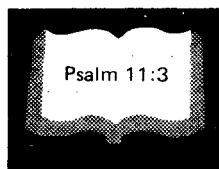


# **Foundations**

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**If the foundations  
be destroyed, what  
can the righteous do?**



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## LUTHER TODAY

Rev Geraint Morgan BA (Colwyn Bay)

To commemorate the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, we include this article on his commentaries and the next article by Douglas Macmillan on the nature of justification by faith.

In no way could we honour the memory of Luther more than by reading his works and allowing him to speak to us today. This has now been made possible by the Concordia Publishing House of St. Louis, Missouri and the Fortress Press (formerly Muhlenberg Press) of Philadelphia who have produced a 54 volume edition of Luther's works with an index volume to follow. These hard-backed volumes of between 400 and 500 pages each are pleasingly produced in a print that is easy on the eye.

Mr Morgan is Pastor of the Welsh Evangelical Church in Colwyn Bay, Clwyd.

Dr Jaroslav Pelikan, editor of 22 of the volumes, says in his 'General Introduction' in Volume 12, which was the first of the series to be published (1955): "The translations of Luther's work in this edition are intended to make many of his writings accessible in modern English for the first time". It has certainly been produced in clear, idiomatic English that can be read with ease. The edition is based on the monumental German Weimar edition (1883 ff) but in certain places the editor and translators have departed from its readings and findings. In each volume the translator has been responsible primarily for matters of text and language while the editor has been responsible for the historical and theological comments in the introductions and footnotes. The editor has also attempted to trace the many "references, citations, and allusions to Scripture, Christian writers, and classical authors in these Lectures, many of them not identified at all, or erroneously labelled in other editions, including the Weimar edition". Each volume is supplied with its own indices. The first 30 volumes contain Luther's Commentaries, the remainder being what have been termed his "Reformation Writings". I propose to confine my remarks in this article to his Commentaries.

One person has commented that "Although one learns a great deal about Luther's earthshaking achievements by reading the works of competent

biographers, it is impossible to arrive at an adequate understanding of this great man's importance in the field of theology unless one digs and delves in his writings", and Luther comes across with striking forcefulness in these translations.

Modern scholars, including many conservative ones, would be embarrassed to include in a scholarly commentary any elements of admonition or application. But this was regarded by Luther to be his duty and that is what makes his works so relevant to today. It also made them relevant in his own day to both student and peasant. As the general editor comments: "It is always difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine from the work itself whether it originated in the classroom or in the pulpit".<sup>1</sup> It is the divorce between exposition and application that has made many modern conservative commentaries so sterile. One wonders to what extent their authors sought to impress their liberal contemporaries or even to have an eye for their own academic advancement. It is precisely here that Luther shines! He sought the truth, and proclaimed it without fear or favour.

It is important to realise, however, that not all Luther's commentaries are of equal value. He learnt as he lectured and preached his way through the Bible - and he readily admitted this: "I was more skilful after I had lectured in the university on St Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews". But his first series of lectures was on the Psalms delivered 1513-1515, (Volumes 10 and 11). These were never published by him because he was too busy, and they now appear in English for the first time. An explanation of Luther's method will indicate the medieval influences on Luther at this early stage of his career. He provided his students with the Latin text of the Vulgate and "contracted with Johann Grunenberg to print, in a special edition with wide margins and generous interlinear spaces, the Latin text of the Psalter together with appropriate headings and short summaries of the contents of the individual psalms. Into the white space of one of these printed copies Luther then wrote his own interlinear and marginal notes ... These notes are the so-called glosses - brief explanations, mostly of a grammatical and philological nature, of individual words and phrases of the Biblical text. The students were expected to enter into their own, identical copies of the Psalter what Luther dictated from his. This was the normal way to begin such lectures. The glosses would then be followed by the so-called scholia - a wider interpretation of as many phrases or statements of the text as the lecturer chose, touching

theological concepts and questions near and far and providing a wide range of support from Scripture generally and from the works of previous recognised interpreters. Hilton Oswald, the editor who took over the work of Jaroslav Pelikan and from whose introduction the above explanation is taken, has only included the scholia in these two volumes, supplemented occasionally by reference to the glosses in the footnotes. This means that one-third of the Psalms are missing because no scholia of them are preserved.

Perhaps these early volumes are more interesting as a study of Luther's own spiritual and theological development rather than as an exposition of the text for present-day preachers. As the editor indicates: "In general, Luther here still follows the traditional manner of his day, presenting a fourfold interpretation of a passage and labelling these interpretations as literal (or historical), allegorical, or anagogical." Furthermore he does not follow the verse sequence when commenting on a Psalm but "allowed himself great freedom to dart back and forth within the psalm" <sup>2</sup> and the same verse may be treated several times. Yet one of his aims stands out clearly, namely to point to Christ in all the Scriptures: "Every prophecy" says Luther, "and every prophet must be understood as referring to Christ the Lord, except where it is clear from plain words that someone else is spoken of. For this He Himself says: 'Search the Scriptures ... and it is they that bear witness to Me' (John 5:39). Otherwise it is most certain that the searchers will not find what they are searching for." That last sentence explains why so many modern commentators have gone astray in their observations on the Old Testament. Luther would certainly not agree to approach the Old Testament as if the New Testament did not exist. Rather, as he says in his Preface: "If the Old Testament can be interpreted by human wisdom without the New Testament, I should say that the New Testament has been given to no purpose." Referring to Psalm 34:5: "They looked unto Him and were lightened", he says: "But others make a detour and purposely, as it were, avoid Christ, so they put off approaching Him with the text. As for me, when I have a text that is like a hard shell, I immediately dash it against the Rock and find the sweetest kernel." And perhaps some of us will find it worthwhile ploughing through even these early commentaries to find a gem such as that statement - for Luther's statements have the habit of sticking in the mind.

1513-1517 were formative years for Luther and as James Atkinson says: "Though he used all the current scholastic terms to express his

thought, all these terms began to carry the evangelical insights that were later to play such a determinative role in the Reformation".<sup>3</sup>

The last thing that one finds in Luther is a cold, analytical and detached view of the Scriptures. As one person has observed: "The message, compared with that of other contemporary lectures, reveals greater individual involvement in the message being expounded." In other words Luther was involved in his message in the way that every true preacher should be involved. This was the new note that was struck in Luther's lectures even though there was much that was traditional appertaining to their format. That he was "dealing not with idle academic definitions but with the issues of life and salvation that affect speaker and hearer directly and personally" is another apt comment that has been made on his early works.

These "First Lectures on the Psalms" must not be confused with his later commentaries on Psalms and published in this series in Volumes 12, 13, and 14 under the title: "Selected Psalms". These stem from 1517 to 1539 and most of them reflect a maturer Luther. For this reason I have inserted in the appended list of Luther's commentaries the dates when the lectures or sermons were delivered so that readers might the better judge which are his maturer works.

Luther learnt quickly. And this becomes evident in his second series of lectures which were on "The Epistle to the Romans" and delivered in 1515-1516. It is true that he uses the same method of lecturing as in his first series on the Psalms and also uses much of the vocabulary and teaching forms of his predecessors. But the commentary is far more useful to the modern reader. "The chief purpose of this letter," said Luther, "is to break down, to pluck up, and to destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh." And the reader not only observes him doing this in the commentary but himself feels searched and sifted, challenged and humbled. His comments on the opening verse regarding the Pastor's office and "call", and how he should avoid seeking popularity on the one hand and being a tyrant on the other are very relevant: "These are the two main faults from which all the mistakes of pastors come". Again in commenting on Romans 3:10 he emphasises the importance of searching one's heart: "We so rarely analyse ourselves deeply enough to recognise this weakness in our will, or rather, this disease. And thus we rarely humble ourselves, rarely seek the grace of God in the right way, for we do not understand, as he says here (v.11)".

Of course there are portions of the commentary where Luther is dealing with philosophical problems raised by late medieval writers and these can only be of academic interest. But the greater part of the book indicates how skilful he had already become in his understanding of the righteousness of God. His lectures also on Romans 6 and 7.1-6, on the believer's death unto sin and unto the law, are most enlightening and heart warming. Again the distinction he draws between the death of the believer and that of the unbeliever is frighteningly clear. The believer's relation to sin ends at his death, so that to him: "death is only a figure, a symbol, and like death painted on a wall when compared with eternal death". But for the unbeliever "sin lives on and continues forever".

His warm, pastoral heart is displayed in his comments on Chapter 8 verses 26 and 27, for example, where he gives a most thought-provoking exposition on prayer and the relationship between our requests and God's answer: "It is not a bad sign but a very good one, if things seem to turn out contrary to our requests." After referring to Isaiah 55:8-9 and other Scriptures he continues: "And He does all this because it is the nature of God first to destroy and tear down whatever is in us before He gives us His good things, as the Scripture says: 'The Lord makes poor and makes rich, He brings down to hell and raises up' (1 Sam.2:7)".

Some readers may already possess the edition of Luther's commentary on 'Romans' published in the 'Library of Christian Classics' (Vol.15: SCM), but that edition only contained the scholia. "The present translation reproduces for the first time in English both the complete interlinear and marginal glosses and the scholia", says H.C.Oswald in his 'Introduction' to this volume. He explains further that: "In addition to Luther's own handwritten copy of both the glosses and the scholia, there are extant a number of student notebooks of these lectures ... and it is interesting to compare the students' record with what the lecturer's own manuscript tells us he had planned to say." Consequently we have a very reliable account of the lectures.

Throughout his lectures on 'Romans' we see Luther freeing himself from the influence of medieval commentators. He makes use of them if they are useful but frequently disagrees with them and refutes their arguments. Already he has discarded the fourfold interpretation of Scripture which was used by the scholastics and which he had utilised in his first series of lectures on the Psalms.



Luther followed his lectures on 'Romans' with a series on 'Galatians' (1516-1517) and 'Hebrews' (1517-1518). Though still following the medieval pattern of providing glosses as well as scholia, his characteristic Biblical stance is becoming increasingly evident. Only the scholia have been translated in the 'Hebrews' volume because, says the editor, "There is virtually no way to translate the glosses in their entirety. Most of them make sense only in relation to the Latin (or even the Greek) text of the Epistle while others are cryptic and fragmentary."

More readers will be familiar with Luther's commentary on 'Galatians' than any other because several editions have appeared in English. What perhaps is not so widely known is that he produced two commentaries on this epistle to which he fondly referred as: "My Katie von Bora". His first series of lectures were delivered in 1516-1517 and published in 1519 when he significantly revised and expanded some of his earlier judgments. In 1523 he published a revised and abbreviated version of this commentary. Then in 1531 he delivered another set of discourses on 'Galatians' and these were published in 1535 and revised in 1538. All previous English translations have been based on the revised edition of 1538 but in this new series both the 1519 lectures and the discourses of 1535 are now published. It has been observed: "The discourses on 'Galatians' that were published in 1535 show Luther at his best. Here one sees the Reformer as a mature scholar and as a master of the art of presenting exegesis in a refreshingly informal manner." Doctrinally Luther had not changed his position on justification by faith in 1535 from what it had been in 1519 but "The Luther of 1535 has at his command far greater simplicity and pungency of expression than one finds in the work of 1519."

What is deeply challenging to us today is the way in which Luther refused to accept any teaching for which he could not find a Scriptural basis. He did not seek extra-biblical proofs of the veracity of the Scriptures. The Bible had become alive to him and it is a true comment that has been made of him that "the great man's whole being is aflame with zeal as he comments on the words of St Paul."

His 'Sermons on the Gospel of John' (1537-1540) similarly come from the heart and go to the heart. It was little wonder that peasants and students crowded to listen to him. His secret lay in his conviction that correct doctrine alone was not enough but that the power of the Holy Spirit was essential to reach the hearts of men. There is much

to be learnt in these sermons, not least the way in which he applies the Scriptures to both himself and his listeners. Through them also we get to know the real Luther - a man whose heart was overflowing with love for his Saviour and for his fellowmen. It would be a pity, however, if only preachers read these sermons. One person has described these volumes of sermons as: "a book for everybody". We should not forget that even children listened with benefit to Luther preaching.

Luther's own comment in his lectures on '1 Timothy' (1527-1528), was: "A man teaches when his hearers understand what he is saying." The mark of a novice, he says, is that he teaches the abstruse parts of Scripture and ignores the simple - readily confessing at the same time that he himself had once been like this. But he had learnt that a bishop must be plain and direct - "the way one speaks to his children at home." There is also the practical aspect of the Word for the preacher himself: "Whoever teaches the Word of God correctly should train himself for godliness. He does not lay the Word down in his napkin, as a lazy slave does (cf Luke 19:20). He keeps it in use so that it may not rust or rot away." It is little wonder that he emphasised regarding the office of the bishop or preacher: "The pious aspire to that office with trepidation. They do not come freely and teach, but they are forced into it, even as I." With such he contrasted the false teachers: "who kept rushing about in all directions, saying that they were driven by the Spirit, by wisdom and by their talent." His comments on "the Enthusiasts", as he called them, are worth noting: "The Enthusiasts are not teachers because they don't strengthen consciences."

It is amazing how contemporary Luther is. His remarks are often far more relevant to us today at the end of the twentieth century than they would have been in Spurgeon's day. One could think that Luther was writing with certain of the unscriptural emphases of the present day in mind. Again on the false teachers he says (on 1 Timothy 6:20): "They have their own empty thoughts and speculations to which they fit and adjust Scripture ... They are simply empty chatterers, although their fine appearance seems to make them theologians ... Just as empty chatter is useless, so this knowledge is falsely boasted of: 'The Spirit provides it in my heart'. This is the knowledge that is praised. It is renowned and has a great name, and it is advertised in glowing terms: 'This is something you have never heard before. Listen carefully'. They bring a sort of wisdom wonderfully advertised,

a glorious wisdom. But it is 'falsely called knowledge'."

It would seem that some would be teachers, who today are a headache to many pastors, are not a new phenomenon after all - and that is no little relief!

Luther had a keen insight into the secular and ecclesiastical affairs of his time and this is reflected in his writings. But, in addition, his statements had a prophetic quality which makes his commentaries timeless in their significance and amazingly contemporaneous.

Luther was a fighter - and a fearless one at that - always opposing the interpretations of his predecessors, and accusing them of having failed to comprehend the meaning of the Gospel and of having interpreted it as another set of rules. Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed out in his introduction to Vol.21: "The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat", that: "A fundamental assumption of Luther's criticisms and of his exegetical work generally is the unity of the Bible". This, of course, is an important point for us today for we are still suffering the effects of those eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators, and their twentieth century offspring, who drove a wedge between Old Testament and New Testament, and then wedges between Jesus and Paul, the Synoptics and John, and Paul and Paul. Two characteristics of Luther are noteworthy here. The first is that he identified himself with the struggles of Paul and the parables of Jesus, so perceiving the fundamental harmony between the two. He recognised that this unity of experience was not uniformity and in the same way he recognised the great variety among the books of the New Testament. Ebeling has indicated that one of his great achievements as an interpreter of the New Testament was that he was able to emphasise the differences of style and expression in the gospels without ever losing the unity of the whole. Similarly he could see the continuity between the proclamations of Jesus and the Pauline and Catholic Epistles without ignoring the particular characteristics of each book and its author. One should notice that Luther arrived at these conclusions because he realised that there was a unity between the Christian experience of the New Testament writers and his own experience. In other words the Scriptures had spoken first to Luther and as he sought to walk humbly with God in the light of those Scriptures so he came to see through the mass of false emphases and interpretations of his predecessors and contemporaries in the Church. Contrary to common belief Luther had a correct understanding of the relation between

Paul's teaching on justification by faith and James' teaching on justification by works "Therefore, when St James and the apostle say that a man is justified by works, they are contending against the erroneous notion of those who thought that faith suffices without works, although the apostle does not say that faith justifies without its own works ... but that it justifies without the works of the Law. Therefore justification does not demand the works of the Law but a living faith which produces its own works". <sup>4</sup>

The second noteworthy characteristic of Luther's teaching on the unity of the Bible is his approach to the Old Testament. He saw it as being absolutely essential for an understanding and correct interpretation of the New Testament. "By rooting his interpretation of the New Testament in his understanding of the Old Testament Luther thus helped to break the exegetical habits of many centuries" for "expositors of the New Testament had so often drawn upon classical rather than upon Biblical sources for their materials." <sup>5</sup> We have witnessed a return in our day to a seeking for an understanding of the New Testament through exaggerated emphasis on the study of extra-Biblical sources. This betrays a lack of confidence in the Scriptures as being their own interpreter. We need to return to Luther's position. "He worked from the Old Testament in interpreting New Testament terms and concepts ... He read the Old Testament as Christian Scripture, and he read the New Testament on the basis of the Old." <sup>6</sup> It is well known that for many years the concept of God's righteousness both frightened and angered him. Consequently it is significant that: "It was in part the realisation of the Hebrew rather than Greek origin behind statements like Romans 1:17 that brought Luther to his 'wonderful and new definition of righteousness' and of justification." Previously he had conceived of 'righteousness' "in a 'passive' way, as that which God was and that which God possessed", but then he came to realise that "righteousness had to do with the divine activity and denoted that which God conferred as a gift." And so "the gates of paradise" were opened to him.

Heinrick Bornkamm's comment might come as a surprise to many, that if Luther were alive today he would have occupied a Chair of Old Testament in a Theological Faculty rather than a Chair of New Testament or of Systematic Theology. This comment is confirmed by the fact that of his 30 volumes of commentaries in this present translation 20 of them are on the Old Testament, and it is these that form his

major work. Pelikan's comment is that "Of all Luther's mature works on the New Testament the commentary on 'Galatians', in its various editions, is perhaps the only one that parallels the many commentaries on books of the Old Testament that he continued to produce". His "magnus opus", of course, was his lectures on Genesis which occupied the last decade of his life and which fill the first eight volumes of this translation. The work was begun in June 1535 but was frequently interrupted by plagues, illness, frequent travelling, and other duties. His last lecture on 'Genesis' (Nov.17,1545) was also the last lecture of his professional life. He died on February 18th 1546.

Peter Meinhold argued that his researches have shown that the theology of the 'Lectures on Genesis' has been adulterated by its editors to conform it to the growing orthodoxy of the second generation of Lutherans. Certainly Luther's editors allowed themselves great liberties as we can see when we have both his lecture notes and the printed versions of his commentaries. The 'Lectures on Genesis' are not the work of his pen nor even a transcript of his lectures. The line of editorial descent runs from Veit Dietrich to Melanchthon and through his pupils to later Lutheran theologians. Consequently Jaroslav Pelikan warns us that we must have some misgivings: "on those sections of the commentary in which Luther sounds more like Melanchthon than like any Luther we know." Nevertheless he challenges some of Meinhold's conclusions, pointing out that: "About most sections of the commentary any responsible historian of theology must conclude that if Luther did not really say this, it is difficult to imagine how Veit Deitrich or even Melanchthon himself could have thought it up. Therefore the lectures on Genesis are an indispensable source for our knowledge of Luther's thought, containing as they do his reflections on hundreds of doctrinal, moral, exegetical, and historical questions." The above comments on his 'Lectures on Genesis' apply also to some of his other volumes.

Already by 1524-1526 when he was lecturing on the Minor Prophets it can be said of Luther: "In his exegesis Luther has here reached a new level of independence and maturity. He no longer follows but more often rejects the thoughts of commentators like Jerome and Lyra. He feels more free than before to fault the Vulgate text on the basis of references to the original Hebrew text." <sup>7</sup> It was no mean achievement to have fought himself free of patristic and scholastic shackles. One should bear in mind that 1524-1526 were crucial years in Luther's career when he knew that the whole Reformation movement was in the

balance and he himself was being opposed on all sides. "But as responsibilities, anxieties, enmities and threats increased, Luther's confidence in the message of Scripture also rose to meet every test. His studies in the Word as well as the resulting lectures on the Word were a haven of refuge where he found the solace and refreshment needed to carry on and to reach the decisions required." At the same period he was lecturing again on the Psalms and a comment of his on his favourite Psalm 18 is significant: "This Psalm has often been an outstanding remedy for me against the plots and wiles of the devil."

In preparing his work on Jonah, Habakkuk and Zechariah for publication Luther did an unusual thing. Having already lectured in Latin on them in the University he then produced additional German versions of those lectures. Translations of both these versions are now published in Volumes 19 and 20. Hilton Oswald says that "Luther probably did not even consult his Latin notes as he wrote the German version" and that the latter "contained many new treatments and omits many thoughts of the Latin version."

Luther's scholarship was extensive and profound but he wore it lightly and made no display of it. He delivered his lectures in Latin which had become a second language to him. He understood "the genius of the language" and at the same time was a master of his native German. Luther was never flippant when dealing with the text but always bore in mind that all Scripture is beneficial. He approached the sacred words with deepfelt humility. He knew that he was treading on holy ground and he was always at pains to make his readers come to a sharp realisation and understanding of the fact. This God-given confidence in the Scriptures is seen in his approach towards the book of Ecclesiastes with which he struggled for some time, eventually lecturing on it in 1526 (published 1532). He admits that it is one of the more difficult books of the Bible but points out that the "difficulties" arise because "commentators have failed to understand the purpose of the book and have taken no intelligent approach to those strange ways of speaking called Hebraisms." He shows that "Ecclesiastes" does not condemn the creatures of God; it condemns man's depraved affections and desires.

By 1543 Luther found it necessary to defend his Christological exegesis of the Old Testament and did so by publishing a treatise "On the Divinity of Christ on the Basis of the Last Words of David

(2 Samuel 23:1-7)". In his exposition Luther indicates that the doctrines of the Trinity and of the two natures in Christ were already taught in the Old Testament. As Pelikan indicates: "In so doing, he set forth not only his exegesis of this passage, but also the hermeneutical principles that had guided him in the interpretation of the remainder of the Old Testament." Luther himself sums it up in the sentence: "Whoever does not have or want to have this Man properly and truly who is called Jesus Christ, God's Son, whom we Christians proclaim, must keep his hands off the Bible ... The more he studies, the blinder and more stupid will he grow." In the last issue of 'Foundations' Philip Eveson reminded us of "the importance of spiritual mind and heart in the approach to the Scriptures" and this is remarkably illustrated in the life of Luther. It is those "that tremble at His word" (Isaiah 66:5) who receive light on it and those who know nothing of that trembling are hardened.

In Luther's lectures on Isaiah (Volume 16: Isaiah 1-39; Volume 17: Isaiah 40-66), delivered 1527-1530, he warns his hearers against the extravagant allegorical interpretations of such Church Fathers as Origen. He himself indulges in a little allegorisation: "almost reluctantly expressed and quite self-consciously held within the limits of evangelical hermeneutics" (Pelikan). In his lectures on chapters 40-66: "Luther seems especially concerned about students preparing for the ministry" (Oswald) and of instilling into them the comforting truth that had sustained him personally, namely that: "The Word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8). He issues a warning that is very timely to us today: "Beware that you do not neglect the Word. It indeed stands firm, but it moves and will be given to others ... Therefore let us prayerfully keep busy with the Word".

Luther's opinion was that: "The Old Testament was best handled in exposition, the New Testament in sermons." But whether dealing with the Old Testament or the New I have found that Luther's directness of application makes the reader sit up and take note as if present at the great teacher's feet. To read Luther is a searching and humbling experience. His works are best read systematically and although he has the teacher's necessary habit of repeating himself, he does so with variations that drive the point home. His knowledge of human nature is profound and his knowledge of Scripture wide and enlightening. But his distinguishing mark is that he seeks to bring his own reason, and that of his listeners and readers, into captivity

and obedience to Christ. Much of what he wrote was produced not merely in the midst of a busy academic life but during times of much physical pain and weakness as well as mental and spiritual turmoil. In spite of these things, plus the opposition from both the Papal Church and "the Enthusiasts", he could say: "The spirit of the godly rusts away unless they are well exercised by tribulations." His invincibility stemmed from the fact that he attacked his opponents from Scripture while his heart overflowed with love. It has been truly said that "He could comfort, console and assure as effectively as he could attack, castigate, and condemn."

Refreshing and spontaneous as are all Luther's commentaries, yet they are based on a painstaking study of the Scriptures with an honest attempt at a grammatical and historical analysis of the Hebrew and Greek texts and of translations.

It remains for me but to draw attention to an invaluable companion volume that Concordia have produced to this series, namely: "Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings" by Jaroslav Pelikan. In this book Pelikan answers such questions as: "What principles guided the Reformer in his expository writings? What tools did he use? How did he arrive at the conclusions he set forth? What impelled him to strive for an ever-increasing knowledge of God's Word?" But in addition he states, and comments, on the principles that should guide those who read and study the Reformer's exegetical works, showing them how to evaluate and understand these writings properly, objectively and helpfully. Concordia lists "Luther the Expositor" as an unnumbered volume while Fortress Press considers this as Volume 56!

Concordia now have a new address in England:-

Concordia Publishing House  
18 Crane's Way, Boreham Wood,  
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I obtained my own copies through arrangement with a local Christian Bookshop whereby they ordered all the volumes and allowed me to pay for them on a monthly basis over a long period of time. I would like to point out also that Luther's works are all available at 'The Evangelical Library', 78a Chiltern Street, London W1M 2HB (Tel.01-935 6997). The Spring 1983 edition (No.70) of 'The Evangelical Library



Bulletin' contains a list of biographies of, and works by, Luther, available for borrowing and reference.

#### References

1. Vol.12: 'Selections from the Psalms I'
2. H.C.Oswald
3. The Great Light, Paternoster
4. See the full exposition on pp 234-236 of Vol.25 on 'Romans' relating to ch.3 verse 20.
5. Pelikan
6. op cit.
7. H.C.Oswald

#### LUTHER'S WORKS

Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press

##### A. The Commentaries

Volumes 1-8: Genesis (1535-1545); Volume 9: Deuteronomy (1523-1525)  
Vols 10-11: First lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515); Vols 12-14: Selected Psalms (1517-1539); Vol.15: Ecclesiastes (1532), Song of Solomon (1539), Last Words of David (1543); Volumes 16-17: Isaiah (1527-1530); Vols.18-20: Minor Prophets (1524-1526); Vol.21: The Sermon on the Mount (1530-1532) and the Magnificat (1521); Vols. 22-24: Sermons on the Gospel of St John: Chs.1-4, 6-8, 14-16 (1530-1532 and 1537-1540); Vol.25: Romans (1515-1516); Vol.26: Lectures on Galatians chs 1-4 (1535); Vol.27: Lectures on Galatians chs 5-6 (1535) and his earlier Lectures on Galatians chs 1-6 (1519); Vol. 28: 1 Corinthians 7 (1523); 1 Corinthians 15 (1534); Lectures on 1 Timothy (1527-1528); Vol.29: Lectures on Titus (1527), Philemon (1527), Hebrews (1517-1518); Vol.30: The Catholic Epistles: Sermons on 1 Peter (1522), 2 Peter (1523), Jude (1523); Lectures on 1 John (1527).

##### B. The Reformation Works: i.e. his works arranged according to themes:

Vols.31-34: Career of the Reformer (i.e. his works that illustrate his career e.g. 95 Theses; Bondage of the Will) Vols.35-38: Word and Sacrament; Vols.39-41: Church and Ministry; Vols.42-43: Devotional Writings; Vols.44-47: The Christian in Society; Vols.48-50: Letters; Vols.51-52: Sermons; Vol.53: Liturgy and Hymns; Vol.54 Table Talk.

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: WHAT IT MEANS

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Our understanding of justification by faith is fundamental to our proclamation and understanding of the gospel so in this article I want to indicate what the preaching of the doctrine of justification is concerned to impart to others. This doctrine then will be discussed here in terms of its importance, its nature and its ground.

### A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

I want now to highlight the crucial importance of justification in the gospel scheme of salvation in three ways:

1. First of all, we can establish the importance of this doctrine by looking at its achievements in the history of the church.

We can begin the survey where the doctrine actually emerged in its clearest formulation. This doctrine has consistently and correctly been regarded as one of the two basic, controlling principles of Reformation theology. The authority of Scripture was the formal principle of that theology, describing its method and providing its sole touch-stone of truth; and justification by faith was its material principle, determining its substance and directing its dynamic.

It was not, of course, a new doctrine discovered for the first time by the Reformers - Martin Luther and John Calvin. We have to recognise that Christians right down through the ages discerned this principle, and in fact acted on it. The fact of acceptance with God on the merits of Christ, and by grace alone, was never really absent from the faith of Christ's church. There are many instances in which it finds expression down through the years, not so much, perhaps, as an articulated article of the faith, but certainly as a testimony of Christian experience. Now, that is to say just this: that no sinner can know Christ savingly apart from justification, and justification was known in the heart of every believer even if it was not clearly formulated in his mind. While this fact must be remembered, yet it nevertheless

remains true that it was the doctrine of justification by faith that was most clearly to mark the cleavage between the Reformation era and the ages that went before it. There at the Reformation it found clarification, clear formulation, and very significant vocal articulation. It was the centre of the preaching of men like Melancthon, Luther, Calvin, and those who under God were entrusted with the revival that lies at the heart of the Reformation.

Now, that the Reformation itself was in essence a rediscovery of the gospel way of salvation, and that the doctrine of justification by faith was one of the two major catalysts in that rediscovery, is proof for us of how closely it lies to the very heart of the gospel. So close to the heart of the gospel that I want to say this: where the truths of justification are held and proclaimed, there a door of hope is set before sinners; where these truths are neither known nor preached, then the way of salvation has been shut up, and the lost sinner can have no hope. It is because of this - and this is absolutely fundamental to our understanding of what the gospel is - G.C. Berkouwer of the Free University of Amsterdam is right (and I don't always think Berkouwer is right!) when he says: "The confession of divine justification touches man's life at its heart, at the point of his relationship to God. It defines the preaching of the church, the existence and progress of the life of faith, the root of human security, and man's perspective for the future." All these things are involved in the proclamation of justification by faith. Professor Finlayson tells us that these truths mentioned by Berkouwer really underlie the spiritual impulse of the Reformation and show us that the Reformation was in fact far more radical spiritually than we tend to think. He points out its historical importance when he says, "It made faith," (not just the Reformation, but the doctrine of justification) "alone the sole contact between the sinner and the Saviour. It turned theology into religion; it proved to be the substitution of one religion for another of a totally different kind, of a divine religion for a human, of the supernatural grace of God for the blind and hopeless efforts of men." This is true. The emergence and the formulation of this doctrine lay behind the Reformation, and it was nothing less than the substitution of one religion for another: the religion of God's grace over against a religion that was couched in the blind and hopeless efforts of men. And if there was one thing that was not said about or by the Pope on his visit to Britain in 1982, it was this: the doctrine of justification by faith was not mentioned.

Now, one of the men I have found most helpful on the doctrine of justification by faith is Dr James Buchanan, a theologian of the Free Church of Scotland in the last century (and it's a comment on evangelical understanding that his book is the last major treatise that we have amongst evangelicals on justification by faith). He pinpoints the importance of the doctrine to our own position like this: "The revival of the gospel doctrine of justification was the chief means of effecting the reformation of religion in Europe in the sixteenth century." And we should never forget that if the Reformation had not taken place, the history of the Western world would be very different today from what it is. It is untrue to say that the Reformation doesn't matter - it matters a great deal. Professor John Murray confirms this opinion when he says, "It may be safe to say that the greatest event for Christendom in the last fifteen hundred years was the Protestant Reformation." He continues, "What was the spark that lit the flame of evangelical passion? It was, by the grace of God, the discovery on the part of Luther stricken with a sense of his estrangement from God, and feeling in his inmost soul the stings of His wrath and the remorse of a terrified conscience, of the true and only way whereby a man can be just with God. To him, the truth of justification by free grace, through faith, lifted him from the depths of the forebodings of hell to ecstasy of peace with God and the hope of glory." ('Collected Writings' Vol.2 p.203). "The doctrine of justification was the radical principle out of which grew the reformation from Popery," says R.L.Dabney; "it was by adopting this doctrine that the Reformers were led out of darkness into light." Let us never forget this and how vitally important, historically, the doctrine of justification by faith is.

2. Secondly let me stress the importance of justification to the gospel scheme of salvation by referring to the spiritual effects which this doctrine has produced in the lives of God's people. The first and basic question in spiritual things is that of a man's relationship to God. All other questions of a religious nature take second place to that one. All religion - not merely the Christian faith - ultimately poses the query, "How can a man be just with God? How can he be right with the Holy One?" And religions pose a whole series of varied answers to that question. But when we come to the Bible the question assumes a far more serious and aggravated aspect than merely, "How can a man be just with God?" The question now is, "How can a sinful man be just with a holy God?" The gospel, which centres on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, supplies the only valid

answer to that question. For this reason: in the final analysis sin is always against God; and the one who is against God can never be right with God. If we are against God then God is against us; it cannot be otherwise. God cannot fail to take account of that which is the contradiction of Himself. His holy perfection requires the recoil of righteous indignation to all sin and that recoil finds its expression in wrath. "The wrath of God," says the apostle, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness," and let us as ministers remember that in our own lives. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." That is our actual situation; that is not theory, but fact. Because this is so, the gravity and complexity of the question is, "How can a sinful man be right with a holy God?"

Man today really fails to face up to this reality. He is living in a cushioned vacuum of his own philosophical creation and his understanding of reality is untrue. To efface not only God, but in addition the God of justice and of wrath who is angry with the wicked every day, is to distort reality, and to hide behind that which is untrue. This is one reason why the ground doctrine of justification by faith alone does not raise large 'Hosannas', either in our own hearts or in the hearts of the people to whom we preach. We fail to reckon with two vital things: with sin, and with the wrath of God. This is the reason why the gospel of grace will really be a mere sound in the world and church of our own day, for man has little sense of the reality of God and of the reality of His judgment; he has little understanding of the majesty of God and of His holiness, while sin is considered nothing more than man's misfortune out of which he is growing. If it's not his misfortune, it's merely a maladjustment to his environment, and proper education will sort it out. If we face reality in biblical terms we have to reckon with the fact that justification deals with lost sinners. "The justification of a sinner," says W.G.T. Shedd (and I would commend him to your reading), "is different from that of a righteous person. The former is unmerited, the latter is merited. The former is without good works, the latter is because of good works. The former is pardon of sin, and accepting one as righteous when he is not so; the latter is pronouncing one righteous because he is so. The former is complex, the latter is simple." That is how he makes the distinction between the justification of a sinner and the justification of one who is not a sinner. "Holy angels," for example, he says, "are justified before the bar of God on the ground of their own righteousness; they have not

sinned."

Now we can go on to this: the plain fact stands before us that sin has involved man in guilt while guilt, in turn, involves divine condemnation. To state the matter in this way points out for us the necessity of a complete reversal in our legal standing before God. That is where justification begins; it is where it must begin. Because of sin, and the condemnation that sin's guilt involves, man's standing with God is wrong. The real question that justification confronts is, "How can that standing be put right?" Our salvation must involve not merely a change in our inward attitude to God, but before that a change in God's judicial relationship to us. How can that standing and that judicial relationship ever be changed? Justification is the answer; and justification is the act of God's free grace. Paul says, in Romans 8:33, "It is God that justifies, who is he that condemns?" So vital and fundamental, then, is justification, that its importance to salvation cannot be highlighted too strongly. Wherever men have come to an understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone, they have come to a wonderful, spiritual emancipation. Wherever it is lost or obscured, men enter in various degrees into spiritual bondage. The spiritual achievements of justification by faith tell us that it lies at the very heart of the gospel.

3. Thirdly, we'll now turn from the historical achievements of the doctrine and its spiritual effects to its theological implications. It is vitally important here to recognise the relationship that justification bears to all other doctrines involved in an evangelical and biblical scheme of theology. The biblical doctrine bears, for example, not merely on the application of redemption to sinners, but it bears even more strongly on the nature of the redemption which is to be applied to sinners. In other words, it ties in not merely with the application of redemption but with the accomplishment of redemption. Or, to put it differently, it ties in with what kind of salvation a sinner can find when he finds salvation in Christ.

Now, we know that the justification of a sinner is inextricably bound up with his regeneration, with his union to Christ, with his faith, his repentance and his conversion. That is, it stands in intimate relation to all the doctrines involved in the application of redemption. But that is not all. We must remember that it also stands intimately related to the person and work of Christ, and especially to the atonement. Was Christ's death a work that lay the basis upon which

sinners could be accounted righteous before a holy God? Did He bear the guilt of sin? Did He safeguard the divine rectitude in the pardon and remission of sin? All these, and many other vital questions of theology, will not only affect, but they will in turn be affected by, our understanding of the doctrine of justification. Now this is very clearly spelled out for us by a theologian whom I admire very much, namely, R.L.Dabney. He writes: "When we consider how many of the fundamental points of theology are connected with justification, we can hardly assign it too important a place. Our view of this doctrine must determine or be determined by our view of Christ's satisfaction. And this again carries along with it the whole doctrine concerning the natures and person of Christ. And if the proper deity of Him be denied, that of the Holy Ghost will very certainly follow along with it, so that the very doctrine of the Trinity itself is destroyed by extreme views concerning justification. Again, 'It is God that justifies'; how evident then that our views of justification will involve those of God's law and of His own moral attributes. The doctrine of original sin is also brought in question when we assert the impossibility of a man so keeping the law of God as to justify himself." I'm quoting Dabney to show the range of doctrines that will be affected by what we believe concerning the doctrine of justification by faith. Perhaps you never knew it was as important as that - but it is. Arianism, Socinianism, and Unitarianism can all be traced back in their origins to a departure from the simple doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. Justification by faith, the more you study it, becomes a key in the whole archway of evangelical doctrine. So vital is it that where it is lost or obscured, perverted or misunderstood, the entire provision of God's redemptive accomplishment for the salvation of sinners is, in the same measure, lost or obscured or perverted or misunderstood. The importance of justification was not being misrepresented in the least when Luther declared it to be the article of a standing or a fallen church. You can determine the health or otherwise of the doctrine of any church when you know its doctrine of justification by faith.

## B. THE NATURE OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Now I want to go on, in the second place, to look with you at the nature of justification by faith. I am assuming that you are already well acquainted with this doctrine, so all I want to do is to clarify briefly the nature of justification by faith. How do you define it? I have looked at many books on this doctrine, and the best definition

I have found is in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Justification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and by faith alone." Could you better that?

1. Now let's look quickly at this definition. First of all, justification is an act of God. That might not seem very important - but it is. It is an act of God, and not a work of God; and the act is of a legal, judicial or forensic nature, and the terminology of Scripture about justification can only be understood in a forensic sense. Because it is a forensic act it has to do with our legal standing before God. It is not a work within the person being justified, but it is a declaration about the person being justified. Regeneration, to take one example of what God does in the application of redemption, is a work of God in us; but justification is purely and solely a judgment of God concerning us. The difference is crucial to a correct understanding of what justification is.

The distinction is similar to the difference between the action of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The one, when he removes some diseased part of the body, does something in us; the other doesn't do that, but he gives a verdict concerning our legal status, our relationship to law and our standing in the eyes of law. The declaration is either concerning our innocence or concerning our guilt - either of these two things and nothing else. Now, that declaration has nothing to do with making us inwardly good or inwardly bad. It is not a work that can make us either holy or evil; it is a declaration not about our inward condition, but about our actual legal standing.

Justification, therefore, means that the sinner is declared as being free from guilt and, in the sight of God, as sustaining a relation which meets all the requirements of His holy law and His inflexible justice. This difference is critical because many make the mistake of confusing justification with sanctification, and this is done in a variety of ways and by a broad spectrum of religious opinion, ranging from the Romanist with its doctrine of infused grace on the one hand, to the Perfectionists with their doctrine of complete holiness, on the other. There is always a confusion of two things which differ: justification and sanctification.

Now, in essence, this type of teaching which confuses these things simply puts the work of the Holy Spirit into the place which should



be occupied by the work of Christ alone. This kind of teaching looks to the work of the Holy Spirit within the sinner as the basis of justification, rather than to Christ's work for the sinner as that basis. James Buchanan writes: "There is perhaps, no more subtle or plausible error on the subject of justification than that which makes it rest on the indwelling presence and the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the heart."

It's worth noting how damaging this kind of thought can be to biblical teaching, and how destructive of spiritual peace in personal experience. For if we are justified solely on account of what Christ did and suffered for us, we can rest upon a completely finished work, a righteousness already accepted by God. But if we are justified in the least measure at all by a work of the Holy Spirit within us, we are called to rest on a work that is still taking place, which is subject to resistance from our own depraved hearts, and which, in the case of the unrenewed sinner, is not even begun until that sinner is safely past the point of regeneration. Any such scheme of justification strongly detracts not merely from the freeness of grace, but from the fulness of the atoning work of Christ. We must be careful, therefore, to distinguish between justification and sanctification; they are closely related, but distinctive.

It is in fact just at this very point that many evangelicals today lamentably fail to preach a full, clear, biblical message. They do this in a variety of ways and often, I like to believe, without realising it. They put forward faith or repentance, or prayer or even 'coming to Christ' as the basis for becoming right with God. Do you do that when you preach? I have to ask myself, do I? In fact, none of these things is the basis on which a sinner can come to God or become right with God. All of these things are only involved in us being made right with God; but it is true that any doctrine that over-stresses the activity of the sinner, or even the work of God within the sinner, as the basis for justification, has failed to grapple with the very nature of the justification it is seeking to proclaim. Justification is no more a work of God than it is the work of us men. They have never understood it as being not a work but an act of God in which He makes a declaration about the sinner's standing before the law.

2. The second thing to note from this definition is this: that the act is one of God's free grace. It couldn't be anything else. This

is what marks the gospel method of justification as being absolutely unique. Justification has to deal with a sinner under condemnation. That is the only sentence which can really belong to him before justice and law; and condemnation is, of course, the exact opposite of justification. The nub of the matter is that because He is dealing with sinners God is required, as the apostle says, "to justify the ungodly." The amazing thing about the gospel is that God can remain God and do that. He can be just and the justifier of the ungodly. This is precisely the truth which the gospel method of justification is concerned to proclaim. God's declaration proceeds upon His legal regard to what His free grace has already done, and what it has already achieved for the sinner in the finished work of Christ. God acts upon the basis of a provision which He has himself provided, and which adequately meets all the exigencies of the matter in hand; a provision which is there because of His gracious love, and for no other reason at all. It is there because, in the words of the apostle, "God spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all." It is there because "God so loved the world ..." What a gospel! It's rooted in the free grace of God. It's an act of God's free grace.

3. And the third point is this: "In that act," the Catechism says, "He pardons all our sins." This is a vital and important but not the only, part of justification. The pardon of sin consists in the removal of sin's guilt; and that involves the absolving of the sinner from the obligation to punishment which was his just due because of his breach of God's holy law. He is absolved from it. This element of justification regards particularly, though not exclusively, the passive obedience of Christ, i.e., His suffering and death on the cross in the place of His people. The pardon granted here applies to sin because of the cross. Now listen: it applies to all sins: "Wherein he pardons all our sins." Sins in our ignorance, sins in our enlightenment, sins past and sins present, and sins future; "wherein he pardons all our sins." It involves the removal of all the guilt of God's people, and it brings them out from under every penalty. Any chastisement that the believer knows in relation to his sin is not, and never is, the chastisement of a judge. It is the chastisement of his Father God upon the child whom He has adopted into His family. Note in passing that Scripture always brings the pardon of sin into the most intimate relation to its punishment in the person of Christ. In the gospel the death of the cross brought about the situation where mercy and justice rejoiced together; where both were conspicuously displayed - "When we were enemies," says the apostle Paul (not, "When

we were friends"), "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. And he goes on to say, "If we were enemies when we were reconciled by his death, much more we shall be saved by his life." In other words, if God grounds our justification as enemies and sinners in His death, He'll carry our sanctification on upon the basis of His life.

Now, although pardon is an important element in justification, it's not the only element. "It is a mistake," writes Dabney, "not only of Romanists but of nearly every school of Arminian thought to teach varying shades of the idea that justification is merely exemption from penalty."

4. There is something even more wonderful than pardon, for He also accepts us as righteous in His sight. It is positive as well as negative. Now this is a vital element in justification: acceptance with God in Christ. We are accepted "in the Beloved". Justification must not only deliver from the penalty incurred by guilt and disobedience, it must also provide a sinner with an equivalent of personal obedience. Whereas a holy being owes only obedience to God's perfect law, a sinful creature owes both penalty and obedience. When the sinner is justified, his justification must provide not merely for his deliverance from hell, but for his entry into heaven and justification comprises not only pardon but entitlement to heaven. Heaven is only for the righteous, and it is ours because God pardons our sin and also accepts us as righteous in His sight. Because of His divine substitute who suffered "unto death" for the sinner, the believer obtains not only release from punishment that his sin entails but he also obtains a reward which he does not merit because his substitute obeyed for him. It is not only the passive obedience of Christ in His death which is important but also the active obedience of Christ in His whole life, where He wrought out a righteousness for His people. He obeyed God not only for himself but also for us. I'm not happy with the division between the active and passive obedience of Christ for it has its weaknesses, yet it helps, too, in clarifying the true aspects of Christ's work for us.

#### C. THE GROUND OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

On what basis does God do all this in His act of justification? Well, the Catechism goes on to say: "Only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us." Why does God accept? How can He do it? Because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Now, we shouldn't be afraid

to use the word 'imputation'. Listening to preachers when I'm on holiday from the North of Scotland to the South of England, I seldom hear this word used in a pulpit, nor do I even hear the truth of it being preached. When did you last preach on imputation and counter-imputation to your people? Would they know what you were talking about? If not, they're not well taught.

To impute sin, or indeed to impute righteousness, in its scriptural usage is a perfectly straightforward, unambiguous concept. Charles Hodge writes, "There is no necessity to go into a prolonged study of the Hebrew or Greek original to understand what imputation means. It means simply," he says, "to set to one's account, to lay to one's charge or to one's credit; to credit as the ground of judicial process." In many scriptures like Isaiah 53, Galatians 3, Hebrews 9, 1 Peter 2, our sins are said to have been "laid on" Christ because the guilt was so charged to His account that they became His, and could be justly punished in Him. "He bore our sins," says Peter, "in his own body on the tree." Now in a similar way Paul teaches us that Christ's perfect righteousness is laid to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21): "God has made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." There is imputation, and there is counter-imputation. Let me put it like this: imputation and counter-imputation, when they are clearly understood, just mean this, that as Christ stood over into the shoes of the believer in relation to sin, so the believer stands over in the very place of Christ in relation to righteousness. Let's remember, too, as Dabney points out, that "imputation is not a transfer of moral character but of legal relation." The imputation of our sin to Christ never made Him a sinner. Not at all. Do you see any theological distinction in my saying that Christ was made sin, and Christ became a sinner? I wouldn't let you into a pulpit to preach if you could not see this distinction! Imputation is no transference of moral character. Christ was still the eternal God when your sins and mine were imputed to Him, and He was still the holy, sinless and perfect God. But it was a transference of legal relationship; as the sinless and obedient one, He was standing in the room of sinners. It is because of His sinlessness that He can be made sin in the sense that He was regarded as the sinner in the eyes of God imposing penalty and punishment.

It is important to realise that this means that Christ, in His person and work, is the real basis and ground of our justification. We tend to think, perhaps, that something we ourselves can do will really help

to make God much more considerate of us, it will help Him to pardon and forgive us, or help us to become Christians. That is to go away from free grace to man's work and endeavour. God cannot justify on the sinful endeavour of a sinful creature. God can justify only on the basis of the ground which He himself, in His mighty grace, has laid: the finished work of Christ.

There is the other danger that we look to faith as the ground of justification. Now, faith is not the ground upon which God justifies. It is true that He will not justify until faith is there; it is the sinner who believes that God justifies. God is just and He justifies the ungodly, but only the ungodly who believe in Jesus; yet it is not because of, or on the ground of, his believing that God justifies. Professor John Murray declares: "While no one is justified apart from faith, faith is not the ground upon which God justifies ... He justifies by, through, or in, faith. But He never uses the expression that God justifies on account of faith." That is worth noting. Sometimes I think that what became the war-cry of the Reformation has led to a misapprehension and a misunderstanding about the ground on which God justifies. "Justified by faith alone," is true yet it carries an inherent danger in it, because it makes people think of the faith of the believer as the ground of justification rather than the finished work of Christ. That shows how theological slogans or popular slogans can often, although correct in themselves, be theologically misleading; and it's one which we should be careful of. We are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Now, on the other hand, we must not minimize the role of faith in justification and salvation. Justification does not occur irrespective of any activity on our part. The Bible makes it clear that while God justifies the ungodly, it is always the ungodly who believe that He justifies. John Murray writes: "Justification is on the event of faith, and not faith on the event of justification."

Finally, remember that justification is not an end in itself. Men are justified in order that they may be sanctified. That's the biblical order: they are not sanctified in order that they may be justified. Remember this when you feel plagued with your inward corruption and sin. But remember, too, that redemption is not fully achieved with justification. In justification, however, the foundation has been laid upon which the whole edifice of redemption will yet stand complete. "For," says the apostle, "whom he justified, them he also glorified."

That's how closely justification and heaven are linked together. While, therefore, we are justified by faith, that faith includes all that will carry us home to the place which Christ is preparing for us.

Once we understand the fulness, freeness and utter graciousness of God's act in justifying sinners on the ground of Christ's perfect, finished work, and have ourselves been touched by the amazing love that's couched at the very heart of this doctrine, then I believe the foundation has been laid for the powerful, passionate, preaching of a doctrine that nestles at the very heart of the gospel of God's saving grace. This is not cold doctrine but something that should set our hearts afire and make us persuade men by all means to rest on no other foundation.

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## THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGES:

### THEIR USE AND ABUSE IN THE MINISTRY: Part Two

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In the previous issue we sought to break through some of the barriers erected in the minds of students and pastors against the acquisition and use of the biblical languages. At the same time, it was emphasised that

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the prime need in the understanding and ministry of God's Word was for the Holy Spirit's illumination and power. Languages do not make a preacher but they are very useful aids in the minister's own personal study and preparation for preaching.

We now put forward the following arguments from the Bible, Church history, the lives of preachers of the past, as well as practical considerations to stimulate and motivate preachers to take up and use the Greek and/or Hebrew Bible.

## THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments we believe to be

the infallible, inerrant and authoritative Word of God. It is God's revealed Word written for our eternal salvation and profit (2 Tim.3: 15-17). This is where we must begin in our thinking. The very nature and content of the Book should impress upon us the need to give careful attention to every word that is written. We live not by bread alone "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut.8:3). Of all people the evangelical, protestant pastor, who holds such a high view of Scripture and seeks to expound it faithfully should see the need and advantage of acquiring some ability, however small, in the handling of the sacred text in the original tongues.

Paul tells us to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess.5:21). It is inevitable that traditions will arise in the life of the church. But no tradition, however good, must be accepted merely because we revere it as a tradition of the fathers. The church was brought into bondage through such thinking. It was the concentrated, earnest study of God's Word, taking nothing for granted, not even a translation, which liberated the Church from the shackles of unbiblical traditions. God's Word is truth and leads us to Him who is the Truth and to real freedom. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to see whether the apostle's words were true. The pastor likewise has a duty to prove all things and to search the Scriptures, and some knowledge of the original languages can be of immense value in this direction.

Pastors are ministers of God's Word. If every believer is to delight in this Word and to treasure it above the riches of this world how much more those set apart to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They should spare no effort in becoming conversant with the whole Bible and this will inevitably draw them into portions of God's Word where some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew would be very helpful.

The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy and every godly minister, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim.2:15). Slovenly, slipshod handling of the text of Scripture is a disgrace to the ministry and a dishonour to God. God demands that every Christian give of his best, whatever he puts his hand to do. The nature of the pastor's calling and the character of the Book he is handling should be added incentive to persevere in giving of his very best. As part of that concern to be an able minister of the Gospel he will seek to

gain at least a knowledge of the rudiments of the biblical languages. I repeat, such learning is not essential or even of first importance to a godly ministry, but a godly minister will do all in his powers, God helping him, to be a faithful servant of the Word, and use such means as are available to clearly and accurately expound the text of Scripture.

## HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

The importance of studying the original texts of Scripture is nowhere more clearly in evidence than at the time of the Reformation. Here are some of the lessons we can learn from the period in connection with our subject:

1. When the use of the Greek and Hebrew texts are set aside pastors and people are at the mercy of any and every commentator or translator. This was the position in the Church during the Middle Ages. In the Eastern Church the Old Testament as well as the New was read in the Greek, while in the West the only acceptable version was the Latin Bible read for the most part in very inferior and corrupt editions. Gospel Light was dim and ignorance bred superstition and idolatry. Evangelical words took on completely different meanings. For instance, the Greek word for 'repentance' was read as 'penance', 'righteousness' as 'conversion' and 'faith' was considered to be a work. There was little or no means of checking the theology of the medieval schoolmen. Let us be on our guard. It is not impossible for such a thing to happen again. Dabney reminds us, "The ingenuity of error is abounding".<sup>1</sup>

2. The Roman Church at the time of the Reformation is a warning against taking an obscurantist position. Only sin and error want to shy away from an enquiring mind. "Back to the sources" became the slogan of the Renaissance scholars and it was the study of the Early Church Fathers and the examination of MSS of the Bible in the original languages which had such a devastating effect on the late medieval church. This, coupled with the invention of the printing press and the establishing of new universities and colleges all over Europe majoring in the study of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, provided the way for the evangelical revival of the 16th century. No wonder the Roman establishment generally disliked the men of the new learning!

Hebrew studies were frowned on by the ecclesiastical authorities and



Jews caught teaching Hebrew to Christians were dealt with accordingly. Nevertheless, interest in Hebrew grew and Reuchlin the first Christian Hebrew scholar of the period published his rudiments of the Hebrew language in 1506. Other Hebrew aids increased including in 1527 the first Aramaic grammar by a Christian. From the end of the 15th century onward Greek grammars were being published in great numbers. In the preface to one published in 1495 we read, "There is a multitude of those who yearn to be well-instructed in Greek". Erasmus used such knowledge to publish his Greek New Testament in 1516. Speaking of Zwingli, Potter writes, "What was wonderful to him and his generation was that they had before their eyes the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The very words directly inspired by the Holy Spirit were there for them to read and the printing-press made possible an exactness unknown previously".<sup>2</sup> We should not despise or ignore such learning but count it a privilege that we have the original texts so freely available, and grammars and lexicons that are much more accurate and detailed. "For unto whosoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).

3. It was through their study of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible that the Reformers were helped in their understanding of the truth. Zwingli mastered Greek and Hebrew in order to study the Bible in the original and from that Bible he began preaching Sunday by Sunday. The Zurich congregation heard not the legends of the saints, or anecdotal sermons but the plain text of Scripture expounded and applied, and with no appeal to pope or tradition. In this way, he and many of his parishioners were led to embrace the Christ of the Scriptures.

Luther poured over his Hebrew and Greek Bible and discovered anew the doctrine of justification by faith alone and gave to the German people a Bible in their own language based on the original texts. Tyndale and others did the same in England. Both Luther and Calvin broke away from the medieval methods of interpreting Scripture and concentrated on weighing every word in its context to bring out the plain meaning of the text. In their pulpits, their faithful hard labour in the study was put to good use as they instructed and exhorted the people.

4. As a necessary corrective we should also point out that the study of the languages and text of the Bible does not in itself guarantee that a person will come to Gospel light. Reuchlin, the Hebrew scholar,

remained faithful to Rome although disliked by the authorities. He tried unsuccessfully to dissuade his grandnephew Philip Melanchthon, professor of Greek at Wittenburg, from joining Luther and the Protestants. Erasmus, the most celebrated Greek scholar of his lifetime did not come to a clear understanding of the Gospel even though he wrote satirically against many of the doctrines and institutions of the Roman Church, and popes even prohibited the reading of his works. It is the Spirit of God who alone can illumine the mind and give that spiritual understanding (1 Cor.2:9-14). What the Reformation period shows is the importance of the Spirit and the Word acting together.

### BIOGRAPHICAL ARGUMENT

It is always inspiring to turn to some of the great preachers and missionaries of the past and learn from their full and disciplined lives. Those who have no intention of acquiring and using the biblical languages sometimes try hiding behind such an impressive figure as Augustine (354-430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, who was ignorant of Hebrew and hated Greek at school. He also emphasised during his ministry the supreme importance of using Scripture to bring us to God and to enjoy God rather than to acquire knowledge merely for its own sake. The other side of the story is this, that he tried to make up for his mispent youth. When he became a bishop, with great demands made upon his time, he studied hard at his Greek, consulted authorities over Old Testament problems and encouraged those training to expound the Scriptures to gain a knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek.

We have all been amazed at the determination of John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787) who became a great preacher and biblical scholar. As a poor orphan boy, minding sheep on the Scottish hills, he mastered Latin, went on to learn Greek the hard way without a grammar and later, in College, studied Hebrew in preparation for the ministry. His story ought to make us blush at our own slackness and mismanagement of time.

The godly Murray M'Cheyne accomplished more in the twenty-nine years of his life than many find time for, given their three score years and ten. Andrew Bonar his biographer writes, "He could consult the Hebrew original of the Old Testament with as much ease as most of our ministers are able to consult the Greek of the New Testament".<sup>3</sup> When they were students training for the ministry, M'Cheyne, Bonar and

others used to meet once a week during the Summer vacation to encourage and test one another in their reading, and in their knowledge of the biblical languages.

John Elias (1774-1841) one of the most powerful preachers of his generation had no College training. He was a born preacher and exercised a mighty ministry in North Wales even before he had any schooling whatsoever. It would have been easy for him to have rested in his remarkable preaching gifts and not to have bothered with any formal education. Indeed, there were those who suggested that to have any schooling would make him puffed up and useless. But it weighed heavily on Elias that the churches should be the losers on account of his disadvantages as a boy. So it was when he was about twenty-one years old he was granted permission to learn English! From such beginnings he went on to grapple with the biblical languages so that with the help of lexicons he was able to read the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture. Towards the end of his life he wrote concerning his time at school "I was given help to work diligently day and night until I acquired in some degree a general knowledge of the things that were most necessary for me. But I am still learning, even in my sixty-seventh year and see a greater need of knowledge." <sup>4</sup> His biographer adds, "He was blessed above all with that knowledge which flesh and blood cannot attain to, spiritual knowledge ... it kept him humble and prevented him from being puffed up." <sup>5</sup>

The Puritans were well versed in the original Scriptures. One of them, Philip Henry, was very keen to impress on ministerial students the importance of studying the Scriptures in the Bible languages. He even taught his eldest daughter Hebrew when she was only about seven years old! His famous son, Matthew, put to good use such early and deep training in the Scriptures with a commentary which has been a source of great blessing to ministers ever since, including Whitefield and Spurgeon.

The members of the Holy Club at Oxford studied the Scriptures in the original tongues. John Wesley was, in fact, a lecturer in Greek. We are told that George Whitefield was reading his Greek New Testament at sixteen. The notes he made in his Greek Testament show his deep knowledge of the language and provided much help in his sermon preparation. He also turned his reading of the Greek text into prayer.

Spurgeon did not have any university or College training but unlike

Elias he did have good schooling as a boy, learning among other things a little Greek. Because he had a thirst for knowledge and as an aid to the work of the ministry he taught himself many things. From his sermons and commentaries it is clear that he had some ability in Hebrew as well as Greek.

We could spend time reviewing the lives of many who left these shores to preach the Gospel overseas in pioneering situations and who laboured much in the biblical languages. Space will only allow us to mention William Carey the founder of the modern missionary movement. As a young preacher and cobbler in Northamptonshire he taught himself Greek and Hebrew with the help of neighbouring ministers and made it his regular practice to read his daily portion of Scripture in the original tongues. This helped him greatly in his preaching and later in his missionary endeavours in India. He corresponded regularly with Dr Ryland of Bristol concerning Hebrew and Greek words as he sought to convey divine truth accurately in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit.

#### PRACTICAL ARGUMENT

Here we mention just a few examples of the practical benefits of gaining a knowledge of the biblical languages.

1. A little knowledge goes a long way. Broadus used to say that a little is a big per cent on nothing.<sup>6</sup> With the many good aids that there are available these days there is every encouragement to persevere.

2. Study becomes much more rewarding. When Greek and Hebrew words are discussed in the commentaries we have a far better idea what the problems are. We can look into the matter ourselves with far more understanding.

3. It helps prevent staleness and becoming a slave to the comments of others. While we shall never be better in our grasp of languages than the experts yet the reading of the text in the original can stimulate the mind and bring us to see God's Word in a new light. A.T. Robertson remarks that we need to know much of the English Bible by heart "so that it will come readily to hand for comfort and for service. But the minute study called for by the Greek opens up unexpected treasures that surprise and delight the soul".<sup>7</sup>

4. It is helpful in evaluating Bible translations and textual criticism problems. Without some understanding of the issues involved, which necessarily includes some knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, the faithful pastor is at a great disadvantage in helping his bewildered flock. Escape into obscurantism is a poor way out as we have seen.

5. It saves money. Instead of obtaining a plethora of word books, all you need is a good concordance, lexicon and grammar alongside the many helpful commentaries that you can either borrow or purchase.

6. A by-product of learning the biblical languages will be a better grasp of your own language. It will improve your vocabulary, grammar and style.

### The Tools to help us

Texts: An interlinear Bible is helpful because at a glance you can see how the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic text is translated into English. There is an O.T. interlinear in three volumes published by Baker which may prove too expensive, but there are various Greek interlinears moderately priced.

If you are looking for a Hebrew Bible then there is (a) N.Snaith's Bible Society edition which contains no notes, or (b) 'Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia' - this is dearer but has marginal notes on variant readings.

As for the Greek New Testament again there is (a) Trinitarian Bible Society 'Received Text' edition without notes, or (b) B.Metzger's British & Foreign Bible Society edition, which is an eclectic text with marginal notes on variant readings.

Grammars: J.W.Wenham's 'Elements of NT Greek' is still the best student introduction. Other useful reference works are: C.F.D.Moule's 'An Idiom Book of NT Greek'; Moulton-Howard-Turner 'A Grammar of NT Greek' in 3 vols or Blass-Debrunner-Funk 'A Greek Grammar of the NT'. J.Sawyer's 'A Modern Introduction to Biblical Hebrew' is an excellent way to begin. For those who wish to brush up their Hebrew the 'Journal of Pastoral Practice' edited by J.Adams started an introduction to 'Hebrew Helps for Busy Pastors' in Vol.3 No.1, 1979. For reference purposes the standard work on Hebrew grammar is Gesenius' 'Hebrew Grammar' 2nd English Ed. by A.E.Cowley.

Lexicons: Baxter's Analytical Lexicons have been of inestimable value to generations of students. The best Greek Lexicon is 'A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament' by Bauer, translated by Arndt and Gingrich. As for Hebrew and Aramaic, a new standard Lexicon is still awaited but 'Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament' by Brown, Driver and Briggs is fairly acceptable.

Concordances: All that you will need is found in 'Young's Analytical Concordance' which is based, of course, on the AV text. If you have Strong's concordance then you do not need Young.

Concerning these tools R.C.Sproul remarks, "Scholars may be able to make more sophisticated use of them but they are also beneficial for the layman. One need not be a professional carpenter to learn how to make good use of a hammer."<sup>8</sup>

### Abuses

Before we go speeding merrily along language lane a touch on the brakes is needed at this point. The following items we do well to remember:

1. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. In the wrong hands it can lead astray with most painful consequences. Dr Lloyd-Jones draws our attention to this matter when discussing the word 'led' in Rom.8:14. "there is the kind of man who is always ready to say dogmatically that any particular problem can be solved with ease by a knowledge of the Greek original. Nowhere is the adage about a little learning being dangerous more important than at this point ... Let us be sure, if we are looking at this word in the original, that we use an authoritative lexicon, and that we consider all the possible meanings."<sup>9</sup>

2. Do not display your learning in the pulpit. To bog down a sermon with Hebrew and Greek words is not helpful. It may impress some, it will confuse many more. Some of the best preachers and teachers have laboured long and hard in the study and have refused to allow their sermons to draw attention to their scholarship. Just as scaffolding is to a building so are the biblical languages to a sermon, very helpful in the building process but obtrusive and unsightly in the finished work.

3. Do not think that a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew will settle every

theological and hermeneutical problem. No doctrine of the Faith is based exclusively on the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words. If we are trying to argue in favour of some subtle point simply on the basis of linguistics then it may be proper to think again and perhaps abandon the idea.

4. A lot of needless argument results from an over emphasis on the etymology of words. You often hear the phrases 'the root meaning' or 'originally the word meant' and sermons and arguments are built up very successfully on this very unsound foundation. The usage of a word by the author is far more important than its origin. Words change their meaning over the years or take on a new significance by a particular writer. On this subject James Barr's book 'The Semantics of Biblical Language' is an important work.

5. I may be biased in my thinking, reading into a text what is not there and using the Greek or Hebrew to prove my point. As a necessary corrective always refer to a good exegetical commentary which will provide a check on personal judgments that may be quite wrong.

In conclusion, we return to the words of John Newton, this time writing to Thomas Charles (Bala) and his friend during their student days at Oxford: "Time was when I thought a minister a sort of superior being, and hardly could be persuaded they had the infirmities with other men. Perhaps you may have thought so likewise. But by and by when you shall be admitted behind the scenes, you will find that the office, though it calls us to difficult services, and exposes us to dangerous snares, yet will not of itself afford us one additional grain of grace or strength. If when we commence teachers, we do not continue learners, if we do not watch unto prayer, if we think because we have been ordained, and can read Latin and Greek, we have a right to go forth as if we were wise or good, experience will soon teach us, or observation will soon convince others, that we are but empty and broken cisterns - and can do nothing right".<sup>10</sup>

#### References

1. R.L.Dabney, Discussions: Evangelical and Theological, Vol.2, p666
2. G.R.Potter, Zwingli, p64
3. A.A.Bonar, Memoir and Remains of the Rev Robert Murray M'Cheyne, p28
4. John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays by Edward Morgan, revised 1973 p.37
5. op. cit. p21

6. Quoted in 'The Minister and his Greek New Testament' by A.T. Robertson, p15.
7. op.cit. p21.
8. R.C.Sproul 'Knowing God's Word'.
9. D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Romans 8:5-17 'The Sons of God' p172f.
10. Quoted in 'The Rev Thomas Charles of Bala' Vol.I by D.E.Jenkins, p55f.

## REVIEWS IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

The Editor

"Here is John Robinson at his brilliant and provocative best, as he looks back, primarily over the 1970s, but at the same time over the wider formative influences which have led to his own distinctive approach to theology and to wider social issues", so reads the publisher's blurb to the book, *THE ROOTS OF A RADICAL* (SCM Press, 1980, pp168, £3.50). Despite the author's unorthodox theology, this is a most readable and informative book.

Robinson's first firing shot needs to be heeded by all ministers! While working hard as a bishop in the seventies, he claims to have read and written more during those ten years than at any other stage of his career, "which to me is some answer to the excuse that busy bishops or ministers are far too preoccupied to read, let alone to write" (p.vii)!

His opening chapter is entitled, 'A tale of two decades' and in a lively and, at times, an amusing manner, he surveys the sixties and seventies. He describes the sixties as "a time for being out on the edges" (p2) beginning with President Kennedy, race marches, student demonstrations, the curtailing of the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship and the development of the 'permissive society'. It was also the period of radical Christianity expressed in phrases such as 'Religionless Christianity', 'Honest to God', 'Death of God', the 'New Morality', 'Situation Ethics' and the 'New Reformation', etc. By contrast, Robinson describes the seventies as a 'Return to the Centre', epitomised "by the withdrawal from Vietnam, the energy crisis and conservation ... a time for turning east and turning in, for the search of self and the exploration of inner space, for the recovery of mysticism and meditation, integration and wholeness" (p3) as well as a



retreat to a new conservatism and quest for security. "The student world", he says, "is a much quieter and duller place" and the religious world was made more aware of "the new fundamentalisms, the strength of the conservative churches, the charismatic revival, the fascination with exorcism and the occult and the widely publicised attacks on the politicization of the World Council of Churches. Ecumenically we appear to have become more rather than less turned in upon ourselves ... Divisions too seem to be hardening between parties in the church. The going (or at any rate the shouting) is at the moment being made by those who would resist further erosion to faith or order, liturgy or morals, and in the Roman Catholic Church theologians are again having their wings clipped" (p4).

What about Robinson himself? He thinks of himself as a radical, that is, someone with "deep roots, with the freedom and courage ... to go to source and speak from the centre ... Over the years I find I have been driven back more and more upon the strength of the Christian centre. In fact some people think that I have become distressingly conservative in my old age! It may look like it with books like REDATING THE NEW TESTAMENT, in which I want to push back all the New Testament documents before AD70 and CAN WE TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT? to which the answer is, if we know what we are trusting it for ... Yes indeed. On the Fourth Gospel I am so square as to be almost indecent among my fellow academics. I actually do think that it may be ... A first Gospel, and written by John son of Zebedee ... I remember being sent an off-print, at the height of the HONEST TO GOD furor, by a Southern Baptist from the United States who was using me and my writings on the Fourth Gospel as a stick with which to beat the liberals!" (p5). Unlike that Southern Baptist, we should not be misled for while Robinson claims to "believe in the centre, both biblically and doctrinally", he does so "on CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDS" and has not recanted of anything he wrote in 'Honest to God' nor of his stands in the sixties on Lady Chatterley or capital punishment, homosexuality or abortion, etc. "We have got to strengthen the centre, to be grounded in the Incarnation, which for me is the heart of anything distinctively Christian we have to say to the world" (p6) yet, he warns, "we must remain totally uncommitted, not constantly trembling for the superstructure of doctrine or morals or organisation, or worrying about the dotted or dotty lines which divide us from other Christians and those of other religions ... As I urged in my TRUTH IS TWO-EYED ... I want to see strong centres and soft edges, not soft centres and hard edges" (p6). You have been warned!

Against the background of a Christian family (his grandfather was involved in the 1859 revival in Belfast) he describes the Anglican ethos as essentially catholic rather than sectarian (p13), a flock rather than a fold (p14), and a communion in which the rule of prayer has shaped the rule of faith (p21) thus creating a distinctive and broad view of authority with "its supple combination of scripture, tradition and reason. We have declined to isolate the infallible man or the infallible book or the eponymous founder. The 'Complete Church of England man' has always been a composite and a rounded character ... a both-and man rather than either-or, Catholic and Reformed, priestly and prophetic, profound and simple, inclusive by temperament rather than exclusive" (idem). Incidentally, Robinson's comprehensivist doctrine of the church - supported by the majority now in the Church of England - makes separatists wonder with amazement how so many evangelicals today can remain within the Anglican communion.

Referring to some of the 'heresy trials' in recent years, the author argues for a theological freedom in which people are free to believe what they wish about the creeds ("no signature is required" p34) and the Bible. In an astonishing statement, he claims that "theological freedom lies at the very heart of the gospel and is an unexpendable part of the birthright I cherish" (p43). This diffused and pluriform model of truth is summarised by Robinson in ten propositions (pp53-58): (1) Integrity is more fundamental than orthodoxy. (2) Love has priority over law, (3) persons over principles, (4) relationships ... existential realities over any abstractions from them. (5) The priority of stands over standards, (6) justice over order, (7) ethos over ethics, (8) function over form, (9) organism over organisation and (10) existence over essence.

'Honest to Christ Today' is the title of the third chapter in which the author discusses the continuing Christological debate. His approach is again disturbing and unbiblical as Robinson underlies four points he regards as relevant to this debate.

His first point is, "Honesty to the irreducibility of incarnation" (p59). He is not sure "which was the worse book, 'THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE' or the evangelical reply, 'THE TRUTH OF GOD INCARNATE'! The latter, Robinson argues, "failed to listen seriously to the important questions being raised" (p60) and for this reason was virtually ignored in the third round when Michael Goulder edited 'INCARNATION AND MYTH: THE DEBATE CONTINUED'. I think it is nearer the mark to

reply that it was not our refusal to listen to questions which disturbed these theologians but our insistence on a thoroughly biblical approach; it is this which isolates us from their assumptions, methods and conclusions.

To establish his first point, Robinson - as he so frequently does - misuses statements of Scripture, particularly 2 Corinthians 5:19 ("God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"). "It is notable", he adds, "for what it does not say. It does not say that God was Christ nor in any simplistic sense that Christ was God, but that he represents the definitive act of God, that he is God about his decisive work. What he does God does, so that Christ is not just a man doing human things divinely, like any saint or seer, but a man doing divine things humanly" (p60). The implications of this are frighteningly clear as Robinson himself recognises, for Jesus is not "God dressed up and walking this earth but the Word, God's creative, self-expressive activity from the beginning, fully and finally embodied in THIS MAN, who is COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY A MAN LIKE THE REST OF US, IN ORIGIN, NATURE AND DESTINY" (p61: capitals mine). This doctrine of the Incarnation for Robinson is not then tied to the orthodox doctrine of the two 'natures', divine and human nor to the notion of ANHYPOSTASIA or ENHYPOSTASIA, i.e. that our Lord's divine and human natures are united in his divine person.

Robinson's second point is to stress honesty to the Jesus of history as part of the Christ of faith (p68). Here he rightly stresses the historical nature of many of the New Testament 'events' and questions "the tyranny of unexamined presuppositions in much of the current post-Bultmannian critical orthodoxy ..." (p70).

Thirdly he wants "honesty to the fact that the Christ is bigger than Jesus and God is bigger than Christ. To believe that God is best defined in Christ is not to believe that God is confined to Christ" (p71) and this subtle distinction allows the author to tone down the distinctiveness and uniqueness of Christ in order to accommodate to other religions.

Finally, Robinson demands honesty to the story-line wherever it may lead. His heretical position is illustrated with reference to the ascension story which he views as "essentially the divine, symbolic, mythological story - what Jesus is "according to the Spirit". Similarly he sees the virgin birth as saying of Jesus "exactly what

John is saying of Christians, that as sons of God, as children of a 'heavenly' birth, they are not to be accounted for in terms of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but only of God (John 1:13) - though of course as human beings they are born like everyone else" (p75).

The following chapter entitled, 'What is the Gospel?' is equally disappointing and unbiblical. Criticising evangelicals (mainly because of a negative attitude towards politics with David Sheppard of Liverpool "a notable exception!!), Catholics ("the church is no longer judged by the kingdom, and ecclesiastical absolutism becomes the shadow-image of biblical fundamentalism" p82) and liberals ("at the heart of much they say there is for me not much gospel either", p83), he views the gospel in terms of the kingdom of God which lets "loose God's sovereign righteousness and love into the affairs of men" (p84). Despite the ambiguity of much of what Robinson writes here it is clear that he has his own gospel which is radically different from that of the New Testament. He emphasises its social character and believes it is summed up in the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 yet sees little point in asking the question, 'What is the gospel?' for it is, in his view, "impossible to answer in the abstract" (p88). He wants to reword the question in personal, existential terms, "what is the gospel - for you? ... What really makes you tick, both in the flesh and in the Lord?"

The remaining chapters deal with Social Ethics and the Witness of the Church, the Place of Criminal Law in the Field of Sex, Christians and Violence, Nuclear Power Options and brief studies of people like Zacchaeus, the unjust steward, Judas, Julian of Norwich, Richard Jefferies and J.B.Lightfoot.

This is an important book even though its content is disturbingly unorthodox; it is of value to us in the lively way in which it comments upon and illustrates trends in contemporary theology away from a biblical faith. We need to be aware of what other theologians are saying and at the same time contend ourselves for the faith in a more meaningful and responsible manner.

A less readable but equally important book is Donald E. Miller's 'THE CASE FOR LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY (SCM Press, 1981, pp154, £4.50).

Writing as a sociologist and a liberal Christian, Professor Miller

suggests how 'liberals' can think about the 'truth' of their faith and commitment. Having abandoned the basic tenets of the Christian faith, the author nevertheless continued to participate regularly in Communion as an expression of his desire to pursue the journey of faith. "Regular attendance at worship services," he declares, "was a highly tangible way of indicating to myself the seriousness of my own engagement with the questions of ultimate meaning" (p4). He now finds himself committed to the "Christian community, its heritage and the Spirit that energizes it" (p5); although he still remains agnostic on issues of faith, his change of attitude is due to the discovery that meaning can function on more than one level. On this approach the creeds and the Bible are only "landmarks representing how those within the community of faith have reflected on the meaning of Christ FOR THEM and how THEY have struggled through the issues of community in their own time. They are statements of our past, of our forebears, of our roots. To recite the creed is to affirm one's tradition. Regularly reading the Scriptures reminds us whence we have come. These acts serve to keep alive the tradition. Why? Because it is in the tradition that we find the SYMBOLIC forms, the collective sentiments, which bind us together as a distinctive community that offers one a unique identity" (p7: capitals mine). Openness to other religions, an identity with transcendent and metaphysical overtones, a point of stability and permanence, Durkheim's view of the community as well as the emptiness of the alternatives all helped to influence Miller and bring him back into the American, Episcopalian Church as an agnostic but enthusiastic member of its community.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are entitled 'Commitment Beyond Belief', and "articulate the reasonableness of a thoroughly liberal option" (p14). He distinguishes between the form and substance (relegating the Scripture and all doctrinal statements to the level of mere social constructions), fiction and myth arguing that "the liberal or radical Christian may be as devoted to the Church, to Christ, to the importance of worship, as the evangelical who takes a more literal view of the symbols ..." (p21).

Employing the story of the analogy of the cave in Plato's Republic and the parable of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's classic novel, 'The Brothers Karamazov', Miller puts forward the familiar argument in chapter three that reality exceeds human form and conceptualization. Some of the distinctive characteristics of the liberal perspective are outlined briefly in chapter four. These characteristics

include an accommodative attitude towards culture, emphasis upon the moral witness of their faith, the basepoint of reason, a critical and sociological interpretation of the Bible, and symbolic realism (i.e. "meaning is always a product of the interaction between subject and object", p39). Professor Miller believes what is needed in the churches today "is a wide-scale recovery of the liberal spirit ... our social situation is ripe for the rebirth of Christian liberalism. But the ethical perspective of liberalism is only one reason for the return. Even more persuasive ... is the fact that in the last decade Christendom has become polarized" (pp41,42) between evangelicals (including the cults) and radical secularists. The concluding sections are devoted to the construction of a liberal Christian identity both in the church and in society.

This is a remarkably honest book, self-critical and provocative in its approach. Basically its message is an old one but the author's personal experience, professional qualifications and deep concern for the 'liberal' cause in Christendom make it a useful and interesting book. Certainly the failure and emptiness of theological liberalism is all too apparent within its pages.

'LIVING THEOLOGY IN ASIA', edited by John C. England is another absorbing publication by the SCM Press (1981, pp242, £4.95). Contemporary theology is not the exclusive concern of the West, of course, but what do we know as evangelicals of the theological reflections and tensions taking place in Asia? This book is a useful introduction to the subject and will repay careful study.

The necessary research for the material was made possible through a fellowship awarded by the World Council of Churches to the editor in 1975-77. In his introduction, the editor reminds us that these Asian theologians are writing in practical situations in which their main concern is "first of all pastoral and missional, in the sense that the present dilemmas facing prophetic and embattled minorities are what determine their response" (p1). They also have a concern for indigenous culture and religion but are "people-centred and radical in concern" (p7). What of the theological method employed by these theologians? Most frequently they blend inductive and deductive elements, individual and co-operative reflection, writing and living. While various sequences and combinations are discernible in the book, the principle elements are: (1) "An involvement in, and exposure to, actual life-conditions of suffering and of struggle. (2) A

contemplation, and receiving, of this reality, which includes both meditative and analytical processes in the attempt to see the whole picture and the larger human perspectives. (3) Reflection, which relates the life and teaching of Jesus and of the Hebrew prophets, to concrete incident and local community. This interprets and clarifies, interconnects and evaluates the 'stories' being told, and the larger affirmations. (4) Engagement, once more, within the situation; in co-operative planning, working, writing. Motivation and understanding are again tested and refined" (pp7,8).

As one might expect, the selected writings from twenty-four theologians representing eight Asian countries vary in quality, orthodoxy and emphases yet all express a serious attempt to relate and interpret Scripture in the light of considerable suffering and anguish.

It may be profitable for our readers to learn of the way in which liberal theology has developed in Asia. Do we naively assume that all 'Christian' theology in Asia or Africa is sound? Consider, for example, the position in South Korea. While Protestantism was established in the country in 1884, it was not until the second and third decades of this century that evangelical teaching in the churches was seriously challenged and this was due largely to the exposure of some Presbyterian pastors and theological teachers to Japanese theological thinking. Eventually in 1953 the Presbyterian Church, Republic of Korea, was founded on the principles of freedom for theological scholarship and an ecumenical pattern of mission. The most prominent leader in this development was an Old Testament scholar, Kim Jai-Jun, who "vigorously focussed attention upon critical biblical studies, upon explosive social and political issues, and upon the formation of a Korean theology" (p10). More recently he has moved his attention from the person of Christ, "whose deeds the Christian must now do in Korean history, to Christ's suffering servanthood. Suffering is necessary for any real revolution, spiritual or social. Whatever the cost, evil must be declared to be evil and resisted, as part of the original mission of the church" (idem). The 1960s and 1970s have seen a strengthening of the ecumenical and critical/political approach encouraged by the National Christian Council of Korea. May, 1973 saw the issuing of the Theological Declaration of Korean Christians in which members stressed their allegiance to the Lord of History, "the ultimate vindicator of the oppressed, the weak and the poor" and reminiscent of South American liberation theology the signatories declared their determination "by the Spirit to participate in

the transformation" of society, history and people and they then list their government's "diabolical acts against humanity" (p11). Due to increased suffering including arrests, torture and executions in the early seventies the cross of Christ has moved "steadily to the centre of theological concern" although the treatment is existential and political rather than biblical.

It was not until the mid-1920s, again, that some churches in CHINA began to develop a contextual theology in a deep concern for indigenisation and the grappling with urgent social and national issues (p58).

India, by contrast, has had a 'Christian' (Syrian Nestorians in South India) presence since the fourth century. Roman Catholicism and then Protestantism (initially through the work of the East India Company Chaplains) were established in the country in the seventeenth century but theological developments in the earlier parts of this present century were influenced by the struggle for independence, religious pluralism, desperate social needs, universalism and liberal theology. By today the YMCA, SCM, the Christian Ashram Movement, the Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society and some of the Roman Catholic seminaries and institutes in Delhi and Bangalore have all contributed significantly to the shaping of Indian theology.

If you want to read of these developments and influences in Asiatic countries then this book will serve as a useful introduction, and the detailed Notes, the Short Bibliography of national and church histories for each country as well as the Biographical Notes concerning the twenty-four contributors are invaluable. All in all, this is a key book. However, the message to evangelicals here is loud and clear. Christians and Pastors overseas, as here, must be trained to think theologically and biblically. The World Council of Churches and related organisations are giving priority (and considerable sums of money in scholarships) to the development of a very different theology, one which is contextual, political and unorthodox. What are we doing to help our brethren in the Third World to "contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)?

Another important book is **CHRIST'S LORDSHIP AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**, edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (published by ORBIS and distributed in Britain by SPCK, 1983, pp209, £5.50).

A Consultation on Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism was held



at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia from 24-27 October 1979 with theologians and Church leaders, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, conservative evangelical and ecumenical Protestant, men and women including Third World representatives all engaging in frank discussions on the relationship of Christianity to other religions. For this reason it is claimed that the conference that this book represents "marks ... a milestone in historical development ... Not long ago THIS sort of conference just would not have happened" (p.vii).

"In this latter part of the twentieth century," declares Donald G.Dawe in his introduction, "Christians are facing in a new way the continuing and seemingly incurable religious pluralism of the world ... other religions have not disappeared but have taken on new vitality and in some areas have expanded their influence. Ancient religions faced the challenge of Western Christianity and culture and have renewed themselves, not by rejecting but by reappropriating their own traditions. And in other places, secular ideologies and Marxism have reshaped whole nations. A renewed Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam have started small but highly visible countermissionary movements. How are we to understand these facts in the light of the Lordship of Christ?" (p3). Expressing the question biblically, the challenge is to interpret Acts 4:12 in the light of Acts 14:17 - "yet he did not leave himself without witness ..."

The opening chapter is entitled 'Notes for Three Bible Studies' and the contributor, Krister Stendahl, radically removes the distinctive character of the Christian gospel by driving a wedge between Jesus's preaching of the kingdom and the Church's preaching of Jesus ("thus we are faced with a danger: we may so preach Jesus that we lose the vision of the kingdom, the mended creation," (p10) and then by interpreting Acts 4:12 as an inter-Jewish debate between the Establishment and the people containing no "good basis for an absolute claim in an absolute sense" (p15)! In a concluding section of this chapter, Stendahl refers to Romans 10:18-11:36 and observes how "Paul writes this whole section without mentioning the name of Jesus Christ, and his final doxology is not - as is his usual style - in Christ-language but in God-language (11:33-36). It is as if Paul did not want them to have the Christ-flag to wave ... They did not understand their mission as a particular witness of THEIR peculiar community in a WORLD of communities" (p18: capitals mine). This astonishing inference is only one of many examples of atrocious hermeneutics in the book.

The next five chapters each contain a main article followed immediately by two responses from people of differing views and traditions; each chapter then ends with a reply by the author of the main articles to these responses. This kind of approach is particularly helpful for, besides facilitating discussion, it quickly exposes weaknesses and pinpoints areas of disagreement.

What does it mean to affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord? Does mission mean the conquest of other religions or 'lords'? Does universality mean simply the extension of Christian particularity? These are the questions raised by Stanley J. Samartha in the second chapter entitled 'The Lordship of Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism'. The chapter contains a radical re-interpretation of Christianity involving the rejection of some foundational biblical doctrines. Predictably he concludes that "there are different faiths, ... alternative ways of salvation ... different hopes about human destiny ... In the last analysis, religions should be recognised as having responded differently to the mystery of the Ultimate. While recognising the plurality of these answers, Christians believe that in Jesus Christ the Ultimate has become intimate with humanity, that nowhere else is the victory over suffering and death manifested so decisively as in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that they are called upon to share this good news humbly with their neighbours" (p36). By way of response, the evangelical Arthur F. Glasser of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena criticises Samartha's understanding of Christ's lordship arguing that in the gospels "Christ's lordship is inseparably linked with the issue of truth ... Throughout the Gospels he unabashedly and with self-conscious authority claimed to be THE Teacher and THE Lord of all mankind. Hence, the test of one's submission to his Lordship is the acceptance of his teaching" (p41). However, Dr Samartha was still unrepentant in his reply and in disagreement concerning the nature of the Bible's authority. "I find it difficult", he adds, "to accept the view which limits the ground of religious authority to the Bible alone" (p54). He continues, "Is any exegesis by itself sufficient basis to conclude that the entire religious life of Hindus and Buddhists extending to more than three thousand years of spiritual struggle and devotion has no share in the struggle for truth at all or is wrong or quite wrong? The limitation is surely not in the Word of God, but in the historical and cultural circumstances, which inevitably change from time to time ... The question of truth is indeed important, but God's love is even more important" (idem).

Chapter Three is a detailed evangelical statement under the title, 'No Other Name' and written by Waldron Scott the former general secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship. "Evangelicals", he warns, "are a biblically oriented people. Precisely because the theme of Christ's lordship is biblically grounded, it becomes inescapable to evangelicals" (p58). Quoting the Lausanne Covenant he insists that we cannot separate the lordship of Christ from the historical figure of Jesus nor from the historic name of Jesus: "We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the Gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and theologies" (p59). Another aspect of Christ's lordship is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18,19. "The missionary movement - traditionally focused on cross-cultural evangelism, conversion, church-planting, discipling, and service - has been and continues to be for evangelicals an authentic expression of the lordship of Christ in a religiously pluralistic world" (p61) where an estimated 16,750 cultural units are still unreached by any Christian witness.

Jesus is also the lord of justice so that Christians will respond to his lordship by working for justice in the world. In this respect "Christians must be prepared to cooperate with people of other faiths in rectifying situations inimical to human welfare and promoting activities that aim at establishing justice".

Referring to the important distinction between general and special revelation, Scott declares that "evangelicals see in the biblical testimony a low view, not a high view, of people's religions" (p65). Scott then quotes David Hesselgrave's call to evangelicals to "review their attitude of disinterest and non-participation in dialogue" (p67) that is, dialogue on the nature of dialogue, interreligious dialogue to promote freedom of worship and witness, dialogue concerned with meeting human need, dialogue designed to break down barriers of distrust within the religious world, and dialogue that has as its objective mutual comprehension of conflicting truth claims. Some evangelicals are currently engaged in interreligious dialogue. For example, the Overseas Ministries Study Centre at Ventnor, New Jersey arranges regular dialogue between evangelicals, ecumenical Protestants and Roman Catholics. Eight evangelical leaders met in Venice in 1978 with an equal number of Catholic theologians to discuss 'signs of convergence' in their understandings of mission. Waldron Scott himself is in frequent contact with the Catholic charismatic office in Brussels while evangelical and Jewish leaders have also met together to discuss

issues of theology and history. Nearer home, the Evangelical Alliance of Great Britain has authorised a special commission "to clarify the issues of inter-faith dialogue" (p68). Two years ago the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians emphasised the necessity of dialogue between evangelicals and non-Christians, including Marxists. In addition, a call to "faith missions to get better acquainted with the psychological and religious sources of non-Christian religions" was made recently by Ernest Oliver. Since 1963 some evangelicals have been engaged in dialogue with Muslims in India.

Amongst the contributions evangelicals can offer in dialogue, Scott pinpoints a positive biblical witness in relation to dialogue, the possibility of losing sight of the very real phenomenon of conversion and the necessity of keeping alert to the demonic in religion (pp71-73).

Margrethe B.J. Brown in her response is extremely unhappy with the basic evangelical position adopted by Scott. She sees an unhealthy preoccupation on our part with Matthew 28:18,19 as well as an immature approach when we ask whether natural revelation in other religions measures up to Christian standards. That kind of approach, she claims, "misses the contemporary key issue for an understanding of the Lordship of Christ vis-à-vis religious pluralism, which calls us first to re-examine our culturally biased understanding of Lordship ..." (p77). Quite discerningly, Thomas Stransky (Roman Catholic) in his response sees the contemporary cleavage not between Rome and Protestantism but between the mainstream Protestant/RC/Orthodox and the conservative evangelicals (p79).

The Roman Catholic perspective is given by Pietro Rossano in chapter four. Relating his comments to the relevant statements in Vatican Council II and in the subsequent documents of the RC church from Paul VI's 1975 Exhortation on Evangelisation to John Paul II's 1979 Encyclical on the Redemption of Man, Rossano warns that the problem of religious pluralism must not be minimised (p98). Acknowledging that "for the Christian, Christ is the religious truth" (p99), the author proceeds to relate this to the "immense problem of the religious pluralism of humankind" (p101). Denying the fact that religions contain different and genuine revelations from God, he quotes the description of religions given by Pope John Paul II as "the marvellous heritage of the human spirit" and of their values as "the work of the Spirit of God who breathes where he will" (p102). The author accounts

for differing religions by insisting that "illumination given by the Word is the same, the responses are different" (idem). Such religions then "are in a continual process of transformation, of progress and reform, of conservation and development, both under the influence of circumstances and, at best, under the action of the Spirit of Christ active in their adherents." He sums up the church's global approach to world religions as that of proclamation and dialogue.

Combining a special blend of liberation theology with an evangelical flavour, Orlando Costas writes in the fifth chapter from a Latin American Christological perspective. He is concerned with the "world of the oppressed and disfranchised ... the struggle ... against social and cultural oppression, economic exploitation and political domination" (p133). He claims that his understanding of the lordship of Christ is derived "from the witness of the canonical Scriptures, through the hermeneutical mediation of exegesis, historical studies, and the social sciences, motivated by a personal encounter with him and verified in a life of radical discipleship amid the struggles of history" (p134).

In the following twenty pages, Costas roots his radical social involvement in the life and ministry of Jesus (e.g. "we have here words IN the deed and a deed IN the words", p138), and the death of Jesus (e.g. "Isaiah's suffering servant situates the cross on the side of the poor and the afflicted, the sick and the oppressed" (p141). Some of his statements are questionable and pressed too far yet this contributor endeavours to be faithful to the biblical doctrines of sin and the person and work of Christ (cf. p144). In relation to world religions, Costas regards the HISTORICAL "name of Jesus" as a criticism of all religions so "it follows that the religions (including Christianity) can mediate God's presence in history only insofar as they are signs and instruments of God's coming kingdom" (p152). For Costas this can occur only under three conditions. First, when religions can "accept the scandal of the cross of Jesus amid the human crosses of the world" and, secondly, if "they lead their adherents to come outside the enclosed circle of their religious interests to the battlefields of life and join the crucified Lord in the struggle for the liberation of the poor and oppressed of the world" (p153). Thirdly, "religions may be signs and instruments of God's kingdom if they are anticipating it in their inner life. This means that their inner structure must be a paradigm of justice, freedom, and hope."

What then, according to Costas, is the challenge to Christians in a

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religiously plural world? Certainly not one of accommodation but rather "a challenge to commitment and engagement in the liberating mission of the crucified and risen Lord who is to be found among the disfranchised of society. To the extent that they are influential in enabling religions to follow this path, they will help religions to fulfil an 'infrastructural' (praxial) role that will turn them into signs of a new humanity" (p154).

The book ends with a panel discussion re: models for Christian discipleship amid religious pluralism then an attempt at summation by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. The relation of Christianity to other religions is now a subject receiving considerable attention amongst theologians and churches and some disturbing developments are afoot. This publication will helpfully lead the uninitiated into the current ongoing debate and, hopefully, encourage a more biblical and theological response from evangelicals.

On the subject of pluralism, you may like to read C.A.Lamb's brief study in the LATIMER STUDIES series (14) entitled, '**JESUS THROUGH OTHER EYES: CHRISTOLOGY IN MULTI-FAITH CONTEXT**' (Latimer House, Oxford 1982, pp36, £1.25). C.A.Lamb, who is co-ordinator of the BCMS/CMS Other Faiths Theological Project, reminds us of what Islam, Hinduism and Judaism teach concerning the Lord Jesus and after this exercise in comparative theology, he considers - albeit too generally - the significance of other Christologies. He laments the fact, for example, that in Great Britain with at least one million Muslims, theological training for ministers includes little, if any, comparative study of religions. But what of the religious experience of people in other religions? Lamb is hesitant and open-ended in his reply as he quotes the expositions of Jeremiah 20:7-13 by Rabbi Jonathan Magonet. Nevertheless, this is a helpful booklet.

It is a great pleasure for the reviewer to commend unreservedly the '**COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JOHN MURRAY**', volumes 1-4, edited by Ian H. Murray and published by the BANNER OF TRUTH (£9.95 per volume). These theological writings are among the most significant to be published within the evangelical constituency in recent years and merit a wide readership.

Volume I, '**THE CLAIMS OF TRUTH**' (pp374) contains the most important of John Murray's shorter writings and talks between the years 1935 and 1973. Divided into nine sections and forty-nine chapters, the book

touches on important subjects like the Holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ, the Gospel and its Proclamation, the Church, Issues in the Contemporary World as well as some historical addresses. None of this material has been published previously in book form. Avoiding verbosity and unnecessary technical jargon, Professor Murray's style is consistently lucid and direct. Unlike other reviewers, I think it best to start reading Murray at Volume 1 for the chapters are relatively brief yet foundational and preparatory to some of the material in later volumes. All the chapters will repay careful study and I hope preachers will refer to these writings regularly in sermon preparation.

The second volume 'SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY' (pp417) represents John Murray's own selection from his articles and lectures in systematic theology. The subjects are arranged in seven sections and thirty-six chapters under the themes of Man, Common Grace, Christ, Redemption, Sanctification, Church and Sacraments, the Last Things. "His self-judgment on his long teaching ministry", remarks the editor Ian H. Murray, "was that it had been given to him to make some contributions to the understanding of Scripture on relatively few subjects. It was THESE subjects, rather than Systematic Theology as a whole, which received most of his attention in the latter part of his life and happily they figure prominently in the manuscripts which he prepared ..." (p.vii).

Volume 3 (pp389) has been well received by readers for two important reasons. One is the excellent biography of John Murray by the editor (pp3-158) which is absorbing and challenging. After outlining his background and education, the biographer details carefully the steps leading to John Murray's appointment in Princeton as assistant in Systematic Theology to Caspar Wistar Hodge (1929) then as Professor of Systematic Theology in the new Westminster Seminary at Philadelphia. Once in Westminster we see Murray alongside men of the calibre of Gresham Machen, helping Machen on intricate theological questions as well as encouraging and supporting him in the doctrinal cleavage with the Presbyterian Church in America then in the establishing of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. Chapter five provides a good insight into the struggles of the later thirties while the next chapter introduces us to the war years when John Murray continued his seminary teaching. His friendship with, and later marriage to Valerie Knowles and his wider ministry in Britain dominate the final chapters. Retiring from the seminary in 1966, Murray returned home immediately to his native Scotland and married a year later. He eventually died in 1975. Another reason why this third volume has been singled out

for praise is the section of nineteen sermons, sermons which contain rich spiritual understanding and application. This volume ends with a section of reviews written by Professor Murray in the period 1939-1953.

'STUDIES IN THEOLOGY' is the title of the final volume (pp390). Almost a hundred pages are allocated to reviews. The remainder of the book contains six historical studies (four, for example, on Calvin's teaching concerning Scripture, the Sovereignty of God and Predestination) and ten articles on such important subjects as Inspiration and Inerrancy, Jesus the Son of God, Who Raised up Jesus?, the Reconciliation, Paul's use of 'Nomos', the Weak and the Strong. All in all this is another substantial volume although some readers may be unwilling for so many reviews to appear in one volume. Let me assure you, however, that these reviews are far from being irrelevant or unimportant. Murray's reviews of G.C.Berkouwer's books ('Faith and Justification', 'The Work of Christ'), Karl Barth's 'Christ and Adam', Emil Brunner's 'Eternal Hope' or Bernard Ramm's writings on The Witness of the Spirit then Special Revelation and the Word of God are invaluable.

Allow me to conclude this review by referring in more detail to some of the more important features of Professor John Murray's writings in these volumes.

First of all, one is impressed by the Professor's graciousness and humility in contending for, and expounding, the Scriptures. Consider, for example, the way in which he reviews Steven Barabas's book, 'The History and Message of the Keswick Convention' (Vol.4, pp281-6). Although he pulls no punches in his criticism of the Convention yet he graciously acknowledges certain emphases of Keswick which call "for special commendatory mention" (p282). For instance, "Keswick has evinced a renewed appreciation of the implications for SANCTIFICATION of the union of the believer with Christ ... 2. Keswick recognises that sanctification is a process in connection with which the believer's responsibility is to be fully exercised ... 3. There is the recognition of, indeed constant stress upon, the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of the believer; the Spirit-filled life is the central, dominating theme of the Convention ... Furthermore, when we think of the honoured names which have been associated with Keswick ... we have to reckon with a movement which enlisted the support of cultured and devoted servants of Christ and one hesitates to embark upon criticism ..." Earlier he commends certain features of the book before he exposes the Keswick claim that



Christians need not be "CONSCIOUS of the tendency' to sin. "To have sin in us and not to be conscious of it", warns Professor Murray, "is itself grave sin; it is culpable ignorance or culpable ignoring" (p283). He certainly spoke the truth - in love!

Furthermore, he remained humble and self-effacing throughout his Christian life and Seminary teaching. When, for example, he looked back over the first ten years of Westminster Seminary, he wrote we "have to confess that we have come far short of our profession and aim. Indeed, when we think of our own sins and shortcomings, we are amazed that God in his displeasure has not wrenched this banner out of our hands and given it to others more worthy than we ..." (Vol.3, p78). Many other examples of his graciousness and humility appear in these volumes and it behoves us to follow his example.

Secondly, his writings are thoroughly biblical. As a student in Princeton (1924-27), teachers like Geerhardus Vos "instilled in him the conviction that doctrine must be arrived at through a painstaking examination of the Scriptures in their original languages ... Murray's commitment to the Reformed Faith was not changed, but it became in a new way, rooted in the Bible itself" (Vol.3:p29). In his lectures he never started by quoting or reproducing Hodge or Calvin, etc. His starting point was always the text of Scripture. "This careful scrutiny of the text of Scripture was never hurried over, and if, sometimes, the examination of the biblical language seemed as dry as dust, he would tell his hearers 'to remember that we are dealing with gold dust!'" (Vol.3:p93). Such an approach proved beneficial to the church for he gave us a more thorough and biblical understanding of certain doctrines (e.g. 'Adamic Administration' and 'Definitive Sanctification' in volume 2; 'The High-Priestly Ministry of Christ' in volume 1, etc) and, at the same time, he challenged cherished reformed traditions or teachings which he deemed to be insufficiently biblical. "However much assistance we may derive from formulations and expositions of Scripture truth ... yet, after all, the Bible is the only SUFFICIENT rule of faith and life as well as the only infallible rule. We must betake ourselves anew, day by day, with humble and submissive minds to the law and to the testimony so that our minds may be illumined, replenished, refreshed, renewed and reinvigorated by the pure light that shines in the pages of God's inerrant Word ... Our devotion to a tradition is wholesome only when we recognise in that tradition, not the authority of the fathers, but the authority of God's Word. Apart from the recognition of divine authority, all our religious

devotion is abomination in the sight of God" (Vol.1:p7). One example of Professor Murray's commitment to Scripture over and above tradition is his excellent treatment of Common Grace where he rightly credits Calvin for opening up "a new vista" and a "new era in theological formulation of this doctrine" but he criticises the definitions of the subject given by C.Hodge then A.A.Hodge as "rather restricted". Murray then broadens the word 'grace' (p96) and proceeds to give a satisfyingly biblical formulation of common grace. One can safely turn to Murray for a faithful exegesis of Scripture and a competent formulation of biblical doctrine.

Another important feature of Murray's Collected Writings is that they are contemporary. He faced many of our problems and speaks in a relevant way to us in the eighties. For example, "Co-operation in Evangelism" is one of our contemporary problems. "The God of the evangelical", he warns, "is not the God of the modernist. The Christ of the evangelical is not the Christ of the modernist. Revelation, as the source and norm of all faith and worship, is conceived of in radically different ways" (Vol.1:p157). The following sections are sub-titled, 'Did Paul Co-operate?', 'Are John's Injunctions Relevant?', 'Preach to All', 'Co-operate with Believers Only', 'God's Revealed Will Versus the Pragmatic Test'. His addresses on, 'Some Necessary Emphases in Preaching', the 'Power of the Holy Spirit', the 'Church and Mission' or 'The Gospel and its Proclamation' are pertinent to our situation. Dealing with the finality and sufficiency of Scripture, John Murray observes: "As we read a great deal of the theological output of the present day ... one of its most striking features is the well-nigh total absence of any attempt to expound or be regulated in thought by the Scripture itself. This is because the regulative principle of the Reformation, especially of its Reformed exponents, has been abandoned, and with it, by necessity, the finality of Scripture" (Vol.1: p.17). He then rebukes evangelicals for failing "to assess the significance of what has been going on for a hundred years or more within the Protestant camp. We are suddenly awakened by the outspokenness of John Robinson. But all of this and more is implicit in seeds sown long before we were born, when the axe was laid at the root of the tree in the denial of the veracity of Scripture ... the fruit is now being borne, and we can see it not only in the realm of doctrine and faith but in the staggering proportions of moral disintegration". Murray is convinced that the leading exponents of contemporary Protestantism are reconstructing the gospel so that it will be relevant. "This", he warns, "is the capital sin of our generation. Taking

their starting point from the modern man's mentality they have revised the gospel to meet the dilemmas in which the church has found itself in the face of wholesale indifference and hostility". Once again these are challenging words of rebuke for evangelicals: "we have not esteemed and prized the perfection of Scripture and its finality ... we have resorted to other techniques, expedients, and methods of dealing with the dilemma that confronts us ..." (p21). Here then are the words and concerns of a theologian rooted in the Word of God and concerned that the message of God should not be "derived FROM the modern mentality, but declared TO the modern mentality in all the desperateness of its anxiety and misery" (p22).

These four volumes then are refreshingly contemporary, outstandingly biblical and profoundly practical. The reviewer heartily concurs with the statement by Ian H. Murray, the editor, in his Preface to Volume 2 (p.ix): "The twentieth century may be remembered by the church of the future as an age in which theology and Christianity, learning and piety, had parted company, save in the testimony of a few. Prominent among the few was the author of these pages and we do not doubt that they will be read with deep enrichment by the redeemed until the Advent of the Saviour." Buy and then read these volumes soon!

### 'MEMOIR OF THE WESTMINSTER DIVINES'

Review by Rev Gilbert Evans, (Flint, Clwyd)

James Reid. Banner of Truth. 2 volumes in one binding. pp768.  
published January 1983. £7.95

Another considerable work from the Banner of Truth has been published containing valuable historical and theological material concerned with the individuals who took part in the Westminster Assembly.

For those familiar with Puritan literature a mere glance at the index of names reveals a galaxy of stars in the firmament, some more luminous than others, perhaps because their writings have prevented distance making dim? This book rescues many great and good men from unmerited oblivion. (p24 preface).

James Reid evidently held these divines in the highest admiration and spent much time and energy on collecting information about them in

order to counter historical calumnies and to exhibit the religious principles and correspondent practices of these reformers. Such men resisted the excessive powers of prelacy and kingly absolutism and took part in a great parliamentary revolution which changed the course of British history.

The preface extols the value of history and specifically biography as a vademecum for all who study divinity (p1). "The lives of good men should often be in the hands of students of divinity" (p4). The author's design is not to lavish ecomiums, but to hold up for imitation eminently learned and spiritual characters, who were indefatigably diligent in propagating the spiritual kingdom of Christ".

An account is given of their birth, descent, education, religious convictions, character, choice sayings and remarkable actions, calibre, achievements, afflictions, deaths, literary remains etc.

Reid's fervour is coaxing, though his style is a little prolix. Perhaps readers will share in the reviewer's regret over the passing of an age of elegant use of language such as Reid displays. We must also lament the difference in stature between the divines of this day and that of the subjects of this memoir. "There were giants in those days"!

There is a great disparity in the length of each subject depending on availability of material at such a remove in time and dependent too on the fame or literary/ecclesiastical accomplishments of individual men. Not all took to the pen so perhaps their value was not perceived by their own and succeeding generations, for example: Thomas Micklethwait (Vol.2 p86) and John Philips (Vol.2 p120). Others are better known, such as William Twisse the Assembly's Prolocuter, John Arrowsmith, Jeremiah Burroughs, Edmund Calamy, Joseph Caryl, Thomas Gataker, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, John Lightfoot, Stephen Marshall, Philip Nye and the four illustrious Scottish Commissioners - Robert Baillie, George Gillespie, Alexander Henderson and saintly Samuel Rutherford. Such men were at the heart of the great national deliverance from Laudinism and were providentially placed for the ongoing of Reformation principles when these were endangered by the equivocation of the Stuarts.

An account is given of the historical antecedents and occasions of

the conflict between Throne and Parliament, and between Erastian and Laudian power-lust, on the one hand and Reformation principles and liberty of conscience on the other. The struggle was intense, as these kings, who desired absolutist powers, encouraged and elevated bishops to aggregate power under the maxim "No Bishop, no king". They attempted to raise the power of the crown above the authority of the law and strove to suppress those opinions and institutions peculiar to Calvinism employing tyrannical courts of High Commission and like repressive measures to achieve their designs (preface pp11-13).

The power of their convictions was supportive to these men during these troubled times and abundant afflictions. To quote a choice saying of Simeon Ashe when dying, "The comforts of a holy life are real and soul supporting. I feel the reality of them and you may know by me that it is not in vain to serve God" (Vol.1 p125). Another saying "Without Me, said Christ, you can do nothing; neither without Him can we endure any thing".

Another godly divine, well known through his writings, particularly "A lifting up for the Down-cast" is William Bridge who also has some of his choice sayings recorded e.g. "Let your company be always such as you may get good from and do good unto". "When you are alone, think of good things; and when you are in company, speak of good things". "Keep the truth, and the truth will keep you". (Vol.1 p144).

Reid's task was an arduous one in a busy life and he was able to proceed in the collection and recording of his materials only at intervals. He mourns the lamentable scarcity of biographical information despite all his efforts and expense, consequently of so many great men we know only enough to wish that we knew more.

The reviewer recognises that the author had great admiration for the subjects of these memoirs, he also sees the important place these men had in the struggle for the Reformed faith in these islands. One must however, be prepared to exercise patience and perseverance with regard to the prolixity and repetitiousness of such a collection - reading it through does call for sympathy and a taste for antiquity. Nevertheless, it is a collection which brings those who contributed so much to the Reformed faith so much nearer, and provides unique information to balance the distortions or neglect of prejudiced minds.

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# **CALVINUS REFORMATOR: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society**

Reviewed by the Editor

Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. 1982. pp323.  
paperback (available from Institute for Reformation Studies,  
Potchefstroom University, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa

Here is a competent, comprehensive - albeit, at times, technical - survey of contemporary Calvin research which will be invaluable to students of Church History and Historical Theology. All the chapters were originally papers read and discussed at the South African Congress for the Advancement of Research on Calvin in 1980, a Congress which was originally conceived of at the International Congress on Calvin Research held in Amsterdam, September 1978.

An absorbing, introductory chapter by Professor W.H.Neuser of West Germany provides details of international Calvin research. He reports that Calvin and Luther research "are currently experiencing astonishing momentum and enormous expansion. Great interest in this research is being manifested today throughout the world by ecclesiastical and academic circles" (p1), although Prof. Neuser argues there is more need to catch up in Calvin rather than in Luther research. Only two centres of Calvin research exist, namely, in Strassburg and in Grand Rapids and while individual scholars throughout the world are researching on Calvin, there is an urgent need to co-ordinate this research. Some immediate tasks include a new edition of the Complete Works of Calvin, a satisfactory presentation of Calvin's theology and more detailed attention to his sermons.

The chapters immediately following touch on the following subjects: Research on Calvin and its influence in the field of Afrikaans theology, Research on and influence of Calvin in the English-speaking ecclesiastical sphere (J.A.B.Holland), Calvin research at Calvin (C.J. Vos), The Editio Princeps of the Institutio Christianae Religionis 1536 and then a brief characteristic of Calvin's theology (Prof. Potgieter). In the latter chapter, Professor Potgieter writes: "It is indisputable that Calvin accepted the apostle's pronouncement (2 Tim 3:16) unconditionally. With respect to his conception of deity, there can be no doubt that it was that of the triune God, which is basic to his Institutes" (p41). His conclusion is that "the most appropriate term to characterise the theology of Calvin would be: TRINITARIAN - with all that implies as to revealed truth as well as

to the unfathomable counsel of the LIVING God, who "so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life", and whose Spirit lives in the faithful as in his temple. This means that Calvin gave us a theology permeated by the "UNIO...MYSTICA", about which he waxes so eloquent: "What the mind has imbibed (must) be poured into the heart" (p47).

Chapter seven is entitled, 'Calvin and the Theological Trends of his Time' and here Dr Balke of the Netherlands identifies the theological trends within and without the reformatory movement as: ROMANISM: "nearer Scholasticism, Mysticism, devotio moderna and biblical Humanism: REFORMATION: including Luther, Melancton, Zwingli and Buser; RADICALISM: nearer Anabaptism, Libertinism and Anti-Trinitarianism" (p50).

Chapters eight and nine deal with aspects of Calvin's philosophical background then the relation between the Renaissance and Reformation ("Contemporaries but not Allies")

Professor P.E.Hughes then provides a useful account of Jacques Lefèvre D'Etaples (c.1455-1536), Calvin's forerunner in France. At the age of 25, Calvin journeyed to S.W.France to meet and confer with this old man who predicted of Calvin "that he would be a distinguished instrument in the restoration of the kingdom of heaven in France! Today, Lefèvre and his worth are 'being rediscovered'. He had a firm grasp of the doctrine of justification by faith alone with the consequence that all the glory must be ascribed to God alone. William Forel (1489-1565), for example, says that Lefèvre was the human instrument God used to 'bring him to trust in Christ as his sole Saviour and Mediator' (p103). One of the major tasks of Lefèvre was to rescue the LITERAL sense of the Scriptures as opposed to the allegorical method of interpretation so common at the time. The literal sense was the INTENDED sense and Lefèvre insisted that the proper literal sense was the sense intended by the Holy Spirit. But this sense was missed if the Holy Spirit was not present with regenerative power in the heart and mind of the reader or student of the Bible. Lefèvre then postulated a two-fold literal sense: (1) 'the improper sense of those who are blind and fail to see, and who therefore understand divine things only in a carnal manner' and (2) 'the proper sense of those who see and are enlightened'. This former sense is 'fabricated by human reason; the latter is imparted by the divine Spirit'" (p100). Incidentally, Lefèvre wrote a short exposition of the Psalms on the basis of these hermeneutical principles and his 1509 edition was found in the library

of Dresden with its margins profusely annotated in Luther's handwriting.

In chapter eleven, Professor D'Assonville compares John Knox's doctrine of the Word of God with that of Calvin. Some general principles are then elucidated. For example, the great merit in Knox's work is the fact that he upholds the authority of the Holy Scriptures unconditionally just like Calvin. However, the difference between Knox's and Calvin's views in the Institutes came to the fore clearly where the substantive view of the Scriptures is concerned. The principle: The Bible is the Word of God, receives a formal application in Knox because he takes his basic premise from Deut.12:32. Their views also differ in their version of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. To Calvin there is no essential difference between the two testaments but in the mode of administration. In Knox these differences are in the background so that the relationship between the testaments is one of identity. Again, Knox takes little cognisance of the historical development of Ecclesiastical history with its Christocentric character which in turn had a one-sided effect on his preaching (p126).

'Calvin as a Spiritual Theologian' is briefly considered in the next chapter under three aspects: (1) his thorough knowledge of the Bible (2) his views on the Bible and, finally, his application of the Bible. It is refreshing to find competent Calvin scholars like Dr Potgieter affirming Calvin's unconditional acceptance of the divine inspiration of the Bible. The following six chapters are basic and stimulating. Themes such as Calvin's view of man (Gen.2:15), Calvin's hermeneutics, the scopus of the Scriptures, the problem of the concept of 'personality' of the Holy Spirit are dealt with helpfully. The final chapters are restricted in their appeal but two chapters at least should be read, namely, 'Calvin and the Protestant Hymns' then Professor J.B. Torrance's 'Calvin and Puritanism in England and Scotland - Some basic concepts in the development of Federal Theology'.

Undoubtedly here is an indispensable reference book for those seriously studying the life and theology of John Calvin.

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The Editor apologises that, due to lack of space, two of his other articles have had to be held back until the next issue, namely, 'The New Hermeneutic (Part 2)' and 'Review of Theological Journals'.