In April 1805 Barclay baptised two of their number, one a man called Thomson,<sup>26</sup> the other Archibald Smith, who was to rise to prominence as co-pastor of the Edinburgh Tabernacle with James

---

<sup>23</sup> Note here only one deacon. This was not unique in the 'English' Baptist Churches. They chose to appoint only individuals identified with the gifts for that particular ministry. The first congregation of this movement in Glasgow also had only one deacon, James Deakin. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>24</sup> Barclay, *James Neil*, p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> 'Origin and History of Irvine Baptist Church', 1925 (?), p. 1. MS in the Waugh Papers, Bundle 2, Scottish Baptist History Archive, Glasgow.

<sup>26</sup> H. Anderson, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Anderson* (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, 1854), pp. 25-6. Probably John Thomson who also attended the Edinburgh Tabernacle Church until his retirement from that church in June 1820 over the exercise of church discipline. J. Thomson to A. Smith, 23 June 1820, Waugh Papers, Bundle 3.

Haldane, once the latter had adopted Baptist principles in 1808. Smith was to become secretary of the first Baptist Union of Scotland in 1827.<sup>27</sup> It was through these Edinburgh contacts that Barclay's lifelong friendship with Christopher Anderson was to develop. In fact, George Barclay was in practice seen as the senior pastor of the 'English' Baptist churches in Scotland in the first decade of the nineteenth century. He was present at the ordination and induction of new pastors in this tradition, for example, giving the charge in November 1829 to James Paterson, the pastor of the 'English' Baptist congregation that met in a hall in Inkle Factory Lane, Glasgow, prior to their church being built in Hope Street.<sup>28</sup> Entries from the diary of Christopher Anderson in this period reveal the prominent position of the Kilwinning minister.<sup>29</sup> After his congregation had been firmly established, Barclay's attention began to turn to addressing other perceived spiritual needs in his native land.

#### HOME EVANGELISM

There had been individual Scotch and 'English' Baptists engaged in Highland Mission in the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> However, the first organisation established for this purpose in 1808 was the Scotch Itinerant Society (SIS), whose leaders were Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh and George Barclay. Anderson was the treasurer and the main contributor to its funds, Barclay was its secretary and figurehead. The introduction to the first printed Journal of itinerant work under the auspices of the SIS included the following statement:

[The SIS had its] origin in the mutual agreement of two friends, who resolved to do 'what they could', not merely in their own little circle, but in the dark and most destitute parts of their native country. Their ability to support others, as it respected pecuniary means, was, but very limited

---

<sup>27</sup> See the documents from this Baptist Union in the Waugh Papers.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Anderson, *Christopher Anderson*, pp. 25-7. Fuller information on Paterson and his congregation are given in B. R. Talbot, 'Contrasting Interpretations of Baptist Identity in Nineteenth Century Scotland: The Contributions of Rev. Francis Johnston, Rev. Jonathan Watson and Dr James Paterson', an unpublished paper delivered at the Third International Conference on Baptist Studies, at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Anderson, *Christopher Anderson*, pp. 25-7.

<sup>30</sup> Fuller details on Baptist Home Mission Work in Scotland in this period are given in chapter five of Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*.

indeed; yet a commencement was made, in reliance upon the bounty of the Shepherd of Israel.<sup>31</sup>

George Barclay had informed his congregation when accepting the pastoral office that he would undertake itinerant preaching tours in other parts of Scotland. Regular visits to Perthshire, Ayrshire and Galloway and a long northern tour as far north as Dingwall in 1810 indicate the scope of his itinerant ministry.<sup>32</sup> Aware of their limited finances, Andrew Fuller persuaded English Particular Baptists in London to provide a small amount of aid for the work in Scotland. The July 1808 minutes of 'The Baptist Society in London for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant Preaching' record that 'They had thereupon resolved that a letter be written to Mr Fuller informing him that if Messrs Anderson and Barclay will make personal application that the committee will attend to their cases.'<sup>33</sup> In the period 1808 to 1812 George Barclay received regular donations of money (usually £5 each time), in addition to tracts and copies of the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The first agent employed by this society was Alexander McLeod, a former Haldane preacher from Dunkeld who had adopted Baptist principles in 1807. He was employed to serve in Perthshire.<sup>35</sup> The second and most successful agent was Dugald Sinclair, a former member of the Bellanoch 'English' Baptist Church, a church-plant from the Glasgow congregation of this network in 1805, under the pastoral leadership of Neil McVicar, a former Haldane preacher. After being trained for the ministry at Horton Baptist College, Bradford, Sinclair was employed in 1810 to serve in the Western Highlands, prior to his emigration to Canada in 1831. An account of his commissioning service on Saturday 9 June 1810 in Barclay's meeting-house in Kilwinning was recorded in Sinclair's Journal:

---

<sup>31</sup> D. Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions in some of the more destitute parts of Scotland* (6 Vols; Edinburgh: Andrew Balfour, 1816), Vol. 1, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> P. Waugh, 'Home Missions and The Highlands', in G. Yuille (ed.), *History of the Baptists in Scotland* (Glasgow, Baptist Union Publications Committee, 1926), pp. 69-70.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Baptist Society in London for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant Preaching', 21 July 1808, MS in the possession of the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

<sup>34</sup> 'Baptist Society in London', Minutes 21 July 1808 to 9 April 1812. The aid probably continued beyond this time, but the minutes apparently have not survived.

<sup>35</sup> For details on McLeod see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 124-6. See also D. E. Meek, 'Evangelical Missionaries in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Scottish Studies*, 28, 1987.

'I was, last night, solemnly set apart for the work of the Lord, as an Itinerant, by prayer, in Brother Barclay's meeting-house in Kilwinning. Messrs [Christopher] Anderson, Barclay and [Peter] McFarlane were present and engaged the service.'<sup>36</sup> McFarlane, the least well-known of these ministers, had been sent from the Kilwinning church to Horton Baptist College to train for Christian ministry. He had chosen to accept a call from Rawden Baptist Church, Yorkshire in 1809.<sup>37</sup> Barclay and his congregation were central in the work of this society.

It was, though, a struggle for the SIS to survive. The printed accounts for the years 1808 to 1815 reveal a deficit every year apart from 1814.<sup>38</sup> It was to get worse: from 1816 to 1824 the amount owed to the society treasurer was £147, with other debts incurred as a result of evangelistic work in Falkirk and Aberdeen.<sup>39</sup> The solution came with a merger with the home evangelisation body led by Robert and James Haldane. 'The Baptist Evangelical Society for Scotland, especially the Highlands', had begun its work in June 1823 with a strong committee and agents for collecting funds based both in Scotland and England. George Barclay was asked to lead the new body as its secretary.<sup>40</sup> In 1827 this society merged with the Baptist Highland Mission, the evangelistic agency of the Scotch Baptists in Scotland, to form the 'Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland'. Barclay was appointed to serve on its committee.<sup>41</sup> Although the Kilwinning minister took a less prominent role in the leadership of Baptist home mission work in Scotland after 1827, there can be no doubt that he, together with Christopher Anderson, was instrumental in placing this work on a very strong footing. Other Baptists would build on the solid foundations that George Barclay had erected.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions*, Vol. 1, p. 7. For details on Sinclair see D. E. Meek, 'Dugald Sinclair', *Scottish Studies*, 30, 1991; and Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 121-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Northern Baptist Education Society Report, 1805-1806* (Rochdale: J. Hartley, 1806), p. 57; *Report, 1809-1810*, pp. 162-3, 169.

<sup>38</sup> See Table 4.1, SIS Accounts, Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, p. 141, and in more detail in Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions*, Vols 1-6.

<sup>39</sup> *The Freeman*, 27 May, 1863, p. 332.

<sup>40</sup> 'Baptist Evangelical Society for Scotland, especially the Highlands', *Baptist Magazine*, 25.5 (May 1825), p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> *Report of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. & D. Collie, 1929), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> One of the most successful former members of his Kilwinning Church was John Gilmour, who was directed to church-plant in Aberdeen from 1822 to 1830 after completing his training at Horton, prior to his emigration to

## BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The vision of George Barclay extended beyond the borders of his native country. He was one of many Scottish ministers across the Protestant denominations that generously supported the work of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).<sup>43</sup> He was passionately convinced that Baptists working together could achieve far more than working as isolated individual congregations. Too often internal differences within Baptist ranks were allowed to get in the way of effective Christian service. There is no better example of Barclay's conciliatory skills than that exhibited in his work with the BMS.<sup>44</sup> Andrew Fuller, the BMS secretary, had preached for the first time in Kilwinning in 1805 during his third collecting tour in Scotland. He appears to have highly esteemed George Barclay, and on the two succeeding visits in 1808 and 1813 he was accompanied by him when preaching and collecting funds for the society in the south-western counties of Scotland.<sup>45</sup> This friendship was maintained until Fuller's death in 1815. Barclay's involvement in the work at Serampore was summed up by his son-in-law and successor as pastor in the church at Irvine, John Leechman:

He was also the correspondent of [William] Carey, and [Joshua] Marshman, and [William] Ward ... and in all the trials and triumphs of the Baptist Mission he ever took the deepest interest. The Serampore brethren especially shared his confidence and regard; and as several of his own family were privileged to reside for a season at that loved spot, where the 'first three' lived, and laboured and died ... in that spot his interests and attachments, in his later years, were so concentrated that he seemed to live as much at Serampore as he did in Irvine.<sup>46</sup>

---

Canada where he was even more influential in home mission work. P. R. Dekar, 'The Gilmours: Four Generations of Baptist Service', in P. R. Dekar & M. J. S. Ford (eds), *Celebrating The Canadian Baptist Heritage* (Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University Divinity College, n.d.[1984?]), pp. 41-53.

<sup>43</sup> B. Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh, T&T. Clark, 1992), p. 20. J. C. Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward, embracing the History of the Serampore Mission* (2 Vols; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1859), Vol. 2, pp. 328, 332-7.

<sup>44</sup> The information in this section is largely taken from Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, chapter four, 'The "English" Baptists', 1796-1852.

<sup>45</sup> 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Baptist Magazine*, 29.2 (February 1839), p. 48.

In 1831 Barclay's youngest and only surviving son, William Carey, joined his illustrious colleagues at Serampore. He had been trained as a printer, but was also used as a preacher after showing remarkable fluency in the Bengali language. The young Barclay's career was cut short in June 1837 by his untimely death on the mission-field. George Barclay's youngest son had died as an infant and Robert Barclay, the second son had died earlier in 1822 aged twenty-three.<sup>47</sup> Two of Barclay's three daughters, Margaret and Janet, were loyal members of the Irvine church until their deaths in 1885 and 1888 respectively.<sup>48</sup> There was, however, another link between Barclay and the work in Serampore. John Leechman, who had studied at Bristol Baptist College and later as a Ward student at Glasgow University, was commissioned for missionary service by Christopher Anderson in July 1832 at Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh. Leechman was an able scholar and well suited to the post of lecturer in the Serampore College. In India during 1833 he married Mary Barclay, the other daughter of George and the brother of William Carey Barclay. The climate in India had an adverse effect upon Mary Leechman's health, and after consultation with their colleagues this couple returned to Britain for good in 1837.<sup>49</sup> The Leechmans also wished to assist the attempts in Britain to resolve the conflicts between the Serampore missionaries and the home committee of the society. George Barclay had been a faithful partner, fund-raiser and activist in the work of the BMS. It was, however, in the resolution of conflicts between 1815 and 1837 within this mission agency in which he would make his greatest contribution.

The controversy within the BMS had arisen in 1815 after the death of its secretary Andrew Fuller. Details of the controversy are complex but have been explained elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> The key point was that traditional supporters in the Northamptonshire Association and Scotland wanted existing arrangements to continue, whereas influential London Baptists, for example Joseph Gutteridge, wanted to control BMS operations through the new committee in the metropolis. It was a recipe for a disastrous confrontation. William Carey in October 1817 gave a warning about the dangers of this situation in a letter to John Ryland, a Baptist minister and a senior member of the BMS committee: 'I beseech you not therefore to

---

<sup>47</sup> Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Irvine Baptist Church 1803-1978. 175 Years of Christian Service* (Irvine: Irvine Baptist Church, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', pp. 30-31.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 57-67.

attempt to exercise a power over us to which we shall never submit'[sic].<sup>51</sup> After twelve uneasy years the partnership was broken in 1827 and reconciliation was not effected until December 1837. The burden of raising funds in this interval primarily fell upon the shoulders of Anderson and Barclay in Scotland and Samuel Hope, a Liverpool banker known for his philanthropic activities. Hope had been described by John Dyer, the BMS secretary, as 'the great stay of the Serampore mission'.<sup>52</sup> Tireless work by these men to bring about a resolution of the conflict between the missionaries and the home committee finally began to bear fruit in 1837. The last major public event in which Barclay participated before his death was the BMS committee meeting in London during December 1837. The reunion of the two parties had been a pressing goal for this stalwart supporter of the Bengal mission. John Leechman, Barclay's son-in-law, emphasised this point in the obituary written for his father-in-law:

To accomplish this desirable object he visited London in December 1837, as one of the deputation to the Society; and none rejoiced more than he at the amicable agreement that was thus, in the Providence of God, so happily brought about. He considered it a peculiar honour to have been instrumental in any degree, in helping forward this auspicious event. The writer recollects with what pleasure he frequently quoted the words of Isaiah, and applied them to this subject, 'And thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the breach, The Restorer of paths to dwell in;' and often did he rejoice that they were applicable to him and others, who were honoured to promote this union.<sup>53</sup>

It has been suggested that Barclay was the leader in bringing about the work of reconciliation.<sup>54</sup> This opinion is plausible due to Barclay's strong relationship with the Serampore missionaries, especially through his family ties, that put him in a unique position to negotiate an appropriate settlement with the London BMS committee. He had believed that strength lay in unity rather than in division and had sought to demonstrate it through his Christian ministry both at home and elsewhere in the Baptist cause. It was, therefore, natural that his conciliatory skills should be utilised in the resolution of this conflict.

---

<sup>51</sup> Carey to Ryland, 1 October, 1817, cited by Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> 'The Necrologies of John Dyer', *Baptist Quarterly*, 23.7 (1950), p. 309.

<sup>53</sup> *Baptist Magazine*, 29.2 (February 1839), p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', pp. 30-1.

It was not only in support of the work overseas that the BMS utilised the gifts of George Barclay. It was this Scottish Baptist minister, together with John Saffery,<sup>55</sup> minister of Brown Street Baptist Church, Salisbury, another dedicated supporter of this society, that the BMS invited to visit Ireland in 1813, with a view to building up the Baptist cause in that land.<sup>56</sup> The reason for this visit to Ireland had been an appeal by an Irish Baptist minister to Particular Baptists in England for colleagues to assist them in their work.<sup>57</sup> The matter was handled by the BMS committee who decided that a six week tour by two respected ministers would be the best means of assisting the Baptists in Ireland. The official history of the Baptist Irish Society, written in 1845, described the purpose of their visit in this way:

[These] men admirably adapted, by their sound judgement and holy zeal, to ascertain the wants of a country, and to suggest measures for its highest welfare, were requested by the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society on its behalf, and to collect donations from the few friends of Christ in that country, desirous of the diffusion of the light of life among the heathen. These honoured brethren were also encouraged to examine the state of Ireland with a view to measures being devised for the extension of the gospel of Christ among its inhabitants.<sup>58</sup>

In the October 1813 issue of the *Baptist Magazine* John Saffery reported their findings from Ireland. He was convinced that the desire to help the Irish Baptists was growing, but requested that, 'something more may be done by our denomination in that part of the United Kingdom'. The report commended at least seventy Episcopal clergymen and the Methodists who were 'faithfully labouring for the salvation of men and their number is

---

<sup>55</sup> Details of Saffery's life and work can be found in B. R. Talbot, 'John Saffery (1763-1825)', in M. A. G. Haykin (ed.), *The British Particular Baptists 1638-1910* (3 Vols; Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press), Vol. 3, 2003, pp. 42-83.

<sup>56</sup> This was not Barclay's first trip to Ireland. He had been in Ireland with Christopher Anderson collecting funds for the BMS as early as 1808. D. E. Meek (ed.), *A Mind For Mission. Essays in appreciation of The Rev. Christopher Anderson (1782-1852)* (Edinburgh: Scottish Baptist History Project, 1992), p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> J. Thompson, 'Baptists in Ireland, 1792-1922: A Dimension of Protestant Dissent' (D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), pp. 35-6 for details.

<sup>58</sup> A. G. Fuller & J. Belcher D.D., *The Baptist Irish Society: Its Origin, History and Prospects* (London: Baptist Irish Society, 1845), p. 2.



daily increasing'. In contrast to these encouragements Irish Baptists were struggling desperately.

The Baptist Churches are few and small. They are in danger of Arminianism on the one hand, and Sandemanianism on the other; so there is much to deplore; yet there are those in their communion who are desiring and praying for better days.<sup>59</sup>

In order to encourage those Irishmen who wanted to address the situation, Saffery and Barclay requested that English and Scottish Baptist ministers should go over each year and spend a week or two with each Irish Baptist church. In addition a special Baptist society ought to be established to take responsibility for the work.<sup>60</sup> Saffery renewed his appeal for a mission society dedicated to the work in Ireland, in a letter written in December 1813 and published in the January 1814 issue of the *Baptist Magazine*.<sup>61</sup> These two men were content to help shape this society at its inception, but would play no further official part in its affairs. They must, though, take a great deal of credit for both assessing the state of the Baptist cause in Ireland and contributing to the establishment of a society that would strengthen the witness of Irish Baptists.<sup>62</sup>

#### THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

To George Barclay is reserved the honour of being the first Scottish Baptist minister to send a theological student to train for the pastoral ministry at a Baptist College. He had been extremely grateful for the provision for his own training by Robert Haldane, and sought to provide opportunities for the next generation of ministers. The Baptist College he chose was Horton, near Bradford. Barclay directed four men from his own congregation to that institution and in association with 'English' Baptist colleagues in Scotland encouraged many more individuals to apply for

---

<sup>59</sup> *Baptist Magazine*, 5.10 (October 1813), pp. 432-4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Baptist Magazine*, 6.1 (January 1814), pp. 21-2.

<sup>62</sup> It is also important to highlight the excellent work done in Ireland by Christopher Anderson in support of this and other causes. See D. E. Meek, 'Christopher Anderson, The Scottish Highlands and Ireland', in Meek (ed.), *A Mind for Mission*, pp. 17-24.

places. In total twenty-two Scots gained places between 1806 and 1837.<sup>63</sup> The Kilwinning/Irvine men were Peter McFarlane (1806), David Gibson (1815), John Gilmour (1816) and William McMillan (1836). Gibson, an itinerant worker with the SIS, had his application for entry deferred in 1815; William McMillan died in the college in 1838 of a chill brought on by a lack of heating. McFarlane settled in Baptist pastorates in England after his college studies.<sup>64</sup> Gilmour was the most successful Kilwinning student, sharing his pastor's enthusiasm for theological education. In Canada in the 1830s he shared a vision for a Baptist College, and saw the Canada Baptist College, Montreal, established in 1838. This institution closed in 1848, but enough had been achieved to ensure that 'others caught Gilmour's vision'.<sup>65</sup> George Barclay had convinced 'English' Baptists in Scotland of the benefits of theologically trained ministers in the early part of the nineteenth century, but members of the other Baptist networks in Scotland were also convinced of its merits by the 1830s.

In April 1836 there was a representative gathering of Scottish Baptists who were concerned to enhance the opportunities for training for prospective Baptist evangelists and ministers within their native land.<sup>66</sup> They had been deeply concerned that out of the thirty Scots who had completed their studies at Horton, only six had returned to work in their native land. The Baptist Academical Society had been established to advance this issue in 1837. There was little progress in the first seven years, but with the establishment of the second Baptist Union of Scotland in 1843 a commitment was made to provide adequate theological training under its auspices. George Barclay, now in his final years, had been unable to attend the meetings of this body, but he had indicated his support and was listed until his death as a corresponding member of the Academical society.<sup>67</sup> Other younger men could now take forward the work that had been promoted so successfully by George Barclay over the previous three decades.

---

<sup>63</sup> For further details see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 147-50 and Appendix 2 'Scottish Baptists sent from Scotland to Horton Baptist College by 1837', p. 346.

<sup>64</sup> Details of all these men can be found in the annual *Northern Baptist Education Society Reports*, 1806 to 1838.

<sup>65</sup> Dekar, 'Gilmours: Four Generations of Baptist Service', pp. 44-6.

<sup>66</sup> For further details see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 215-20.

<sup>67</sup> *First Report of the Committee of the Baptist Academical Society* (Edinburgh: R. Marshall, 1838), p. 1.

## MOVES TOWARDS BAPTIST UNION

The last major initiative in which George Barclay played a significant part was the attempt to form a union of Baptist churches in Scotland in 1827.<sup>68</sup> In March that year<sup>69</sup> an anonymous circular was apparently sent to every Baptist congregation in Scotland inviting them to participate in moves towards the establishment of closer ties between the three streams of Baptist witness in Scotland. The 'English' Baptists led by George Barclay and Christopher Anderson had held, since the inception of their movement, close ties with English Particular Baptists. The Scotch Baptists also, within the framework of their own movement had regular fellowship with colleagues in England. The third group of Baptists, a network of pastors and churches associated with Robert and James Haldane, did not have such strong ties with other churches outside Scotland, but had seen the benefits of merging their home mission agency with the one promoted by 'English' Baptists in 1823. The enthusiastic responses from many churches led to a meeting being held in the Elder Street Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh, in April 1827. A decision was taken by those individuals present to invite churches to send official delegates to a further meeting at the same venue in Edinburgh on 13 June that year to constitute the first union of Baptist churches in Scotland. George Barclay had represented the Irvine church at each of these gatherings, but at the June meeting was appointed interim secretary of the Baptist Union prior to a more permanent arrangement being made.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately this union did not survive and had ceased to function by 1830 at the latest, however, the decision to appoint Barclay as its figurehead for the first few weeks or months of its existence speaks highly of the regard his colleagues had for him. The Irvine minister had consistently been a bridge-builder throughout his ministry. This tribute, therefore, by his Baptist colleagues in Scotland confirms that aspect of his ministry.

---

<sup>68</sup> The details of this initiative are found in Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, chapter six, 'The Attempts to Form a Baptist Union of Scotland, 1827-1842'.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous Circular, *To The Baptist Churches of Scotland*, 18 March 1827, Waugh Papers.

<sup>70</sup> *Circular from the Committee of Proposed Baptist Union*, 4 May 1827, and *To The Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 22 June 1827, Waugh Papers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GEORGE BARCLAY

On 20 July 1838 George Barclay died at his home in Irvine, having served in one church for thirty-six years. He was a Baptist by conviction who had left a numerically strong denomination in Scotland to found an 'English' Baptist Church. The uniqueness of the ecclesiology of his congregation was such that there was no other similar cause that could send a minister to represent it from amongst the existing Baptist churches in Scotland. However, this small group of devoted Christians maintained a faithful witness under his inspiring leadership and saw a steady growth in churches holding to their theological principles in Scotland. A statistical survey in 1843 found that 'English' Baptist causes comprised 64% of all Baptists in Scotland,<sup>71</sup> and by the end of the century almost all Baptist churches in Scotland had adopted the 'pastor and deacons' model of church leadership promoted by George Barclay.

The Irvine minister, together with his colleague Christopher Anderson had founded the first Baptist home mission agency that in time inspired other colleagues to join them in forming the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland in 1827, an organisation that was astonishingly successful in its evangelistic work in the nineteenth century. Barclay was also a leading figure in the BMS, both in promoting its activities in Ireland and in supporting its workers in India. His enthusiasm for theological education was infectious, linking with the Horton College to train a generation of Scottish Baptist theological students. By the time of his death in 1838, almost all Scottish Baptist leaders were convinced of the importance of adequate training for the pastoral ministry, even the great majority of Scotch Baptists who had opposed it at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The least successful of the initiatives in which he participated was the attempt to establish a union of Baptist churches in Scotland, but the fact that 45% of Scottish Baptist churches had participated in the 1827 union, a figure not matched until 1869 at the launch of the present Baptist Union of Scotland,<sup>72</sup> indicates something of the strength of his influence in support of this cause. George Barclay, in conclusion, was probably the most influential minister in Scottish Baptist ranks in his lifetime, establishing a pattern for ministry that continues to the present day.

---

<sup>71</sup> F. Johnston, *The First Yearly Report of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Cupar: G. S. Tullis, 1843), pp. 18-20.

<sup>72</sup> Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, Appendix 4.2, 'The Proportion of Churches Affiliated to the Scottish Baptist Association or the Baptist Union of Scotland', pp. 357-8.

# A FRESH EXPOSITION OF ADOPTION: I. AN OUTLINE

TIM J. R. TRUMPER, EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Perhaps more than any other influence, the impact of biblical theology on systematic theology has demanded a reorientation of soteriology towards the concept of sonship. The doctrine may therefore be on the verge of a long-awaited reinstatement to the position it occupied in Calvin's thought, one which pervades the whole ethos of the Christian life.

Sinclair B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship'<sup>1</sup>

This is projected to be the last of three two-part articles on adoption published in *SBET*.<sup>2</sup> Throughout, my purpose has been to highlight both the neglect and the importance of the doctrine by providing a fresh introduction to it – one grounded in an awareness of its theological history, a back-to-basics approach to the biblical language and its data (consistent with the Reformed principle of *ad fontes*),<sup>3</sup> and appreciative of Robert

---

<sup>1</sup> N. M. de S. Cameron and S. B. Ferguson (eds), *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> These final articles are based on two of three addresses delivered at the John Bunyan Ministers' Conference (Pennsylvania, April 2004). They are published here in honour of Richard B. Gaffin Jr, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, to mark his seventieth birthday; in honour of Donald Macleod, Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh, to mark his sixty-fifth birthday; and in memory of John Murray, erstwhile Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of his passing.

<sup>3</sup> See Tim Trumper, 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation. I: The Adoption Metaphor in Biblical Usage', *SBET* 14 (Autumn 1996), pp. 129-45; 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption: A Plea for Realisation. II: The Adoption Metaphor in Theological Usage', *SBET* 15 (Autumn 1997), pp. 98-115; 'The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account', *SBET* 20 (Spring 2002), pp. 4-28; 'The Theological History of Adoption II: A Rationale', *SBET* 20 (Autumn 2002), pp. 177-202.

Candlish's view that in the area of the Fatherhood of God and adoption 'there lies a rich field of precious ore yet to be surveyed and explored'. His point has been mine: 'theology has fresh work to do, and fresh treasures to bring out of the storehouse of the Divine Word'.<sup>4</sup> All that remains for us, in the last of these two-part articles, is to draw together the principles enunciated thus far in the series. To do so, I have outlined here a biblico-theological exposition of adoption, and in the second part will summarise its chief implications. I must begin, however, with a reminder as to why a fresh exposition is needed.

First, the exposition of adoption must reflect the actual language of the New Testament (NT), especially the uniqueness of Paul's term (*huiiothesia*), from which the adoption model derives its name (Rom. 8:15-16, 22-23; 9:4; Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:4-5).<sup>5</sup> In keeping with this, I have refused to draw on *extra*-Pauline NT texts, including John 1:12.

It has long been assumed that John's reference to those 'receiv[ing]' Christ (*hosoi de elabon auton*) gaining an authority (*exousia*) to become children of God,<sup>6</sup> speaks of adoption. I would argue, however, that the most we may draw from John 1:12 is a *metaphor* of adoption.<sup>7</sup> Yet, even if we assume we can, its location within the ambit of Johannine theology raises questions about its correlation to Paul's adoption *model*. It is a fallacy to presume that the *metaphorical* structures of Johannine and Pauline thought are identical or even compatible, even though we insist that the underlying concepts they convey contribute harmoniously to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God being the first course of the Cunningham Lectures delivered before New College, Edinburgh, in March 1864* (5<sup>th</sup> ed. Edinburgh, 1869), p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> I recognise the danger of building a theology on a specific biblical term. As Vern S. Poythress warns, a biblical term may become technical when used theologically. We must ensure, then, that its technical use retains its core biblical meaning (*Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI, 1987], pp. 74ff.).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Paul's reference to 'receiv[ing] the adoption as sons' (*ten huiiothesian apolabomen*) [Gal. 4:4-5]).

<sup>7</sup> Since the publication of my articles on the metaphorical import of adoption in 1996/97, I have come to see the usefulness of Sallie McFague's distinction between a metaphor, which is a one-time analogy, and a model – a root, dominant or foundational metaphor capable of carrying greater theological content and, thus, more suited to pervasive and sustained usage (*Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, 1982; London, 1983), p. 103; cf. McFague's volume *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (London, 1987), pp. 29-40.

oneness of the gospel. Furthermore, it is clear that the predominant soteric model in the Johannine corpus is the new birth (John 1:13; 1 John 2:29; 3:1; 5:1).

It is my contention, then, that Paul's adoption model should not be conflated or confused with the language of other NT authors, as has generally been the case to date in the work of systematians. We must break with the established custom of reading adoption arbitrarily into the filial language of the NT, irrespective of the author in view or the specificity of the language under consideration. Paul's adoption model should be treated on its own terms, and this is what has been attempted in the exposition that follows.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, by keeping within the confines of Pauline thought we may both discern and express without hindrance the apostle's redemptive-historical understanding of adoption. The admixture of the language of other NT authors could never allow this.<sup>9</sup> In any case, issues germane to the construction of an *ordo salutis* have typically taken precedence over the panoramic perspective of the *historia salutis*. A survey of the volumes of systematic theology dealing with adoption will reveal that the focus is often very much on its connections to regeneration, justification and sanctification.<sup>10</sup>

Once, however, the adoption model has been disentangled from those *extra*-Pauline models of the NT, we may prepare the way for the exposition of the doctrine by arranging the apostle's five references to *huiiothesia* in their clear salvation-historical order; from Ephesians 1:5

---

<sup>8</sup> The reader will find that many points made in passing in this first article are taken up again in the second.

<sup>9</sup> While Thornton Whaling notes that 'the Grounds of Adoption make up a great section of Biblical Theology', the manner in which he deduces this ignores the authorial diversity of the NT ('Adoption', *The Princeton Theological Review* 21 [1923], p. 226).

<sup>10</sup> Systematians tend to arrange their treatment of adoption *theologically* rather than *exegetically* or *historically*. For this reason their treatments tend to focus on the soteric and pneumatological implications of Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 8:12 ff. at the expense of the other 'huiiothesian' texts (Rom. 8:22-23; 9:4 and Eph. 1:5, the latter often disregarded as deutero-Pauline). But when they unpack these implications, the systematians resort to *extra*-Pauline references that have little or no relevance to adoption, as Paul understood it. Such treatments of adoption tend, then, to be theologically systematic but exegetically asystematic, in that they overlook the internal logic of Paul's (redemptive-historical) understanding, and blur it by their reliance on the statements of authors other than Paul.

(protology [predestination to adoption]) to Romans 8:23 (eschatology [the adoption *simpliciter*]). This order demonstrates the validity of Geerhardus Vos' principle of periodicity/historical progression<sup>11</sup> and the wide-ranging significance adoption has in Paul's theology:

Eph. 1:4-5      Rom. 9:4      Gal. 4:4-5 (Rom. 8:15-16)      Rom. 8:22-23  
 ←-----^-----^----->  
 Protology   Covenant Theology   Soteriology (Pneumatology)   Eschatology

No wonder Ridderbos believes adoption is 'an important concept'<sup>12</sup>

The seeds of this fresh approach are found in the theological history of adoption, notably the biblico-theological contributions of Irenaeus, the church's first biblical theologian; of John Calvin, a biblical dogmatician and theologian of adoption *par excellence*;<sup>13</sup> and Herman Ridderbos, who

<sup>11</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, reprint ed. (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1985), p. 16. 'When we consider... the passages where Paul expressly speaks of the sonship of believers and of their adoption as sons, it becomes clear at once that he is again thinking in redemptive-historical, eschatological categories.' (Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [transl. J. R. de Witt; London, 1977], p. 198).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197. Whereas biblical theologians recognise the importance of adoption for the history of the church, others tend to limit their recognition to her theology. The nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian preacher, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, comes to mind: 'Probably no word in our science of theology more completely covers all parts of the system of grace than does this word, adoption.' (*The Threefold Fellowship and the Threefold Assurance: An Essay in Two Parts* [first published Richmond, VA, 1902; reprint ed. Harrisonburg, PA, 1980]), p. 39. Robert A. Peterson also comes to mind: adoption is 'an overarching way of viewing the Christian faith' ('Towards a Systematic Theology of Adoption', *Presbyterion* 27/2 [Fall 2001], p. 121). The full-scale recovery of adoption is dependent, I suggest, on the widespread recognition of the importance of adoption for both the history and theology of the church.

<sup>13</sup> Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption I', pp. 15-16, 18-20; 'An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition' (Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 2001), chs 1-4; Nigel Westhead, 'Adoption in the Thought of John Calvin' *SBET* 13 (Autumn 1995), pp. 102-15; of narrower scope is Howard Griffith's "'The First Title of the Spirit': Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology" *Evangelical Quarterly* 73:2 (2001), pp. 135-53. The description of Calvin as a biblical dogmatist alludes to the presence of both humanist and scholastic influences in his



is to the Dutch tradition of Reformed theology what Vos is to its Princetonian counterpart. Following Ridderbos' lead, I have sought to bring together Paul's scattered references to adoption so as to expound adoption comprehensively, although not exhaustively, and address, albeit in preliminary fashion, the historical, theological, metaphorical and conceptual issues the doctrine raises.<sup>14</sup>

This brings us, thirdly, to the vexed question of the origin of Paul's adoption model. The redemptive-historical approach to adoption renders implausible the view that the apostle's use of *huiiothesia* echoes exclusively aspects of Greek or Roman adoption.<sup>15</sup> It reveals that while the term may be Hellenistic – one of the most common terms for adoption in the Graeco-Roman world, meaning 'the placing of a son' (a compound of the noun *huios* and the verb *tithemi*, 'to place') – Paul's usage of it strongly suggests he filled it with historical and theological content derived from the OT, the absence of *huiiothesia*'s use in the Septuagint notwithstanding.<sup>16</sup> This does not mean to say that the apostle did not draw

work and to his relevance for both biblical and systematic theology (Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York and Oxford, 2000), which he builds on in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* [Oxford, 2003], pp. 16, 30 passim).

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus and Calvin, by contrast, left their comments strewn throughout their works.

<sup>15</sup> Traditionally the presence of *huiiothesia* in epistles written either from Rome or to Rome was taken as undeniable evidence of the Roman origins of the model. Opinions nowadays are more diverse. For some samples see 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption II', p. 103 fn. How views shifted in favour of an Old Testament (OT) origin, see James I. Cook, 'The Concept of Adoption in the Theology of Paul' in *Saved by Hope: Essays in Honor of Richard C Oudersluys* (ed. James I. Cook; Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), pp. 134ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, pp. 197-8; likewise, Cook, 'The Concept of Adoption', p. 137, and James Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* [WUNT 2. Reihe 48; Tübingen, 1992] p. 61, and 'Adoption, Sonship', *Dictionary of Paul in His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester, England, 1993). Daniel J. Theron writes, 'there hardly seems to be any doubt that Paul's metaphor of adoption roots in the Jewish rather than in Graeco-Roman, or other traditions' ('"Adoption" in the Pauline Corpus', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 28 [1956], p. 14). Contrast David J. Williams' opinion in *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MS, 1999), pp. 83-4 n.138.

at all from Graeco-Roman forms of adoption, but it does remind us of the significant difficulties there are in ascertaining the degree to which he was influenced by these variegated forms, and which elements of them may truly be said to have supplemented his predominant OT reading of *huiiothesia*.<sup>17</sup>

All I can suggest here is that we first understand Paul's use of *huiiothesia* in its biblical context. Only then may we begin to ascertain which, if any, aspects of the first-century practices of adoption coalesce with Paul's use of *huiiothesia* and are demanded by it. By tackling the question in this manner, we may do justice to the circumstances out of which Paul wrote, and steer clear of foisting on the biblical text ideas arbitrarily extracted from Graeco-Roman forms of adoption. It is important to remember that for all Paul's awareness of the world he lived in, closest to his thought, and most determinative of it, was the history and faith of God's people. Any verifiable allusions he makes to Graeco-Roman forms of adoption relate, I suggest, to the doctrine's application. But what is of particular concern here is the basic narrative of redemptive history.

#### PREDESTINATION TO ADOPTION

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... (Eph. 1:5).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Discussion of the issue nowadays revolves around the work of James Scott. See his description of Greek and Roman forms of adoption (*Adoption as Sons of God*, pp. 3-13); cf. 'Adoptio' and 'Adoption, Greek' in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Sculland, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1970); or 'Adoption' in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (Oxford and New York, 1996). While Scott has received support from the likes of James D. G. Dunn (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK, 1998], p. 436), his views have been critiqued by John L. White (*The Apostle of God: Paul and the Promise of Abraham* [Peabody, MS, 1999], pp. 177ff.).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise stated quotations from Scripture are taken from the New King James Version (Nashville, TN, 1983). In my view, treatments of adoption that omit to use the *Ephesians* reference to *huiiothesia* are impoverished. As we know, *huiiothesia* is a term Paul alone uses in the NT, and, as the following exposition shows, its use in *Ephesians* comports with the other four references (cf. 'The Metaphorical Import of Adoption II', pp. 102).

'Sonship', counsels Ridderbos, 'is not to be approached from the subjective experience of the new condition of salvation, but rather from the divine economy of salvation, as God foreordained it in his eternal love (Eph. 1:5), and realized it in principle in the election as his people.'<sup>19</sup> Stated simply, it originated in the mind of God the Father and is essential to protology. This Ephesians 1:4-5 makes clear.<sup>20</sup> These verses are a part of one of the most notable doxologies of the NT. Ephesians 1:3-14 constitutes, says R. W. Dale, 'a gold chain' of doctrine,<sup>21</sup> which demonstrates most richly the Trinitarian nature of the soteric blessings that come to God's people *from* the Father (vv. 4-6), *in* the Son (vv. 7-12), and *by* the Spirit (vv. 13-14) (v. 3). Immediately obvious is the fact that Paul's reference to adoption appears amid his focus on the Father. For the sake of convenience, we may unpack its meaning, as has been done in the doctrine's theological history, in terms of causality.<sup>22</sup>

First, Ephesians 1:4-5 speaks of the *efficient* cause of adoption: the grace of the Father. He adopted a people for himself for no other reason than 'the good pleasure of his will'.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding all the perfection and fullness of reciprocated love that passed eternally between the persons of the Godhead – such that God need never have loved outside of himself in order to remain love – God voluntarily condescended to extend his love to his 'offspring' (Acts 17:28), even though they had broken loose from

---

<sup>19</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Woudenberg, 'Eternal Adoption', *The Standard Bearer* (September 1, 1990), pp. 475-7; Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption II', pp. 189-90.

<sup>21</sup> Cited by John R. W. Stott in *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Leicester, England and Downers Grove, 1979), p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Although the utilisation of Aristotelian devices such as causality is typically associated with Protestant orthodoxy (Muller, *After Calvin*, pp. 55, 35), we find relevant use of it in John Calvin's *Institutes* (3:22) and in his commentary on *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (transl. T. H. L. Parker, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance; reprint ed. [Grand Rapids, MI, 1965], p. 126).

<sup>23</sup> Long ago, the Scottish pastor-theologian Thomas Boston exclaimed: 'Was it ever heard that there was an adoption where the party adopting was not childless? *Ans.* Gods [*sic*] ways are not man's ways. It is free grace only, and not need, that puts the heavenly Father to adopt any of his creatures. – yet there is a suitableness in it to the divine wisdom.' (*The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, Vol. 1, ed. Rev. Samuel M'Millan [London, 1854], p. 652).

him.<sup>24</sup> Ever since the Fall, men and women have been 'sons of disobedience', 'children of wrath', inhabitants of the household of the living dead, and slaves to the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:1-3).

In grace the Father named for himself a family (Eph. 3:15). He did so by predestining the adoption of each member from the devil's household into his own. This action constitutes adoption's *material* cause and helps explain why Ephesians 1:4-5 is the *locus classicus* of predestination. It was by, or literally through (*dia*), Christ (v. 5; cf. v. 7) that the Father eternally foresaw those he would adopt into his family.

By trusting in Christ's redeeming work on the cross, the sons of disobedience may become adopted sons of God. The faith of which this trust speaks is the *instrumental* cause of adoption.<sup>25</sup> It implies a negative liberty *from* the enslavement the sons of disobedience knew in the household of the living dead, and a positive liberty *to* enjoy, through union with Christ in his Sonship, an adoptive sonship in the household of the living lively. Upon transferral from the one household to the other, the adopted are accepted in the beloved and experience the warm embrace of the Father (*eis auton* v. 5). Henceforth, they anticipate with hopeful longing the grand family gathering planned for the end of the age (v. 10); the prospect of which reminds us, that, while the gospel begins with grace, its *final* cause is glory: our glory (see below), but ultimately our Father's (v. 6).<sup>26</sup>

## THE PRIVILEGE OF ADOPTION

to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises... (Rom. 9:4).

What was divinely planned in eternal ages past was realised in history through the unfolding of God's covenantal dealings with his chosen people. Care is needed in unpacking these, for nineteenth and early-twentieth century theologians of adoption became so embroiled with Adam's pre-Fall status in Eden (whether subject, son, or both) that they struggled to accord due attention to Paul's emphasis on the divine

---

<sup>24</sup> This language is Calvin's (*The Acts of the Apostles 14-28*, transl. John W. Fraser, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance [Edinburgh and London, 1966], p. 117).

<sup>25</sup> Whaling, 'Adoption', p. 227.

<sup>26</sup> Adoption is, says Whaling, 'the supreme illustration of grace, and the highest reach of glory for the redeemed' (*ibid.*, p. 223).

enactment of redemption and adoption subsequent to the Fall.<sup>27</sup> Of uppermost importance to Paul was not what God's people were in Adam, but what they are in Christ. Thus, his mention of Israel's privilege of adoption serves not so much as an appendix to what happened in Eden, but as a precursor to the full revelation of divine redemption and adoption.

We begin with a little background information concerning Abraham. To him was given a divine promise that he would inherit the world (Rom. 4:13). This promise was eventually activated through Christ (Gal. 3:18, 29). Yet, contrary to Calvin, it did not constitute his adoption,<sup>28</sup> for the promise preceded Yahweh's official adoption of his people by some centuries. In the intervening period, Abraham's seed became so numerous, as had been foretold, that, upon redeeming Israel from Egypt, Yahweh inaugurated Israel as a nation. This inauguration coincided with Yahweh's adoption of Israel as his (corporate) son.<sup>29</sup> While it indicated a circumstantial change in Yahweh's relationship to his people, its substance remained unchanged; hence the continuance of its familial tenor (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 2:10).

The adoption of Israel is based on Romans 9:4, where Paul lists the six privileges Israel knew under the old covenant: the adoption (*he huiiothesia*), the glory (*he doxa*), the covenants (*hai diathekai*), the giving of the law (*he nomothesia*), the temple service (*he latreia*) and the promises (*hai epangeliai*). A close look at the endings of the Greek terms reveals that they are divided into two groups of three.<sup>30</sup> The first of the first group (*he huiiothesia*) corresponds to the first of the second group (*he nomothesia*), and so forth. Scott interprets this correlation to mean that Israel's adoption occurred at Sinai.

Yahweh's adoption of Israel would not have sounded strange to ancient Near Eastern ears. It was quite usual for father-son imagery to be employed in the drafting of covenants.<sup>31</sup> At the time of the exodus Near Eastern

<sup>27</sup> The question of Adam's Edenic status leaves unchallenged the certain superiority of sonship in Christ. The latter entails no probation. For a summary of the nineteenth-century discussions of the issue see Trumper, 'An Historical Study', chs 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., ch. 2.3.i; cf. White, *The Apostle of God*, p. xxv.

<sup>29</sup> Sometimes Israel is spoken of as Yahweh's daughter (Jer. 31:21b-22a); cf. the covenantal formula in 2 Cor. 6:18.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>31</sup> Quoting D. J. McCarthy, Richard D. Patterson writes, 'the father-son relationship... is essentially that of the covenant. And there is no doubt that covenants, even treaties, were thought of as establishing a kind of quasi-familial unity.' ('Parental Love as a Metaphor for Divine-Human

## A FRESH EXPOSITION OF ADOPTION

religions customarily regarded their gods as having consorts who bore them sons.<sup>32</sup> Yet, being without equal, Yahweh was without a consort and, therefore, without a son. Nonetheless, he sovereignly and graciously chose out insignificant Israel from all the people groups of the earth (Deut. 7:1, 7) and adopted him as his own. Yahweh became thereby the original single parent! Yet, lest Israel consider his adoptive sonship to compare unfavourably to the 'natural' sonship the surrounding people groups enjoyed in relation to their gods, Yahweh assured Israel that he possessed all the rights of primogeniture. He was truly as special to Yahweh as a firstborn son (Exod. 4:22; cf. Jer. 31:9). Succeeding centuries were to prove Yahweh's undying commitment to Israel, his son's multiple rebellions notwithstanding.

### THE RECEPTION OF ADOPTION

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' (Gal. 4:4-6).

In Galatians 3:23-4:7 Paul unpacks the nature of Israel's sonship under the old covenant era. He does so to draw a contrast with the adoptive sonship of the 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16) in the new covenant era. As authentic as was Israel's sonship of old, it afforded Abraham's seed but a foretaste of the enriched familial experience God's sons know now that Christ has come. Writing in particular of the *locus classicus* of adoption (Gal. 4:4-6), Ridderbos describes adoptive sonship as 'the object of the great eschatological redemptive event and... the direct result of redemption'.<sup>33</sup> It

---

Love', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 46 [June 2003], p. 212).

<sup>32</sup> Here I am indebted to Cook, 'The Concept of Adoption', p. 138; contrast C. J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI and Exeter, 1990), pp. 15-23. Cook's interpretation has the benefit of recognising Israel's context, and of explaining plausibly why Israel is said to have been born to Yahweh and yet also adopted by him. Could this explanation also shed light on Paul's use of *tekna* (from *tiktēn* – to beget or to engender) amid his discussion of adoption (see below)?

<sup>33</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 197; Theron, "Adoption", pp. 10-11. Ridderbos continues: 'Sonship is... a gift of the great time of redemption that has

is in effect the fulfilment of the Exodus typology of the old covenant and is therefore essential to soteriology.

When Israel entered into (corporate) sonship at Sinai, he did so as a child under age (*nepios*, 4:1). Thus, while he was heir to a great estate ('the world', Rom. 4:13), his earthly circumstances were more akin to servitude. The law with its multiple ceremonies kept custody of him, hemming him in with numerous rules and regulations (3:23). It was his tutor (literally, 'child-leader', *paidagogos*), his guardian or governor (*epitropous*), and his steward, administrator or manager (*oikonomous*) (4:2). The law's purpose was to train up Israel in readiness to receive his inheritance. Thus, it taught him of the holiness of his Father and of his own sinfulness. It also protected him from getting scorched by the inevitable outflow of the Father's holy character (Exod. 19:12-13; Deut. 4:10-12). In Paul's words, Israel had to learn 'the elements [or basic principles, *ta stoicheia tou kosmou*] of the world' (Gal. 4:3).<sup>34</sup> All the while, he yearned for the time he would come of age and enter freely into the blessings of the great estate promised him.<sup>35</sup>

Israel's maturation coincided with the one major hiatus in redemptive history: the epochal transition from the old to the new covenant. Says Paul, 'after faith has come we are no longer under a tutor' (3:25).<sup>36</sup> By dint of Christ's work, believing Jews may now enjoy 'the full rights of sons' (to use the NIV's translation of *huiiothesia* [4:5]). Believing Gentiles – who previously were enslaved to their heathen gods (cf. 4:3 and 8) – may know these rights too. Thus, Paul introduces us to further circumstantial

dawned with Christ. It is the fulfilment of promise that was given of old to the true people of God (Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18)' (*Paul*, pp. 198-9).

<sup>34</sup> For a list of the ancient meanings of *ta stoicheia* see Richard Longenecker's dependence on Gerhard Delling (*Galatians* [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41; Dallas, TX, 1990], p. 165-6).

<sup>35</sup> 'This', says Calvin, 'was the actual youth of the church [*ecclesiae adolescentia*] and next follows the age of manhood [*virilis aetas*] down to Christ's last coming, when all things shall be fully accomplished.' (*Commentary on the Prophecy of Isaiah*, Vol. 4, transl. William Pringle [Edinburgh, 1853], p. 136 [CO 15 (37): 270]).

<sup>36</sup> On the various interpretations of Paul's deliberate choice of the first and second person pronouns throughout Gal. 3:23-4:7, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 164. In general, I believe Paul's use of the first person refers to all Christians in general, whether Jew or Gentile; although the Jew was to the fore in his mind, especially in his earlier uses of the pronoun (3:23ff.). Paul's use of the second person pronoun refers, by contrast, to his Gentile converts.

changes in the familial relationship between Yahweh and his people.<sup>37</sup> Three factors signal these changes: the advent, work and Spirit of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

In 4:4-6 Paul repeats twice the fact of Christ's birth. He does so to emphasize the true humanity of God's Son and, thereby, his unity with us in that humanity. Hence, Paul juxtaposes the clauses 'born of a woman, born under the law'. Clothed in the very (unfallen) flesh of those requiring redemption (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21), he stretched out to humanity, in Calvin's words, 'a hand of fraternal alliance' to forge 'a bond of brotherhood' more definite than what was formed through his *assumptio carnis*.<sup>39</sup>

While the incarnation rendered humanity redeemable, Christ's cross-work is what accomplished redemption (Gal. 3:13). This explains why, for all the intrinsic redemptive significance of the virgin conception, Paul focuses on what Christ achieved in the light of it. Living obediently under

---

<sup>37</sup> In assuming and defending the substantive continuity of the covenants, covenant theologians have perhaps been slow to express adequately their circumstantial (as opposed to substantial) discontinuities. This may explain the emergent protest of new covenant theology, which claims that covenant theology flattens out the contours of redemptive history. (See, for example, Tom Wells' and Fred G. Zaspel's *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* [Frederick, MD, 2002]). The antidote to this criticism is not found in new covenant theology's denial of the church's existence in old covenant times – which substantive discontinuity bespeaks, I suggest, an incipient dispensationalism – but in covenant theology's less inhibited expression of the circumstantial discontinuities between the covenants. Such a response humbly acknowledges our need to balance afresh the continuities and discontinuities of the covenants, without conceding ground, unwarrantably, to our critics.

<sup>38</sup> Gal. 4:4-6 reveals that the gospel is a continuum running from incarnation through atonement to resurrection and Pentecost. The atonement ought not to be considered, therefore, as but a suffix of the incarnation, as Victorian liberals and the neo-orthodox have been wont to imply, nor the incarnation as but a prefix of the atonement, which is the impression later Calvinists have given. Herman Witsius hints at this when he speaks of the 'latitude to that fullness of time[ ] in which the New succeeded the Old Testament' (*The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, Vol. 1, reprint ed. [Kingsburg, CA], 1990, pp. 315-16).

<sup>39</sup> *The Gospel according to St John 1-10*, transl. T. H. L. Parker, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, reprint ed. (Edinburgh and London, 1979), p. 72 [CO 47 (75):62]; cf. Calvin's comment on 1 Tim. 2:5 cited in J. F. Jansen, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (London, 1956), p. 103.



the law, he worked out a righteousness that could be imputed to his people in exchange for their sin.<sup>40</sup> Suffering unto death their punishment, he bought their deliverance/redemption (*exagorase*) from enslavement.<sup>41</sup> In his resurrection, he was declared (*horisthentos*) to be the Son of God with power (*kata pneuma*, Rom. 1:3-4). This declaration some scholars regard as his adoption (in fulfilment of the promise given David [2 Sam. 7:14])<sup>42</sup> and the prototype of his brethren's, which is obtained through union with Christ in his resurrection.<sup>43</sup> Thus, all weary slaves need 'do' for their sonship is receive it! (4:5)<sup>44</sup>

The receipt of adoption entails trust in Christ. This trust is possible because the Spirit inspires it. It is the means by which he unites the elect to Christ (cf. Gal. 3:26-27). As real as is this union, it is neither symbiotic (deifying the sons of God and humanising the Son)<sup>45</sup> nor

---

<sup>40</sup> Although the notion of imputation is widely queried by scholars today (most recently by those of the new perspective on Paul), a close reading of N. T. Wright, for example, reveals a hesitance to jettison the idea entirely. See his telling comments in *What St Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cincinnati, OH, 1997), p. 123; cf. John Piper's defence of imputed righteousness in *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> As claimed in a previous article, adoption is a second-order metaphor of the cross that completes redemption, a first-order metaphor ('The Metaphorical Import of Adoption II', pp. 109-10). In Samuel King's words, adoption is 'the end of Redemption' ('The Grace of Adoption', *The Union Seminary Magazine* 22 [Oct., Nov. 1910], p. 31).

<sup>42</sup> Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, pp. 223-44.

<sup>43</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr has argued that the resurrection event is of central importance to soteriology and ensures its christocentricity. It does so by coordinating in Christ the distinct facets of salvation to a degree the *ordo salutis* model has been unable to express (*Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, second ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ, 1987], pp. 117-19).

<sup>44</sup> The contrast of the verbs *exagorase* and *apolabomen* highlights the difference between the divine orchestration of salvation and the human reception of it.

<sup>45</sup> For this reason the eastern language of deification (*theosis*), which was also used by Augustine in the west, sounds misleading to our ears. See my earlier comments (Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption I', pp. 15-17), and the dialogue between the new Finnish interpretation of Luther and Eastern Orthodoxy in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of*

ontological (admitting us entrance to the Godhead).<sup>46</sup> Yet it is not just a vague sense of affinity either. Having sent his Son into the world, the Father sends the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of Christ's brothers (Rom. 8:29). While they share with Christ an identity of relation to the Father, he remains forever the firstborn Son (*primus inter pares*).

Those possessing the Spirit enjoy a freedom unknown hitherto. At the outset of the new covenant era, the experience of this freedom was particularly poignant.<sup>47</sup> Those liberated could verbalise audibly for the first time in redemptive history their relationship to the Father. Prior to that, claims Calvin, believing Israelites had but an internal awareness of the divine Fatherhood. They could only speak of God as their Father by way of simile (e.g. Ps. 103:13). This explains why, at the dawn of the new covenant era, those receiving Christ's Spirit let out a 'cry of liberation' – 'Abba, Father'! Luther captured its tenor by translating the cry, 'Abba, lieber Vater [dear or loving Father]'. The cry is repeated every time a slave joins the second exodus and becomes thereby an adopted son. First heard on the lips of Christ (Mark 14:36),<sup>48</sup> when spoken by his siblings the cry marks a new freedom *from* an accursed life *to* one of sonship through union with the Son (cf. Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15).

Second, the Spirit puts on the lips of the Father's sons the filial language of prayer (*Abba, ho pater*). In its redemptive-historical context

*Luther* (ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson [Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK, 1998], *passim*).

<sup>46</sup> As Longenecker writes, 'Paul with his high Christology could speak of being "in Christ" without softening or dissolving the fixed outlines of personality for either Christ or the Christian' (*Galatians*, p. 153).

<sup>47</sup> Writes Witsius: 'God... has displayed his manifold, and even his unchangeable wisdom... in suiting himself to every age of the church: ... a stricter and pedagogical discipline was better suited to her more advanced childhood, but yet childhood very unruly and headstrong. And adult and manly age required an ingenuous and decent liberty. Our heavenly Father therefore does nothing inconsistent with his wisdom, when he removes the pedagogue, whom yet he had wisely given his son during his nonage; and treats him, when he is now grown up, in a more free and generous manner.' (*The Economy of the Covenants*, Vol. 2, p. 380).

<sup>48</sup> 'Abba... does not occur in Jesus' time in the language of prayer addressed to God. Of Jesus' standing out, in a historico-religious context, purely on the ground of his addressing God as *Abba*, there can be no question, *per se*' (Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* [London, 1979], p. 260).

this language bespoke the coming of age of God's people.<sup>49</sup> That is why, to quote Ferguson, 'we cannot open the pages of the New Testament without realising that one of the things that makes it so "new", in every way, is that here men and women called God "Father"'.<sup>50</sup> In its spiritual context the language of *Abba* speaks, in Tom Smail's words, of 'a new word for a new relationship'.<sup>51</sup> Those using it are no longer slaves, they are sons.

Note how, in the use of *Abba*, the collectivised sonship of Israel is replaced by the individualized realisation of a filial relationship to the Father. Synthesising OT texts into new covenant formulae,<sup>52</sup> Paul speaks more readily in the plural of the sons (and daughters) of God. He thus implies that, whether *Abba* means 'Daddy' or not,<sup>53</sup> the relationship is most personal. No one demonstrated this more than did Christ in the loneliness of his Passion. Yet, the trauma of Gethsemane reminds us powerfully that the appropriating language of *Abba* bespeaks not dripping sentimentality – as if Daddy were a big softy to be manipulated at will – but the seriousness of filial love, devotion and obedience. It reminds us that while *Abba* is most loving and gracious, he is *Holy* Father who has personalised the providence we face, determining to love us without ever spoiling us, and calling us to defer to him in all matters of faith and conduct just as did Christ, our elder brother.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> 'In Jesus' time *Abba* was a familial term denoting one's earthly father; it had formerly been a kind of childish talk, but had been in use among adults for a long time past' (Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, p. 259).

<sup>50</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1989), p. xi.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (first published 1980. Reprint ed.; London *et al.*, 1990), p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Cor. 6:18 (cf. Rom. 9:26), which finds its OT origins in 2 Sam. 7:8, 14 and Isa. 43:6.

<sup>53</sup> This view, however, has become a matter of debate, notably in James Barr's refutation of Joachim Jeremias's case for the 'daddy' connotation of *Abba*. For a summary of the argument and the sources see Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Abba and "Father": Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 3 (1992), pp. 614ff.

<sup>54</sup> Used among Jews, *Abba* bespoke paternal authority. Writes Schillebeeckx, 'the father is the one charged with authority, with *exousia*, complete authority, whom the children are in duty bound to obey and treat with piety. The father is also the one available to look after and protect his own, the family, to come to the rescue and to give advice and counsel. He is the focus of the entire family (paternal house), everything revolves around him and

## A FRESH EXPOSITION OF ADOPTION

Nonetheless, while the experience of sonship is more personalised in the new covenant era, together the sons of God form a community: the family or household of God (cf. Eph. 2:19). Family members are known by their possession of the Spirit of the Son. What is more, possession of the Spirit indicates the equality of family members irrespective of ethnic origins (Jewish and Gentile). Hence Paul's causal use of *hoti*, his use of the second person plural (*este*), and his reference to the prayer the Spirit puts on the lips of God's sons (4:6). Its combination of Aramaic (*Abba*) and Greek (*ho pater*) indicates that Christ has broken down the 'middle wall of division' (Eph. 2:11-22). Those 'far off have been made near by the blood of Christ', such that, through Christ, believing Gentiles and believing Jews now have access by one Spirit to the Father. Union with Christ produces, therefore, fraternal communion across racial barriers.

### THE ASSURANCE OF ADOPTION

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15).

Whereas in Galatians 4 the adopted have the Spirit because they are sons, in Romans 8 the apostle writes, inversely, that the adopted are sons because they have the Spirit (8:14). The Spirit of adoption ('sonship', NIV), as he is called, assures God's sons of their relationship to the Father.

First, the Spirit counteracts the encroachment of the fear-producing spirit of bondage (cf. Gal. 5:18). It is not the Father's will that his sons should live as slaves, as did our OT brothers during the infancy of the church. Jewish believers are no longer hemmed in by the ceremonial law's minutiae. They now have the Spirit, who grants them the freedom to perform the law, and Christ's example to show them what obedience looks like. Second, the Spirit helps them to enter into their filial relationship boldly. Having placed on their tongues, once-for-all, the filial language of prayer, the Spirit of the risen Christ (cf. Rom. 1:3-4) resides there ever after, remaining available to the sons of God as they learn how to cry with confidence to their Father (note the use of *krazo* in both Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15). The Spirit witnesses supernaturally and personally with their spirits (*summarturei*) that they are authentic children of God (*tekna theou*, Rom.

---

through his person forms a community. There is no contending with the father's authority in Judaism' (*Jesus*, p. 262).

8:16).<sup>55</sup> Yet this witness falls short of divine revelation. He witnesses *with* their spirits, not *to* them. He fulfils thereby the biblical requirement of a dual/multiple testimony for the establishment of a truth (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1; Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Paul may also have had in his mind contemporary practices of Roman adoption in which the adoptive act was performed publicly before witnesses.<sup>56</sup>

But why, having made so much of the maturation of the sons of God in the new covenant era, should Paul describe them in Romans 8 as *tekna* (cf. vv. 17, 21, 9:6 [cf. Phil. 2:13-14; Deut. 32:5])? Is not the term characteristic of John? True, but it is said that a Roman adoption was, existentially, like a new birth.<sup>57</sup> The former slave was no longer just existing, but alive and in possession of all the rights of his new family: freedom from debt and a share in the inheritance – hence Paul's talk elsewhere of the Spirit as the downpayment/guarantee or pledge (*arrabon*) of the inheritance (Eph. 1:13, 14). Yet the divine inheritance is unique in that it does not, and cannot, require the death of the Father. Neither does he become decrepit or dependent on his children. There occurs no role reversal. His immortality knows no aging process. Thus, no matter how mature the sons of God become in these last days, they remain forever but *tekna* who never cease to depend on their heavenly Father.

## THE CONSUMMATION OF ADOPTION

For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits

---

<sup>55</sup> The Spirit's assurance is described metaphorically in Ephesians 1 as a seal or mark of authentic sonship (1:13). The allusion is to farming where a seal was an external mark of ownership. By contrast, the Holy Spirit is an internal seal indicating the Father's possession of his sons until 'the day of redemption' (Eph. 4:30). The eschatological orientation of the Spirit's assurance explains Ridderbos' description of the Spirit as 'the gift of the interim' (*Paul*, p. 200).

<sup>56</sup> Trevor J. Burke, 'Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8', *Evangelical Quarterly* 70:4 (1998), p. 322.

<sup>57</sup> As Paul states matters in Ephesians 2:1-5, the transfer from the household of the living dead to the household of the living lively is dependent on being made alive. Yet, consistent with what was said at the outset, this idea of new birth must be understood within the ambit of Pauline theology before any comparisons or contrasts can be made with the Johannine model of new birth. Those interested in following up on this would do well to begin with Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, pp. 140ff.

## A FRESH EXPOSITION OF ADOPTION

of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:22-23).

The final use of *huiiothesia* looks beyond these last days to the end of the age when the present eschatological tension will be no more. At the climax of redemptive history the Father will consummate the adoption of his sons. Not only will their adoption be publicly ratified, they will experience in full, and with Christ, the blessings of their inheritance. This fifth use of *huiiothesia* teaches us, perhaps more clearly than any other, the truth of Gaffin's words, that 'in both overall structure and internal development, dogmatics needs to make clearer that soteriology is eschatology'.<sup>58</sup>

In Romans 8:17-23 the adoption *simpliciter* is said, first, to coincide with glory. The pattern of Christ's life – suffering now, glory later – is repeated in the lives of his brethren. While there are minimal details supplied us in this passage concerning this glory, Paul makes four things clear: God's people shall be glorified together with Christ; the sufferings of the present time cannot compare in their miseries (not even in Nero's Rome) to the blessings of the coming glory; the glory will be revealed in the sons of God; and it will shine forth in their full, perfect and eternal liberty (vv. 17, 18, 21).

Secondly, the adoption *simpliciter* entails the revelation of the sons of God (v. 19). Even now creation is straining its neck to see who are the sons of God. The day of consummation will throw up some surprises. Some we assume are God's sons shall be seen to be sons of disobedience. Some we fear are children of wrath may in fact turn out to be God's children. The authentic children are those who, blessed with the Spirit (the firstfruits, v. 23), join with creation in groaning (as in the pains of labour, not the throes of death) for the revelation of God's sons. They do so, not because assurance is impossible in the present, but because their public unveiling hails their release from the futility of the present order of things. Thus, they hope with perseverance (vv. 24, 25).

Thirdly, the consummation of adoption entails the consummation of the liberation of God's sons (vv. 20, 21). Although the adopted are already free, that freedom they know but in their souls. As it may be undercut, it

---

<sup>58</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr, 'The Vitality of Reformed Dogmatics' in *The Vitality of Reformed Theology: Proceedings of the International Theological Congress June 20-24<sup>th</sup> 1994, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands* (ed. J. M. Batteau, J. W. Maris, and K. Veling [Kampen, 1994], p. 31; cf., *Resurrection and Redemption*, p. 138; Theron, "'Adoption'", p. 13).

requires maintenance (Gal. 5:1). Only with the final deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption shall God's sons be fully, perfectly, eternally, and psychosomatically free. Only then shall all traces of their former enslavement vanish and all hopes for the inheritance be realised.

Assured of the prospect of the consummation of adoption, we hope with a yearning that shall survive our deaths. As Westminster's Larger Catechism puts the matter so well, only at the resurrection will hope be satisfied.<sup>59</sup>

The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls (Ans. 86).

Paul's doctrine of adoption reminds us, then, that the terminus of NT hope is not heaven in its ethereal intermediate state – which, for many, is where their hopes mistakenly lie – but in its final state: a redeemed creation filled with God's presence and purged of the corruption of the old order. Heaven in its final state is the domain wherein the Father's children exercise their consummate psychosomatic liberties (v. 21) in enjoyment of the inheritance they share with Christ, their elder brother and natural possessor of the rights of primogeniture. As the Father looks on, blessed to see all his children safely home and enjoying the inheritance, so they in turn glorify him for all he is and for all the love and mercy he has bestowed on them.

## CONCLUSION

These main contours of Paul's adoption model help establish its uniqueness among the filial/familial models of the NT. They demonstrate its essential redemptive-historical structure, the coherence of the apostle's thought, and the richness of its content. Given I have provided but an outline of this fresh exposition, it is necessary to mention those issues neither addressed nor resolved above.

The first issue concerns Paul's understanding of the adoption of Israel. Taken on its own terms, the OT speaks overall of Yahweh's creation of

---

<sup>59</sup> On the resurrection see 1 Corinthians 15 – the NT's longest single treatment of the subject.

Israel. How, then, are we to respond to Wright's opinion that 'the adoption analogy is somewhat suspect, since the texts [Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Deut. 32:6; Jer. 31:9] speak rather of sonship by birth'?<sup>60</sup> Are we to believe that Paul's apostolic authority gave him the right to interpret afresh the origins of Israel, notwithstanding the actual wording of the OT record? Or was Paul merely developing hints found in OT texts such as Exodus 19:3? Questions such as these touch on the thorny issue of the NT's use of the OT.

For reasons of space I have omitted, secondly, mention of Scott's claim both that the adoption formula of 2 Samuel 7:14 underlies four of Paul's five uses of *huiiothesia* (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; Eph. 1:5), and that it was applied subsequently in Judaism to both the Davidic Messiah and, in new covenant theology (cf. Hos. 2:1; Rom. 9:26), to the eschatological people of God.

Third, there needs to be a fresh consideration of the question whether adoption is after all a legal metaphor. Certainly, the Graeco-Roman origin of the term *huiiothesia* suggests a legal reference. But can this be sustained on a redemptive-historical reading of the model?<sup>61</sup> As we have seen, this reading suggests that, at its core, adoption speaks metaphorically of union with Christ. It is therefore relational in its purview,<sup>62</sup> but it is difficult to tell what the implications are for the traditionally-perceived legal character of the model.

Fourthly, I have mentioned nothing of baptism, the symbol of adoption. Galatians 3:27 is important in this regard. It is said to be either wholly or in part a confessional portion of the baptismal liturgy of the early church.<sup>63</sup> The matter warrants further study.

Fifthly, I have stopped short of working out the inter-connections between adoption and the other soteric themes in Paul. By acknowledging this, I hope to dissuade the reader from concluding that I have merely substituted a biblico-theological perspective for the later Calvinistic systematic-theological approach. My immediate concern has been to provide a reliable biblical basis on which to pose the theological

---

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 16

<sup>61</sup> Scott, 'Adoption, Sonship', *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St Bernard* (Louisville, KY, 1994), pp. 8 and 90.

<sup>63</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 154; cf. Trevor Burke, 'Pauline Adoption: a Sociological Approach', *Evangelical Quarterly* 73:2 (2001), pp. 121 fn. 9, 127.



questions.<sup>64</sup> It is to be hoped that, one day, these will be answered. Once they are, we shall have to hand what John Kennedy long ago (1869) described as 'awaiting'; namely, 'a clear definition of adoption, and a just description of its effects, on the relation between believers and God'.<sup>65</sup>

Despite these lacunae, I believe this fresh exposition furthers the case for the recovery of adoption. Not only does it draw attention to the doctrine, by building on the redemptive-historical perspective of its best exponents, it clarifies the doctrine's importance, and offers the reader a more accurate idea of its shape than do those treatments that are less exegetical/more systemic in their approach.

The tackling of these lacunae require the efforts of a greater number of theologians. While it is the duty of our tradition to recover what our forefathers lost, it is also surely our desire. After all, adoption is 'a topic full of comfort to the Christian heart, and one which opens up a grand field for religious thought and inquiry'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, in proceeding, we need to realise that 'figures of speech', to quote Francis Lyall, 'aim at comprehension, not at explication'.<sup>67</sup> We may grasp Paul's notion of adoption sufficiently to enable its use, without ever gaining necessarily a complete understanding of its every nuance and implication.

The resolution of these issues will inevitably take time. The continued pondering of them should not hinder us, however, from turning, meanwhile, to those implications our fresh exposition has for Westminster Calvinism. As we shall see next time, there is plenty we may discuss of their significance for the reshaping of Westminster Calvinism and the long overdue transformation of its feel. Such a discussion is crucial, for the integrity of our theology requires not only that it reflect the Bible's doctrine, but that it also resonate the Bible's atmosphere.

---

<sup>64</sup> I concur with Gaffin 'that a redemptive-historical approach [does not] necessitate[ ] abandoning the so-called loci method of traditional dogmatics. After all, strictly speaking, that method simply calls for a topical presentation of doctrine, and it is difficult to see why the biblical materials preclude such an approach.' ('The Vitality of Reformed Dogmatics', pp. 28-9).

<sup>65</sup> Kennedy, *Man's Relations to God* (The James Begg Society, 1995), p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Law, 'The Grace of Adoption', *Southern Presbyterian Review* (April 1879), p. 277.

<sup>67</sup> Francis Lyall, 'Metaphors, Legal and Theological', *SBET* 10 (Winter 1992), p. 97.

## REVIEWS

### **Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity**

Wallace M. Alston Jr and Michael Welker (eds)

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003; 449pp., £ 26.87; ISBN 0 8028 4776 5

It is encouraging to see a major new book on the theme of reformed theology and its place in the church and the world. This scholarly volume arose out of a consultation held in Heidelberg in 1999. The twenty-eight essays are divided into five sections which focus in turn on: reformed identity in historical context and contextual awareness, the shaping of reformed ecclesiology, reformed pneumatology, the place of reformed theology in ecumenical conversation and, finally, ethical profiles of reformed theology. In their introduction, the editors state that the book is an attempt to represent and explore the 'rich, structured pluralism... in reformed theology today' (p. x).

The book's first essay in discussing the identity of reformed theology helpfully sets out the book's definition of what reformed theology is. Yung Han Kim identifies the foundations of reformed theology as *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus*. All reformed Christians will be happy to see these foundations, but will be less happy with some of the definitions used. For example, in discussing the authority of Scripture we are told that

We must have biblically realistic thinking that does not evaluate critically but instead accommodates what the scripture is saying. We who are listening to and interpreting the Word of God can interpret it in diverse ways (p. 9, 10).

Many of the essays that follow use a similar methodology and, as a result, serious questions must be asked as to just how faithful to the reformed tradition this book really is. To cite another example, in the chapter 'Rethinking the Scripture Principle: Friedrich Schleiermacher and the role of the Bible in the Church', we are told that

The biblical texts are human reports of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and not strictly speaking the Word of God.... I do not see how we

can go on appealing to Scripture as the 'written Word of God' and face in all honesty the history of abuse associated with such appeals (p. 308).

There is an agenda at work here which is at variance with the reformed tradition, and it is therefore tempting to close the book and dismiss all of its contents. But this would not be entirely fair.

The book is stronger in the sections that deal with the socio-political aspects of the gospel. H. Russell Botman's essay 'A Cry for Life in a Global Economic Era' reminds us that

Reformed theology is at the same time deeply personal (never merely private), existential (never disinterested) congregational, (never dislocated) ecumenical (never parochial), and contextual (never ahistoric and abstracted) (p. 375).

This is a helpful reminder that reformed theology must always engage with our deepest personal needs, beginning with our need of salvation and moving from there into all areas of life. It is this movement that has been difficult for some and which needs to be recaptured, so that a fully-orbed reformed theology may be seen at work in the church and in the world.

This is an important book which ought to be read by those who wish to be informed about, and engage with, current scholarly theological trends. At the same time it needs to be handled with care, since in its redefinition of reformed theology it has departed significantly from the biblically-based Calvinism that places a genuine belief in the Bible as the written Word of God at its centre and moves from there to enable the church to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

*Sandy Finlayson, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia*

## **Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective**

Andrew C. Clark

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2001; xii+385pp., £24.99; ISBN 1 84227 035 4

This scholarly volume is the fruit of Ph.D. research done substantially at Tyndale House in Cambridge under supervision from Professor Max Turner of London School of Theology (formerly London Bible College). It belongs to the eminently useful series of Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs. The ample footnotes (frequently making up between a quarter and a half of the page), detailed exegesis,

untransliterated Greek, seven-page general index and thirty-one-page bibliography all bear eloquent witness to the book's origins.

You would, however, be completely incorrect to conclude that the above observations point to a boring, over-difficult or ill-composed read. Far from it. Certainly Andrew Clark makes substantial demands of his reader, but the theme itself and manner of execution render the book both readable and immensely valuable. There is a great deal of insight and raw information within its covers. The book deals with the broad theme of the depiction of Paul in Acts in relation to the portraits of Peter, the Twelve, Stephen, Philip and Barnabas rather than focusing upon the atomistic analysis of short passages. It spans the entirety of Acts and integrates topic into the overall purpose of the book. As such this monograph can be described as holistic and narrative in approach and is impatient of the reductionist tendency to explain away textual phenomena as a result of Luke's sources or 'Lucan style'.

Of course such a project warrants great care in terms of method. Clark identifies considerable methodological problems in previous studies of parallels in Acts especially those between Peter and Paul. Namely, there has tended to be a lack of precision in what constitutes evidence of an intentional parallel, and a general lack of credible external criteria from the Greco-Roman literary context. Clark seeks to remedy this by establishing internal criteria for determining when two accounts really are intended as parallels, using genre, verbal links, order of events and themes. It is accepted that individual verbal parallels may be insufficient on their own to make a case. However, Clark insists that a cumulative case can be made and that there are significant parallels bearing a distinct purpose in Luke's writing. The case is made through focusing upon the accounts of Paul's conversion and upon the speeches in Acts.

External criteria are sought in comparison with Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. In this it could be observed that there is no certainty that Luke and Plutarch were bound to use the same approach. He may have followed similar literary procedures selectively or he may have transformed what he saw. This problem is not very fully addressed. Strangely the ample bibliography contains no reference to the articles of Samuel Sandmel, 'Parallelomania' (*JBL* 81:1-13) or T. L. Donaldson, 'Parallels: Uses, Misuse and Limitations' (*EQ* 55:193-210).

Such quibbles aside, let me say straightforwardly that this is a highly interesting, informative and even enriching read. The quality of scholarship is very high and the spiritual interest of comparing Luke's presentation of such seminal figures in the history of earliest Christianity is enormous. Most significantly Clark concludes that the parallels

between Paul and Peter, and Paul and the Twelve support the contention that for Luke there is essential unity between the Jewish and the Gentile missions as part of God's plan of salvation. Paul is shown to be the equal of both Peter and the Twelve. Like them, Paul has seen the risen Lord, has been commissioned as a witness, proclaims that same Lord and performs signs and wonders to validate his message.

*Robert Willoughby, London School of Theology*

## **The Irish Puritans. James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church**

Crawford Gribben

Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2003; 160pp., £7.95; ISBN 0 85324 5364

The reviewer suspects that he is not the only Northern Irishman who would confess that his knowledge of English and Scottish church history is more extensive than his grasp of the situation in Ireland. This book will help remedy the deficiency.

Dr Gribben begins with a sketch of the 'colourful and diverse' religious scene in modern Ireland. He is convinced that the reasons for the present position must be sought in a careful study of men and movements in the 16th and 17th centuries. The complexity of the 16th century situation is well described, with the interplay of religion and politics among the different population groups. The progress of the Reformation in England was not paralleled in Ireland. Dr Gribben lays part of the blame on the policy of the English government with regard to the Irish language. A switch from Latin to English liturgy brought no increase in comprehension to most Irish people; 'the demonstration of English culture was more important than the clear communication of the gospel'. And the dominant popular Roman Catholicism owed as much to ancient pagan survivals as to the doctrines of Trent. By the end of the century the protagonists were consolidating their positions, with the training of Irish priests in many continental seminaries, and the foundation in 1592 of Trinity College, Dublin, to provide clergy for the Reformed church.

One year after its foundation, James Ussher entered Trinity at the tender (but not unusual) age of 12 years, already 'nourished in the Puritan atmosphere of home and school'. His success as a student inspired him to devote his life to the study of the Scriptures, and he began his famous work on biblical chronology. His rise to prominence was rapid; by 1613 he was vice-chancellor of the college, and in 1625 he became Archbishop of Armagh, the one-hundredth primate of that ancient see. And he was an

anti-Roman polemicist of no mean order. Far from being in the legitimate succession of St Patrick, contemporary Roman Catholicism was a 'great dunghill of errors'.

In 1615, under Ussher's guidance, a convocation of the church endorsed a detailed statement of faith known as the Irish Articles. (The 104 articles are printed in full in a useful Appendix.) Dr Gribben provides a detailed analysis of the Articles, seeing them as 'most significant', a considerable advance on the 39 Articles with 'a profound influence on the major Puritan confessions'. They were 'rigorously scholastic but charitable to weaker consciences'. Prospects for the evangelization of Ireland seemed favourable but for 'the interference of English Protestants'.

Ussher now had to face the opposition of the new Lord Deputy, Thomas Wentworth, and the baleful influence of Archbishop Laud. The Catholic counter-reformation was advancing under the 'limited toleration' granted by Charles I. This toleration did not extend to the development of Presbyterianism within the church in the north, where Scottish influence was strong and revival much in evidence. The clampdown from the English church and state was severe, and Ussher's position became almost intolerable. In 1640 he departed to England, hoping to pursue his scholarly interests in peace.

There was no peace in Ireland, however, as the 1641 rebellion resulted in the slaughter of large numbers of Protestants. In England the Civil War culminated in the execution of Charles I, an event abhorred by the irenic Ussher. Meanwhile the Westminster Assembly was convened. Gribben convincingly demonstrates that Ussher, though not present, had a 'massive influence' on the deliberations. His influence therefore persists to this day.

Continuing also to this day, much less happily, is the legacy of Cromwell's campaign in Ireland, with the savage massacres at Drogheda and Wexford. The 'bloodthirstiness and ethnic hatred', Gribben suggests, may be to some extent explained, but certainly not excused. The reader may raise an eyebrow at the views of John Owen and Jeremiah Burroughs. The thousands of English soldiers brought a 'bewildering array' of ecclesiastical opinions, many of them still with us. From the foundation of the first presbytery in 1642 Presbyterianism flourished, particularly in the north, but Dr Gribben concludes that the native Irish were never really evangelized.

In 1656 James Ussher died in England. Synods met in Ireland in attempts to establish a united Protestant church. These efforts came to nothing with the reinstatement of the established church under Charles II. Sadly, the heading of the last section in the penultimate chapter is 'The

collapse of Irish Puritanism'. Dissenters thereafter suffered much discrimination.

'Why study James Ussher and the Irish Puritans?' asks the author, as he gives a rapid survey of developments in the last 300 years, which included the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1870. Very significant also was the partition of Ireland in 1920 and the subsequent dramatic fall in the Protestant population in the Republic. In answer to his own question, Dr Gribben suggests that 'modern evangelicals need to learn from the Irish Puritans' failure to evangelize'. Ireland is a neglected mission-field. Gribben is fairly critical of modern evangelicals, whom he sees as complacent and respectable. They need to recognize that 'the gospel will never win Ireland when it comes packaged in any kind of national flag'.

The book, though short, is highly concentrated. Compact almost to a fault, it requires close attention. The account of the confused ecclesiastical situation is expertly done but does not make for light reading. There is no detailed portrait of James Ussher but he emerges as a pivotal figure in 17th century Ireland, a godly man, peaceable and reasonable, who retained the respect of his opponents. A few intriguing questions remain: What has gone wrong with the arithmetic on p. 123? Why did Ussher present Cardinal Richelieu (of all people) with Irish greyhounds? (p. 79). And do *all* Dublin accountants and management consultants wear blue suits? (p. 11).

This enlightening book has a serious purpose and deserves to be widely read.

*Robert Thompson, Belfast*

## **Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West**

Lamin Sanneh

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003; 138pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 8028 2164 2

The growth of the church in Africa, Asia and Latin America has occurred while the church in the West has continued to decline. Yet this worldwide Christian resurgence seems to be largely ignored if not treated with scepticism and suspicion by many. Lamin Sanneh chooses to close the gap between 'robust secularism' and private piety through a question and answer style, although he acknowledges that this will entail 'taking liberties with nuance and niceties in order to be responsive'.

Following a short introduction, in which the author describes how he will proceed, are two chapters, a select bibliography and an index. The

first and main chapter looks at Christianity as a world religion, largely in the form of 90 questions and answers. The second deals with issues centering on Bible translation, largely through a further 25 questions and answers.

This 'interview approach' works remarkably well and is flexible. It is easy to imagine oneself present during a good-natured but robust interchange. There is the variety you would expect in such a debate: some questions receive one-word answers while others are dealt with over a page or more. What is at issue is not the fact of Christian expansion but the attitudes displayed by many towards this expansion and its significance. The author interacts with a wide audience, so many questions and objections reflect a secular viewpoint, or that of an ecumenical rather than an evangelical standpoint. Nevertheless since priority is given 'to indigenous response and local appropriation over against missionary transmission and direction' the answers reflect a different perspective for those used to seeing through missionary eyes.

'World Christianity' is preferred to 'global Christianity', which carries vestiges of the imperialism of Christendom as well as connotations of parallels with economic globalisation. This shift in world Christianity is traced to the development of mother tongues as the means of receiving the gospel. The possibility of a new religious cold war is rejected. Several points are made with reference to the continent of the author's birth and upbringing: the significance of adopting African names for God is emphasised, as is the fact that African Christianity has not been a bitterly fought religion. 'Christianity helped Africans to become renewed Africans, not remade Europeans.'

Examples are given where world Christianity could benefit the West: 'Christianity is a world religion of recent vintage with energy to renew the church as it reels exhausted from its pact with secularism.' 'Christianity should not anywhere be about the refusal to change the old; it should be about the willingness to embrace the new.' 'A post-Christian West is not so far gone that it cannot make live contact with a post-Western Christianity.'

At different points in the book contrasts are helpfully drawn with Islam, and throughout there are echoes of the author's earlier writings. This is particularly the case in chapter 2, dealing with translation issues. We are reminded that 'Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language.' Nevertheless Christians have tended to arrogate a position to the language most natural to them and the Bible in that language, the Authorized Version acquiring 'an apocryphal reputation as the only Scripture Jesus knew!' However, 'No culture is so advanced and



so superior that it can claim exclusive access or advantage to the truth of God, and none so marginal or inferior that it can be excluded.’

In reminding us that God is continuing to build his church, and the means he uses, Lamin Sanneh encourages and challenges. The, at times, hostile secularism implicit in many questions reminds us of the mindset so prevalent in our culture. We might well benefit from reflecting on the issues raised as they impact our attitudes and our ways of ministry.

*M. Gavin Smith, Latin Link Scotland*

## **The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability**

Jay Wesley Richards

IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2003; 267pp., £17.99; ISBN 0 8308 2734 X

Jay W. Richards examines the case for jettisoning classical theism for its derivation from, and continued dependence upon, classical Greek metaphysics. He notes, for example, the Christian use of Greek words (and possible attendant concepts) such as *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *physis* and *hyparxis* and their Latin and English counterparts: *essentia*, *substantia*, *existentia*, *natura*, substance, essence and nature. He finds the case for wholesale Hellenization of theology to be ill-conceived and poorly argued. In a series of chapters, some of which are not for the faint-hearted, Richards examines the complex relationship between philosophy and theological expression.

The opening chapter is a *tour de force* in its historical analysis of the classical (deductive) formulation of Christian theism according to the *via triplex*: the *via eminentiae* (the way of eminence), the *via negativa* (the way of negation) and the *via causalitatis* (the way of causality). Richards notes, with more or less explanation, the differing contributions of Karl Barth, Charles Hartshorne and Jürgen Moltmann on the issue of the viability of classical formulations. Disappointingly (but in a subtly amusing way), he relegates Clark Pinnock’s *Open Theism* point-of-view to a three-line footnote (p. 41, n. 38). It is to be feared, however, that for the evangelical church, it is this deconstruction of classical theism that causes (and *will* cause) the greater damage.

How does Richards propose to deal with this issue? Answer – with the use of ‘modal logic’. Part of the assumption underlying this book is that religion (theology) and philosophy have not been on speaking terms for some time. His aim is get them talking! And talking about the core issues of Christian theism: God exists, God has created everything else that exists, God is sovereignly free from all that is outside of himself and

God is perfect. Certain formulations of these doctrines have caused tension when, for example, expressing the 'change' involved in the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity or God's freedom to create a world different from one he has (the question of *possibility*: could things be different from the way that they are?). Richards believes that modal logic aids in this issue.

As examples of this premise, Richards analyzes the antipodal theologies of Karl Barth and Charles Hartshorne (the latter willing to jettison various aspects of classical theism entirely).

The final two chapters are, perhaps, the most accessible. They are certainly the most interesting. Richards examines the classical formulations of God's immutability and simplicity, highlights modern disaffection for both tenets, agrees that certain aspects of both are difficult to sustain and finally makes an argument that (in the main) both of these doctrines are biblical and sustainable theologically and philosophically.

*The Untamed God* is an example of the utilization of philosophy in the cause of theology. Some will find the use of modalism to be itself suspect and ultimately unverifiable. One assumes that presuppositionalists will, for example. In the current challenges that Christian theism faces from atheism, agnosticism, pantheism and especially process theology, this book will have some important contributions to make.

*Derek Thomas, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi)*

## **Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary**

Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004; 421pp., £24.99; ISBN 0 80284 504 5

Witherington is one of the most prolific NT scholars around and he keeps producing a prodigious amount of good quality NT studies and commentaries. In his Romans commentary Witherington begins by noting that many previous commentators seem more influenced by Calvin and Barth than Paul in drawing their conclusions. I am a big fan of Calvin and Barth, but I sympathize with his observation. Witherington states that he wants to escape from this reformed monopoly on Romans, although he does not want to offer merely an Arminian/Wesleyan reading of Paul, but desires to move beyond the reformed mould (pp. xi-xii).

As such, I would agree with Witherington in places like Romans 7:13-25, which is not an autobiographical account of Paul's pre-Christian struggle with sin, and chapters 9-11, which are not concerned with

formulating a doctrine of individual predestination. Nor does Romans 4 speak of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Moreover, Witherington does not completely repudiate all standard reformed conclusions. For instance, his understanding of the origin of sin in Adam as 'corporate personality' (pp. 143-45) leans towards the reformed view of federal headship. He also argues that *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25 means 'propitiation' which most reformed exegetes would be in accord with (pp. 108, 138).

However, at several points he introduces a caricature of reformed theology only to dismiss it quite abruptly, often in pejorative terms (pp. 71, 84, 121-23, 133, 183, 197). He regards imputed righteousness and Luther's maxim of *simul iustus et peccator* ('at the same time both justified and sinner') as a license for antinomianism (pp. 122, 133, 199, 210 n. 3, 248, 368). In fact he charges, 'If God were simply to impute to believers his righteousness, then there would be no basis to require righteousness of them after their conversion' (p. 133). This was an accusation I am certain Calvin and Luther knew of and rejected. In their thinking, the separation of justification and sanctification did not nullify the necessities of faith, obedience, holiness and love outworking from faith (see Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.1). Witherington also walks into the cross-hairs of his own critique since his view of election as occurring in Christ (pp. 61, 255, 394 n. 82) sounds more like Barth than Paul.

Witherington has indeed held to his initial promise: he isn't offering an Arminian/Methodist reading of Romans as much as he appears (at times) to be offering an anti-reformed one. Whether Witherington's critique of reformed dogmatics is correct or not is beside the point; his comments against the position are often just unnecessary intrusions and on some occasions do not even appear to be tied to the argument of the text.

Yet, lest reformed readers be discouraged, this is the only major misgiving in what is otherwise a fine commentary. The strengths of the book are many. First, it represents a sound application of rhetorical criticism and demonstrates the relevance of the tool for Pauline exegesis. Second, Witherington represents what I suspect will become a standard feature of Pauline studies, that is reaching a post-New Perspective equilibrium by neither affirming antiquated nor revisionist views of Paul, but instead critically appropriating the post-Sanders landslide on Paul and Judaism (see in particular his excursus on justification and covenantal nomism on pp. 102-7). Third, the section on 'Bridging the Horizons' enables Witherington and Hyatt to ask the question I wish more exegetes would ask, namely, 'So what?' This is no ivory tower commentary but

keeps an eye on the meaning of Romans for Christians today. Fourth, the excurses are good summaries of debates in recent scholarship. Fifth, he provides good interaction with recent scholarship, particularly books by Wright, Grieb, Talbert, Bryan and Johnson.

Overall, Witherington's commentary is sound and, though hardly ground-breaking, it is a worthwhile study to have on one's bookshelf. Finally, it is more affordable than other more well-known commentaries by Moo or Byrne, which makes it a useful textbook for cash-strapped students.

*Mike Bird, Brisbane, Australia*

## **The Gender Neutral Bible Controversy**

Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2003; 501pp., £12.99; ISBN 1 85792 879 2

Issues of 'gender' are very prominent and often controversial topics currently, not least in the area of Scripture translations. Arising out of the publication of 'gender neutral' Bible translations, and in particular the *New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition* (published in the UK in 1996), this book seeks to prove that the way in which gender-related terms in Scripture are translated impinges upon the translation, integrity and authority of the Bible as God's Word. The aim of the book, as well as the importance attached by the authors to the subject, can be seen in its subtitle: 'Is the age of political correctness altering the meaning of God's words?'

The authors set out in pursuit of their answer by firstly defining the term 'gender neutral', taking it as descriptive of translations that deliberately and unjustifiably (although not all for the same reasons) avoid being gender-specific where the textual context clearly calls for it. The term 'generic he' refers to the use of the masculine pronoun 'he' so as to be inclusive of male and female, such as in Matthew 16:24-26.

Poythress and Grudem then show how gender-neutral translations of the Bible arose, followed by an excellent chapter on the Bible as the Word of God, including the truthfulness, inerrancy and authority of Scripture. The remaining chapters deal with principles of Bible translation, the various ways in which 'generic he' is avoided in gender-neutral translations, and finally a treatment of specific words like 'father', 'brothers' etc.

Pages 299-491 consist of 12 Appendices ranging from the 'Colorado Springs Guidelines' (for translation of gender-related language in

Scripture) of which both authors were signatories, to an analysis of relevant Greek words, and a detailed treatment of the points of criticism levelled at *Today's New International Version*, in which the authors disagree with other prominent evangelicals like Don Carson and Craig Blomberg.

This is a detailed, scholarly and balanced presentation of the issues of gender neutrality. It also reminds us as we read it that Bible translation is a holy work, dealing as it is with the Word of God. With admirable clarity the authors show that the real issue is not one of changes in gender language required to conform to modern English styles. They accept unequivocally that language does change and that translations of the Bible need to be revised from time to time to take account of such changes.

The real issue lies in the systematic exclusion of male components of meaning that are found in the original text. Many of those who are in favour of a gender-neutral translation seem to be motivated by a desire to reflect current attitudes towards women, whereas Poythress and Grudem insist that a translation of the Scriptures must be motivated primarily by a desire to present God's Word as it was written, when it was written. When a translation by conviction uses gender-neutral language it is more or less what the translators wish had been written or would have been written had the text been written today. The authors convincingly argue that such a translation actually obscures the original meaning of the text, and so deprives its readers of the privilege of reading God's Word as it was written, leaving them free then to interpret it in accordance with personal faith.

The process at work in the natural development of a language is very different from what drives the juggernaut of 'political correctness'. Pressure groups who seek to push the agenda for gender-neutral translations are effectively a 'language police' in the opinion of the authors. Submission to what Scripture says, in all its nuances, is as essential to the translator as to the disciple; the alternative is a modification of Scripture to sit more comfortably with modern patterns of thought. Ultimately it is the doctrine of Scripture that is affected, and once that has been modified access is opened for the same process to be applied to all other doctrines founded upon it.

*James Maciver, Knock Free Church of Scotland*

## Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism

Christopher R. Seitz (ed.)

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2001; 240pp., £14.99; ISBN 1 84227 54 7

This absorbing collection of fifteen papers emerged from a 2001 ecumenical conference in Charlestown, South Carolina. The essays are penned by an international group of theologians from across the denominational spectrum. By focusing on Nicene Christianity pre-dating the later 'rending of Christ's body' (p. 18) the authors hope to describe a basis of belief and praxis around which orthodox Christians from all traditions can unite. This is what is meant by 'a new ecumenism'.

This agenda emerges more sharply in some essays than in others. William J. Abraham's chapter on 'the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church' challenges our casual acceptance of profound division and wonders if we need to reckon on the possibility of divine judgement for our sins. His words are echoed by Ephraim Radner in his discussion of the challenge of creedal Christianity. He argues with passion that our 'atomized Christianity' works against not only the spirit of Nicene faith, but against the very truth of the gospel itself.

Other essays concentrate on unpacking the theological content and significance of different articles of the Nicene creed. Here I can offer only a few brief snapshots of some. The late Colin Gunton contributes a fine piece on 'Jesus Christ... begotten not made' relating fourth century struggles with Arianism to contemporary restatements of that heresy. Alan Torrance's article explores the heart of Nicene Christianity – its proclamation of Jesus as of one substance (*homoousious*) with the Father. If this defines the faith of the church catholic, he notes that at times what unites much modern theology is 'a common desire to reject it' (p. 50). Robert Jenson contributes a difficult chapter on 'For us... he was made man' that in this reviewer's mind at least, appears to redefine the incarnation in terms at odds with the Nicene confession. David Yeago develops six richly rewarding propositions on preaching the cross in his essay on 'crucified... under Pontus Pilate'. Carl Braaten offers a refreshingly forthright apologetic for the necessity and uniqueness of resurrection faith. Ecumenical progress, he contends, cannot be made unless there is agreement that 'there can be no authentic Christianity without belief in the resurrection of Jesus' (p. 116). John Webster concludes his discussion with the realistic assessment that a renewed emphasis on the creed will only be effective if accompanied by our cry to God to renew us through his Spirit (p. 131). Douglas Farrow appeals for a bold reaffirmation of Christ's second coming suggesting that 'a church

whose “Maranatha!” is spoken *sotto voce*, is a church that has lost its nerve together with its christological nerve center’ (p. 148). Thomas Smail does an excellent job of exploring the theological and practical implications surrounding the *filioque* clause for the pneumatology of Western and Eastern Christianity. Susan Wood’s reflection emphasises the ecumenical implications of ‘one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’.

The book’s title implies perhaps that the ‘old ecumenism’ has failed. The strategy of building unity around a classic articulation of orthodox faith is certainly more welcome than an attempt to minimise theological debate under the blanket of lowest-common-denominator Christianity. Huge problems persist of course. Can the agendas of fourth-century Christianity adequately address the very different challenges facing the Christian faith in the twenty-first century? What would the success of such an enterprise actually look like in practice? Philip Turner, in the Introduction, states that none of the authors wish to start another party, a Nicene party lying ‘between the spent force of theological liberalism and the dogmatic certainties of its evangelical critics’ (p. 18). Leaving aside what some of the evangelical contributors may think of his comment, this an issue largely left ill-defined and vague throughout.

A couple of minor points: rather disappointingly no index is included and, rather surprisingly for a book on Nicene Christianity, the full Nicene creed is nowhere available to hand. However, overall I warmly recommend this book as a resource full of historical and theological insight on fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The essays assume familiarity with the issues addressed, yet are fairly short and are not packaged in the impenetrable wrappings of academia.

*Patrick Mitchel, Irish Bible Institute, Dublin*

## **God’s Man for the Gilded Age. D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism**

Bruce J. Evensen

Oxford University Press, New York, 2003; 232pp., £18.99; ISBN 0 1951 6244 7

Dwight L. Moody was one of the great sensations of the nineteenth century, sweeping through Britain and Ireland and then the major cities of the USA in an evangelistic campaign that was, in style and scope, wholly unprecedented. In just over 25 years, Moody was estimated to have preached to one hundred million people, speaking to packed houses in cities from Edinburgh to Philadelphia, and from London to New York. He made Christian evangelism the stuff of headlines, and began a way of

taking the gospel to the masses that has been much imitated but in many respects never equalled.

In his excellent new book *God's Man for the Gilded Age*, Professor Bruce Evensen discusses the five pivotal years of the Moody ministry, from 1873 to 1877. He argues eloquently that the key to understanding Moody's extraordinary success in these years is to see the intimate relationship between Moody the evangelist and Moody the publicist. In our current age of spin doctors and public relations, it is astonishing to see just how modern Moody's campaigns were, with meticulous planning and at times ruthless exploitation of the mass media being used to begin and then maintain the momentum that would bring hundreds of thousands out to see and hear the spectacle in cities across Britain and the USA.

As Evenson observes, his techniques allowed the creation of 'the kind of crowds and civic spectacle that encouraged the simply curious to come. That was what made the careful cultivation of the secular press such a crucial strand in campaign planning.' The press attention was backed up by painstaking attention to detail to ensure that the events were as successful as they possibly could be – in London in 1875, for example, every house was targeted by Moody's volunteers as part of a door-to-door campaign, with all contacts kept in a log which was then shared with supervisors. The results were astonishing, with over two and a half million people attending Moody's meetings there in the Spring of 1875.

Moody is a fascinating character, but Evensen does not set out to paint a biographical portrait, nor does he pay much attention to Moody's career outside these five implausible years of evangelistic superstardom. Instead he portrays in great detail the precise nature of the campaign as it made its way through the British Isles and then through Brooklyn, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago and Boston. He provides a wealth of information about these American cities and the contexts into which the Moody mission placed itself in each one. While each place was different, and the personalities of the Christian leaders and the local newspapers were varied, the story becomes a fairly repetitive one by the time Moody reaches the last stop in Boston.

Professor Evensen's book is well written and splendidly researched – there are 38 pages of endnotes – and it contains many evocative contemporary illustrations. The combination of the newspaper accounts and the line drawings of the meetings allows you to picture clearly what these amazing afternoons and nights must have been like. The book's focus is on how Moody used the mass media and on how the mass media used Moody; it provides little analysis of his long-term impact and even less of his theology. The questions of where this explosion came from in



1873 and where it went in 1877 and, perhaps more importantly, what was left behind when all was said and done, are questions that Evensen leaves for another writer to answer. It is a testament to the quality of this book, however, that the reader is left much better informed about Moody and his mission, but feeling hungry for more.

*James Lachlan MacLeod, Department of History, University of  
Evansville, Indiana*

## **An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity**

Delbert Burkett

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; xv+600pp., £60 h/b, £20.99 p/b; ISBN 0 521 00720 8 p/b; 0 521 80955 X h/b

The author, Delbert Burkett, is Associate Professor at Louisiana State University. The book is aimed at 'first-/second-year undergraduates, and seminary/bible college students in courses on the New Testament, biblical studies, Christian origins, and early church history; and also teachers, church professionals, and other general readers interested in the New Testament, its background, and the origins of Christianity.... It aims to provide students with a balanced critical overview of the origins and early expressions of Christian belief.'

Burkett introduces all the books in the NT canon and much other Christian literature written before AD 150. The main section headings are Historical and Religious Background; Acts; Pauline Christianity (including Ephesians); Judaic Christianity (examines the Letter of James and the Didache); Gnostic Christianity (examines the Gospel of Thomas); Proto-Orthodox Christianity (including 1 Clement, the Pastoral Epistles, Jude and 2 Peter, the Johannine Epistles, Hebrews, the Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Peter and Revelation); Appendices (in which he provides a useful series of primary texts (e.g., Lucian on sacrifices, the Essenes, Jewish messianic hopes, etc.).

As one may gather from the above section headings, Burkett views the NT as containing several 'perspectives' on Christianity. As such, it follows a standard historical-critical approach. Indeed, Burkett deliberately avoids the confessional method of studying the New Testament. Thus, the Gospels are said to contain not only authentic sayings of Jesus, but other traditions which were created by the church, and sayings which were incorrectly attributed to Jesus by the evangelists. Moreover, whatever authentic Jesus material is found in the Gospel of John, much of it is believed to have undergone development before being included in the

Fourth Gospel. The Johannine community are said to have retrojected the glory of the exalted Lord into Jesus' ministry. However, the chapter on 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus' is well written and brief.

Burkett does not believe Acts to be historically accurate, a conclusion he bases on various inconsistencies, the emphasis on the miraculous, the composition of the speeches and the presentation of Paul which he does not believe accords with information gleaned from Paul's extant letters. He does not believe that the Pastoral Letters were written by Paul and remains on the fence with respect to 2 Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians. Nonetheless, he writes lucidly on 'Pauline' theology with respect to the ten letters.

The section on Proto-Orthodox Christianity (represented by 1 Clement, the Pastoral Epistles, Jude and 2 Peter, the Johannine Epistles, Hebrews, the Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Peter and Revelation) describes the type of Christianity that became dominant as that which arose out of Pauline, Johannine and related forms of Christianity. It is neither Judaic nor Gnostic in focus. It combines the Jewish and Greek conceptions of God, presents salvation as that which was necessary because of sin (not ignorance), believing, like Paul, that salvation from sin is only possible by the death of Jesus as the sacrifice for sins. It also follows the Hebraic emphasis on the soul and the body, including a hope for life in the body in a renewed earth. Moreover, in this Proto-Orthodox Christianity, Christ is regarded as both human and divine.

This book is written in an extremely lucid, uncluttered style. It is well illustrated throughout and provides the reader with an introduction to the New Testament and the origins of Christianity from a non-conservative perspective. Burkett insists on treating New Testament texts on the same level as other Christian texts. While this may be valuable at some levels, it also poses its own problems. There are, of course, good conservative introductions to the New Testament written with undergraduates and serious Bible students in mind which more fairly present the New Testament on its own terms, and with a higher regard for the books of the Old and New Testaments as revelation from God: e.g., *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*, Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meye Thompson (Eerdmans, 2001); *An Introduction to the New Testament*, D. A. Carson, Leon Morris, Douglas J. Moo (Apollos, 1992); or the older (1970) work *New Testament Introduction*, D. Guthrie (IVP, Downers Grove).

*John A. MacLeod, Free Church College, Edinburgh*

## **The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners**

Marguerite Shuster

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004; 280pp., £21.99; ISBN 0 8028 0994 4

A Ph.D. in psychology, former pastor, and present professor of preaching at Fuller Seminary, Shuster deftly wields the tools of these three trades in this third in a series of theology texts (following Paul Jewett's *God, Creation, and Revelation* and *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human*, which was written with Shuster). The book is divided into two sections on 'The Fall of Humankind' and 'The Doctrine of Sin'. Included are five sermons which effectively recapitulate and refocus the salient points Shuster discusses.

Shuster's unflinching account of human depravity is written out of two convictions. First, she is adamant that 'the doctrine of sin is an essential protection of human dignity' (p. 101). That is, while we may have *become* sinners, we are not *naturally* sinners. The Fall and sin are in no way necessary constituents of human existence but are decidedly alien to our true dignity as those created in the image of God and for right relationship with him and one another.

A correlate of this is Shuster's second conviction: 'By trying to define sin out of existence, we deprive ourselves of our only remedy' (p. 180). She laments the explanatory choices on the contemporary scene: therapeutic sin-as-sickness, hopeless determinism, ridiculously optimistic self-making. Rather, armed with a strong doctrine of the will's freedom and humanity's God-given capacity of self-transcendence, she stares sin, and its daughter death, in the face. Sin and death are decidedly real, and we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Shuster's discussion of the Fall is a nuanced revalorization of a doctrine that has been dismissed frequently as naive, unethical, unscientific or mythological, particularly in these disorienting post-Darwinian, post-critical days. After a wise overture to the complexity of the issue, she details a view of primal history as covenantal and as in some sense *history*, which is key to our recognising that God works in history rather than on some idealized plane. This has a knock-on effect in christological and soteriological issues, as Shuster emphasises Paul's paralleling of Adam and Christ in Romans 5. In her chapters on the root, nature and consequences of the Fall, Shuster makes much of the 'mystery of iniquity' ('Moral evil is a surd', p. 43), at the same time recognising that, while Genesis gives no explanation for Adam and Eve's sin, it does *describe* their sin as a free act of rebellion against their Creator. Sin's source is volitional, and the Fall itself was an act of unbelief and pride.

In the second half of the book, Shuster deals with sin's nature as act and condition, the difference between *sin* and *sins*, degrees and categories of sins (including discussion of 'the unforgivable sin', mortal versus venial sins and the seven deadlies), the doctrine of original sin, a cluster of issues related to freedom and 'civil righteousness'. On specific issues, readers will be interested in her discussion of total depravity in terms of its 'extensive' rather than 'intensive' definition. Against the objection that original sin pulls the rug out from under moral responsibility, Shuster affirms two things at once: 'we are now incapable of doing the good by our own power; and we are responsible for our sinful state' (p. 183).

Yet at times, Shuster's otherwise irenic Reformed perspective obscures insights into sin that might come from elsewhere. Wesleyan Arminianism is dismissed in a parenthesis – in a section on Pelagianism, no less! Similarly, Orthodox and Roman Catholic perspectives become occasional foils rather than frequent friends. While far from provincialism, this is unfortunate, in that she misses the helpful correctives these traditions might provide to an all-too-often Protestant split between ontology and ethics. In the process, our acting and our being are divorced, as if what we do is not integrally related to who we are.

*The Fall and Sin* will be an excellent resource for theology teachers, pastors and thoughtful Christian readers. Its accessibility rarely trades away intellectual rigour; and Shuster's keen interest in doing Bible-breathing, preachable theology is evident throughout, not least in the fascinating anecdotal and psychological insights she uncovers in what seemed to be dry and dusty, overtrodden theological territory.

*Matt Jenson, University of St Andrews*

## **The Cambridge Companion to St Paul**

James D. G. Dunn (ed.)

Cambridge University Press, 2003; 301pp., £15.99; ISBN 0 521 78694 0

This work comprises one chapter by each of nineteen scholars, a bibliography, and two indices. The editor's introduction traces the story of Pauline interpretation from Baur to the New Perspective, and notes some strands in the ongoing debate. The remainder of the work falls into four parts.

In Part One, 'Paul's life and work', Klaus Haacker pieces together the chronology of Paul's life from the fragments of evidence in his epistles

and in Acts, while Stephen Barton addresses Paul's work. He considers some of the metaphors which the apostle employs, documents the hardships involved in apostleship, and demonstrates the local and small-scale nature of Paul's evangelism.

The main aim of Part Two is to summarise the contents of the Pauline letters in probable chronological order. Some contributors make interesting, and sometimes illuminating, comments on the background and main themes. Margaret Mitchell sees loss of hope as the key to understanding 1 Thessalonians. Bruce Longenecker finds the heart of Galatians in 'cruciform' Christian lifestyle. However, to summarise Galatians without a single reference to justification is odd. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor well catches the pastoral passion underlying the Corinthian correspondence. Robert Jewett reads Romans as four successive proofs of the thesis that the gospel overcomes human hostility, but fails to do justice to the overcoming of divine-human hostility. Morna Hooker convincingly defends the integrity of Philippians and its Roman origin, while Loren Stuckenbruck's piece on Colossians includes an interesting section highlighting both the wisdom background to the Christological hymn, and the use of themes from the hymn later in the epistle. Andrew Lincoln's essay on Ephesians and Arland Hultgren's on the Pastoral Epistles, in which he defends the threefold ordering of ministry, conclude this section.

In Part Three five essays each address a different aspect of 'Paul's theology'. Alan Segal traces the methodological continuity between Jewish techniques and Paul's writings as a Christian, which in turn means that Paul is an important witness to the nature of first-century Judaism. Graham Stanton identifies the dominant strands in Paul's understanding of the gospel as divine initiative enacted through the Spirit's power, the death and resurrection of Jesus, justification, and reconciliation. L. W. Hurtado focuses his account of Paul's christology around the apostle's devotion to Christ as the agent of redemption and the legitimate recipient of worship and obedience. Luke Timothy Johnson finds Paul's ecclesiology centred in the notion of community, but considers community organisation to be functionally, rather than theologically, legitimated. Brian Rosner makes a useful contribution to the debate about law and gospel: Paul's ethic is the application of both.

The use of the Pauline corpus by the church developed slowly. Calvin Roetzel opens Part Four, arguing that it was largely Marcion who rescued Paul from obscurity, and that the anti-Marcionite opposition, led by Irenaeus and Tertullian, cemented the place of the epistles in the canon. Robert Morgan traces the impact of Pauline interpretation from the

fathers via the Reformation to dialectical theology, and suggests that there are wider perspectives, such as the possibilities in the Pauline epistles for motivating environmental concern, still waiting to be applied. Finally Ben Witherington assesses four contemporary perspectives on Paul – Jewish, feminist, rhetorical and canonical. He is rather generous to some readings which are bizarre.

The book is marred by criticisms of the inspired apostle as a biblical interpreter, allegations that his theological emphases were sometimes mistaken, and frequent statements incompatible with the authorship claims of the letters themselves. Nevertheless, as an indication of the present, albeit transient, state of Pauline research, it serves a useful purpose, not least because its succinctness makes it accessible.

*Jonathan Bayes, Hambleton Evangelical Church, Carlton Miniott,  
Thirsk*

**The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards**

Richard A. Bailey and Gregory A. Wills (eds)

Crossway Books, Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 2002; 190pp., h/b, £13.99; ISBN 1 58134 451 1

**An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards**

Stephen J. Nichols

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2003; 202pp., £8.95; ISBN 0 87552 791 4

**The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition**

D. G. Hart, S. M. Lucas and S. J. Nichols

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2003; 255pp., £16.50; ISBN 0 8010 2622 9

It is not surprising that the tercentenary of the birth of one of the most influential thinkers and theologians of the late Puritan period should spawn several new studies and editions of his life and work. Those for whom the published works of Jonathan Edwards appear prohibitive can now access his thinking through several new publications; those who

have ploughed through the voluminous writings will benefit from the further reflection of these volumes.

In *The Salvation of Souls* nine sermons on the nature of the gospel ministry, only one of which has been published previously in a theological journal, are made available to us from Edwardsean manuscripts. They are quintessential Edwards, distilling the essence of the Puritan understanding both of ministry and of preaching. A useful introduction by the editors sets these sermons in context, while the modernised English makes them easier to read. These sermons cover subjects such as 'Ministers need the Power of God', 'The Minister before the judgement seat of Christ' and 'Preaching the Gospel brings poor sinners to Christ'. They are a useful addition to available Puritan literature.

In *An Absolute Sort of Certainty* Stephen Nichols looks at the Holy Spirit in the thinking of Edwards, and seeks to find a role for Edwards as an apologist of the faith. For Nichols this is a kind of *via media* between studies which have focused on Edwards the theologian and others which have focused on Edwards the philosopher. Against those who have concluded that Edwards held these in tension, Nichols argues that they coalesced in Edwards' apologetic for the faith.

The centre of Edwards' apologetic is located by Nichols in epistemology. This allows Nichols to find a central core to Edwards' thought, relating both his philosophical and theological writings. It also enables Nichols to demonstrate how Edwards' use of different sources relate to one another; how, for example, he is able to draw theologically on Augustine and Calvin in his discussions on the nature of knowledge, and to draw philosophically on Newton and Locke. The net result is that, far from seeing a tension in Edwards' thinking, Nichols actually finds a harmony in it, as Edwards grounds our knowledge of God both in the external witness of Scripture and the internal work of the Holy Spirit.

With these emphases Edwards, according to Nichols, is able to steer his listeners safely between the arid wastes of rationalism and the excesses of religious 'enthusiasm'. Knowing God is a matter both of mind and heart. Nichols' approach to Edwards provides a useful interpretative grid within which to understand his thought. Written in a clear and engaging manner, it is a welcome contribution.

Nichols is one of the editors in the new volume from Baker Academic, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, which seeks to examine the impact of Edwards' thought on the later evangelical tradition. In four parts, 'Vision', 'Theology', 'Legacy' and 'Reflections', it is a collection of thirteen essays from various scholars.

The first part looks at Edwards's worldview, his mission work, his emphasis on preaching and the sense of Christ in his theology. The second examines the Two Dissertations, with their challenge for views of the world then current, his work on divine foreknowledge and its impact on the open theism debate, his apologetic for Christianity in the light of the total effects of sin, and his federalism. The third section looks at the growth of experimental Calvinism following Edwards, the gradual dissolution of the New England theology, and the impact of Edwards on Southern Presbyterian theology. The final part contains an interesting piece on the difficulties in editing Edwards, and concludes with a fine bibliographical essay.

As with any collection of essays, the contributions are somewhat unequal, but the essays by Darryl Hart, George Marsden and Sean Lucas are particularly noteworthy. All in all, these three new publications demonstrate a renewed interest in, and appreciation of, one of the world's leading thinkers, and will give renewed impetus to studies of his theology.

*Iain D. Campbell, Back, Isle of Lewis*

## **Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis**

Richard Burnett

Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2001; xiv+305pp., €49.00; ISBN 3 16 147677 8

As one trained in biblical studies of the overly historicist type, Burnett's work on Barth's theological exegesis came as a clarifying and refreshing call back to the subject matter of Scripture, namely, God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of Burnett's elucidation of Barth's exegesis for today's biblical scholars. As optimistic as this reviewer is about the significance of Burnett's work, my optimism fades regarding its reception in the realm of biblical scholars. This reviewer simply wonders whether or not the guild of biblical scholars has the ears to hear such a call.

For Burnett, Barth's theological exegesis was not a one-off 'virtuoso performance' but was actually an intricately and loving participation in the subject matter of Scripture as well as a direct response against the empathetic tradition of biblical hermeneutics espoused by the likes of Herder, Schleiermacher and Dilthey. According to Barth, the goal of exegesis is not to know the author better than the author knew himself by means of a highly-tuned grammatical analysis and an intuitive, artistic psychologizing of the author. Rather, the goal of exegesis is to



understand the *res*, or subject matter, towards which the authors of Scripture were pointing. The revolution for Barth, in light of his study of Paul, was that Paul does not point to himself in his writings. He actually witnesses to God. Barth's response to his critics who charged him with a lack of interest in Paul himself or Paul's time was, and I paraphrase, 'I would be interested in Paul if Paul were interested in himself.' If the reader of Scripture is going to take Paul seriously, the reader should respect the substance of Paul's own concerns. In Barth's understanding, Paul acts as apostle and points beyond himself to God's actions in Jesus Christ.

Barth's model of exegesis, as expounded by Burnett, involved several different, yet overlapping, aspects. A theological exegete does not read Scripture as a disinterested observer hampered by a hermeneutic of suspicion. Instead, the theological exegete actively participates in the subject matter and reads the text in light of that self-same subject matter, content, and substance. Also, the theological exegete reads the authors of Scripture in a loving manner, seeking to understand them humbly, before casting aspersions on the author's words and thought (a vocation that Barth's exegetical contemporaries were all too happy to do). As such, Barth is no enemy of historical criticism *per se*. Barth is an enemy of the idolatry of historical-criticism. Historical criticism serves a preparatory role in the reading of the *text*, but it is not the goal of exegesis. Put another way, expounding the historical background of the text is, for Barth, not the primary aim of a commentary. Pressing on to the subject matter of Scripture is.

Any criticisms of Burnett's treatment are actually related to this reviewer's desire for more. Barth describes his exegetical hero, Calvin, as one who was always concerned about *Aktualität*, or relevance. This reviewer yearned for a bit more of this from Burnett. What does Barth's theological exegesis have to say to a James Dunn or N. T. Wright, both of whom claim to be first and foremost historians? This reader believes Barth has a good deal to say to modern exegetes (even evangelical ones). Also, at the end of the day a work on theological exegesis must at some point deal with the text of Scripture itself. Burnett does not do this. In fairness, however, Burnett ends his work by humbly claiming that much more needs to be said regarding Barth's theological exegesis. We can only hope that Burnett, with his own lapidary and lucid style, will have more to say himself regarding Barth's theological reading of Scripture.

*Mark Gignilliat, Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford*

## Universal Salvation? The current debate

Robin Parry and Chris Partridge (eds)

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2003; 291pp., £14.99; ISBN 1 84227 199 7

This book is a collection of essays by a dozen authors of differing viewpoints on the issue, 'Will God one day save all people through Christ's atoning work?' Gabriele Farke, in a foreword, suggests that Paternoster 'has given a platform in the opening chapters to the most thoughtfully wrought argument for universalism to date from within the contemporary evangelical community' (p. xiii). The main protagonist is the universalist, Thomas Talbott, who writes the first three chapters (Part I) in an attempt at a sustained case for universalism. Parts II – V follow with responses from a biblical, philosophical, theological and historical perspective. Finally (Part VI) Talbott responds to his contributors.

His combatants include other universalists, Thomas Johnson and Eric Reitan. Arminianism is represented by Howard Marshall and Jerry Walls. Daniel Strange is the Calvinist/Augustinian representative and John Sanders upholds the Open Theism school of thought. Two chapters are given to an historical overview of the issue (Morwenna Ludlow, David Hillborn and Don Horrocks).

The book gets off to bad start, inaccurately suggesting that the desire of God for the salvation of all (not simply all *kinds* of people, but *all* people) is a tenet only true of Arminianism. However, even a stalwart Calvinist such as John Murray believed this, bringing to life a memorable sentence: 'there is a will to the realization of what he has not decreetively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree.' ('The Free Offer of the Gospel' in *Collected Writings*, Vol. 4, p. 131).

Thomas Talbott makes an able case for universalism based mainly on the Adam/Christ parallel in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Traditionally, the 'hell-texts' have been taken at face value and seeming universal passages interpreted in the light of it. According to Talbott (and the reasoning isn't rocket science!) if you take the Augustinian notion of sovereignty (that ultimately God will be victorious over evil) and add the (wrongly attributed as) Arminian notion that God *desires* the salvation of all, it is but legerdemain to emerge with universalism. It is a mere shift of hermeneutical perspective giving weight to the universal-passages rather than the hell-passages. Strange counters with a crucial text (for Talbott's case as argued), Revelation 22:11: 'He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still.'

Sanders adds a perspective that, by now, has become the commonplace argument of the Open Theists: Scripture presents us with a God who makes himself vulnerable to being hurt by creating beings who have the freedom to reject him. This God takes risks and leaves himself open to being despised, rejected and crucified. The creator and sovereign lord is one who suffers with, because of, and for his creatures. (p. 174). Quite how this case for divine vulnerability and possibility aids in the argument for universalism isn't always clear. What is clear is that this view lies outside of historic evangelicalism.

J. I. Packer has noted elsewhere that universalism has in this century quietly become part of the orthodoxy of many Christian thinkers as it did in Origen's day. This book is testimony to it. To that extent it is an insightful glance at current skepticism of an historic Christian doctrine. It is also a testimony as to the breadth of hermeneutical licence now acceptable to modern evangelicalism.

*Derek Thomas, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi)*

## **New Testament History: A Narrative Account**

Ben Witherington III

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2001; 430pp., £19.99; ISBN 0 84227 114 8  
(currently out of print)

Biblical scholars are in general agreement that a precise knowledge of the historical, social, and religious movements in the first century CE is crucial for properly understanding the New Testament. Few scholars, however, have had the adeptness to produce a streamlined monograph on these complex topics. In this regard Ben Witherington's *New Testament History* has filled a genuine lacuna by chronicling in sixteen chapters the major people, events, and social and religious ideas of this period, including a cursory treatment of the intertestamental period. Witherington enhances this book with various excurses on significant topics under the heading 'A closer look' (e.g. Pharisees, zealots, speeches in Acts), along with many helpful charts and brief insets.

Upon close inspection one can find few faults with this work. One may observe, however, a few areas where this monograph could have been significantly strengthened. To begin, his brief discussion on the topic of Jewish rights in the Roman world does not reflect the current state of scholarship. Witherington adopts the traditional view that Jews were granted special participation in the imperial cult – i.e. offering sacrifices 'on behalf of' and not 'to' the emperor (p. 77 – thus apparently

unaware that this consensus has largely been overturned among ancient historians (e.g. T. Rajak and M. Ben Zeev).

Furthermore, a monograph covering such an extensive range of subjects requires strict discipline in order not to become unduly cumbersome. Although Witherington deserves praise for condensing such vast material into a single publication, he could have trimmed the book's length even more had he exercised more discipline in at least two ways. First, at several points the information contained in his excurses and insets is repeated verbatim in the main body of his work. A much better job could have been done to omit these unnecessary redundancies for a more succinct read. Secondly, Witherington sometimes indulges in unnecessary (and wild) speculation. Just to cite one of the many available examples, Witherington postulates on p. 297 that perhaps a large portion of the funds reserved for the 'Jerusalem collection' may instead have been used to pay for ritual expenses incurred when Paul (at the behest of James) sponsored four men when undertaking their religious vows (Acts 21.17-26). Whilst these tantalising tidbits add a personal flavour to his narrative account, perhaps they are unfitting in the light of his stated aim to produce a reliable history that refrains from outrunning the available evidence (p. 10).

Finally, there are at least two organisational shortcomings. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of this book is that it does not contain a bibliography. At several key points in the monograph Witherington raises an interpretative debate but fails even to provide a bibliographic footnote citing those key scholars upon whom he relies (or with whom he disagrees). Furthermore, it would have been quite helpful from a reference point of view had his charts, insets and excurses been included in the table of contents. For some scholars, therefore, this monograph will not serve as a very convenient bibliographical reference work.

Even with the few weaknesses of this monograph, there is no doubt that Witherington has successfully achieved his goal to produce a carefully narrated account of New Testament history. Engaging thoroughly both with the primary and secondary sources whilst eliminating much of the cumbersome technical language, Witherington has written a first-rate history both for the expert and the non-specialist in Graeco-Roman and Jewish history. For many years to come this important work will serve as a solid treatment of New Testament history for theology students, pastors, as well as any serious student of the New Testament.

*Justin K. Hardin, Cambridge University*

## **Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch**

John Webster

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003; 144pp., £35 h/b, £13.99 p/b; ISBN 0 521 83118 0 h/b; 0 521 53846 7 p/b

Written for upper-undergraduate and graduate students of theology, this work seeks to give a dogmatic account of the nature of Scripture. Chapter 1, 'Revelation, sanctification and inspiration', introduces the term 'sanctification' alongside two terms that are more common in discussions of Scripture. 'Sanctification' is used to describe the way God sets apart the biblical texts for the purpose of revelation. Webster holds that problems have arisen in Christian accounts of revelation because revelation has tended to be related too closely to contemporary intellectual conventions and too little to the doctrine of the Trinity. He complains of the way therefore that discussion of revelation has tended to come first in dogmatic treatments so as to form the starting point for epistemology while somehow detached from the doctrine of God. He finds rather that revelation is a 'corollary of more primary Christian affirmations about the nature, purposes and saving presence of the triune God' (p. 13). Considering attempts to describe the relationship between divine and human elements in Scripture, he finds problematic the use of the concept of divine accommodation and also the use of the hypostatic union of Christ as an analogy for the divine and human properties of Scripture (pp. 22-23). The notions of Scripture as testimony or as a 'means of grace', as well as of its 'servant-form' are found to be helpful, though the author judges the concept of 'sanctification' to be most useful as it 'can more readily be applied to the full range of processes in which the text is caught up from pre-textual tradition to interpretation...' (p. 26). In common with classic Reformed positions, inspiration is said to be verbal, that is to involve words; inspiration applies not only to the subject matter of Scripture but also to its form. Chapter 2, 'Scripture, church and canon', insists that the church is a product of the divine word and that 'the church is not competent to confer authority on Holy Scripture' (p. 53), though at the same time Webster wishes to avoid 'denials of the element of human decision-making in the process of canonisation' as might be found in some 'older theories of inspiration' (p. 58). Chapter 3, 'Reading in the economy of grace', contrasts attitudes to reading in contemporary culture, as represented by Schopenhauer, and the approaches to reading Scripture advocated by Calvin and Bonhoeffer. Whereas Schopenhauer contrasts reading with 'thinking for yourself', stressing human autonomy, Calvin and Bonhoeffer emphasise the need

for thought to be subordinate to the word. Webster maintains, 'Reading Scripture thus involves mortification of the free-range intellect which believes itself to be at liberty to devote itself to all manner of sources of fascination' (p. 90). Chapter 4, 'Scripture, theology and the theological school', considers the catechesis of the sixteenth-century Reformed theologian Zacharius Ursinus. His theological 'method' was simply a question of organising matter to help the reading of Scripture. Webster contrasts to this the primacy given to universal reason in prestigious theological institutions today along with the fourfold division (or fragmentation) of theology into biblical, historical, systematic and practical. He calls for a reformation of the curriculum, realising that in many situations this will mean that

theology will find itself moving to the edge of the modern university. In contexts committed to the sufficiency of natural reason (or at least to the unavailability of anything other than natural reason), theology will have something of the scandalous about it (p. 134).

In days when the church continues to wrestle with its relationship to academic institutions, and when even evangelical curricula are in danger of theological fragmentation, there is much to heed in this book.

*P. J. Williams, University of Aberdeen*

## **One Faith. Biblical and Patristic Contributions Towards Understanding Unity in Faith**

William Henn

Paulist Press, New York, 1995; 334pp., \$22.95; ISBN 0 8091 3577 9

Here's an ambitious book on an important subject! William Henn hopes in this work to trace a common thread to the idea of unity of faith in Old Testament, New Testament and Historical Doctrine. The book is successful and helpful. In the Old Testament he follows the thread through the themes of community, monotheism, basic creeds and universalism. Short confessions, such as the *shema*, enshrine Israel's common and continuous faith, underscoring a reliable relationship of covenant love. The New Testament's contribution is to add to all this a focus for faith upon the identity and action of Jesus. Even then, dialogue and discussion in the early church was a healthy sign of common unity of faith, for it just disclosed diversity of perspectives, not conflict about what formed the core teachings of the apostles.

The result is an excellent contribution to debate. The chief thrust sets out a 'multi-dimensionality' to the concept of faith. In the words of the early martyr, Ignatius, faith is 'a way of living' as well as the essence of Christian convictions. According to the author five factors combined to preserve unity in faith: common credal statements, dialogue, charisms and ministries, the composition of the NT canonical books and the development of a regulative role by church leaders. True to denominational preference, Roman Catholic, Henn makes much of the fifth factor, in my view *too* much. Having conceded that the NT does not justify the magisterium, attempts to re-instate its fundamental character on historical and theological grounds will lack conviction for non-Catholic readers. The case is read off the unity of the church and the Lordship of Christ, but one could equally read off an alternative case – one for a lordship exercised through the consensus of the whole church (much more difficult) and a voluntary, not top-down imposed, unity.

Readers from a different theological persuasion to the author's, should not be put off. Henn's sound, careful scholarship bears the fruit of a readable and rare integration of biblical and doctrinal material vital for properly assessing the church's future and mission.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

## **Mark: Good News from Jerusalem**

Geoffrey Grogan

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2003; 302pp., £8.99; ISBN 1 85792 905 5

The Principal Emeritus of Glasgow Bible College (now the International Christian College) will be well known to most of our readers. Geoffrey Grogan has written on both Old and New Testaments over many years, and this revised and enlarged edition of a commentary first published in 1995 deserves to be noted and welcomed.

After an introductory survey of issues such as author, readers, literary features and relationship to the rest of Scripture, Grogan works through the Gospel in eighteen sections (up to 16:20, taking the longer ending as a genuine product of the apostolic or post-apostolic ages). Each section is clearly outlined and expounded, often with additional discussion. So, for example, the miracles of 4:35-5:43 are bounded by attention to the purpose of miracles and the presuppositions behind these stories.

There is a refreshing sanity about the whole thing, eschewing novelty and focussing on explaining the text. The flow of the story is maintained and there is a constant focus on the Good News in Christ. This is a

popular commentary and not a detailed verse-by-verse treatment, but it is based on wide reading and devout scholarship.

The writing is warm, as one would expect from this author, and there is constant engagement with the discipleship of the contemporary reader. The book would be accessible to most Christians, and it includes brief questions for personal reflection at the end of each chapter.

It would also be a helpful companion to the preacher working through Mark, looking for an adjunct to the academic commentary. Grogan always keeps the bigger picture in view, and is often homiletically suggestive. I had never, for example, seen 10:13-16 and 10:17-31 as balancing one another in successively stressing the need for faith and for repentance, but Grogan's approach opens up that kind of perspective.

There is a useful Subject Index, but no Scripture Index.

*Alasdair I. Macleod, Free Church, St Andrews*

## **Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts**

Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2003; 232pp., £14.99; ISBN 1 84227 246 2

This work originally appeared in the USA in 2000, and has been republished in the United Kingdom by Paternoster. At the heart of the volume is a supreme evangelistic issue: how may the Bible's doctrine of the atonement be communicated today in a way that will recover the 'scandal' of the cross? The authors are motivated by a twofold concern: first, that much evangelistic preaching and missionary work has failed to see the many metaphors used in the Bible regarding the atonement; second, that contemporary evangelicalism is obsessed with the idea of the cross as penal substitution – a view, according to the authors, which does nothing to communicate the significance of the cross meaningfully to the modern world.

It will be appreciated, therefore, that the position of this volume has profound consequences for the way in which we handle and contextualise the biblical data. That Christ died for our sins is, according to Green and Baker, a fundamental Christian message. And yet, even within the New Testament, the cross was not a straightforward doctrine: it was 'a puzzle to be contemplated, a paradox to be explored, a question on which to reflect' (p. 16).

Three chapters of this book handle the New Testament material relevant to the theme, and conclude that both in the teaching of Jesus and that of the apostles, a wide variety of metaphors is used to describe the



atonement. Jesus himself, we are told, uses 'creativity and innovation' to draw together concepts illustrative of his saving work, while the apostles continue this use of imagination to find ways of expressing what it was Jesus actually did, and what it was the cross actually achieved. Thus the total message of the New Testament is that no one metaphor is adequate to convey the doctrine of atonement to us.

The final chapters of the volume reflect on ways in which the church today must follow the example of Jesus and the apostles in using creative imagination to communicate the meaning of the cross. Reference is made to the work of Norman Kraus, a missionary to Japan who used the concept of 'shame' in Japanese culture as a way of communicating the atonement. Ultimately this book is missiological rather than doctrinal, demonstrating that 'the images of the atonement that have surfaced in the history of the church have often taken shape through... commitments to articulating the significance of the cross in particular settings' (p. 221). The lesson is clear: we need to articulate the atonement with primary reference to contemporary contexts.

Driving much of the discussion, however, is an evident antipathy towards the idea of penal substitution. In the overview of historico-theological perspectives on the atonement in chapter 5, Charles Hodge is singled out as the culprit who championed this view of the atonement, to the detriment of the modern missionary movement. Penal substitution, according to Green and Baker, is not taught in Paul (p. 95 – which New Testament are the authors reading?), and therefore ought not to dominate the discourse of contemporary evangelicalism. Hodge found his doctrine in Western views of guilt and punishment, we are taught; straightjacketing the atonement in Hodgian language is neither biblical, nor helpful to the modern church in its various missionary settings.

To be sure, the biblical data on the atonement does employ wide-ranging vocabulary, drawn from different areas of life, as the authors rightly say. The lawcourt provides justification language; commerce provides redemption language; worship provides sacrificial language, and so on. But the wide imagery of the Bible surely does not give us a warrant to create new metaphors; the biblical language nuances for us the nature, implications and effects of the death of the one who did, in fact, die in our place. It was for us Christ was made a curse. It was to redeem us that the lamb was slain. The biblical testimony is unified in its insistence that the broken relationship between man and God can only be restored on the basis of the substitutionary death of Christ.

The argument of the authors that penal substitution distorts the biblical view of God, or that it legitimises suffering and violence, is

impossible to justify. No Reformed scholar ever argued in these terms (least of all Charles Hodge). The net result of the arguments of this volume is that it leaves us, as communicators of the message of the cross, with a vacuum. If the Bible simply warrants the use of our imagination in the creation of new metaphors, then the Bible's message is insufficient. How could we ever be certain that we were preaching the correct message? The scandal of the cross remains simply the fact that apart from the shedding of (Christ's) blood, there is no remission of sins.

The authors have legitimate concerns in this book; but to follow their directives is to do precisely what Paul feared: to make the cross of no effect through human ingenuity. To be faithful to our missionary task today requires new ways of preaching the old message of the substitutionary death of Christ as the ground of all our justification and hope. It does not require substituting the message itself with new images of the cross. This book is a rare thing: a volume with much useful insight into biblical material, yet with the potential of doing immense harm to the work of the gospel.

*Iain D. Campbell, Back, Isle of Lewis*

### **Amyraut Affirmed**

Alan C. Clifford

Charenton Reformed Publishing, 8 Le Strange Close, Norwich, NR2 3PN, 2004; 64pp., £3.50; ISBN 0 9526716 7 0

Following writers like B. G. Armstrong, Alan Clifford has been an active proponent of the view that later Calvinists turned the Biblical teaching of John Calvin into a hard legalistic system exemplified in the Westminster Confession (1646) and the writings of John Owen. He thinks the French Reformed theologian Moses Amyraut (1596-1664) was the true disciple of Calvin. Thus, over against the general Calvinist position that Christ's atonement was intended for the elect (although not without lesser benefits for the non-elect), Amyraut taught that the atonement was made for all 'in case they should believe', although in God's secret will it was effective only for the elect. So Amyraut maintained a double reference theory or 'hypothetical universalism', and this is to be distinguished from Arminianism, which said the atonement was actually made for all, although benefiting only believers.

In *Amyraut Affirmed*, Clifford responds to a lecture by Ian Hamilton prepared for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales in 2003. The form of response is not very helpful to the debate since there is little direct quoting of the lecture and frequent reference to Clifford's

earlier publications such as *Atonement and Justification* (1990, 2002) and *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism* (1996). The standard of documentation does not meet scholar's requirements, and the booklet is too disjointed to serve a popular constituency. No one not already convinced is likely to find *Amyraut Affirmed* establishes the thesis.

The general approach of pitting Calvin against the later Calvinists has been debunked through the work of scholars such as Richard A. Muller and Carl R. Trueman, to name but two. Interestingly, Clifford cites Muller (p. 4) as admitting the later reformers were more rationalistic than Calvin, but does not do justice to the context in which Muller makes this statement. On the same page he says Muller admitted (in an email to an unnamed person known to Clifford) that Trueman had not disproved Clifford's thesis. Muller has no recall of such an email and thinks precisely the opposite (email to this reviewer 2/2/2005).

Clifford's thesis assumes scholastic language is evidence of scholastic content, but all scholarly discourse in the 16th and 17th century used such language: it is found in Calvin as well as Beza, in Amyraut as well as Owen. There is development in the systematic presentation of truth as the Reformed church becomes established, but in setting Amyraut against men like Owen, Clifford is also failing to appreciate the diversity which existed within the bounds of Reformed theology. He takes a debated minority position in 17th century orthodoxy and makes it out to be the only orthodoxy. Mind you, if Amyraldianism is not excluded by the very terms of the Westminster Confession, as I consider it is, it is excluded by the terms of the Act by which the Church of Scotland Assembly adopted the Confession in 1647.

As a closing appendix Clifford gives some quotations (not well referenced) from Amyraut's 'friends', who include Augustine, Luther, the synod of Dort, Twisse, Calamy, Boston, J. C. Ryle, John Murray and Lloyd-Jones. Probably only Ryle was a true Amyraldian. Clifford is confusing 'Christ freely offered in the gospel' (Shorter Catechism, 31) as maintained by these men, and Amyraut's rather novel construction which presumably he thinks to be the only proper ground of the free offer. His booklet is not recommended.

*Rowland S. Ward, Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia,  
Melbourne*

### **Theology and Science, Volume 1, Number 1, April 2003**

Routledge, Abingdon, 2003; 140pp.; ISSN 1474 6700

personal subscription rate £22 per annum for two issues, available from Taylor and Francis Ltd, Rankine Road, Basingstoke, Hants, RG24 8PR.

*Theology and Science* is the latest journal to come from CTNS (Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences), the American equivalent of Christians in Science. This journal purports to be a bridge for dialogue between the disciplines of the natural sciences and theology.

*Theology and Science* has two aims: first, to investigate areas both of consonance and dissonance between the natural sciences and theological reflection, and secondly, to encourage rigorous, careful and constructive reporting of the science/theology dialogue. It does not limit itself to Christian theology, but encourages contributions from scholars of other religions. The editors conceive of their scope as multi-religious, but not syncretistic, encouraging Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Judaistic theologians to presume the truth commitment of their respective faith tradition.

This journal views the dialogue between science and theology from the viewpoint of two complementary philosophies. Methodological naturalism is a philosophy of God's interaction with his world. I can find no better definition of methodological naturalism than that given by one of the editors, Robert Russell, who writes, '*since nature is God's creation and not divine, scientific theories cannot include reference to God. "Do not put God into my equations!" is the scientific version of the theological command against idolatry.*' Critical realism is a philosophy of science which represents a middle way between the morass of idealism and that of absolute realism. Most of those who contribute to the first edition of this journal, e.g. John Polkinghorne, would be avid proponents of critical realism.

*Theology and Science* has two main editors, both top-flight scholars in the theology/science dialogue: Ted Peters from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Robert John Russell from CTNS. The editorial advisory board is a 'Who's Who' of the theology/science dialogue, claiming such names as Ian Barbour, Malcolm Jeeves, Howard van Till, Nancey Murphy and Owen Gingerich. This first edition boasts articles by scientists and theologians as well respected as Francisco Ayala (biology), John Polkinghorne (physics) Philip Hefner (systematic theology) and William Drees (philosophy of religion). Topics dealt with include the intelligent design argument, cloning and stem cell research, Trinitarian physics and metaphysics and the philosophy of the theology/science dialogue.

*Theology and Science* presents a real step forward in the science/theology dialogue for three reasons: first, the breadth of scholarly contribution and academic presentation is breathtaking; secondly, its peer-reviewed status contributes to its quality and academic appeal and thirdly,

it is attractively bound and presented – a good journal to have on your shelf. It also contains a book review section.

This journal holds appeal to all those interested both in the philosophy of the science/theology interface, but also to those working in areas of scientific ethics. It is a surprisingly easy read given its subject matter. It has no sympathy with the creationist position and may therefore act as a useful corrective to the perceived sub-science and incomplete philosophy commonly associated with that position. Whilst I do not recommend *Theology and Science* to the average reader, it certainly provides much grist to those working in this most controversial area of modern theology.

*Colin Dow, St Vincent Street/Milton Free Church of Scotland, Glasgow*

### **The Gospel and Henry the Eighth: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation**

Alec Ryrie

Cambridge University Press, 2003; 306pp., £48; ISBN 0 521 82343 9

The conventional wisdom about the course of England's Protestant Reformation in the last decade of Henry VIII's reign has long been that from the enactment of the Act of Six Articles in 1539 and the fall of Thomas Cromwell in 1540, this movement encountered a serious checkmate which placed it under terrible constraints for the balance of the reign. Thus, these years witnessed the resignations of advanced Protestant bishops Latimer and Shaxton, the executions of others who denied the transubstantiation affirmed in the Six Articles, and the forced parting of married clergy from their spouses. Under these circumstances of checkmate, the Reform movement was variously understood to stand in abeyance (so Dickens, 1964) anticipating the later emphasis upon 'via media' or, to stand at a virtual stoppage (so Haigh, 1993).

Ryrie, a recent Oxford D.Phil. whose research was supervised by the respected Diarmaid MacCulloch, and now of Birmingham University, has put this period under the lens and come to a strikingly different conclusion, i.e. that the evangelical Protestants who endured during this period themselves saw the era differently. These, maintains Ryrie, persisted in believing (in spite of much contrary evidence) that their King sympathized with their cause and that the chill represented by the notorious Six Articles represented the determined efforts of a Catholic faction led by Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester. Drawing confidence from the spotty enforcement of the Articles during the 1540s, the English evangelical movement learned to expand.

While there were hot-gospelers who assailed Henrician religious policy both from foreign exile and from within the nation (some paying with their lives for their outspokenness) the mainstream of the movement learned both to shun contention over the issues specified by the Articles and to concentrate on gospel proclamation within the constraints imposed by the royal supremacy. After 1543 these constraints included attempts to restrict access to the English Bible.

Ryrie's reinterpretation of the era is to be welcomed. Here is the most plausible explanation yet put forward for the show of strength mounted by English evangelicals immediately upon King Henry's passing. Older explanations could not so plausibly explain the rapid liturgical revision, the haven immediately extended to distinguished foreign Protestants, or the openness of Protector Somerset and the Duke of Northumberland to the Continental Reformation at and after 1547. English evangelical religion thus finished the reign of Henry in greater numerical strength than in 1539, all the difficulties of the preceding eight years notwithstanding.

The contemporary significance of this fine work deserves to be noted. On the one hand, here is further evidence, supplementing that recently brought to light by such writers as MacCulloch, Hylson-Smith, and Daniell, that evangelicalism in England – far from being the creature of the eighteenth century – is of a much more ancient pedigree. Christ-centred, Scripture-based, conversionist religion with an activist bent was already in clear evidence in this period. Again, the book draws attention to the fact that the cause of the early evangelicals grew steadily stronger in times so seriously adverse that we might judge them hopeless; they determined to keep to the main things and await a time of greater liberty. Has such a strategy outlived its usefulness? Superb bibliographies conclude the work.

*Kenneth J. Stewart, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, GA, USA*

## **Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in the Free Church Tradition**

Christopher J. Ellis

SCM Press, 2004; viii+327pp., £19.99; ISBN 0 334 02967 8

For the benefit of Scottish Presbyterian readers let me say at the outset that *Gathering* has nothing to do with the worship of the Free Church of Scotland. The 'Free Church Tradition' being explored here is that of a particular branch of English non-conformity, namely the Baptists.

The title belies the fact that much of this book is historical. It does indeed explore the 'Theology and Spirituality' of Baptist worship but does so within the framework of a detailed survey of four hundred years of Baptist history.

The author has researched this history well. His primary focus is the history of Baptist worship and in particular, the principles and practices of Baptists in relation to prayer, preaching, singing, the Lord's Supper, and baptism.

Many interesting facts emerge from this survey. Up until the twentieth century, for example, prayer in corporate worship was virtually always *free* prayer, i.e. unwritten and unread. Baptists have historically made the preaching of God's Word the central feature of their worship, giving the major part of their gathering to it. Congregational singing was at the outset of their history a matter of great controversy, with some churches excluding it from their worship altogether. In regard to the Lord's Supper, there has been ongoing debate as to whether it should be regarded as a sacrament or simply as an ordinance. And in regard to believers' baptism, it is intriguing to learn that early in Baptist history candidates were sprinkled rather than immersed.

*Gathering*, however, is considerably more than a historical survey of principles and practices of Baptist worship. It is fundamentally an exercise in liturgical theology. 'In liturgical theology', writes the author, 'we observe the worship practices of a community and then draw from them what we perceive to be their theological meaning.... We can observe what is done and listen to what is said and build a picture of what a particular worshipping community believes' (p. 14). Hence the historical facts about Baptist worship. They constitute the building blocks from which a liturgical theology of Baptist worship is constructed.

Of special interest to the author are four core values that emerge in all the aspects of Baptist worship that he surveys: 'attention to Scripture, devotion, community and kingdom' (p. 98). These 'core worship values... influence worship or are expressed in it' (p. 97), and a great deal of space is given to illustrating this in connection with prayer, preaching, singing, the Lord's Supper, and baptism. Thus in preaching, to take just one example, *Scripture* is clearly central because preaching is both commanded in Scripture and undertakes to expound Scripture. On the part of the preacher this preaching is an expression of *devotion*, and aims to kindle devotion in its hearers. It has a *community* aspect to it because it is addressed to a congregation. And it has *kingdom* dimensions too for its aim is the furtherance of God's kingdom plans.

The author is very aware of the ecumenical context in which Baptists find themselves today and of the ongoing debate within the wider Christian community over liturgy and worship. His book is intended as a contribution to that debate and it is a fine one. For this writer, however, the chief value of the book lies in the historical facts and core values themselves, and the unavoidable challenge of evaluating them in the light of Scripture. Toward the close of his book the author acknowledges that 'as well as an upward movement from practice and experience, there is a need for a downward, critical movement, as the liturgical phenomena of worship are tested against a systematic theology which can claim to be founded on the witness of Scripture' (p. 250). The results of such evaluation will undoubtedly not be uniform. But if Scripture is normative for Christian worship it is an evaluation that must continue to be made.

*David Campbell, Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, Pennsylvania*

## **The Case for Traditional Protestantism: the Solas of the Reformation**

Terry L. Johnson

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2004; 182pp., £6.25; ISBN 0 85151 888 5

Terry Johnson has produced his fourth popular monograph, this time an introduction to important biblical doctrines. The first chapter introduces readers to five Reformation 'solas' (an odd pluralizing of a Latin term). Subsequent chapters treat each 'sola' in turn, explaining the scriptural basis for each doctrine and illustrating its importance and significance with thoughtful anecdotes and illustrations. Johnson devotes twenty-eight pages each to *Sola Scriptura*, *Solo Christo*, and *Sola Fide*. *Sola Gratia* is given a somewhat shorter chapter and *Soli Deo Gloria* two chapters, one of them discussing Reformed worship which, from the pen of Johnson, is always a treat. Joining a host of others, Johnson does not mention that the popular delineation of these five solas is not a Reformation idea but a modern one. That is to say, if the Reformers were told to list their core doctrines they might as readily have spoken about salvation by the Holy Spirit alone in the church alone.

Johnson's theological exposition of these doctrinal loci is sane and simply stated and I appreciated his frequent doxological and hortatory comments. This is a book written for the edification of the church and the glory of God. It is also written to provide a broader doctrinal foundation than the beguilingly simple chapter headings would lead a reader to believe. Johnson often imports condensed discussions of related doctrinal subjects under each head. His discussion of active and passive obedience



may be too condensed since Johnson sometimes equates Christ's active obedience with his life and his passive obedience with his death (p. 89). Yet while the Saviour's active obedience includes the obedience of his life it extends to his passion as well, and though his passive obedience is most evidently and movingly exhibited in his sufferings and death, it began in the virgin's womb.

Historical portraits and landscapes in the book are generally accurate. However Johnson's assertion on pp. 13 and 103 that Luther identifies grace as the hinge on which his debate with Erasmus turns needs some adjustment since the Reformer actually locates the hinge in the freedom or bondage of the human will. Additionally, it would take an army of social and political theorists to prove Johnson's (very traditional) assertions about the connection between the Reformation and representative forms of government (pp. 1 and 154). Although Protestants pushed for civil reforms, it is by no means clear that the dominant force behind eventual political changes was Protestant theology.

I end by stating that I found the book compelling, but I am not sure if I am the one who was to be compelled. To whom is the case for traditional Protestantism being made? In other books Johnson explains why and to whom he is writing but here he does not. In correspondence with the author I learned that this book is for 'evangelicals who don't know that they are Protestants, that is, who are ignorant of their protestant heritage and core convictions. Their numbers are legion.' It may have been better to have said so in the preface. In any case, for churched people wanting a book-length explanation of major biblical doctrines, I heartily recommend Johnson's fresh restatement of these dearly bought truths at the heart of traditional Protestantism.

*Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, Wolfson College, Cambridge*

## **Contours of Pauline Theology**

Tom Holland

Mentor (Christian Focus), Fearn, 2004; 384pp., £14.99; ISBN 1 85792 469 X.

Tom Holland's conviction is that two 'major lenses' have been missing from New Testament exegesis which have had a detrimental effect on the study of Paul: the lens of the Passover, and that of a corporate reading of the texts. His burden is to establish the significance of these themes in understanding Pauline Christology, soteriology and anthropology.

Holland begins by arguing the prominence of the 'New Exodus' theme in the teaching of both Jesus and Paul, the dependence of Paul on Isaiah and the faithfulness of Paul to the teaching of Jesus. There is a useful and timely chapter on the limits of the use of the pseudepigraphal writings for the study of the New Testament. He then seeks to support the argument that Paul worked from an Old Testament basis by studying the 'Servant' in Isaiah and concluding that as Paul takes this over into his writings it is to be seen as a Hebrew, not Greek, metaphor. A consequence of this is that a Christian is 'not a slave of Christ, but is a servant with all of the dignity and privileges that such a calling carries'. One might accept what Holland asserts without jettisoning what he denies: does not Paul's use of 'slave' contain the precious idea of ownership by Christ?

Perhaps the least convincing section for this reviewer is that in which the author argues that 'the body of sin' (Rom.6:6) is not individualistic but corporate, and represents 'the state of unredeemed humanity in its relationship to Satan', 'the opposite of the body of Christ'. Later he says that 'Sin is the personification of evil, Satan, the husband of the body of Sin.' If Holland wants to establish a 'corporate' interpretation of what Christ has done for fallen man it would be better to maintain the clear distinction between 'the old man' which Ridderbos defines as 'the supra-individual sinful mode of existence' (man in Adam) and 'the body of sin' which is the 'concrete mode of existence of sinful man' (Ridderbos). Instead Holland compounds the two, seeing the 'old man' as 'being part of the description of the "body of sin" in Romans 6:6'.

Holland pursues the 'corporate' theme in seeing the work of Christ as a 'bride-purchase' price for the church and here equates Babylon with the 'body of sin'. On baptism he concludes that 'Paul saw the death of Jesus to be his exodus and identified the moment of the birth of the community under its new representative to be in the moment of its Messiah's death. Thus all Christians have been baptised into his death.'

The third section of the book highlights the Passover motif in Paul's understanding of redemption and deals helpfully with the 'New Perspective'. Holland questions the reliability of Sanders' 'covenantal nomism' as a general description of first-century Judaism, and challenges Dunn and Wright at a number of points, especially the latter on the adequacy of 'martyrdom' as a category for Christ's death. He argues that the Reformers got justification basically right but we need to add to their formulations the notion of entry into a covenant which is contained in the concept of justification. This would have been accepted by the Reformers and Puritans, says Holland, but they did not express this

relational aspect of justification as clearly as the forensic because of their focus on the latter.

A final section deals with the significance of 'the firstborn'. There are four appendices, mostly reviewing relevant scholarship, and a full bibliography. There are also a few examples of ugly grammar, e.g. 'Paul, nor indeed any Christian, is not a slave of Christ, but is a servant with all the dignity...'

This book is certainly aimed at the serious reader. Some of Holland's arguments persuade; others provoke to further thought; some (to this reviewer at least) are unconvincing. In the end, are the Passover motif and the 'corporate' nature of salvation really as radical as is claimed? However, readers will certainly not come away from this book without having been made to think.

*Mostyn Roberts, Welwyn, Herts*

### **The Portable Bunyan. A Transnational History of *The Pilgrim's Progress***

Isabel Hofmeyr

Princeton University Press, 2004; 314pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 691 11656 3

Isabel Hofmeyr, Professor of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, has researched the impact of the writings of John Bunyan – notably *The Pilgrim's Progress, Parts 1 and 2* – in a non-European context, and notably in different parts of Africa.

Ms Hofmeyr adopts a structurally different approach to Bunyan's writings from that of other Bunyan scholars in her field such as Christopher Hill and Roger Sharrock. Her view of Christianity and the Bible is not in any respect 'evangelical' or 'conservative'. She refers to conversion as 'ideally an emotional event...' (p. 58), and elsewhere 'a form of magical transformation' (p. 17).

Her lack of sympathy to evangelicalism, however, does not stop this from being a challenging book. When reading it, one has to keep constantly in mind the anti-Christian paradigm from which her thinking emerges.

Isabel Hofmeyr considers Non-Conformity as a social rather than spiritual phenomenon, and the missionary movement of the nineteenth century an endeavour, at least in part, to export it and make it socially acceptable in other parts of the world. Central to the modern missionary cause was not only the translation of the Bible, but also the translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and this is examined and considered in terms of

its translatability, the material and social practices of translation, and then how the book, or elements from it, were circulated.

Research into how Bunyan's writings were received in Africa suggests that there was a high level of indigenisation, involving some of Bunyan's theology being discarded (notably the doctrine of original sin) and the erosion of other elements in the translation process. Hofmeyr posits that, in many instances, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (like the Bible itself) was accepted into local cultures in Africa largely owing to the view, current at the time amongst Africans, that books held magical properties. To be literate, and to be able to use such a 'fetish', gave a local person an advantage over others in his or her society.

Ms Hofmeyr aims to reformulate (or at least to stimulate the academic debate to such an end) the diverse terrain of Bunyan scholarship through what she terms 'rethinking Bunyan historiography'. Rather than assessing Bunyan from the perspectives of 'at home' or 'abroad', she adopts a broad-based reconfiguration that takes into consideration Bunyan both as a *spiritual icon* (the legacy of nineteenth-century missions) and the fact that he is recognized internationally as a *national English figure*, through the power of English literature. It is likely that her work will stimulate further research, discussion and debate in secular academic circles.

The extent of reference of Ms Hofmeyr's research is considerable, encompassing what she terms the Protestant Atlantic (where she refers to numerous examples in substantiation of her argument), Bunyan, the Public Sphere and Africa (in which she assesses the response of African intellectuals and audiences) and, finally, a section entitled Post-Bunyan, in which she examines again the tensions between the *universal (spiritual)* and the *English* perspectives that there are on the writer.

People who love reading Bunyan for his sheer biblical and spiritual brilliance will not enjoy reading Ms Hofmeyr's book. At times, it is repetitive, and its man-centred presuppositions have to be constantly challenged. However, for missionaries and educators, particularly those working in a cross-cultural context, this material may contain some interesting observations.

The book is intended for an academic readership, is generally well written, and well footnoted. An extensive bibliography and index conclude the work.

*Jim Holmes, Darlington*

## **Karl Barth**

John Webster

Second edition, Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series. Continuum, London, 2004; 181pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 8264 7463 2

In the preface to the second edition, John Webster states 'One of the aims of this book is to unsettle its readers into exploring Barth for themselves.' This brief but thorough book is an excellent resource for introducing the major works and dominant theological themes of Karl Barth to students and pastors. This book is particularly helpful in helping a novice just beginning their journey through the field of theology and the realm of Barth studies. Entering the field of Barth studies may be intimidating because of the staggering amount that Barth wrote during his career and the ever-increasing pool of secondary materials available for study. Webster's introduction to Barth provides enough background on Barth's life and his significant contribution to theology to assist someone entering the field of Barth studies in gaining an initial understanding of Barth while also encouraging readers to continue the exploration by reading more material by Barth and about Barth.

Webster, Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen, skilfully articulates the significant contributions Barth made to theology without overburdening the reader with lengthy quotations or overly technical vocabulary. The strength of this book is the manner in which Webster summarises and explains detailed concepts in a simple yet accurate manner. For example, in only 16 pages Webster's opening chapter provides relevant biographic information concerning Barth's life and the specific theological concerns Barth wrestled with during his career to facilitate an understanding and awareness for a reader encountering Barth without significant prior study.

Webster provides an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary literature but primarily draws upon *Church Dogmatics*, *The Christian Life*, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, *The Epistle to the Romans*, and relevant secondary resources. Webster balances direct quotations from the English translations of Barth's writings with comments and analysis from the growing secondary research. The book for the most part is arranged chronologically, with Webster beginning by exploring Barth's life and work and 'the deep secret YES' with the development of Barth's early writings. Then, Webster focuses primarily on the *Church Dogmatics* while exploring the doctrines of God, creation and reconciliation. Webster then addresses Barth's concern with ethics and his involvement in politics

before turning in the final chapter to analyse the legacy Barth left for the continuing study of Christian theology.

In writing a book of this type, the author is forced to include some material and leave out other material while highlighting specific topics and choosing to exclude other topics. It is particularly interesting that Webster devotes only six pages to Barth's development of the doctrine of election as part of Barth's doctrine of God, even though Webster believes election 'forms the centrepiece of the doctrine of God' and 'is one of the most crucial chapters in the *Church Dogmatics* as a whole' (p. 88). Although the doctrine of election is addressed only briefly in the chapter concerning the doctrine of God, Webster addresses it again in the chapter that discusses reconciliation (as does Barth). Webster's articulation of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation provides an outstanding foundation for those newly interested in Barth's writings. Webster clearly describes the complex structure of the lengthy doctrine of reconciliation and explains Barth's thoughts while providing careful and insightful analysis.

Although the book reads Barth favourably, Webster attempts to present an accurate introduction to Karl Barth as he does not hesitate to include the thoughts of Barth's critics or point out areas of weakness in Barth's work. While describing the fragment of writing concerning baptism Webster warns, 'Read as an essay on sacramental theology, the fragment is rather obviously unsatisfactory' (p. 157). Webster also states that the exegesis in the fragment 'is sometimes surprisingly shoddy' (p.157). Readers of this book will gain insight into the theology of Karl Barth, and I think many readers will want to continue their investigation as a result of Webster's fine presentation.

*Heather Paige McDivitt, New College, University of Edinburgh*

## **Houses of the Interpreter. Reading Scripture, Reading Culture**

David Lyle Jeffrey

Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, 2003; x+288pp., £27.50; ISBN 0 918954 89 4

In this book by the Provost of Baylor University, known to many for his *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, the author seems interested in breaking the monopoly on the Bible held by professional theologians and Bible scholars. In the Introduction he claims, 'the really great readers of Scripture include fewer trained theologians than one might expect.'

What he wants is that we listen in to the Bible's wider conversation with the fuller church. All the same, there are a few buzz words borrowed from theology and its recent trends, e.g. power has replaced authority (which relates to truth); there is a need for exegesis in *communio*; and a retrieval of an understanding of Scripture as sacramental.

Picking up on the scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian is directed to the House of the Interpreter, and where we learn that we must read for profit and not for certainty of finding the one meaning of the text, the conclusion to be drawn is that there is more than one House. In fact, there are a number of possibilities of interpretation, which does not mean that the individual should come up with their own but attempt to listen to the rich variety of others. 'Reading with' is a good discipline which works against the postmodern tendency to be interested in one's own private interpretation.

The arts are presented as that which lead us part of the way to God: it is a bit like getting the cable car halfway up the mountainside. One example of literature helping to get theology on its way is the Roman classical tradition. The main theme of *The Aeneid* is that the journey is not one which takes us home (as in *The Odyssey*) but is one which leaves that past behind: a tale of two cities (Troy and Rome) receives a refiguring by Paul with his teaching on old law and a new fresh start (Sinai and Zion?), then by Augustine in *The City of Man* and *The City of God*. Virgil guides Dante only part of the way and it is clear that in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* the trip is from the earthly towards the realm of the heavenly.

One of the most interesting essays first saw life as a dictionary article and deals with the 'slipperiness' of the word 'love'. *Amor* can be *caritas* or *cupiditas* depending on its object and intention. We find a parody of chaste love based on the text of *The Song of Songs* in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*. In the medieval era, chastity and charity were almost interchangeable but perhaps this meant that eventually charity became seen as something 'cold' in the Enlightenment period, even though the Romantics reversed this. A nice balance is located in the thought of T. S. Eliot who stressed the need for love to help detachment of desire so that love can grow.

There are some memorable moments in these essays: 'though argument does not create conviction the lack of it destroys belief', and the author's insistence that the Bible should be more often changing than confirming its readers' views.

Another helpful interaction is with recent interpretations of Isaiah that stressed the political nature of his message. When the hymn-writer

Whittier uses Isaiah 45:8 in his 'Drop thy still dew of quietness' and John Sawyer in *The Fifth Gospel* criticises Whittier for rendering the abstract noun as 'quietness' not 'justice', then Jeffrey objects: 'In fact, prophet and poet are both misrepresented in this instance. Neither the Hebrew text (*tsedeq*) nor the KJV translation used by Whittier ('righteousness') uses the word *justice* at all (nor do RSV, JPS, etc.)' (p. 80). But 'righteousness' means exactly the same thing as 'justice', and anyway, it is actually more likely that Whittier was not quoting Isaiah 45:8 at all. On Isaiah, Berrigan and Sawyer are both criticised, for 'each is limited by a curiously common failure to see that, for all the partiality in interpretation in every place and time, the common threads that run through the fabric of our historic understanding are not only many, but most are persistently visible and anchoring' (p. 83). In other words the message of the gospel and the thrust of the Bible produce similar kinds of things in every generation.

Jeffrey calls for an attitude of self-effacement before the text: where this happens, the paradox of grace means that some of the most creative and human art ensues.

*Mark W. Elliott, University of St Andrews*

## **Building Your Spiritual Life: The Best Contemporary Writing on Christian Spirituality**

Ian Paul (ed.)

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2003; 352pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 00 713332 4.

This book is a compilation of various articles from the Grove Books spirituality series. It draws together essays by various authors who would all have broad evangelical sympathies. It deals with issues like pilgrimage, working with a spiritual director, appreciating silence, learning from the English mystics and personal confession.

The book is not so much a plea but a mild request to evangelicals not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when engaging with other traditions of spirituality, especially Anglo-Catholicism. I am ashamed to admit that I often approach books with an unhealthy degree of scepticism and this was more than true on this occasion. The problem is, I was taken by surprise.

Let me give two examples. As an unreconstructed Scottish Presbyterian I would not be seen dead in a confession box giving auricular confession! I most certainly would agree with Calvin who called it, 'a pestilential thing and in so many ways pernicious to the church'. There is however a place for mutual accountability and Scripture would



go further in requiring us to 'confess your sins to one another'. Mark Morton's chapter in the book on this issue certainly calls us to consider the question. This chapter is typical of the book in that it calls us to redefine various terms which we have regarded with suspicion in the past. One example of this is 'penance' which Morton would want us to regard as restitution. He would argue that mutual confession is simply part of normal church life and why should the Roman and High churches have all the good concepts? This chapter is typical of much of the book, however, in that it tends to be over-generous to the Anglo-Catholic position, e.g. he argues that sacramental confession is essentially no different from mutual accountability.

In the chapter on pilgrimage, David Osborne, encourages us to look for pilgrimage experiences every day. He argues that too many of us equate pilgrimage with trips to Lourdes or Taizé. Osborne argues that there are evangelical equivalents, e.g. an annual trip to Minehead for Spring Harvest. Osborne basically tells us to forget about less laudable reasons for pilgrimage such as the cult of the saints and buying time out of purgatory through the pilgrimage experience. A pilgrimage is the appreciation that the destination of the journey is not the entire story; he says that if we are travelling to a conference then the whole pilgrimage experience comes into play the moment we begin to pray over the possibilities which the event may present. A journey to work can be a pilgrimage if we view the process and possibilities through God's eyes. Travelling time is never wasted if we reflect on the providence which placed us on that journey.

I liked the book and I recommend it to those of us who need to look at our world through a different lens.

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

## BOOK REVIEWS

WALLACE M. ALSTON & MICHAEL WELKER (eds): <i>Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity</i> (Sandy Finlayson).....	81
ANDREW C. CLARK: <i>Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective</i> (Robert Willoughby).....	82
CRAWFORD GRIBBEN: <i>The Irish Puritans. James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church</i> (Robert Thompson).....	84
LAMIN SANNEH: <i>Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West</i> (M. Gavin Smith).....	86
JAY WESLEY RICHARDS: <i>The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability</i> (Derek Thomas).....	88
BEN WITHERINGTON III WITH DARLENE HYATT: <i>Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary</i> (Mike Bird).....	89
VERN POYTHRESS & WAYNE GRUDEM: <i>The Gender Neutral Bible Controversy</i> (James Maciver).....	91
CHRISTOPHER R. SEITZ (ed.): <i>Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism</i> (Patrick Mitchel).....	93
BRUCE J. EVENSEN: <i>God's Man for the Gilded Age. D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism</i> (James Lachlan MacLeod).....	94
DELBERT BURKETT: <i>An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity</i> (John A. MacLeod).....	96
MARGUERITE SHUSTER: <i>The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners</i> (Matt Jensen).....	98
JAMES D. G. DUNN (ed.): <i>The Cambridge Companion to St Paul</i> (Jonathan Bayes).....	99
RICHARD A. BAILEY AND GREGORY A. WILLS (eds): <i>The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards</i> (Iain D. Campbell).....	101
STEPHEN J. NICHOLS: <i>An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards</i> (Iain D. Campbell).....	101
D. G. HART, S. M. LUCAS AND S. J. NICHOLS: <i>The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition</i> (Iain D. Campbell).....	101
RICHARD BURNETT: <i>Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis</i> (Mark Gignilliat).....	103
ROBIN FARRY AND CHRIS PARTRIDGE (eds): <i>Universal Salvation?: the current debate</i> (Derek Thomas).....	105
BEN WITHERINGTON III: <i>New Testament History: A Narrative Account</i> (Justin Hardin).....	106
JOHN WEBSTER: <i>Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch</i> (P. J. Williams).....	108
WILLIAM HENN: <i>One Faith. Biblical and Patristic Contributions Towards Understanding Unity in Faith</i> (Roy Kearsley).....	109
GEOFFREY GROGAN: <i>Mark: Good News from Jerusalem</i> (Alasdair I. Macleod).....	110
JOEL B. GREEN AND MARK D. BAKER: <i>Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts</i> (Iain D. Campbell).....	111
ALAN C. CLIFFORD: <i>Amyraut Affirmed</i> (Rowland S. Ward).....	113
<i>Theology and Science. Volume 1, Number 1, April 2003</i> (Colin Dow).....	114
ALEC RYRIE: <i>The Gospel and Henry the Eighth: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation</i> (Kenneth J. Stewart).....	116
CHRISTOPHER J. ELLIS: <i>Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in the Free Church Tradition</i> (David Campbell).....	117
TERRY L. JOHNSON: <i>The Case for Traditional Protestantism: the Solas of the Reformation</i> (Chad B. Van Dixhoorn).....	119
TOM HOLLAND: <i>Contours of Pauline Theology</i> (Mostyn Roberts).....	120
ISABEL HOFMEYER: <i>The Portable Bunyan. A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress</i> (Jim Holmes).....	122
JOHN WEBSTER: <i>Karl Barth</i> (Heather Paige McDivitt).....	124
DAVID LYLE JEFFREY: <i>Houses of the Interpreter. Reading Scripture, Reading Culture</i> (Mark W. Elliott).....	125
IAN PAUL (ed.) <i>Building Your Spiritual Life: The Best Contemporary Writing on Christian Spirituality</i> (David C. Meredith).....	127