

FOUNDATIONS

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The Gospel and Mission

Contemporary Culture

Old Age

The Son's Limited Knowledge

Dead Sea Scrolls

Calvin versus Calvinism

Theodicy

British Evangelical
Council

FOUNDATIONS

Foundations is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics – and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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Editor's Notes

Several of the articles and reviews in this issue deal either directly or indirectly with Christology. The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ should always be central to both our theological thinking and our devotional lives. Behind the profound thinking of the greatest teachers of the church – Augustine, Calvin, Owen, Warfield to name a few – was an even more profound personal devotion to Christ. It is essential that those of us who preach and teach stay close to Christ. A recent book that can help us in this is Don Carson's *For the Love of God* (Leicester, IVP, 1998) – a series of daily meditations based on Robert Murray M'Cheyne's Bible reading calendar. M'Cheyne has been a devotional tool that many of us have used and therefore it is refreshing to have Carson's incisive thoughts on one of the passages in the family readings. As one would expect from Carson these meditations are gems of exegetical and devotional insight. On every passage he sheds some redemptive historical light and usually has some brief application that avoids cheap moralising. I'm not sure how usable this book would be for many church members. He can use words that may send some to a dictionary and some of the meditations verge on saying the obvious from the passage, but overall a very helpful book to use in one's devotions and one that will help to keep us daily focused on Christ.

Sometimes a devotional time, especially in the morning, needs a kick-start. Several years ago it was recommended to me to read a few pages of a classic devotional work before turning to the Bible and prayer. I have found reading some of the Banner of Truth's Puritan classics to be helpful in this way. RJK Law's simplified abridgements of John Owen are excellent devotional reading. Owen is one of my favourites and these books make him easily accessible and more immediately rewarding. The most recent of these is Owen on the Holy Spirit. I challenge anyone not to find this a tonic to the soul. Of a similar nature is Grace Publication's Great Christian Classics series. Number 19 in the series contains extracts from George Smeaton's *The Holy Spirit* and Owen's *Communion with the Holy Spirit*. Oliver Rice has done a good job abridging and simplifying these works. Reading these books is a reminder that we are very small people standing on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before us.

As the century and millennium nears its end we are still waiting for God to send revival. Revival must always be a passion for us. Iain Murray's historical works have put us all in his debt and his latest book is no exception. *Pentecost Today?* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1998) seeks to go beyond describing revival historically, as so many books on the subject do, and to give a theological foundation for revival. Murray rightly argues the case for revival from a redemptive-historical perspective and sees our expectancy for it grounded in the exaltation of Christ. Strictly speaking revival happens after Christ's ascension as a central aspect of his meditorial reign when the Holy Spirit, having been given to the church at Pentecost, continues to be given to the church in varying measures. Murray argues that the expression "baptism of the Spirit" can be used for more than the initial reception of the Spirit or for a subsequent crisis experience and appropriately describes the fuller measures of the Spirit that churches and Christians can expect in the new covenant era. All this is illustrated with historical examples. He especially engages with the theology of revival of Charles G Finney and its powerful

impact on evangelicalism today. The book concludes with a helpful chapter on **six** things that happen when revival comes: there is renewed confidence in the word of **God**; there is a more definite understanding of what it means to be a Christian, the **gospel** advances rapidly, there is a new appreciation of the Christian ministry, communities **are** impacted and corporate worship is transformed. In my own church we have **been using** each of these points as a focus for our weekly prayer meetings. Prayerfully read **this** book for a reminder of the big thing that our ministries should aim for.

For something very different but not unrelated read Nick Davies' *Dark Heart – The Shocking Truth about Hidden Britain* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1997). Davies is **not** a Christian, but he has written a book that deliberately echoes what William Booth did in *In Darkest England* (1890). Based largely on his own personal investigations, Davies offers us a deeply disturbing picture of our society and particularly its underclass. What he describes is not nice – child prostitution, drugs, violence, the sheer emptiness of life for many people. The picture of the church he draws is not attractive – it is **largely** irrelevant, shut up or overwhelmed with the problems. For Davies the root of the problem is economic and the book offers little hope other than changes in government policy. Which brings me back to Murray's book. While there are practical things in social policy that Christians should be concerned about, ultimately the only **answer** to the dark heart of Britain is the triumphant advance of the gospel through **whole** communities. Without this the picture can only get darker. William Booth understood this but sadly Nick Davies does not.

Let me recommend a book on the millennium. Richard Kyle's *Awaiting the Millennium* (Leicester, IVP, 1998) is a thought-provoking history of millenarianism from the beginning of the church until the present. His sweep is impressive, covering everything from the millennial views of Montanists, Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchists, the Papacy, Taborites, Spiritual Franciscans, Camisards, Shakers, Mormons, Muslims, Dispensationalists and many others. As this list reveals, he goes beyond orthodox Christianity and shows the impact of millenarianism in the world at large. This is **a** book that will help you keep a sensible historical perspective in an area where **there** perspective is all too often lacking.

Finally, two personal notes. First I want to mark the imminent retirement of Alan Gibson as General Secretary by expressing my deep appreciation for his encouragement and assistance in this aspect of the BEC's ministry. Without him this journal would not be what it is. On behalf of all our readers I want to assure Alan of our prayers for him as he continues to serve the Lord in years to come. Second, congratulations to Nick Needham, a member of our editorial board, on his appointment as lecturer in church history at the Highland Theological Institute.

This issue of *Foundations* sees the beginning what I hope will be a regular feature. It is vital that pastors keep up to date with the latest biblical literature, especially commentaries. With this in mind I have asked two respected evangelical theological teachers to each undertake an annual literature review. In this issue Philip Eveson, principal of the London Theological Seminary, gives us a review of Old Testament literature. In the autumn, Alistair Wilson of the Highland Theological Institute will give us a review of New Testament literature. If these reviews prove popular and helpful they will become an regular feature. We will also continue to review other books that are of interest. I would appreciate your comments and suggestions on this or any other aspect of *Foundations*.

The Gospel, Sanctification, and Mission

Robert Heppe

An example of spiritual self-preoccupation

It is now a commonplace that American Christians are self-absorbed. I believe that this self-preoccupation in the church, whether in the US or here in Britain, can be traced at least partially to a faulty paradigm of sanctification, and that this faulty paradigm is due to a misunderstanding of the gospel – which can be traced back to the Reformation!

We don't understand the gospel. I am not talking merely about not understanding *grace*. It is painfully true that many Christians don't understand grace. But legalism is not the root of the problem of self-preoccupation. Legalism is rather just one form of it. Many have been brought out from under legalism to a new appreciation of grace and yet their visions and passions have remained substantially unaltered. They are still basically self-centred. They are still wrapped up in themselves. One could multiply examples, but I trust that the one given below will illustrate the sort of self-preoccupation that can and often does occur, even among those who have been liberated from legalism by a deep understanding of grace:

Please pray for me – God is really dealing with the roots of some of my most consistent sins and it hurts to not be able to do any righteous things to take care of them. – All I'm asked to do is trust Jesus that he has been plenty righteous for me and that he is constantly willing to change me into a son who believes that he doesn't need to achieve his own righteousness or try harder to keep from sinning. A life of faith ... I have a lot of anger toward God that I struggle so much with sin ... then I hear him say "Stop struggling!! I've done it all. Just believe that I have the power to help you live based in these truths." You know, sometimes I get tired of rambling like that – I feel like it is sort of another way to conjure up some righteousness sometimes. Sometimes I get genuinely excited, but sometimes I wonder ...

This has the appearance of being deeply spiritual. But the whole enterprise is turned inward, self-referential, and somewhat nauseating. The holy extroversion of an Isaiah, who, when confronted with sin, takes it to the cross there to be forgiven and forgotten, is replaced by a morbid interest in whether he is properly trusting in the finished work of Christ or surreptitiously trying to build his own righteousness. Grace is serving a quest that ought not to exist in the first place, the quest of attaining one's goal of freedom and happy feelings. The problem is deeper than legalism; it is self-centredness. And grace is serving self-centredness.

The gospel misunderstood

How is it that the gospel could be put to such a self-centred and self-serving use, and lead to such morbid introversion? The answer to that is a long story, which stretches back at least to Augustine. However, one major reason, I believe, is that the *scope* of the gospel isn't appreciated and, in many cases, is actually filtered out of view. Two pivotal moves enable this to happen:

1. It begins with the individual person at the centre and asks how they can relate to (be

right with, justified before) God. It is anthropocentric.

2. It so elevates the forensic aspect of the gospel (atonement, justification) that **these** elements tend to take on the whole meaning of the gospel, thereby screening out the broader implications of the gospel.

This is essentially what I call the “Lutheran” paradigm of the gospel.¹ Luther himself is the primary example, having wrestled for years with the state of his soul in the light of “the righteousness of God” and finding the solution in imputed righteousness. Such was the power of his discovery that it became the basis for a method of doing theology: theology, says Luther, is to be done *from the standpoint of the human subject*, bound in sin and set free by grace:

The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned and God the Justifier and Saviour of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject is error and poison.²

Jerry Bridges, although not a Lutheran but a Calvinist, reflects this “Lutheran” paradigm in *Discipline of Grace*. This is one of the best books on the market dealing with living the Christian life by grace. But when he explains what it means to “preach the gospel to yourself” – one of the central themes of the book –³ his explanation involves a detailed exposition of Romans 3:21-31 and concludes by saying that this passage is the “clearest” and “fullest” account of the gospel. Bridges’ book is representative example of the “Lutheran” paradigm of the gospel operative in almost all evangelical theology.

I do not wish to deny the absolute necessity of living out of the grace of God. The Christian life involves a continual process of repentance and faith, both in the finished work of Christ and for his ongoing enabling power through the Spirit. The dangers of legalism and moralistic self-sufficiency, to which writers such as Bridges draw attention, are very real and are eating away at the vitality of the church. We are told continually to go to the throne of grace, there to find the resources we lack in ourselves. Nevertheless, there are problems with this “Lutheran” paradigm, as I see it, one of which I will discuss here. The problem is that the “the gospel of God’s grace” is much broader and far greater than justification by faith; it is more than merely an answer to legalism, works-righteousness, Roman Catholicism, or even how to get saved.

The scope of the gospel is *a whole world made new as men and women are brought into a saving relationship to Christ, to be consummated when he returns*. It is cosmic in scope. Jesus summarises it as the gospel of “the Kingdom of God” (see, for example, Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:16-21,43). It was anticipated by the Old Testament prophets as the good news of Messiah’s coming, when all of God’s enemies would be destroyed and Israel vindicated. It is pictured as a restoration of exiled Israel, but far more: it means also a time for the inclusion of the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:1-7; 54:1-3; 56:1-8; Jeremiah 1:4; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:16ff; Romans 1:1-6). It looks back to the pivotal promise to Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed and included as “the people of God” (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:8; Ephesians 3:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10). But even more, it involves a restoration of *SHALOM* to the whole creation (see, for example, Isaiah 65:17-23; Romans 8:18-25). Paul speaks in terms of reconciliation, having in mind more than personal, individual peace between man and God. He has in view the whole cosmos – all things in the heavens and on earth – being reconciled, that is, brought

into proper relationship not only to God but to everything else, subsumed under the headship of Christ (compare, for example, Colossians 1:20 with Ephesians 1:9-10).

NT Wright's recent work on the theology of Paul sheds further light on the meaning of "gospel", and it confirms that Paul's message, which could be summed up as "Jesus is Lord", is a Pauline way of expressing the theme of the gospel of the kingdom. Wright summarises his conclusions as follows:

My proposal has been that "the gospel" is not, for Paul, a message about "how one gets saved" in an individual and ahistorical sense. It is a fourfold announcement about Jesus:

1. In Jesus of Nazareth, specifically in his cross, the decisive victory has been won over all the powers of evil, including sin and death themselves.
2. In Jesus' resurrection the New Age [kingdom] has dawned, inaugurating the long awaited time when the prophecies would be fulfilled, when Israel's exile would be over, and the whole world would be addressed by the one creator God.
3. The crucified and risen Jesus was, all along, Israel's Messiah, her representative king.
4. Jesus was therefore also the Lord, the true king of the world, the one at whose name every knee would bow.⁴

We need to recover the grand, cosmic significance of Jesus' saving activity, that moves the gospel out of the narrow realm of our self-preoccupation. Reformation Christianity has had a tendency to produce introspective, self-centred people. We get terribly worked up over how we are doing at living the Christian life: "Am I good enough? Have I evangelised enough? Is God pleased with my progress? Am I weak enough? Am I living by grace?" The legalists are trying to earn God's favour and those who have had a grace-breakthrough act as though the chief goal in life is not to be a legalist.

God has more important (and interesting) things to be concerned about. The gospel is God's message of liberation: from guilt, alienation and every bondage that hinders the human race from being fruitful for God and reflecting his glory. The good news that Jesus preached is that he, as Lord of the cosmos, is now in the business of recapturing a runaway planet.⁵ He came to destroy the works of the Devil – all of them, not merely the psychological ones that plague middle-class Westerners – and to bring the world under his saving authority. That means he came to reverse the effects of the fall "as far as the curse is found". The gospel of the kingdom announces nothing less than God's intention, and activity, to replace the effects of the fall (sin, guilt, sickness, hunger, injustice, oppression, poverty, bondage, dehumanisation and death) with his kingdom righteousness and his work will not be finished until his redemption covers the whole earth.

The cross is not thereby minimised. It is absolutely necessary that Jesus become incarnate, die as an atoning sacrifice, be raised and ascend to heaven. Moreover, the centrality of faith is not threatened. Indeed, *more* faith needs to be exercised to believe the gospel of the kingdom than the "Lutheran" gospel, for the former includes everything in the latter for the individual, but extends to the entire fallen world as well.

The gospel has to be at least as broad as the effects of the fall. A gospel which doesn't address all of the effects of the fall is less than the gospel. Francis Schaeffer neatly discerned four levels of alienation which resulted from Adam's sin:

- (1) theological: man became alienated from God through guilt and corruption;
- (2) psychological: man's relationship with himself (self-alienation, identity crises,

- crises of meaning and purpose) quickly became problematic – Adam was ashamed;
- (3) societal: alienation between human beings (broken relationships, injustice, poverty, violence, oppression, societal patterns that conspire to destroy the image of God in man and to maintain the Devil's bondage and oppression over people), and
 - (4) natural: even our relationship with nature (diseases, famine, natural disasters, work cursed) has been corrupted!

Jesus means to transform everything! He says, "Behold, I am making all things new!" And he won't be satisfied until he has destroyed evil in every corner and crevice of the world. He is on a mission of renewal.

One of the marvelous things about this gospel is that he has saved us so that we can be a part of his redeeming activity. God's new people are called into his redeeming activity (e.g. Exodus 19:4; 1 Peter 2:9). David Schwartz puts it this way:

For all of us who have heard his voice and claim his name, Jesus' conquest of a runaway planet should be our main business ... Everyone who comes by faith to Jesus Christ enters the most revolutionary enterprise a human being can undertake – the pursuit of the kingdom of God!⁶

The gospel, properly understood, is much broader than our concerns for personal survival, security, significance, success, or even self-centred sanctification. It presents us with a Jesus, not meek and mild, but One come to set the world on fire. It presents a plunderer and it bids us to throw ourselves away in the pursuit of his new world order. This gospel, properly understood, includes within it a *mission*. For to accept the gospel is to believe in and identify with God's ultimate purpose for his world. Thus when one accepts the gospel, one does not merely accept forgiveness and assurance of eternal life, but a vision of and for the future and a mission. This has been overlooked, and so, given our unending bent towards the self (which is the essence of sin), it is little wonder that a gospel which filters out the grand cosmic redemptive purposes of God cannot combat self-preoccupation.⁷ In a word, we need to preach the gospel of *the kingdom* to ourselves every day.

Sanctification sidetracked

One effect of not understanding the gospel (of the kingdom) is that sanctification gets sidetracked. Almost all treatments of sanctification tend to discuss it within what I consider to be the faulty, anthropocentric, "Lutheran" paradigm of the gospel.⁸ Sanctification is then thought of as working out the implications of the gospel within one's personal life, but as it begins with man at the centre of things and doesn't challenge this, it tends to produce self-absorbed Christian "sanctophiles". Sanctification becomes merely a Christianised version of the non-Christian quest of self-realisation. Christians – the spiritually-minded ones – are so busy working out God's plan of salvation in their own lives that they have little interest, time or energy for God's "other concerns".

One way this misplaced foundation works itself out is that in treatments of sanctification the emphasis is placed *merely* on Jesus' *character traits*. Sanctification then becomes the science of developing Christ-like qualities in one's life. They can be grace/faith oriented methods or discipline/legalistic methods, but in both types the focus and goal is the character traits of Jesus: patience, humility, kindness, love (understood quite self-centredly) and so on.

What is left out is the *mindset* of Jesus. While we cannot ignore the character traits

of Jesus, I have begun to question whether this was the chief concern to the gospel writers. Rather, they show us his *mentality*, his *passion*, his *mission*. In Jesus' interaction with people, we are not primarily being given examples of character traits to emulate, but examples of his *mission* in action: to seek, to save, to suffer, to restore, to embrace, to include, to renew, to forgive, to reconcile, to heal, to comfort, to liberate and so on. What then does "becoming like Jesus" look like in this paradigm? It certainly includes his character traits. But it also includes at the centre of it adopting his mindset and hence his mission – not only to act the way he acted but to be what he was. Now the punch line: he was a *missionary*! He was dominated by a sense of purpose which lay outside of himself. Bear in mind that the word "missionary" comes from the Latin "*mitto*", and that this word is used to translate the Greek *apostello* (from which we get "apostle"), which means "to send (with a purpose)". Jesus was *the* sent one, the "missioned" one. He was a man on a mission of love, come to sacrifice his life for the sake of others. In that light, consider what John Stott has to say:

The sense of having been sent was a fundamental awareness of Jesus. It gave significance, urgency, and compulsion to everything he did. "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is still day," he said; "night comes, when no one can work." (John 9:4). Thus his mission dominated his mind and actions. Indeed, the phenomenon of Jesus is inexplicable otherwise. Wherever we look in his earthly career – his birth and boyhood, his words and works, his suffering and death – we are faced with the fact that he had been "sent" and that he knew it.

Now he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Therefore, if mission was central in the mind of Jesus, it must be central in our minds too. If Jesus is inexplicable apart from his mission, his church is equally inexplicable apart from its mission. If God was to Jesus "he who sent me", then Jesus must be to us "he who sent us." For this is part of the very nature of the church. The church is the community of Jesus who have first been chosen out of the world and then sent back into the world. Mission is as fundamental to us as it was to Christ. An introverted church, turned in on itself, preoccupied with its own survival, has virtually forfeited the right to be a church, for it is denying a major part of its own being. As a planet which ceases to be in orbit is no longer a planet, so a church which ceases to be in mission is no longer a church. In order to qualify for the name "church" we must be a community deeply and constantly aware of our "sentness" and actively loyal to this part of our Christian identity.⁹

It is frightful to think that what Stott says about the "introverted church, turned in on itself ..." might be equally applicable to the individual Christian. To qualify for the title "Christian", we must be deeply and constantly aware of our "sentness". But how many Christians or churches approach this mentality?

Jesus had no time for self-absorption because he was absorbed by a higher purpose of love. Note, by the way, that it is a higher purpose *of* love, not the higher purpose *to* love. Love was not his purpose. Saving people and transforming the world was his purpose, motivated by love. I draw attention to that distinction because, in our self-centredness, we turn even love into a self-centred goal. Love which is aware of itself is not love at all. Love for us was not the object of Jesus' endeavour but the motivation. Love was not the goal; the salvation of others for the glory of God was his object.

BB Warfield, in a sermon on Philippians 2 entitled *Imitating the incarnation*,

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This is essentially what I call the “Lutheran” paradigm of the gospel.¹ Luther himself is the primary example, having wrestled for years with the state of his soul in the light of “the righteousness of God” and finding the solution in imputed righteousness. Such was the power of his discovery that it became the basis for a method of doing theology: theology, says Luther, is to be done *from the standpoint of the human subject*, bound in sin and set free by grace:

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- (3) societal: alienation between human beings (broken relationships, injustice, poverty, violence, oppression, societal patterns that conspire to destroy the image of God in man and to maintain the Devil's bondage and oppression over people), and
 - (4) natural: even our relationship with nature (diseases, famine, natural disasters, work cursed) has been corrupted!

Jesus means to transform everything! He says, "Behold, I am making all things new!" And he won't be satisfied until he has destroyed evil in every corner and crevice of the world. He is on a mission of renewal.

One of the marvelous things about this gospel is that he has saved us so that we can be a part of his redeeming activity. God's new people are called into his redeeming activity (e.g. Exodus 19:4; 1 Peter 2:9). David Schwartz puts it this way:

For all of us who have heard his voice and claim his name, Jesus' conquest of a runaway planet should be our main business ... Everyone who comes by faith to Jesus Christ enters the most revolutionary enterprise a human being can undertake – the pursuit of the kingdom of God!⁶

The gospel, properly understood, is much broader than our concerns for personal survival, security, significance, success, or even self-centred sanctification. It presents us with a Jesus, not meek and mild, but One come to set the world on fire. It presents a plunderer and it bids us to throw ourselves away in the pursuit of his new world order. This gospel, properly understood, includes within it a *mission*. For to accept the gospel is to believe in and identify with God's ultimate purpose for his world. Thus when one accepts the gospel, one does not merely accept forgiveness and assurance of eternal life, but a vision of and for the future and a mission. This has been overlooked, and so, given our unending bent towards the self (which is the essence of sin), it is little wonder that a gospel which filters out the grand cosmic redemptive purposes of God cannot combat self-preoccupation.⁷ In a word, we need to preach the gospel *of the kingdom* to ourselves every day.

Sanctification sidetracked

One effect of not understanding the gospel (of the kingdom) is that sanctification gets sidetracked. Almost all treatments of sanctification tend to discuss it within what I consider to be the faulty, anthropocentric, "Lutheran" paradigm of the gospel.⁸ Sanctification is then thought of as working out the implications of the gospel within one's personal life, but as it begins with man at the centre of things and doesn't challenge this, it tends to produce self-absorbed Christian "sanctophiles". Sanctification becomes merely a Christianised version of the non-Christian quest of self-realisation. Christians – the spiritually-minded ones – are so busy working out God's plan of salvation in their own lives that they have little interest, time or energy for God's "other concerns".

One way this misplaced foundation works itself out is that in treatments of sanctification the emphasis is placed *merely* on Jesus' *character traits*. Sanctification then becomes the science of developing Christ-like qualities in one's life. They can be grace/faith oriented methods or discipline/legalistic methods, but in both types the focus and goal is the character traits of Jesus: patience, humility, kindness, love (understood quite self-centredly) and so on.

What is left out is the *mindset* of Jesus. While we cannot ignore the character traits

of Jesus, I have begun to question whether this was the chief concern to the gospel writers. Rather, they show us his *mentality*, his *passion*, his *mission*. In Jesus' interaction with people, we are not primarily being given examples of character traits to emulate, but examples of his *mission* in action: to seek, to save, to suffer, to restore, to embrace, to include, to renew, to forgive, to reconcile, to heal, to comfort, to liberate and so on. What then does "becoming like Jesus" look like in this paradigm? It certainly includes his character traits. But it also includes at the centre of it adopting his mindset and hence his mission – not only to act the way he acted but to be what he was. Now the punch line: he was a *missionary*! He was dominated by a sense of purpose which lay outside of himself. Bear in mind that the word "missionary" comes from the Latin "*mitto*", and that this word is used to translate the Greek *apostello* (from which we get "apostle"), which means "to send (with a purpose)". Jesus was *the* sent one, the "missioned" one. He was a man on a mission of love, come to sacrifice his life for the sake of others. In that light, consider what John Stott has to say:

The sense of having been sent was a fundamental awareness of Jesus. It gave significance, urgency, and compulsion to everything he did. "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is still day," he said; "night comes, when no one can work." (John 9:4). Thus his mission dominated his mind and actions. Indeed, the phenomenon of Jesus is inexplicable otherwise. Wherever we look in his earthly career – his birth and boyhood, his words and works, his suffering and death – we are faced with the fact that he had been "sent" and that he knew it.

Now he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Therefore, if mission was central in the mind of Jesus, it must be central in our minds too. If Jesus is inexplicable apart from his mission, his church is equally inexplicable apart from its mission. If God was to Jesus "he who sent me", then Jesus must be to us "he who sent us." For this is part of the very nature of the church. The church is the community of Jesus who have first been chosen out of the world and then sent back into the world. Mission is as fundamental to us as it was to Christ. An introverted church, turned in on itself, preoccupied with its own survival, has virtually forfeited the right to be a church, for it is denying a major part of its own being. As a planet which ceases to be in orbit is no longer a planet, so a church which ceases to be in mission is no longer a church. In order to qualify for the name "church" we must be a community deeply and constantly aware of our "sentness" and actively loyal to this part of our Christian identity.⁹

It is frightful to think that what Stott says about the "introverted church, turned in on itself ..." might be equally applicable to the individual Christian. To qualify for the title "Christian", we must be deeply and constantly aware of our "sentness". But how many Christians or churches approach this mentality?

Jesus had no time for self-absorption because he was absorbed by a higher purpose of love. Note, by the way, that it is a higher purpose *of* love, not the higher purpose *to* love. Love was not his purpose. Saving people and transforming the world was his purpose, motivated by love. I draw attention to that distinction because, in our self-centredness, we turn even love into a self-centred goal. Love which is aware of itself is not love at all. Love for us was not the object of Jesus' endeavour but the motivation. Love was not the goal; the salvation of others for the glory of God was his object.

BB Warfield, in a sermon on Philippians 2 entitled *Imitating the incarnation*,

brilliantly points out what becoming like Jesus means and exposes the way in which the interest in personal piety can mask self-absorption. Warfield distinguished between self-denial and self-sacrifice, showing how Jesus (and only Christianity) taught and practised self-sacrifice. Self-denial, as practised in, for example, ascetic forms of Hinduism, and in Christianity is essentially self-centred, directed towards the salvation or improvement of the practitioner. Self-sacrifice, on the other hand, is exhibited when one is no longer thinking about oneself and one's performance, but has forgotten oneself by becoming absorbed in the service of the need of others. Warfield says:

Our self-abnegation is thus not for our own sakes, but for the sake of others. And thus it is not to mere self-denial that Christ calls us, but specifically to self-sacrifice: not to unselfing ourselves, but to unselfishing ourselves. Self denial for its own sake is in its very nature ascetic, monkish. It concentrates our whole attention on self – self-knowledge, self-control ... [Christ] was led by his love for others into the world, to forget himself in the needs of others, to sacrifice self once for all upon the altar of sympathy. Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, his followers, not away from but into the midst of men ... Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them.¹⁰

What then does it mean to be like Jesus? Certainly, it does not look like being all wrapped up in our sanctification programmes; but rather, to simply forget about ourselves as we become absorbed in his self-sacrificing mission to save the world.

A missionary gospel

The gospel discovered at the Reformation, while a great advance on the Roman Catholic theology of merit, filtered out of view the broader dimensions of the gospel of the kingdom. In the “Lutheran” paradigm, therefore, there is no conceptual link between the gospel and mission. Indeed, as Addison Soltau puts it, the Reformation understanding of the gospel was somewhat anti-missionary:

Historic Reformed confessions lack an adequate expression of the teaching of Scripture concerning the apostolic task of the church. So lacking are they, in fact, that there are those within our communities who feel that Reformed tradition is threatened by too great a missionary emphasis.¹¹

The historian Richard Lovelace likewise points out that the Reformation did not produce kingdom-oriented, missions-minded Christians. He says that the “tendency to forget the redemptive emergency in the world and to concentrate on enjoying dominion in a part of it has been a continual temptation of the church.”¹² Concerning the Reformation in particular he says:

It would seem at first that the Reformation should have overcome this problem, since it attacked the separation between lay and clerical vocations, encouraged the priesthood of all believers and stressed the truths of justification and sanctification through Christ. All these emphases should have helped release the laity spiritually for mission.¹³

The emphasis on justification and sanctification by faith that was rediscovered in the Reformation did not always result in a significant unleashing of the church in missions. “Gospel” became Lutheranism to such an extent, in my opinion, that it became synonymous with “atonement” or “justification”. The broader implications of the gospel were filtered out and it took until the late 18th century before any significant

missionary activity began.

Lovelace seems to imply that the Lutheran paradigm of the gospel should have contained within it a missionary motivation. He says, "But the Kingdom of God continued to be an elusive reality for Protestants."⁴⁴ Although they had some missionary concern,

Most American Puritans in the late seventeenth century seem to have been caught up in either of two forms of self-absorption: those who were seriously religious were urgently concerned to establish their regeneracy and grow in personal holiness and those who were formally pious were mesmerised by their interest in land and business.⁴⁵

The idea of the kingdom of God was submerged, or rather, never recaptured during the Reformation.

In a later book, Lovelace pushes the importance of the kingdom further, devoting a whole chapter to it, and he explicitly connects its absence in the Reformers' thought with spiritual introversion:

As we have noted, the Protestant Reformers did not clearly point to the kingdom of Christ as a goal to be pursued beyond the concern for individual salvation. This opened the way for self-centredness to reassert itself after the event of conversion. The Reformation corrected the Catholic understanding of individual salvation, but did not go beyond it to define adequately the collective Christian enterprise.

In large measure, the Reformers simply tuned up the medieval model of individualistic spirituality, without refocussing the church's consciousness on the kingdom of God.⁴⁶

These observations are critically important and they point in the right direction, but they do not go far enough. I believe Lovelace should rather have said that the Reformers, stuck with a problem bequeathed to them in Medieval Christianity, made a breakthrough in the area of soteriology, but nevertheless still didn't understand the gospel comprehensively enough. The gospel *is* the good news of the kingdom of God, centred in the person of Jesus the Messiah. This includes within it justification and sanctification by faith (though these concepts may have to be revised in the light of a more redemptive-historical approach to the Scriptures), but it is not circumscribed by these doctrines.

In the vacuum caused by the absence of Christ's kingdom agenda, and, at best, presented with a "Lutheran" gospel, Christians have *nothing better* to do than pursue a modified, Christianised version of the middle-class life. But if, the gospel is about the kingdom of God, that "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run" and that his reign means the end of sin, misery and death; if it is a message of a world made new as it is brought under his lordship through the agency of his (suffering and sacrificing) church, then it will be impossible to believe in the gospel without embracing his mission. To believe the gospel is to believe in this future and to embrace his mission. We should not, however, adopt this understanding of the gospel merely for utilitarian reasons. We should adopt it because it more accurately reflects the true meaning of the gospel.

References

¹ I use the quotation marks to note the fact that there were a number of differences between Luther and other Reformers, but also to draw attention to a fundamentally common approach among all of them. It is appropriately called a "Lutheran" paradigm because his personal struggle with the righteousness of God, and subsequent breakthrough in understanding

justification, became the lens through which Scripture was approached for all of the Reformers.

² *Luther's Works*, 12:311

³ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1994), chapter 3.

⁴ NT Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Oxford, Lion, 1998), p. 60.

⁵ I owe this expression to David Schwartz, *The Magnificent Obsession*, (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1990), p. 23

⁶ David Schwartz, p. 38.

⁷ The nature of sin and repentance takes on a new light, We must repent not only of legalism, self-righteousness and self-indulgence, but of the fundamental sin of "self-ism": of not really wanting to see and embrace the plan and purpose of God, of not caring about the glory of God. It is completely self-consuming! We need to repent of the resistance of the flesh to wanting to see God's name hallowed, to longing for righteousness (of the kingdom), to mourning (over the broken condition of the world), to throwing ourselves away for "my sake and the gospel's" (Mark 8:35). To preach the gospel to ourselves will involve both the appropriation of grace on a daily basis, and reorienting ourselves every day around Christ and his kingdom.

⁸ There is a Lutheran view of *sanctification* which contrasts to, and disagrees with, views such as Keswick, Pentecostal, Reformed and the man in the street's try-harder moralism. But they all share a "Lutheran" paradigm of the gospel.

Perhaps there is a more fundamental issue at work here: whether to approach sanctification in a systematic-theological and anthropocentric point of view, or from a Biblical-theological (redemptive-historical) point of view. In theology departments (and popular texts) sanctification is usually treated within the context of the (anthropocentric) *ordo salutis*. Years ago John Murray pointed out that underlying the whole order of salvation was the doctrine of union with Christ. This points in the right direction, as no discussion of sanctification can neglect the importance of union with Christ. Still, the discussion takes place from an anthropocentric starting point. It is born and bred of systematic theology and man-centred. Another perspective is gained by a redemptive-historical approach, which places personal sanctification in the framework of the already/not yet unfolding of the kingdom of God. For such a treatment see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Reformed doctrine of sanctification*, in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views On Sanctification* (Leicester, IVP). Individual sanctification is then seen as part of God's global plan of renewal. Ferguson puts it something like this: I experience on a microcosmic level the macrocosmic conflict of kingdoms. Another way to put it is this: individual sanctification can be seen in the light of a broader redemptive-historical understanding of the Bible, rather than in terms of a theological approach, which puts human soteriology at the centre of things.

⁹ John Stott, "The Lord Christ is a Missionary Christ", in David M Howard, ed., *Declare His Glory* (Leicester, IVP, 1977), p. 53.

¹⁰ BB Warfield, *The Saviour of the World* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), pp. 268-269.

¹¹ Addison Soltau "Mobilizing The Seminaries" in Harvie Conn, ed., *Reaching The Unreached*, (Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), p. 156.

¹² Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Leicester, IVP, 1979), p. 147.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁶ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Leicester, IVP, 1985), p. 178.

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Understanding Contemporary Culture

David Smith

Over twenty years ago I set sail for Nigeria, responding to the call of God to assist the African church in the training of pastors and teachers. I remember vividly the problems of communicating effectively with my students during that first period of service. It quickly became evident that many of the cultural assumptions which shaped my understanding of reality were not shared by African Christians. My biggest nightmare was the homiletics class; students just could not grasp the methods of sermon preparation and structure which I had assumed to be of universal validity and, worse still, when a particularly bright man did begin to produce the goods, the models of classical exposition which he delivered on Sunday mornings left his village audiences stone cold. Indeed, my own preaching rarely seemed to get through to the African heart, and this in a cultural situation where communication in day-to-day contexts brought audible and warm responses! What was it about my preaching that seemed to shut down the normal processes of communication and leave people so unmoved?

Our assumptions

Subsequently I had to unlearn many of my *cultural* assumptions and listen with the humility of a child to those willing to teach me about the patterns of communication which were normal in traditional African societies. For example, I had to realize how culturally inappropriate long monologues are in face-to-face societies in which (as one of my students put it), an African “will not deem you wise if you fail to retort something after a communication”. The great Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe confirmed this insight for me when he described an old non-Christian Igbo man who attended church once a year at harvest time as saying that his only criticism was that “the congregation was denied the right of reply to the sermon”.

Another lesson came as I listened in astonishment to a Nigerian colleague acting as mediator between estranged parties and helping them to see the issues through a skilful and liberal use of proverbs. I began to notice that proverbs were quoted all the time, that they remained part of the warp and woof of normal communication in this culture. However, my personal breakthrough came when I rediscovered the art of storytelling. My mother’s constant admonition throughout my childhood, “Don’t tell stories” (a phrase that equated “stories” with “untruths”) had prejudiced me against this method of teaching. This anti-narrative bias had been reinforced by an education which gave priority to “bare facts” and crowned reason and logic as undisputed monarchs in the realm of knowledge. Not surprisingly I still recall with joy the blazing African Sunday when I carried through a decision to abandon homiletical orthodoxy and instead just “told the story”. As I related the gospel account of the healing of the woman with the discharge of blood and tried to ground this in the realities of daily living in an African village setting the congregation came alive! The realisation dawned that Christ was not after all a distant saviour of somebody else’s world, demanding that Africans abandon their traditions and accept a form of cultural circumcision in order to benefit from his

grace. On the contrary, it was clear that he is Lord, redeemer and judge of *every* culture and that there are ways of ensuring that the Good News is communicated by means that resonate within the traditional African worldview. This is surely what it really means to preach Christ? The essence of missionary communication involves the struggle – often long, painful and dangerous – to ensure that the gospel reaches people through the channels of communication which are taken for granted in their cultural context.

Our culture

What is the relevance of this to our contemporary culture? Over the last few years I have experienced a strong sense of *déjà vu* when encountering young people who have appeared listless and bored during services of worship on Sunday mornings. This has not been a sporadic experience but something that has happened frequently and in many different locations and over and again I have been reminded of my homiletic disasters in the African bush! Local church leaders have been acutely and embarrassingly aware of the problem and have sometimes lamented to me the “rebellion” of the children of the church. Their response has been to redouble prayer for the conversion of the youth, thus analysing the problem entirely in spiritual terms. While I have no wish to deny the reality of sin and rebellion, nor do I for a moment undervalue the importance of prayer, my experience of struggling to communicate across a cultural barrier leads to me to ask whether the issue here has something to do with a process of cultural transformation. Nearly thirty years ago Francis Schaeffer warned us that many Christian parents and ministers were so out of touch with the children of the church “as though they were speaking a foreign language”. Three decades later entirely new fault lines have appeared in Western culture creating fresh potential for misunderstanding and the breakdown of meaningful communication. Are we, then, employing means of communication which are no longer used in any other sphere of modern life and, so far as contemporary youth are concerned, simply don’t work? Are we as a result imposing on our children a pattern of obedience based on custom which utterly fails to communicate the real message of the gospel? To put it very bluntly: is the real cause of the crisis facing churches that cannot retain the allegiance of their own children (never mind those who have no prior connection with the religious sub-culture) not so much a sign of the rebellion of youth but an indication of the failure of the church to recognise the challenge of *mission* in a changed cultural situation?

Not so long ago I arrived to preach at a baptist church to discover a rusting metal notice attached to the external wall which declared “All sittings free in this church”. It was, of course, a historical and cultural relic left over from the Victorian era and I suppose few people passing by ever really paid attention to it. What was far more serious however was the later discovery that what went on *inside* the building had, like the notice outside, scarcely changed in a hundred years; every aspect of the service declared its origin in an era long since passed. Just across the road was a massive new leisure complex with ice rink, swimming pool and the usual features of the postmodern entertainment industry, identified in blazing neon signs as “The Time Capsule”. I could not help feeling that I was also entering a capsule, only here the journey was one that took us backward in time to a sub-cultural world beyond the comprehension of the hundreds of young people seeking recreation across the road.

The maintenance of long-established church structures and patterns of worship is

often justified by an appeal to *faithfulness*. If we make relevance the criterion of the shape and practice of the church, it is argued, we tread a path that leads to compromise and spiritual death. Such concern to ensure the purity and holiness of the church is justified. However, faithfulness without a willingness to take ground-breaking initiatives to ensure the transmission of the message of the gospel to ever new hearers is also a path to extinction. In fact, we are *not* faithful if we ignore Christ's call to mission and a retreat to the apparent security of a closed community repeats the failure in mission that has characterised the people of God with monotonous regularity from at least the time of Jonah onwards. Tragically, many churches have died (and are dying) even as members continually assure each other of their faithfulness.

How then can we be faithful to the missionary call of Christ in the specific culture of the Western world? Perhaps the first thing to say here is that it is extremely difficult to gain an objective and critical view of one's own culture. This is the culture to which we belong; through the processes of socialisation and education it has shaped our lives in the most profound ways so that we simply take for granted the practices, beliefs and values which structure the Western way of life. This culture determines for us what counts as "reality" and there are what one sociologist has called "reality policemen" (teachers, academics, TV newsreaders) who guard the reigning definitions of what may be treated as "real" and what must be dismissed as simply unbelievable.

Our understanding

How then *can* we stand outside our own culture and view it from some other perspective? I suggest there are two ways of answering this question. *First*, we can listen to people who, because their cultures operate according to different values and assumptions, are able to offer us a critical view of the West. I remember standing with some students beside the Qua Iboe River in Nigeria as together we watched a complex piece of machinery operated by Dutch engineers rebuilding the river bank. I became aware that one of the students, a man for whom I had a particular regard, was repeating quietly to himself the phrase "Thank God ... Thank God ..." Curious as to why a rather grotesque sample of Western technology should elicit such a spiritual response, I enquired what he meant. "I was thanking God" he said, "that he could make men with such intelligence and skill that they could produce that". The comment, made so innocently and entirely naturally, was like a flash of revelation; it highlighted the yawning gap between the Western tendency to place ultimate trust in technology and a traditional African ability to retain, even in the face of a technological culture, a "sacred" view of human existence. Thus, a key resource in understanding modern, Western culture is the fellowship of the worldwide Body of Christ; in an era of global Christianity we must listen to sisters and brothers who have met Christ in other cultural settings and must have the humility and wisdom to see ourselves as they see us.

The *second* resource from which we may gain a critical perspective on our culture is to be found in the Bible. This may seem such an obvious statement as to appear rather ridiculous. However, what I wish to emphasise is the need to listen *afresh* to Scripture, to break through the crust of received traditions of interpretation that so often protect us from the real message of the Bible. A specific example may help. Throughout the early years of my Christian life I knew the book of Revelation only as a quarry for prophetic speculation and thus its true purpose was completely hidden from me. Only

recently have I begun to appreciate how revolutionary this great work is. As we, like John, are invited to enter the “door standing open in heaven” so we discover that the limited view of reality that dominates our surrounding culture can be broken apart and replaced by an understanding of human life and purpose that is utterly liberating. Once having passed through that door, everything changes; much that is esteemed and valued in a closed, secular world turns to dross and shafts of light are thrown onto the evils, corruption and idolatry of a world that, for all its absurd arrogance, is seen to be heading for collapse. Revelation chapter 18, with its terrifying vision of the destruction of Babylon, sends shivers down my spine and leaves me trembling for a culture built (like that of ancient Rome) on the foundation of human greed and the impossible assumption of ever-increasing economic and material growth.

Why has this biblical perspective remained so long hidden from us? I suggest that we have lived too long with the illusion that it is enough simply to *read* the Bible and have failed to appreciate the distorting influence of the cultural lenses with which that reading has taken place. The Peruvian theologian, Samuel Escobar observed that Western Christians seemed unable to acknowledge “how much of their faith was conditioned by their culture” and he argued that we need to learn to “question the position from which we read the Bible”.

Our engagement

Two aspects of contemporary culture are especially important in relation to this discussion. *First*, we live at a time of transition and change when most of the assumptions that have long been taken for granted are widely challenged and rejected. This is the significance of the term *postmodern*; the worldview of the European Enlightenment is increasingly recognised as inadequate, if not fundamentally mistaken. Two centuries of confidence in human reason, during which people dreamed of a new world resulting from science and technology, is *behind* us. Increasing numbers of Western people have come to feel that the dream has turned into a nightmare and yesterday’s cultural heroes are now placed in the dock, charged with propagating a onesided ideology that has led to the rape of the earth. This is a fantastic turnaround with massive implications for Christians.

It would be easy to respond to this growing crisis in modern culture with an attitude characterised by the phrase “We told you so!” After all, Christians have always been aware of the deficiencies of secular thought and have often warned of the terrible dangers of a worldview which excludes the transcendent and divine from consideration. Long before the term “postmodern” appeared we find the Christian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev arguing that the loss of faith in God was bound to result in a loss of faith in mankind.

However, before we give way to the temptation to engage in self-congratulation there are some serious questions for Christians to face in this situation. Can we claim to have maintained a clear critical distance from the culture of modernity, or has Christianity (and I include Evangelicalism here) in fact been thoroughly assimilated within it? In Douglas Coupland’s book *Generation X* (a work widely recognised as providing peculiar insight into the spirit of our times) one of the characters complains that his parents, who grew up in the era of the depression, belong to a generation “neither able nor interested in understanding how marketers exploit them. *They take*

shopping at face value". Are Christians above such criticism or have they actually been able to live easily and comfortably within consumer society? Is there not clear evidence that even the gospel can be turned into a product, capable of being promoted and marketed like any other item designed to satisfy human needs? Does the history of Christianity in the modern era reveal a community that takes Jesus seriously and models an *alternative* way life to that offered within industrial society, or does it actually show a rather dismal record of conformity in which the cutting edge of the biblical message has been almost entirely blunted?

The era that has come to an end in the final decades of the twentieth century is one in which Christianity has been, to a greater or lesser degree, implicated. We are not only now post-modern but also post-Christendom and a particular phase in Christian history, during which the faith was linked to the expansion of Western culture, is over. Far from regretting this, or seeking to prolong an age now irrevocably past, we should confess the compromises that were part of this phase and receive with gratitude the new opportunities before us in the postmodern age. Perhaps this moment in time presents us with a unique opportunity to recover the fullness of the biblical gospel and to rediscover what it really means to be the pilgrim people of God in a hostile world.

The *second* aspect of contemporary culture to which attention should be drawn concerns the depth of alienation and loneliness to which people now bear witness. The very term post-modern indicates that our times are characterised by an awareness of *loss*, of having *abandoned* the hopes and dreams of our predecessors, so living *after* the possibility of believing that the world might be changed for the better and human life might be happy, purposeful and fulfilled. Tragically, nothing remains but a huge vacuum into which are sucked a bewildering variety of opinions. Thus, someone has described the experience of postmodern people as one in which "We see through a kaleidoscope darkly". In a word, we are *lost*; unable to replace the faded dream of the Enlightenment with a new vision of human destiny and purpose and increasingly realising that the moral and ethical capital of the past is practically exhausted. In a book bearing the significant title, *Life After God*, Coupland confesses, "My secret is that I need God – that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem capable of giving ... to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love".

Do we not hear the call of Christ in all of this: "See I have placed before you an open door ..."? The question is, do we have the courage, the apostolic boldness, to enter that door and seize the opportunity of this moment in history? Can we address the challenge of *this* culture with imagination and creativity, retaining our hold on the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" while yet finding new ways to tell the old story? Can we connect with this generation so that they may learn of Christ, who came that people of every era, including Generation X, might have life? I have ended this article where it began, with the challenge of cross-cultural mission and I suggest that the most fundamental issue before all of us is whether or not, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, we can provide channels of communication through which the waters of life can revive and irrigate a cultural wasteland facing death.

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An Age Old Problem

Roger Hitchings

The glory of young men is their strength, grey hair the splendour of the old (Proverbs 20:29).

Such a view of the significance and complimentary worth of age distinctives would find little support within the prevailing philosophies of our culture, and only an uncertain intellectual assent among most Christian people. A balanced society, such as that presented to us in Scripture, is generally an unappreciated ideal. Even within conservative evangelical churches the fallacy of the youth and beauty culture has a powerful influence and to be old is to lose considerable value.

That this situation exists is a sad indication that in this area of our thinking we have lost the Bible's perspective. What is suprising is that this can happen despite the amount of space given to the issue of old age within the Scriptures. It is important therefore to seek to review this teaching so that we may relate it to the society in which we live and thereby produce a truly Biblical response to what will be a major challenge in the next quarter of a century.

Society's confused perspective

During the first decade of the next century there will be an increase of 1 million (9%) in the number of people over retirement age (60 years of age for women, and 65 for men) in this country. By that same time the number of people over 75 will have risen to almost 600,000. This has enormous implications for our society. If, for instance, we think of the economic demands that this will make on the nation in terms of Pensions, Benefits and Health and Social welfare provision, it can be seen why politicians are becoming increasingly anxious. 51% of pensioner households depend on state benefits for at least 75% of their income. At the same time older people are, both in terms of cost and numbers, the major "consumers" of Health Service and Local Authority Social Services provision.

Yet we also have to recognise that within society in general old age is devalued. There is an emphasis on youth, health and beauty. And whilst we must avoid the excessive claims of the "ageism" debate, we must recognise that to be old is not seen as having anything to commend it. This distaste now affects people over 50 as the mad struggle to avoid becoming old, or at least appearing to be old, rages with an ever increasing intensity (fuelled by clever business interests and advertisers).

Sadly, but almost inevitably, these confused perspectives are found among Christians but the church has largely failed to begin to discuss the issue and its implications. An examination of any Christian book shop will demonstrate this fact. Yet here is an area where a godly perspective can do more than raise questions of our society. It can offer the most constructive, wholesome and practical answers to what many social planners feel is almost the unanswerable problem.

Scripture's balanced analysis

As we turn to the Bible we immediately encounter an entirely different mind-set and approach to age. Generational competition, and even artificial division, is entirely absent. Each generation has its role and ministry and each generation relates to and supports the other. In this scheme old age is viewed honestly, its sorrows and limitations are squarely faced, but throughout there is profound respect. Gone is the divisiveness of our society and in its place is that balanced understanding of Proverbs 20:29.

The vision for old age that the whole of Scripture presents to us is a picture of prosperity and fruitfulness, a time of rejoicing in the mercies of God. It is sometimes suggested that there is a causal link in Scripture between longevity and obedience to the commands of God, and this appears to be the implication of the promise attached to the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12). Paul, of course, quotes this promise, but in the light of the comment of Deuteronomy 5:16, with an emphasis on quality of life rather than quantity. So we may conclude that this must be regarded as one of those general promises that point to the value of a sensible, careful and godly lifestyle, which undoubtedly has an impact on length of life, since many causes of illness and problems in life will be avoided, (Proverbs 1:8-9; Proverbs 4:1-4; Proverbs 6:20-22).

The best summing up of Scripture's view of growing old is found in those familiar words in Psalm 92:12-14. Commenting on the imagery employed by the Psalmist, Spurgeon says: "The Palm Tree has 300 uses and is at its most fruitful at 100 years old." This picture of value and significance pervades the whole teaching. Even in death, our societies ultimate phobia, there is a positive note. So we read frequently of those who died "at a good old age, full of years". Whilst this may have some reference to physical aspects, the primary thrust of the Old Testament is that of spiritual vigour. And this is clearly paralleled in the Apostle Paul's happy claim, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Such a sense of contentment and accomplishment is a right and necessary goal (2 Corinthians 4:16). Indeed there is an expectation that spiritual growth and progress continues throughout the whole of life. It is not an impossible ideal but rather that for which we should all be straining. To help us achieve this goal we find many glorious promises which are designed to sustain and motivate us (e.g. Isaiah 46:4; Psalm 71:14-21; Psalm 37:25; *et al*).

The Scriptures' analysis of old age can be broken down into four strands.

1. The value and respect of Old Age

Old people are to be respected, that is the unequivocal demand of Leviticus (Leviticus 19:32). A similar perspective is given by Paul, 1 Timothy 5:1. The mark of a degenerate society is a failure to do this (Deuteronomy 28:50; Lamentations 5:12). But such respect is not merely based on the number of years a person survives in this world, "the sinner who reaches a hundred will be considered accursed". Age has no merit in itself. But with age should come spiritual qualities which demand respect and recognition. So the principle for growing old is set out in Psalm 90:12. This concept of "numbering our days" presupposes an urgency and application to every part of life in order to "grow wisdom", and this is powerfully endorsed by Paul when he tells us "to redeem the time", (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5). Indeed the development of wisdom is the hallmark of "good old age" (although not its unique province, Job 32:9), and this

is manifested by a righteous life (Proverbs 16:31) and a full experience (Psalm 37:25, 1 John 1:13-14). Such an old age is a mark of great blessing, (Isaiah 65:20). The examples in Scripture of a godly and spiritual old age, which has great effectiveness in the kingdom of God, are many and varied and therefore present a considerable challenge to any culture which would wish to develop a different understanding.

To value old age in this way, and to promote it amongst *all* our congregation, requires many modern Christians to make a massive shift in thinking and emphases. But to fail to do so is to rob the life of the church of a source of ministry, blessing and mutual service that is God ordained.

2. Reality and Honesty towards Old Age

Old age has its problems, failures and great disadvantages (Ecclesiastes 4:13). In its presentation of old age the Bible is totally honest and realistic. There is no sentimentalisation of ageing or avoiding painful issues. Physical and mental decline are both faced. In fact the picture painted in Ecclesiastes 12 must rank as one of the most vivid and painfully accurate descriptions of frailty and confusion ever penned. For some people, though not all, old age is a time of great difficulty and distress in many areas of life. The challenges of coping with the sorrows and losses of old age (Jeremiah 12:5; Psalm 90:10), and the practical implications of decreasing independence (Genesis 27:1-2; Luke 1:62-63) are faced fairly and squarely. In similar manner the spiritual challenges of old age are not shirked and we find loss of assurance, memories of sin and the sense of failure all well addressed (Psalm 71:9), as are the losses of advancing years in characters such as Barzillai (2 Samuel 19:35).

This degree of honesty and frankness are not characteristic of many approaches to old age even among professionals in the world of geriatric medicine and care of the elderly. An all-round view of the person is sadly too often lacking. The Bible's honest but hopeful message provides a level of insight provided no where else.

3. The dangers and sins of Old Age

Whilst considering the honesty of Scripture we must take notice of its concerns over the great dangers and sins that come with old age. Godly men such as Noah, Moses and Hezekiah are all found exhibiting the common failings of old age in overindulgence, impatience and selfishness. There are sins common to the whole of life, and there are sins peculiar to each stage of life. Ecclesiastes 7:10 highlights just one sin, which often starts quite early in life. But to see what *was* as preferable to what *is*, is a real danger, and an implied challenging of Providence. To be over anxious and to engage in self-pity are frequent errors. To be resentful or be always complaining about our declining physical state is to lose sight of the reality of 2 Corinthians 4:17 and Romans 8:18. It is a pastoral duty to attend to such matters with respect and compassion, 1 Timothy 5:1.

The fact is that old age often exposes what people really are. The masks of "our image" are not so easy to sustain when just keeping going demands all our energies. And as we lose strength, faculties, friends and roles, our levels of confidence in the world around, people and ourselves all begin to fall as well. Temptations and questions of assurance become major concerns (Psalm 71:9-12).

4. The blessings and hopes of Old Age

But the last days of life are not intended to be the worst, "the path of the righteous

is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (Proverbs 4:18). What blessings attend those who know that even in old age there is One who “will carry you, will sustain you and will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:4). A life of experience in walking with God provides a ministry peculiar to those who are old (Psalm 71:18; Psalm 37:25). In this they are able to comfort “with the comfort received from God”, (1 Corinthians 1:3-5). Memories rightly used are a marvellous gift and grounds for service, which is not to be despised (although if recounted every day, or a thousand times without thought they lose their value!).

In natural terms old age is the very gateway of heaven. And who has not been blessed by the godly old persons’ expression of delight in the sense that glory is but a step away? Thus it is at this time of life that the greatest of spiritual activities becomes the focus – to prepare to die, to prepare to be with the Saviour.

Perhaps we have lost the delight in the thought of heaven as we are increasingly taken up with things of time. But the presence of active and contributing older people in our congregation should be a corrective to our temporal preoccupations. It is a vital aspect of church life to cultivate a right joy in later years and to enjoy the fruits of the blessedness that old age brings.

Special Responsibilities for the Local Church

Finally we must look at the responsibility that the New Testament places on the local church to minister to and receive from older people. Space forbids even a cursory examination of those passages in the Pastoral Epistles that deal with this, and that blow apart the ageist structures that we have adopted from the culture around us. But there is to be direct teaching of older people; encouragement to them in their battles, fears, regrets and difficulties; challenge to their sins and failures; care for their practical needs (and in these days those who care for them); comfort for them in their distresses and losses; and, most importantly, opportunity to serve and minister within the congregation.

As the full weight of Scripture on this theme is accepted the inevitable reformation of our practice must be pursued. We need to teach our whole congregations about the true nature of old age and give to those in middle years, as well as later years, a vision of what their old age should be. So many are conditioned by the stereotypes of our society, and the misleading emphasies of much social welfare. Is it true, as has been said, “our old people fail us, because we fail them”? I fear it may well be.

Then there are the questions of evangelism of old people, coping with Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia, enabling carers to handle the heavy burdens of frail spouses or parents. Add to this the problems that arise from the break down in relationships (not infrequently due to very difficult old people), the reality of severe anxiety states and the many other areas of life where it is old age which has the highest incidence of social dysfunction. All of these issues baffle our society, which hides that confusion by an obsession with specifics and political correctness, so that a holistic approach is rarely grasped. But for us, whilst there are no easy answers, the Scriptures give us clear guidelines, and precious illustrations of how to respond.

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Exegesis 24:

The Son's Limitation of Knowledge

Paul Brown

This study of Mark 13:32 and related verses explores the doctrinal implications of current interpretations and suggests its purpose in revelation.

There are three verses to be considered in this study, but Mark 13:32 is the most basic and the one which will be examined in its context. It reads (using the UBS 3 Greek text¹), "But of that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, only the Father." There are no textual difficulties, though we may note that TR² has "and the hour".

The Matthean equivalent of this verse is 24:36, "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son, except the Father alone." Many manuscripts, including TR, omit "nor the Son", but its attestation is strong and it is widely accepted. TR also has the article before "hour" and inserts "my" before Father, but neither of these variants is given in UBS 3. The slight variations between this verse and the Marcan version indicate that neither are dependent on each other. Here the emphasis on the Father is stronger, "the Father alone".

The third verse is Acts 1:7, "And he said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority.'" This is clearly very similar in content to the other two verses in the way it shows that there is knowledge which belongs exclusively to the Father. Two points arise out of bringing this verse alongside the other two. Firstly, in this case Jesus was asked about the time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel, whereas in the other verses it is the time of the Son's return which is in question. Are these two entirely separate events, one event or at least two parts of one complex event? This study takes the view that they are at least two parts of the same complex event. Secondly, the reference to times and seasons means that we must not interpret "day and hour" too narrowly, as if it were possible to determine the year, or even month, of the Lord's return, but cannot get any closer than that.

Summarising what these verses teach we can note that the timing of the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ is not for human beings, even apostles to know. Nor is this surprising, for even the angels of heaven do not know it. This must mean also that the demons do not know either. The devil knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12; cf. Matthew 8:29), but he does not know how short. The time is known by the Father, however. Mark 13:20 says, "Unless the Lord has shortened those days, no flesh would be saved..." indicating that although Jesus does not know the time, he knows that the Father does, and that the Father has shortened it for the elect's sake (see also, e.g. Acts 17:26).

What is surprising to us, and a source of great difficulty, is that the Son does not

know the day or hour. This has been a difficulty from the beginning. Ambrose thought that the phrase “nor the Son” was an Arian interpolation³, but there is no evidence for this at all. However we try to understand this limitation of the knowledge of the Son, we have to acknowledge that we are facing a mystery. The question is, what sort of a mystery is this? Three answers seem possible.

1. It is an incarnational mystery

That is to say, limitation of knowledge is a necessary corollary of the incarnation. The Son in his incarnate condition is not omniscient and does not know the time of his return. This can be approached, or looked at, from at least three different angles. The first is the idea of *kenosis*. In some way the incarnation involved not only the Son leaving the glory that was his and the exercise of his divine attributes, but the attributes themselves were curtailed or left behind in the act of self-emptying (Philippians 2:7). The kenotic understanding of Philippians 2:7 was adequately answered by Warfield⁴ many years ago and it would be a diversion to consider it any further here. Secondly, this can be looked at from the point of view of the union of the human and the divine in the one person of Christ. Augustus Strong says: “This communion of the natures was such that, although the divine nature in itself is incapable of ignorance, weakness, suffering, or death, the one person Jesus Christ was capable of these by virtue of the union of the divine nature with a human nature in him.”⁵ Thirdly, it can be looked at from the view point of psychology. Tony Lane says: “It does not make sense to speak of the same one person being simultaneously ignorant and omniscient. This is not a biblical paradox but a docetic undermining of biblical teaching on the true humanity of Christ.”⁶ It is, of course, true that it is impossible for us to understand the psychology of Christ, but for that reason we have to take care in considering what makes sense to us.

It seems clear that this view involves the assertion of a single consciousness and a single will to the incarnate Son, a conclusion which Strong expresses forcibly: “Christ has not two consciousnesses and two wills, but a single consciousness and a single will. This consciousness and will, moreover, is never simply human, but is always theanthropic – an activity of the one personality which unites in itself the human and the divine.”⁷

2. It is a christological mystery

Here I am restricting the word “christological” in a quite arbitrary way, and contrasting it with the incarnational view. According to this view Christ was ignorant according to his human nature, but not according to his divine nature. This is the usual, orthodox way of understanding these verses. For example Wayne Grudem says, “This ignorance of the time of his return was true of Jesus’ human nature and human consciousness only, for in his divine nature he was certainly omniscient and certainly knew the time when he would return to the earth.”⁸

It has to be acknowledged that while this is easy to say it seems incomprehensible, and Tony Lane’s comment is not altogether surprising. However, such a formulation does not necessarily open up the possibility of minimising the real humanity of Christ. It is clear that Christ did not call on his divine knowledge to inform his human mind. So, for example, he grew in knowledge, Luke 2:40,52. He was dependent on revelation

from the Father for every word of his message, John 8:28. We can surely assume also that he learned the Scriptures in the same way as every other Jewish child, and that it was by the Holy Spirit that he was given perfect and unique insight into their meaning. Some writers have used analogies to help in our understanding of this mystery.

Geoffrey Grogan says:

How can absolute knowledge and limited knowledge co-exist? An idea that has helped the present writer arises from the fact that none of us ever uses as much knowledge as he possesses. Most of the knowledge we have is not present to our conscious minds. Consciousness is like a very small tip of a very large iceberg. It is our conscious knowledge that we are aware of using. If I have learned something in the past and yet it is hidden in my subconscious mind at the moment awaiting the appropriate stimulus before it can come into my consciousness, can I be said to know it? In a sense I do and in a sense I do not. Perhaps such items as these were below the level of Jesus' consciousness so that, at that moment, for purposes of conscious action, he could not be said to know them, and yet they were present in the great unlimited reservoir of divine knowledge which was in union with his human nature. I cannot give you chapter and verse for this, but it has helped me.⁹

Another writer who has explored this theme is Donald Macleod, linking it with the temptation and the cross:

The other line of integration between the omniscience of the divine nature and the ignorance of the human is that just as Christ had to fulfil the office of Mediator within the limits of a human body, so he had to fulfil it within the limits of a human mind. Part of the truth here is suggested by the first of the three temptations in the desert: "tell these stones to become bread" (Mt.4:3). The essence of the temptation was that the Lord disavow the conditions of the incarnation and draw on his omnipotence to alleviate the discomforts of his self-abasement... Christ had to submit to knowing dependently and to knowing partially. He had to learn to obey without knowing all the facts and to believe without being in possession of full information. He had to forgo the comfort which omniscience would sometimes have brought. This, surely, was a potent factor in the dereliction (Mk.15:34)... He suffers as the one who does not have all the answers and who in his extremity has to ask, Why? The ignorance is not a mere appearing. It is a reality. But it is a reality freely chosen, just as on the cross he chose not to summon twelve legions of angels. Omniscience was always a luxury within reach, but incompatible with his rules of engagement. He had to serve within the limits of finitude.¹⁰

3. It is a trinitarian mystery

This is not just a mystery relating to Christ as incarnate, but to the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is, after all, what the language of the verses strongly suggests. In particular the stress in Matthew, "the Father alone", and Acts, "which the Father has placed in his own authority", make this almost irresistible.

- a) Remember that Acts 1:7 refers to a post-resurrection situation. Even if we granted that there was a limitation of knowledge arising in some way from the incarnation, would this continue after the resurrection? The evidence is not decisive on this point – the resurrection was not the return of the Son to the glory which he had with the Father prior to the incarnation. Nevertheless, two verses suggest that the resurrection involved a new condition which sits uneasily with a limitation arising

from the incarnation. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus says, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” And Romans 1:4 says, “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The second verse has a number of imponderables when it comes to detailed interpretation. For example is the verb “declared” or “appointed”? Is Christ by the resurrection now “Son of God with power”? Matthew 28:18 might suggest that this is a likely understanding of the verse. It is surely surprising to find the risen Christ, in the course of giving commandments to the apostles, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:2,3), speaking of “things which the Father has placed in his own authority.”

- b) The similarity of Matthew 24:36 with Matthew 11:27 suggests that Matthew 24:36 ought to be understood in a trinitarian sense. 11:27 reads: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him.” It seems quite arbitrary to understand the earlier verse in one way, and the later verse in quite a different way. When Ridderbos says: “Obviously ‘Son’ here does not denote the complete unity between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity (as, e.g., in 11:27). It refers only to the relationship that Christ has to God by virtue of his office (see the comments on 17:5) a relationship that does not make him omniscient. The Son therefore must wait for the Father to tell him when to return, for the Father alone knows the day and hour (see Acts 1:7)”¹¹ it does not seem quite so obvious that the verses should be interpreted in such different ways. If Matthew 24:36 is not to be understood in a trinitarian sense, why should 11:27?
- c) We ought to ask also how far the limitation of knowledge referred to here is unique. Is what we have here just one aspect of the limitation of knowledge which arises from the incarnation, or isn’t this wholly unexpected and quite unique? Granted that according to his human nature Jesus did not know Chinese, isn’t it quite clear that the limitation of knowledge here is of a completely different order to that? There is something special here; this is knowledge which the Father has reserved to himself. There is a parallel here with Mark 10:40, “But to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but is for those for whom it is prepared”, which also surely has no reference to any limitation arising from the incarnation of the Son.
- d) How can we understand this as a trinitarian mystery? The fact that there is one God suggests undivided knowledge. By definition God knows everything. To suggest one person of the trinity does not have the full knowledge that belongs to Godhead appears to deny the essential deity of that person.
 - i. Nevertheless the distinction between the persons is real. Difficult though it is to comprehend there are actualities that only belong to the particular person. Neither the Father nor the Spirit became incarnate. The Father and the Son send the Spirit, but the Spirit did not send the Son. Not only are there distinctions relating to the persons and their actions, but there are distinctions that relate to the attributes as well. The knowledge that the Father has of the Son is not the same as the knowledge that the Son has of the Father. Moreover the Father does not have personal knowledge of life in this world, whereas the Son does. In this case there is a knowledge which is proper to one person of the trinity but not to the other two. In considering these verses, then, we are not talking of the

omniscience of God as God, but of the knowledge which arises from their interpersonal relationships.

- ii. Is it any more difficult to think of the Son choosing not to use his divine knowledge in his incarnate condition than it is to think of the Father retaining an item of knowledge and choosing not to disclose it to the Son? Is there not in fact a real similarity between these two things? It certainly seems more difficult to think of one person not having the full knowledge that belonged to both his natures, than two persons not having identical knowledge even though sharing the same nature.
- iii. If in a particular respect the Father withholds knowledge from the Son, that does not necessarily mean subordinationism. Subordinates can themselves withhold knowledge for good reasons, but they do not thereby cease to be such. If the knowledge belongs to the Father as Father then the fact that he does not reveal it to the Son has no bearing on their equality.
- iv. The verses are not so concerned to speak of the limitation of the Son's knowledge as they are to emphasise the Father's knowledge.

Is it legitimate to ask why the Son does not have this knowledge?

- a) If Christ's limitation of knowledge here is a necessary concomitant of the incarnation, then the answer would seem to be that he simply shares in the same ignorance that is our experience. However this is a totally unsatisfactory answer because the Father could have revealed the time to him. Many other details about the end were revealed to him, it was only the time which the Father put into his own hands. One might suppose that knowing all the events that take place beforehand would necessarily involve a knowledge of the time, but this is evidently not the case.
- b) Asking this question makes us realise that the incarnational approach to these verses is quite inadequate; even if it were true, these verses do not demonstrate it, for the real question they raise is not, What is it about Christ that means he is ignorant of the time? but, Why didn't the Father reveal the time to the Son?
- c) If a speculative answer is justifiable it might be tentatively suggested that this is a surprise of love. Love delights to bring joy and pleasure by surprises. The Son knows that he will return in power and glory, but perhaps the day will come as a joyful surprise to him. This may seem far too anthropomorphic, but God is love and the love between Father and Son must be the supreme example of love.

The context of this verse in Mark

- a) Verse 26 speaks of the coming of the Son of Man in great glory. The background of these words is surely Daniel 7:13,14. While on the surface v.32 may appear to limit the greatness of the Son of God, v. 26 emphasises the eternal majesty of the Son of Man.
- b) His sovereignty is also underlined in v. 27. He sends out *his* angels. Their role is to gather *his* chosen ones.
- c) Verse 31 stresses the eternal validity of Christ's words. It is striking to read straight on from v. 31 into v. 32. Geoffrey Grogan is undoubtedly right to say, "It is

important that these two verses should be taken together and interpreted in relation to each other, and it is singularly unfortunate that so many English translations, including the NIV, separate these two verses by the paragraphing structure they adopt.”¹² However we understand v. 32, it cannot be used to erode the absolute status of Christ’s words as infallible and certain, “my words will by no means pass away.”

- d) All these considerations taken from the context show how surprising this verse is. This limitation of knowledge occurs in one of the Gospel passages which emphasises above most others the glory and sovereign majesty of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this verse

- a) The purpose evidently is to ensure that people would prepare themselves and be ready for when Christ would return, v. 33-37. If the time, even generally, were known beforehand, the temptation would be to put off repentance to the last minute.
- b) We ought to note that what we have seen means that it cannot be possible for anyone to work out from Scripture the time of Christ’s return. No-one knows the Scripture better than the Son of Man knew it, but if he did not know the time of his return, then it cannot be contained in Scripture. Conversely if it were contained in Scripture he could not have spoken this verse, because he would know it.
- c) We may finally say that this passage functions in at least these ways.
 - To prevent idle curiosity.
 - To promote humility.
 - To rebuke false teachers and false prophets who try to fix dates, v. 21,22.
 - To keep us diligent in our duty as Christians.

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These are expanded notes of a fraternal address*

The Dead Sea Scrolls on the High Street

Part I

Alistair Wilson

Introduction

The year 1997 marked (almost certainly) the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls and so, once again, the significance of these ancient documents is a matter of great public interest. Already, volumes have been published to mark this jubilee in which highly competent scholars discuss questions of a technical nature.¹ A recent (May 1998) international conference held at New College, Edinburgh, indicates that academic interest is as strong in the author's homeland Scotland as in the rest of the world.

However, it is not only specialists who are interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls (hereafter, DSS). There is widespread public interest in the subject also and this, in certain respects, is something to be warmly welcomed. This is true simply because of the value of the DSS to archaeology; they have been described as "the greatest MS [manuscript] discovery of modern times",² and it is always valuable to be aware of developments in our knowledge of the ancient world. However, the fact that during the 1990s the DSS have been at the centre of some of the most startling, dramatic, and controversial events imaginable, leading to massive publicity in both the academic and popular press, has surely added to the public interest in these documents.

The phenomenal interest in the scrolls is once more demonstrated in the Scottish setting by the important exhibition, "Scrolls from the Dead Sea" which ran from 1st May to 30th August 1998 in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. Thousands of people flocked from all over the country (Glasgow was the only British venue for the exhibition) to see the tiny fragments of ancient leather parchment and to hear experts lecture on their significance.

Given the great interest in these ancient documents, it is worth our while taking some time to learn a little more about them. But when authors make claims about the Christian faith on the basis of the supposed contents of these documents, it is important that we are able to tell fact from fantasy, so that we neither lose our confidence in the certainty of our salvation in Christ, nor reject the valuable insights which these amazing discoveries have brought to light.

The Story So Far³

The first scrolls were discovered in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd boy who, according to the most familiar account, tossed a stone into a dark cave in the Judean wilderness as he searched for a lost sheep and was surprised to hear the sound of pottery breaking. When he entered the cave he found several clay jars which contained leather scrolls. The region in which the cave is situated bears the Arabic name, Khirbet Qumran.

It appears that the Bedouin were not particularly impressed with the new

discoveries. Edward Cook cites the recollections of the shepherd boy:

We kept them lying around the tent, and the children played with them. One of them broke in pieces and we threw the pieces on the garbage pile. Later we came back and found that the wind had blown all the pieces away.⁴

When one considers the vast amount that has been written about even the smallest sections of text from the scrolls, it is fascinating to imagine how much material became play material for Bedouin children. However, the Bedouin knew that Western scholars were often willing to pay substantial amounts of money for ancient documents so they took the scrolls to a dealer in Bethlehem known as Kando.⁵ Since he suspected that the strange writing on the scrolls might be Syriac, he and a friend took them to the Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem, Mar (his ecclesiastical title) Samuel in April 1947.

Mar Samuel recognised the writing as Hebrew, and asked to buy the scrolls. Unfortunately, when the Bedouin and the dealers returned, the gatekeeper of the monastery turned them away. Mar Samuel eventually realised the mistake and persuaded some of the Bedouin to sell him four scrolls.⁶ However, others had been so aggrieved that they went elsewhere, and a batch of three scrolls came to an antiquities dealer called Salahi who contacted the professor of archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, EL Sukenik. Sukenik's training and experience were ideal for making sense of this ancient writing. Sukenik bought the three scrolls; two of them on November 29 1947, "the very day on which the United Nations passed the resolution to create the state of Israel."⁷

The remaining four scrolls were still in the hands of Mar Samuel who was by now finding that these ancient documents were not so easy to sell. This led him to the most startling method of selling ancient documents: he placed an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* of June 1, 1954 (p. 14). It read,

"The Four Dead Sea Scrolls" Biblical Manuscripts dating back to at least 200BC, are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or a group.⁸

The advertisement was placed in the category of "Miscellaneous For Sale"! As strange a course of action as this sounds, it was effective because Professor Sukenik's son, Yigael Yadin, a military officer who was in the United States at the time, arranged to purchase the scrolls for a sum of \$250,000. They were then presented to the State of Israel and, together with the three already held by Sukenik they are now housed in the "Shrine of the Book" in the Israel Museum.

Over the decade following the first discoveries of 1947, a total of eleven caves were found, including cave 4 which contained a vast number of fragments but mostly in very poor condition. It was generally agreed that this represented the library of a monastery inhabited by the most sectarian members of a Jewish group known as the Essenes. Some of the documents were written by members of this group while others were brought to the site from elsewhere. There is still broad agreement on this view, although other views have been proposed.⁹

Clearly a vast amount of time was required to be spent on these texts by experts in Hebrew and Aramaic. The task demanded the formation of a team of specialists, and such a team was duly assembled. However, the composition of that team was to prove

the beginning of the rumours of conspiracy.

Before we come to these matters, however, we will consider some of the documents themselves.

Some Significant Documents

Numerous documents and fragments of documents have been found since the first discoveries in 1947, so that a collection of more than 6,000 photographs of scrolls or fragments of scrolls has recently been published. The word “fragments” is important, however, since many of them are very tiny with only a few characters on each. The number of documents which are either substantially intact, or significant, is much smaller.¹⁰

Before we get into the details of the individual scrolls, a word about the way in which the scrolls are normally identified. Each scroll or fragment is normally identified by means of a standard formula. It is very common to find reference to the scrolls in modern books about the Bible and so it is useful to know what the formula signifies. The formula begins with a number to identify the cave in which the document was found, followed by a capital Q to indicate that it was found at Qumran. Then follows the specific identification of the individual document, by means of either a number, an abbreviation, a group of letters, or a combination of these. Let us take two documents as examples. First we can take one of the first documents to be discovered, the interpretation of the OT book Habakkuk. This scroll was found in cave 1 (the first cave to be discovered) at Qumran, and so the formula begins 1Q. Next we discover that it is a “pesher” (or interpretation) which is identified by means of a lower case “p”, and that it relates to Habakkuk which is abbreviated to Hab. Thus the formula reads 1QpHab, and actually tells us quite a bit about the origin and content of the scroll.

The second example is the “Testimonia”, which quotes portions from several OT books. It is identified by the formula 4Q175, which tells us that it also is a Qumran document but found in cave 4. However, the number tells us nothing about the content of the scroll and is useful only for classification purposes. The first scrolls to be found were named rather than numbered because nobody expected to find so many more!

I will now identify a few of the most interesting scrolls or fragments. Some of these are very large but it should be said that some of the most interesting and controversial texts from Qumran are very small in physical size. However, we will begin with one of the largest scrolls discovered at Qumran:

The Isaiah Scroll Among the very first documents discovered in the first cave, there were two copies of Isaiah. This part of the find generated particular excitement since one of them contained virtually the complete text of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. (It became known as 1QIsa^a.) What was it that excited the scholars so much?

The answer, surprisingly enough, is that what they had found was almost exactly the same as what they had already. The significant difference was that the copy of Isaiah scholars now possessed was around one thousand years older than the oldest copy previously available.¹¹ The significance of this find was enormous! This was now the oldest copy of *any* OT book available and since two texts separated by about one thousand years proved to be virtually identical, the reliable transmission of the OT text was demonstrated in a way not possible previously. Many whole or partial copies of books which we find in our OT were among the documents found in the caves at

Qumran. Indeed, every one of our 39 canonical OT books was represented in the finds, with the exceptions of Nehemiah and Esther. However, Nehemiah, is not really an exception since in Hebrew it was bound with Ezra to form one document. Thus only Esther is not represented among the texts so far discovered. But this does not prove that Esther was not used at Qumran. Some of the larger books of the OT are only represented at Qumran by a few lines on a disintegrating fragment or two. All we can say is that any copies of Esther which may have been used at Qumran have not been preserved. These finds help to confirm that the Jews of Qumran held the documents of our OT in high regard, and that there was already an agreed collection of “canonical” texts.¹²

The Damascus Document Abbreviated as CD (for Cairo Damascus, since it was first discovered in a synagogue in Cairo in 1896), this scroll is one of the legal texts of the community.

The Manual of Discipline Edward Cook tells of the interesting background to the name of this scroll:

Burrows gave the name *Manual of Discipline* to the scroll...because it reminded him vaguely of the Methodist *Manual of Discipline* which he had in fact never read.¹³

It has been described as the equivalent of the constitution of the community and contains rules and regulations relating to the ongoing life of the community.

The Habakkuk Commentary This is a commentary on the first two chapters of our canonical OT book. Clearly the third chapter did not serve the purposes of the author. The method of interpretation known as “pesher” attempts to show how the events in the life of the Qumran community are found in the pages of scripture. This document gives us a fascinating insight into how the community read the Hebrew Bible and it also contains a famous description of the conflict between the “Teacher of Righteousness” (the founder of the Qumran sect) and “the Wicked Priest” (possibly the High Priest in Jerusalem at the time, though we cannot be sure).

The War Scroll This document tells of a forty-year war between the “sons of darkness” and the “sons of light”. It is clear that this is no ordinary battle but it is the final war. Members of the Qumran community will fight alongside angels and will at last know the blessing of God.

Some of the Works of the Torah Also known as 4QMMT (the letters represent the Hebrew words¹⁴ for the title), this letter is believed to have been written from the Qumran community (perhaps by their leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, to their priestly counterparts in Jerusalem).

The Copper Scroll This is one of the most startling finds among the Qumran scrolls. It is exactly as it sounds; a document “written” (or hammered) onto a sheet of copper which was then wound as a normal scroll. When it was found in Cave 3, however, it was impossible to open due to corrosion. It had to be taken to Manchester University where it was cut into thin vertical strips. It does not make for scintillating reading! However, its contents have got at least a few people excited, as we shall see.

4Q285 Known as Serekh ha-Milhamah, this text has been understood by some to speak of a “slain Messiah” with the verb “slain” bearing the meaning “pierced”. This is then linked to the notion of a crucified Messiah and the claim is made that this is a precursor of the crucifixion of Jesus. The text is very badly deteriorated, however, so

that any reading requires a lot of reconstruction. That being the case, we should note that several scholars have argued that the text actually speaks of a messiah who pierces. However, even if the translation “pierced messiah” is accurate, in the context of the text that simply describes the mutilation of a body on the battle field. Any theory that claims so much on the basis of such shaky evidence must be treated with extreme care.¹⁵

We could also have mentioned the longest scroll, the Temple Scroll, and the various hymns which indicate the piety of the community, but these will be left for the readers personal investigation!

Publications and Tried Patience

One of the fundamental objectives of the research committee was to make the contents of the scrolls available to the wider world (or at least the wider world of scholars) as soon as possible. Initially this appeared to be happening at a steady pace with several of the team producing initial publications at a relatively early stage – the original seven scrolls were all published within a decade of their discovery. Notable in this respect was one John Allegro who was a very capable researcher (he worked alongside FF Bruce for a short time at Manchester University). Unfortunately for everyone, Allegro did not restrict his literary output to his translation of the scrolls. Allegro was a self-confessed atheist who had quite open contempt for the religious convictions of his Christian (mainly, but not solely, Catholic) colleagues. While difference in religious perspective should not have impeded the task of transcription and translation in principle, Allegro’s public and virulent attacks on his colleagues’ religious beliefs led to significant tensions between the members of the translation team.

Allegro’s reputation as a serious academic researcher was seriously damaged by two further events. Firstly, in the mid-fifties, Allegro gave a BBC radio lecture in which he announced that research on the recently discovered scrolls had revealed that they worshipped a crucified Messiah and that they waited for him to return in glory. This being the case, it was clear that Christianity was not historical but was simply a repetition of beliefs previously held by a Jewish sect.

Allegro’s colleague could not remain silent, and so a letter was printed in *The Times* signed by the key figures in scroll research – de Vaux, Milik, Starcky, Skehan, and Strugnell. Edward Cook cites it as follows,

We are unable to see in the texts the “findings” of Mr Allegro ... It is our conviction that either he has misread the texts or he has built up a chain of conjectures which the materials do not support.¹⁶

Allegro retracted his claims but his determination to undermine Christianity was made clear. His was only one of numerous similar attempts in following years. The second blow to his credibility was somewhat different, however. In 1959-60 Allegro organised a treasure hunting expedition with the intention of discovering the staggering quantities of gold (it would be measured in tons) mentioned in the Copper Scroll. As I mentioned before, several members of the research team believed the descriptions to be fictitious and intended to fit into the setting of folklore. Allegro thought that this was simply a way of keeping others away from the real treasure and anyway, he supposed, the hunt might lead to new scrolls being discovered. Unfortunately for Allegro, neither treasure nor scrolls were found. He did, however, spoil part of the archaeological dig and attract

the anger of de Vaux, the team leader, who described his actions as “infantile behaviour”.

These incidents only go to show the kind of very human ambitions, jealousies and follies which have been all too evident through the years of scroll research. Perhaps it was because of distractions like these that progress in publication of scrolls slowed down dramatically but that reality certainly provided fuel for the fire of several conspiracy hunters and it is to them we shall turn in the second part of this article.

To be continued.

References

- ¹ One of the first of these is the important volume *The Scrolls and the Scriptures*, edited by S. E. Porter and CA Evans (Sheffield: SAP, 1997).
- ² William Foxwell Albright on seeing the photographs of the first scrolls to be discovered. See JC VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (London: SPCK, 1994), p. 5.
- ³ Here I rely particularly on O Betz and R Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican* (London: SCM, 1994), pp. 3ff., and VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, pp. 1-12.
- ⁴ Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 12.
- ⁵ His real name was Khalil Iskander Shahin (Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 12). The fact that he was also a shoemaker once again raises other fascinating possibilities regarding what might have happened to these leather scrolls!
- ⁶ VanderKam (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, p. 4) indicates that the purchase price was £24 for all four scrolls!
- ⁷ VanderKam *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, p. 4.
- ⁸ See the photograph in VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, plates between p. 83 and p. 84.
- ⁹ See G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (London: SCM, 1994), pp. 18-21. He highlights the alternative views of Garcia Martinez and van der Woude (Groningen Hypothesis – community was an Essene “splinter group”), and Golb (settlement was a fortress where Jerusalem library or libraries were hidden).
- ¹⁰ A very good survey of these is found in VanderKam’s book, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*.
- ¹¹ See VanderKam, p. 126, who dates 1QIs^a to approximately 100 BC, compared with the standard Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text or MT) dating to around AD 900.
- ¹² VanderKam, who is generally a particularly helpful guide in this subject area, is less convincing in his argument that the sectarians had a fairly open attitude to the canon (see especially his conclusions on p. 157). He appears to blur the important distinction between authoritative documents and canonical documents. There is no doubt that the sectarians regarded non-biblical documents as authoritative (as many churches regard various confessions, for example), but that does not imply that they regarded them as canonical.
- ¹³ Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 30
- ¹⁴ Miqsat Ma’aseh ha-Torah.
- ¹⁵ See particularly the rather technical but excellent article by M. Bockmuehl, “A ‘Slain Messiah’ in 4Q Serekh Milhamah (4Q285)” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.1 (1992) pp. 155-169.
- ¹⁶ Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 47.

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Calvin versus Calvinism Revisited

Tony Lane

Review article commenting on:

Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649

RT Kendall

Paternoster, 1997 (2nd edition), xii + 263pp., £19.99

Calvinus. Authentic Calvinism: A Clarification

Alan C Clifford

Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1996, 99pp., £5.95

The Extent of the Atonement. A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536-1675)

G Michael Thomas

Paternoster, 1997, ix + 277pp, £19.99

It has been said that the ultimate failure for an academic work is not to be attacked but to be ignored. By this criterion RT Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* has been hugely successful. Kendall argued that the English Puritan tradition that led to the Westminster Confession departs from the teaching of Calvin at important points. His thesis was not as pioneering a work as he implies, William Chalker and Homes Rolston III having argued for a similar (not identical) contrast in the 1960s and '70s. So why did Kendall's thesis arouse such controversy? One contributory factor was that Kendall was not just another American research student but Martyn Lloyd-Jones' (not immediate) successor at the Westminster Chapel. I understand that his thesis had received the seal of approval from the Doctor himself. This was never a purely academic debate. The real point at issue is, what is the legitimate Reformed heritage today?

So what is Kendall's thesis? It is perhaps best known for the provocative statement which opens the first chapter of his book: "Fundamental to the doctrine of faith in John Calvin (1509-64) is his belief that Christ died indiscriminately for all men." Kendall was not the first to affirm this, but he did succeed in stimulating a substantial debate on the topic and in generating a considerable bulk of literature. I personally have sixteen books, articles and papers that have been written on Calvin's view of the extent of the atonement since Kendall's thesis – and that does not include many shorter discussions in books and articles.

The question of the extent of the atonement is not, however, the prime focus of Kendall's thesis, which was originally entitled *The Nature of Saving Faith, from William Perkins (d. 1602) to the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649)*. He paints a sharp contrast between Calvin and the "experimental predestinarians" of the seventeenth century. For the former the seat of faith is the understanding; for the latter the will. For the former faith precedes repentance; for the latter it follows it. For the former

assurance of salvation is enjoyed by a “direct” act of faith; for the latter it requires a “reflex” act. They also differ as to the ground of assurance and the concept of the “temporary faith” of those who will not persevere.

Kendall’s thesis has been subjected to intense scrutiny and there are undoubtedly points at which it needs modification. The contrast between Calvin and the Calvinists is exaggerated in places. But the value of his thesis is not dependent upon his complete accuracy. That there is *some* contrast between Calvin and English Calvinism is very widely accepted. It is also in large measure due to Kendall that the matter has received so much attention in the intervening years.

Some will be disappointed to hear that Kendall’s book has been republished with no changes. Realistically the only alternative would have been a massive revision, taking into account a decade and a half of analysis and debate. In the light of his current calling and its demands the author cannot be blamed for drawing back from this option. But while the book may be unaltered it is enhanced by three additions. First there is a new, largely autobiographical, preface in which Kendall helpfully outlines the way in which he reached his conclusions. Secondly there is an appendix which contains many of the relevant passages from Calvin, especially from his commentaries, also from his sermons and treatises. Finally there is a second appendix which discusses the one passage where Calvin appears explicitly to deny that Christ died for all, thus remedying one of the blemishes of the original book, for which it was chided by reviewers – its failure to mention that passage. This appendix is an extract from Curt Daniel’s substantial and widely respected treatment of the topic.

Those who appreciate the passages given in the first appendix will be glad to have Alan Clifford’s *Calvinus*. Here ninety extracts from Calvin are given, on the universality of the atonement. These extracts overlap with Kendall’s appendix but each includes material not found in the other. The extracts are preceded by a useful introduction which argues that the key to Calvin’s view of the extent and efficacy of Christ’s death is his twofold approach to the will of God. We have to distinguish between God’s revealed will, which includes the gospel, and his secret will, which includes his decree of predestination. According to God’s revealed will or intention the death of Christ is universal in its scope, but conditional upon human response; according to his secret will or decree it is restricted in its scope but absolute and unconditional. Thus Calvin affirms *both* a conditional salvation made available to all *and* an efficacious, unconditional salvation given to the elect alone. It is this antinomy, the author claims, that makes sense of the diverse statements that Calvin makes on the subject.

The early history of the Reformed tradition is a complex matter. Partisan polemics, on either side, have tended to distort this. Some have been determined to prove that Calvin was a thoroughgoing Calvinist, by the criteria of the Synod of Dort. Others have been equally determined to prove that the Westminster Confession, say, was a betrayal of Calvin’s teaching. Underlying both approaches in their crude forms is a fundamental fallacy. The assumption is that there is a pure form of Reformed teaching (Calvin’s) and that all later Reformed teaching is either a legitimate development or a betrayal of it, against which at least two objections can be raised. First of all, the seventeenth-century Calvinists were more concerned to be faithful to Scripture than to Calvin or any other sixteenth-century figure. But leaving aside that objection, Calvin never enjoyed such a

unique position in the Reformed tradition. This tradition began with Zwingli and was further developed by other Reformers like Bucer. Calvin was one of a number of second-generation Reformed theologians. He was more prolific than the others and also considerably more gifted in expressing his ideas concisely and lucidly. For these and other reasons he was ultimately more successful in spreading his views, though others, such as Bullinger, also enjoyed considerable success at the time, especially in England. Eventually the Reformed tradition came to be known as “Calvinism”. But this should not cause us to forget that there was from the beginning diversity in the tradition and that at no point was conformity to the views of Calvin regarded as the test of orthodoxy. Those who, on this point or that, followed the position of Bucer or Bullinger rather than Calvin would have been surprised and annoyed to have been told that they were “betraying” the teaching of Calvin.

What is primarily needed today is not polemical works which set out to show who was faithful to Calvin and who betrayed him but works of careful scholarship which trace the intricate development of the Reformed tradition in the first century or so of its history. When it comes to the question of saving faith and assurance this has been done competently by Robert Letham whose 1979 thesis *Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to Dort* is hopefully soon to be published and by Joel Beeke whose thesis has been published as *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation*.

On the question of the extent and efficacy of Christ’s death Michael Thomas’ *The Extent of the Atonement* (his London Bible College PhD thesis) is the most thorough attempt to date to trace the doctrine from Calvin to the late seventeenth century. Having examined the views of a range of Reformed theologians and having discerned unresolved tensions in their theology he concludes that there never was “such a thing as a coherent and agreed “Reformed position” on the extent of the atonement.” Why then the lack of agreement and the unresolved tensions? He attributes this to the inner conflict between two distinct elements in the tradition. On the one hand all wished to affirm “the free promise, the unrestricted preaching of grace and the summons to all to believe”. But on the other hand they were all also committed to “a doctrine of the eternal predestination of certain individuals, as opposed to others” (pp. 249f.).

With Calvin the tension between the universal promise and unconditional election leads him to speak of redemption in two different ways. Thomas does not deny the strong thrust in Calvin’s teaching that the death of Christ was for all, but he detects other passages where the contrary is taught. “From the perspective of election, Christ died for ‘all sorts’ but not all individuals. From the perspective of the promise of the gospel, he died for all the world, even for those who do not participate in the purchased benefit” (p. 33). The tension between these two he relates to Calvin’s teaching of the two wills of God, his revealed and his hidden will. He notes that of these two wills it is the absolute will of predestination that is the more basic. “It is impossible to doubt [Calvin’s] concern to maintain a genuine universal promise. However, it continually becomes apparent that his concern to safeguard the eternal, hidden will of God is even greater” (p. 24).

Thomas is right to point to the ambivalence in Calvin’s thought and right to argue that the “particularism” of Beza and his followers could trace its roots to Calvin’s theology. But he exaggerates, giving the impression that Calvin was balanced between

“universalism” and “particularism” *when speaking of the cross*, while there can be little doubt that the overwhelming emphasis in Calvin is that Christ died for all. The particularist passages to which Thomas points all come in Calvin’s exegetical works where he is discussing the meaning of “all” in one or other specific biblical passage. The universalist teaching, by contrast, is also found in wider contexts, the most compelling being the very structure of the *Institutes* (barely mentioned by Thomas). Having in Book II expounded the work of Christ on the cross Calvin begins Book III by stating that what Christ has achieved for the human race is of no use unless it is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Atonement is for all; the application of its benefits is for the elect. What Thomas shows is not that Calvin teaches a particular atonement but that there are other aspects of his teaching which Calvin could have allowed and Beza later did allow to point to particular atonement.

One of Thomas’ recurring complaints against the Reformed theologians is that they failed to relate election adequately to Christ, that the election of certain persons lies behind Christ, and so, in election, we have to do with a hidden God. There is an undeclared assumption at work here: the Barthian principle that God is revealed only in Christ. The early Reformed doctrines of predestination are indeed, as Barth complained, guilty of transgressing this principle. But do they transgress it only because it has already been transgressed by the New Testament writers, indeed by the teaching of Jesus as recorded in John’s Gospel for example?

Thomas’ portrayal of the unresolved tensions within the Reformed tradition is persuasive. But what should we conclude from this? Should we assume that a good theology will have resolved all tensions into a logically consistent whole? Could it be that the Bible itself leaves us with tensions that we are called to maintain faithfully rather than resolve into logical coherence? Doctrines like the Trinity, the person of Christ and the relation between justification and sanctification all involve holding together in tension truths which it is hard to resolve logically without losing the biblical balance.

For Thomas the resolution of the problem is, in the last page and a half, to produce Karl Barth’s approach as a pointer to the way forward. I have problems with this. In the first place, Barth is produced like a “rabbit from a hat” without any discussion of the problems that might flow from his approach. Has Barth been any more successful at resolving these tensions than the earlier Reformed theologians? This question is not raised or answered. In my own view Barth does not resolve the question of predestination but simply evades it by applying the vocabulary of election to the doctrine of the atonement. This “concluding unscientific postscript” does not cohere well with the rest of the book.

These points of criticism do not alter the fact that here is a competent and insightful analysis of the early development of the Reformed doctrine of election. All who own some measure of loyalty to this tradition are strongly recommended to read this book and to ponder the issues that it raises.

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John Hick's Theodicy

Maurice Bowler

Theodicy is concerned with justifying the ways of God to Man (*theos*=God; *dikaioo*=justify). Anyone seeking to engage in this activity would need to believe in God, as understood by theists, and to believe that God is just. Just as justification is a forensic term so too the theodicy can be seen as a counsel for the defence whose basic premise is the "innocence" of his client.

In the case of John Hick's "Vale of Soul-Making" theodicy,¹ the writer is concerned to give a rational and Christian explanation for the presence of evil and suffering in the world, particularly as it impinges on the human race. Hick asks, quite rightly:

Can a world in which sadistic cruelty often has its way, in which selfish lovelessness is so rife, in which there are debilitating diseases, crippling accidents, bodily and mental decay, insanity and all manner of natural disasters be regarded as the expression of infinite creative goodness? Certainly all this could never by itself lead anyone to believe in the existence of a limitlessly powerful God.²

After this very powerful statement of the case against the "innocence" of his client, Hick seeks to show that although God has deliberately built this painful element into the world, it is for a good and benevolent purpose, i.e., that of "soul-making". Hick sees man being "initially set at an epistemic distance" from his Creator.³ This is an assertion that man's estrangement from God is a deliberate pre-condition of "soul-making" – it is an "initial" placement of man by God in that position. He then says:

... this very irrationality and this lack of ethical meaning contribute to the character of the world as a place in which true human goodness can occur and in which loving sympathy and compassionate self-sacrifice can take place.⁴

Stated in these terms, theodicy becomes a gigantic task. Hick recognises the presence of moral and natural evil and the consequent terrible suffering and anguish which follows but considers that in the final analysis it is worth it. He admits that it is God who has initiated all this pain but asserts that it was necessarily introduced by God into a Creation which might otherwise be bland and painless. But because a "bland and painless" Creation would lack the "soul-making" ingredient of pain, this evil had to be brought in. Hick recognises that on the surface this seems a rather far-fetched explanation. In the quotation given above he admits that "by itself" this situation would never "lead anyone to believe in the existence of a limitlessly powerful God."⁵

If Hick could achieve his object in justifying this "soul-making" theory it would certainly be a great achievement. As he admits, all the evidence seems to be piled up against him. He has conceded that God has chosen to work through a fantastically long and painful process of evolution in his plan of creation and he admits that the evil and cruelty seen in man and beast were built into the process (evolution means to "unfold" what is already there). He says of early man:

... the life of this being must have been a constant struggle against a hostile environment, and capable of savage violence against one's fellow human-being.⁶

This is not the traditional, classic picture of man's origin as presented by earlier Christian thinkers. Hick refers to Augustine⁷ as the pioneer of the "fall" explanation of evil but this is, of course, a biblical concept and was only adopted by Augustine, his predecessors and successors because it was in the Bible. Hick concedes that this view is "not logically impossible"⁸ but he says "I am in fact doubtful whether their argument is sound". He believes along with "most educated inhabitants of the modern world" that the account of the Fall is "myth" whereas the theory that "humanity evolved out of lower forms of life, emerging in a morally, spiritually and culturally primitive state" is the currently accepted view. Atheists tend to be amused by this accommodation of Christianity to include evolution because for them the great attraction of the evolutionary theory was that it dispensed with the need for a Creator. There is for them a blind, purposeless process at work, governed by time and chance, which has produced philosophers, theologians and scientists (and animals) without any directing intelligence or design behind it. If later adherents to this Victorian "ætiological legend" tended to deify the process, this could only be seen as an aberration rather than a true evolutionary insight. The fact that many Christians feel they can reconcile evolution and creation does not remove the challenge raised by the problem of evil. On this reading of history, the blame for evil has to be placed squarely on the Creator as the one who started the process of "nature, red in tooth and claw". Any improvement on original bestiality can only be attributed to man's self-achieved progress – what Bronowski has called "The Ascent of Man". As Hick expresses it:

... human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort [which have] a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process.⁹

Taking this slow build-up of human goodness as the result of human effort and the presence of natural and moral evil as part of God's design for his creation we see a reversal of traditional Christian theodicy. God is seen as the author of evil (for the best possible reasons) and man as the architect of good, who by his achievement wins the approval of his Creator. This reflects the rabbinic view of creation (Kidd 30b) which sees man as subject to two inclinations, the good (*YETZER HATOV*, and the evil (*YETZER HARA*). When God "saw everything he had made and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), the rabbis say that this pronouncement also included "the evil inclination" which was also seen as "very good". A Jewish legend on this theme tells of a time when the evil inclination was taken out of the world for a day. On that day the hens did not lay any eggs, nobody built any houses and no business deals were done. The obvious message here is that evil is a "necessary evil", like yeast in the dough which is an essential part of the bread-making process. There is even a Jewish saying which is used to excuse the peccadilloes of great men which asserts "The greater the Man, the greater the Yetzer" (*HARA*, evil inclination). This approach, like so much of rabbinic teaching, is man-centred, in that it finds the answer to all problems in human wisdom.

In his presentation, Hick, like the rabbis, makes a virtue of necessity and having decided the outcome of the problem of evil on the basis of what appears to be the case, he works back, in a *posteriori* fashion to an original situation in which God includes evil in his creation "mix" in order to achieve the best outcome. Perhaps an illustration

will provide a parallel. An importer of expensive tropical fish found that the journey, by air, left the fish in a weak and sluggish condition on arrival, with several dead. He hit on the idea of including a “cannibal” fish with each consignment and found that the continual activity this caused kept the fish alert and lively until their arrival, even though some succumbed to the “cannibal”. The importer felt, like Dr Pangloss, that “all was for the best” in the end.

Samuel Johnson, in his interesting book *Rasselas, prince of Abissinia* (sic), approaches what might be called “the problem of innocence” (which underlies Hick’s approach) in a different way from Hick. He raises the issue of untried innocence which never attains to virtue and his hero Rasselas and his sister Nekayah and their mentor, the philosopher Imlac have to dig their way out of their home in the “Happy Valley”, where “every prospect pleases” and not even “man is vile”, to quote the old hymn. They escape in order to experience “the real world”. Johnson here joins Hick in affirming that a painless world is an incomplete world and that sheer unalloyed pleasantness is cloying dull and enervating. Although Johnson is not presenting a theodicy he is saying what Hick is saying, that misfortune and pain constitute the “spice” which gives zest and flavour to the dish of life. A similar thought is expressed by those who say, half-jokingly, that the world would be a dull place without “a few rogues”. By extension, this judgement would apply even more strongly to the “fellowship of saints above” which would be of course similarly deficient of “rogues”. Of course Dr Johnson knew better than this but his presentation could be used by Hick in support of his argument for “beneficent evil” as a necessary ingredient in a wisely constructed creation. But whereas Hick asserts that the Creator was too wise to omit the necessary spice of evil in his creation, Dr Johnson seems to envisage a condition which, because of the omission of evil, leaves the inhabitants of Happy Valley either as mere children at aimless play or dissatisfied seekers after unattainable adventure and meaningful challenge.

All this presupposes that God did not intend that the innocence of his human creatures should be tested so that innocence could develop into virtue by victory in testing. Hick, in rejecting the Eden account, cuts himself off from an elegant and satisfying presentation, even if it were viewed as a myth (which is his position). Far from imposing natural and moral evil upon the human race as a “medicine”, a necessary training device which goes disastrously wrong, Genesis sets a scene which is presided over by a loving, benevolent and communicating Creator. The scene is one of perfect felicity with plants and animals and scenery perfectly suited to the human being placed there. One thing is lacking and that is a mate for Adam. He is shown that none of the animals is suitable to be his mate and as “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18) a mate is envisaged for Adam. The Amplified Version of Genesis 2:18 is very suggestive. It reads “It is not good (sufficient, satisfactory) that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper meet (suitable, adapted, completing) for him”. This indicates the wise foresight of the Creator in making provision for the man’s need of companionship. The need of useful, interesting occupation is also provided in that the man is given the task of “dressing” the garden and exercising dominion over the animals. This is in contrast to the situation in Johnson’s Happy Valley described in *Rasselas* where the inhabitants are idle and bored, with all their wants supplied without effort on their part.

The element of discipline is also present in Eden, whereas it is missing in the Happy Valley. In Eden a prohibition is placed on the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is a defining feature of Adam's life which fixes the servant and master relationship between the man and his Creator. Adam has a place, a defined role in the scheme of things and he knows where he stands. His covenant relationship with God gives him a status and also fixes a limit beyond which he must not go. This is what every child looks for and for which every child pines when he is met with parental indifference. As Johnson and Hick both realise, this Edenic innocence is not enough for full human development and innocence has to be tested. It was not God's intention that man should be "tested to destruction" like some prototype car which could be easily replaced. Adam was a "one-off" model at that stage and his experiences would have age-long consequences. Satan/Diabolos had a role here to "confront man with an alternative to what is known to be right", which could serve as a definition of temptation. In order for man to freely choose what is right and thus show his love and allegiance to the author of righteousness, the possibility of an alternative had to be presented to him. This was the case even in Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) and the agent of this temptation was also Satan and the response made by Christ was also available to Adam – the use of the Word of God (in Adam's case, the prohibition). Adam and Eve, although exposed to the power and wiles of Satan, were not without defence. God had spoken, saying,

Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:16-17).

This was a clear prohibition with a dread sanction attached to it and it provided both Adam and Eve with an answer to Satan in the event of any enticement to disobey. Satan's approach to Eve was aimed at misrepresenting God's word, saving "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1) Eve's reply should have been a faithful quoting of God's word but she gave an "unfaithful" quotation saying:

We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said "Ye shall not eat of it, *neither shall ye touch it*, lest ye die". (Genesis 3:2,3)

The words "... neither shall ye touch it" are not recorded as coming from God, so it seems that Eve took it on herself to embellish God's statement, thus undermining the authority of the Divine command. Satan's reply is an outright denial of God's statement, saying "*Ye shall not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4). This should have drawn from Eve a strong reproof to Satan as she knew this was a lie, on the authority of God's pronouncement. But Satan then went on to entice Eve with the promise of God-like powers and this enticement, together with the attractive appearance of the forbidden fruit, moved her to rebel against God by eating it. She compounded her sin by giving some to Adam, her husband, who also ate. This moment in human history is very important for any understanding of the origin of evil. It was in God's will that Adam and Eve should be tempted because if they had resisted they would have emerged stronger, moving from innocence to virtue, joining with God in the stand against evil and preserving the creation against the depredations of the Satanic onslaught. As it

transpired, this personal fall by the representatives of the human race, brought about the fall of the whole human race. As Paul puts it, ... by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19) and not only mankind was brought into subjection to sin and consequent evil, but also:

... the creation was made subject to vanity ... the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8: 20-22)

Surely this account of the origin and entry of evil into the world ought to figure in any *Christian* theodicy, especially as it clears God of any initiating responsibility for pain and evil and places the blame squarely on Satan as saboteur and Man as collaborator in the ruin of God's good creation.

Hick's theodicy shows man as the "victim" of evil for which he bears no responsibility and his rise from an imagined bestial past is seen as an achievement for which he deserves the credit and for which God is supposed to be grateful and pleased. This is indeed "God in the dock", with very little help from his professed counsel for the defence. Hick's scenario is very little different from Voltaire's approach in *Candide*. Whereas Hick is restrained and dignified in his treatment of the suffering and evil in the world, "glossing" over the anomalies and injustices everywhere present with his "Vale of Soul-making" rationalisation of suffering, Voltaire makes merry over suffering. Doctor Pangloss who, like Hick, believes there is a benevolent purpose in all that happens and that "all is for the best, in the best of all possible worlds" as Leibnitz taught, is made a figure of fun. Pangloss is made to suffer any amount of unjust suffering, even seeming to die and then coming back from the dead to suffer again, but his disciple Candide is able at last to say "... everything is not too bad".¹⁰

Voltaire's lampoon is unfair and does nothing to throw light on the tragic problem of evil. But what it does do is to expose the vulnerability of Hick's theodicy and any other like it and it shows that it does not do what a theodicy is supposed to do, that is to "declare God righteous". Voltaire and other critics of the "Panglossian" school are able to show that the theory of a divinely sabotaged creation which is continually spoiled and hindered by its Creator raises more problems than it solves. The humble believer does not presume to explain the inexplicable and he follows Wittgenstein's dictum which affirms that where nothing can be said, silence is appropriate. This is not to say that theodicy should not be attempted but rather that it should begin from defensible premises. In a court of law, in Britain at least, the accused is presumed innocent until proved guilty. It is certainly not for the defending counsel to start from the premise of Divine guilt. Unfortunately for Hick and other advocates of theistic evolution, their position forces them to see evil embedded in the scheme of things from the very beginning. Once this concession is made, the argument is inexorably drawn into a process which can only seek to justify God's involvement with evil, rather than justify his righteousness, which is the declared aim of theodicy.

In conclusion, it has to be said that Hick's presentation of "The Vale of Soul-making" theodicy fails to convince because of the fallacious premise on which it is built. Once the presence of evil is attributed to God, the road is taken to an inevitable fastening of blame for evil on the Creator who is said to have implanted it into the universe. Hick is turning his back on the Biblical account which "For most educated inhabitants of the modern world ... must be regarded as myth rather than as history ...

they see all this as part of a pre-scientific world-view". He sees this Biblical view "... even if logically possible ... radically implausible" so he feels he must look elsewhere for light on the problem of evil".¹¹ After considering Hick's theodicy it would seem that, for those who reject the Biblical explanation, the search must go on.

References

- ¹ John Hick, "Soul-making and Suffering" in *The Problem of Evil*, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 168-188; John Hick "An Irenaean Theodicy" in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Stephen T Davis (ed.) pp. 39-52 (Westminster John Knox Press, 1981).
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- ³ *Problem*, p. 177.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- ⁵ *Encountering Evil*, p. 4.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Problem*, p. 169.
- ¹⁰ Voltaire, *Candide*, p. 163, (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1997).
- ¹¹ *Encountering Evil*, p. 41.

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The book of Job is one of the most remarkable in the Old Testament. Apart from its inspiration, and considered simply as a literary production, it bears the stamp of uncommon genius. It is occupied with a profound and difficult theme, the mystery of divine providence in the sufferings of good men. This is not treated in the abstract, in simple prose or in a plain didactic method. But an actual case is set vividly before the reader, in which the difficulty appears in its most aggravated form. By an extraordinary accumulation of disasters a man of unexampled piety is suddenly cast down from his prosperity, and reduced to the most pitiable and distressed condition. There is then delineated in the most masterly manner the impression made on others by the spectacle of these calamities, as well as the inward conflict stirred in the sufferer himself, his bewilderment and sore distress, his alternations of despair and hope, his piteous entreaties for a sympathy which is denied him and his irritation under the unjust suspicions and censures which are cast upon him, his wild and almost passionate complaints against the Providence which crushes him, intermingled with expressions of strong confidence in God which he cannot abandon. This wild tumult in his soul is graphically depicted in its successive stages, until we are brought to the final solution of the whole, and the vindication at once of the providence of God and of his suffering servant.

WH Green, *Conflict and Triumph: The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*
(to be reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in Summer 1999)

Foundations Subscriptions

The November 1999 issue of *Foundations* will be the last in this three year series. A Renewal Form will be enclosed with each pre-ordered copy of Issue 43, giving details of the rates for the next series to cover the years 2000-2002. Regular readers are advised to complete the Renewal Form in the autumn to ensure that their subscription is continued.

Book Reviews

Jesus and the Logic of History

Paul W. Barnett

Apollos, Leicester, 1997, 182pp., pb., £12.99

This is the third volume in the series edited by DA Carson, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, but interestingly the author (who is Bishop of North Sydney, Australia) does not follow the established pattern of examining an important theological theme. Rather, in these published lectures (given in Moore College, Australia in 1996), he moves into the realm of history, and particularly into the daunting but exciting world of "life of Jesus research" or the "third quest". In particular, he sets out to address the problem that in the present discussion there "are as many Jesuses as there are people who write about him" (p. 11).

Chapter 1 introduces the issues, noting the renewed confidence of recent scholarship in what can be known of Jesus and yet the general unwillingness to acknowledge anything unique about him. He raises the question of whether this approach is as historical as is claimed, comparing the views of various historians. His insistence that all possible sources must be examined is a particularly significant contribution.

Barnett's thesis is that Jesus can only be understood as an historical figure when he is assessed in the light of the events which followed his ministry. In particular, the proclamation of the early Christians, as found in the letters of Paul and other New Testament documents, is fundamentally important for appreciating the impact of the historical figure of Jesus on his followers.

The letters are particularly valuable sources of historical information, it is

argued, because they are not self-consciously historical documents. Therefore, any information that is gleaned from them forms a valuable framework for comparing the accounts concerning Jesus in the Gospels. In this connection, Barnett discusses the concept of "tradition" in Paul, showing that the historical Jesus lies at the heart of Paul's preaching.

In his chapter on "Jesus in the Gospels", Barnett makes his view plain. Elaborating on a statement made by M. Bockmuehl (who constructs a similar argument), Barnett writes, "Not only is ... a 'causal continuity' between Jesus and the faith of the early church 'historically legitimate', but any lesser interpretation would be historically implausible" (p. 102). Barnett is aware of the different emphases of the four Gospels; he addresses the question of whether Jesus can be reconstructed from these documents, and later he discusses how Jesus teaching would have found its way into written form. In these discussions he is both sensitive to the problems and faithful to the Gospels.

A brief final chapter on the death of Jesus challenges modern scholarship (as Ben Witherington has already done) to take sufficient account of the death of Jesus as an exceptionally significant part of the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus.

This is a helpful volume which provides a strikingly different approach to the study of Jesus from many contemporary works, and therefore challenges the validity of a number of their conclusions. It deserves a wide readership, including both students and interested Christians, but I fear that such a readership might be restricted by the fairly high price for a relatively slim paperback.

Jesus and the Gospels

Craig L. Blomberg

Apollos, Leicester, 1997, 440pp., hb., £16.99

Craig Blomberg has produced an admirable textbook for theological students coming to serious study of the Gospels and Jesus for the first time. In his introductory remarks, Blomberg explains how the book developed out of twelve years of teaching students and attempting to provide a balance between thorough coverage of material and opportunity for discussion and application of what is learned. The end result is a volume that is comprehensive and yet clear, and will be of great value both to students and their teachers.

The book is composed of five main parts. The first deals with details of the historical setting of Jesus' ministry, both historical and religious. The chapter on socioeconomic factors indicates the value of a fresh survey which takes account of recent research.

The second part deals with methods of biblical criticism. This is always a tricky issue to address without alienating some Christians and baffling others, but Blomberg provides a sensibly brief outline of the significance of textual criticism, followed by fuller, yet clear, discussions of both historical and literary criticism. Inevitably, this is a demanding part of the book and demands some significant level of concentration and commitment, but Blomberg helpfully explains the value of persevering by showing how Luke indicates in his preface to his Gospel that he made use of earlier sources and composed his own distinctive account of the life of Jesus.

The third section is composed of brief introductions to each of the four Gospels. Thankfully, Blomberg does not wade his way through the jungle of evidence and

arguments related to the traditional introductory questions regarding authorship and date, etc. (The job has already been done well by Guthrie and more recently by Carson, Moo and Morris.) Instead, he provides a very readable theological introduction to each Gospel which takes account of structure and important theological emphases. This is both more memorable and more illuminating for the student. Having traced the distinctive contributions of each Gospel, on the other hand, Blomberg is then in a position to make brief but sensitive comments on the historical matters.

The fourth part which surveys the life of Christ is the longest section of the book. The first chapter deals with the history of the "Quest of the Historical Jesus", along with matters of chronology. Here as elsewhere in the book, clear charts make the information more accessible. This chapter is followed by others on the infancy narratives and then the beginning of Jesus' ministry, through to a thorough chapter on "Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection".

The final part briefly discusses the historical reliability of the Gospels and the theology of Jesus. The former chapter deals with issues on which Blomberg has written more fully previously, yet it is a useful survey of the discussion with reference to important recent literature. The latter chapter surveys Jesus' teaching on issues such as the kingdom of God, ethics, redemption and Christology.

Each chapter concludes with suggested literature for further study, graded according to the experience and competence of the reader. The literature is consistently both appropriate and up to date, reflecting a good range of perspectives. Questions at the end of each chapter are a helpful means of review and consolidation of learning, and also provide teachers with useful material for class discussions. The book concludes

with indices for Authors, Subjects and Scripture citations.

There is a certain amount of overlap between this volume and Blomberg's 1987 book, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, but not so much as to depreciate the value of either. Indeed, many teachers will wish the former volume continued good health (and perhaps a facelift?) while greeting the new addition with enthusiasm.

Alistair I. Wilson

The Person of Christ

Donald MacLeod

IVP, Leicester, 1998, 303pp., £14.99

This volume is the seventh in what is proving to be a most stimulating series of theological works published under the general title, *Contours of Christian Theology*. The series preface by Gerald Bray, its editor, might well be encapsulated in some theological equivalent of the *Starship Enterprise's* stated mission: "To boldly go where no man has gone before!" It indicates that these studies are intended to build on material already extant in the standard handbooks of theology and go on to explore the interface between systematic theology and the contemporary world.

In light of such an introduction, it is striking that Donald MacLeod spends so much time in the past as opposed to the present. Saying that is in no sense meant as a criticism but rather as a commendation. He demonstrates in a most constructive fashion that so much confusion in the realm of contemporary theological studies arises from the fact that modern theology has in many cases cut itself loose from its roots in Scripture and historical theology, especially in this most central of biblical doctrines which was the focus of such concentrated reflection in the early centuries of church history.

The first five chapters of the book are grouped together and entitled, "'Very God of very God' – from the gospels to Nicea," while the remainder in the second half, "'Very God, very man' – to Chalcedon and Beyond."

Although the work is prefaced with an apology for the length of time it took in being written and its consequent failure to take into account the most recent of literature on the subject, it is refreshingly up-to-date in the way it answers many of the problems thrown up by the twentieth century debates over Christology. The author's presupposition that the Gospels provide access to the real Jesus is stated from the outset and set forth without reservation throughout. He has no hesitation in asserting that the Christology of the Gospels is "from above", despite the insistence of Pannenberg and other contemporary theologians that such an approach is impossible. Thus the pattern of the Gospels is followed in this consideration of Jesus in such a way as to take seriously the humanness of Christ. Yet in his revisiting of these issues from Tertullian to Barth and Praxeas to Irving, what is proffered does not degenerate into mere parrot-like repetition of past definitions.

By taking us immediately into a discussion of the Virgin Birth of Christ, MacLeod challenges the contemporary insistence that Christology "from above" is impossible. He takes the record in the Gospels at face value and follows their own pattern in introducing Jesus in this way. This follows through into chapters which explore the pre-existence of Christ and his deity. "The Jesus of History" takes us across "Lessing's Ditch" to the fact that the early church had no significant problems in accepting that Jesus was divine. This approach obviously takes the author into conflict with Bultmann and his scepticism

at this critical point. The final chapter in this first section of the work deals with "The Christ of Faith" and brings us right up to date with contemporary issues, interacting constructively, for example, with the Christology of John MacArthur in the area of eternal Sonship.

The humanity of Christ becomes the focus as we are taken into a discussion of the incarnation. We are helpfully warned of a mere scholastic approach to such significant truth and reminded of the need for a true understanding of this doctrine to be suffused with faith and love. In this and following chapters, most of the major Christological heresies from the early church are surveyed both in their original expression and also in the different forms in which they have surfaced at different times in church history.

The treatment of *kenosis* from the second chapter of Philippians brings out the fine balance between exegesis and theological formulation, warning against popular expressions of doctrine which are not adequately supported by the textual evidence they claim.

The penultimate chapter brings us into the struggle of Gethsemane and the final chapter to the unashamed exclusiveness of Christ as the only Saviour as he is presented in the New Testament.

It is impossible to read this work without being conscious of the much publicised circumstances which formed a backdrop to its writing (something to which the author alludes obliquely in his preface.) At the same time it is impossible not to acknowledge that this is a work which commends itself for its thoroughness and orthodoxy, combined with a sense of reverence and awe. Professor MacLeod is insightful and incisive in the way he deals with recent and contemporary critical scholarship and leads, not just to a fresh

endorsement of historic evangelical Christology, but to a sense of holy adoration in the presence of such a glorious Saviour.

The closing epilogue acknowledges that the canon of theological reflection is never closed. Each generation is faced with fresh issues which demand renewed deliberation. The church can only be grateful to this professor of theology for the way in which he brings the timeless light of Christ to shine into the darkness of a modern world.

Mark G. Johnston

The Acts of the Apostles, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary

Ben Witherington III

Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1998, 874pp., £19.99

As Don Carson noted in his 1993 edition of *New Testament Commentary Survey*, "The Book of Acts is still not particularly well served by commentaries". The shelves of many ministers' libraries probably bear this out. In the age of the mega-commentary this one will fill quite a large space, and it will be space well-filled. As a *Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* particular attention is paid to the background of Acts, its relationship to literary forms of the day, and the way Luke selects and fashions his material to clarify the Christian faith for Theophilus and establish him in it. In a brief, fascinating *Foreword* Witherington says it is his belief that Acts "was a document written to be read aloud, and the author attended to his writing so that what he had written could be rhetorically effective when read and heard by the first listener or listeners." From time to time the commentary draws attention to Luke's use of *paranomasia*, and seems to delight

in word-play itself, so that not only are the section headings frequently alliterative, but 9:1-19a is entitled *The Assaulting of Saul*, and 25:1-12 *An Appealing Time with Festus*!

There is a thorough *Introduction* of 100 pages, half of which is taken up with *Acts and the Question of Genre* and *Luke-Acts and Rhetoric*. The final section of the *Introduction*, *Acts and Hermeneutics*, raises the important issue of what in Acts is normative for the church today, "Luke does not encourage us simply to ... assume that all the early church did and said should be replicated today." The text of Acts is not printed in the commentary; it appears to be taken for granted that readers have their English text before them. There is no close word by word exegesis. The commentary is broken up by excursions called *A Closer Look* – 25 in all, which are printed in smaller type. There is also another excursus called, *Chronological Comparison – Paul's Letters and Acts* and two appendices, the second being a substantial discussion of *Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity*. Some of the *Closer Looks* are particularly interesting; for example *Luke's Use of Sources in Acts* considers the lodgings used by Paul and Luke, "Lodging is important... because it provided a venue where Christians could meet, eat, pray, preach and relate stories... these residences may well have become places where oral and written Christian traditions were not just passed on but also collected." There are also illustrations at various points in the text and a map of Paul's missionary journeys.

While Witherington presents forceful arguments for the historicity of Luke's account, it is disappointing to find him say, "Luke could have made a mistake in his dating of Theudas. This must be

frankly admitted." If Luke was not only a careful historian, but also writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit such a concession is not necessary. Some of the more theological statements, 4:12 for example, receive rather meagre treatment. In view of the importance of a verse like this for the contemporary church one might have expected a more thorough discussion than he gives.

It is a pity to have to sound any negative note because there is a great deal that is informative and stimulating in this commentary. Richard Bauckham, on the back cover, is quoted as saying, "It is full of fresh insights..." and this is certainly the case. Note, for example, the suggestion that Ethiopia (not Rome) represents the "end of the earth". So chapter 8 takes the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth even before the conversion of Saul. Students and pastors will find considerable benefit from this commentary.

Paul E. Brown

Strategy of the Spirit

J Philip Hogan and the growth of the Assemblies of God Worldwide 1960-1990
 Everett A. Wilson

Paternoster Press, 214pp., Price £6.99

Gordon Fee once joked that where he grew up the phrase "Pentecostal Theologian" was considered an oxymoron. There is also something of a paradox about the title of this highly readable account of AOG growth. Yet like Lloyd-Jones' definition of preaching as "logic, on fire," there is a compelling resonance to the title *Strategy of the Spirit*, it reminds me of the dynamic redirection of Paul by the Spirit which opened Europe up for the gospel. This exciting historical account is built

around the imposing figure of J. Philip Hogan who was Director of Missions for AOG during the three decades covered by this book. Everett Witson writes: "An AOG national church is listed as the largest or the second largest Protestant denomination in almost a quarter of the countries of the world, making it one of the most effective vehicles for extending the historical Christian faith in our time." What then was the strategy? One factor is visionary leadership; little of lasting value is accomplished without key people. Hogan was a man who discerned the time, grasped opportunities and was open to the prevailing wind of the Spirit. Wilson describes him as "A man of strong convictions and courageous action, Hogan was not afraid to face new challenges and adapt to change." The second factor is the use of an effective model of church planting. The continuing presence of foreign missionaries was not regarded as indispensable, instead the AOG missions operated on "indigenous" church principles. This meant working hard at enabling local believers to fulfill roles of responsibility. This trust invested in local leadership and the granting of permission for the AOG churches of each country to establish their own distinctive identity has served to promote good stable grassroots growth. A further factor is the emphasis on the movement's application to a single task: Christian conversion and spiritual development. Here is a group that has been especially good at reaching lost people. The book also honestly faces the scandals which mar its history, the downfalls of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker etc. are analyzed and the dangers of the abuse of power noted. This was a period when the AOG movement had its fingers burnt. Jimmy Swaggart in particular had a considerable missionary network. The

lesson that no-one should be allowed to be so big that they can operate without proper accountability was learnt, albeit belatedly.

Mention is also made of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul South Korea, and its phenomenal growth. Planted by Pastor David Yonngi Cho in a shack in the aftermath of the Korean War, it has now grown to a congregation of 700,000 which fills a stream of Sunday services in the largest (Protestant) ecclesiastical edifice on our planet. There is no critical analysis of this often controversial congregation or of its rather idiosyncratic senior pastor. This is a book that celebrates rather than dissects a movement which has come of age and is clearly here to stay.

Here is a book that demands that we do not ignore nor lightly dismiss a group that now numbers 30 million members worldwide. This account of bold initiatives in virgin territory, perseverance despite misunderstanding or rejection by mainstream Christianity, cruel setbacks and great suffering dispels many of the accusations of froth and bubble often directed at Pentecostalism. Facing the challenge of mission in the 21st Century and beyond we could do far worse than be informed by a group that has made such an energetic impact on the last quarter of the 20th Century.

John Woods

The Inclusive Language Debate (A Plea for Realism)

D.A. Carson

IVP and Baker, 1998, 197pp+notes and indexes, £9.99

In this book Don Carson is trying to shed light (not heat; there is plenty of that already) on the vexed issue of putting

“people” instead of “men” in Bible translations—and lots of other similar changes. The New RSV uses so-called “inclusive” language (i.e. language that does not exclude women by the way it refers to people or by the use of he/him/his when it could be a woman), and an inclusive language NIV was published in Britain, with an American version in the pipeline. However, a storm of protest broke in the US, which led to the formulation of some essentially anti-inclusive language translation principles at Colorado Springs; and now the NIV translation committee is revising its inclusive language guidelines, presumably in a slightly “conservative” direction.

Carson is a very interesting man to read on such a topic because not only does he know a lot about linguistics and translation, but he is ideologically right in the middle on this one: he takes a clear complementarian rather than egalitarian view of male/female roles, yet is more than a little sympathetic, on linguistic grounds, to inclusive language translations.

First he describes the crisis and then sets out the NIV translation committee principles (that led to the NIVI) as well as the Colorado Springs principles. After this, we come to the meat: thirty pages on what translation inevitably involves because of the nature of language and the differences between languages. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book. We discover that you cannot translate anything and keep “the same” words: “... it is impossible to map the words of one language onto the words of another” (p. 48). We learn here and elsewhere in the book that a word’s referent is not the same as its meaning—so in James 5:17 *anthropos* refers to a man (Elijah) but does not mean “man” as opposed to woman, but “human being”. We learn that a “gloss”, or translation

equivalent (i.e. a one or two-word way of expressing a Greek or Hebrew word in English) is not the same as the *meaning* of the word. We also learn in chapter 4, the other really linguistically meaty part of the book, that different languages have enormously varying number systems and gender systems—i.e. the way the gender of words in one language function is not the same as in another language. Thus the Hebrew word for Spirit, *RUACH*, is feminine and is treated as feminine a number of times in the Old Testament; but Hebrew and English do not have the same gender system, so there is no need to use the English feminine third singular pronoun. His central thesis is summed up on p. 98: “The argument that attaches a particular formal equivalent in gender assignment to faithfulness to the Word of God is profoundly mistaken in principle. It understands neither translation nor gender systems.”

Carson then applies these facts of language to the two conflicting sets of principles, and comes out *largely* in favour of the inclusive language ones. After this he applies his approach to various Biblical passages, asks if the English language really is changing and pleads for Christians, even when they disagree with one another, not to do so in a manner that puts all sensible non-Christians off the faith by the irrationality and condemnation-by-association employed.

Not only is a vast amount of light shed on the inclusive language debate, but the insights into the limitations of *any* translation are calculated to take 98% of the unhelpful steam out of the whole translation issue—apart from textual questions, of course!

Rev. Christopher Bennett

EDITORIAL POLICY

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
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Annual Old Testament Literature Survey (1999)

Philip Eveson

There are plenty of helps these days for preachers and students to carefully exegete and expound the Old Testament text. Only books which have appeared in the last two years are included in this survey.

We begin by drawing attention to two unique dictionaries. The first is the **New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis** under the general editorship of **WA Van GEMEREN** and published in the UK by **Paternoster Press, 1997** in five volumes. It contains four parts. Part one is a guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis and includes articles on textual criticism, the canon, history, literature, biblical theology and hermeneutics. Part two, the bulk of the work, provides a very useful Hebrew lexicon and topical dictionary. Volume five contains the final two parts which comprise an integrated cross-reference system and indices. The work enables those with no knowledge of Hebrew to use all the material to good advantage. At the close of each entry and article there is an up-to-date bibliography. Each book of the Old Testament is considered from a theological perspective. Overall this is a very useful and satisfying resource for ministers and Bible students and, dare I say, excels its New Testament counterpart.

Secondly, there is the massive one-volume **Dictionary of Biblical Imagery** published by **IVP (USA/UK), 1998**. The general editors are **Leland RYKEN, James WILHOIT, and Tremper LONGMAN III**. Biblical and literary scholars were involved in the production with quite a number of contributions from the United Kingdom. As the subtitle explains, the dictionary is "an encyclopedic exploration of the images, symbols, motifs, metaphors, figures of speech and literary patterns of the Bible". The topics covered immediately distinguish this from other Bible dictionaries. For instance, there are articles on "Cheat the Oracle", "Domineering Mother, Wife", "Gestures", "Lying Prostrate", "Refuser of Festivities", "Sibling Rivalry" and "Well, Meeting at the". The dictionary also draws attention to the imagery, rhetorical features and literary devices in each book of the Bible. Surprisingly, there is neither an article on "preacher" or "preaching" nor any reference to it under other headings. The nearest it gets, are two sentences on the "Herald" under the general subject of "Authority". There are 26 columns of text on "Jesus, Images of" and over 13 columns given to an essay on "Rhetorical Patterns". A fascinating introduction includes a list of archetypes of ideal experience and their opposites and closes with an exhaustive index of biblical references followed by a subject index. The book is aimed primarily not at "scholars but laypeople".

Two books on Old Testament subjects have recently been published by Apollos (an imprint of IVP) in the "New Studies in Biblical Theology" series, edited by **DA Carson**. Number 4 in the series is **Daniel J ESTES, Hear, My Son. Teaching and learning in Proverbs 1-9, 1997**. The author expounds some of the leading themes in

the first main part of this neglected book of Proverbs. His main goal, however, is to show what it says and implies about education. It will, for this reason, be of special interest to teachers and parents.

The sixth monograph in the series is by **J Gary MILLAR, *Now Choose Life. Theology and ethics in Deuteronomy*, 1998.** This scholarly work started life as an Oxford DPhil. thesis. Against the background of the theology of Deuteronomy, Millar handles the ethical teaching in a fresh and careful way. The author's preface reveals his pastoral concern: "It is my conviction of the relevance of Deuteronomy for the church that has brought me back to it again and again, and while I hope that this book makes some small contribution to the critical study of Deuteronomy, my greater burden is that it might enable some pastors and teachers to bring its vibrant message to bear on churches and communities in a new and more relevant way."

A number of evangelical commentaries have seen the light of day in the last couple of years.

For the early part of Genesis there is **Douglas F KELLY, *Creation and Change. Mentor (Christian Focus)*, 1997.** As the subtitle indicates this commentary has a specific purpose of expounding "Genesis 1:1-2:4 in the light of changing scientific paradigms". There is a wealth of information and a wide range of apt quotations, from the Early Church Fathers to modern day writers. He uses the latest scientific knowledge to counteract those who use science to reject the biblical account. Dr Kelly unashamedly and persuasively argues for a literal interpretation of the account of creation in Genesis 1. He engages at length with proponents of the "Framework Hypothesis" such as Meredith Kline and Henri Blocher. His discussion of Hebrew words will need to be supplemented with the comments of Wenham and Young. Kelly is sometimes too dependent on Cassuto the Jewish commentator. The final chapter considers the Sabbath and presents a good case for Christians observing it on the first day of the week.

Also under the **Mentor** imprint three full-length, hardback commentaries have recently appeared. **Amos** by **Gray SMITH, 1998** exegetes the text in such a way as to emphasise the theological significance of the book. **Psalms** by **Allan HARMAN, 1998** brings together a lifetime's work of study and teaching on the Book of Psalms. The introduction is particularly helpful, covering such items as the development of the psalter, types of psalms, the problem psalms, the messianic element and the use of the psalms today. This is followed by sound and illuminating comments on each psalm drawing out their abiding significance. Detailed textual and exegetical difficulties are not undertaken. **Richard L Pratt on 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1998** makes good use of the scholarly work on these books that has been produced over the last twenty years. Besides dealing with authorship, date, historical and theological purposes, translation and transmission of the text, the introduction sets out twenty eight major themes detected in Chronicles. The commentary continually refers back to these themes. In this way the distinctive nature of the Chronicler's work is brought to our attention. It seems to be the policy of the publishers not to provide footnotes or to mention the names of other scholars or commentators. The commentary on Chronicles does not even offer further help toward the study of these books. This is surprising in works aimed primarily at Bible College and seminary students and pastors. All three

commentaries in this new series are very readable and are highly recommended but the price may be off-putting to some.

Focus on the Bible from **Christian Focus** has recently produced **Judges and Ruth** by **Stephen DRAY, 1997** and **Daniel** by **Robert FYALL, 1998**. These commentaries are intended as more popular aids to the study of God's Word. They seek to communicate the truth in a clear and relevant way without being technical. Too many expositors of Old Testament books have tended to indulge in fanciful spiritualization instead of allowing the message of the books themselves to speak to our situation. That cannot be said of these authors. At the end of each chapter there are questions for further thought. In the case of **Daniel** the format has changed allowing for more comment.

The **Welwyn Commentary Series** published by **Evangelical Press** have added **A Family Tree, 1 Chronicles** by **Andrew STEWART**. The commentary explains the text with apt illustrations and will provide a sure guide to Christians in their daily devotions. Pastors and scholars will need to look elsewhere for a detailed study of the text and problem passages. There are no endnotes or references to other commentaries. The Evangelical Press are also responsible for publishing **Roger ELLSWORTH, He Is Altogether Lovely. Discovering Christ in The Song of Solomon, 1998**. It is not a commentary on the text but it is an antidote to those who can see only sex in this book of the Bible.

Recent additions to the **The New International Commentary on the Old Testament** series include **John N OSWALT The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66 Eerdmans 1998**. The first part of Oswalt's work was published in 1986 before Motyer's commentary on Isaiah appeared. This second part has been eagerly awaited. The layout and binding of this new book is certainly more user friendly than the earlier volumes in the series. There is not very much to choose between Oswalt and Motyer for they are both thorough in their treatment of the text and very soundly and warmly evangelical. The whole prophecy is considered to be the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem in the eighth century before Christ. Oswalt generally has more detail than Motyer but in some places the latter is theologically richer. The premillennialism of Oswalt peeps through in 65:17. It was disappointing to see Oswalt accepting too readily the translation "startle" in place of "sprinkle" in 52:15. Nevertheless, this is a most useful work and it will certainly encourage preachers in their sermon preparations as well as provide a good guide to students.

In the same series, **Tremper LONGMAN III** comments on **The Book of Ecclesiastes, Eerdmans 1998**. This is a disappointing work. He believes that the body of the book is a piece of pessimistic writing "out of sorts" with the rest of the Old Testament. Qoheleth's (the Preacher's) speech "is a foil, a teaching device" used by the author of the final verses to instruct his son "concerning the dangers of speculative, doubting wisdom in Israel". These conclusions arise out of a failure to understand the key word. If "vanity" means "meaninglessness" then these kinds of conclusions are to be expected. Longman is forced to reinterpret the positive statements within the book in a way that supports his negative view of Qoheleth. His efforts are unconvincing. He fails to interpret the term "vanity" in the light of its use in similar passages throughout Scripture. It is clear from both Old and New Testaments that, for believer and unbeliever alike, life in this world is a mere breath. It is fleeting, frustrating and

unsubstantial. We all experience the curse of Genesis 3. It is not ungodly pessimism but biblical realism to admit that we live in such a world. This is what the Preacher, in his own inimitable way, shocks us all into seeing.

Finally, in the NICOT series, there is the massive two-part study of **The Book of Ezekiel**, Eerdmans 1997 and 1999 by Daniel I BLOCK. In addition to a detailed study of the text, theological implications and reflections appear at the end of each section. Concerning Ezekiel's future pronouncements, Block writes: "while the NT often recognizes fresh significances in its reading of OT texts (the church is heir to the spiritual promises of God to Israel), Ezekiel's own understanding of his oracles must be determinative in our interpretation."

It is the object of IVP's **The Bible Speaks Today** series to expound the text accurately and to apply its message to our own situations in a readable way. The latest additions are no exceptions. They are **The Message of Nehemiah, God's servant in a time of change** by Raymond BROWN, 1998 and **The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk, Listening to the voice of God** by David PRIOR, 1998.

It is always helpful and often challenging to read good sermons on Old Testament texts. There are not many available by modern preachers but the following are highly recommended.

Two books of Martyn LLOYD-JONES' sermons on Isaiah have appeared which provide excellent examples of evangelistic preaching that is both faithful to the text and powerfully applicable to the present situation. One is **A Nation Under Wrath, Isaiah 5 speaks to us today**, Kingsway, 1997. The other is **God's Way Not Ours, Sermons on Isaiah 1:1-18, The Banner of Truth Trust**, 1998. They were preached in 1963/64 but reading them you would think they had been delivered last Sunday. These sermons show how the prophet's word to Israel can be legitimately applied to the whole human race.

There are more sermons by LLOYD-JONES in the booklet **True Happiness, an Exposition of Psalm One**, Bryntirion Press (formerly Evangelical Press of Wales), 1997. Also published by the same press are the morning addresses which Geoffrey THOMAS gave at the Aberystwyth Conference under the title **Daniel, servant of God under four kings**, 1998. These books are both challenging and encouraging.

Finally, two more volumes of sermons by Roy CLEMENTS have been produced by IVP. **Practising faith in a pagan world** appeared in 1997. It consists of a series of ten sermons from the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel. The author shows how the church in the western world is in a kind of "exile" situation. These sermons provide help to Christians seeking to live the life of faith in a pagan, antichristian society. **People who made history**, 1998 takes us through the books of Judges and Ruth. Again, the relevance of the Scriptures to our own situation today is presented in a compelling way with helpful illustrations. The author is sensitive to the flow of redemptive history while also drawing out lessons from the lives of the individual men and women mentioned in the text.

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