

FOUNDATIONS

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Evershed House, Alma Road, St Albans, UK, AL1 3AR

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What is Worship

Calvinistic Methodist Worship

The Sermon in Worship

The Worship Downgrade

also

Law and the Christian Life

Paul, the OT and Judaism

Dead Sea Scrolls

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FOUNDATIONS

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Editor **Rev. Dr Kenneth Brownell**
6 Elrington Road
Hackney
LONDON
United Kingdom
E8 8BJ
Tel: 020 8980 6125 (Office)
020 7249 5712 (Home)

All MSS, Editorial Correspondence and Publications for Review should be sent to the Editor.

Editorial Board **Rev. Christopher Bennett MA**
Dr Eryl Davies MA BD PhD
Dr Nick Needham BD PhD
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Rev. David Robertson MA

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Editor's Notes

With the millennium fast approaching it is not surprising that there are a number of books being published that examine the state of the church. I want to draw your attention to three of them,

In his *The Church of the Third Millennium* (Paternoster 1999) Phil Hill, pastor of Hockcliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard, has provided a brief and very helpful overview of the state of the church in Britain. The book is divided into three sections. The first section puts the church in its postmodern context. Much has been written on post-modernism, but this is a good and accessible primer on the subject. While mention of “po-mo” has become something of a joke it is nevertheless the context in which we minister and therefore needs to be taken seriously. The second section consists of four brief chapters in which Hill analyses the impact of post-modernity on the church. The chapter titles neatly sum up his points: Unity Without Truth, Conversion without God, Fellowship without Relationships and Spirituality without Selflessness. To some extent these chapters are a simplified version of David Wells’ works. The third section is the more practical. Hill calls for a church that is committed to the Scriptures (not least, in applied expository preaching), spiritually alive, in touch with the world and notably a community of faith. The last point is especially important. Perhaps controversially, Hill emphasises the place of believers’ baptism in shaping the Christian community, but even paedo-baptists would agree with the vital importance of the church regaining a sense of community for her witness to the world. The book’s weakness is a tendency, no doubt born of its brevity, of overly simplifying things. So, for example, at a number of points there are some rather hackneyed contrasts between conservative and charismatic evangelical churches. But that aside, I warmly recommend this book, not least as a basis for discussion in fraternals or congregational leadership teams.

Of a similar ilk is Richard Keyes’ *Chameleon or Tribe?: Recovering Authentic Christian Community* (IVP 1999). Keyes works with the L’Abri Fellowship in the USA and many of the concerns of the late Francis Schaeffer come through in this book. Like Hill, Keyes emphasises the church as community. He particularly highlights the danger in our secular culture of churches either becoming like chameleons and losing their distinctiveness or like tribes existing as subcultures with little interaction with the wider culture. How this happens is helpfully described. Keyes’ antidote is a recovery of a biblical gospel of grace in which the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is robustly proclaimed and reflected in the life of his people. In particular, Keyes calls for a recovery of apologetics. Christian truth must be unashamedly communicated at the same time as many of the blocks to faith are removed. Echoing Schaeffer, Keyes calls for the church itself to become the “final apologetic” as she exhibits the truth of the gospel in the world. It seems to me that this is one of the big issues facing the church in the new millennium.

But the most stimulating of the three books is *Good News In Exile* (Wm B Eerdmans 1999) by Martin Copenhaver, Anthony Robinson and William Willimon. The authors are pastors in “mainline” denominations in the United States, two in

Congregational churches (United Church of Christ) and the third in United Methodist Church. Willimon, the Dean of Chapel at Duke University, is well known as a preacher and co-author with the ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. The influence of Hauerwas is particularly evident and acknowledged, not least his neo-anabaptist emphasis on the church as a community of faith in an alien culture. Brought up and taught at seminary in classic theological liberalism, they have come to discover its spiritual and theological bankruptcy. The book begins with their own very moving accounts of how they have rediscovered the riches of Christian orthodoxy and their calling as ministers to nurture the spiritual life of God's people by preaching and teaching his word. What is particularly moving is to read of how their churches have grown to love the Bible and to expect biblical preaching. One of the authors was told by a church member that the difference between their church now and ten years ago is that today the Bible is everywhere. Aligned with this is a renewed concern for spiritual formation, worship and evangelism. A central theme in the book is that of the exile of God's people in Babylon. As "mainline" ministers the authors had expected to minister in churches that were culturally dominant, only to find that by the 1990s the church in general in the USA and the "mainline" denominations in particular had been marginalised, a situation not dissimilar to exile. But in a very powerful section they ask what happened to Israel in exile? The answer is that she rediscovered the Bible.

There is much in this book that is very thought provoking. I doubt if any of these authors would call themselves evangelicals and it is surprising how little impact evangelicalism seems to have had on their pilgrimage from liberalism. What struck me in reading this book is that just as these men are rediscovering the Bible and the importance of preaching so many evangelicals seem to be neglecting these things. It is so easy to take our evangelical heritage for granted. Perhaps like these refugees from the wreckage of liberalism, we need to realise that we too live as exiles in a strange land and that in the Scriptures we have a treasure that needs to be studied, taught and proclaimed to the nations.

As a millennium project I recommend reading a good historical theology. Surely one of the greatest wonders of the past 2000 years has been what the Scottish theologian James Orr called "the progress of dogma". There are a number of good works in the field, but one of the most recent is Roger Olson's *The Story of Christian Theology* (IVP 1999). Olson, who teaches at Bethel College in Minnesota, tells the story well. This is not dry-as-dust history, but the stories of men (and a few women) that have reflected on the Christian faith. I would love to give the book a ringing endorsement since it is so well written, but I cannot. Much of it is very good. The chapters on the early church and the medieval period are excellent. Olson also highlights theologians and movements often neglected in other historical theologies. For example, he gives considerable space to the Anabaptists and German Pietism. In some measure this reflects what I suspect is his Scandinavian Free Church background. But there are some weaknesses. While Olson does a good job on Luther, he falls down badly on Calvin. Calvin is linked together in a chapter with Zwingli whom he considers the real fountainhead of reformed theology. Calvin was at best a great synthesiser of the

theological insights of others and a great organiser of churches, which is why his reputation is so great. This indicates a certain dislike of the Augustinian-Calvinist strand in historical theology. Olson seeks to rehabilitate Jacobus Arminius as one of the church's most neglected theologians, but does not adequately deal with the Puritans. In focusing on their theological method and ecclesiology, he totally misses their emphasis on the Christian life and a theologian of the stature of John Owen is not mentioned at all. The surprise is the chapter on Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley which, while I could quibble at a number of points, is really very good. The last section of the book deals with liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, evangelicalism and more recent trends. While respecting Hodge, Warfield and Machen as theologians, Olson sees their influence on the evangelical doctrine of Scripture in a somewhat negative light. Olsen wrongly tries to distance it from the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture (p. 566). Barth, on the other hand, is treated far too generously and his conservative critics, such as van Til, dismissed out of hand. Can it really be said that neo-orthodoxy has flourished? Rather than being the bridge between liberalism and evangelicalism that Olson suggests, it seems to me to be a hybrid that leaves little spiritual fruit. One surprising omission is any reference to the impact of Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement on theology. But having said all that, Olsen's book is a good read that will remind you that the "queen of sciences" needs to be returned to her throne.

The BEC Executive Committee has asked me to draw your attention to a project with which I am involved and that hopefully will be of benefit to churches in the United Kingdom. The Board of Trustees of the London Theological Seminary has agreed to establish **The John Owen Centre for Theological Study**. The purpose of the centre is to encourage evangelical theological thinking and inquiry in order that leaders will be equipped for the challenges and opportunities of the next millennium. It is intended for the centre to provide facilities for short-term or sabbatical study, for post-graduate theological study at secular institutions, for doing post-graduate degrees from other evangelical institutions and for particular scholars to pursue lines of study of relevance to the life and mission of churches in the UK. The Centre will be a separate institution from LTS, but will share its facilities at the Kensit Memorial College in Finchley. The Revd Philip Eveson, the principal of LTS, will be the Director of Studies. Behind the founding of the Centre is a concern to see the Reformed evangelical heritage understood, restated and applied today and to encourage biblical theology that nurtures local congregations and connects with the contemporary world. That was what John Owen did in his day and that is what needs to be done today in very different circumstances. The Centre will begin to operate in January 2000 and, as resources permit, to develop its staff and programme. More information about the Centre's programme will be available in the near future, but in the meantime if you would like more information please contact Philip Eveson at the John Owen Centre, 104 Hendon Lane, Finchley, London N3 3SQ (Telephone: 020 8346 7587). Whether it is at the John Owen Centre, or at other institutions such as the Evangelical Theological College of Wales or the Highland Theological College, I would encourage preachers to make use of the opportunities that are available for in-ministry study and training.

What on Earth is Christian Worship?

by Digby L. James

Introduction

There is often confusion over the use of the word *church*. Christians regularly use it to refer to the building in which they meet. This is justifiable on the basis that the English word *church* comes from the Greek work *kuriakon*, meaning “belonging to the Lord”.¹ But the word is also used as a translation of the New Testament Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means “assembly”. The Christian Brethren are justified in referring to their churches as assemblies because of this. In the New Testament the word *ekklesia* is used for the local church and the universal church. It should be in these latter two senses that we use the word, but in practice we don’t.

What does this have to do with the subject of worship? A great deal. We suffer exactly the same problem with this word and its meaning. The subject of worship is one which has been a matter of debate among professing Christians for most of the history of the church. One of the major debates during the Reformation and Puritan periods was what was and what was not permitted in the public worship of God. Things have not changed much since then and professing Christians today are still arguing about what is and what is not allowed in worship. Some say that we should stick to a traditional hymn sandwich, others that we should raise our hands and sing choruses, others believe that we should have greater ceremonial.

The issue of worship appears to be the apparent cause of numerous defections from evangelicalism to Eastern or Greek Orthodoxy. The 18 May 1992 issue of *Christianity Today* reported:

It has been five years since a group of 2,000 evangelical Protestants in 17 congregations, headed by former Campus Crusade for Christ staff member Peter Gillquist, entered the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Since then, 15 more congregations have been added. And the new Orthodox are now proselytizing their evangelical friends, with notable success. “There are so many enquiries, I don’t have time to scratch up new contacts,” said Gillquist, now chairman of the archdiocese’s Department of Missions and Evangelism. “Evangelicals have a growing awareness of reductionism – what’s been left out – and a true hunger for worship. They need something more.” That “something more” is tradition which the Orthodox claim they have handed down in pure form from the early church.²

A thirst for a “deeper worship” or “something more” is the attraction of a number of the older denominations. I know an Anglican vicar who says that the Anglican contribution to the modern church is their knowledge and experience of “worship” (by which he means liturgy). Many non-conformists are moving over to Anglicanism because they believe it offers better “worship”. An example is Robert E Webber. The son of a Baptist minister, he graduated from Bob Jones University, became a Presbyterian minister and professor in theology at an evangelical college. He then moved to American episcopalianism. The prime reason for this shift was his sense of a lack of Christ-centred “worship” in non-episcopal churches. In his dissatisfaction with the “worship” of his

church, he describes how he discussed the issue with some friends. They dismissed evangelistic, educational and social reasons for church attendance. The only reason they had was obedience to Hebrews 10:25.³ He then experienced an Easter time service in a Roman Catholic church. This led him to establish a house church seeking to follow the early church's practice of "worship" that he had been studying, and then into an episcopal church. His new experience of "worship" in episcopalianism has now satisfied his heartfelt longings for "deeper worship". He says at the end of the chapter on worship,

I have discovered that a major reason why people are leaving evangelical churches for Episcopal churches is their longing for a more satisfying experience of worship. Maybe the key to satisfaction within the Evangelical tradition can be found by restoring a worship in which Christ is front center not only in our weekly worship, but in our pattern of yearly personal and corporate worship as well.⁴

He then further supports his case by giving the testimonies of several others who have made the same journey to episcopalianism that he has. The sad thing is that his whole quest has not been based upon Scripture, but upon an existential feeling that there should be something more. This illustrates that to a large degree the word "worship" has become a connotation word which has no defined meaning, but which each person who hears or uses it "feels" that he knows what it means.

In approaching this subject Christians should be bound by the teaching of the Scriptures. In seeking to determine what worship is we should not follow the approach of the world, seeking to conduct a survey of opinion and declare what the majority think. Neither should we discover what the major religious leaders teach on the subject. Christians should have an ear that listens to God's Word and accepts what it says.

It is therefore surprising that many people who hold to Scripture as the Word of God begin their discussions of the subject of worship by quoting from an English dictionary. There we find that the word worship is derived from the Old English word *weorthscipe* which means to ascribe worth to God.⁵ Therefore, it is said, this is what worship is, and this definition is then read into all the passages of Scripture where the word occurs. Check any articles and books that you have read on the subject recently. All of the books and articles on the subject that I have consulted are guilty of this.

Perhaps the most shocking example comes from JI Packer. Writing in 1966 he made the case for the status quo with regard to the Book of Common Prayer as central to the religious life of the Church of England. At the start of the booklet he sought to give a clear definition of worship.

The first step towards forming sound ideals of worship is to get clear as to its essential nature. So we start by asking: what is worship? The history of the word gives us our answer. The noun "worship" is a contraction of "worthship" (Anglo-Saxon, "weorthscipe"). Used as a verb, it means "to ascribe worth", or to acknowledge value. To worship God is to make recognition of his "worth", or "worthiness"; to look God-ward, and acknowledge in all appropriate ways the value of what you see. The Bible calls this activity "glorifying God", "giving glory to God", and views it as the ultimate end and, from one point of view, the whole duty of man. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name" (Psalms 29:2; 96:6). "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).⁶

Another example of this is Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer in their book, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*. In their preface to the book they state that they have

taken their lead (and the title) from AW Tozer's book *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*. They imply that worship is an activity of praise and adoration of God that is done corporately. They then seek in chapter 1 to define worship.

What then is worship? Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare his worth ... Sometimes seminary-trained preachers bedazzle and benumb a congregation with repeated emphasis on the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words "in the original text," acting as evangelical priests with new substitutes for Latin barriers which only they may breach. But on occasion the English words we use are of surpassing worth and it is they that should be explained. So it is with the term worship.

The English word worship is wonderfully expressive of the act that it describes. This term comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, which was then modified to *worthship*, and finally to *worship*. *Worship* means "to attribute worth" to something or someone.⁷

This is then followed by a supporting quote from RP Martin⁸ and three Scriptures speaking of praising God. Thus, the rest of the book has been based upon a definition that does not derive from the pages of Scripture, but from the pages of an English etymological dictionary. Sadly for such a view, the Scriptures were not written in Anglo-Saxon. The meanings of Anglo-Saxon words, though interesting, are useless when it comes to understanding the doctrines of the Bible. Since the Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and since no translation is perfect, we have constantly to go back to the original languages to discover what the Bible says in detail. Thank God for translators, but they are not always accurate and right when translating, because of their own backgrounds and prejudices (this can be seen, for example, in the differences between the AV and the NIV. The latter has more occurrences of the English word "worship" because its translators chose to translate the Hebrew word *ABAD* as "worship" which the AV translators translated as "service" or "work". *ABAD* often occurs with *SHACHAH* as in Exodus 20:5, "You shall not bow down to them (*SHACHAH*) or serve them (*ABAD*)."). It is our responsibility, with the aid of the vast wealth of dictionaries, lexicons, etc. that God has provided us with, to check our translations of the Bible. Allen and Borror's book is made all the more sad because later on in the book they refer to the Hebrew word used and are quite correct in their understanding of what it means. Unfortunately, they discuss it in the context of whether or not believers should kneel to pray in "worship".⁹

It is necessary, therefore, to determine what words the Scriptures use and the way in which the Scriptures use them. The easiest way to do this is to use a concordance, such as Young's or Strong's or one of the many computer Bibles, to find and then examine all of the references. All Christians should have such tools on their shelves. Though more expensive than most books they will be of use throughout life. How many cheap paperbacks are left on Christians' shelves having been read only once? *The On-Line Bible* is available for both Macintosh and PC and is available free from the Internet¹⁰ or cheaply on CD-ROM. These will show every occurrence of the English word worship and of the underlying Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words where they are translated by different English words.

The primary Hebrew word translated into English as worship is *SHACHAH*. According to the On-Line Bible it occurs 172 times in the Old Testament of the KJV, although not always translated worship. Its literal meaning is to depress, bow down or

prostrate oneself. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, the word is a verb which means to bow down. They quote Winckler who says that it is related to the word *SAHAHU* from Tel-el-Amarna, which means to prostrate oneself, and is probably a Canaanism deriving from the Assyrian *SAHAHU* meaning to oppress or torment.¹¹

Harris, Archer and Waltke consider *SHACHAH* under the hithpael, *HISHTAHAWA*. It is a cognate of the Ugaritic *HWY* which means “to bow down” and is used in parallel with *KBD* “to honour”. They give examples of this usage in the Old Testament. They say that prostration was a common act of submission before a superior.

Vassals in the Amarna letters write, “At the feet of the king ... seven times, seven times I fall, forwards and backwards.” Jehu or his servant bows down on his knees with his forehead touching the ground before Shalmaneser III on the Black Obelisk.¹²

They go on to compare such action with the *salah* or prayer by an elaborately prescribed *sugud* in which the forehead must touch the ground. This is much the same as the practice of Muslims at prayer which can still be observed today.

The meaning of the words thus carry with them the following senses. Firstly, a physical act of prostration for whatever reason. It is then applied specifically to a physical prostration as an act of homage and then, by extension, to the attitude of heart that such homage is supposed to represent, whether humility or depression.

In the Latin Vulgate, translated in the fourth century by Jerome, *SHACHAH* is translated as the Latin word *adoro*, which means to entreat, worship or revere. This is where the English word *adore* comes from, meaning to worship or love intently. It does not quite connote the same as *SHACHAH* (certainly not to the modern mind) and may be, in part, the origin of the Roman Catholic view of worship.

The Aramaic word *SEGAD*, only occurs in the Aramaic portions of the book of Daniel. It also literally means to bow down or prostrate oneself and is equivalent to *SHACHAH*.

While the etymology of words can be helpful in understanding their meaning, it can only be illustrative. For example, the Greek word for paradise originally meant a Persian hunting ground. The actual meaning of a word is not determined by its etymology, but by the way it is used. Most particularly, with regard to the things of God, it is determined by its usage in the Scriptures. Hence, books like Thomas Conant’s *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*,¹³ while interesting in discovering the uses of the word in classical Greek literature, are not relevant in determining its usage in the Scriptures. Some words are technical words which the Biblical writers pick up and give a different meaning.

The first occurrence of *SHACHAH* in the Old Testament is in Genesis 18:2 where it is used to describe the greeting given by Abraham to the three angels who visited him. Here Abraham prostrates himself as an expression of humility in receiving guests. This was the normal method of respectful salutation in eastern countries, as is acknowledged by commentators such as Calvin,¹⁴ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown,¹⁵ Leupold¹⁶ and Aalders.¹⁷ Calvin comments that some commentators had seen a recognition by Abraham that one of these three was God, or that God existed in three persons, but rejects it as frivolous. This is a view consistent with Genesis 19:1 (see below). In this context, *SHACHAH* is used to signify an attitude of reverence to his visitors. This is not dissimilar to the modern practice of Orientals, particularly the Japanese, to bow to one another in greeting. The degree of bowing is an indication of the relative social or

business positions of the people concerned. Thus, an exalted person would bow a little, but a servant would bow profusely. Abraham appears to be expressing something of this in greeting these strangers. It is thus not a recognition that one of them was God, but the common greeting of the people of that age.

In Genesis 19:1 Lot bowed down to the ground in greeting the two angels when they arrived at the gate of Sodom. As with Abraham, above, this appears to be no more than the common form of greeting. There is no indication at this stage that Lot recognised them as angels, that he viewed them as God, or that he was rebuked for so doing, as the Apostle John was later to be (Revelation 22:8,9). Once again, *SHACHAH* is used in the sense of a reverential greeting to honoured guests.

It is not until Genesis 22:5 that *SHACHAH* is used in direct relation to God. Abraham is on his way to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice at God's command. When they approached the designated place, Abraham told his servants to stay there with the animals while he and Isaac went on to worship (*SHACHAH*). There is no description in the passage of what worship involved, although there is a suggestion that this involved the building of the altar and the offering of Isaac. Few commentators make anything of this beyond importing a modern view of worship into the text. Morris, however, gives a much fuller consideration of this, which is worthy of quotation.

But what about Abraham's statement that he and Isaac were going to worship? Could such an act as killing his own son be considered worshiping? Yes, this was a supreme act of worship. The word "worship", as we have noted earlier, means simply "bow down," and is often so translated. Singing hymns and giving testimonies, hearing a preacher and enjoying Christian fellowship is not worshiping, although we speak of such activities as a "worship service." To worship God is simply to bow down to His will, recognising and acknowledging that His will is best. What He does is right, by definition, whether we understand it now or not. His will may involve waiting and suffering, even dying; but if it is His will, then we must bow down to it and accept it with thanksgiving. It is then, and only then, that we worship God. Abraham and Isaac indeed were going to worship God. Not understanding, but believing, they were willing to do His will. Somehow they knew that even such a command as this, in the eternal counsels of God, was for their good.¹⁸

In this context, then, *SHACHAH* is used for the act of physical prostration before God as a sign of submission to his will.

The response of the people at the dedication of the Temple is described in 2 Chronicles 7:3, when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, and the glory of God filled the Temple, so that no one could enter. The people bowed down to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord. This is a significant verse, because here there is a description of worship and, in addition, the people praised God, indicating that worship is a distinct activity from praise. Keil and Delitzsch say that the assembled congregation bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement and worshipped God to praise.¹⁹ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's comment is worth quoting in full:

This form of prostration (that of lying on one's knees with the forehead touching the earth), is the manner in which the Hebrews, and Orientals in general, express the most profound sentiments of reverence and humility. The courts of the temple were densely crowded on the occasion, and the immense multitude threw themselves on the ground. What led the Israelites suddenly to assume that prostrate attitude on the occasion referred

to, was the spectacle of the symbolical cloud slowly and majestically descending upon the temple, and then entering it.²⁰

Jeremiah 7:2 is the start of a message from God to all those who entered the Temple to worship the Lord. Thompson's comment here is worthy of quoting in full:

The Hebrew verb worship (*HISTAHAWÁ*) brings to mind a significant picture. The verb arises from a metaphor, namely, that of bowing down or prostrating oneself before someone whose high state is thereby acknowledged and to whom allegiance should be offered. When the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek, an equally expressive word was used to translate it, *proskuneo*, which likewise denotes the physical act of bowing down. A term that was used in the secular context of a vassal bowing down before his suzerain is thus pressed into a cultic and religious use. The great majority of the occurrences of the term in the OT refer to the veneration and worship of Yahweh or to that of false gods. This powerful figure is a particularly apt one to describe the proper attitude of the man of Israel to Yahweh. When the man of Israel came to worship Yahweh, he acknowledged on the one hand Yahweh's high status and his complete and sole sovereignty over the worshipper's life, and at the same time he recognised his own dependent status and the need for personal submission to his sovereign Lord, Yahweh. Worship thus involved him in the willing acknowledgement of Yahweh's Lordship and the glad acceptance of his covenant demands. He was therefore obligated to obedience to the commandments, the laws, and the statutes in which the covenant demands came to expression. There were thus powerful ethical demands laid upon every worshipper who came to the temple.²¹

He adds, in a footnote, that of 171 instances of *SHACHAH* in the Old Testament Masoretic text, 164 are rendered by *proskuneo* in the Septuagint translation.

In the New Testament there is an almost exact parallel to the words used in the Old Testament. *Proskuneo* is the equivalent of *SHACHAH* and *latría* is the equivalent of *ABAD*. *Latría*, which means to be a servant, or to serve, occurs in references such as Romans 12:1 and describes the kind of service that Christians should give to God. There are other Greek words translated into English as worship, but they occur infrequently in the New Testament. *Proskuneo* is the Greek word which is most often translated by the English word worship. Etymologically, it means to do reverence by kissing the hand. This is the action performed by people approaching Karol Wojtyła (the Pope). They bow down, usually on their knees, and kiss his hand. Thus, *proskuneo* is seen to be an almost exact translation of *SHACHAH*.

Schönweiss and Brown considered the word under prayer. In classical Greek,

The basic meaning of *proskuneo*, in the opinion of most scholars, is to kiss. The prefix indicates a connection with cultic practises going back beyond Gk. history. On Egyptian reliefs worshippers are represented with outstretched hand throwing a kiss to (pros-) the deity. Among the Greeks the vb. is a technical term for the adoration of the gods, meaning to fall down, prostrate oneself, adore on one's knees. Probably it came to have this meaning because in order to kiss the earth (ie the earth deity) or the image of a god, one had to cast oneself on the ground. Later *proskuneo* was also used in connection with the deification of rulers and the Roman emperor cult. In addition to the external act of prostrating oneself in worship, *proskuneo* can denote the corresponding inward attitude of reverence and humility.²²

Two examples of its use in the New Testament are Matthew 4:9 and Acts 10:25.

And [the devil] said to [Jesus], “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.”

As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

Lenski says that *proskuneo* in Matthew 4:9 is an aorist subjunctive and signifies a single act. The word is used for the prostration of Orientals before great human lords, but especially for prostration before God in the deepest religious reverence and adoration, and this latter is what the devil was asking Jesus to do to him.

Among the many other references, Matthew 28:9; Mark 15:19; Revelation 5:14; 22:8 make clear the physical action involved. So it can be seen that in the New Testament, the word is used to mean physical prostration in the presence of a superior being as an act of reverential submission. The word therefore is identical to the meaning of the Old Testament word, *SHACHAH*.

There is one exception to this general rule of the meaning of the word *proskuneo*, and that is the use of the term by the Lord Jesus Christ in speaking to the woman at the well in John 4:23,24 where he says that true worshippers of the Father will worship in spirit and in truth. What he means is that no longer is worship to be outward and physical. No longer is it to be a physical prostration of the body but rather a spiritual prostration. This is surely a spiritual prostration or submission of the heart to God. Submission to God is the essence of the faith, a Christian is a person who has surrendered their heart to the Lord Jesus Christ and live their lives in submission to him. Someone who is a Christian is a worshipper of God and worships God all of the time, in everything that they do. A Christian therefore worships God when they are brushing their teeth, washing the car, drinking tea or when they are meeting with Christians and singing God's praises. It is the attitude of the heart with which a person lives their life (and which of course will affect the way in which they live their lives) which is important to God. There are, of course, degrees to which a person lives in submission to Christ. The degree of submission may be increased as a result of a Christian meeting, or reading the Scriptures or reading a good Christian biography, or meditating on how good God has been to our souls.

In John 4 Jesus said that worship was not only in spirit (in the heart) but also in truth. He goes on to expand that by telling the woman that the Jews worshipped what they knew, the reason being that God had revealed himself to the Jews. The Samaritans worshipped what they did not know, because they had not received God's truth. Therefore, to truly worship God, to truly submit to him in all things, we need to learn more about him. Reading the Scriptures, being instructed in the faith and meditating on the truth of God so received is therefore vital. It is impossible to worship God without knowing something about him. It is therefore wrong to speak about unbelievers worshipping God. Muslims may worship (in that they prostrate themselves), but it not according to truth as they reject basic truths that God has revealed.

Implications

If this is the teaching of the Scriptures (and I would urge all readers to check the Scriptures for themselves) then it has a number of implications. Because worship is in spirit, it is not restricted to any particular time or place. Jesus said in John 4 “Not on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem”. Worship is therefore not geographically localised, it is in

the heart of every believer, wherever they happen to be. I believe that we are therefore Biblically wrong to speak about places of worship or the house of God when referring to church buildings, since, as Paul said to the Athenians, “God does not dwell in temples made by man”, Acts 17:24. Rather, a Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place where God dwells as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19,20. We no longer have a temple in Jerusalem or anywhere else. God dwells in our hearts by his Spirit. This is where God is worshipped. This is an amazing thing to contemplate, that the almighty and most holy God, the creator of the universe, should lower himself to not only save us from our wickedness, but then to come and make our hearts, the hearts of sinners, his home. How glorious! Secondly, we are Biblically wrong to speak of any Christian meeting as being a time of worship. Indeed, it is significant that there is not a single reference to Christians meeting together “for worship” anywhere in the New Testament. So to speak of having a “time of worship” is meaningless. This also rules out the addition of the rôle of “worship leader” to the officers of the church. Should we refer to any Christian meeting as a “service”? God does not need us, so in what way are we serving him by singing, praying and preaching? Christian meetings are for the benefit of believers not God.

It is my conviction that many views of Christian worship are in fact a hangover from Roman Catholicism, where doing the right things in the right buildings at the right times are what really matter. At the time of the Reformation the Reformers cleared away many of the errors and abuses of Rome, but carried over the basic Roman view of the meaning of worship. This was never subsequently challenged by the successors of the Reformers down to the present day. I believe that it is also true that worship and praise have become confused. Praise is an activity that Christians should partake in, a reminder to them of what God has done, and should be a humbling activity.

The architecture of church buildings (not churches!) should be of a simple practical design for Christian meetings. The building should not be designed around the communion table, the pulpit or the baptistry. The purposes of Christian meetings are apostolic doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. Our architecture should allow for this. Since the buildings are not “holy” or “the house of God” or “the sanctuary” there should be nothing wrong with them being multipurpose buildings. This view undermines all thoughts that God’s blessing is dependent upon us having beautiful and well-maintained buildings. It also undermines the view that Christian meetings are an “appointment with God” and that we should wear our best clothes “just as we would if we visited the Queen”. God is concerned with our hearts not our architecture or wardrobe.

What about what we sing? There are continuing debates concerning ecclesiastical psalmody. Those in favour insist we should only sing inspired words “in the worship of God”. If the view of worship presented here is correct this becomes a non-issue – unless it is insisted that Christians should only *ever* sing psalms under *any* circumstances. To speak of “worship songs” is meaningless.

So where is the “regulative principle” in all this? It has disappeared along with the wrong view of worship it derived from. It brings the discussion back to Scripture and its actual meaning, rather than, as often happens, using Scripture to support personal preferences in formats of meetings. The view presented here will be a more powerful defence against the oft repeated phrase “we need more lively worship” (whatever that means) than that often put forward. It also undermines the cause of drift towards greater stress on ceremonial noted earlier.

What is the Purpose of Christian Meetings?

There will be some people reading this who will think that this provides ammunition to those people who say “I can worship God just as well at home as in church”. This statement is quite true, but it is not an excuse for absenting oneself from Christian meetings since their purpose is not the worship of God.

If Christian meetings are not for the worship of God, then what are they for? The New Testament gives us a clear pattern, summarised in Acts 2:42. Following Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost many were converted, “and they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer”. The key elements of a Christian meeting should therefore be instruction in the faith [preaching and teaching], fellowship [mutual encouragement and edification of every member by every member], remembering the Lord’s death in the Lord’s Supper, and praying together. Other references (such as Ephesians 5:19) speak about singing God’s praises. The purpose of singing God’s praises is not for God’s benefit, but to express our emotions about what God has done for us and to help us to remember God’s truth. How many can remember silly songs that we learned in our early years? Singing God’s truth to music is a powerful way of helping us remember it. An examination of the history of various denominations will show that those which had a strong tradition of singing sound hymns and psalms resisted the longest the ravages of liberalism. It is therefore vital that we consider carefully what we sing. How much false doctrine are we innocently singing because “we like the tune”?

An example of a New Testament Christian meeting is found in Acts 20:7-11 where Paul met with the Christians at Troas for the purpose of breaking bread. So concerned was he about instructing them in the faith that his message went on late into the night (don’t complain too much when the minister preaches for an hour! You can take comfort, too, in the fact that even then people fell asleep during sermons – but be warned by what happened to Eutychus!). Having finished his message he then broke bread with them (the Lord’s Supper) and spoke to them (fellowshipped) until dawn (!) and then went on his way. Other examples can be found in Ephesians 4:12-16 (the purpose of Christ giving the gifted men in verse 11); 5:18-20 (singing to one another); Hebrews 3:12,13; 10:19-25 (encouraging one another); 1 Corinthians 14:26 (all must be done in meetings for edification).

Throughout the New Testament, the great emphasis is upon Christians receiving right teaching (eg Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 4:6,11; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:1-5; Titus 1:11) since wrong teaching or a lack of teaching leads to wrong living. This does not mean that Christian meetings are to be dull boring lectures. Rather preachers and teachers are to present God’s truth in a way that is intelligible to all the hearers and show some of the applications of it. After the sermon, we shouldn’t discuss the weather or politics or fashions with other believers, but rather discuss what has been preached and discuss also its practical applications – God is concerned that the truth changes our lives, not that we can pass degrees in theology.

So what format should a Christian meeting take? Is there a regular pattern that must always be followed? The Scriptures don’t give us a set format. We have the principles mentioned above and God has given us freedom in applying them to our own situations. The only additional principle is that “all things should be done decently and

in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Meetings are not to be free for alls, but then they need not be rigidly structured. Thus, the traditional “hymn sandwich”, so belittled today, is probably closer to apostolic practice than many “knees-ups”, except that there needs to be more emphasis on fellowship.

For further reading I would suggest I Howard Marshall’s article, “To What Extent Did the Early Christians Worship God?” in *The Churchman*, 1985 where he discusses the subject in the context of liturgy.

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Dr Digby L James is minister of the Quinta Independent Evangelical Church, Weston Rhyn, and reprints old theological works through Quinta Press

Calvinistic Methodist Worship

Eifion Evans

A study of Calvinistic Methodist Worship is a study of the legacy of George Whitefield in England and of his contemporaries, Daniel Rowland, Howell Harris and William Williams, in Wales. The mere mention of their names suggests the priority of preaching and hymn-singing as an expression of faith and experience. The buildings which these men and their successors erected, in time, to perpetuate and prosper Gospel labours, reflected their central aims in the worship of God: simplicity, spirituality, and freedom, always within an ordered and awe-inspiring framework worthy of the God whom they served.

The simplicity of their worship stemmed from an aversion to all things that distracted from God's glory: ornate buildings, intricate ceremonial, and sophisticated garments. Spirituality was furthered by an emphasis on verbal rather than visible communication of truth, since God is Spirit, and also by spontaneous, heart-sourced prayers rather than set forms which, although they could be useful, are frequently made for artificial rather than real involvement. Extempore prayers and vigorous preaching, God-centred hymns as well as metrical psalms gave expression to their exercise of that freedom which they believed to be warranted by Scripture.

Whitefield is famed for his preaching, totalling 18,000 sermons during his 34 years ministry.¹ On the day before he died, he preached what many considered his best sermon, which lasted two hours in spite of his physical weakness. In it he confessed, "My body fails, my spirit expands. How willingly would I live to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him!"² It was his preaching that God owed to the conversion of so many people. The same could be said of Rowland and Harris. Their itinerating, their field-preaching, and their preaching in churches all stemmed from an inner constraint. As it was the minister's duty "to preach (and woe be to them if they do not preach the gospel, for a necessity is laid upon them!)", so it laid a great responsibility on people "to attend on so great a means of their salvation ... this spiritual manna, this angel's food." They were convinced that "preaching is an ordinance of God, a means appointed by Jesus Christ himself, for promoting his kingdom amongst men."³

For Whitefield, then, preaching had prior claim over considerations of decorum or ecclesiastical regulations, a fact borne out by his obvious delight in open-air preaching: "I went ... to Kingswood [Bristol] ... My bowels have long since yearned toward the poor colliers, who are very numerous, and as sheep having no shepherd. After dinner, therefore, I went upon a mount, and spake to as many people as came unto me. They were upwards of two hundred. Blessed be God that I have now broken the ice! I believe I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields. Some may censure me; but if I thus pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."⁴

Nevertheless, for the early Calvinistic Methodists, Anglicanism still retained their allegiance and respect: all the men mentioned above remained within Anglicanism. For the whole of the eighteenth century, Calvinistic Methodism used the Book of Common

Prayer forms of worship while developing its own emphases. English Calvinistic Methodism emerged in 1783 in the form of The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, whose chapels continued to use The Prayer Book after the Countess's death in 1791.⁵ A similar situation prevailed in Wales, and Thomas Charles could say in 1813, "I always use the prayers of the Church in publicly administering the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and in our Chapels, the Bible, with the Prayer Book bound with it, is in general on all our Calvinistic Methodist Worship pulpits."⁶ But theirs was an Anglicanism with a difference. The Methodists passionately believed in the Puritan legacy of preaching as a converting ordinance.

The Puritans passionately believed in the primacy of preaching. In *The Second Admonition to Parliament* in 1573, Thomas Cartwright pleaded for every parish to have a preaching pastor, and for the setting up of "prophesyings" in which ministers should exercise themselves in the interpretation of Scripture. It was not the word read, but preached which was God's chief means of salvation. Cartwright put it this way: "As the fire stirred giveth more heat, so the Word, as it were, blown by preaching, flameth more in the hearers, than when it is read."⁷ A sense of urgency as well as of importance is found in John Penry's *Treatise containing the aequity of an humble supplication ... in the behalfe of the Countrey of Wales, that some order may be taken for the preaching of the Gospell among those people*, 1587: "We desire that the tyranny of Sathan, who exerciseth a regency in the hearts of all them (amongst whom God's truth hath not been taught) may be overthrown by the powerful arm of God the word preached, who can save our souls."⁸ William Perkins takes up this strain in his 1606 *The Art of Prophesying*, "Through preaching those who hear are called into the state of grace, and preserved in it ... (1 Thess. 2:13,14 ... Rom 1:16 ... 10:4) the call to the ministry ... is clearly a commission to go and deliver people from the power of hell, to redeem them to be God's children, and to make them the heirs of heaven."

Nowhere is that legacy more clearly epitomised than in a work of William Bradshaw (1571-1618), *Englishe Puritanisme, containing the maine opinions of the rigidest sort of those that are called Puritanes in the realm of England*: "They hold that the highest and supreme office and authority of the Pastor, is to preach the Gospel solemnly and publicly to the congregation, by interpreting the written Word of God, and applying the same by exhortation and reproof unto them. They hold that this was the greatest work that Christ and His apostles did."⁹ Such convictions led Parliament to issue in 1641 *An Order Made by the House of Commons for the Establishing of Preaching Lecturers, Through the Kingdom of England and Wales* which claimed that "[Preaching] is even the very way to bring people into a state of salvation; it is the way to save their souls, Rom 1:13-14. Preaching is the declaring of the will of the Lord God, what His pleasure is, to have done by others; as also what Himself will do, and that by the voice of the minister, who comes to the people of God, as an ambassador, to publish and spread abroad the mind and message of God touching man's duty, and salvation, and to instruct the Church of God."¹⁰ The Westminster Assembly expressed this in their 1645 *Directory for the Public Worship of God*: "Preaching of the Word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the Gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him."

A recent biography of the Countess of Huntingdon notes that "It was the sermon, closely followed by the hymn-singing, which attracted people to the Connexion chapels."¹¹ An account of the Countess of Huntingdon's chapel at Brighton in the late nineteenth century bears this out:

... they were evangelicals primarily, and not sacramentalists, preachers not priests. So the pulpit became the centre-piece of their churches. Though the communion-table was still in the old place in the centre of the "East" end wall, the pulpit was placed in front of it in the middle of the church and the "curate" read prayers from the desk below. The service was read with great care and expression and the choir sang at the proper times, but the sermon was the chief thing and, for this, the preacher put on a special black gown, very noble and voluminous ... They had "the Communion" once a month ... For the rest it was a kind of combination of Congregationalism (for the congregation was autonomous and elected and paid for its own ministers) and "Low" Church of England.¹²

For the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, Thomas Charles, in his *Geiriadur Ysgrhythrol* (Scripture Dictionary), makes the claim that "preaching the Gospel by men sent by God is the chief means which God has appointed to save men's souls, by spreading knowledge of the Saviour among sinners."¹³ In all their activities, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists reflected this conviction. In 1783, Charles reported one such occasion thus: "There were at the Association about twenty clergymen, and between sixty and eighty lay-preachers, though not all in the connexion ... You may suppose how glad I was to hear once more the old grey-headed Elijah [Daniel Rowland] proclaiming the deep things of God with a pathos, perspicuity, and energy peculiar to himself. I heard him twice, and three clergymen besides, and also several lay-preachers, endowed with excellent gifts. Preaching began on Saturday, and lasted till Wednesday morning."¹⁴ This abundance of preaching which characterised the denomination at least until the end of the nineteenth century is illustrated by the fact that at one of their Association meetings in the Rhondda Valley from 9th to the 12th of October 1899, a total of 51 sermons were preached within the churches of the area.¹⁵

While this emphasis on preaching was dominant, it has to be said that it was preaching of a certain kind that the Calvinistic Methodists desired. They looked for the power of the Holy Spirit to make preaching effective. Here is a description of Daniel Rowland's preaching by the Baptist, Christmas Evans: "Methinks I see him now, entering in his black gown through a little door from the outside of the pulpit, and making his appearance in it thus on a sudden to the immense congregation ... It was the general practice for some minister to read and pray before Rowland made his appearance in the pulpit. He then frequently gave out with a clear and audible voice that stanza in Psalm 27:4 to be sung ... Then D. Rowland would stand up and read his text ..."¹⁶ Prayer before the sermon was an acknowledgement of the need for divine unction. The Westminster Directory puts it this way, suggesting that the prayer before the sermon should ask "... that God would in a special manner furnish his servant now called to dispense the bread of life unto his household with wisdom, fidelity, zeal, and utterance, that he may divide the Word of God aright, to every one his portion, in evidence and demonstration of the Spirit and power; and that the Lord would circumscribe the ears and hearts of the hearers, to hear, love, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save their souls; make them as good ground to receive in the good seed of the word, and strengthen them against the temptations of

Satan, the cares of the world, the hardness of their own hearts, and whatever else may hinder their profitable and saving hearing ...” In his *Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter makes the same point: “All our work must be done spiritually, as by men possessed of the Holy Ghost. There is in some men’s preaching a spiritual strain, which spiritual hearers can discern and relish ... Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence on Christ. We must go for light, and life, and strength to him who sends us on the work.”¹⁷

Behind this insistence on divine aid in preaching lay doctrinal convictions. Regeneration is a spiritual resurrection, bringing the sinner out of the grave of sin into the life of righteousness. Sanctification is a work carried on by God’s Spirit and God’s truth. God’s voice in preaching is as Christ’s voice at the tomb of Lazarus to bring him back to life, or as Ezekiel’s prophesying to the wind to bring about the transformation of a valley of dry bones into a mighty army. The Welsh Methodist, William Williams, used his poetic genius to portray real Gospel preaching:

Though learning has great value, I see this every day,
That only the experienced will preach the gospel way;
The Spirit makes a preacher, and heaven’s choicest sound
Is heard and felt with power, when heaven’s gales abound.¹⁸

Feeling was his life and power,
The breeze of heaven his hidden strength;
Without the Spirit’s gentle breath
His vessel could not move one length;
No wooden oar did he possess,
But God’s sweet breeze alone did bring
The saints with triumph and with joy
Into the land of endless spring.¹⁹

Even preaching was not a means of grace apart from the sovereign bestowal of life from God. He must give “testimony to the word of His grace” and grant “signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3).

When such preaching bore fruit, “Society” or “Fellowship” meetings and Methodist organisation made increasing demands on the leaders. In Wales, buildings were erected for separate gatherings of such societies, while the members attended the parish church for the Sacraments. The Trust Deeds of these buildings affirmed their character and purpose: “a Meeting-House or place of religious or divine Worship for the use of the said Protestants called Methodists and wherein such Teachers or Ministers only are to be admitted as shall preach and embrace the Doctrine of Salvation contained in the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Articles of the Church of England.”²⁰ “Chapel or Meeting House to be used for the worship of Almighty God by a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters commonly called Calvinistic Methodists, holding or professing to hold the Doctrinal Articles of the Church of England as Calvinistically interpreted or understood.”²¹

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists became a separate body in 1811 when they ordained men to the ministry. In their Confession of Faith, which appeared in 1823, Article 37 deals with “the Ordinances of the Gospel”: “Christ, the head of the church, has instituted ordinances, means of grace, and an order of worship, to be used in the

church by all his people, – in private, in the family, and in the congregation. Through these ordinances, God gives grace, and nourishes and increases the grace given. They are the ordinances of preaching, reading and hearing the word, prayer, praise, mutual instruction, conversation, the exercise of every part of church discipline, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are to be observed especially on the Lord's day (that is, the first day of the week), which was sanctified to be wholly spent in the service of God. They are to be observed at other times also. No specific rules have been given respecting the length of the service, the manner of conducting it, and every matter of detail; but the church is to judge and act according to the general rules: "Let all things be done with charity, unto edification, decently, and in order." This latter reference, 1 Cor 14:26,40, also appears on the title page of the 1645 Westminster Assembly's Directory for the Public Worship of God. From that time onwards, while there was some latitude in the length and conduct of worship, in practice the public service followed a pattern of hymn-singing, Scripture reading, preaching and prayer which was identifiably nonconformist.

Hymn-singing had been a feature of Calvinistic Methodist worship from early days. George Whitefield had published in 1753 a hymn book with the title, *Hymns for Social Worship, collected from various Authors, and more particularly designed for the use of the Tabernacle congregation in London*. It included 170 hymns, some by the Wesley brothers and others, but the majority were by Isaac Watts, and before the end of the century some 36 editions had appeared. Whitefield's preface addresses the "Courteous reader" thus: "If thou art acquainted with the divine life, I need not inform thee that, although all the acts and exercises of devotion are sweet and delightful, yet we never resemble the blessed worshippers above more than when we are joining together in public devotions, and, with hearts and lips unfeigned, singing praises to Him who sitteth upon the throne for ever. Consequently, hymns, composed for such a purpose, ought to abound much in thanksgiving, and to be of such a nature, that all who attend may join in them, without being obliged to sing lies, or not sing at all."²²

As for the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, there were so many editions of its hymn book from 1765 onwards "that it is impossible to compile a complete list."²³ The Preface to *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Hymn Book* of 1854 claims that "such a work will be to many a congregation a rich means of grace ... May the Holy Spirit enable all who shall adopt these anxiously-selected strains of devotion to employ them with melody in their hearts to the Lord. So shall our praises in the church below become an earnest of those purer and more rapturous hallelujahs wherewith we shall at last, through infinite mercy, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, surround 'the throne of God and the Lamb'."

In their hymns, Calvinistic Methodists were making a statement, as well as expressing their devotion to God. It was a statement of their view of God's majesty, and also a statement of His gracious dealings with His people. There was in them, therefore, doctrinal content as well as experimental testimony. The hymn-writer who influenced the Welsh Methodists as well as being their mouthpiece in hymnology was William Williams. His convictions about hymn-singing were definite and challenging:

I acknowledge that there are some of these first hymns, on the assurance of faith, longing to be dissolved, spiritual joy, together with triumph over enemies, which weak Christians

cannot easily sing. This happened not so much because the Lord kept my own soul in good spirits at the time, but chiefly because the Spirit had been so plentifully poured out on those godly people for whom they were written ... When I came to know myself better, and saw what an Egypt of darkness, a sea of uncleanness, a world of pride is in man, I determined to exalt the salvation which is in Christ far more, and to abase man and his gifts more. I did my utmost, whatever the nature of the hymn – complaint, plea, holy boasting, or praise, for Christ to be the centrepiece of it all ... I am constrained to give a little advice to those who give out these hymns ... Some give out verses full of assurance and delight to a congregation that denies the first and has not experienced the second. Others give out verses of complaint and questioning to a people who have been elevated to the heavenlies, and who feel life in their faith, and Satan under their feet, as if to urge people to sing about the cold of winter while the sun blazes in hottest summer.²⁴

Hymns, therefore, had a didactic ministry, conveying objective truth and providing a confessional framework for the individual believer, while at the same time fulfilling an important role in congregational worship.

For Calvinistic Methodists, hymns were not the only means of congregational participation. Their society meetings were more intimate, occasions for spiritual exercises, complementing public worship. Here, spiritual experience would be monitored and nurtured; spiritual gifts recognised and developed; and the spiritual objectives of growth, discipline, encouragement, and witness were fostered. In an early *Letter to the Religious Societies*, Whitefield spoke of their purpose in this way:

The only end which I hope you all propose by your assembling yourselves together, is the renewing of your depraved natures, and promoting the hidden life of Jesus Christ in your souls ... None but those who have experienced it, can tell the unspeakable advantage of such a union and communion of souls. I know not a better means in the world to keep hypocrisy out from amongst you. Pharisees and unbelievers will pray, read, and sing Psalms; but none, save an Israelite indeed, will endure to have his heart searched out.²⁵

These sentiments were echoed by Williams in *The Experience Meeting*: “Of all the means of grace, I know of none more profitable than the special fellowship meetings, called private societies, to correct, to edify and to encourage weak members who are ever ready to stray aside ...” He gives seven reasons for their usefulness:

First ... they are means of keeping up this same warmth and liveliness that was ours at the beginning ... second ... to unravel the various nets and hidden snares woven by Satan to catch the simple believer ... Thirdly ... forestalling contentions, suspicions, prejudices, discords, jealousies and all uncharitableness ... fourth ... that we may look after and watch over each other’s lives, lest any should fall into loose living ... fifth ... give us the opportunity of bearing one another’s burdens ... sixth ... gives us the opportunity to declare the work of God on our souls, and to praise His name for it ... lastly ... for strengthening ourselves against all our spiritual enemies, and for praying together as one man against them all.”²⁶

While the sermon was the centrepiece of worship, openness was the key to fellowship.

Nearly fifty years after the appearance of that work, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists reaffirmed the strategic benefit of the society meetings in Article 36 of their *Confession of Faith*:

Through their union with Christ, their head, the saints are united to one another, have special communion in each other's spiritual gifts and graces, and are bound to perform such duties towards each other as conduce to their mutual profit and edification. It is the duty of those who profess godliness to maintain fellowship and communion with each other in the public worship of God, to love each other as brethren, and to do good especially unto them who are of the household of faith, by relieving, according to their ability, and several stations in life, each other's necessities.

Congregational life, then, revolved around a mixture of public preaching and private fellowship, occasions of ordered worship and intimate sharing of gifts and graces. The one exercise complemented the other, exhibiting structure and freedom, and together promoting growth and witness.

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Eifion Evans is a retired pastor and has written on Welsh revivals

Putting the Sermon Back at the Heart of Worship

Paul D Gardner

There has never been an age in church history when so much has been written about preaching and sermons. Yet, in many churches the sermon is almost an embarrassment.¹ Far from being seated at the heart of worship, it strikes people as irrelevant, or too complicated. For many it is the most boring part of a service, the time when their thoughts wander from worship and turn towards Sunday lunch.

It is easy to offer rather pious answers to this problem. Usually the listener is blamed. The problem lies with the TV age or with people's spiritual maturity or whatever. However, those who are committed to restore the preached exposition of Scriptures to the centre of church life and worship must look to themselves first. In this article I do not intend to talk of sermon preparation, of the hard technical work involved in exegesis and moving from that to the final product delivered on a Sunday. Here it is assumed that those preaching have some training in this.² My intention, rather, is to encourage those who already believe in preaching, and to offer some practical suggestions and personal reflections on developing or re-invigorating an expository preaching ministry in this day and age.

An apologetic for the sermon

Ministers and others who are convinced the expository sermon is a vital, central element of corporate worship must be able to articulate an apologetic for an apparently archaic means of communication. It is not good enough simply to say it "worked" in the past so it will work today. Neither is a general apologetic for the centrality of the Word of God in church life adequate for the purpose. It fails to explain the use of the "sermon" form as opposed to any other form of communication of the Word such as showing a good teaching video, or having a discussion on a Bible passage.³ A full defence of the "sermon" will follow many lines of argument but two are vital.

a) Biblical precedent

There are several examples in the Old Testament of something akin to what we know as a "sermon". For example, Moses preached a "sermon" at the end of his life as the congregation of Israel waited to enter the Promised Land. There (in Deuteronomy) he proclaimed God's Word to the people, setting it in its historical context, expounding it and discussing how it should be applied and obeyed while illustrating how the Israelites had failed to obey in the past. In Nehemiah 8 we again see the proclamation of the Word of God to the gathered congregation as the Word was read, explained and applied publicly.

In the New Testament Jesus' ministry is itself summarised in terms of preaching, "From that time on Jesus began to preach (*kerusso*), "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."⁴ Certainly Jesus' own ministry included at least some teaching delivered in what approaches our "sermon" form, with a public exposition of Scripture

that was then applied directly to the listeners.⁵ Peter's proclamation on the Day of Pentecost⁶ also provides a clear example of a "sermon", partly because it was a monologue but also because of the clear exposition of Scripture and specific application designed to change the will of the audience. For the apostle Paul, preaching centred on the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ crucified. That this often took place in front of a congregation, that it was an authoritative proclamation and explanation and followed upon the public reading of Scripture, that it was designed to change people's will and behaviour,⁸ and that it could readily be distinguished from other forms of teaching is perhaps best seen in Paul's letters to Timothy. For example, 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" and in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction."

b) Appropriate form of communication

Given time we could also develop from Scripture an understanding that the proclamation/monologue, no doubt ending with discussion about how to respond to the message,⁹ is an entirely appropriate form of communication. Its very form speaks of authority and of exhortation, command and demand. The Gospel is not one of many options God lays before the public. Christ's return is not a theoretical possibility but must be "proclaimed" as fact – the King is coming! In the Gospel, God doesn't suggest that it might be a good idea (but let's discuss it) that we should repent, he "commands all men everywhere to repent".¹⁰ And so we could go on. The "sermon" form does, in fact, reflect some aspects of the nature of the message.

The "sermon" as one way of validly communicating the Gospel has biblical precedent and provides a means of communication appropriate to the message. If we are not convinced of this ourselves, we will never be able to persuade others why a "sermon" should be part of worship.

The sermon, the congregation and worship

It is vital that those who worship have the nature of preaching and the reason for the sermon style clearly explained to them. This should probably be done by contrasting it with the other forms of Bible teaching employed within the congregation. People who come to Christ in our day and age do not understand instinctively why we have sermons. Most have never heard one before.

a) Explain everything!

Developing an expository preaching ministry requires that we carry the congregation with us. Thus time must be given to a careful explanation of this very weird thing (as they see it) in the church services.

b) Sermon as central to worship

Apart from the points made above, it is also vital to communicate that preaching is at the heart of worship and not an "add-on". This means being clear about what worship itself is. Again much has been written on this,¹¹ but I would specially emphasise corporate worship seen in terms of dialogue. All the older Reformed liturgies made this so clear it hardly needed to be argued. Services began with Scripture (God speaking to us). This led to our response, often using God's Word back to him through, say, a

Psalm. God's Word was again read and the congregation responded further perhaps in prayer or with an appropriate hymn. The sermon or exposition of Scripture was at the heart of this dialogue for it was here that, after the public reading of Scripture, the message of that Scripture was proclaimed and explained as God's word. A response was then also expected.

Developing congregations committed to the "sermon" requires helping them to see it as a part of the "dialogue", and to appreciate that in the sermon they hear God speaking (to the extent that what is said accurately reflects and applies the Word of God). A great sadness to me is that "worship" in many circles these days refers only to a prolonged time of singing. To limit worship in this way is unbiblical and will only hinder our attempts to insist that a sermon is central to corporate worship.

c) The Preacher is not infallible!

It is precisely because the sermon form is right for the message that we must explain clearly that it is Scripture and not the preacher that is infallible. To a modern generation, the form will hide this distinction unless it is carefully explained. The pulpit reminds us that it is the Word of God to which we are listening and that it therefore "stands above us" because of its authority. This symbolism is easily misunderstood, many believing that it indicates the preacher himself is "six foot above contradiction". To help people see the distinction, we must urge open Bibles and encourage people to question the preacher at the end of the service. Any minister who is afraid of advertising opportunities for people to question him will be unlikely to persuade this generation of the value of the sermon.

Knowing the congregation

a) Preach for a particular congregation

If people are to see the value of sermons, the preacher's careful preparation will need to be based upon a deep knowledge of the congregation. If we know our people we will know what examples to suggest to them of how the passage should be applied to their lives. We will know what illustrations will be relevant to them and at what level the material should be pitched. Some years ago I heard a young minister preach on the Woman at the Well in John 4. The service was a traditional Anglican 8.00 am communion. About 20 people attended with an average age of around 75 years. Most were widows. His application related to the danger of looking at other *women* (sic!) and lusting after them and how Jesus could see our hearts. Apart from the totally inadequate understanding of a vital part of John's Gospel, the application made the whole text irrelevant to the people present. Any idea that all Scripture is useful for teaching for all Christians had gone out the window! On other occasions I have heard excellent expositions strewn with illustrations from the Puritans or Reformers. Most people do not even know who these groups were! As a young preacher, I once referred, without explanation, to "the Reformation". A Christian couple came to me the following week and asked me what the Reformation was. They couldn't find it in the Bible! Praise God for committed believers like them! They taught me that I had not really understood their background.

b) Relevance without “speaking down”

If a new generation of people is to regard the sermon as part and parcel of *their* worship, ministers will have to work hard at speaking in a direct and relevant way to their congregations. However, this does not at all mean “speaking down” to them. The sermon should still seek to stretch a congregation in faith, life, and theological understanding. I once preached in a church on a housing estate that had just seen serious riots. There was no minister there at the time. The two church wardens greeted me with the comment that the only person in their church who had had paid employment had just lost her job that week! There were over 100 adults in church. I preached a quite deep but relatively straight forward sermon from a passage of Scripture. At the end the wardens expressed gratitude that I had not “spoken down” to them. They commented that many ministers who visited them seemed to equate poor education and lack of employment with simply being “thick” spiritually! The balance is hugely difficult to achieve in all these things, but it begins by knowing our congregations thoroughly well and thus helping them see the relevance of God’s Word to them.

c) The quest for certainty

In the last few years God has given our church considerable growth, for which we continually praise him. Interestingly this has led to people simply “dropping in” on Sunday morning to see what is going on. This is exciting and has led to conversions, but also creates another set of problems when we come to the sermon. While some forms of preaching may be specially aimed at outsiders, the sermon of which we are talking is central to worship and designed for God’s people. However, we have been surprised at how well outsiders respond to preaching. It appears to satisfy some of the yearning in the postmodern heart for certainties. People are looking for security and conviction. The sermon form once again is thus an appropriate medium to convey the certainty of the Gospel. By listening to a sermon that is serious and weighty, yet relevant, many non-believers have also realised for the first time that there is real content to the Gospel of Christ and that Christians take it very seriously.

Of course, people enter church without knowing what they are coming to. They hear a sermon which they find quite hard and rather long,¹² so we do have to work hard at linking what we are saying into their experiences. Nevertheless, from time to time the introduction, the conclusion, or an illustration may make them sit up and think. Certainly, in our experience, sermons help people realise the questions they have about the faith and that, if they are to get into this “Christian thing”, they are going to have to find out more. Like most churches we offer a Christian basics course. Most come on the course because of the challenge of sermons. They are looking for answers and for spiritual certainty. We advertise the course as “the place to ask all the questions you always wanted to ask but never dared ask!” and so by God’s grace many discover the treasury of grace and salvation.

d) Biblical illiteracy

It is easy to over-estimate the level of biblical knowledge among those outside and even inside the church these days. If ministers fail to grapple with how little is understood by those who may wander into worship, then their sermons will be ignored from start to finish. We will be praying that “outsiders” will come to faith, so from early days in the

church they need to be helped to regard the sermon as important for *their* worship, even if they don't yet fully understand worship. So be aware of just how little people really know of the Bible and preach accordingly. The other day I mentioned Moses in a sermon on a passage from Matthew. One of our well-educated but new Christians asked me, "Was Moses an apostle or a friend of Jesus?" This sort of question is not at all unusual. Recently I asked 250 children in Year 9 at High School how many knew the story of Jonah. Two put up their hands. These are the people who pluck up the courage to enter our churches as God leads them to himself. The sad thing is that many of even the most well known preaching churches actually never give their congregation the opportunity to ask such questions, for they breathe an air of "everybody should know that!" Regular offerings of short and basic "Bible overview" courses covering the whole of the Old Testament or the New are hugely popular. They help give a taste of the whole Bible and build people's confidence in being able to listen to sermons without feeling "lost".¹³

Growing a Word-centred ministry

Finally, let me make a few suggestions about growing a ministry and worship services which are word centred. Much of this is commonplace but will hopefully provide at least some pointers to help us examine how we are doing.

a) An expository ministry must start gently

If expository preaching rich in content is really new to a congregation, or it consists mainly of new Christians, then build this vital ministry carefully and slowly with attention to detail. Forget the one hour sermons, preferably for ever! Fifteen minutes maybe all a congregation can cope with at this start. Set clear time limits on preaching. This can be very frustrating for the preacher, but the end result is worth waiting for! It may be humbling but necessary for most of us to realise that we do not have the gifts Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones had, we do not have the maturity of congregation that he had, and that we live in a different age! Building trust with a congregation on this point is a vital element in helping people to learn to listen to sermons and thus to God's Word and its application. To be central to worship a sermon does not have to be the longest element in that service!

b) Carefully choose the hymns

Ensure they feed into and out of the sermon and explain briefly how they do this, so that people come to see the whole of worship has been planned to respond to the public reading of and preaching of the word of God. Thus if others choose hymns or help lead worship they will need to discuss the sermon, before preparing, if it is to remain truly central to worship.

c) Link other parts of the church teaching programme into the sermons

In this way everything can point back to the sermon again. For example, with care, a Sunday school programme could be linked to the sermon, or the women's meeting could study the same passage, or the prayer meeting could elaborate upon a point expounded on the Sunday.

d) Plan ahead!

It is vital to plan an expository ministry well ahead, especially if the links to other aspects of the church's ministry are being made. The congregation need to receive a sermon card announcing the passages of Scripture at least a term in advance. They can then be encouraged from the pulpit to come having already read the relevant Scripture.

e) Preach consecutively through Scripture

Ensure the whole Scripture is covered in sermons over a period of time. Topical preaching is sometimes useful. It can provide a break in an extended series or be used to deal with some important topic of current interest but, generally, we should preach consecutively through a book of the Bible.¹⁴ This also helps the Minister avoid his personal hobby-horses.

f) Limit the length of sermon series

I find this a real struggle, but we are to preach the whole council of God. To preach for a whole year on one book simply denies our congregation much of the rest of God's word. This may mean choosing rather larger sections of text in order to get through a book more quickly, or perhaps preaching on the first few chapters of a book, leaving it for a while, and then returning to it a term or so later. There are always problems with this, but we must be careful people do not become bored with one book of Scripture because they have simply been in it too long! This will undermine Scripture as well as destroy their appreciation of the sermon as part of worship.

h) Be passionate!

This is an age when once again people are able to show emotion and are allowed to "feel" things publicly. The younger generation wants to know whether the Word is so deeply felt in our hearts that when we preach we are seen to be "real". Of course, we should not manipulate people for an emotional response to God's Word. Passion in preaching can appear forced, and all preachers must be true to the personalities God has given them. However, they must also work at how to present the emotional content of the biblical message. We can preach substitutionary atonement as dry theological truth or we can persuade people to see that it is the most moving and wonderful truth we will probably ever experience this side of eternity. If we do this we should not be surprised that even a mature Christian may have a tear in their eye as they reflect on Christ's sacrifice for them. Without being forced, ministers should be passionate and speak the Word of God with real conviction, only then will a modern generation believe they mean it and are "for real".

h) Give people a chance to respond

Here we need to think more imaginatively. Choosing a final hymn is vital, but we need to vary the form of what happens after the sermon. Recently a number of people have been asking me for a short time of silence or quiet at the end of a sermon to reflect on what has been said and to pray it through. This is easy in our evening service, but more difficult in a crowded morning service with many children out in Sunday school and time running on. But we need to work at allowing this response time.

Conclusions

The expository sermon is vital to a vibrant maturing Christian congregation. It should be regarded as an indispensable part of the dialogue nature of worship in which we hear God addressing us and seeking a response from us. The sermon form itself suits the message, but it should be backed up with teaching in many other ways. It is indeed possible to build a renewed commitment among congregations to the “sermon”, but this takes patience and time and much extra preparation on the part of the preacher. It is worth the effort, for we have a generation calling out for clarity and for conviction of belief and we will find them hugely responsive if we put in the effort.

References

- 1 I am referring here to what we might call the “traditional sermon”, that is the formal monologue delivered to an assembled congregation in which Scripture is explained and applied.
- 2 Many excellent books are available to help us in this most vital of tasks. Among the best are: S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Leicester: IVP, 1988); J MacArthur Jr, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, (London, Word Publishing, 1992).
- 3 It is extraordinary that so few books on preaching ask this basic question about the *form* of the sermon. Even an excellent work on the theology of preaching (P Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Leicester, IVP, 1996)) hardly touches at all on this point. We need to develop an apologetic and theological base for this particular *style* of communication.
- 4 Mathew 4:17
- 5 For example, Matthew 5-7.
- 6 Acts 2.
- 7 1 Cor 1:17, 23.
- 8 Also see Acts 17:10-12,22-31 for examples of Paul's work.
- 9 eg Acts 2:37-39.
- 10 Acts 17:30.
- 11 An outstanding book on the biblical theology of worship is D Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester, IVP, 1992)
- 12 For what it's worth, in a church long trained to see the sermon as central to worship. I preach a maximum of twenty-five minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the evening.
- 13 Bishop Michael Baughen used to offer a one-day intensive “through the Bible” course. Hundreds of people took this course and many say it was a highlight of their early Christian lives, enabling them to get so much more from sermons.
- 14 Again, for what it's worth, usually when we have a series on the Old Testament in the morning, we preach on the New at the evening service and vice versa, perhaps staying for around one term on a book before changing this round again.

Paul Gardner was lecturer in New Testament and Homiletics at Oak Hill Theological College, and is now Rural Dean of Middlewich and minister of St John the Baptist Church, Hartford, Cheshire

The Worship Downgrade: A critical look at Evangelical backsliding

Nick Needham

One of my favourite theologians is John Williamson Nevin (1803-86), of the German Reformed Church in America. At one period in his life, Nevin immersed himself so deeply in the study of the early Church fathers that he said he became “dizzy” when he tried to connect what he saw in the fathers with what he saw in contemporary Evangelicalism.

Brother Nevin, I know the feeling, especially with regard to the vexed matter of *worship*. When I have been deep in the early Church – Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius and their colleagues – and I then resurface in the late 20th century, I too suffer a Nevin-like dizziness. I become dazed and amazed at the strange sight of what has replaced early Christian worship in these dark days. So let me try to sketch the things that disturb me about modern Evangelical worship, having drunk deeply (but hopefully not become drunk) at the wells of the early Church.

We could look at worship in terms of its *spirit* and its *form*. Let us take spirit first. I am disturbed at the man-centred spirit of much that passes for worship today. The almost universal assumption is that we come to church on the Lord’s day *in order to be blessed* – to be uplifted, refreshed, comforted, taught, or zapped (fill in the appropriate word). In other words, the worship is to minister to *us*. As somebody once put it, church is a theatre, we are the audience, the worship-leader is the actor, and God is the prompter.

On the Charismatic end of the spectrum, this means that “worship” is geared to stimulating and gratifying our felt needs, longings and impulses. We want emotional satisfaction out of our worship. The spotlight is on us; God is there to minister to us, to hug us, kiss us, and make us glow with warm feelings of mystic intimacy. Plainly, worship has become a man-centred activity. And yet are things very different in principle when we go into a more “conservative” non-charismatic service of worship? Here the “worship” revolves around the sermon; everything else are mere “preliminaries” to be got through as quickly as is decently possible. People listen to the sermon to get a blessing out of it – to have an experience of God’s presence through the anointing on the preacher, or to receive intellectual satisfaction through the sermon’s contents.

My problem is that both these approaches to worship are equally and catastrophically man-centred. The Charismatic comes to church in order to have a mind-bypassing Toronto/Pensacola experience; the Puritan comes in order to have a mind-massaging “preaching experience”. But mankind and human experience stand resolutely in the centre in both cases. One man wants to be zapped *out* of his mind with wondrous feelings, the other man wants to be zapped *into* his mind with wondrous preaching. But both varieties stand centre stage, crying like the leech, “Give me!”

This shared disease of Charismatic and Puritan man-centredness has, I surmise, seriously distorted the true spirit of worship. True worship is God-centred. As the same writer quoted a minute ago put it, if church is a theatre, the reality is that we the congregation are the actor, the worship-leader is the prompter, and *God is the audience*. Why do we, the Lord's people, gather before the Lord on His day? Not primarily to be blessed, but to bless Him as our Creator and Redeemer. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name!" (Ps. 103:1). Of course we desire blessing *from* God; but we are most likely to find it when our overarching desire and aim are to bless Him. "Bless" means "speak well of". God speaks well of us when we speak well of Him.

Consider Acts 13:2: "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." The Holy Spirit speaks when the church in Antioch is doing what? Ministering to one another? Being ministered to by the Lord? No, *ministering to the Lord*. "Minister to" is the Greek word "*liturgeo*", from which we get "liturgy". They liturgized to the Lord. They served Him, blessed Him, offered worship to Him – not with any ulterior motive of getting a good feeling out of it, but because the Lord of glory is worthy of such worship. Notice the mention of fasting: here was a ministering to the Lord which involved self-denial, not self-satisfaction. And it was while they were liturgizing to the Lord in this self-denying spirit that the Spirit spoke back. This seems a number of light years away from the man-centred "Bless me, teach me, zap me" ethos of modern worship, whether Charismatic or Puritan.

Or consider again the Lord Jesus Christ's discussion with the Samaritan woman about worship: "The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23). The word "worship" here is "*proskuneo*", literally "to kiss towards". The original reference was to a subject kissing the hand of his king as a sign of homage and loyalty. Hence it came to mean "to do obeisance", and hence "to worship". Worshipping the Father in spirit and truth means performing towards him those acts which manifest our homage and loyalty to Him as our King, by which we "kiss his hand", paying Him due honour. Once again a God-centred view of worship confronts us. Why do God's people gather on God's day? To render to Him homage, honour, obeisance and adoration by those actions which are the divine equivalent of kissing a king's hand.

Here, then, is the spirit which ought to govern our worship. How far away this is from our modern preoccupations is painfully evident. Charismatics seek emotional fixes from Spirit-dispensing gurus, and Puritans seek sermonic highs from Spirit-anointed orators, but Scripture preaches the God-centred worship of the true God, the ever-blessed Trinity. This is costly; it demands effort; it is not necessarily emotionally fulfilling or heart-warming in any immediate sense. The greatest worshipper was our great high priest, Jesus Christ, and the greatest act of worship ever offered was His priestly self-offering to God on the altar of the cross. Did that warm Jesus' heart? No, but it warmed the Father's heart – and that is the most basic consideration in worship.

From the spirit of worship let us pass to its *form*. Spirit must be embodied in form, and form in its turn fashions and nurtures spirit. Yet both Charismatic and Puritan worship harbour a deep hatred of form. Each in its own way idolises *spontaneity*. The assumption is that only the spontaneous utterance of the heart can be spiritual and

sincere; therefore form, structure, set pattern and liturgy stifle the Spirit. (This argument, of course, would prevent us from ever singing psalms and hymns, which are pre-composed set prayers to be sung by those who did not write them; but no-one seems to notice this.) Hypnotised by spontaneity, Charismatics tend to want to “go with the flow” of the (alleged) Spirit in a service of worship, which in its extreme variety leads to gatherings where nobody knows what is going to happen next. Who knows how the Spirit will lead? Form and structure are thus placed under the dictatorship of mood and feeling. Indeed, the creation of mood and feeling, the engendering of atmosphere, become the ultimate goal of whatever forms exist; and this atmosphere is then assumed to be the Holy Spirit.

Puritanism suffers from the same defect in a different guise. The adulation of spontaneity leads to the abandonment of liturgy. Since the whole congregation obviously cannot pray spontaneously at the same time without sounding like a tower of Babel, vocal prayer is taken away from the congregation and monopolised by the minister, who prays his own prayers, often long-winded, often flowery, often tedious, during which the mind of the average worshipper wanders half-a-dozen times. There is in Puritan services no collective confession of sin, no collective affirmation of the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed, no collective reciting of the Lord’s Prayer or the Ten Commandments. A passive congregation sits and listens to a Puritan priest carrying out acts of worship on their behalf. Who said the popish Middle Ages were over? They are alive and well and living in the clericalism of Puritan worship.

It may surprise many of us, but the worship-forms of the early Church and the Reformers were resolutely, robustly, resoundingly liturgical. Liturgy means “the work of the people”. Worship is not the work of the minister; it is the *people’s* work. Here is an interesting question: who invented liturgical worship-books for congregational use? Not medieval papists, but Reformation Protestants. Why? To liberate worship from priestly captivity and put it back where it rightly belongs, in the hands and mouths of the people. Liturgy liberates the congregation to take part actively, vocally, together, as the body of Christ, in the worship of the blessed Trinity. Not Tom, Dick and Sally popping up with their own individual contributions (there’s self-serving individualism for you), but the whole people corporately confessing, affirming, reciting, interceding, praising as a congregation of royal priests. As for the minister, he happily ceases to be the “crafter of worship experiences” (an Evangelical blasphemy I recently came across), and becomes instead the servant of the liturgy. As Alexander Vinet put it, “The minister is bound to the liturgy, which belongs not to him, but is the utterance of the congregation, to which he does but lend his own individual voice” (*Pastoral Theology*, p.221).

Protestant backsliding from liturgy, and the renewed medieval captivity of worship to the all-performing minister, must be traced largely to Puritanism, especially its Independent “left wing”. I admire the Puritans as physicians of the individual soul. Yet in a real sense, they so easily became proto-Charismatics in their emphasis on inwardness, emotion, spontaneity, and the “felt presence” in piety and worship. In their case it was wedded to a distrust of the physical as a vehicle for the spiritual. (But what then becomes of baptism, Lord’s Supper, the printed Bible?) As a result, Puritanism set in motion a powerful stream of tendency towards the stripping down of physical worship forms to a bare (almost naked) minimum, that the soul alone might stand before God alone. At times, this Puritan crusade against liturgy could take on quite

ludicrous proportions. The prince of the Puritans, John Owen, manfully disposed of the Lord's Prayer in corporate worship by arguing that Christ gave this prayer before His resurrection, therefore it was essentially an Old Testament prayer not suited to New Testament worship! (See Owen's *Discourse Concerning Liturgies*, in *Works* vol. 15, p. 14). Perhaps we should heroically ditch the whole Sermon on the Mount for the same reason. Was John Owen the unwitting father of Dispensationalism?

Under the dynamic of Puritanism, then, out went the liturgical-congregational worship structures of Luther, Calvin, Anglicanism, and the original Reformation. In came the passive spectator-style worship of Nonconformity: the sermon sandwich, with all its man-centred idolisation of the anointed preacher and the "warmed heart" which his rhetoric engendered in the pew-fodder. By the close of the 17th century, Samuel Wesley (father of John and Charles) tells us that the mere mention of liturgy was enough to make Nonconformists sneer and hurl abuse at their Anglican brethren. "Nothing was more common than to hear the public prayers and established liturgy ridiculed, and the words and expressions therein, as well as the persons officiating, made the constant subject of all the bad jests that could be invented" (*Letter from a Country Divine*, London, 1706, p.4). In so behaving, Puritans and Nonconformists were sneering at the early Church fathers and hurling abuse at the Reformers. Fortunately the continental Reformed Churches were unaffected by this English Puritan downgrade and retained the old Calvinistic liturgical forms.

The Charismatic movement was partly, we may think, a timely reaction against the congregationally passive, minister-dominated, sermon-worshipping degeneration of Protestant worship in the English-speaking Nonconformist world. But Charismatic worship turned out to be based on the same anti-form assumptions as Puritanism. If Puritanism's hyper-spirituality tended to make worship exclusively a matter of mental piety to the exclusion of the body, Charismaticism has often run to seed in a style of worship which is all body to the exclusion of the mind. And so Evangelical worship has polarised between the party of anti-form mental experience and the party of anti-form physical experience: "teach me" versus "zap me". But where is "worship God"? Neither party seems willing to challenge the shared presupposition of experiential romanticism. This is what equally undergirds each side's hostility to the liturgical form which harnesses and empowers the spirit to worship God in harmony with other worshipping spirits.

Yes, brother Nevin, I too feel dizzy. Evangelicalism has sold its theocentric birthright for a man-centred idolatry of feeling and experience, in worship as well as in theology, among Puritans as well as Charismatics. But I do suggest it is high time we went back to the Fathers and the Reformers, that we might be reminded about the nature of true worship, both in its spirit and in its form. "They ministered to the Lord." – "Those who kiss God's hand must kiss His hand in spirit and truth." – "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." – "And all the people said, Amen!"

Suggested Reading:

Charles W Baird, *A Chapter on Liturgies* (London 1856)

William D Maxwell, *An outline of Christian Worship* (London 1945)

Dr Nick Needham lectures in Church History, Highland Theological Institute, Dingwall

Law and the Christian life

a primer on the current debate

Christopher Bennett

Introductory considerations

There are not two views on the relationship of the law to the Christian life, but a whole range of them. If you are going to say, “This detailed position of mine is the right view, and I am going to regard all who do not adopt it as baddies”, you are not going to have fellowship with a large percentage of Christians!

And even if we group the various views into kinds of views, I would suggest that there are not two but three: legalistic ones, Biblical ones (of course there is only one really Biblical view, but there are probably a few that we should regard as right or fairly near), and antinomian ones. Furthermore, even when you have identified a view of the law and the Christian life that is, in your opinion, legalistic or antinomian, it is not necessarily right or fair to regard all who hold it as spiritual lepers. We have got to ask, “How do they hold this view? Are they making it the centre-piece of their theology and then bringing everything else round into conformity with it? Is it their big thing – or not?” If it *is* their big thing and they are bringing their other views and teaching round to fit in with it, they are probably well on the way to departing from Biblical Christianity as a whole; but if they are not, they may just have a little quirk. And if on the law or any other point we cut off all the people we regard as having quirks, we are going to end up in a pretty small circle! Spiritual discernment is necessary.

A range of views of law and the Christian life

1. We are justified by faith, but faith includes repentance, love for God or at least delight in him, and a heart commitment to obey him. This is not the same as saying that saving faith is always accompanied by repentance or at least a repentant attitude; it is going a significant step further. (Even John Piper wants to smuggle love into faith in ch.15 of *Future Grace*; it sounds as if his mentor (?) Daniel Fuller gives some theological underpinning to this in his *Unity of the Bible*, and denies the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace).

2. We are justified by faith alone but sanctification means keeping God’s law and this is the OT law in detail – apart from the ceremonial part (so G. Bahnsen’s ch. 2 – see bibliography – is entitled *The abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail* (Mat. 5:17-19)). This view is known as *theonomy*.

3. We are justified by faith alone but sanctification is necessary and it means keeping the Ten Commandments (with the Sabbath transferred to Sunday) as well as NT commands. This view often goes along with the view that it is by keeping our eye on the law that we are able to keep in step with the Spirit and show love to others; ie the law is important in sanctification (see eg Calvin and W Hendriksen on 1 Tim. 1:9 – they are contending for Calvin’s so-called *third use of the law*). This would be the traditional

Reformed view from Calvin and the 17th century to the present day – see John Murray et al. I have heard this referred to as the Reformed, non-theonomic view of the law.

4. We are justified by faith alone, and sanctification is also largely by faith; ie the main way to promote holiness is to look at Christ as revealed in the gospel; meanwhile the Spirit will use the whole Bible, including the law, to write the law on our hearts, but we act from moment to moment out of communion with God, not from the law as regulations we are following. (So, in Gal. 5, if we keep in step with the Spirit and love others, this will lead, almost incidentally, to keeping the law). Interestingly, Herman Bavinck, who was from pretty much the Reformed mainstream at the turn of the century, in his wonderful summary of doctrine called *Our Reasonable Faith*, teaches something in this direction in chs. 6 and 22, though he does not go as far as view 5.

5. This view is often held by those who hold no. 4: the Christian is not directly under an obligation to keep the Ten Commandments, but only the reissuing of the law of God in the NT, *the law of Christ*. (So Sunday is the Lord's Day but not the Sabbath; it is not sinful to work on Sunday). Views 4 and 5 together constitute what could be called *the modern redemptive-historical reformed view*, and in one form or another is taught by people like Don Carson, Douglas Moo et al. This view says that the whole Mosaic law needs to be contextualised into the new covenant era; we are at a significantly different point along the line of redemption history from Israel between Moses and Christ; and it is textually unnatural and naïve to try and cope with this simply by dividing Mosaic law into moral, civil and ceremonial parts. On this, see Chris Wright, *Living as the People of God*, 1983.

6. Holiness or obeying God's law (usually understood as NT commands) is good and is promoted by faith in the gospel, but is not necessary in the sense that most since the Reformation have believed: to say that assurance of our own salvation depends at all on holiness of life is legalistic. (The evangelicals who hold views 4 and 5, by contrast, normally preserve a fairly traditional understanding of the necessity of holiness and of the relationship between holiness and assurance). This is the view of Michael Eaton and RT Kendall in the books cited in the bibliography.

7. The Christian should never feel guilty; we are not under law in any sense; don't worry about sin much, if at all.

Comments

on view 1:

There is a crumb of legalism here; ie the moment we start defining faith as more than knowing that Christ has died for sinners and consequently resting in him for salvation/holding out empty hands to receive/counting on him to do something very big and very important for us, we are going down the road to salvation by works.

The NT guards against presumption and superficial profession of faith by demanding that we turn from sin to Christ as Lord. Our lives must change and repentance must bear fruit, but not by getting us to look at our faith to see if it contains love for God! Yes, repentance accompanies saving faith, but when the NT answers the questions, "How can I be forgiven?" it says simply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31).

on view 2:

We are in Christ, not under Moses (see the contrast in John 1:17). The details of the law given to Moses was applied directly to God's people in a very different situation from ours, and at a very different point along the line of the unfolding history of redemption. Also, don't forget Gal. 3:25! Of course we should learn things from all the laws of Moses.

on views 3, 4 and 5, taking 4 and 5 together:

There is a major debate among evangelical scholars as to whether the 17th century view of the law (can we distinguish the Ten Commandments from the rest of Mosaic law as they did?) and the Christian life is right or not. It would appear that many good commentators and writers who follow a *redemptive-historical* understanding of Scripture now feel that view 3 is wrong and something like 4 and 5 together is right. I gather that Richard Gaffin at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia is an exception to this. My own view now is that Carson, Moo et al must be going along the right line: we are motivated by the Spirit and by knowing the love of Christ, so the gospel needs to be a lot more prominent in our minds and ordinary meditation than the law. After all, knowing right from wrong is not our main problem! Why?

1. Because the old view does not fit with Paul's letters, especially Galatians and Romans. Paul does not counter selfishness by saying "You are under law as a rule of life" or "You must keep the Ten Commandments." Instead he goes back to grace (Rom. 6:1-2; Gal. 5:16ff). Furthermore he says we are not under the law, and never says we are under it (1 Cor. 9:21 is no exception, when you look at the Greek). And finally, taking Sunday as the Sabbath just will not wash exegetically, because of Col. 2:16-17 and Rom. 14.

2. The redemptive-historical approach to the doctrine of salvation in Scripture means we fall in between the typical baptist and paedobaptist interpretations: there is *one* covenant of grace and even the Mosaic era was part of this in a way; but at the same time there is development, change, new things – a dynamic unfolding of the covenant right into the NT. Jesus himself brings the kingdom, which is new.

3. The old division of the Mosaic law into three elements will not work; it is all fulfilled in Christ and must all be viewed through him.

4. Trusting the Spirit to sanctify us is not as dangerous as some good men think!

So my advice is: keep up close fellowship with Christ; do this partly by reading the whole Bible and being much in the gospel. Make glorifying God and doing to others as you would want them to do to you your rules of thumb, and you will end up keeping the law, which the Spirit will write on your heart while you think about the whole Bible and keep in fellowship with God.

on view 6:

While this is an understandable reaction to an introspective and rather legalistic note in the Puritans, exegetical gymnastics are needed to sustain view 6 (see eg Eph. 5:5; 1 Jn. 2:3, etc). Furthermore, what is it going to lead to? Presumably this, that people who have prayed a prayer of commitment to Christ, or have had an experience of some kind in a Christian meeting, or have been told by a pastor that they are Christians now,

will feel quite immune to the warnings of Scripture even if ten years after “conversion” their lives remain unchanged. Is this helpful? I don’t think so.

on view 7:

This must be counted as some kind of antinomianism, and can easily lead to the kind of things warned against in 2 Peter 2 and Jude.

Six clear Scriptural principles on avoiding antinomianism:

The following I would suggest as things to regard as particularly important for avoiding antinomianism, whereas most other points (apart of course from justification by faith alone, which keeps us from legalism), being less obvious, can be taught, but should not be held as “disfellowshipping issues”! And even on these six, I would caution against being “trigger-happy”.

1. We have moral obligations.

2. The Spirit uses Scripture to guide and sensitise our consciences concerning these obligations.

3. When we have done wrong – or our consciences tell us we have – we should feel pain, sorrow, negative emotion.

4. When we know we have sinned, we should, as well as looking to Christ our advocate, seek to obey God in future – ie we should repent, and true repentance will issue in the fruit of repentance.

5. If 4 is not happening and we are not obeying God, sooner or later we should start to wonder if we are really saved.

6. If we don’t think that breaking the Ten Commandments as republished in the NT is wrong, something is wrong with us.

A small bibliography:

The law, the gospel, and the modern Christian – 5 views ed.W.Strickland (Zondervan)
For a view that some would see as tending towards legalism, see D Fuller, *Unity of the Bible*.

For theonomy, see Bahnsen in Strickland (above) and G Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian ethics* and R Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*.

For a Reformed answer to theonomy, see *Theonomy: a Reformed critique*, ed. Barker and Godfrey.

For a traditional Reformed view, see Vangemeren in Strickland (above) but also J Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, pp 193-228. See also Walter Chantry, *God’s Righteous Kingdom*, which deals in part with theonomy.

For the modern redemptive-historical view, see Moo in Strickland (above) and his commentary on Romans, and Carson (ed.) *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*. See also Edgar Andrews’ commentary on *Galatians* in Welwyn Commentary Series (Evangelical Press), and various modern comms. on Galatians (Longenecker in *Word Bibl. Comm.* series, Bruce in *NIGTC* series, Fung in *NICNT* series ...).

For the disconnection of holiness and assurance, see Michael Eaton, *A theology of encouragement*, and RT Kendall, *Once saved, always saved*.

Christopher Bennett is minister of Hounslow West Evangelical Church

Paul, the Old Testament and Judaism: A Review Article*

Mark W Karlberg

Discussions on the topic of Paul and the Mosaic law continue to occupy some of the best minds in contemporary theology. The complexity of the issues involved and the importance of the subject for a biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments and for Christian dogmatics account for current preoccupation with this topic. In the interests of contributing further to ongoing dialogue, interaction with Colin G Kruse's recent study, *Paul, the Law, and Justification*, is, I believe, timely and constructive. Kruse begins by surveying briefly recent trends in NT scholarship. The limited space afforded to this overview, however, may account for the author's at times less than accurate summary of the various positions. As regards Kruse's position, special mention should be made of the views of Frank Thielman and Thomas Schreiner: somewhat surprising, however, is the omission of Douglas Moo's work in this opening survey.

From the standpoint of historical theology, Kruse's interpretation is characteristically Lutheran, rather than Reformed. The following essay will indicate reasons for this classification, as well as address the central exegetico-theological issue in the current debate. The pressing question is whether or not the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries understood correctly the foundational doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Respecting the broader theological issues at stake, the modern-day controversy brings to the fore the age long problem concerning the relationship between the old and new covenants, including the question of the relationship between ancient, theocratic Israel's compliance with the stipulations of the law of Moses and God's bestowal of temporal rewards and punishments. Is the classic Protestant antithesis between law and gospel valid? According to James DG Dunn, one of the most influential critics of the traditional view, the Pauline expression "works of the law" has exclusive reference to the ethnic "boundary markers" of theocratic Israel, namely, the ceremonial laws. While Kruse is correct in opposing this line of interpretation, he does not succeed in producing a consistent and thoroughgoing critique.¹

A focal issue in Kruse's interpretation of the Mosaic law is Paul's teaching on OT religion seen in the light of Christ's coming. Like Thielman's *Paul and the Law*, this study offers a contextual analysis of Paul's letters, starting with the letter to the Galatians, the benchmark for Paul's theology of the law.² Basic to his interpretation of Paul, Kruse rightly contends that Paul's negative assessments of the Mosaic law are not merely aimed at Judaistic misunderstanding of the law. "The works of the law," writes Kruse, "are the carrying out of all those things which the law requires."³ Unfortunately, however, Kruse misreads Judaism itself. "To say that Paul regarded the works of the law as good works done to amass merit," notes Kruse, "is to have him misrepresent Judaism, for in principle Judaism was not a religion in which the law was observed for

this reason, but simply because it was required under the terms of the Mosaic covenant.”⁴ This reading of Judaism conflicts with the portrait given in the NT; across its pages we find Judaism’s soteriology to be fundamentally at odds with the teachings of Christ.

Kruse concedes that his own view is not without problems. “To escape the horns of this dilemma,” he writes, “it is probably best to say that Paul’s argument was not with Judaism in principle, and certainly not with the religion of the Old Testament, but with those who, by the demands they were placing upon his Galatian converts, were insisting that salvation did depend upon the observance of certain demands of the law.”⁵ As regards the doctrine of salvation, the NT lays out the clear-cut, irreconcilable differences between the teaching of Judaism and the OT. To be sure, first-century Judaism contains a diverse body of beliefs. Nevertheless, a common thread runs through Judaism as a whole. The major cleavage between Judaism and OT religion lies in their respective doctrines of sin and the law of God.⁶ Though the central theme in the opening chapters of Romans, Paul’s teaching on the universal plight of humankind is prominent throughout his writings. All humankind is guilty of transgression of God’s law. The law at Sinai, stipulating obedience *as the meritorious grounds of temporal blessing* (see Lev 18:5 and its NT citations), reinstitutes the original law of creation in a manner appropriate to the Mosaic dispensation of the economy of redemption.⁷ In the Israelite theocracy the reward for obedience is life and prosperity in the land of Canaan. Under the Sinaitic covenant the principle of works-inheritance, operative in the restricted sphere of temporal life in the promised land, was uniquely adapted to the historico-covenantal context of theocratic Israel. The works-inheritance principle, functioning within the broader economy of redemption, served God’s sovereign, electing purpose in salvation. Temporal blessing (s), appropriate to the typological setting of Israel’s life in Canaan, was contingent upon Israel’s satisfaction of the legal demand of the Mosaic law, which obligation appeared as a reinstatement of the original demand placed upon the first Adam at creation. Herein lies the significance of the law’s pedagogical, tutelary function (cf. Gal 3 and 4).⁸ Accordingly, the reintroduction of the “covenant of works” was modified in post-lapsarian, redemptive history. The covenant of law under Moses was, after all, a renewal of the single “Covenant of Grace” spanning the entire age from the Fall to the Consummation. Salvation is only by grace through faith, and rests exclusively upon the merits of Christ’s substitutionary obedience, not human works. With respect to faith and works (grace and law), there is no mixing or mingling of the two.⁹

Contrary to the teaching of Judaism, both Jew and Gentile stand guilty before God. The law works wrath and those under the law, whether the law of Moses or the law of creation, are under the curse of God for transgression (cf. Hos 6:7 and Isa 24:5).¹⁰ The fatal error of the Judaizers lay in their misunderstanding and misuse of the Mosaic law; the Jews thought that salvation could be obtained on the basis of works-righteousness. (Obedience to the law was thus mistakenly viewed as the meritorious grounds of salvation, ie, life everlasting.) Unlike OT religion, Judaism not only minimised the power of sin, it also assumed a natural ability on the part of sinners to covenant with God (to enter into and/or maintain the covenant relationship). It effectively obscured the need for vicarious atonement, that which was to be accomplished by the coming messianic Servant of the Lord, indeed by the One who had come, fulfilling the promise

of God to Abraham. A true Jew, Paul taught, was one who believed and practised the teachings of OT religion.¹¹ On the road to Damascus, Paul experienced the regenerating and renewing work of the Spirit necessary for divine reconciliation. Having been converted and received into membership within the Israel of God, the apostle renounced Judaism for Christianity, the full flowering of OT religion (Gal 6:16; cf. Phil 3:3-11 and Rom 2:25-29).

Speaking of the believers whom Paul confronted in Galatia, Kruse remarks: "They must recognise that just as they began their new life as believers with the Spirit (and independently of the works of the law), so they must seek its completion in the same way. The question implies, of course, that the nomistic thrust of the Judaizers' teaching was erroneous."¹² Kruse adds that "both the legalistic and nomistic implications of the Judaizers' teaching were wrong. The works of the law make possible neither the initial experience of the Spirit nor his ongoing activity among believers; believing what was heard is all that is needed"¹³ The problem with this interpretation is twofold: first, in this monograph Kruse's definition of legalism and nomism is ambiguous and ill-defined; second, his understanding of the place of obedience under the new covenant is misformulated. What, according to our author, constitutes nomism and what constitutes legalism? In raising this issue we are addressing the question regarding the chief (and peculiar) function of the Mosaic law in the history of redemption. What does the law require? Why does Paul set faith over against works precisely in regards to the two contrasting covenants, the Mosaic and the new? Why does he place the principle of works (Lev 18:5) in opposition to the principle of faith (Hab 2:4)? And why does Paul state that the (Mosaic) law is "not of faith" (Gal 3:12)? What did he mean when he said that the law was *added* to the promise? The only satisfactory explanation, we contend, is found in the apostle Paul's *typological* interpretation of Israelite history. (The ancient, theocratic kingdom of Israel was finally abolished at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD). The apostle recognised a *legal* principle at work on the symbolico-typical level of physical life in Canaan: temporal blessing and prosperity were contingent upon Israel's own obedience, not upon the substitutionary obedience of the Lord's Anointed. Herein lies the grounds for the contrasting principles of inheritance, faith and works (grace and law).¹⁴

Kruse confusingly describes the Mosaic covenant as nomistic, not legalistic. Under the former dispensation, the dispensation of law, we are told, Israelite believers were obliged to keep the commandments in order to enjoy God's blessing (s). While not the meritorious ground of reward, obedience to the Mosaic law was nevertheless required. What was requisite of Israel as a nation and as individual members is no longer requisite of Gentiles in this present dispensation, the new age inaugurated by Christ. Kruse explains:

In the case of the Gentile believers in particular, Paul insists that they must be free from the law as a regulatory norm, *ie* they were not to become covenantal nomists, people justified by grace through faith but then required to live under the law. Jewish believers might live like nomists if they wished, because they were used to living under the law and for them it meant no change in lifestyle; it entailed no extra conditions for justification apart from faith in Jesus Christ. But in the case of the Gentiles it would mean a change in lifestyle; it would involve extra conditions for justification. So then, what was

covenantal nomism for the Jewish believers became legalism when applied to the Gentiles.¹⁵

Despite disagreement with Dunn's position, Kruse ends up holding a similar reading on Paul. He cannot consistently uphold the classic Protestant law/gospel antithesis. The difference between old and new covenants is reduced to that between what is merely external ("letter") and what is internal ("Spirit"): the old is characterised by outward, ceremonial observance of the Mosaic law, what Kruse views simply as a matter of "lifestyle." Kruse counters Reformed teaching on the "third use" of the law, namely, the regulative or normative use of the law in the life of the Christian. But contrary to Kruse and Lutheran interpreters, obedience to the commandments of God is required of believers in both dispensations of the "Covenant of Grace," old and new. *Obedience to God's law, however, functions in different ways with respect to the particular covenantal arrangement established by God, whether legal or gracious.* While Israel's obedience to the whole law of God (civil, moral, ceremonial) was never the meritorious grounds of salvation, it was the basis of temporal prosperity in Canaan. On the spiritual level, God's sanctifying work of grace made obedience the necessary outworking of true, saving faith. (There is no difference in this respect between OT and NT saints.¹⁶) Kruse's view of covenantal nomism cannot make sense of the radical Pauline contrast between two principles of inheritance (law versus gospel). "Seeing that neither the traditional Reformation view nor Dunn's view is without problems," Kruse concludes, "a third option was seen to be preferable. The works of the law are best understood as the fulfilment of all that the law requires, not in any sense of amassing merit before God, but simply because that was what was required under the terms of the Mosaic covenant."¹⁷ He then offers the following as an explanation:

What [Paul] warns [the Galatian believers] against is probably not a "bad" legalism which requires the doing of good works *to amass merit* (it is questionable whether first-century Jews themselves operated in this way). Rather, he warns them against what might be called a "good" legalism which involves doing the works of the law, simply because this is what the law itself demands, and believing that this will bring justification. Even this so-called "good" legalism must be avoided because "all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse"¹⁸

The line drawn by Kruse between nomism and legalism becomes exceedingly thin. Paul the apostle, on the other hand, speaks of the old covenant unequivocally as a ministration of death and condemnation, a legal dispensation which gave the appearance of jeopardising God's promise to Abraham.¹⁹ Since the arrival of Jesus the Messiah, whom NT Wright identifies as "the climax of the covenant," no longer is it a question of Gentiles being assimilated into the old, national covenant.²⁰ In short, the Israelite theocracy had come to an end. God's saving act in Christ does not bring about a mere change in lifestyle, but marks a decisive transition in the history of redemption. Under the new and better covenant the operation of the works-principle had been *abrogated* and the shadowy form of the old covenant, including the symbolico-typical aspect of Israel's life in earthly Canaan, had given way to the realities of the new, eschatological age of the Spirit (cf. Jn 4:24).²¹ Kruse's nomistic reading of the law obscures the fact that the curse of the Mosaic law had been laid upon the entire house of Israel, comprising both the elect and the non-elect. Kruse mistakenly reasons that

“When [Paul] says that those who are of the law are under a curse, he is not necessarily overlooking the fact that the law makes provision for repentance and forgiveness for those who trust in the covenant grace of God. What it is saying is that those who trust, not in that covenant grace, but in their fulfilment of the law’s demands, will come under the curse of that law.”²²

Contrary to Kruse’s interpretation, all Israel was made subject to God’s wrath and indignation for covenant unfaithfulness: according to the terms of God’s covenant with Israel, exile in a foreign land was just payment for the sin of disobedience. Those who were once “my people” became “not my people” (Hos 1-2). The Mosaic administration thus served its tutelary function in convicting Israel of transgression; her bondage to sin and death was typified in the Babylonian exile. Although not consistently applied, Kruse does acknowledge that “the law operates on the principle of performance, calling for obedience to its requirements, and promising life to those who do obey. This is not the principle of faith which calls people to trust in God’s promise of justification, even when they find themselves under the curse of the law for having failed to do what it demands.”²³ At this point in his argument Kruse incorporates the traditional Protestant law/gospel contrast. The law’s function is “to keep [Israel] from moral danger until Christ should appear.” He explains:

Thus, in Galatians, Paul portrays a custodial and disciplinarian role for the law. It kept people from danger until the coming of faith. It could not itself provide people who were under the power of sin with a means of justification. But its role was positive in the sense that it was intended to keep people from danger until the coming of Christ and faith in him.²⁴

The function of the Mosaic law was chiefly negative, though ultimately serving the purpose of God’s sovereign, electing grace. (The Mosaic covenant was, assuredly, an administration of the Covenant of Grace.) At an earlier point in his work Kruse stated that with the coming of Christ, “believing Gentiles have become, and continue to be, true children of Abraham without the necessity of law observance. Both the legalistic and the nomistic implications of the Judaizers’ demands are to be rejected.”²⁵ Viewed as a whole, Kruse’s interpretation does not make for a clear, coherent analysis of Paul on the law.

Kruse concludes his discussion of Galatians by reflecting upon the role of obedience in the Christian life. In Lutheran fashion, Kruse defines new covenant obedience in terms of Christian love, maintaining that “Paul is defining love in terms of the law, not reinstating the Mosaic law as a regulatory norm, every part of which believers must obey.”²⁶ He draws a distinction between “fulfilling the law” and “doing the law,” insisting that Paul is “*describing*, not *prescribing*, Christian behaviour.” Reformed theology, on the other hand, upholds the regulative use of the law, seeing that the NT does prescribe a code of ethics which is normative for Christian living. The difference here between Lutheran and Reformed interpretation is more than semantics. Decisive in answering this question concerning law-keeping is the proper understanding of the *covenantal context* in which that code of ethics functions, whether under law or under grace.²⁷ Kruse is wrong when he asserts that “the law was not reintroduced as a set of demands to be observed as a regulatory norm,” serving under the new covenant dispensation only as “a paradigm for Christian behaviour.” Kruse

concedes: “while the demands of the Mosaic law were not binding upon believers, the commands of Christ were.”²⁸ Is not this at odds with his contention that the law of God is not binding upon the people of God *as a regulatory norm*? We maintain that if the commands of Christ are binding, then they are normative for Christian conduct.²⁹ Kruse properly distinguishes sanctification from justification, while acknowledging the vital relationship between the two. Nevertheless, Kruse fails to incorporate the biblical idea of divine imputation. In his exposition of Rom 5, where one expects to find mention of this essential act of God constituting sinners righteous on grounds of the meritorious obedience of Christ, there is silence.³⁰ Kruse does recognise that Christ’s obedience sustains a unique relationship to God’s justifying act acquitting transgressors of sin’s guilt, but he is of the opinion that Scripture does not provide an explanation how this is so. Accordingly, Reformed theology – in Kruse’s judgment – says more than is warranted.³¹

As in many recent studies on Paul and the law, Kruse makes no reference to the covenant made between God and Adam in creation, what Reformed dogmatists from the late sixteenth century up to the present have identified as the “Covenant of Works.” Are we to construe this silence as repudiation of that doctrine of Scripture which has exercised so pivotal a role in Reformed systematics?³² However that question is answered, Kruse’s neglect accounts for his misreading of the apostle Paul, notably, Paul’s sustained argument in Rom 5 through 7. The “likeness to Adam’s transgression” (5:14), we contend, has reference to probationary testing under a covenant-of-works arrangement, that which was applicable to Adam, Christ, and Israel of old. As representative (federal) heads of the covenants in creation and in redemption respectively, the first and second Adams while under probation were subject to the legal requirement of perfect obedience.³³ As argued above, Israel’s probation under the terms of the Mosaic covenant bears both similarity and dissimilarity to the probationary testing of the two Adams.

Within twentieth-century evangelical scholarship, the verdict is not yet in concerning the question of the relationship between the biblical covenants, including interpretation of the administration of law in the creational order (the Covenant of Creation) and the Mosaic epoch of redemption (the Covenant of Redemption). But the battle lines in this modern-day controversy have now been clearly drawn. Students eager to make their way through very difficult terrain in contemporary theology and exegesis will not find a steady guide in Kruse. In the judgment of this reviewer, Kruse’s critique of the current literature and his analysis of Paul on the Mosaic law suggest that ongoing discussion and debate remain the order of the day. Openness to another interpretative approach, one firmly rooted in the biblical and Reformed theology of the Protestant reformation, stands as the only hope for a satisfactory resolution of present differences among evangelicals on issues of fundamental import, issues concerning the faithful articulation of the one, true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notes

* Colin G Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996).

1. See James DG Dunn, “Paul and Justification by Faith,” in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 85-101.

- ² The remainder of the book canvases the other Pauline letters, highlighting and reinforcing the argument laid out in the chapter on Galatians. Focus shifts from interpretation to application, viz., consideration of the manner in which the apostle Paul is understood to apply the Mosaic law as a paradigm, not regulatory norm, for Christian living.
- ³ *Paul* p. 69.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Cf. the remarks by Schreiner in *Romans* pp. 164, 184.
- ⁷ Kruse explains: "In the original context Leviticus 18:5 constitutes a promise of continued enjoyment of physical life within the promised land to an obedient Israel. Paul picks up the quotation, not to deny that the law could deliver what it promised, but to show that it operates on the principle of performance, unlike the promise which operates on the principle of faith. Paul does not deny that the law could deliver what it promised, but rather that the law, operating on the principle of performance, could not bring life and justification to those who broke it" (*Paul* p. 289).
- ⁸ Kruse rightly maintains that *telos* in Rom 10:4 "is best construed as "termination". Thus in Romans Paul alludes to the time when the law was introduced, and to the time when its role as both an (ineffective) means for righteousness and a regulatory norm for believers came to an end" (*Paul* p. 243). Schreiner's exegesis of this text (*Romans* pp. 544-48) is not persuasive.
- ⁹ Moisés Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), adopts the view of Don B Garlington and Richard Gaffin Jr on justifying grace as including faith and good works. Departing from traditional Protestant interpretation, these authors understand faith *and* (non-meritorious) works to be the means of appropriating divine justification.
- ¹⁰ Were righteousness based on the law attainable (after Adam's fall into sin) the work of Christ would have been in vain.
- ¹¹ FF Bruce (in "Christ Our Righteousness," *Jesus: Past Present and Future: The Work of Christ* [Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1979] pp. 51-52) describes the unconverted Paul as "a more dyed-in-the-wool Jew than any of the original apostles of Jesus." He adds: "His religion was based on the works of the law, not on the work of Christ."
- ¹² *Paul* p. 75.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* p. 76.
- ¹⁴ Bruce comments: "Anyone who – in theory, at least – gained life through keeping the law gained it as the reward which his achievement had earned. It was a matter of work and merit. But anyone who had failed to keep the law – and that meant everyone – could make no claim to such a reward. The law which pronounced blessing and life on those who obeyed it pronounced cursing and death on those who disobeyed it. If those who disobeyed it were nevertheless admitted to blessing and life, it could not be on the score of merit, but on the ground of God's grace" ("Christ our Righteousness" pp. 54-55).
- ¹⁵ *Paul* 111,12.
- ¹⁶ See Mark W Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," *WTJ* 43 (1981) pp. 213-46.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 79.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 80.
- ¹⁹ Kruse correctly asserts: "The ministry of the old covenant was one of the law, the ministry of the new covenant was one of the gospel" (*Paul* p. 153). See note 22 below.
- ²⁰ NT Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Wright's writings, prolific and stimulating though they be, fail to offer the solution to the modern-day question regarding Paul's view of the law.

- ²¹ Law-keeping was the means of retaining the temporal inheritance. It is this feature of OT religion, namely, Israel's governance under the Mosaic law, which justifies the description "covenantal nomism." Apart from this understanding of the terminology, all other interpretations of Paul and the law end up mired in confusion and contradiction. (Kruse here expresses indebtedness to Richard Longenecker for his distinction between legalism and nomism [*Paul* p. 69, n.38].)
- ²² *Paul* 83. Comparison here with the views of Schreiner are instructive. A major plank in his argument is that "the law itself provides [the individual] no ability to keep it" (*Romans* p. 109). Accordingly, the Mosaic covenant only works condemnation, not salvation. No sinner is able to meet the requirement of perfection obedience. Yet, as Schreiner reminds us, elect Israelites (ie, the righteous remnant) were saved under the old covenant, viz., the righteous remnant. The letter/Spirit contrast, he reasons, is to be explained in terms of the history of redemption – the aid economy being characterised by the "externality of the law" and "the inadequacy of the law alone," – the law functioning apart from the Spirit of regeneration (ibid., p. 142). The new covenant, argues Schreiner, is superior to the old because of the gift of the Holy Spirit which accompanies the former. The question then arises: what does this say about the righteous remnant saved by grace through faith (of whom Schreiner spoke earlier)? Were they not also saved by the personal, regenerating work of the Spirit of God?
- ²³ *Paul* p. 84. Comparing the typology of the Old and New Testaments, Bruce observes: "The Israelites' experiences had been on the earthly level, whereas those of the early Christians were on the spiritual level; but the former served as a kind of allegory in advance for the latter" ("Before the Incarnation," *Jesus: Past, Present and Future* p. 99). Regarding the antithetical principles of law and grace, Bruce explains: "By contrast with the new covenant and its life-giving message, the law is described in terms of 'the old covenant'. The law did indeed hold out life to those who kept it – 'Do this and you shall live' – but it pronounced a curse on those who broke it; and since the lawbreakers were always more numerous than the law-keepers, the general tendency of the old covenant was death. The gospel, however, presents the way of life; through it the law-breaker who repents of his law-breaking finds forgiveness and justification by grace. Paul rejoices to be the administrator of a covenant which is life-giving and not death-dealing, a covenant which, far from imposing a yoke of bondage, conveys that freedom which rules wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, and he sees the gospel invested with a greater glory than attended the administration of the law" (*The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] p. 55).
- ²⁴ *Paul* p. 109.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 100.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 103-4.
- ²⁷ On the one side of the current debate, we find Silva parting company with his former teacher, John Murray, regarding what the law can and cannot do. Silva is now eager to cast aside traditional Reformed, Protestant teaching regarding the law/gospel antithesis as seen in his most recent study, *Explorations*. On the other side of the debate, Kruse commends the view of Morna D Hooker, who argues "that the law was temporary in so far as its offer of life to those who fulfil its demands has been superseded with the coming of Christ. The law is abiding, however, in so far as it is a witness to Christ" (*Paul* p. 154, n.8).
- ²⁸ *Paul* pp. 119, 140
- ²⁹ Kruse contends that "it is easier to say what *ennomos Christou* does not mean than to determine what it does mean." In this study his argument has been that "to live *ennomos Christou* involved at least the obligation to keep the commands of Christ and to live by the law of love (in the power of the Spirit), and that it probably also involved living for the Christ who died for us" (*Paul* 147). Later Kruse writes: "While Paul insists that believers are free

from the law, and that they must maintain that freedom if they want to live holy lives that bear fruit for God, he argues, paradoxically, that the law nevertheless finds fulfilment in the lives of believers" (*ibid.* p. 285).

³⁰ Here Schreiner's exegesis fares better (*Romans* pp. 267-93).

³¹ Kruse reasons: "Justification comes through Christ's blood (Rom 5:9), and Christ's act of obedience (primarily his death) effects justification for all those who believe (Rom. 5:12-21). (*Paul* p. 281). Compare the similar argument of Richard B Gaffin, Jr, in "Justification in Luke-Acts," *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. DA Carson; Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1992) pp. 106-125.

³² Consult further Mark W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *WTJ* 43 (1980) pp. 1-57.

³³ Cf. Mark W Karlberg, "Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7-13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the 'Old Man'," *TrinJ* 7NS (1986) pp. 65-74; and my "Justification in Redemptive History."

Mark Karlberg is a theologian and writer based near Philadelphia, USA

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The Dead Sea Scrolls on the High Street

Part 2

Alistair Wilson

Conspiracies and Cover-ups?

Everybody is attracted to an exciting story, not least those working in the media, and this is as true when it comes to the Dead Sea Scrolls as in any other field of interest. Indeed the DSS provide unusually rich ingredients for a drama: accidental discovery, political tensions, secret codes, hidden treasure and more. What more could a journalist ask for? Well, perhaps a religious scandal! The Scandinavian scholar Krister Stendahl writes:

It is as a potential threat to Christianity, its claims and its doctrines that the scrolls have caught the imagination of laymen and clergy.¹

Three books in particular have made the headlines in the last few years. Each one is distinctive in its particular slant on the DSS, but they are united in the claim that whatever new evidence they bring to the public requires a complete re-evaluation of historic Christianity. Another characteristic common to each of these volumes is that they have sold in vast numbers and, as the title of this article indicates, are found not simply on the dusty shelves of specialist theological or archaeological bookshops. Rather they sit brightly lit on the shelves of high-street newsagents, in railway stations and in airports. As an illustration of their widespread distribution, the author of this article walked into a second-hand bookshop in Inverness in the Highlands of Scotland (hardly a centre of DSS research!) and found a copy of each of the controversial volumes considered below (indeed, two copies of Eisenman and Wise's book). Of more mainstream books on the subject there was no trace.

The first book has the most dramatic title of the three: *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*.² This book, written by two journalists, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, certainly made a big impact internationally. The German scholars Otto Betz and Rainer Riesner write that in Germany it,

appeared in September 1991 with a major advertising campaign, and within a month had begun to top the non-fiction best-seller lists, where it stayed for a year; to date [1994] more than 400,000 copies have been sold in Germany alone.³

It is surely clear from these comments that the Dead Sea Scrolls are big news and that a sensational story concerning them will find a very receptive audience. The sensational story in this case was the conspiracy between the Vatican and the Scrolls researchers to keep certain scrolls unpublished on account of the damage they would do to the Christian faith. The position of the two journalists becomes clear on only their second page of text:

we found ourselves confronting a contradiction we had faced before – the contradiction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.⁴

James VanderKam commends the authors for “a rather good start” to their book but states that it “quickly degenerates into a disgraceful display of yellow journalism.”⁵ They attempt to convince their readers of a Vatican organised conspiracy and it has to be said that the policy of the publication team did not help to build widespread confidence in their work. In 1977 the renowned DSS scholar Geza Vermes was warning that the lack of publication of scrolls 30 years after the first discoveries was threatening to become “the academic scandal *par excellence* of the twentieth century.”⁶ However, the scandal clearly had nothing to do with a Vatican conspiracy to hide devastating new revelations about the origins of Christianity. At the most obvious level, the team working on the scrolls included Protestants and Catholics and even an agnostic, Allegro. It should also be pointed out that several of the Protestants were liberal in their theology and were not committed to protecting the claims of orthodoxy at any cost. Also, several authors involved in bringing the scrolls to fuller publication in recent years are evangelical Christians, so it is highly unlikely that they have been working tirelessly to publish documents which they know will destroy their faith.

A much more plausible (but much less publishable) explanation than Baigent and Leigh’s is that the delay in publication was simply due to unwise management as scholars took on huge personal commitments which they were simply unable to fulfil. Foolish they may have been but conspirators they were not.⁷

It might be said that despite the wild claims of Baigent and Leigh, their work was part of a movement which convinced the scholars in charge of the scrolls that they could not keep them to themselves any longer, so that in 1993 a microfiche was published containing around 6,000 official photographs of documents from Qumran and the surrounding region. For Baigent and Leigh, however, this was perhaps less than great news for, as VanderKam comments, recent access to the scrolls has revealed nothing damaging to Christianity and shows their conspiracy theory to be baseless.

The second book came from an Australian called Barbara Thiering and is entitled *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls*.⁸ N.T. Wright comments

Of all the books I have ever read about Jesus, Barbara Thiering’s is one of the strangest. Entitled *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls*, it has been marketed vigorously in its native Australia and on both sides of the Atlantic. The most distinctive thing about the book, which has guaranteed it headlines all round the globe, is the suggestion that Jesus was married (to Mary Magdalene – might one have guessed?); that he had three children, a daughter and two sons, by her; that they then divorced, and that Jesus married again.⁹

With revelations like that, it was no wonder that Thiering’s book was snapped up in vast quantities but the obvious question that they raise is, Where did Thiering find such dramatic information? The answer, of course, is in the DSS.

Thiering believes that early Christianity developed out of the Qumran community. She identifies the Teacher of Righteousness with John the Baptist and the Wicked Priest (or the Man of the Lie) with Jesus.¹⁰ These two figures led two factions of the community. The faction led by Jesus/the Wicked Priest produced the Gospels and Acts, which, claims Thiering, must be regarded as encoded documents and must be interpreted in the manner of “pesher” interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹¹

Edward Cook draws out some of the interesting codes she identifies:

by reading the Gospels as a text concealing esoteric symbolism, Thiering claims that even the most innocuous words in the Gospels are laden with meaning: The word *all*, for instance, refers to the king Herod Agrippa I; *apostles* refers to John Mark; *crowds* also refers to Agrippa I, as does the expression *disciples of John*; *earthquake* refers to the head of the Egyptian branch of the Essenes; *elders* means James the Just, as does *Joseph of Arimathea*; *Jews* means the head of the circumcised Gentiles; *leper* and *lightening* refer to the heretic Simon Magus; *the Pharisees* equals the high priest Caiaphas; *Zacchaeus* is the high priest Ananius; and so on.¹²

Cook and Wright both point out that Thiering's proposals are hopelessly flawed, not just in the eyes of conservative Christians but to almost all who examine them. In particular, Tom Wright identifies two fatal flaws. First, the scrolls simply were not written when Thiering suggests they were; they belong to a time before Jesus and the Christian church were on the scene of Palestine. Secondly, the pesher method which she places at the centre of her argument was never used as a method for encoding the life of the community in a document which someone else must decode. Rather, it was a way of seeing the present life of the community in the pages of scripture. Thiering's theory requires that she rewrite the rules of the method she claims was used. Wright says,

There is nothing in the writing of actual "pesher"-style works which corresponds in any way to what we find in the gospels.¹³

The third and final controversial book which I wish to mention is another collaborative effort entitled *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* by Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise.¹⁴ This book is interesting in that it is written by one of the most maverick of modern scholars but co-written by an evangelical scholar. It seems that Wise, the evangelical, was not as wise as his name would promise and got involved in a project that was neither credible nor entirely appropriate. He later apologised to fellow experts for aspects of the work. However, his part in the work was to provide texts and translations of some previously unpublished documents. The book is therefore valuable for the access it gives to these. However, Eisenman provided the commentary and it has no credibility whatsoever.¹⁵ He believes that the Teacher of Righteousness is James, Jesus' brother, and this underlies his commentary at many points. This view suffers from much the same weaknesses as does Thiering's: the dating of the scrolls makes this view impossible and the anonymity of the Teacher of Righteousness leaves Eisenman's view unverifiable. It is interesting to note that Eisenman's work lies behind much of the thinking of Baigent and Leigh in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*.

In a somewhat different category to the previous works is the view of Father Jose O'Callaghan that a tiny fragment from cave 7 (7Q5) is a fragment of the Gospel of Mark which, if true, would have implication for the common assumptions about the dating of the New Testament documents. This argument has been taken up and forcefully presented by a German evangelical scholar, CP Thiede but most scholars are not convinced, largely on the basis that the argument depends on a reconstructed text and several alternative reconstructions are possible. The argument (regardless of who has the better of it) may be a valuable warning that a position should be adopted because of good evidence, not because it helps conservative conclusions!

It should go without saying, however, that these books are not the only ones which have been written in recent years.¹⁶ Evangelical scholars, in particular, have produced particularly valuable works on the scrolls.¹⁷ It is encouraging to see a growing number of evangelicals involved in the process of scroll translation and the communication of its results. However, it remains a fact that while some rather maverick volumes fly immediately to the top of the best-seller charts, the most sane and reliable volumes seldom gain the same publicity and shelf-space. But then sanity and reliability never did make fortunes.

Conclusion

The Dead Sea Scrolls have captured the attention of scholars and Christians in the churches, the academics and the readers of popular paperbacks. It really is possible these days to find the DSS on every High Street in the country. However, “let the buyer beware”! Many of the volumes on the shelves of the bookshops and newsagents will give an impression of the scrolls that would not be accepted by the most competent researchers and may lead interested Christians to doubt the credibility of their faith. It may be that the interested reader has to search a little off the beaten track to find the most reliable guides.

But after all the fuss is gone, do these scrolls leave the Christian with his or her faith in shreds? The answer must be a resounding, NO! This is not primarily because the authors of the scare-mongering paperbacks have been proved to be either manipulative or selective with the evidence (though they have indeed been shown to be guilty on this score). Rather it is because there is no evidence at all that challenges the truth of Christianity. One of the original team of experts, Dr Millar Burrows, with no particular desire to uphold Christian orthodoxy, wrote as follows:

It is quite true that as a liberal Protestant I do not share all the beliefs of my more conservative brethren. It is my considered conclusion, however, that if one will go through any of the historic statements of Christian faith he will find nothing that has been or can be disproved by the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is as true of things that I myself do not believe as it is of my most firm and cherished convictions. If I were so rash as to undertake a theological debate with a professor from either the Moody Bible Institute or Fordham University [a Catholic institution, *author's note*] – which God forbid – I fear I should find no ammunition in the Dead Sea Scrolls to use against them.¹⁸

As Christians who trust the Bible to tell us the truth, both about God's plan for his people, and about how he worked that plan out among the first Christians, we have nothing to fear from the DSS. Again I say, this is not because we reject the false teaching of the scrolls regarding Christian belief but because the scrolls say nothing about Christian belief.

In fact we should rejoice that in God's providence he has made these fascinating ancient documents available to us and in a future article I hope to indicate some of the benefits of having discovered these fascinating documents.

References

- ¹ *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1958) p. 1.
- ² M Baigent and R Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (London, Cape, 1991).
- ³ Betz and Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican*, p. 1.
- ⁴ Baigent and Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p. 12.
- ⁵ VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, p. 198.
- ⁶ Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 61
- ⁷ See the comments of G Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (London: SCM, 1994), p. 5: "It should have been evident to anyone with a modicum of good sense that a group of seven editors was insufficient to perform such an enormous task on any level." Vermes further notes (p. 9) that the team assembled by the current chief editor, Emanuel Tov, "consists of some sixty scholars compared to the original seven!"
- ⁸ New York: Doubleday, 1992. Paperback edition, Corgi, 1993.
- ⁹ NT Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (London, SPCK, 1992)
- ¹⁰ *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 26.
- ¹¹ Thiering devotes chapter four of her book to the issue of "pesher" interpretation, *Jesus the Man*, pp. 28-35.
- ¹² *Solving the Mysteries*, pp. 143-44.
- ¹³ Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* p. 27.
- ¹⁴ Element, 1992.
- ¹⁵ For this account of the division of labour, see Betz and Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican*, p. 29.
- ¹⁶ The name most associated with responsible scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls is Geza Vermes. He has provided the most accessible translation of the Scrolls which has been revised several times as new material has been made available. He has also written a very useful introduction to the Scrolls entitled *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*. More recently, an excellent introduction to the Scrolls has been produced by James C. VanderKam of the University of Notre Dame, entitled *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. The reader will recognise the author's debt to VanderKam by a quick glance at the footnotes. (The various volumes mentioned in this, and the following, note have been used in the preparation of this article. Publication details may be found on the first citation.)
- ¹⁷ The most readable book on the scrolls by an evangelical Christian is that of Edward Cook called *Solving the Mysteries of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. The reader who seeks a good, lively introduction to the subject will find this book a dependable guide. At a more demanding level, the German evangelical Rainer Riesner has co-written a book with Otto Betz called *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican* which provides more in-depth discussion of some of the issues. The recent translation, *The Dead Sea Scrolls – A New Translation* (Harper, 1996) by Wise, Abegg and Cook, also reflects the high standards of evangelical scroll scholarship.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Cook, *Solving the Mysteries*, p. 128.

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Rev. Alistair I Wilson, BA, BD, lectures in New Testament at the Highland Theological Institute

Book Reviews

Why do Christians find it hard to grieve?

Geoff Walters, Paternoster Press, 203 pp., £12.99

This book, by the senior pastor of Ashford Baptist Church, addresses the issue suggested by the title and it is written out of the fulcrum of pastoral experience. The central thesis is that for many grieving believers, their understanding of the Christian faith, instead of bringing comfort in time of bereavement, has imposed a sense of guilt and denial. He has drawn from the teaching of the Old Testament and New. He has examined at length the approach of Plato and Augustine, with a critical review which charges them, (and particularly Augustine) with the responsibility for the denial and suppression of grief that has gained currency today. There is a great deal of pastoral wisdom needed at the time of crushing bereavement. To cry with those who cry at such bitter times is an experience few of us relish and we are persuaded that such empathy helps the bereaved and us as well. Do we grieve well? These are not easy issues. But does this book help us?

I finished reading the book both dissatisfied and disappointed. It is a scholarly work for which Mr Walters gained his PhD. It is not written from a popular point of view and those determined to read this will struggle to complete it. Reading this did not have a beneficial effect upon me. My impression was that this was a book written for academia. The concessions that he makes to the higher critical movement as regards to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch early on in the book worried me. For example, on page 16 he talks of "a commonly accepted

explanation in terms of source critical theory." That kind of statement tended to fill the book, with an eye to the supervisor of the thesis rather than for the reader of the book. There is a denial of the immortality of the soul, the thesis being that this is a Platonic Augustinian theory. There is not great paradigm shift between this and conditional immortality. That is never stated directly, but this is where such emphases inevitably lead to. What was not said in the book seemed to dominate what was. I was left unpersuaded of the central thesis that the Platonic Augustinian approach has suppressed grief. Such suppression where it occurs can be explained in terms of cultural reserve. There can be no doubt as to the sincerity of the author but this work will have limited usefulness and needs to be read with care. Limited budget believers can give this a miss.

Geoff Gobbett

A grief sanctified – Love, loss and hope in the Life of Richard Baxter

JI Packer, Crossway Books, 208 pp, £6.99

The savage loss of a loved one is the most painful of experiences that a human being can go through, and each of us needs to be prepared well in advance for such a traumatic experience. Death is no friend to any of us and it is the enemy that our Saviour has destroyed. This is a very intimate account of the love match between Richard Baxter and his beloved wife, Margaret. She died on 14th June 1681 aged 45. They had been married for nineteen years. He was twenty years older

than her. Within a space of a few weeks, Richard was writing a brief history of her life, how they met and their married life together. This undertaking was an essential part of the grieving process. This did for Baxter what *A Grief Observed* did for C.S. Lewis two hundred and seventy years later. The story is well told and moving to read. Baxter wrote out of a broken heart, and this makes the book very affecting to read. It does show us an age now long past and how poorer we are today for that. One is staggered at the work and writing schedule Richard undertook before the age of word processors. He enters into personal judgements that us moderns wince at, but there is a comely frankness about Richard that one finds refreshing, if not a little embarrassing. One quote will suffice. "And the pleasing of a wife is no easy task. There is an unsuitableness in the best and the wisest and most alike. Faces are not so unlike as the apprehensions of the mind. They that agree in religion, in love and interest. Yet may have different apprehensions about occasional occurrences. Persons, things, words etc."

This personal odyssey makes it evident that Baxter knew himself, and his writing was an aid that showed this to a marked degree. Packer has evident affection for Baxter. In the closing chapter he gives three reasons why this book saw the light of day. Firstly, he wanted us to meet his friend, Richard Baxter who evidently and plainly worked at his puritan marriage, and who became a widower grieving for his dear one. Secondly, he wanted to show us the puritan ideal for marriage and how much this is in contrast with today. Thirdly, to show us the Christian way of handling grief that bereavement inevitably brings. All of us are to face it and it is well to be prepared. This book goes a long way to do that. This is highly recommended and a worthy

addition to your library when comes the sad day when help is needed as is offered here.

Geoff Gobbett

Picking Up the Pieces

David Hilborn

Hodder and Stoughton, 322pp, £8.99

David Hilborn is a minister at the City Temple in London and also works as Theological Consultant of the Evangelical Alliance. In this impressive tour de force he challenges both the reductionist tendencies of "post-evangelicals" and the protectionist tendencies of traditional Evangelicals. This statement of a "third way" will not please everybody, many of our cherished preferences, including "expository preaching", are challenged. However, I was impressed by David Hilborn's honest attempt to respond creatively rather than emotively react to changing trends in our society. The book concludes with his "Agenda for Postmodern Evangelicalism", in which he seeks to stimulate us to "meet the challenges of postmodernity without diverting into the vagaries of post-evangelicalism". Here is a book to keep us on our toes!

The Meaning of Freedom

J Andrew Kirk

Paternoster Press, 262pp, £12.99

This is a well researched and beautifully written exploration of the subject of Freedom. Kirk compares and contrasts the differing approaches to freedom in history, the contemporary world, Islam and Christianity. Clarifying the basis and nature of personal freedom is one of the main challenges in our increasingly relativistic generation. No longer are people asking "is it true?" Rather the predominant question will be "does it feel good?" Kirk underlines the fact that true freedom can only be experienced

within the context of truth. It is worth noting his statement that the gospel would not be good news if it was not true news. Here is a book which will stimulate of our thinking and aid us in our attempts to evangelize our "free" thinking contemporaries.

John Wood

Virtual Morality

Graham Houston

Apollos, 1998, 224 pp, £14.99

This is a rare and a brave book which deserves to succeed. It handles two unfamiliar topics and seeks to bring them together. Virtual Reality [VR] is the use of computer technology to create an artificial space/time universe which simulates but can extend and mould reality for those who experience it. Christian Ethics is, for evangelicals at least, the use of revealed Biblical principles to consider what is right and wrong in human conduct. [At the sharp end we are all doing this but as a theoretical discipline it remains a specialist field.]

Dr Houston wrote his PhD thesis on the application of Christian Ethics to VR and this book is the fruit of his study. It has the merits of a scholarly work, with some searching analysis of the philosophy of technology in the context of postmodernity. Although not an easy read, it is a valuable exercise, as there has been so little work done by evangelicals in this field.

While most of us think of VR as being an entertainment medium there are well chosen examples here of its use in medicine, architecture and museums. There are also timely warnings about cyber-sex, child abuse and the sheer individualism of VR as the ultimate artificiality in fleeing from the real world of human relationships.

At one level, of course, technology, is value free but Houston argues that the kind of world envisaged by the VR technologist

necessarily assumes its own set of values. It is how and why God's creatures use the complex tools now available to them which is the proper subject of ethical enquiry. That is why Houston is right to set VR against the background of Biblical anthropology and also of eschatology. Christians are meant to be witnesses in the here and now to the reality of the new heavens and the new earth, which are for us not virtual constructs but living realities!

If for no other reason this book is useful in providing [pp. 75-85] a more accessible introduction to Oliver O'Donovan's ethical insights than his own somewhat opaque 1994 work, "Resurrection and Moral Order". Chapter Five tackles the difficult area of "Christian Ethics as Public Truth", where the author follows Lesslie Newbigin in looking for ways to use distinctively Christian principles which could be validly applied to secular conduct. I wish I could say that he succeeds but I fear he does not. While these efforts are helpful in encouraging Christians to witness to their colleagues, confident in the Bible's self-authenticating truth claims, they cannot address the blindness of fallen nature which neither sees nor feels the weight of this evidence.

I have other reservations, too. Calvin is made to sound more Barthian than he was [p. 23] and Ephesians 2:14 is applied to the unity of the human family rather than that of the redeemed community [p. 87].

More and more evangelicals, however, are working in the IT industry today and this book will give them a lot to think about. Our contemporary culture is bringing with it a lot of suspicious baggage and, read with care, Houston will help us to think through this stuff. But it does not come with a yellow cover because it is not for Dummies.

Alan Gibson

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.
 4. To stimulate interest in contemporary theological matters among evangelical churches by the way in which these topics are handled and by indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.
 5. To keep our readers informed about the contents of new books and journals, as a means of encouraging their stewardship of time and money.
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Annual New Testament Literature Survey (1999)

Alistair I Wilson

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to survey recent literature on the New Testament. I make no claims that this survey is exhaustive. I have not restricted my selection to evangelical authors, but have also included reference to several constructive non-evangelical works, which nonetheless contain comments or conclusions that I would not accept. The focus of this article will be on works published in the last 24 months, but since there has been no similar survey in recent editions of *Foundations*, I will perhaps be excused if occasionally I refer to important literature published as far back as 1993.¹

NT Theology

There are three categories of books on NT Theology to consider here. First there are volumes that seek to present the theological voice of the entire NT canon. The posthumous *New Testament Theology* by **George B Caird**, (and completed by his student **LD Hurst**) was published in 1994. Though not holding to a sufficiently robust doctrine of Scripture, Caird is nonetheless an able guide through the NT. His comments are generally sensitive to the message of the biblical text, and often penetrating. Stretching to two large volumes is the recently translated and published NT Theology of **Adolf Schlatter**.² Schlatter should be required reading for those who ask, "can any good thing come out of Germany?" This reformed Swiss scholar, who taught in the University of Tübingen for many years, offers a challenging (and demanding) presentation of the message of the NT, demonstrating equal concern for history and theology.

Worth watching is the McMaster New Testament Studies series. Edited by **RN Longenecker**, these volumes aim to draw together essays by specialist biblical interpreters written in accessible style on topics of significance for the life of the church. To date, three volumes have appeared in the series: *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*,³ *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life Thought and Ministry*,⁴ and *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*.⁵ Generally these volumes achieve what was intended for them. They certainly dispense with much of the clutter of academic papers, and there is a clear effort on the part of the authors to express themselves clearly, although some papers do not make the connection with the life of the church particularly obvious.

Also dealing with a specific issue is the two volume set, *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will*, edited by **Thomas R Schreiner** and **Bruce A Ware**.⁶ Written as a direct response to the Arminian theology of *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*,⁷ and echoing the title of Luther's famous work, this collection of essays examines the theology of the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation. Although the volumes include a broad range of essays from theological, historical and practical perspectives, there is also a group of fine exegetical papers from authors such as Grudem, Piper and Schreiner.

In a similar vein is the important volume, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*,⁸ edited by **A Köstenberger, TR Schreiner & HS Baldwin**. This is a valuable attempt to earth ecclesiastical practice in careful exegetical theology, written from a "complementarian" perspective.

Secondly, some volumes present the theology of a particular canonical document. Notable in this regard is the series entitled (rather prosaically) "New Testament Theology" edited by Professor James DG Dunn, and published by Cambridge University Press. Most of the proposed volumes have now been published, and many are useful. Particularly excellent is the volume on Revelation by **Richard J Bauckham**.⁹

Finally, we must mention works that focus on the thought of one individual NT author. Not surprisingly, Paul has been the focus of several important works published in the last few years. Pride of place must go to the outstanding achievement of **James DG Dunn** in producing his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. This is a superb volume, profound yet readable. There is no doubt that some of Dunn's conclusions can be and should be contested, but that is the task of a careful and respectful review. In a few words, all that can be conveyed is the clarity, rigor and usefulness of this landmark volume.

On a similar scale, and equally indispensable, is **Gordon Fee's** book on the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul, which has been reviewed elsewhere in *Foundations*.¹⁰ Fee's skill as an interpreter of Paul is immense, and the wise preacher will listen to his opinion, even if he finally rejects it.

The impact of EP Sanders' writings is felt in numerous ways in Pauline studies, and in particular it has prompted a vibrant debate on Paul's view of the Mosaic law. Three useful volumes that critically interact with Sanders and his followers from an evangelical perspective are **Thomas R Schreiner's** *The Law and Its Fulfillment*,¹¹ **Frank Thielman's** *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach*,¹² and **Colin Kruse's** *Paul, the Law and Justification*.¹³ These volumes also provide useful sparring partners for readers who wish to wrestle with James Dunn's recent volume. With regard to the theme of justification, **Philip Eveson's** valuable study may be consulted for discussion of some important contemporary literature.¹⁴

Encompassing all three of these categories, mention should be made of the various titles in the series "New Testament Biblical Theology" published by Apollos. Some volumes in the series are on OT Theology, but several devoted in full or in part to NT themes, such as recent volumes by **Craig Blomberg** and **Murray Harris**. This series includes several excellent volumes, and the preacher will find in them rich material based on solid exegesis, which will still provoke fresh thinking on issues of contemporary application.

NT Ethics

The issue of NT ethics has not been particularly well served in terms of serious theological literature. A substantial step to rectify this situation has been taken with the publication of **Richard B Hays'** volume, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.¹⁵ Although one wishes that Hays' doctrine of scripture was more robust, yet he takes a commendable stand on the contemporary relevance of NT teaching to issues such as homosexuality and warfare. This is a stimulating book, which repays careful and thoughtful reading.

Commentaries

Turning our attention to commentaries on individual books, we have only space to mention a few significant volumes.

Beginning with the Gospels, the recent commentary by **Craig Keener**¹⁶ is a detailed exegetical work, which nonetheless is presented accessibly, with the preacher and teacher in mind. A mammoth work, it deserves more detailed evaluation at a later date, but it shows great promise and deserves a brief mention here. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) series has served preachers faithfully for over forty years. Several fresh volumes are worthy of note here. The NICNT replacement on Luke is written by **Joel B Green**,¹⁷ who draws on literary studies of the Gospels for his interpretation. However, the preacher may find more help in **D Bock's** massive two-volume commentary on Luke in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (BECNT).¹⁸ Though Bock teaches in the dispensational Dallas Theological Seminary, he is a so-called "progressive dispensationalist" which indicates, in part, that he is more sensitive to the importance of the OT for understanding the NT than we might expect.

On Acts, we must note the major commentary by **Ben Witherington**, who continues his pattern of producing "socio-rhetorical" commentaries. Although the phrase sounds daunting, it basically indicates sensitivity to the world of the first century and to the structure of the text that leads to helpful exegesis.¹⁹ For a more specifically theological perspective, **DG Peterson** and **IH Marshall** have edited *Witness to the Gospel* on the theology of Acts.²⁰ Bridging the gap between scholarship and application is the innovative volume by **Dennis Johnson**, entitled *The Message of Acts*.²¹ Pastors will find that Johnson provides a useful model for exposition.

Douglas J Moo's commentary on Romans in the NICNT series has already earned an assured place on the shelves of ministers.²² Vying for attention, however, is the new commentary on Romans by **Thomas R Schreiner**,²³ which is a model of clear expression and keeps the needs of the preacher in view, yet does not evade important issues. The recent commentary by **Paul W Barnett** on **2 Corinthians** is a further welcome addition to the NICNT series. On Galatians, **Ben Witherington's** commentary, entitled *Grace in Galatia* may be found to be helpful.²⁴ It is typically thorough and well written, with an eye to application. Witherington's concern for rhetorical structure, though it will not convince at every point, leads to a sense of the coherence of the argument of the letter.

Philippians is well served by good commentaries. Noteworthy are **Peter O'Brien's** NIGTC volume and **Moisés Silva's** volume in the BECNT series. More recently, **Gordon Fee's** contribution to the NICNT series²⁵ has demonstrated that Fee is able to maintain the exceptionally high standards of textual, historical, literary and theological comment set by his commentary on 1 Corinthians for the same series.

Recent additions to the admirable Crossway Classic Commentaries series are **John Calvin** on *1&2 Timothy/Titus* and **John Owen** on *Hebrews*. These volumes are condensed and modernised versions of classics from various ages. Calvin is always contemporary, and the astonishingly brief edition of Owen's *magnum opus* may provide a helpful entry point to his voluminous writings.

Two recent volumes in the Welwyn commentary series²⁶ deal with short letters.

Peter Barnes provides an exposition of the Johannine letters, and **John Benton** writes on Jude. It is particularly good to see the latter document given a separate treatment, which may open it up to readers who have so far neglected it.

Recent years have seen several major commentary series add a commentary on Revelation. While Aune (WBC) and the revised Mounce (NICNT) will be important resources for the serious exegete, perhaps the most important volume has come from the pen of **Greg K Beale**.²⁷ For those who have reasonable competence in Greek, this volume provides virtually an exhaustive discussion of the text from a thoroughly evangelical standpoint. Beale is particularly helpful on the Old Testament background to Revelation.

Conclusion

The volumes identified above are only a small proportion of the aids to exegesis and exposition available to the pastor. It is our responsibility to use them widely and wisely so as to make more effective our proclamation of the Gospel of God.

Notes

- ¹ The most useful survey of literature published up to 1993 is DA Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Leicester, IVP, 1993).
- ² Vol 1: *The History of the Christ* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1997); Vol 2: *The Theology of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1999).
- ³ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996.
- ⁴ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997.
- ⁵ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.
- ⁶ Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.
- ⁷ Clark Pinnock (ed). Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1989.
- ⁸ Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.
- ⁹ Cambridge, CUP, 1993.
- ¹⁰ *Foundations* 38 (1997) 46-48.
- ¹¹ Grand Rapids, Baker, 1993.
- ¹² Downers Grove, IVP, 1994.
- ¹³ Leicester, Apollos, 1995.
- ¹⁴ See the review by C. Bennett in *Foundations* 38 (1997) 45-46.
- ¹⁵ Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1996.
- ¹⁶ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999.
- ¹⁷ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996.
- ¹⁸ Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994, 1996.
- ¹⁹ See the review by P. Brown in *Foundations* 42 (1999) 45-46.
- ²⁰ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.
- ²¹ Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998.
- ²² See the review by J Woods in *Foundations* 40 (1998) 45-46.
- ²³ BECNT, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998.
- ²⁴ Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998.
- ²⁵ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995.
- ²⁶ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995.
- ²⁷ NIGTC, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.

Rev. Alistair I Wilson teaches New Testament at the Highland Theological College, Dingwall
