

# FOUNDATIONS

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**Calvin and Mission**

**Gospel and Culture**

**God's law: Two Views**

**New Testament Literature Survey**

**John Stott biography reviews**

British Evangelical  
Council

# FOUNDATIONS

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

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## Editor's Notes

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Neither this journal nor its parent body, the British Evangelical Council, is distinctively reformed. The BEC is an evangelical body to which Calvinists and Arminians can belong. But there is no doubt that the reformed faith has had and continues to have a profound influence in the BEC constituency. Some of its constituent bodies are confessionally reformed while others owe much to the renewal of reformed faith and life in the 20th century. Therefore the health of reformed theology is vitally important for our churches. I would like to mention several recent books that help us understand the state of reformed theology today as well as one older work.

The first book is **Donald McKim's *Introducing the Reformed Faith*** (Westminster John Knox Press 2001). McKim is somewhat notorious in evangelical circles as the McKim of the Rogers/McKim proposal on biblical authority in the 1980s. He is a conservative Barthian and this comes through in the book, not least in his catechism that is included. Nevertheless McKim is relatively fair in his presentation of the reformed faith. Intended as a primer of the reformed faith for thoughtful 'lay people', the book is organised like a systematic theology. He begins with a discussion of the importance of confessions in the reformed tradition and then takes the various topics of theology beginning with the Trinity. On each topic he gives a biblical orientation, followed by a summary of how the doctrine has been understood in the broad Christian tradition and then finally by a discussion of any reformed distinctives. Overall McKim is very helpful in giving an overview of the tradition. At some points he is wholly inadequate, as on the last things, and on others his Barthianism shows. This is especially evident in his discussion of Scripture where he tries to claim Kuyper and Bavinck for his middle way position between classical evangelicalism and liberalism. Also his definition of reformed is very broad indeed and includes anyone remotely connected with the tradition by denomination or whatever. Moreover he leaves out many Reformed writers both inside and outside confessionally reformed or Presbyterian bodies. But having said that McKim offers us a very useful overview of reformed theology today. However I would not put it in the hands of an undiscerning reader. What is needed is a more conservative version of this book that would accessibly, reliably and winsomely introduce people to the reformed tradition.

***Still Sovereign***, edited by **Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware** (Baker 2000) brings together fourteen chapters from the earlier two-volume work *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*. That work was a response to an attack on Calvinism by Clark Pinnock and others in *Grace Unlimited* and *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*. From that quarter emanates a loathing of reformed theology and a determination to unseat it from its position of influence within evangelicalism. The authors of *Still Sovereign* requite themselves well in battle. Part 1 deals exegetically with a number of key issues: the sovereignty of God in the Old Testament (Raymond Ortlund), election in John and Paul and Romans 9 in particular, the will of God (John Piper), perseverance (Wayne Grudem) and foreknowledge (S.M. Baugh). I found the chapter on the last topic particularly helpful. Section 2 takes up a number of theological issues including effectual calling, prevenient grace (Thomas Schreiner and especially helpful), assurance (D.A. Carson), and God's love (J.I. Packer). The final section has three very

helpful pastoral reflections on divine sovereignty and everyday living (Jerry Bridges), prayer and evangelism (Samuel Storms) and preaching (Edmund Clowney). Everything here is very worthwhile. While it is a defensive response to an attack this book is nevertheless a fresh and timely reminder of the greatness of the reformed faith. Reformed Christians have a glorious treasure to share with all Christians.

Not far beneath the surface of *Still Sovereign* (as the footnotes and occasional references bear witness) is a far more serious attack not only on the reformed faith but on historic Christianity. This emanates from Clark Pinnock and a number of radical Arminians. I am referring to the open theists who in a number of publications are proposing a radical revision of the doctrine of God in which they deny that he has exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. It has to be said that many classical Arminians disagree with them. Obviously the open theists are radically opposed to Calvinism and in many ways Calvinists are the best equipped to deal with what can only be called a heresy. This teaching has stirred up much controversy in North America and it is gaining influence here, especially in some charismatic circles. The reduced God of open theism is much more culturally friendly than the transcendent God of Calvinism. I believe that accounts for much of the appeal of this teaching as does the fact that it makes much of man in shaping the will of God rather than humbly submitting to it. As others have pointed out, we are faced here with a revival of a tenet of Socinianism that will seriously endanger the health of the church. We must take this challenge seriously. Perhaps the best book on the subject is **Bruce Ware's *God's Lesser Glory*** (IVP/Apollos 2000). Very accessibly and fairly Ware explains open theism and then subjects it to a biblical analysis. He doesn't really deal with the philosophical issues involved but stays close to Scripture. He shows how open theism fatally undermines not only God's omniscience, but also his omnipotence and wisdom. In the final section he deals with a number of practical issues: prayer, guidance and suffering. On these three issues the open theists claim that their teaching is a gain for Christians, but Ware shows how just the opposite is the case and how believers are left little confidence or consolation in this world.

Of course controversy is nothing new in the Christian church. The recent publication of a new English translation of a 19th century Welsh classic is a reminder of how intense controversy between Calvinists and Arminians and between Calvinists could be. **John Aaron's translation of Owen Thomas's *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1707–1841*** (Banner of Truth 2002) makes fascinating reading. The content of this book is in fact only one chapter in Thomas's *Life of John Jones, Talsarn* of 1874. This is a classic in Welsh literature of which Dr Lloyd-Jones had a very high opinion. The book recounts the long controversy over the doctrine of the atonement within Welsh Calvinistic Nonconformity. It begins with the 18th controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, but later focuses on the heated debates among the Calvinistic Methodists and others on the extent of the atonement and the free offer of the gospel. The three main figures are Christmas Evans (the Hyper-Calvinistic position), Thomas Jones (the 'classical' Calvinist position) and John Roberts (the 'moderate' Calvinist position). Jones is Thomas's hero. As the translator and editor make clear in the introduction and footnotes, Thomas is not a wholly reliable guide at some points, both historically and

theologically. Nevertheless he gives a remarkable account of how men on the front-line of evangelism debated these important issues. That is why this book is more than an arid record of a theological controversy. Here were godly men not always in a godly way grappling with gospel issues. Incidentally the Banner has also republished **John Murray's *The Free Offer of the Gospel*** (Banner of Truth 2002). This short pamphlet provides the exegetical basis for offering the gospel freely to everyone.

Finally I will mention a few books that can help lift drooping spirits. **John Piper's *Tested by the Fire*** (IVP 2001) helpfully shows how God's grace triumphed in adversity in the lives of John Bunyan, David Brainerd and William Cowper. As always, Piper writes with the pen of a poet as well as the insight of a pastor, preacher and theologian. Each of these pen-portraits wonderfully reveal the humanity and frailty through which God worked to advance his kingdom. The chapters on Brainerd and Cowper are especially interesting in relation to the problem of depression. **Murray Heron** is not a name known to many of us, but his short autobiography ***Footprint across Quebec*** (Joshua Press 1999) will be a great encouragement to many people working in places where there is either much opposition or little seems to be happening. The book is the story of Heron's experience as a pastor in Quebec when French-speaking Protestants were a tiny and persecuted minority. Of a more devotional nature is **John Piper's *Seeing and Savouring Jesus Christ*** (IVP 2001) in which in 13 short chapters he offers meditations on the person and work of Christ. I recommend using them in your own personal devotions as a way of focusing on Jesus and gazing on his beauty. Finally **Derek Thomas's *Making the Most of Your Devotional Life*** (Evangelical Press 2001) is really a plan for developing a disciplined devotional life. Each chapter is a meditation on one of the psalms of ascent (120-134) to be used over a two-week period. The chapters are fine examples of devotional exposition, firmly rooted in the text but calculated to warm our hearts and transform our lives. As well as using it yourself this would be a good book to recommend to anyone struggling with their 'quiet times'. Perhaps the greatest weakness in our churches is not the adequacy of its preaching or the lack of evangelistic effectiveness but rather the low level of personal spiritual life. While not the only means, books like Piper's and Thomas's will help remedy this weakness.

In the last issue Robin Weekes reviewed *Alpha* and *Christianity Discovered* courses. Mr Weekes would like the sentence on page 41 that reads 'The doctrine of penal substitution is simply not taught in the course', to be altered to: 'The doctrine of penal substitution is simply not taught clearly in the course'.

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## **Whitefield and George II.**

A Bishop was complaining to King George II of the popularity and success of Mr Whitefield, and entreating his Majesty to use his influence some way or other to silence him. The monarch, no doubt thinking of a class of ministers described by Hugh Latimer as 'unpreaching prelates,' replied ironically, 'I believe the best way to silence him would be to make a Bishop.'

Taken from Rev. JB Wakeley, *Anecdotes of George Whitefield on The Works of George Whitefield* CD-ROM published by Quinta Press.



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# Calvin's Influence on Mission

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Eifion Evans

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Writing in 1982, Stanford Reid noted that in France 'there were only 5 organized churches in 1555 (in Paris, Meaux, Angers, Poitiers, and Loudon); nearly 100 four years later, at the time of the first National Synod in Paris in 1559; and 2,150 in 1562, the date of the beginning of the Wars of Religion.'<sup>1</sup> Menna Prestwich, a more recent writer, considers this last number to be an exaggeration, and that '1,750 would be more accurate'. She adds that 'modern estimates put the number of Calvinists in 1560 at around two million, 10 per cent of the population of France ... 50 per cent of the nobility is said to have been Calvinist in 1559.'<sup>2</sup> By any standard, the figures reflect phenomenal Gospel success.

In the early years of the Reformation the Gospel had taken root very slowly and sparsely in France, mainly through the writings of Martin Luther. Even the witness of native converts had produced minimal results. Persecution was fierce as the Roman Catholic authorities sought to suppress biblical teaching, and many paid for their faithful witness with their lives. The address of Nicholas Cop, recently appointed Rector of the Sorbonne University, Paris, delivered on 1 November 1533, included Lutheran sentiments and provoked a hostile response. A month later a royal letter requested the *Parlement* to bring 'the accursed Lutheran sect' to an end. In October 1534, the affair of the *Placards* further antagonised the Catholic authorities: a broadside attacking the Mass had been pasted on walls in many French towns, including Paris. Arrests and executions followed, and many fled the country, including Calvin, who fled to Basle. There he found amenable company, among them William Farel, Henry Bullinger and Nicholas Cop, and there he prepared the *Institutes* for publication. He was aware that the work needed to address two parallel issues: a systematic presentation of Protestant Faith, and a rebuttal of charges of rebellion. This latter was necessary on account of the Anabaptists, whose amorphous theology of the sacraments, particularly baptism, and subversive idealism in both Church and State threatened the unity of Protestantism in its most formative period.

The appearance of the *Institutes* in 1536 may justifiably be seen as Calvin's first effort in mission. In his bold 'Prefatory Address' of the work to the King of France he nailed his colours to the mast: 'I shall not fear to confess that here is contained almost the sum of that very doctrine which they shout must be punished by prison, exile, proscription, and fire, and be exterminated on land and sea.'<sup>3</sup> Behind this vigorous presentation of the Faith lay convictions such as those expressed in his commentary on Isa. 49:21:

The Lord, who has no need of human aid, begets his children in an extraordinary manner, and by the astonishing power of his Spirit; and 'brings them up' wherever he thinks proper; and in the fulfilment of this prediction, the Lord supplied them with nurses contrary to the expectation of all, so that it is not without reason that the Church wonders how they were reared. When we read this prophecy we are reminded that we ought not to be distressed beyond measure, if at any time we see the Church resemble a 'bereaved' woman, and that we ought not to doubt that he can suddenly, or in a moment, raise up and restore her, though we perceive no means by which she can be restored.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the difficulties, concern for the spread of God's kingdom needs to be matched by confidence in the power of God's grace.

Born 10 July 1509 at Noyon in Picardy, John Calvin was encouraged to become a lawyer because of the excellent financial prospects that profession held for its members. The 'Preface' to his Commentary on the Psalms gives an account of his coming to faith in Christ, with its consequences: 'To the study of law ... I endeavoured faithfully to apply myself ... but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame ... Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.'<sup>5</sup> Some words here are indicative of powerful influences: 'abyss', 'sudden', 'subdued'; 'inflamed'. They also explain the constraints upon Calvin for the rest of his life in the cause of propagating the Gospel. Mission for him was not an optional extra; it was an urgent passion, inextricably linked to the service of God. To achieve its objective Calvin believed in the sovereignty of God's grace and the initiative of God's Spirit.

Calvin's initial settlement at Geneva in the summer of 1536 provided an immediate challenge to his missionary zeal. The city was in the early pangs of Reformation, and for two years he struggled to establish the work on sound foundations. Calvin composed 'a short formulary of confession and discipline', and provided guidelines for worship that included Psalm-singing. The Psalms gave content to their faith and expression to their experience. Later Calvin was to write, 'we know by experience, that singing has great strength and vigour to move and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal.'<sup>6</sup> A three-year exile in Strasbourg preceded his final settlement at Geneva in September 1541. Both his convictions and his experiences were enriched by the time spent away from the city, and he benefited from close fellowship with Martin Bucer.

By this time Calvin's first commentary had appeared, on Romans, and the thrust of his ministry was apparent. In his 1539 *Reply* to a letter written by Cardinal Sadolet to the Senate and people of Geneva, Calvin wrote: 'There are three things on which the safety of the Church is founded, viz., doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments.'<sup>7</sup> An echo of this is his found in the terms of his return to Geneva: 'On my return from Strasbourg I made the Catechism in haste, for I would never have accepted the ministry unless they had sworn to these two points; namely, to uphold the Catechism and the discipline.'<sup>8</sup> François Wendel highlights the importance of this insistence: 'the Catechism of 1542 played a very considerable part in the diffusion of Calvinism. It familiarized the faithful with a number of theological questions, and thereby contributed to the religious training of several generations of Protestant believers.'<sup>9</sup>

Guidelines for discipline came in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* issued in November, 1541. They included four ministries: pastors, teachers, elders, deacons; a Consistorial meeting of elders and deacons each Thursday; and a recommendation that a college should be instituted for instructing children to prepare them for the ministry as well as for the civil government.<sup>10</sup> Although inauguration of this college did not take place until June 1559, Wendel estimates that the Geneva Academy was Calvin's 'crowning work'.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, as Wendel observes, 'to ensure the recruitment of pastors for Geneva, for the surrounding regions and even for France, courses of lectures in theology were instituted, which, moreover, Calvin was at first almost the only one to deliver.'<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise to read John Knox's famous epithet of Geneva as 'the most perfect School of Christ since the Apostles'.



It was to this school that Calvin urged young men of faith and promise to come to be equipped for life and ministry. As an example, here is Calvin's 1550 letter to William Rabot, a young French convert and law student at Padua facing the pressures of persecution and worldly allurements:

That nothing of this kind may happen to you, you must first of all give devoted submission to the will of the Lord, and in the next place, you must fortify yourself by his sacred doctrines. But as this is too extensive a theme to be embraced in a letter, it is better for you to draw from the fountain-head itself. For if you make a constant study of the word of the Lord, you will be quite able to guide your life to the highest excellence. You have faithful commentaries, which will furnish the best assistance. I wish very much you could find it convenient at some time to pay us a visit; for, I flatter myself, you would never regret the journey. Whatever you do, see that you follow the Lord, and at no time turn aside from the chief end.<sup>13</sup>

Coming to Geneva, however, was not to be an end in itself, but a means of equipping men for the arduous task of mission. This was the reason for Calvin's stay in Geneva, as he confesses in a letter to Henry Bullinger in May 1549: 'If I wished to regard my own life or private concerns, I should immediately betake myself elsewhere. But when I consider how very important this corner is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over.'<sup>14</sup> A similar urgency permeates another letter, this time to the city dignitaries of Berne, in March 1555: 'I beg you to consider that hitherto God has made use of my instrumentality, and in all likelihood will continue to do so, that according to my slender capacity, I labor continually to combat the enemies of the faith, and lay myself out entirely to the best of my abilities to further the spread of the gospel. Thus may it please your excellencies like good Christian princes, whom the prophet Isaiah styles nursing-fathers of the church, to hold out to me a helping hand and support me against malignants and detractors, rather than suffer me to be aggrieved by them. But I ask of you no favor save on this condition, that you find in me a good and loyal servant of God.'<sup>15</sup>

There have been many who have either denied or neglected Calvin's influence on mission. Here is a typical quotation: 'He displayed no trace of missionary enthusiasm. Allowance, of course, must be made for his preoccupation with multifarious interests embracing Europe in their scope, and also for the practical impossibility, in that age, of instituting the necessary organization for the prosecution of missionary enterprise. But there is little in his writings to indicate that he felt the pressure of the foreign mission problem.'<sup>16</sup> Hunter was thinking, primarily perhaps, of 'foreign missions', but the remark reflects his general assumption. By way of contrast, here is the conclusion of Philip E. Hughes:

Calvin's Geneva ... was not a theological ivory tower that lived to itself and for itself, oblivious of its responsibility in the gospel to the needs of others. Human vessels were equipped and refitted in this haven, not to be status symbols like painted yachts safely moored at a fashionable marina, but that they might launch out into the surrounding ocean of the world's need, bravely facing every storm and peril that awaited them in order to bring the light of Christ's gospel to those who were in the ignorance and darkness from which they themselves had originally come. They were taught in this school in order that they in turn might teach others the truth that had set them free.<sup>17</sup>

Another student of Calvin's life and work, H. Bergema, concludes that, 'when missions is first of all—proclamation of the kingship of Christ over all areas of life in a world

alienated from God and his Word, witnessing for Christ as the only and perfect Saviour and of his absolute sovereignty over the entire world, and the summons to all men to be converted to God and his Christ—*then the whole of Calvin's work has been mission work.*<sup>18</sup>

There is also the assumption that Calvinism, with its emphasis on the cerebral, both in personal experience of understanding the Christian faith, and in the practice of teaching it, has little to do with a heartfelt burden for mission. Nothing could be further from the truth, a fact borne out by Calvin's own spirituality. Calvin was 'a God-possessed soul', whose religion was 'reflected in his crest—a hand with a burning heart in it, and the words, "I give Thee all".'<sup>19</sup> 'Calvin describes the whole Christian life as a bearing of the Cross', says Ronald S. Wallace, wherein we are 'laying ourselves out for God's service and proving to him our obedience.'<sup>20</sup> It was this incandescent zeal for realizing God's will by submission and confession that brought about the spread of the Gospel.

Blazing zeal, yes, but coupled with profound compassion, as is evident from his famous letter to the five prisoners of Lyons, 15 May, 1553:

Since it pleases him to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel, he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet in time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express. But as he hath vouchsafed you this privilege, that your bonds have been renowned, and that the noise of them has been everywhere spread abroad, it must needs be, in despite of Satan, that your death should resound far more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby. For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto himself, that he has preserved you hitherto, in order that your long-continued imprisonment might serve as a preparation for the better awakening of those whom he has determined to edify by your end. For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you, in order to be contemplated from afar.<sup>21</sup>

Writing to the church at Montelimar, he urges the same compassion in the face of opposition: 'Whenever you see the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ rise up passionately against you, try to win them in humility and modesty.'<sup>22</sup> And in another place, he issues a similar challenge: 'All the help we want is given to us to endure wrongs with patience, but in such a way that we abandon all desire for vengeance and endeavour to win over our adversaries with earnest reproofs, so that they are forced to admire our patience that they take the opportunity to turn to God. For what is to be the aim and the goal of our patience, if not to win their impoverished souls?'<sup>23</sup> Calvin had a heart for God, and therefore a passion for the precious souls of men.

Rejection of Calvin's influence on mission also stems from the popular fallacy that Calvinism by definition renders evangelism redundant. The argument runs something like this: election guarantees salvation to the elect, therefore they will be saved irrespective of means, and those not elected will never be saved whatever diligence accompanies means. The answer to this lies in the conviction that God uses means to bring about His ends: in particular, Gospel preaching made effective by the authority of the Holy Spirit. Take, first, these statements from his *Institutes*:

Faith needs the Word as much as fruit needs the living root of a tree ... unless the power of God, by which he can do all things, confronts our eyes, our ears will barely receive the Word or not esteem it at its true value. [III.2.31]

This bare and external proof of the Word of God should have been amply sufficient to

engender faith, did not our blindness and perversity prevent it. ... Accordingly, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing. From this, also, it is clear that faith is much higher than human understanding. And it will not be enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power. [III.2.33]

Therefore, as we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God, so when we are drawn we are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul, illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendour had previously blinded it. And man's understanding, thus beamed by the light of the Holy Spirit, then at last truly begins to taste those things which belong to the Kingdom of God, having been formerly quite foolish and dull in tasting them. [III.2.35]

God breathes faith into us only by the instrument of his gospel, as Paul points out that 'faith comes from hearing' [Rom.10:17]. Likewise, the power to save rests with God [Romans 1:16]; but (as Paul again testifies) he displays and unfolds it in the preaching of the gospel. [IV.1.5]

Secondly, consider two passages from his Commentaries on significant texts:

'Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?', says the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live' ... God desires nothing more earnestly than that those who were perishing and rushing to destruction should return into the way of safety. And for this reason not only is the Gospel spread abroad in the world, but God wished to bear witness through all ages how inclined he is to pity ... In the Gospel we hear how familiarly he addresses us when he promises us pardon. And this is the knowledge of salvation, to embrace his mercy which he offers us in Christ. It follows, then, that what the Prophet now says is very true, that God wills not the death of a sinner, because he meets him of his own accord, and is not only prepared to receive all who fly to his pity, but he calls them towards him with a loud voice, when he sees how they are alienated from all hope of safety ... We hold, then, that God wills not the death of a sinner when he calls all equally to repentance, and promises himself prepared to receive them if they only seriously repent. If any one should object—then there is no election of God, by which he has predestinated a fixed number to salvation, the answer is ready, that God always wishes the same thing, though by different ways, and in a manner inscrutable to us. Although, therefore, God's will is simple, yet great variety is involved in it, as far as our senses are concerned.<sup>24</sup>

'God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' ... God has at heart the salvation of all because he invites all to the acknowledgement of his truth. This belongs to that kind of argument in which the cause is proved from the effect; for, if 'the gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one that believeth', (Rom. 1:16,) it is certain that all those to whom the gospel is addressed are invited to the hope of eternal life ... Hence we see the childish folly of those who represent this passage to be opposed to predestination. 'If God', say they, 'wishes all men indiscriminately to be saved, it is false that some are predestinated by his eternal purpose to salvation, and others to perdition' ... the Apostle simply means, that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to all without exception. Now the preaching of the gospel gives life; and hence he justly concludes that God invites all equally to partake salvation. But the present discourse relates to classes of men, and not to individual persons; for his sole object is, to include in this

number princes and foreign nations. That God wishes the doctrine of salvation to be enjoyed by them as well as others, is evident from the passages already quoted, and from other passages of a similar nature ... Now the duty arising: out of that love which we owe to our neighbour is, to be solicitous and to do our endeavour for the salvation of all whom God includes in his calling, and to testify this by godly prayers.<sup>25</sup>

A sentence from one of Calvin's letters, to believers at Poitou, summarises his aim: 'Let each one strive to attract and win over to Jesus Christ, those whom he can, and let those whom a careful examination shall have proved worthy of it, be received with the consent of all.'<sup>26</sup> Clearly, Calvin did not teach his followers complacency and inaction in the matter of mission.

Calvin's prayers for the power of the Holy Spirit went hand in hand with the primacy he gave to preaching the Gospel to the lost. Hence his exhortation based on Paul's prayer for the Ephesians:

His prayers for them are mentioned, not only to testify his regard for them, but likewise to excite them to pray in the same manner; for the seed of the word is scattered in vain, unless the Lord render it fruitful by his blessing. Let pastors learn from Paul's example, not only to admonish and exhort their people, but to entreat the Lord to bless their labours, that they may not be unfruitful. Nothing will be gained by their industry and toil,—all their study and application will be to no purpose, except so far as the Lord bestows his blessing. This ought not to be regarded by them as an encouragement to sloth. It is their duty, on the contrary, to labour earnestly in sowing and watering, provided they, at the same time, ask and expect the increase from the Lord.<sup>27</sup>

It followed, therefore, that God's kingdom would be extended using God's means and pleading God's promises, a passage from Isaiah providing sufficient precedent:

The restoration of the Church proceeds solely from the grace of God, who can remove its barrenness as soon as he has imparted strength from heaven; for he who created all things out of nothing, as if they had formerly existed, is able to renew it in a moment ... We are renewed as soon as the Lord has sent down the Spirit from heaven, that we who were 'wilderness' may be cultivated and fertile fields. Ere the Spirit of God has breathed into us, we are justly compared to wildernesses or dry soil; for we produce nothing but 'thorns and briars', and are by nature unfit for yielding fruits. Accordingly, they who were barren and unfruitful, when they have been renewed by the Spirit of God, begin to yield plentiful fruits ... Whenever, therefore, the Church is afflicted, and when her condition appears to be desperate, let us raise our eyes to heaven, and depend fully on these promises.<sup>28</sup>

Calvin strenuously insisted on the need for the Spirit's activity to accompany the Word preached in order that the soul should be illumined, convicted, and converted to God. Mission is effective only when the truth penetrates the heart as well as the head.

That truth, given fervent and lucid expression in Calvin's printed works, was spreading throughout France.

Calvin's works were known in France from at least the early 1540s. The *Institutes* seems to have been in circulation among French intellectuals within a short time of publication of the first French edition in 1541, and the following year the book was specifically singled out for condemnation in a proclamation against heretical works. The first comprehensive index of forbidden books was largely made up of Genevan imprints, including no fewer than nine of Calvin's writings. That, these prohibitions notwithstanding, his works continued to be read is evident from the [1551] Edict of Châteaubriand, Henry II's

persecuting edict which rationalized and systematized previous legislation against evangelicals. The edict repeatedly singled out Geneva as a notorious centre of heresy, and forbade any contact with it.<sup>29</sup>

The Sorbonne drew up twenty-six articles setting out the true Catholic Faith in reply to the *Institutes*, and they were ratified by a royal Ordinance in July 1543. It was a time when 'religious meetings were held by night or in cellars; doctrines were spread by secret house-to-house teaching, or by treatises concealed among the wares of pretended pedlars ... Moreover, the influence of the exiles reacted on their old homes. From Geneva and other Swiss centers of Protestantism missionaries came to evangelise France.'<sup>30</sup>

Pedlars and colporteurs, fired by Calvin's example as much as by his teaching, travelled widely throughout France. The Gospel was to be shared with everyone, prince and peasant, in urban centres and provincial towns, to people at work or leisure, on weekdays as well as Sundays. Émile G. Léonard graphically records their labours in this way:

The work of transporting books from abroad (especially from Geneva) and of circulating them in France was undertaken by the colporteurs, who formed the majority of those propagandists whose number and importance has often been exaggerated. They included professional pedlars, who were not always indifferent to the profit attached to a merchandise which commanded high prices, but soon came under the influence of their wares and went to their death singing psalms ... Militant zealots like 'Guillaume Husson, an apothecary, who fled from Blois for the Word of God', and promptly went off to the *Parlement* of Rouen 'to disseminate certain little books containing teaching on the Christian religion and on the abuses of human traditions'; printers, readers and booksellers, including Philibert Hamelin of Touraine, who won the peninsula of Arvert for the Reformation. A publisher in Geneva, Hamelin transported his books to France and sold them up and down the country. Following his mules on foot, he took advantage of the opportunity to evangelise at the roadside: 'Many believers have told how, as he went through the countryside, he would often watch for the hour when the men in the fields took their meal, sitting under a tree or in the shade of a hedge, as is their wont. And there, pretending to rest alongside them, he would take the opportunity, by simple and gradual means, to teach them to fear God and to pray to him before and after their meals, inasmuch as it was He who gave them all things for the love of His Son Jesus Christ. Whereupon he would ask the poor peasants if they would not like him to pray to God for them. Some were greatly comforted and edified by this, others were astounded as hearing unfamiliar things; some molested him, because he showed them that they were on the path to damnation if they did not believe in the Gospel.'<sup>31</sup>

An underground network seems to have existed between Geneva and French soil, to facilitate travel and safety. Where groups of believers existed, they, too, had to be cautious and prudent in gathering together. Over them all, it is clear, Calvin's shadow, if not an awareness of his concern and prayers, was an ever-present reality, urging them to personal constancy and public witness.

When Calvin heard of an isolated Christian or even of an isolated group trying to gather by themselves, he was there on the doorstep, as it were, with a messenger and a letter, seeking to make them feel they were part of a far larger group in touch with the universal church which was praying for them, and had a word for them, and was seeking to support them in every practical way. Each small group that appeared, he regarded as the nucleus of a congregation which must be made to grow and define itself in to receive as a pastor one of the numbers he had trained for the purpose of such leadership under the Word of God.

When he sent his man to them, he asked them to see the pastor as one to be listened to for the sake of Christ, and respected as representing Christ in their midst, the good Shepherd. Within each congregation he sought to develop a cellular structure in which under wise and trained leadership each individual would give the other support, enlightenment and encouragement and in which those who tended to falter would be held to the faith and the standard by the expectations, example, and encouragement of the others and if need be by the discipline exercised by them. Congregations too had to be organized in groups sharing a common concern for each other and a common discipline.<sup>32</sup>

A delicate situation required secrecy; and also the city could be held responsible for what might be thought by the civil authorities of France as subversion.

Given such constraints, and aware of Calvin's eagerness to help, pastors were often requested by local, emerging congregations. A typical response by Calvin is found in this letter sent in 1553 to 'a gentleman of Jersey' in the Channel Islands:

We praise God for having inclined your heart to try if it will be possible to erect, by your means, a small church on the place where you reside. And indeed according as the agents of the Devil strive by every act of violence to abolish the true religion, extinguish the doctrine of salvation, and exterminate the name of Jesus Christ, it is very just that we should labour on our side to further the progress of the gospel, that, by these means, God may be served in purity, and the poor wandering sheep may be put under the protection of the sovereign Pastor to whom every one should be subject. And you know that it is a sacrifice well pleasing to God, to advance the spread of the Gospel by which we are enlightened in the way of salvation, to dedicate our life to the honour of him who has ransomed us at so costly a price in order to bear rule in the midst of us. Therefore we pray you to take courage, as we supplicate at the same time the Father of all virtue to confirm you in your holy purpose. Meanwhile, because we have heard that you desire to be assisted by us, and to have a man proper for the work of edification, we have not wished to be wanting to our duty. We present to you then our brother [name with-held because of the danger of the letter falling into the wrong hands], the bearer of this letter, who has shown us by deeds by what zeal he was animated. He has had such a conversation among us that we doubt not but that his life will be an excellent example. His doctrine is pure, and as far as we can judge, those who will content themselves with being taught by him in simplicity, and will show themselves docile, will be able to profit by his preaching.<sup>33</sup>

By this time, requests for ministers multiplied, and the demand exceeded all possibility of supply. It was a time of widespread spiritual harvest in France.

Mission includes consolidation as well as expansion, and Calvin consistently advocated the adoption of his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* to emerging congregations. Menna Prestwich sees the establishment of a regular worshipping congregation at Paris as pivotal in the development of a French Reformed Church:

In 1555 the Calvinist church in Paris was founded, giving an internal focal point distinct from the international Calvinist capital at Geneva... The years from around 1555 to 1562 saw an explosion of Calvinist conversions. The foundation of the Paris church set the tone for a mood of defiance, almost of triumph, and the will to resist replaced the cult of martyrdom. In May 1558 Jean Macar, a minister of the Paris church, wrote to Calvin that 'the fire is lit in all parts of the kingdom and all the water in the sea will not suffice to quench it.' Shortly afterwards, Calvinist demonstrators occupied ... the left bank of the Seine, much frequented by Parisians for evening strolling, and for six nights three to four thousand of the faithful paraded and sang psalms.<sup>34</sup>



Evidently, it was not only an explosion of numbers, but also of confidence, and of urgent need. Conversions had to be monitored and nurtured. Mission and ministry are complementary.

Something of that urgency comes across in the records preserved of the movements of pastors at the time.

During the period between 1555 and 1562, the *Register of the Company of Pastors* mentions by name 88 men who were sent out from Geneva to different places as bearers of the gospel. In actual fact these represent no more than a fraction of the missions that were undertaken. The incompleteness of the *Register* may be gauged, by way of example, from the consideration that in 1561, which appears to have been the peak year for missionary activity, the dispatch of only twelve men is recorded, whereas evidence from other sources indicates that in that year alone nearly twelve times as many—no less than 142—ventured forth on their respective missions. For a church, itself struggling, in a small city-republic, this figure indicates a truly amazing missionary zeal and virility, and a fine unconcern for its own frequently pressing needs.<sup>35</sup>

The same *Register* gives details of such appointments:

On 22 June 1556 Jean Vignaulx was elected to be sent to the brethren of Piedmont, who had requested that one or two more ministers should be provided because of the size of the flock which, by the grace of God, was growing daily.

On Friday 27 November, since a letter had been received from the brethren in Piedmont requesting that more workers should be sent because the harvest was increasing, the ministers of this church chose and sent one named M. Albert [blank], of Albigeois.

[June-July 1557] At the beginning of June M. Guy Moranges, otherwise called Monsieur de la Garde, left for Anduze to serve as pastor to the inhabitants of that region who had the knowledge of God and who are said to be very numerous. At the end of two months, however, it became necessary for him to return with the consent of the elders there, both because of his illness and also because of the severe persecution which had broken out.

[1561] M. d'Anduze was lent to the church of Lyon for some time following a request for the help of one of the ministers of Geneva in their need, since by reason of the multitude of persons daily joining the church, they had an inadequate number of ministers.<sup>36</sup>

Such entries convey an impression, not only of eagerness to help, but of deliberate policy to disperse trained pastors as widely and efficiently as possible in the cause of Christ.

Calvin's only known attempt at a foreign mission took place in 1557, when two men were sent to Brazil as chaplains to a group of Protestant emigrants. When the church at Geneva received this request it 'at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation so entirely without the knowledge of the true God.'<sup>37</sup> Thus, from the outset the enterprise was seen as missionary in its character, but the task proved impossible. The emigrants found the natives barbaric in the extreme, ignorant of God, servile to evil spirits and sorcerers. Time was not on their side and the language barrier proved insuperable. Doctrinal disputes arose, the Governor reverted to Catholicism, and persecution followed. It had proved an abortive attempt.

The following document provides a vivid, contemporary account of the typical circumstances that faced Genevan pastors nearer home. It is part of a long letter sent from 'a minister in Normandy' to Calvin, dated August 1561:

I have no doubt that some report will have reached your ears of what occurred at the Guibray fair which began on 15 August ... it seems to me that there is nothing to compare with this fair, not only in Normandy but in the whole of France. People come from all over, even from abroad ... the crowd who wanted to hear the sermon was more than two or three thousand persons ... The sermon was conducted in a seemly silence and with a psalm at the beginning and at the end. The following day the rumour spread through the whole camp that a sermon had taken place, and everyone wanted to find out about it, asking after the place and the hour. But we had no wish to tell them, fearing an ambush ... The priests had complained greatly, because of the preaching and because they had been quite openly selling books from Geneva and because boys had been hawking through the streets with loud cries broadsheets denouncing the mass ... On Sunday morning a huge number of people gathered together at five o'clock in the morning. The meeting place was changed to a place out in the open country, which was felt to be better so that any enemies could be seen from whatever direction they came. There was not the same silence as on previous days, yet everything passed off in a most edifying way, and after the preaching everyone went off peacefully ... our people assembled at five that same evening ... I believe that something more than five or six thousand people were present. I was in a considerable doubt what text to take for my sermon, but my mind was suddenly made up to speak about the Communion ... I spoke as gently as I could so as not to give offence to anyone, attributing to Christ alone all authority. But very suddenly a disturbance arose, so that everyone sprang up, clutching their swords, and crying, 'What is it, what is it?' For my part, I did not move from my place (thanks be to God for giving me courage). But I did not have the wit to remove my beret, which I was wearing to distinguish me from the rest. Then I called out, 'My friends, it is nothing', and this cry was soon on everyone's lips. Daggers and swords were put back in their sheaths. Many said to me, 'Fear not, monsieur, if you die, we die with you.' And suddenly the tumult passed ... silence having been restored, I exhorted the people to listen to the words of the Gospel, and said that it was Satan who had caused this disturbance to prevent the coming of Christ's kingdom. Then I returned to my theme without (thank God) further trouble, and continued to the end, showing the difference between the Communion of Christ and the priestly mass ... This same day after supper, between nine and ten o'clock, the stall holders were sitting around singing psalms with great gusto. And a number of makers of rosary beads from Paris called them ... rebels, and mocked them by singing bawdy songs. They were told either to shut up or join in singing the Lord's praises. And since they took no notice, a fracas arose, and voices were heard crying 'Rouen, Rouen' [a rallying cry], and a great crowd of two or three hundred found themselves at sword-point, and the cry went up, 'Long live the Gospel!' The rosary-sellers took fright, and started shouting 'Long live the Gospel!' with the rest. And the crowd moved through the camp, reforming all the singing and dissolutions they came across. That done, they put up candles at the junctions of the main roads and knelt down to pray before they went to bed, and this practice was continued until the end of the fair ... On the Tuesday, when I was about to leave, I was told of an issue that was causing some disquiet among the people. Many were saying, 'what shall we do now? We can no longer go to mass: how do we live now?' I remained there this day also, and important people, principally the local nobility, began to arrive. For it is the custom that the seigneurs come with their ladies for the last days when the merchants have done their deals. In my sermon on this day I took as my text Colossians 2: when you have received Christ, follow him. And I gave many suggestions what each should do while they were waiting for the Gospel to be preached in public. How each might teach his family, read scriptures, reform his life, pray for the King and the princes, that God might bring them to an understanding of his Holy

Gospel. Also that each should attempt to join themselves to our secret assemblies. I took this opportunity to talk of our meetings and what was done in them, and answer the calumnies spoken about us... I spoke briefly of the articles of faith, and how ours is not a new faith but that of our forefathers, like the prophets and all those who have known the Gospel. Briefly, I enumerated the commandments one by one, denouncing vices, particularly idolatry, blasphemy and other most common faults.<sup>38</sup>

The enormity of the task did not daunt or discourage men of Genevan calibre. There was an over-riding consideration: the glory of God in the salvation of souls.

By the time of Calvin's death in 1564 his labours for the propagation of the Gospel had borne abundant fruit in many lands, in none so more than in his native France. In his moving farewell to the pastors at Geneva he confessed:

I have had many infirmities which you have been obliged to bear with, and what is more, all I have done has been worth nothing. The ungodly will greedily seize upon this word, but I say it again that all I have done has been worth nothing, and that I am a miserable creature. But certainly I can say this, that I have willed what is good, that my vices have always displeased me, and that the root of the fear of God has been in my heart; and you may say that the disposition was good; and I pray you, that the evil be forgiven me, and if there was any good, that you conform yourselves to it and make it an example.<sup>39</sup>

And in a letter to his colleague, William Farel, he added: 'I draw my breath with difficulty and expect each moment to breathe my last. It is enough that I live and die for Christ, who is to all his followers a gain both in life and in death.'<sup>40</sup>

Those who bear his name from a conviction of the biblical integrity of his message, share the intensity of his commitment to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinism is inherently evangelistic: doctrine and mission, knowledge and zeal, preaching and power combine harmoniously together. It honours God's means while it seeks God's ends. It trusts God's providence whatever the circumstances, and sees adversity as opportunity. It is a way of life that uses the Day of Grace for the purposes of grace, because it flows from a heart ablaze with a vision of God's majesty. It is permeated by gratitude and godly fear that are the result of submission to a personal salvation bestowed and the divine glory desired. To recognize this missionary instinct is to acknowledge John Calvin's influence on mission.

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# The Christian and God's Law: Two Views

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*Jonathan Bayes and Christopher Bennett*

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## **Are the Ten Commandments for Today? Jonathan Bayes**

Are the Ten Commandments for Christians today? This question has occupied quite a bit of attention in the course of Church history. The traditional evangelical answer has been, 'yes, indeed'.

During the Reformation period the term, 'the third use of the law' came into vogue. It refers to the use of God's moral law, summarised in the Ten Commandments, as the rule of life for the believer. Incidentally, the first two uses of the law are (1) to convict of sin and drive the repentant sinner to Christ, and (2) to put a restraint on lawlessness in society so that the world doesn't collapse into anarchy. These uses apply only to the moral component of the law, which both Jews and Christians have traditionally distinguished from the ceremonial and civil parts of the law.

At various times in Christian history the third use of the law has been challenged. Even today there are those who say that the Ten Commandments are not for Christians now. Different people say this for different reasons. We can distinguish three main groups.

At the extreme there are those who think that, because salvation is by grace, nothing we do can jeopardise our salvation, so there is simply no need to worry about all the effort involved in trying to keep commandments: if we sin, there is instant forgiveness, so who cares?<sup>1</sup>

Another group of people are (quite rightly) horrified by such talk. We ought to be living good, upright, Christlike lives, they insist. However, they don't think that keeping the Ten Commandments is the way to do it. Their argument is that we have the Holy Spirit, and he will make us holy, so we mustn't worry ourselves about external things like law: just walk in the Spirit, and all will be well.<sup>2</sup>

Yet a third group is anxious that this second approach is just a bit too glib. It forgets that sin remains inside us, fighting against the Holy Spirit. One of the things which tips the battle in the Spirit's favour is God's moral standards written down for us to think about: the Spirit, they correctly recognise, always works through the word. However, the part of God's word which we need to concern ourselves with is the New Testament. That is where we must find our Christian principles, not in the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments were given to Israel for a limited time, they were the document of the old covenant, and now that Christ has come, now that the new covenant is in force, the Ten Commandments as our law code are finished. It is the teaching of Jesus and the apostles which is our guide.<sup>3</sup>

I want now to demonstrate from Scripture that all three of these positions are wrong.

The first can be dealt with quite quickly. It is a heresy called 'practical antinomianism', which Paul came up against and mentions in his letter to the

Romans. These people's favourite text is Romans 6:14, 'you are not under law but under grace'. From here they draw the conclusion that we may freely sin: in fact, if we continue in sin, grace will abound.

Paul's answer is that grace has already abounded as much as it possibly can in the obedience of Jesus Christ to death on the cross. In that death, we died to sin, so the idea that we can go on living in sin is preposterous. A changed life is the vital evidence that we really have been born again. This is the message of Romans 5:19–6:4.

But what is it to walk in newness of life?

Our second group jumps in immediately with the answer: it is to walk according to the Spirit. Their position is often called 'doctrinal antinomianism'. They might refer to Romans 8:4–9. They insist that the sanctified life of the justified believer will conform to the righteous standards of God's moral law, but we are not to be trying to keep the law. That would be a fleshly approach. We are to rely on the Spirit, and he will produce in us a life to please God.

What this teaching overlooks is the way the New Testament consistently holds the Spirit and the word together. The work of the Spirit in our lives is mediated through the word. Otherwise God would treat us as something less than the responsible creatures he made us to be.

To be born again is to be made new. It is to have a new will to obey what our new heart delights in—namely, the law which our new mind has come to understand in its far-reaching implications. So God chooses to channel his work in our lives via his word.

The apostle refers to this in Romans 7:6. Up to this point in the epistle, when talking about the law, Paul has been mainly concerned with what theologians came to call 'the first use of the law'. It is the law in that sense from which we have been delivered. The first function of the law is to expose us as sinners, and drive us, repentant to Christ as Saviour. Once we have put our trust in Christ the law has served its purpose in that respect, so we are delivered from it in that respect.

But we are still servants of God. It is significant that the apostle contrasts 'the newness of the Spirit' with 'the oldness of the letter', not the oldness of the law. Later on in the same chapter he says that the law is spiritual (v. 14). So the newness of the Spirit cannot exclude the law. 'The letter' means the law misunderstood, the law regarded as a mere piece of writing which we struggle to obey independently of the Spirit. That is the typical attitude to the law of the unconverted moral person: 'I do my best; I don't do anyone any harm; I try to live a good life'. But the unconverted moral person fails to see that it is impossible for him or her to live a good-enough life without the power of the Spirit.

Earlier on in Romans Paul has introduced the subject of the Spirit and the law. In chapter 2, where he is speaking particularly to his fellow Jews, he draws their attention to Christian Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, as the Jews did, and yet who obey the law because it is written on their heart (vv. 14–15).

He returns to this theme a few verses later. He contrasts in verses 25 and 26 the Jew and the Gentile as circumcised and uncircumcised, and goes on to point out that sometimes a Jew, despite having the law in writing, transgresses it, whereas a Gentile



obeys it (v. 27). Obviously he is thinking about Gentiles who have been converted. He then says that to be a true Jew is not merely a matter of ethnicity. It has to do with the heart.

Paul is thinking of Moses' words to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 10:16: 'Circumcise the foreskin of your heart'. In the context this phrase is sandwiched between two references to obedience to God's law (Deut. 10:12-13; 11:1). The circumcised heart is evidenced by the obedient life, and as Paul says in Romans 2:29, this is a work of the Spirit. Again, the Spirit is contrasted, not with law, but with the letter. The law can be wrongly used as a mere piece of writing. However, its right use in the life of the true believer, Jew or Gentile, is as the channel of the Spirit.

But this leads on to the question, where do we, as Christians today, find the law through which the Spirit works out holiness in our lives?

This is where we must consider the third group which we identified. Their answer is clear and straightforward: in the New Testament. It is the teaching of Jesus and the apostles which we are required to obey. This position is often called 'New Covenant Theology'. Those who hold this view recognise that most of the Ten Commandments are re-stated in the New Testament, and are, therefore, part of the pattern of moral life for the Christian believer. However, we obey them, not because they are the Ten Commandments, but because we find them in the New Testament. The Ten Commandments (as a document) are dead, but that does not mean that the morality of the Ten Commandments is obsolete. But to find out which of the Ten Commandments are moral principles, we have to discover them in the New Testament.

These people conclude that the Sabbath commandment is not a moral one which must be obeyed today because, they claim, it is repealed by the New Testament. That is why the early Church abolished the Sabbath and began to assemble instead on the day of Christ's resurrection.

They argue, therefore, against the doctrine of the third use of the law (the teaching that God's moral law as summarised in the Ten Commandments is the pattern for the Christian life). For one thing, the Ten Commandments are not a summary of God's moral law. For another, the law as given to Israel cannot be dissected into constituent parts, and is of no use to the Christian today as a rule of life.

These points may be answered by two considerations, the first specific, the second more general.

The specific consideration concerns the Biblical status of the Sabbath law.

The first thing to note is that the Sabbath already existed before the Ten Commandments were given. In fact it goes right back to creation. Genesis 2:3 tells us that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day—and this is given in Exodus 20:11 as a reason why his people should keep the day holy (v. 8). The day cannot be made holy by human beings. It has been holy since creation, because God sanctified it. Human responsibility is to keep that holiness and avoid profaning it. The people were reminded of this in the way that the manna was provided in Exodus 16. The Sabbath already existed then, several weeks before the giving of the law at Sinai.

The 'New Covenant Theologians' tell us that, if we believe that the Sabbath command is part of God's moral law, then we ought to be Seventh Day Adventists and hold our services on Saturdays. However, we need to note that even in Old

Testament times Sabbaths didn't always fall on Saturdays. This is obvious if we compare Leviticus 16:29–31 and 23:24 and 39. From these verses we learn that every seventh month there were Sabbaths on the 1st, 10th and 15th days. You don't need to be a mathematical genius to see that those three dates couldn't all fall on Saturdays.

It is true that the New Testament makes those festal Sabbaths a matter of indifference: they were destined for oblivion as fulfilled in Christ (Col. 2:16). However, the fact of the festal Sabbaths does emphasise the point that there is nothing intrinsic about a Saturday Sabbath.

1 Corinthians 16:2 suggests that the day of the Lord's resurrection was already the day set aside for Christian gatherings during the apostolic age. Hebrews 4 is all about rest, but it uses two different Greek words for rest. Usually it uses the word from which we get our word 'pause'. However, the word used in verse 9 is connected with the word 'Sabbath'. The point of the chapter seems to be that through faith we enter into rest: we have ceased from works. In other words, we rest in the work of Jesus, and do not rely on our own efforts for salvation. Verse 9 adds this: there remains a reminder of that fact in the weekly Sabbath which we celebrate on the Lord's Day.

The more general consideration can only be briefly touched on. It is this: the tendency of New Covenant Theology to drive a wedge between the Testaments is at odds with the teaching of the New Testament itself. Paul speaks of the Old Testament as inspired by God and therefore profitable for the Christian's training in righteousness. Moreover, Jesus stated quite plainly that he had not come to annul the law (Matt. 5:17–20). The way in which he continues makes it clear that it is the moral law summarised in the Ten Commandments which he has in mind. At a key point in his instructions on Christian ethics, Paul quotes the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:9).

Are the Ten Commandments for Christians today? Most certainly. They sum up the life of holiness to which we are called. They are the channel for the Spirit's sanctifying power.

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- <sup>1</sup> This position is represented by the once fashionable idea that it is possible to separate acceptance of Jesus as Saviour from acceptance of him as Lord. It was popularized by Zane Hodges and opposed by John MacArthur in his Book *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas, Word, 1993).
- <sup>2</sup> This position is represented, for example, by Michael Eaton: see his *How to Live a Godly Life: The Biblical Doctrine of Sanctification* (Tonbridge, Sovereign World, 1993).
- <sup>3</sup> Probably the leading proponent of this position has been John Reisinger. See the following three of his books: *Abraham's Four Seeds: An examination of the basic principles of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism as they each relate to the promise of God to 'Abraham and his seed'* (Venetia, Sound of Grace, 1987); *Tablets of Stone* (Southbridge, Crowne, 1989); *The Law/Grace Controversy: A Defense of the Sword and Trowel and the Council on Baptist Theology* (Sterling, Grace Abounding Ministries, 1982).

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## **Not under law, but not without God's law. Christopher Bennett**

**W**hat is the role of God's law, his commands, in the Christian life; and in particular the Mosaic law including the 10 Commandments? A lot of ink has been spilled and is currently being spilled on this issue already, but I have been asked to spill a little more on the other side of the matter from Jonathan Bayes, and I am happy to do so, because of the truth not because of Jonathan.

### **A Old Testament and New Testament**

We must first understand the overall shape of the Bible: it is centred on Christ. OT is promise, NT is fulfilment; or perhaps better, OT is preparation for Christ and the kingdom, and the NT is the arrival of the Messiah-king, bringing in the kingdom. OT prophecy and typology show this to be the case, as does Jesus' use of the OT (e.g. Jonah), and then we have Matt. 12:39–41; see also Mark 1:15; Galatians 4:4–5.

Furthermore the major interpretative keys are not in the OT but in the NT: Ephesians 3:5 (and see vv. 1–13) makes it clear that there is new light from heaven in the NT, it's not all there in the OT. We need the NT to understand the OT, but we do not in the same way need the OT to understand the NT. We can start in the NT. Tyndale realised this when he said that Romans was a way in unto the whole OT; the Westminster divines acknowledged this in part in the 1640s when they let the NT determine what they did about the 4th Commandment (changing its observance to a Sunday); and Graeme Goldsworthy does this in the early chapters of *According to Plan*. There he says that it is the witness of the NT that shows us what the relationship between the OT and the gospel event actually is. If we try to understand Exodus to Deuteronomy on its own terms and work out the relationship between the Christian and the Mosaic law from Moses, we will end up with one view, and we will have a tendency to make Paul fit into that view; but if we start with the gospel event as explained in the NT and then come to Exodus to Deuteronomy, we will come to a different view of that relationship, and it is more likely to be the right one! The starting point in interpretation is crucial. Start at the centre, where all the lines meet, not in Exodus.

### **B Brief statement of the results of this perspective**

The NT shows us that Christ has brought the OT to fulfilment and this includes bringing the OT law to its intended goal in his own finished work as well as in his ethical teaching; the result is that we are not under law—any law—for justification, that is our standing before God, nor does law, even Christ's law (let alone Moses') have the same place in the Christian life that it had for God's Old Covenant people; nor is Mosaic law our primary ethical guide but rather a secondary rule, to be interpreted and applied through NT eyes and in the light of our primary, direct responsibility, to keep the law of Christ and his apostles in the NT.

In a word: Christ has fulfilled the law and we are not under it. This by no means implies that we do not have moral obligations or that we should not sorrow and repent when we sin; but it does mean we are justified by Christ's blood, motivated and empowered by the Spirit, and externally guided principally through the NT's ethics, and by OT law as seen in the light of its fulfilment in the work and teaching of Christ. One

implication of this is that neither Saturday nor Sunday is a Mosaic-type Sabbath, but that Sunday is the Lord's Day which is not quite the same.

## C Exegesis—Paul

I make no apology for basing this largely on the teaching of Paul, the most systematic and integrative writer in the whole Bible. Why shouldn't we think that he has been given the task of putting everything together on this issue, as he clearly has on so many others?

**Romans 6:14** says we are not under law but under grace. It has often been said by those who hold the 10 Commandments to be crucial for our sanctification that it is only in the matter of *justification* that we are under law. However, what is remarkable in Paul is that time and again he says we are not under law in contexts where he is talking about living the Christian life every bit as much as our justified status, if not more. So here: Romans 6:1–14 is about how we live—do we sin so that grace may abound? This shows that not being under law is a much wider and bigger thing than not being justified by law. We are in a new realm (see also Colossians 1:13) where we are under grace and the Spirit and Christ, not in the realm of law, sin, death and Satan.

Before leaving Romans 6, it is at the very least interesting to note that when Paul mentions the idea of sinning so that grace may abound, he does not say in vv. 2ff what many a Westminster Confession person has surely been inclined to: 'You *are* still under the law as a rule of life.' In other words, the Biblical answer to possible abuses of grace is not law but a right understanding of God's saving grace!

**Romans 7:4** makes a similar point: it is no longer being married to the law but to Christ instead that produces a holy life for us. This is not to say that Christ does not *use* Biblical commands in our lives, but it is our relationship to Christ that is crucial, not the operations of the law. Verse 6 is along similar lines.

**Romans 7:7–12** tells us that God's law, because of our sinful natures, increases sin in practice.

**Romans 7:14–25**: whatever this passage means—and I am increasingly inclined to think that Martyn Lloyd-Jones was on target or very near it—it certainly shows that the law is not the answer to sin and does not produce a holy life, even if we love the law and try to keep it.

**1 Corinthians 9:20–21**: Paul says he is not under law (*hypo nomon*), but then says he is outside of the law, without it (*anomos*); and to correct the false impression that the readers may get that he is lawless altogether, he adds that he is not without God's law, in fact he is subject to Christ's law (*ennomos Christou*). In other words, he has moral obligations to obey God, and for Paul these are summed up in the ethical teaching of Christ and in the moral imperatives that flow from his gospel (for this last concept, see 1 Timothy 1:10–11). Note first that Paul does not use the phrase 'under the law of Christ' (*hypo nomon Christou*) but *ennomos*, 'in a relationship of obligation to obey'. Secondly note that it is the law of Christ not of Moses. See also Galatians 6:2. Nowhere in his letters does Paul say we are under the law, (*hypo nomon*).

**2 Corinthians 3** is all about the superiority of the new covenant to the old, and describes the Mosaic covenant (and therefore law) as fading away or being destroyed in v. 11. The glory of the NT is not law but the Spirit, v. 17–18. It is beholding as in a mirror the glory of Christ that changes us as the Spirit works in us. And Christ's glory shines in the gospel (see 4:4–6).

**Galatians**—of course! Chapter 3:15–25 is about salvation-history, not (directly) personal experience. Why did God give the law of Moses? Not to give us life. It convicts of sin (v. 22) and is a child-minder (*paidagogos* is not a schoolmaster) to look after the people of God until Christ came. It had a temporary function. Verse 24 says that law was our child-minder ‘until Christ’ (*eis Christon*), better translated in the NIV margin that in its text: ‘until Christ came’ not ‘to lead us to Christ’. Hence v. 25: we are no longer under the law as our child-minder. The whole relationship of the people of God to the law has changed with the coming of Christ.

The idea that in Galatians Paul is not dealing with the Mosaic law and our relationship to it but with the law as misunderstood by legalistic people in the first century looks like a subconscious attempt to squeeze Paul into the 17th century’s theology of still being under the law in some sense, rather than something that flows out of the text. Paul purports to be telling us in Galatians 3 why the law was given (3:19)—why not accept that here is the Biblical theology of the Mosaic law and the Christian? Start here, not in Exodus to Deuteronomy.

**Galatians 5:13–25** is of a piece with ch. 3. The way to avoid moral laxity in the light of the freedom of grace is not to go back to the law and a life lived closely following it in all its regulations, but to walk in the Spirit (v. 16), to keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25). What produces holiness is the Spirit (v. 22), and therefore if we walk in harmony with him, we will be godly, which will end up fulfilling the overall intention and thrust of God’s law, which is to love others. In v. 14 Paul is not saying that the key procedural thing in true piety is to keep the law in all its details; rather he is saying that if we love and serve one another we will end up fulfilling the law’s spirit and intention.

**Ephesians 2:15** says that Christ has abolished the law.

**Colossians 2:16–17** mentions the Sabbath as a shadow fulfilled in Christ. The plural, *sabbaton*, is used, but this does not mean that translations are wrong in saying ‘Sabbath’, because the Greek for one Sabbath is normally plural in form. Even if, as is probably the case, Paul has Sabbaths other than the weekly Saturday one in mind as well as the weekly one, is there anything to suggest that the weekly Sabbath is excluded from *sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16? No, nothing; and therefore the Mosaic Sabbath is a shadow that has now gone with the coming of Christ. And *therefore it cannot have been transferred to Sunday*. Sunday as the Lord’s Day must be something different from the Mosaic Sabbath moved a little.

The fact that Romans 14:5 speaks happily of all days being equal, and that there is no record of the apostles telling the early Christians to refuse to work on Sunday even if they got into trouble for it, all serves to back up the idea that Sunday is a day when it is especially appropriate to meet with other believers and celebrate Christ’s complete work for us, but that we are not under a law of doing no work, let alone enjoying no secular (whatever that means) recreation (of course, sinful recreations and entertainments are to be avoided 7 days a week). Calvin saw the logic of this, though he didn’t quite follow it through on the rest of the Mosaic law (*Institutes* 2.28.28–34).

**1 Timothy 1:9** says that the law is for sinners not the righteous. Of course a bald antithesis like this need not mean that it has absolutely no place in the life of the righteous, but it surely does mean at least that the law is mainly for non-Christians, to convict them of sin and to restrain sin in the community. The tergiversations of Calvin,

Hendrickson and George Knight to make out that Paul has in mind the Christians Timothy is dealing with, when he talks about ‘law-breakers’, ‘the irreligious’, ‘killers of fathers,’ and ‘killers of mothers’ etc., are wondrous to behold, but not very convincing. If there ever was a knock-down argument for the primacy of the historical ‘first use of the law’ over the ‘third use’, particularly when we have Mosaic law in mind, it is here. And if ever there were obscure passages in commentaries, the three brethren have provided them!

Before I leave Paul, what about the places in Ephesians 4–6 where he uses the 10 Commandments to enforce godly living? Well, I am not saying that OT law has no relevance to the Christian life, but that it is not our primary code and needs contextualising in the light of Christ’s coming and teaching. In Ephesians 4–6 Paul contextualises Moses into the Christian era; the only Commandment he quotes is the 5th, and he changes the wording of the promise attached to it in a significant way.

## **D Exegesis—other passages**

But what about **Matthew 5:17–20**, and especially v. 18: ‘Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth disappear, not one jot or one tittle will pass from the law, until everything is accomplished.’ How can I therefore say that law of Moses has in any sense gone?

If the ‘all things’ at the end of v. 18 means the end of the world, and if no fundamental change in the believer’s relation to the Mosaic law is permitted because of our understanding of the earlier part of the verse, then all Christians must definitely offer animal sacrifices, avoid polycotton shirts, and do no work on Saturdays. If on the other hand ‘until everything is accomplished’ does not repeat the ‘until’ clause earlier in the sentence, and means ‘until all that the law looked forward to happens’ (which is what was happening in the ministry of Jesus), then the law, though not altered in itself, can change in its relation to us who are in Christ, in this era of fulfilment.

Furthermore, beware of thinking that ‘fulfil’ in Matt. 5:17 must mean something like ‘restate’ or ‘reinforce’. The NT fulfils the OT not just in terms of predictions. Matt. 1:23 has a prediction being fulfilled, but Matt. 2:14–15 is about an historical statement being ‘fulfilled’: Hosea 11:1 is about the historical fact of Israel, God’s son, being called out of Egypt. This is ‘fulfilled’ when Jesus, God’s Son, comes out of Egypt as a young child. Matt. 5:17 uses ‘fulfil’ of ‘the law and the prophets’, and in the rest of the chapter Jesus shows how the OT commands are ‘fulfilled’ in his teaching. Some of them are deepened by him (v. 21–30), some of them have Rabbinic confusion cleared from them, but some of them are also *changed*, v. 31–37. The concept of fulfilment that fits all these, in Matt. 1, 2, and 5, is that of *bringing something to its intended goal or climax*. This is what Jesus does with all the OT, the law of Moses included (this may be backed up by Rom. 10:4 as well, if ‘end’ there is understood as ‘goal’).

So by his life and saving work, and *in his teaching*, Jesus is bringing the whole OT to its intended goal. The law of Moses, including the 10 Commandments, is not a literal set of rules in its final form, expressing God’s will for Christians—we have to look at OT law through Jesus and the NT teaching, the ‘law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21).

As for **Hebrews 4:9**—there is yet a *sabbatismos* for the people of God—the context gives no hint that this is Sunday as Sabbath, but rather it is glory, and the rest of faith now which is a foretaste of it.



## **E How do we put all this together, in terms of the role of Mosaic law today?**

The Mosaic law was an expression of God's holiness in terms of Israel, one nation long ago, and in terms of the people of God in their immature state before Christ came. It is fulfilled by Jesus, both in his life and death, and in his teaching and that of his apostles. He fulfilled some things *in our place* (the animal sacrifices, and the commands that were ceremonial), but the more moral parts of the law are telling us about how to live, but not always in a direct literal way—things have changed.

So 'don't muzzle an ox when it is treading the grain' has become 'pay Christian preachers a decent wage.'

'Don't murder' has become 'don't murder and don't even be angry, hateful, insulting.'

'Don't commit adultery' has become 'don't commit adultery and don't even lust after other women.'

'Love your neighbour' has become 'love your neighbour and love your enemy too'.

'Remove the evil man from among you' has become 'excommunicate unrepentant church members who have committed serious offences.'

The Sabbath (Saturday holy, with no work at all) has become the Lord's Day (Sunday special, with meeting other Christians to celebrate Christ's completed saving work).

Not coveting your neighbour's ox has become not coveting his Mercedes.

Having a long life in Canaan has become having a long life on the earth (see Eph. 6:2).

And so on.

## **F Practical conclusions**

1. The law of Moses, including the 10 Commandments, is not the direct set of regulations for the Christian—we are not under it any more. Instead we are obliged to obey Jesus' commands (Matt. 28:19), the 'law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21—which means we have Christ's law, rather than that we are actually 'under' it), i.e. love others by the power of the Spirit, and bear his fruit.

2. The law of Moses is relevant to the Christian because it shows us God's holiness, and its principles still apply and guide us, as long as we interpret it through Christ and the NT (see above for some examples).

3. Laws of *any* kind, in OT or NT, are not meant to be nearly as prominent or central in our Christian lives as they were in the lives of God's people between Moses and Christ. We have come from an era of law into an era of grace, John 1:17. Gal. 5:13–26 clarifies this: Ex. 16:4 and Lev. 18:4 say 'Walk according to laws', but Gal. 5:16 says 'Walk in the Spirit.' The Spirit does indeed *use* the whole Bible, including the commands in it, to educate our consciences and our inner sense of right and wrong. But in terms of daily life, making ordinary decisions, reacting to people and situations, expressing ourselves, etc., we are not meant to be continually referring to any written code of rules, but acting in line with Christ whom we are in fellowship with through the Spirit. In this way, the saying of Hebrews 8:10 is fulfilled: in the new covenant the will of God is written on our hearts, not only in terms of desire and ability to keep it but also in terms of it becoming increasingly natural, intuitive, to sense what is pleasing to God. Hence also we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the written

code, Rom. 7:6. Life is meant to be like a walk with a loving and wise father, or like being married, rather than like being a low-grade official working for the council who has to follow detailed regulations for everything. The chain of causation in Gal. 5:13–26 is *not*: study and keep rules—love—please God and walk in the Spirit.

Rather it is the very reverse: walk in the Spirit (v. 16, 25)—love (v. 22)—fulfil the true intention and spirit of the law, almost accidentally (v. 14, 23).

Of course walking in the Spirit, love and obeying God all belong together; but where do we start? What is the procedure? What is the key thing? The key is not the law (see Rom. 7:14–end); it is walking in the Spirit, i.e. active fellowship with God and sensitivity to the Spirit.

4. Keep Sunday as the Lord's Day not the Sabbath.

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John Reisinger, *Abraham's four seeds—a Biblical examination of the presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism*.

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# Four offerings from Gospel and Culture

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## Bill Nikides

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J. Richard Middleton, Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. London: SPCK, 1995.

Trevor Hart. *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology*. London: SPCK, 1995.

Andrew Walker. *Telling the Story: Gospel Mission and Culture*. London: SPCK, 1996.

Bob Holman. *Towards Equality: A Christian Manifesto*. London: SPCK, 1997.

**I**t is no great surprise to evangelicals that liberalism and modernism have served to undermine historical Christianity, both through the erosion of confidence of the Bible as received truth, that God is supernatural creator and author of life and that Jesus Christ is the only source of eternal life. Criticism of this Enlightenment backlash to traditional formulations of Christianity, particularly those championed by the Reformation, emerges from different and often unexpected sources. Conservative evangelicals, like all other ideological groups, concentrate on their own responses to these challenges to their faith. They do not, however, represent the only, or even necessarily the best alternatives to liberalism. Particularly in cultures such as ours, where we seem to represent an increasingly isolated minority of the visible church, we often seem to lag in terms of the timeliness, originality and effectiveness of our response.

Lesslie Newbigin and the group he inspired, Gospel and Culture have been at the forefront of a response to the deleterious effects of modernism and, in some ways, postmodernism in the Church. Newbigin, a long-time missionary to India used his distance from the West to gain great insight into the effects of modernism on the church in his home country. His views also reflected a substantial dependence on the theological positions of Karl Barth, particularly concerning the importance of viewing the Bible as one complete, final source of revelation. Walker notes that Newbigin was instrumental in reaffirming the gospel as public rather than as exclusively private truth. Middleton, Walsh, Hart, Walker and Holman all, to one degree or other, reflect Newbigin and respond to him.

Middleton and Walsh's contribution concerns Christianity's dialogue with postmodernism. They are particularly concerned with safeguarding what they consider to be the essence of Christianity from postmodernism's critique. They see contemporary culture plagued with a 'plurality of voices vying for the right to reality.' Postmodernism has emerged by devastating the modernism from which it emerged. The idea of progress, the staple of the old modernist order, is in abject retreat. Modernist claims to objective, universal truth (whether Christian or secular) have been conclusively exposed as nothing more than power plays, the arbitrary desire to master all other competing views. Such assertions are, according to the authors, 'totalizing visions' like racism. All such claims must go under the knife. Postmodern deconstruction, therefore, puts the lie to all such dogma by ruthlessly exposing biases. Middleton and Walsh appreciate much of this effort, particularly as it uncovers the hidden subjectivism of Enlightenment thought.

They note that the devastation does not stop with a useful purging of modern bias. Postmodernism is a hungry virus that must continue to eat to live. It consumes modernism's imbalances, but continues on to erase every sort of norm and reference. There are no cohesive stories, no grand narratives. Things do not relate sensibly. Carried to its conclusion without modification, it leaves only *homo autonomos*. The authors place their finger on part of the problem. In its aggression, postmodernism serves as its own grand, or meta-narrative. Thus, it destroys all other narratives. In the process, it disconnects people from any ethical bases. Underlying the authors' work is a desire to construct a framework for Christian living.

Their answer is the embracing of scripture in a way that inoculates the church against the excesses of modernism exposed by postmodern critics. In other words, they formulate postmodern-friendly evangelicalism. In doing so, they confront two issues raised by postmoderns. Postmoderns charge the Church with endorsing a totalizing view inexorably bound up in the nature of Scripture. Christianity is, therefore, an expression of intellectual tyranny or imperialism. Middleton and Walsh counter, claiming that the Bible contradicts any tendency to totalize. The Exodus, far from presenting a totalizing theology, presents a community of freedom. Even Israel's travail in the wilderness underlines their inclusion as God's people and the necessity to live in that reality. Most significantly, the gospel points to a Jesus that acted on behalf of the 'excluded other,' leading the way from bondage to freedom. The Bible is, therefore, not a totalizing vision. It frees rather than enslaves.

The authors also address postmodernism's damaging propensity toward autonomy and meaninglessness. Far from being alone and impotent in the world, God's people are privileged with the task of ruling the world. Nor are people left to wallow in their own tragic lives and inadequacies. They are continually being renewed in God's image. Middleton and Walsh's formulary for salvation was, interestingly and to the point, more reminiscent of Eastern Orthodox theosis than it is of the substitutionary atonement of the Reformation. The fact that it is special in God's eyes, however, serves as no warrant for the Church to embrace a 'royal,' totalizing ideology. Christianity is not intended to be a confrontational faith. It must not, therefore, endorse any understanding of the Bible as propositional. I can only wonder what 'thus saith the Lord' means. Their text admirably defends against postmodern critique while it seems to ignore what the Bible says about itself.

Finally *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be* summarizes the role of the Bible in the modern world. On one hand, Scripture is presented as our 'nonnegotiable canonical foundation of faith.' On the other, we must guard against using it in any totalizing, rule-making fashion. It cannot, in this sense, be considered as universal. It must be authoritative only in an intrasystemic sense. Moreover, the Bible is an open-ended story which invites people to participate in 'a future that is genuinely unscripted.' Their work concludes with more than a suggestion of open theology and a direct repudiation of orthodox Christianity.

Andrew Walker concentrates on Christianity as a plausibility structure for all of life. Like the other authors representing Gospel and Culture, Walker criticizes the corrosive effects of the Enlightenment. Modernism replaced the traditional Biblical meta-narrative with a secular objectivism which was, in turn, deconstructed. The deconstruction, however, did not lead the Church back toward the rediscovery of its historical

foundations, but drove it into the seductive arms of corrupting consumerism and mass communications. This served merely to accent the modern Christian's propensity to privatize the faith and marginalize the Church. Walker's antidote is a revival of the Bible as meta-narrative. This, he does not wish to employ in order to impose Christian values on society. Rather, he sees in Scripture an invitation to people to abandon their own inadequate stories in favor of joining an older, more coherent one, the gospel.

But what is the gospel? It is, he states, neither a documentary of real history nor a record of God's dictation to humanity. Rather, it is a people's story, sacred because it has been set apart by the historical Church as the inspired doctrine of its apostolic fathers. It is sacred tradition. Walker's formulation echoes an understanding of Scripture standard in the Church prior to the Reformation. Concurrently, it points in directions alien to the early church. He not only moves away from affirming the Bible as historically accurate propositional truth, he asserts that it was 'embellished in the telling as it was in the making.' The Bible, therefore, is a kind of myth, an orally based saga. It is authoritative because the Church has always accepted it as such. One might expect that the Reformation would be praised, given its dedication to recovering the Bible as the authoritative voice of the Church. Walker indeed affirms this, but also criticizes the Reformation for using Scripture to fracture the catholicity of Christendom. He seems to agree with postliberal theology in implying that a particular approach to understanding the Bible is appropriate if it works, rather than because it is true. It is important because it effectively shapes and orders the Church. In this sense, it is subordinate to the Church. *Sola scriptura* is thus turned on its head.

The author finds no solace in Reformation constructs. He prefers to locate Christianity's recovery in a rediscovery of the Bible as an oral story and the Church as an oral culture. He looks to monasticism and early sects for appropriate models, rather than Reformation triumphalism and what he refers to as Calvin's 'ascetic individualism.' These serve as foils for the prevailing consumerism, narcissism and privatization. The recovery of early Christianity's orality and community provide an effective plausibility structure which addresses the threats posed by modernity and its errant offspring, postmodernism. In common with the other works, Walker endeavors to recover the Church by leading it away from its Reformation legacy. Like many other such works, the Reformation is linked to the Enlightenment and its destructiveness.

Trevor Hart's *Faith Thinking* provides the meatiest fare of the present offerings. The title is a digest of his definition of theology. 'Theology is the attempt by faith to understand itself, its object, and its place in today's world.' The definition is notable. It, like theologians such as Karl Barth, George Lindbeck, William Placher and John Milbank, underlines the idea that theology is the domain of the faith community. It is not a practice undertaken by the outside world with supposedly objective methods and practices. No such objectivity is possible. Hart endorses postmodernism's deconstruction of this supposed objectivity. On the other hand, the faith community must not be given a free ride. It must not make assertions that satisfy itself. It must be accountable to a larger audience. Despite its being an activity of faith, Christianity must conform to an external understanding of reality. The problem of modern theology is that these two components have been divorced from one another. Theologians consequently err in either embracing supposed objectivity without a faith commitment or express passionate faith without any sort of accountability for what they believe.

Hart examines the Enlightenment in order to discover how the two boundaries for theology, faith on one side and outside accountability on the other became separated from each other. He sees in Descartes the roots of fragmentation as the Enlightenment asserted the presence of universal truth divorced from the divine. Kant expanded the chasm, completely removing faith from the realm of rational discourse. Ideals such as truth or beauty are mere constructs of the mind, not reflections or revelations of a creator God. Concepts such as ethics, therefore, are not rooted in divine disclosure, but rather in principles of human discourse. The noumenal or upper world becomes the unknown realm of the divine. The lower, phenomenal, knowable world becomes the world of objective discovery.

Hart, like the others, points out that this artificial bifurcation was not only hugely destructive to good theology, it could not last. Thinkers such as Nietzsche exposed the myth of universal, objective, clinical truth. No one can avoid unproven doubts. There is no detached objectivity. There is no purely safe place from which to study and analyze. Everyone believes something and, most importantly, thinks on the basis of that belief. The best we can hope for is arriving at a reasonably reliable, workable vantage point. Hart locates this for the Christian theologian as somewhere within the community of faith as part of an extended ecclesiological tradition. It at least exposes personal biases, even if it cannot ensure 'uncontaminated knowledge.' In this sense, the author is neither a theological liberal, nor an evangelical conservative. He sees the Enlightenment as father of both. Both believe in objective, universal truth. One sees it in rational tools with which we judge the Bible and religion. The other locates it in the clear understanding of an objective, inerrant truth, Holy Scripture. Both, according to the author, miss the mark.

Theology, rather, must be expressed as 'faith seeking self-transcendence through critical reflection in community.' It must, in other words, be accomplished within the faith community **and** conform to external standards of verification. Revelation cannot only be recognized by those of faith. It must be credible to the world not just the Church. It, as Hart notes, cannot be a blind leap, but a carefully reasoned judgment. He arrives at this balance in discourse with postliberals such as George Lindbeck, approving of the latter's intra-systemic perspective, but criticizing his relativism. For Hart, theology has to transcend the faith system, even as it is embedded within it. One senses the concerns of a rigorous theologian at work. He wants to make the theologian accountable for his work.

Hart as with postliberals locates his theology in the 'story.' He refers to his understanding of the Bible as a 'stained glass text.' The meaning is not found in the text itself as a book of facts or propositions. Neither is it found in some search for the sources or ideas behind the text. Rather the meaning is discovered within the context of the story. In other words, it is not to be read conforming to some set of theological propositions. Neither can we ascertain its meaning by filtering it through a sociological or anthropological grid as we would in comparative religion. The text, as Hart states, has a life of its own. The reader remit is to enter the world of the text in order to understand it and retrieve its meaning for us. But what kind of story is it? Is it a true story, and if so, in what sense? Furthermore, if it isn't propositionally true, what gives it the authority that its status as truth once afforded?



Hart accepts modern and postmodern criticism in denying Scripture propositional qualities. For him, Scripture is most accurately studied as both open-ended story and sermon. It is impossible to prove its superiority over other faith stories and its authority does not derive from this. The Bible receives its authority from the church's use of it as Holy Scripture. Once again, in a manner consistent with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the Bible is authoritative largely because the Church considers it as such. Hart is not suggesting that this makes it any less inspired. Like both of the churches noted, the author sees the Holy Spirit working within the entire process which produced the text, to include the early church councils. *Faith Thinking*, however, is not satisfied with this traditional reading of the text. He wants to see tradition as a point of departure, a kind of starting block for a sprinter, not as an anchor reducing interpretation to anachronism. Tradition should serve as a foundation for theological creativity and critical thinking. He notes that the story, after all, 'offers yesterday's answers to yesterday's questions and concerns.' It seems that what the Bible provides is a way of thinking through things. It is, in this sense, more philosophy than prescription.

We must, as we think through Hart's stated commitment to creative theological inquiry, ask another question. Where does warranted application end and unwarranted theological adventurism begin? What forms the boundary between divine revelation and self-revelation? It seems that what Hart's earnest desire for a continually relevant and acceptable Bible will produce is clay infinitely moldable by any person of faith to any purpose. In other words, what safeguards the text from the reader's own form of totalizing? Hart is right to attempt to free the Bible from the dead grip of historical or cultural anachronism. I am afraid his conclusions will only serve to produce the sort of relativism he wishes to avoid. Furthermore, he makes a great many assertions (read propositions) concerning the Bible itself, but takes away the one thing that could have secured his speculation, the Bible's own assertions concerning itself. In wanting to free the Bible from a propositional prison, he places himself in a propositional cell of his own construction. Whose propositional framework would you rather trust?

Holman, professor of social administration at the University of Bath, left his position to serve as a volunteer on the Easterhouse Estate in Glasgow. Newbiggin's vision for a robust missionary church extending the kingdom into every area of life is given hands and feet in Holman's fierce prose. His is very much a church militant. Holman has no time for ghettoized Christianity. The sine qua non of Holman's concern for the church in society is his insistence on social and economic equality. The basis for his conviction that poverty is morally wrong is anchored in an understanding of the Creation. Neither poverty nor inequality were Creation intentions and ought, therefore, to be eradicated. The Fall, itself, does not justify the Church's reluctance to redress substantial societal imbalance. As proof, Holman offers the Jubilee. He sees, in its regular cancellation of debts and servitude, a repudiation of the class society. In this, he seems to find common cause with a number of modern Christian ethicists, particularly those emerging from the Anabaptist camp such as John Howard Yoder and Anglo-Catholic socialists such as Kenneth Leach and the Jubilee Group.

Holman may have found inspiration in Newbiggin, but his proposals go far beyond and, in fact, conflict with the Bishop. Newbiggin's conviction that the church should serve as the conscience of society without being contaminated by it proves too tentative for Holman's activism. Christians 'should use their economic and social power to

promote the common good, to spread privilege and resources, to reduce injustices, to uphold integrity and honesty.' His goal is essentially social and economic equality. To be fair, he does not consider absolute equality possible, but any surviving inequities would be trivial rather than substantial.

If equality is the goal, Holman's principle of mutuality is the mechanism with which to produce it. Mutuality means creating opportunities for every member of society to participate in some measure of 'giving and accepting.' In other words, Holman sees the very heart of this reformed society as a spirit of cooperation. In a word, he advocates socialism, which he believes reveals the essence of Christianity, not that the embrace of Christianity is necessary for mutuality. He, in fact, asserts that this principle affords the opportunity to work in conjunction with those of other or no faith. What a great contrast with Newbiggin's critique of the Church of England's report, *Changing Britain*, a document which eschewed a public reliance on the Ten Commandments or any other identifiably Christian doctrine. Standing behind Holman's assertions are very basic presuppositions concerning human nature, the Fall etc. Holman militates against acts of human selfishness, but he almost seems to consider these as unnatural. He does not articulate a detailed position on human sinfulness or depravity, but it can be said that he retains a great deal of optimism concerning humanity. There is no hint here of pessimism concerning human initiative or potentiality. All that stands between people and Jubilee is ill-advised selfishness on the part of the poor. His work seems almost a bit naïve in discounting the devastating presence of sin in everyone, rich and poor. Furthermore, Holman must be seen for what he is, an advocate for the poor, and I must add, a formidable one. When there is blame to be meted out, he does not distribute it equally. He is not interested in a balanced academic approach to an ethics of poverty and wealth. The book contains theology, of course, but it is fundamentally a polemic.

Holman's work, in some ways most clearly of the four, exposes the fabric connecting Gospel & Culture, postliberalism etc. Christianity is fundamentally a way of life. It is social, cultural, linguistic, and anthropological. Clearly, Newbiggin endorsed a Christianity firmly anchored in the supernatural. The point is that Gospel and Culture along with other post-Barthian Christian expressions such as post-liberalism, radical orthodoxy and Pauline new-perspectivalism do focus on the church as a sociological phenomenon. The Church is a religious community which focuses on a sacred story. Being Christian means being part of a process of acculturation; you join the group and learn how to function within it. Doctrines are rules which govern life **within** the system, rather than universal expressions of truth.

There is much to learn from these four works and the broad movement of the Church of which they are a part. Walker, Hart and Middleton clearly identify the complete corpus of Scripture as the ground of their thinking. They are, in this sense, manifestly not liberal. They also champion the recovery of the importance of the Church in modern society. In this sense, they are a potent antidote to a privatized Christianity which more closely resembles New Age or Hellenistic mystery religion than it does the 'faith of our fathers.' Church always means covenantal community. They also recognize that the Bible is neither philosophical treatise, systematic theology, nor an anthology of religious aphorisms. It is one, coherent and comprehensive redemptive story.

It is a shame, and perhaps inevitable that this stream of work comes up short in some significant ways. Gospel and Culture, like Barth himself, emerged from, and reacted against liberalism. They are a response to a largely liberal theological hegemony they experienced within the divinity schools, universities and seminaries of the Twentieth Century. Liberalism and modernism were their points of departure. It is in this sense that postmodernists are always a kind of modernist. They are formed in dialogue with the thing to which they compare themselves. Therefore, these four works, and a great many more like them, depart significantly from traditional evangelicalism. There is, most importantly, a profound difficulty accepting Christianity as definite, propositional truth. In case after case, the presupposition is that since liberalism has already destroyed the Bible as the exclusive source of universal salvific truth, we have to see the Bible as something less. We are left unsure of whether or not the narrative **facts** are historically true or whether they are only true in the sense that they form consistent parts of a coherent story. In other words, is the Bible closer to being considered history and biography or is it an epic novel? Additionally, is the authority for the text based on something inherent in it, is it truly prophetic, or is it based on the way the community of faith uses it?

Works such as these are worthy of our attention as thinking evangelicals. They are most certainly flawed both in their presuppositions and many of their conclusions. Is it true that the church's deepest need is to respond to postmodernism's claims? It is, of course, necessary to consider the claims of both moderns and postmoderns, but does the Church need to respond with the assumption that these philosophies must be correct in their analysis? Each of these works seems to operate from a presupposition that Reformation-era Christianity is fatally flawed and in need of contemporary rebuilding. This opinion is not confined to the non-evangelical. Increasingly, evangelicals seem to accept, *ad hominem*, these views. Why should we accept their critique any more readily than they would the views they reject? Contrary to the views expressed in these offerings, the Church's future in this world seems to depend on a thoughtful defense of objective truth as the basis of our grand narrative, the Bible. One might also wish that modern critics of the Reformation would be more seriously challenged to prove their assertions and analogies. In short, it seems high time to reintroduce greater evangelicalism to the Reformers and their world, not in support of reducing the Church to historical anachronism, but because inaccurate history breeds poor theology.

On the other hand, each of these works makes points we would be well-advised to hear and heed. In a world rapidly losing all semblance of coherence, where we seem to face the unacceptable alternatives of Christianity as completely privatized, ghettoized and therefore irrelevant or other worldviews such as an imperialistic Islam, we need a rediscovery of the Biblical Church as true community of the faithful. This is a community unlike the world around it, a community united to a past and part of a larger story, a true story. It is a story emanating from an eternal source calling us to an eternal future in Christ.

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# **John Stott: A global ministry by Timothy Dudley-Smith: Two Views**

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*John Woods and Graham Harrison*

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*John Stott: A Global Ministry*, by Timothy Dudley-Smith (IVP, 2001) £14.99.

## **John Woods**

**A** *Global Ministry* is the second and concluding volume of Timothy Dudley-Smith's (TDS) authorised biography of John Stott (Volume 1 was reviewed in an earlier edition of *Foundations*.) Written from a sympathetic angle this is a thrilling story of one man's mature and dedicated faithfulness in Christian ministry, a ministry that has had a genuinely global impact.

This volume covers the period from the 1960s up to the present day and it tells of Stott's transition from Rector of All Souls to a more trans-local ministry. Whilst still being based at All Souls he was allowed considerable freedom to travel, teach and write. It is a credit to John Stott under God that All Souls is as healthy and influential church now as it was in the from the 1950s to the early 1970s. Perhaps the word that comes to mind in reading this book is the word—focused. Many times suggestions were made that Stott should become a Bishop or theological college principal, but he refused to be distracted. Stott seems to possess an instinctive sense of what is the most strategic use of his time and gifts in the service of the kingdom. In an age where many are driven by the 'tyranny of the urgent,' this may be a lesson that all Christian leaders could do with learning.

Dudley-Smith relates Stott's strategic work with The National Evangelical Anglican Congress (Celebration 1987), International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, Tear Fund, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, Church of England Evangelical Council, The Evangelical Literature Aid Trust and Lausanne. In the latter Stott's considerable skills as a chairman and writer helped in the production of the Lausanne Covenant and its accompanying commentary. TDS deals fully with this process and the way that Stott handled the criticisms of some of the conclusions reached in the Lausanne Covenant. These include an illuminating section on accusations that the statements on scripture fudge on the issue of inerrancy and that the statement on a simple lifestyle was too vague (Ruth Graham's take on this is very interesting—she didn't sign the covenant because of the latter issue!). TDS relates how the motivation for Stott's involvement in the Lausanne project was his desire to see progress in world evangelisation. Evangelism, as is made clear in volume 1 of this biography, has always been a priority in his ministry.

Stott's involvement in all of the above-mentioned groups indicates his desire to invest in people so that they would be equipped to serve Christ effectively in the future. In particular his continued links with the student world shows his desire to shape the minds of future leaders. This same desire is reflected in Stott's impressive literary output. TDS relates the process of producing many books that have stimulated reflection on biblical, theological, ethical and cultural issues. Most evangelical

ministers in the UK will have used books like those contributed to the *Bible Speaks Today* series, *Issues Facing Christians Today* or *Baptism and Fullness*. The last mentioned book is a reminder of the clear yet fair position that Stott took on the Charismatic movement. A *Global Ministry* relates how he had charismatics like Michael Harper on his team at All Souls and how Stott was instrumental in seeking to build bridges on this issue. These bridges included the helpful Church of England Evangelical Council Report *Gospel and Spirit* that was published in the late 1970s. Stott has maintained a critically open stance to those who identify with the charismatic movement. Yet overarching this generous spirit there was a clear affirmation of a largely reformed doctrine of the Spirit.

The biography also reveals something of Stott the man. It reveals that one of the secrets of Stott's insight is his regular intake of chocolate, in particular Smarties—obviously the best kind of brain food! Another insight is that of the HHH or horizontal half-hour. This pause for a snooze at around midday has helped this wake up early stay up late bachelor to achieve a phenomenal amount of work in the life God has given him. There is rather a lot in this book about birds; Stott has been a bird watcher since his boyhood. One of the fringe benefits of his extensive trips around the world was the opportunity to track down rare birds that he had not seen before. The account of the discovery of the Snowy White Owl is one striking example. One can almost imagine Stott taking the same type of approach in tracking down the root of an obscure Greek word in an attempt to discover the meaning of a difficult New Testament text!

TDS writes as a friend and although he does make observations about Stott's weaknesses this is largely a kindly and positive treatment. Yet this being said Stott's contribution to British and world evangelicalism has been massive. The book paints a comprehensive picture of that global impact. It tells us why members of All Souls placed the following inscription on the new pulpit of All Souls:

Many friends of John Stott combined to give this Pulpit and communion table out of deep gratitude for his dedicated ministry as evangelist, teacher and pastor during 25 years as Rector of All Souls (1950–1975). He taught us to make God's word our rule, God's spirit our teacher and God's glory our supreme concern.

The book gives many reasons why the evangelical community in the UK and beyond should be grateful to God for this godly man with such a fruitful global ministry. It concludes with words of one of his many study assistants who wrote:

Thank you for your ministry to me ... I feel most blessed to be your friend. Please live forever.

However read a little more cautiously there are issues of concern. These include the now infamous 1966 National Assembly of Evangelicals, the issue of conditional immortality and the debate on homosexuality with Bishop Spong of New York.

Taken in reverse order:

TDS frankly explores the exchanges with Bishop Spong on homosexuality. Stott argued as he does in the book *Issues Facing Christian Today* for a traditional biblical position on homosexuality. The debate was costly and exhausting for Stott but someone needed to take a stand he was well equipped to do it.

It continues however to pose questions about the whole mixed Anglican network.

The need to publicly put a Bishop right on issues of theology and ethics reminds me of the amusing definition of a husband: A husband is someone who stands by you in all the problems you would not have had if you remained single!

The spilling of the beans on the issue of conditional immortality almost had to be dragged out of Stott. In what appears to have been an inadvisable collaboration with the liberal Anglican David Edwards, Edwards makes the shrewd observation that Stott had never really expressed his own views on this issue. Stott's reputation as an evangelical was not enhanced as a result of his views being aired in this way. TDS skilfully navigates the choppy waters that followed in the aftermath of this collaboration. He stresses that Stott's response was an honest yet tentative expression of the way he saw the issue. Reading both volumes of the biography I conclude that it is the kind of response that a man like Stott would make on such a sensitive issue. We may not agree with his tentative conclusion but the reader is invited to understand the man before being too hasty in dismissing him as a heretic!

Before becoming a Christian 1966 meant only one thing—it was the year that England won the World Cup. I still remember the commentators' words: 'They think it's all over ... it is now!' For readers of the *Foundations* 1966 means The National Assembly of Evangelicals meeting in which Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott had their famous showdown. As recently as 1996 this journal has devoted a whole issue to the events of 1966. The discussion there is fairly exhaustive.

TDS deals with the incident and takes note of that issue of *Foundations* and of Iain Murray's monumental biography of Lloyd Jones. 1966 is, as TDS writes, 'rooted firmly in the folk memory of many evangelicals, both Anglican and Free Church.' Yet he adds that the impact has left more negative reactions among the BEC constituency than the Anglicans. TDS feels that MLJ's address couched as it was in terms of an 'appeal' missed the mood of the moment and that no clear alternative to belonging to the mixed denominations was presented. It is interesting to note that Iain Murray in his biography of MLJ makes two similar points. Ironically the recently published history of the Evangelical Alliance, *One Body in Christ*, expresses considerable sympathy with MLJ. The history offers the opinion of Robert Amess that 'to blame Lloyd-Jones for personally wrecking the serene waters through which evangelicalism seemed to be sailing at the time of the 1966 Assembly would not be just ... Neither was he directly responsible for what followed.' It also relates the view of Gilbert Kirby who was the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance at the time that 'Looking back over a decade, later ... encouraging Lloyd-Jones to put his case had been 'probably one of my biggest mistakes.'

On reflection it may be the case that both MLJ and Stott were set up to fail at the 1966 assembly. It was essentially a no win situation! Stott was part of a denomination that was under pressure. The party line among evangelical Anglicans at the time was that all calls for an evangelical exodus from the Church of England should be resisted. With this in mind and the fact that Stott would be all too aware of the practical implications for many present, we can understand why he felt compelled to speak out. Whether this was the best way to do so is an open question. TDS relates how Stott stands by his actions of 1966 but also shows how he made peace with MLJ. Stott's esteem for MLJ is clear from the warm way he refers to him in his writings.

Litres of ink has been poured out on 1966, will it ever be clear what went wrong. There were certainly some misunderstandings, both conscious and unconscious. Maybe Stott and the Evangelical Alliance underestimated the impact of MLJ's outline, which they had heard previously being turned into a full-blown and passionate address. Perhaps Lloyd-Jones had underestimated the strength of denominational ties that held some ministers. Why should 1966 give more of a reason to leave denominations than 1910 or 1948 or 1967 or beyond? Some would argue that the events of Keele 1967 and the Growing into Union controversy of 1970 gave even greater reason to consider loyalties. It is difficult for evangelicals who have always been independents to appreciate the complicated links and the pockets of relative independence that there are in Anglican evangelicalism. It has been interesting to observe that the frosty post 1966 relationship between Anglicans and Independents has begun to thaw through initiatives like the Proclamation Trust, Reform and Essentially Evangelical. Nevertheless we are still living with the aftermath of the 1966 dispute.

I highly recommend this book as essential reading for anyone who wants to understand evangelicalism in the latter half of the 20th Century.

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## **Graham Harrison**

**T**he limpid and fluid style of the author is what we have come to expect from one whose expertise as a wordsmith has been demonstrated over many years in the hymns he has written. 'Charming' and 'comprehensive' are the terms that immediately come to mind in seeking to describe it.

Timothy Dudley-Smith is an obvious admirer of John Stott—and who in his right senses would not be! Few men in the modern era can have been so influential over such a long period and in such dire times in Evangelicalism worldwide. But the downside of this is that there is hardly the measure of objectivity that one looks for in a mature biography. Perhaps there is an element of inevitability about this, given that the subject is still living and the author is an old esteemed friend.

There are three areas where this assumes particular significance:

*1966 and all that*— or 'the Stott/Lloyd-Jones incident' as it is called on p. 70. This reviewer and the author obviously differ in their estimate of the now notorious events of the Evangelical Alliance Assembly in October 1966. Partly this may be due to the fact that we view the issues from different theological or ecclesiastical perspectives—Nonconformist and C of E respectively. Although, as would be expected in the chronology of this volume, the matter is dealt with early on, it does seem to have been handled with an uncalled for brevity (only seven pages). It would be wrong to describe it as having been sidelined, but in view of the considerable anguish occasioned by Lloyd-Jones' address and Stott's uncalled for response, it should have received a more detailed treatment here than it does. It simply will not do to imply that those who have regarded it as a fundamental issue were predictably divisive and thus on the fringes of authentic evangelical life. Nor is it the case that with the advent of the Evangelical Ministry Assembly and the Proclamation Trust wiser counsels have prevailed so that the C of E/Independent division is largely a chronological hiccup. TDS chronicles it

largely as another episode in the multi-faceted story of this remarkable man. In truth, it was virtually a clash of titans, in which the one whom many of us would consider to be the greater restrained himself remarkably in the face of dire provocation.

What exactly Lloyd-Jones was doing is a question never satisfactorily answered by Dudley-Smith. He clearly was not in the business of setting up an evangelical supra-denomination any more than he was calling on all and sundry to leave their 'mixed denominations'. Those who knew him best in subsequent years would testify to his great patience with and deep feeling for the many men who felt trapped in their denominational situations.

Surely what was at the heart not only of that address, but of the wider concern Lloyd-Jones had, was the utter and absolute priority of the Gospel—i.e. it was essentially positive and aimed at the big issue and not an exercise in negative nit-picking by someone lacking in any adequate ecclesiology. From this flowed considerations that inevitably had ecclesiological and disciplinary consequences. What are you to do with heretics when reasoning and patient pleading have already failed? Was (and is) Lloyd-Jones' charge that evangelicals were often content to belong to a 'paper church' rather than to an authentically biblical one, true? Certainly little has happened in the intervening years to suggest that there has been a return to ecclesiastical orthodoxy in any of the so-called main-line denominations.

It also seems difficult to credit Dudley-Smith's apologia (partly advanced by Stott himself) for the latter's unchairmanlike riposte to a speaker who had done what he had been asked to do. Dudley-Smith seems to suggest that Stott feared a mass exodus of bright young things from the ranks of the C of E under the spell of Lloyd-Jones' impassioned oratory. He actually quotes evidence (in the subsequent section dealing with Keele) to the contrary. The prevailing spirit among the young Turks was anything but of a secessionist nature. Did L-J have wind of what was in prospect at Keele? In which case, was the Doctor's 'appeal' (if that term can be used without prejudice) something of a now-or-never statement? Certainly Stott need not have panicked in the chair.

The whole issue is still supremely relevant. It had (and has) nothing to do with the alleged aim of establishing the mythical 'pure' church. Rather it demonstrates the importance of conforming our existing ecclesiastical institutions to recognizably biblical standards of belief and discipline.

Appropriately (as well as in the sequence of time) Dudley-Smith turns next to Keele. Here was proof that the attitudes manifested in the Westminster Central Hall clash of October '66 were likely to be set in stone—and that for decades to come. Call it youthful naivety if you will, but there is little indication in Dudley-Smith's account of the measure of distress, not to say pain, experienced by some Nonconformists who had been schooled in IVF circles when we realized that what might have been sauce for the CU goose was certainly not going to be the sauce for the denominational/ecclesiastical gander! And little evidence has been forthcoming subsequently to show that second thoughts are likely to modify earlier intransigence. When, if ever, should secession be contemplated? Evangelical Anglicanism over the last half century seems to many a nonconformist to bear a remarkable similarity to a series of Maginot lines the fall of each of which (if a change of metaphor is permitted) would be the straw that would break the camel's back! Our Anglican friends must pardon our scepticism, but



some of us wonder whether as long as *disbelief* in the deity of Christ and *repudiation* of the resurrection are not added as articles of faith to the existing XXXIX the subject is even discussible!

Certainly, as Dudley-Smith amply demonstrates, John Stott is someone who practises what he preaches when it comes both to a simple lifestyle and the courageous application of cherished principles despite their unpopularity. But other areas where the biography would have benefited by being transposed from the key of a mildly adulatory chronicle to that of a critical theological assessment are in its treatment of Lausanne and the debate on Conditional Immortality. But in both these areas—at least in the evidence supplied in the book—there is little by way of hard criticism of the positions espoused by Stott. Is evangelicalism really a two-winged bird depending both on the gospel and socio-political involvement? Has evangelicalism been shunted down the road of at least a mildly leftish political agenda as a result? Then, as RC historian Adrian Hastings points out, it was due to Stott that ‘the Lausanne Covenant avoided a commitment to the verbal inspiration of Scripture’ (p. 219).

Likewise the treatment of Stott’s views on Conditional Immortality (long known to the cognoscenti and suspected by a wider audience but only really made public by his dialogue with David Edwards in *Essentials*) never deals incisively with the issues at stake. Indeed the views of FF Bruce are introduced with the effect of shoring up Stott’s position without subjecting it to real scrutiny. But then, some will argue, is that ever the job of a biographer? Overall one is left with the impression that Timothy Dudley-Smith has written with a non-judgmental ethos (which from some points of view is good). But might this not at least have been sharpened by a rightly critical evaluation in these controversial areas?

Venturing even tentatively into criticism of such a widely used servant of God will, no doubt, seem churlish to some. But it is at least an arguable proposition that if only in the above-mentioned areas Stott has made some rather fundamental misjudgments that, sadly, continue to be widely influential.

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## **Whitefield and the Uncharitable Minister**

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A minister who had not a large share of that charity which thinketh no evil, being in company with Whitefield, was during the interview very free in his reflections on Wesley and his followers. Finally he expressed a doubt as to Wesley’s final salvation, and said to Whitefield, ‘When we get to heaven shall we see John Wesley?’ ‘No, sir,’ replied Mr Whitefield, ‘I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get a sight of him.’ Old Bigotry blushed in his presence.

## **Preaching Christ**

‘Preaching Christ I find to be the best means of winning sinners and building up saints. This, done with a single eye and a disinterested heart, will make its way through all opposition.’

Taken from Rev. JB Wakeley, *Anecdotes of George Whitefield on The Works of George Whitefield* CD-ROM published by Quinta Press.

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# Survey of New Testament Literature

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Alistair Wilson

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## Introduction

There is no end to the stream of literature which is published on various aspects of the New Testament (NT). As I have done in previous literature surveys, I have chosen to note a selection of volumes on the grounds of their usefulness or their significance (the two terms are certainly not synonymous!), not because I agree with everything claimed within the covers or wish to commend them without reservation. I make no claims to providing an exhaustive survey but I trust that there will be something to interest most readers. I must say at the outset that anyone who regards such a survey as having some value must make the purchase of D.A. Carson's *New Testament Commentary Survey (Fifth Edition)* a priority.<sup>1</sup> Carson's comments are judicious and my own convictions regarding what is useful to the student or minister reflect his closely.

## How to Read the Biblical Text

Let me mention first of all some useful books on the act of reading and interpreting the scriptural text. Of great usefulness to the interpreter of the NT is the third edition of D. Stuart's *Old Testament Exegesis*.<sup>2</sup> While the author clearly devotes most space to issues of OT interpretation, he consistently treats the OT as part of the whole canon, indicating connections with the NT. Look out for the third edition of Gordon Fee's companion volume on *New Testament Exegesis* due out soon. While probably rather demanding for many readers, the first two volumes in the *Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* are important and worthy of attention. Volume 1, entitled *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*,<sup>3</sup> considers ways of bringing new life to the interpretation of Scripture and includes essays on both OT and NT issues, as well as some more philosophical and theological essays. The second volume, *After Pentecost*,<sup>4</sup> draws heavily on recent scholarship on hermeneutics, particularly work on 'speech-act theory'. This will not be for everyone, but it is an example of serious reflection being done by authors such as K.J. Vanhoozer and A. Thiselton on the principles by which we interpret the Bible. M.A. Powell's book, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism*,<sup>5</sup> is written in a friendly style and with substantial doses of humour (which readers may or may not appreciate!). It is nonetheless a rather demanding study of how one reads the NT, taking Matthew's narrative about the Magi as his basis for discussion.

## Biblical Theology

It is good to see quite a number of studies appearing which seek to foster interpretation of the biblical texts as part of the whole Christian canon. G.J. Wenham's monograph, *Story as Torah*<sup>6</sup> discusses two portions of the OT text (Genesis and Judges) using 'Rhetorical criticism' as a foundation for considering the significance of these texts for ethics. In the last main chapter of his book, Wenham examines the place of the OT in formulating NT ethics, interacting with significant writings by B. Witherington and R.B. Hays. This is a concise, well-written book, which is worth reading both for its helpful

insights into the OT narratives and for its guidance on using the Bible in ethics. O.P. Robertson's book, *The Israel of God, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*<sup>7</sup> is a scholarly, yet clearly presented discussion of an issue that is of unmistakeable contemporary significance. Robertson devotes himself to careful biblical exegesis but does so with awareness of the highly charged political issues which make the headlines in our modern world. As you would expect of this author, he demonstrates great competence in dealing with both OT and NT texts, treating Scripture with respect yet engaging carefully with many who would hold very different views to his own. This is a model of biblical theology done in service of today's church. A.J. Köstenberger and P.T. O'Brien have written a superb volume on the biblical theology of mission entitled *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*.<sup>8</sup> After an important, but relatively brief, chapter on the OT material and a chapter on attitudes to mission in 'Second Temple Judaism', the authors survey the NT material in Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts (not surprisingly, a substantial chapter), Paul, John, and the General Epistles and Revelation. Of a similar character is the important study by T.R. Schreiner and A.B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*.<sup>9</sup> The authors take a topical approach to their subject, attempting to hear both OT and NT texts in context and devoting substantial discussion to difficult matters such as the warning passages in Hebrews. They conclude that 'God's election establishes and sustains our perseverance' (p. 330). Also by Schreiner is his superb theology of Paul, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*.<sup>10</sup> This volume is a substantial conservative alternative to the major book by J.D.G. Dunn and deserves to be considered alongside it. It will be very useful to students and ministers. *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*,<sup>11</sup> edited by D. Peterson, is an interdisciplinary defence of penal substitutionary atonement which provides careful biblical and theological reflection on this foundational issue. Of quite a different character to all the above, G. Strecker's, *Theology of the New Testament*<sup>12</sup> is sceptical about the Gospel records and full of standard critical assumptions about the NT documents in general. It will be important for students to be aware of the continuing significance of such scholarship, particularly in the German-speaking world (although P. Stuhlmacher's two-volume work in German is quite different in tone), and they will certainly find lots of information in this book, but since Strecker does not find any coherent theology in the NT as a whole, students and preachers would be better advised to spend their money on the standard older volume by G.E. Ladd or the stimulating recent volume by G.B. Caird. Probably also belonging to the category of 'Biblical Theology' is A.B. Rhodes and W. E. Marsh, *The Mighty Acts of God*.<sup>13</sup> This book is a mixture of introduction to the Bible, biblical theology and Bible study notes. It provides brief comments on all sections of the biblical text plus occasional illustrations and regular questions for personal reflection. It is aimed at a lay readership, although some of the scholarly issues raised would be taxing for many study groups. There is a tendency to accept the findings of mainstream critical scholarship, although the author clearly holds a relatively positive view of the Bible as scripture.

## Introductory Issues

Several important introductory volumes have appeared in the last couple of years. P. D. Wegner has written an excellent volume on 'the origin and development of the Bible' entitled, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*.<sup>14</sup> Wegner has combined high quality research with excellent presentation to provide an astonishing reference tool which

provides accurate and accessible information on everything from ancient inscriptions through approaches to textual criticism to 'the NET Bible'. Richly illustrated (in black and white), this book is highly recommended both to those who need to know and those who want to know. A volume which covers some of the same material and is written by a gifted communicator is *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* by Alan Millard.<sup>15</sup> This book is certainly more demanding than Wegner's but will be equally fascinating to those who are intrigued by biblical archaeology and it has important positive implications for the demonstration of the reliability of the NT text. On a related issue, M. Silva and K. Jobes have written *Invitation to the Septuagint*.<sup>16</sup> While this topic may not be of prime importance to many preachers, students would do well to gain some understanding of the issues relating to a major source of OT quotations in the NT from this reliable book. The first part is quite accessible while the second and third parts demand more competence in the biblical languages. On the history of NT times, B. Witherington's *New Testament History: A Narrative Account*<sup>17</sup> is typically well written and well researched and provides clear and helpful maps and illustrations. Readers who do not possess Witherington's many previous books and commentaries may, however, find the frequent citation of these volumes as sources of further discussion rather frustrating. L. McDonald and S. E. Porter have collaborated in writing *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature*<sup>18</sup> which provides detailed discussions on the background to the NT and the origins of the various biblical documents but very little on the biblical text itself. It is an important resource for students and so theological libraries should have it, but will probably be of less immediate use to the preacher. Of a similar nature, but with more emphasis on the theological and literary character of the NT texts is P. Achtemeier, J.B. Green and M.M. Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*.<sup>19</sup> This is in many respects a very useful volume, but it is disappointing that, having been co-written by two evangelical authors (Green and Thompson), it should accept so many standard 'critical' conclusions. Watch out for a revised edition of Carson, Moo and Morris' important introduction which, it is said, will pay more attention to literary and theological features of the biblical text than the first edition. On one section of the NT, D. Wenham and S. Walton's new textbook, *Exploring the New Testament: Volume 1, Introducing the Gospels and Acts*,<sup>20</sup> is presented in such a way that its function as a textbook is unmistakeable. While this may put some more seasoned readers off, this book is full of helpful material, clearly expressed and will be of particular help to students. A second volume on the remaining NT documents written by S. Travis, I.H. Marshall and I. Paul should be published quite soon. P.J. Tomson's *'If this be from Heaven...'*<sup>21</sup> is an unusual introduction to the NT which reads the biblical text in order to consider whether it contains 'anti-Judaism'. He concludes that such material is found in every Gospel bar Luke's and that modern Christians must therefore read the NT documents in a way that compensates for this fact. Tomson appears to argue for a 'two covenant' theology, arguing that both Judaism and Christianity are legitimate. While this is an interesting book (particularly for those concerned with dialogue between Christians and Jews), it does not really function effectively as an introduction to the NT and is not an indispensable resource. Finally, in this category, B. J. Malina's well-known book, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, has been reissued in a 'revised and expanded' third edition.<sup>22</sup> Malina's book is important in that it reminds a modern reader of the NT that words make sense in context, including social context and that the social context of, say, a modern western

reader is very different from that of a first-century Mediterranean hearer. Malina helpfully highlights the importance of, for example, honour and shame; kinship and marriage; and purity, for understanding the NT. Malina draws on studies of modern Mediterranean society and one might wish to raise the caution that ancient Mediterranean society may not have shared precisely the same values, but, in general, this book is valuable in allowing modern interpreters to bridge the cultural gap between themselves and the NT. It is likely to be of most interest to students and teachers but preachers could benefit from the book also.

## **Studies of 'the Historical Jesus'**

S.E. Porter's book, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research*,<sup>23</sup> includes a very clear history of the most recent phase of research on Jesus as a figure in history and in his ancient setting (the so-called 'Third Quest') and a good discussion of the various criteria by means of which scholars have evaluated the material in the canonical Gospels. However, the second half of the book is a detailed discussion of suggested criteria for authenticity based on features of the Greek text of the Gospels which will be very demanding for most readers, even those who have quite competent Greek. This is probably a volume which libraries might wish to hold but which individuals can live without. *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*,<sup>24</sup> although perhaps bearing a rather peculiar title, is in fact a useful collection of essays by recognised experts written at an accessible level. The book is divided into two parts: the first historical and the second more theological, although a number of contributors emphasise the need to hold such distinctions lightly. The contributors reflect a range of theological perspectives. It was rather frustrating to find some of the language typical of mainstream critical scholarship assumed without question by even the more conservative scholars. Particularly interesting (if not completely convincing) is the contribution by Francis Watson who argues that 'the real Jesus' cannot be discerned by historical scholarship alone but must be known in the act of Christological confession. G.W. Dawes has written a companion volume to his reader on 'The Quest of the Historical Jesus' (which I mentioned in my last literature survey) entitled *The Historical Jesus Question*.<sup>25</sup> Dawes provides a detailed engagement with some of the key figures in the field up to Bultmann. He ultimately comes to very pessimistic conclusions regarding the significance of the 'historical Jesus' for the modern church, which are quite different from many recent contributors to 'Life of Jesus Research'.

## **Commentaries**

Mark's Gospel has been well served recently with the production of four substantial commentaries by evangelical authors. B. Witherington's latest offering in his series of 'socio-rhetorical' commentaries is on *The Gospel of Mark*.<sup>26</sup> The strengths of the commentary are a strong emphasis on literary structure and progression, helpful use of historical and sociological data, good use of contemporary scholarship by means both of appropriation of insights and of engagement with contrary positions and a concern to 'bridge the horizons' between the ancient text and the modern world. Also on Mark is the most recent addition to the *Pillar* series by J.R. Edwards.<sup>27</sup> Edwards' commentary is full of useful detail and discussion and is sensitive to literary, historical and theological issues. Finally, R.T. France has produced a contribution to the

excellent *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series and C.A. Evans has completed the commentary on Mark 9–16 for the *Word Biblical Commentary* series.<sup>28</sup> On an entirely different scale, N.T. Wright has produced the first two volumes in an ambitious project to provide accessible commentaries on the whole NT. *Mark for Everyone* and *Luke for Everyone*<sup>29</sup> are not detailed commentaries but they do present Wright's generally helpful perspectives on the Gospels in a way that might be interesting to a Bible Study group, students or even preachers who have not read any of Wright's major works. Wright is an excellent communicator and these commentaries may well provide a much more conservative alternative to W. Barclay's readable, but dated and Liberal, series.

G. Keddie's volume on *John 1–12*<sup>30</sup> is the first NT volume to appear in a new series aimed at serious students of the Bible. Keddie's comments reflects the origins of the material in a preaching ministry, tending towards exposition rather than exegesis. While he does draw on some modern exegetical commentaries by evangelical scholars, more often he draws on older theological works. Future volumes in the series will be exegetical without being technical. J. Currid's excellent two-volume commentary on *Exodus*<sup>31</sup> illustrates the series editor's vision for the future volumes. Also on John's Gospel are three important volumes which are not commentaries. C.L. Blomberg has helpfully developed previous work into a full-scale book on *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*.<sup>32</sup> This book is required reading for students of John and would-be apologists. M.M. Thompson has written a true Theology of the Gospel in *The God of the Gospel of John*.<sup>33</sup> Careful and well informed studies of, for example, 'The Meaning of "God"', 'Knowledge of God', 'The Spirit of God' and 'The Worship of God' will prove very useful to preachers. A.T. Lincoln has written an ambitious book, *Truth on Trial*,<sup>34</sup> which seeks to move beyond a literary and historical study of the trial motif in John's Gospel to a theological appropriation of the biblical material for the modern world. This substantial work, which draws on NT scholarship, literary theory and theological reflection from the Fathers through Barth to the present is a stimulating study and will repay careful reading by a serious reader, even where one would not wish to follow Lincoln.

Those who have used volumes in the *International Critical Commentary* will know what to expect from M. Thrall's second volume on *II Corinthians*, which covers chapters 8–13.<sup>35</sup> Thrall believes that the letter as we have it now is in fact composed of three letters combined: letter 1 in chapters 1–7, letter 2 in chapter 9 and letter 3 in chapters 10–13. In addition to painstaking exegesis of the Greek text, in discussion with a huge number of ancient and modern authors, Thrall provides nine excursuses and two essays on Paul's opponents and 'Paul the Apostle'. Students and scholars with good Greek skills who are working on 2 Corinthians must engage with this commentary. Preachers are unlikely to find this commentary so useful because of both detail and critical position. On a somewhat smaller scale, R. Schnackenburg's commentary on *The Epistle to the Ephesians* has been republished in paperback format. Although Schnackenburg reflects mainstream critical views about non-Pauline authorship, his comments on the text are theologically rich and his detailed notes on the Greek text will prove very useful to students. This is not an easy commentary but neither is it highly technical. It is well worth a look and is worth buying for those with the skills necessary to use it. Following closely after the publication of I.H. Marshall's important ICC commentary on the Pastoral

Epistles comes W.D. Mounce's contribution to the Word Biblical Commentary series on the Pastorals.<sup>36</sup> Mounce provides a useful conversation partner for Marshall as he holds to Pauline authorship of these letters and takes different positions from Marshall on a number of significant issues. It is unfortunate that the commentaries were being written at almost the same time so that the two scholars could not engage with each other's views. Although Mounce provides plenty of detail, as one would expect of a volume in this series, he set out (as did Marshall) to write a commentary for the church. Although the comments are based on the Greek text, Greek is normally translated.

While not truly a 'commentary', L.R. Donelson's, *From Hebrews to Revelation: A Theological Introduction*<sup>37</sup> is a collection of 'theological readings of the NT documents from Hebrews to Revelation', which attempt to hear the 'proper historical and literary voice' of the biblical texts. Although some suggestions for further reading are offered at the end of the book, there is no explicit engagement with the work of others in the body of the book. Those who cannot pluck up the courage to tackle G.K. Beale's superb but mammoth commentary on Revelation have been well served in the last few months. P. Gardner has written a very sane and accessible commentary on the apocalypse in the *Focus on the Bible* series<sup>38</sup> while V.S. Poythress has written *The Returning King*<sup>39</sup> which draws on the best scholarship to provide a very readable guide to this daunting biblical document. For those who wish a more substantial treatment, D.E. Johnson's, *Triumph of the Lamb*<sup>40</sup> is a sober exegetical treatment of Revelation which draws on the best contemporary scholarship without providing exhaustive detail. While he occasionally engages with more maverick interpretations, Johnson most often treats the biblical text on its own terms, being particularly sensitive to OT allusions. Readers who carefully heed Johnson's clearly stated hermeneutical principles will save themselves from numerous exegetical disasters.

## General NT Studies

R.N. Longenecker's new book will be appreciated by those who have valued previous examples of his careful exegesis. *New Wine into Fresh Wineskins*<sup>41</sup> argues that a substantial number of portions of early Christian confessions may be discerned in the NT texts. Part one aims to demonstrate how such material may be identified. Part two shows how Longenecker believes the NT authors 'contextualised' such confessional material in their writings, looking at examples from most of the NT documents. Part three considers how such confessional material might be 'contextualised' today. The book is interesting, but as it is mainly a study of method there is little detailed exegesis of NT texts. The value of this book to any given reader hinges on how convinced one is of Longenecker's fundamental point concerning the identification of confessional material. I think that there are too many propositions which are highly debatable for this to be a must-have book. On the other hand, the latest offering in the *McMaster New Testament Studies*<sup>42</sup> series which is edited by Longenecker is a highly useful contribution to the study of a topic which is of great importance to the life of the church. *Into God's Presence* is a collection of essays on prayer in the NT, as well as several on the background material in the OT and other Jewish writings. As usual, the authors have been instructed to write in an accessible style, although some readers will find some essays a bit demanding. Francis Watson has written a number of stimulating books and articles arguing for a closer relationship between the disciplines of biblical studies and

theological studies. In *Agape, Eros, Gender*<sup>43</sup> he works out these methodological principles in a study of a highly controversial but highly relevant topic: sexual ethics. Three chapters on important secular authors are each followed by an essay in theological exegesis. While I cannot endorse all of Watson's views, he is such a stimulating thinker that those who dare (and can afford!) to wrestle with this book will come away with a more nuanced perspective on a topic which is of crucial importance not simply for Pauline studies but for the life of the church. Dealing with similar issues is S.C. Barton's, *Life Together*.<sup>44</sup> This is a collection of previously published essays which seeks to relate the biblical text to the contemporary world in a careful way.

The 'New Perspective on Paul', most effectively articulated by Professor J.D.G. Dunn has had many advocates over the last two decades, but recently there has been a spate of books which raise challenges to this view. The slightest is by the veteran Tübingen professor, Peter Stuhlmacher, and is entitled, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*.<sup>45</sup> This brief discussion of justification argues for a forensic understanding of 'justification'. On a more substantial scale, S. Kim's new book, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*<sup>46</sup> engages directly with the work of Dunn and others, particularly in a substantial first chapter which defends the thesis of his published doctoral thesis. Unnecessarily technical for most preachers, yet exceptionally important for advanced students, a so deserving of a brief mention, are the responses to E.P. Sanders by M.A. Elliott<sup>47</sup> and Carson, O'Brien and Seifrid.<sup>48</sup>

*Preaching Like Paul* by J. W. Thompson<sup>49</sup> moves from a useful study of the NT evidence concerning Paul's preaching to a discussion of homiletics based on the pattern of Paul. There is much useful material here for those who preach. The collection of essays edited by P. Bolt and M. Thompson and entitled, *The Gospel to the Nations*,<sup>50</sup> is a *Festschrift* in honour of P.T. O'Brien and is a very valuable collection gathered under the broad theme of Paul's missionary theology and activity. Very worthwhile for students and those who enjoy such collections. G.D. Fee is perhaps best known for very substantial expositions of Pauline theology. In *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*,<sup>51</sup> however, a number of his shorter published articles have been brought together. These studies reveal clearly a scholar with a heart for the church. Particularly powerful is the chapter 'On Being a Trinitarian Christian' which deserves a wide readership. Likewise, while many readers will not share Fee's views expressed in 'Toward a Pauline Theology of Glossolalia', one could hardly wish for a more careful presentation of a 'Pentecostal' perspective on this topic. More demanding but equally valuable is the collection of Fee's scholarly articles, *To What End Exegesis?*<sup>52</sup> There are some real treasures in this collection of previously published articles—Fee's study of Philippians 2:5–11 stands out as an exegetical model—but most readers will find that there are a limited number of essays which are of direct relevance to them.

## Conclusion

No one reader is likely to find all the above volumes equally important and useful. It is well worth giving some careful thought to one's priorities before parting with one's hard-earned cash. Some preachers may be tempted to buy nothing but commentaries (and perhaps not even the exegetical kind suggested above), while some students may wish to seek out the latest monograph. I would encourage all readers, however, to treat



their reading as continuing education and therefore to buy and read books that will stimulate as well as inform, challenge as well as instruct. My particular commendations (for what they are worth) are Wenham, *Story as Torah*; O'Brien and Köstenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*; Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*; Wegner's *The Journey from Texts to Translations*; Bockmuehl (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*; Witherington or Edwards (or probably France) on *Mark*; and Longenecker (ed), *Into God's Presence*. In this coming year, may we read not simply as a means to the end of the next sermon or essay but as an opportunity to develop our Christian thinking so as to be more effective as a student and communicator of the words of eternal life to our contemporary world.

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# Improving Worship: Worship as God Intended it

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*Extracts of Papers Presented at the  
BEC Theological Study Conference, Dinas Powys,  
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## **Worship and the Gospel: Jonathan Bayes (Hambleton Evangelical Church, Carlton Minniot, Thirsk)**

Most of the words translated from Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek by our English word *worship* are concerned entirely with posture. We nonconformists now jump quickly on to the defensive. ‘Yes, but’, we interject: ‘yes, but it’s posture as a symbol of the attitude of the heart.’ We are right, of course. So then we need to consider this: what attitude of heart is indicated if we slouch before the Holy One, if we approach the Most High with the cultivated slovenliness of today’s generation? ...

Out of the response of worship towards God as covenant Saviour arises a wider recognition of his entitlement to worship. The act of bowing down before the LORD is linked with the acknowledgement of his holiness and glory (1 Chr 16:29, Ps 29:2, 96:7–9, 99:5,9), his exalted greatness (Neh 8:6, Ps 86:9f, 95:3–6, 99:5,9), his unchanging blessedness even in times of adversity (Job 1:20), his sovereignty (Ps 22:27f, 66:7, 95:3–6), his awesome judgement (Is 66:23f, Zeph 2:11), his uniqueness (Ps 86:8f), and with the fact that he is the Creator and Preserver of all things (Neh 9:6). The rationale for such worship is seen in Psalm 95:6f. The Psalmist worships the LORD as Creator, but does so because of his covenant commitment to his people. Calvin explains the movement outwards from celebration of God’s triumphant covenant grace to recognition of his awesome glories in these words:

God supplies us with ample grounds for praise when he invests us with spiritual distinction, and advances us to a pre-eminency above the rest of mankind which rests upon no merits of our own<sup>1</sup>

Distinguishing grace opens our eyes and hearts to the absolute magnificence of the LORD.

## **Worshipping the Living God: Iain D Campbell (Free Church of Scotland, Back, Isle of Lewis)**

At one level, we can say that *theology is worship* and that *worship is theology*. As we study the great doctrines of the Word of God, and meditate on their content and their implications, we are led to marvel at the being and grace of God. In this sense, ‘theology is done in the presence of God and should therefore be reverent as well as rigorous.’<sup>2</sup> ...

It is equally true that worship is theology: 'Worship in all its forms is laden with theological insights....theology is acted out, expressed in practice. Worship is the vehicle of theology.'<sup>3</sup> Whether we fully appreciate it or not, every element of our public worship of God is pervaded with doctrine and theology. Our worship is encounter with, and a response to, the presence of the living God who has made himself known to us. As Calvin puts it, 'The beginning and perfection of lawful worship is a readiness to obey.'<sup>4</sup> It is the revelation of God in his word that forms the basis for all true worship; and when we are willing to obey the voice of God speaking to us and revealing himself to us in the Bible, then we can worship him aright.

## **New Wineskins for New Wine—from Old Testament to New Testament: David J Montgomery (Knock Presbyterian Church, Belfast)**

While we now approach God through this direct route, the 'new and living way' in Christ, we find that the New Testament has actually got very little extra to say on form, aside from Ephesians 5:19 and a few hints in 1 Corinthians 14:26ff (and Corinth is not the best place on which to base our praxis).

There are, however, two key verses in the New Testament which underlie everything else. First of all there are Jesus' words to the woman at the well in Jn 4:24: 'God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.'

If our worship lacks either of these dimensions, Spirit or truth, it is not Christian worship. If it is deadly formal, ritualistic, even legalistic, with no engagement of the heart, it will lack the vibrant life-giving presence of God's Spirit and is mere religious exercise, what Paul calls 'a form of godliness, but denying its power' (2 Tim 3:5). If, on the other hand, it is lively and entertaining and attractive but tells us nothing, or even tells us wrong things, about God then it is simply *enthusiastic* religious exercise, but it is not Christian worship ...

The other key verse is Rom 12:1 where Paul says that we are to 'offer our bodies as living sacrifices,' and that is 'our true spiritual worship'. Here is the remarkable statement that everything that was encompassed in the old system of temple worship was not to be acted out in how the people of God lived from day to day. They were to be living sacrifices.

## **The Puritan Approach to Worship: Gwyn Davies (Evangelical Theological College of Wales)**

*Question:* What were the differences between the Anglican approach and that of the Puritans?

*Answer:* The Lutheran/Anglican approach, often called the *normative* principle, upheld the authority of Scripture inasmuch as no practice clearly condemned by the Bible should be countenanced in public worship: 'What the Scripture forbids not, it allows; and what it allows is not unlawful; and what is not unlawful my lawfully be done.'<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the Puritan approach, usually termed the *regulative* principle, upheld the authority of Scripture by allowing in public worship only those practices that are either commanded in the New Testament or have biblical warrant in the

practice of the New Testament Church.<sup>6</sup> In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy scriptures<sup>7</sup>

This statement represents the substance of many of the major confessional declarations of the Reformation.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Puritans, however, the long and sometimes bitter debates concerning the proper approach to God that followed the Elizabethan Settlement drew them almost inexorably to argue increasingly for the consistent application of the regulative principle to every aspect of worship—so much so that the principle was regarded by an opponent as ‘the foundation of all Puritans’.<sup>9</sup>

### **Continuity and Contemporariness in Worship: Ray Evans (Kempston Evangelical Church, Bedford)**

Now in connection with form, structure and style—that which tends to dominate in any discussion of contemporariness and continuity in worship—I want to expand on three points about the regulative view as it addresses them.

First, regulation or prescription is not over specified. In one sense one could say that the New Testament is not detailed enough if we are looking for a ‘service programme’ that would fit all places at all times. Rather it gives us the big things that free us from superstition and which unite all true Christians ....

Second, the regulative principle as outworked by our forefathers left open great areas that were left to Christian prudence, the so-called ‘things indifferent’ or ‘adiaphora’. These were the matters of ordering a meeting that in themselves carried no spiritual significance; that is they neither brought the worshipper closer nor further away from God ...

Thirdly ... It is part of the regulative view to say that God has deliberately left areas of decision in worship contexts. He *has prescribed* freedom within prescribed forms and it is part of what it means to respond in love to him to make choices as an expression of our commitment ...

The principle then gives us continuity with the past, for like all Christians we should continuously bring our practice to the Word of the Lord we worship. But it will also make sure we are contemporary.

### **Worship and the Presence of God: Graham Harrison (Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Newport)**

Think what is involved—personal communication and communion with the living God. This is a contrast infinitely more extreme than the wildest known in a merely human context. All analogies based on the differences between two individuals at opposite ends of the human social spectrum hardly begin to set forth the amazing fact that ‘we who are dust and ashes’ (Gen 18:27) not only approach the Creator but can do so with joy, confidence and boldness despite the fact that he is ‘of purer eyes than to behold iniquity’ (Hab. 1:3). We may be confident in the assurance that what we

are doing pleases God; indeed Ps 50:23 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me' suggests that it even adds to his glory. It is incredible that such an activity should ever be regarded as a drudgery or a burden rather than an unspeakable privilege.

It is worthwhile pursuing the contrast with the human analogy. Many people would regard being invited to Buckingham Palace to a garden party, with the chance to seeing the Queen, or even possibly having a brief conversation with her, as a great privilege. But in worship, even when we come as members of a crowd (which still happens on some occasions!), potentially we are also coming as individuals, not to the remote monarch but to the Lord God Almighty who is also our Heavenly Father. We speak directly to him. He does not engage in polite pleasantries in which he formally enquires as to some peculiar circumstances, which might explain why we have been singled out for interview. His concern is infinite, all-knowing, and tender. And he is able to communicate to us such feelings of assurance and love as may well be indescribable, or to express this in biblical language we 'rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Pet 1:8).

## References

- <sup>1</sup> J Calvin, *Commentary upon the Book of Psalms*, Baker, 1979, vol 4, p. 34.
- <sup>2</sup> D B Forrester, J I H McDonald, G Tellini, *Encounter with God: An Introduction to Christian Worship and Practice*, T & T Clark, 1996, p. 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Forrester, p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in G Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom*, Edinburgh, 1992, p. 387.
- <sup>5</sup> Owen, 'Truth and Innocence Vindicated' in *Works*, XIII, p. 480. These do not represent Owen's views but rather his summary of the position taken by Samuel Walker, an apologist for the Church of England. The principle is formally enunciated in Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, III, xi, p. 168; iii, p. 135. See also the declaration of Articles 20 and 34 of the Thirty-Nine Articles, 'that the church has power to decree rites and ceremonies' but 'that nothing be ordained against God's Word'; and William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, I, p. 72.
- <sup>6</sup> John Owen drew an important distinction between the worship of the Old Testament and that of the New in 'The Nature and Beauty of the Gospel Worship', *Works*, IX, pp. 81–84 and 'A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God', *Works*, XV, pp. 468–9.
- <sup>7</sup> The Confession of Faith agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster (1647), XXI, in *Subordinate Standards*, 32. Cf Swinnock, *Works*, I, pp. 34–35; Manton, 'Sermons on the Sacraments' *Works* (1873), XV, pp. 344, 349, 351–2; Flavel, 'An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism', *Works*, VI, pp. 228–9; Owen, *Works*, XIII, p. 464; XV, pp. 447–530.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, the Gallican (or French) Confession XXXIII (1559); the Belgic Confession XXIX (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism Q96 (1563). For the views of Independents and Baptists, in virtually the same words as those used in the Westminster Confession, see the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (1658) and the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).
- <sup>9</sup> As reported in Owen, *Works*, XIII, p. 462.

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## Book Reviews

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### **Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Reformed Theologian of the Church of England?**

*Nigel Atkinson*

*Paternoster Press, 1997, 138 pp. £11.99*

This book is a highly significant and long-overdue assessment of the architect of classical Anglicanism from an evangelical perspective. All varieties of churchmanship will find the author's analysis and exposition of Hooker's stance stimulating and provocative. Indeed, it is impossible to be neutral about Atkinson's thesis since the issues involved are very much alive in both academy and church. The author challenges much scholarly interpretation of Hooker, not least John Henry Newman's portrayal of him as 'the theologian of the *via media*'. Exploring the key areas of reason, tradition and Scripture, the author investigates Hooker's understanding of the authority attributable to each. The three main chapters involve in-depth comparisons of Hooker's theology with the views of his contemporary puritan critics on one hand and the thought of the magisterial reformers on the other. The fourth and final chapter is an assessment of Hooker's position in the light of recent scholarship. The author's conclusion is that Hooker's debt to Reformation theology is greater than many scholars have allowed hitherto. A recurring theme in the book is that Hooker was closer to the reformers in general and Calvin in particular than his puritan critics were. Thus the author believes that the question in the book's subtitle demands an answer in the affirmative.

The author argues with ease that Hooker held a Protestant view of Scripture. However this is not the same thing as a Reformed view of Scripture as maintained by Calvin and the Puritans. On the relationship between

Scripture and reason, the author also proves that Hooker was neither rationalist nor fideist. However, the reviewer was not convinced that Hooker's stress on reason was entirely compatible with the magisterial reformers. What is clear from the author's argument is that Hooker is pursuing a very definite agenda: his defence of reason is necessary in order to defend the appeal to tradition which in turn is essential to defend the Anglican retention of episcopacy. The fact remains that while Hooker defends both a Protestant view of the presbyterate and the validity of non-episcopal Reformed orders, he cannot justify Anglican episcopacy from Scripture.

From the reviewer's perspective, the least convincing features of Atkinson's thesis are his interpretation of Calvin and the wedge he attempts to drive between Calvin and the Puritans. For instance, Hooker's case that Calvin's choice of presbyterian church order was determined by the political circumstances prevailing in Geneva (pp. 47, 58) is just absurd. Anyone who has read Calvin in any depth knows that Scripture rigorously determined his thought on every issue he expounded. Doubtless the situation made it easier for Calvin to argue the presbyterian case. That he might have adopted something different had circumstances been otherwise is doubtful pleading indeed.

To say that Calvin regarded the church order of the early church as something indifferent (p. 69) is to ignore his carefully argued case in *Institutes*, IV.3.4–16. Clearly, presbyterian order was based on 'God's pure word', being the 'ministries established by Christ' (*Inst.* IV.4. 1). Atkinson entirely misappropriates Calvin's *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet* to establish his view (pp. 66ff). Calvin's acknowledgement that Genevan church order was "not such as the ancient church professed" did not mean he was making any concessions over bishops. He was happy to leave discipline out of the immediate discussion (*Tracts*, p. 38) merely to show that where *doctrine* was concerned, the Reformed churches had antiquity on their side (*ibid.* p. 37). Regarding the "form which

the Apostles instituted", Calvin is adamant that in Scripture "we have the only model of a true Church, and whosoever deviates from it in the smallest degree is in error" (*ibid.* p. 38). In the face of Atkinson's claim, this is some indifference! Calvin's seemingly sympathetic discussion of early-church episcopacy (*Inst.* IV. 4. 1-15) was merely an account of the changes which were made to apostolic order *en route* to papal episcopacy. His early toleration of Anglican orders was clearly only temporary judging by his correspondence with Cranmer and Grindal (see my 'Bishop or Presbyterian? French Reformed Ecclesiology in 1559', *EQ* 67.3 (1995)). The author similarly misleads the reader into thinking that Calvin believed God had "prescribed nothing specific" about each churches "form of organisation" (p. 71). However, had the author consulted the context of Calvin's comment on 1 Cor. 11:2 (instead of simply reciting William Bouwsma's citation), he would have seen that Calvin is not discussing ministerial offices but unwritten apostolic traditions concerning service times, praying by kneeling and burial customs, etc. All this plainly correlates with *Inst.* IV.10.27-32.

Calvin clearly saw a close relationship between doctrine and ministerial office in the New Testament. In arguing that apostasy occurred in both respects, Cartwright and his puritan brethren were true disciples of Calvin (p. 69). That Scripture speaks clearly in both areas was fundamental to truly Reformed polity *vis-à-vis* the semi-reformed Anglican variety. However, Atkinson makes much of Hooker's attempted *reductio ad absurdum* of the Puritan's appeal to scriptural authority (p. 88). Indeed, one must ask, did the Puritans really demand a Bible text for "the taking up of a rush or strawe"? This is unlikely, in view of any specific lack of evidence cited by the author. One suspects that this charge is an instance of Hooker's tendency to exaggerate the puritan position (see Cargill Thompson's comment to this effect, p. 77, n.3). The fact is that the Puritans did not demand a simplistic omniscient view of Scripture. Cartwright did allow that ecclesiastical ceremonies might vary with circumstances (see M. M.

Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 1939, p. 237). Even Wilcox and Field, the authors of *An Admonition to Parliament* (1572), admitted under interrogation that while "in matters of government and discipline, the Word of God is our only warrant", yet "rites and ceremonies not mentioned in Scripture are to be used or refused, as shall best appear to the edification of the church" (*English Puritan Divines in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth: Cartwright and his Contemporaries*, 1848, p. 232). In other words, the Puritans did allow a place for sanctified human reason. Hooker's mistake was to endorse forced obedience to Anglican *adiaphora* through the Act of Uniformity, a policy which occasioned much puritan suffering.

In short, there are serious grounds for rejecting Atkinson's thesis that Hooker was closer to Calvin than the Puritans were. On reason, tradition and Scripture, a wedge cannot be driven between Calvin and his English sons, at least where church order was concerned. It therefore remains true that the Elizabethan settlement left the Anglican Church a semi-reformed church, even—albeit to a lesser degree than Rome—a 'disobedient church'. Hooker effectively disregarded clear New Testament teaching about church order in the interests of Elizabethan political correctness. The Puritans were right to highlight Scripture's teaching in matters of order as well as doctrine. While in these respects they were faithful Calvinists, a case may certainly be made that the Puritans went beyond Calvin in certain dogmatic details associated with the extent of the atonement, the nature of justification and the Sabbath, but that is another story. Suffice to say that Atkinson's thesis remains highly unconvincing and the enthusiasm of Peter Cousin's promotional review somewhat excessive (*Nota Bene* 5.1 (1998), pp. 8-9). However this book is a welcome contribution to a debate which shows no signs of going away. One could wish that this otherwise valuable work had provided an index, a deficiency which perhaps will be remedied by a future edition.

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Alan Clifford

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