

FOUNDATIONS

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Oneness in Christ
Congregationalists and Confessions
God in eternity and time
English Standard Version
Preaching Christ
Church History Literature Survey

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Council

FOUNDATIONS

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

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Editor's Notes

Because I have written the survey of church history literature in this issue I will keep my notes brief.

Not far from where I was brought up in Massachusetts is the town of Northampton. Today the home of the prestigious Smith College, in the early 18th century Northampton was the home of Jonathan Edwards and saw the remarkable revivals that took place during his ministry there. The meeting-house of the Congregational Church in the town is a replacement of the one he preached in that burned down in the 19th century. Inside it is a memorial plaque to Edwards on which are inscribed the words of Malachi 2:6 which in the English Standard Version reads, 'True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity'. Those words fittingly sum up Edwards's ministry as they should the ministry of every faithful gospel minister. In their description of the ideal priest that was such a contrast to the priesthood of Malachi's day, these words are a constant challenge to me whenever I think of my ministry. Of course, gospel ministers are not priests in the old covenant sense and we must guard against any tendency to become such, but there are some functions of the priesthood that new covenant ministers are called to fulfil, not least of which is to teach the word of God. We must be those on whose lips true instruction is found and to whom (verse 7) people should turn for instruction amidst all the spiritual confusion and falsehood of our society. The prayerful preaching and teaching of the word must be our priority as it was for Jesus and the apostles, but we must also walk with God in peace and uprightness. Echoing what Genesis 5:22–23 says about Enoch, Malachi reminds us how we must have a close and intimate relationship with God characterised by righteous behaviour. Our relationships with God as gospel ministers should also be characterised by peace or *shalom* in its biblical sense of well-being and wholeness. How carefully those of us who preach the word must nurture intimate communion with God. And what is the purpose of our ministries? It is to turn many from iniquity. Fundamentally this happens when through our ministries people become Christians and begin to live in a godly way. But our ministry of the word in public and private is intended to continue turning people from sin to godliness right through their Christian lives. Like an anti-virus programme on a computer meditation on Malachi will help us to fight those things that would corrupt our ministries and nurture those things that would make them more effective.

I will keep until the next issue a review of some books that can help us in fulfilling the kind of ministry described in Malachi 2:6. There is one, however, that I would urge you to get if you do not have it already. And that is **Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision*** (Banner of Truth). For a number of years now I have used this collection of prayers in my devotions. Covering a wide variety of subjects these prayers have been collected together from a number of Puritan and later writers. Not only do I use them

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'For you are all one in Christ Jesus'

(Galatians 3:28)

Ian Hamilton

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a sustained polemic against false teachers who added Moses to Christ and works to faith. Christ was not enough, and faith in Christ was not enough. This was no minor theological dispute; the gospel of Christ was being 'perverted' (1:7), the eternal good of sinners was being imperilled, and the cross of Christ was being eclipsed (2:21). This is why Paul speaks so solemnly and so calculatingly in 1:8–9. He is not speaking out of pique, as the reiterated asseveration in verse 9 makes abundantly clear. Paul's response to this 'damnable error' is detailed and decisive. It reaches something of a climax in 3:26ff. Here we see that all our spiritual privileges, all of them, depend on nothing but our connection with Jesus Christ, a connection that is formed entirely and only by faith. This leads to Paul's monumental statement, 'you are all one in Christ Jesus'—not 'You will be one in Christ Jesus, some day', but 'You are, now, present tense, believe it or not, in spite of all your differences, Jew and Gentile etc., take it in, all one in Christ Jesus'. It sounds so good, so unspeakably spiritual, but can it possibly be true? Doesn't the fragmented nature of Christ's church mock it? Don't our disputes and divisions deny it? Herman Bavinck, the great Dutch theologian wrote, 'We cannot be humble enough as Christians about the disruptions that have existed in the Church of Christ throughout all ages; it is a sin against God, in conflict with the prayer of Christ, and caused by the darkness of our mind and the lack of love in our hearts'. These are strong words, but who would want to deny their truth? Certainly not me! The history of the Christian church is a history of divisions, dissensions, and disputes—and the Reformed churches fare no better. And yet Paul can write to the Galatian churches, 'You are all one in Christ Jesus'. Let us be clear, Paul is not writing as a naïve idealist. The New Testament church had its divisions, its dissensions, its disputes. The New Testament church was not an ecclesiastical paradise. Yet, 'You are all one in Christ Jesus'. How can this possibly be true? Simply because it is! It is because the church is an 'organism' and not a 'mechanism'—'It is not a mechanism in which the parts precede the whole, but an organism in which the whole is prior to the parts'.¹ To quote Ted Donnelly, the church is not a clock, with many different parts, it is a seed with all its life in organic union—everything and everyone is there!² The Church is the Body (singular) of Christ; the church is the Bride (there is only one) of Christ; the church is the Temple (and there is but one) of the living God; there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all'. 'You are all one in Christ Jesus'!

I would like to tease this out and see how truly united true believers truly are:

1. We were all in Christ Jesus in God's electing love (compare Eph. 1:4). In God's electing love he saw us all as sinners, guilty, vile, judgement deserving sinners. This is the common identity of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the same point of origin. Beyond all our denominational distinctives, we are what we are by the electing grace of God in Jesus Christ. We are all debtors to mercy alone.

2. We were all in Christ Jesus when he paid the ransom price for our sin (compare Matt. 1:21.) 'His people'! The Lord has but one people, one, indissoluble unity. This is the text that is engraved on John Murray's headstone. Our Lord Jesus laid down his life for his 'sheep', his one flock. He has a people given to him by his Father, of whom he will lose not one (John 6:39)—in John 17 he speaks six times about 'those you have given to me'. The cross makes all Christians one.
3. We are all one in Christ Jesus because we share the same salvation. We are all saved uniquely, because God treats us uniquely; there are no (or ought to be no) Christian clones. But we have all been regenerated, called, justified, sanctified, united to Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, bound for the same glory! We have all believed and repented. We are 'all one in Christ Jesus'.
4. We are all one in Christ Jesus in our submission to the Holy Scriptures—there is one Bible for everyone! We are given the same promises and have the same duties. There are not Holy Scriptures for this evangelical group and that evangelical group. There is but one Bible and it is for all!
5. We are all one in Christ Jesus in Christian living. You cannot live the Christian life in solitary confinement, isolated from other believers. It is 'together with all the saints' that we grasp 'how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ' (Eph. 3:18). It is 'From him (that) the whole body ... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work' (Eph. 4:16). When we pray, our Lord has taught us to say, 'Our Father'. Who are the 'Our'? Your group? My group? Your denomination? Mine? No! The 'Our' is the whole family of the Father—the weird and the wacky as well as the sober and correct! So, 'love one another as I have loved you'! Does that not humble you, deeply? How did he love us?—partially? selectively? grudgingly? deservedly? It was 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly'!
6. We will be all one in Christ Jesus in glory (compare Rev. 7:9). Are we not to be now what we will be then? This doesn't mean you turn a blind eye to sin or to things that grieve the Lord (we are always to speak the truth, but always in love! And no less must we be open to receiving rebuke, unless we imagine that, unlike the rest of the church, we don't see through a glass darkly!).

These are foundational principles. But what does all this mean for us in the practise of daily Christian life?

The Implications of our oneness in Christ

1. Our oneness is in Christ. We are 'all one in Christ Jesus'. The fundamental error of the ecumenical movement is that it never asked the great question, What is a Christian? The Bible makes it abundantly clear that Christ is the Vine, we are the branches! He is the Head, we are the members! It is your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that brings you in to union with him. Christian unity has therefore a fundamental demarcation. Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone, is not a Reformed distinctive, it is a biblical fundamental!
2. Our oneness means that people will know that you belong to Christ when you love the people of Christ (compare John 13:34–35). Do you not think we would speak differently to one another and about one another if we really believed that Christ was in us? Now Christian love is neither supine nor blind; it never turns a blind eye

to sin, but it does remember that 'love covers a multitude of sins'. Whatever else Christian love is, it is seeking, sacrificially, the good of all God's people (of course not only God's people), whoever they are.

3. Our oneness will mean that we resist the 'Elijah complex'—'I alone am left'. It can so easily creep up on us. We think we are the last bastions of orthodoxy. Being one in Christ means you will cultivate wide horizons, you will see the Christian life through a wide-angled lens, the widest you can find! Some Christians have extravagant practices. But if the Father has chosen them, and the Son has died for them, and the Spirit has sanctified them, you and I are to embrace them. Too often we give the impression, not that we are 'holier than thou', but that we are 'holier than God'. Look how Paul can describe the Corinthians with their 'extravagant ways' (compare 1 Cor. 1:2,4,9). He was not slow to rebuke them, but look how generously he describes them! When Jesus' disciples said, 'Teacher ... we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us', Jesus' response was withering, 'Do not stop him' (Mark 9:38–41). He wasn't one of 'them', but he was one of Christ's!
4. Our oneness will surely mean us seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, resisting the temptation to make theological mountains out of molehills; learning to disagree in love, not allowing an unbelieving world to gloat over the tragic and God-dishonouring sight of Christians publicly advertising their differences. This is, of course, easier said than done. There may well be times, as there have been in the past, when Christian disagreements cannot but be public. The honour of Christ may well demand it. But, too often it is not Christ's honour but human pride that is the driving force in Christian disputes. Pride is a subtle, surreptitious disease. It clothes itself so easily with piety. We would do well to remember the wise words of a Puritan divine, 'On earth, the Lord washes our hearts; in heaven he will wash our brains'. We don't know everything. So let us beware of acting in ways that may 'destroy your brother for whom Christ died' (Rom. 14:15).

Let me finish with quotes from three outstanding Reformed theologians, two Englishmen, and one Scotsman (we always leave the best to last). Listen first to Thomas Brooks: 'Labour mightily for a healing spirit. Away with all discriminating names whatever that may hinder the applying of balm to heal your wounds ... Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous'. Listen to Thomas Watson, 'There is but one God, and they that serve him should be one. There is nothing that would render the true religion more lovely, or make more proselytes to it, than to see the possessors of it tied together with the heart-strings of love'. Finally, listen to John Murray, 'the lack of unity among the churches of Christ which profess the faith in its purity is a patent violation of the unity of the body of Christ, and of that unity which the prayer of our Lord requires us to promote. We cannot escape from the implications for us by resorting to the notion of the invisible church. The body of Christ is not an invisible entity, and the prayer of Jesus was directed to the end that the world might believe. The unity prayed for was one that would bear witness to the world, and

therefore belonged to the realm of the observable. The implications for visible confession and witness are unavoidable' (2.335)

I've barely scratched the surface. You know that, I know that, and the BEC knows that. It will always be a struggle to practise as well as confess the unity of Christ's church, but it will be a good struggle. As a recent editorial in the *Free Church Monthly* commented, 'The very existence of the BEC is a strong reminder to us that we cannot live in isolation from other believers'. The BEC is far from perfect, but with your support it can be a force for truly Christian good in our nation. We need one another; we belong to one another. Our Lord Jesus lived and died and rose again to make us one. Let us resolve by his grace to be what we are, and 'seek to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace', that the world might know that He came from the Father. He died to make us one—we should seek by his grace to live as one!

References

- 1 Berkhof p. 449.
- 2 Some of the material that follows is gleaned from Professor Donnelly's superb address on this verse at the Aberystwyth Conference in 2001. I would warmly commend all four addresses and urge you to get the tapes, if you haven't already done so!

This article is the substance of an address given in Glasgow at a meeting commemorating the 50th anniversary the BEC.

Iain Hamilton is minister of Cambridge Presbyterian Church

☞ *Editor's Notes continued from page 1*

myself, but I also recommend the book to young ministers and church officers as an aid to teach them how to pray both in private and in public. There is something of a poverty in the latter in many churches and this book is a great help in teaching people how to lead others in prayer. Banner have republished this little classic in an attractive leather bound edition that while a little expensive is one of those books that will go with you for life.

Let me say a word about this issue. Readers may think that the issue has a Congregationalist feel to it, since two of the articles deal with some aspect of Congregationalism. Mike Plant looks at the role of confessions in Congregationalism and Douglas Vickers looks at the Savoy Confession's doctrine of God. The latter is easily adaptable to those who adhere either to the Westminster or 1689 confessions and the former will stimulate everyone to think of what subscription to any statement of faith involves. But please do not think that these articles mean that *Foundations* has taken to banging the Congregational drum. This is just the way things worked out for this issue. But I would encourage Presbyterians, Baptists and others to send me articles that deal with aspects of their own traditions so that all of us are better informed and that there is some debate within our readership on these issues. Having said that I think (as a Baptist) that the Congregational tradition is one that should be better known. It is tragedy to see what has happened to the once significant

☞ *continued on page 38*

Congregationalists and Confessions

Michael Plant

How did I end up as an evangelical Congregational minister? I was brought up by Christian parents, who attended an evangelical Anglican church. I was converted at that church and when I left home, to go to college, I attended another evangelical Anglican church. I remain deeply influenced by, and deeply grateful for, those churches and their contribution to my life. Some things however happened to change the obvious course that I was on and to lead me into contact and ministry with churches I knew nothing of until I was well into my twenties.

- 1 *I was exposed to non-conformist worship.* Many may now feel that the long minister's prayer is boring and has no place in modern worship. However my experience was of a man of God praying in the Spirit and there is nothing like that. This made a commitment to liturgical worship unattractive.
- 2 *I was exposed to Reformed Theology.* The ministry that I was experiencing in Student Conferences and locally was often Calvinistic. I encountered something thrilling and mind expanding that I had not come across before.
- 3 *I began to examine what the Bible taught about the church.* I had a very clear sense of call to the ministry and had to sort out where I should train and where I might minister. Even apart from any reservations I might have about mixed denominations and the direction of evangelical Anglicanism, and these were not unimportant factors, I could not see a complex denominational structure, such as would be essential in Anglicanism or Presbyterianism, anywhere in Scripture.

So here I was, and incidentally I was also a convinced believer in infant baptism, and I believed I had a new grasp of Biblical truth but I didn't know if there had ever been anybody who believed the same as me. Then somehow I came across a copy of the 1658 *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*, as then in print from Evangelical Press, and realised that I was not all alone in the world and that the position I now held had been believed down the years by many other people. So my attraction to ministry with the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches came about through a confessional document. Subsequently I managed to get hold of a copy of the 1833 *Declaration of Faith* and that, in my opinion, is broadly in line with Savoy but, being far less complex and detailed, is better adapted to be of value as a contemporary statement of faith.

However, the next stage in my discoveries was that in the EFCC, *Savoy* might have some relevance as a historic and foundational statement of faith but is not used in the sense that subscription to it, or any adherence to it, is asked of ministers or member churches. So the *Savoy Declaration* was reprinted in *Evangelical and Congregational*, but only as a guide to what Congregationalists historically believed, and not as something to be subscribed to. The church to which I was called, and which I have been pleased to serve for over nineteen years, has six very basic doctrinal points in its statement of faith, which is in its Trust Deeds and which the minister must preach in accord with. These Trust Deeds also refer to the need for the minister to be a Congregationalist and a Paedo-Baptist. Clearly, while many evangelical Presbyterians give the *Westminster Confession*

a central place in their thinking, and many Reformed Baptists feel the same about the *1689 Confession*, the majority of Congregationalists are not giving, and historically have not given, such a central place to their confessions of faith.

What are the reasons for this different viewpoint? It is not the belief, characteristic of Liberal Theology, that truth cannot be defined in objective propositions. Doubtless this belief has fuelled anti-creedalism but not on the part of evangelical Congregationalists. Nor is it the truth that Congregationalists are essentially non-creedal even if evangelical—they would hardly have produced the above named declarations if this was their position. Indeed it could be argued that Congregationalists have been particularly active in formulating new creeds on a regular basis. This could certainly be argued from the proliferation of creedal statements in Congregational church covenants; a strong case could be made for this. Nor do I conclude that this simply means that modern Congregationalists suffer from pernicious doctrinal anaemia and that this means we have radically departed from the attitudes to creeds that earlier generations of Congregationalists held. Rather I believe that there may be a thought out and Biblical rationale for this stance. If we are not conscious of this rationale then, if we belong to the modern Reformed movement, we will simply make the mistake as Independents, and the same problem would apply to Baptists, of being David trying to fight in Saul's armour or rather Independents trying to fight in Presbyterian armour. It may be that, even were it possible to stimulate such a change, a renewed emphasis on Confessions and subscription to them would not be a good way forward for us.

In order to properly explore this question today what we will be doing in this paper is examining a number of questions:—

1. Why do the 1658 Savoy Declaration and the 1833 Declaration of the Faith of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters simply seem to disappear from view in our church history? If the declarations pass so swiftly from prominence what was their original purpose?

That the declarations play a far more minor part in Congregational church history than does the *Westminster Confession* in Presbyterian church history is inescapable. In churches which date back to the 17th and 18th Centuries, you will not find that the Trust Deeds involve the *Savoy Declaration* although in the 19th Century some churches did have the *1833 Declaration* attached to their trust deeds—this is the case at Eston and Staithes Congregational Churches. The general practice in the 17th and 18th Centuries would be to have a Statement of Faith, which might resemble but would probably be far less complex than the *Savoy*. The Statement of Faith would be part of a church covenant and was often drawn up by the minister. One common practice was that the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* would form the doctrinal basis for a Congregational Church as is the case at Bridgenorth and at Reeth. I don't know of Congregational churches to which this applied but some of the Calvinistic Independent churches used the doctrinal articles in the Anglican *39 Articles* as their basis of faith. Our own church, which was founded within fifty years of the publication of the *1833 Declaration of Faith*, has six very basic articles of faith:

- 1 The divine and special inspiration of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and their sole authority and entire sufficiency as the rule of faith and practice.

- 2 The unity of God with the proper deity of Father, Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- 3 The depravity of man and the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's agency for man's regeneration and restoration.
- 4 The incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ and the universal sufficiency of the atonement by his death and free justification of sinners by faith alone in him.
- 5 Salvation by grace and the duty of all men to believe in Christ.
- 6 The resurrection of the dead and the final judgment when the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous unto life eternal.

There is a statement in our trust deeds, which states that the minister is to be a Congregationalist and a Paedo-Baptist although no such restrictions are stated as applying either to members or church officers. I assume, but it is nowhere stated in the trust deeds, that the general definition of a Congregationalist would have been intended to be taken as that given in the *1833 Declaration*.

The reasons for the ephemeral nature of Congregational declarations of faith may relate to the purpose of creeds amongst Congregationalists—that is that they were never intended to be for subscription but as a vehicle for the declaration of the faith of churches of the Congregational way. This may be inferred from the fact that the term 'declaration' rather than 'confession' is used. I wrote to a distinguished Congregational historian to ask whether there is intended to be clear distinction between the two terms and he replied 'that there is all the difference between confessions and declarations. Confessions are given, authoritative, orthodox, conceived as ideally timeless truth, declarations are worked out anew as what is believed to be the truth as understood now by a particular group—the more, the better, as proceeding from a living community.'¹

With respect to this opinion, it does need to be noted that the preface to the *Savoy Declaration*, said to be written by John Owen, happily uses the term 'confession' to refer to the *Savoy Declaration* and does so consistently and not as an isolated instance. Having said that, the preface also states:

And accordingly such a transaction is to be looked upon as a fit *medium* or *means* whereby to express *that their common faith and salvation*, and no way to be made use of as an *imposition* upon any: Whatever is of force or constraint in matters of this nature causeth them to degenerate from the *name* and *nature* of *Confessions*, and turns them from being *Confessions of Faith*, into *exactions* and *impositions of Faith*.²

Again,

The Spirit of Christ is in himself too free, great and generous a Spirit, to suffer himself to be used by any humane arm to whip men into belief, he drives not but gently leads into all truth, and persuades men to dwell in the tents of like precious faith; which would lose of its preciousness and value, if that sparkle of freeness shone not in it.³

I conclude here that the general point about a distinction being intended is correct but that there was not, at least at the time of the *Savoy Declaration* being produced, the sharp distinction between the two terms that is inferred. The distinction that exists, I think, is between *expressions of faith* and *impositions upon faith* rather than between timeless statements of truth and the current consensus of a particular community. However, as I shall demonstrate later, the Congregational Way often seems to involve framing new statements of faith in which to express eternal truths when it is faced with

deviations from the Faith. One reason that the *Savoy* and other later declarations of faith were made was actually to safeguard the eternal truths contained in the faith once delivered to the saints. The reason for producing the *Savoy Declaration* was due to attacks on 'The great and fixed truths of the gospel'⁴ and for it to act as a doctrinal marker for the churches which previously were 'like ships launched singly, and sailing apart and alone in the vast ocean of tumultuating times' by holding out to them: 'common lights ... Whereby to show where we were.'⁵

Following in the same footsteps as the *Savoy Declaration*, the preliminary notes to the 1833 *Declaration of Faith* read: 'It is not intended that the following statement be put forward with any authority, or as a standard to which assent should be required', rather it is 'designed to state the leading doctrines of faith and order maintained by Congregational Churches in general.' In each case the declaration is made to show where we stand, so that others may stand with us, rather than to be a standard to be imposed on others.

Before proceeding further, I want to raise with those who would tend to favour subscription and are not at home with the viewpoint I am outlining, a general point about the nature of subscription and the difficulty of defining what is required from those subscribing to a confession. A reluctance to insist on subscription is very understandable when the creeds in question are complex and detailed in many areas. Must someone who is subscribing to the *Westminster Confession* agree that the pope is the Man of Sin and that not only adultery but also desertion is a biblical ground of divorce? While those who advocate subscription may say that you can fully subscribe to a confession without absolute commitment to the wording and that if you 'scruple over a statement here and there' you can 'still remain true to the doctrinal intent of the confession' they are still left with the fact that there is actually no objective way that these distinctions can be defined and upheld. Once you admit the viewpoint that the wording isn't binding it is possible to disbelieve virtually any detail of the confession, and yet claim that you 'still remain true to the doctrinal intent of the confession'. For example, could you hold to the Amyraldian position, of election of individuals to salvation but of a universal atonement rather than an atonement limited to the elect, and still subscribe to the *Westminster Confession*? People's understanding of the idea of limited atonement, even amongst those who claim to hold to it, vary considerably and there is a spectrum of possible views rather than two stark alternatives. Where on the spectrum will the line be drawn? A paper I have at home, which actually originates from amongst Reformed Baptists, lists three varieties of subscription—absolute subscription: 'every word as it is written'—historical subscription: 'agreeing with the author's intention'—or full subscription which I have defined above, where you can reject details provided you are generally in agreement. I think that the above points about subscription are worth making because if you are to dismiss the case that I make and insist, against the intention of the writers, that subscription to documents like the *Savoy* and the 1833 declarations is desirable, then you will need to think through what you mean by subscription and how closely agreement is to be insisted on. It is not the simple matter some may assume.

In EFCC where we annually affirm our oneness and our shared belief, it seems common-sense to say that where we are going to insist on agreement of a meaningful

kind we are best to keep the statements simple and basic, such as any evangelical holding to a congregational polity would agree.

A reason for this distinct perspective against subscriptionism amongst Congregationalists, which we should not be unaware of, is the historical background to the production of the *Savoy Declaration* and *1833 Declaration*. Prior to *Savoy* the value of creeds was partly in the fact that they formed a useful tool of persecution and that this was an experience and danger all too real to the early Congregationalists. Nor should we doubt that the *Westminster Confession*, which was intended to form the basis of a national church settlement, was seen as a tool of persecution against those who did not conform. This is one reason why *Savoy* and the *1689 Baptist Confession* both stress their indebtedness to the Westminster standards and largely adopt their wording. Peter Toon wrote: 'the Congregational way was in 1658 a cause under both attack and siege. It was being described as a "sink of all heresies and schisms"; it wanted legal recognition under the rule of Richard Cromwell or whoever succeeded him; and it wanted to affirm its Reformed Theological basis'.⁶ As regards the *1833 Declaration*, all Congregationalists still suffered the loss of most normal civic rights until 1828, and of some rights until 1871, as a punishment for refusal to subscribe to Anglican doctrines or the liturgy which expresses them. Geoffrey Nuttall writes: 'Historically there is much justification for associating creeds with persecution.'⁷

It should also be pointed out that at no stage did *Savoy* necessarily reflect the views of all, or even of a majority of, the English Congregationalists. The *Declaration* was drawn up very speedily in response to the urgent need for legal recognition. The whole proceedings of the conference took just eleven days and the wording of the doctrinal portion of the *Declaration* was delegated to a sub-committee, consisting of Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl and William Greenhill. This explains the reasons for, and was enabled by, the almost wholesale adoption of the *Westminster Confession* as a doctrinal standard. Richard Baxter, who is an unfriendly critic, wrote 'They once met at the Savoy, and drew up an agreement of many Pastors. But in this they differ from many other churches called Independants.'⁸ The *Declaration* was at no stage circulated for approval by the churches, although publication was delayed until some other pastors had the opportunity to state their agreement or disagreement with them. Some disagreed because they were more open to recognising and fellowshiping with parish churches where a godly ministry existed and others might disagree with the distinction made in the 'Platform of Order' between 'pastors' and 'doctors' or 'teachers'.⁹

By the 18th century *Savoy* was already a dead letter. However, another possible reason for the failure of strong and defined creedalism in Congregationalism may be the influence of the Great Awakening and the Missionary Movement. The London Missionary Society was largely Congregationalist in composition, with people like David Bogue and Philip Doddridge amongst its founders, and became increasingly Congregationalist over the years. Generally the missionaries were Calvinists but some held views of church polity which were not Congregationalist. The policy of the Society was that the missionaries would plant churches, which reflected the ecclesiastical polity held to by their founders: 'The Society's purpose is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government ... but

the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.’ As the missionary movement developed and as the Spirit was poured out during the Great Awakening, the eyes of 18th century Evangelicals were moved from the perspective of being a denomination in ‘Christendom’ to being Christians in ‘Heathendom’. Suddenly the world was bigger than Christianised Europe. This perspective on the gospel and the missionary task was a sea change in British evangelicalism and resulted in a cast of mind that was not as friendly to the magisterial and complex confessions of the 17th Century. When you consider the importance of the emphasis on mission and evangelism in the New Testament all the 17th Century Confessions are notably deficient in this area of thought.

2. How did Congregationalists continue to declare their faith without having a nationally recognised and binding confession?

I would suggest that there are many ways the faith of a church is affirmed and declared which do not require subscription to a nationally recognised confession of faith. One prominent way in the early centuries of Congregationalism was by the use of church covenants. Congregational churches covenanted together at their inception and on occasions would renew their covenant or make a fresh covenant with the Lord. I will give you the wording of the covenant entered into, and frequently renewed by the Independent Church at Axminster in Devon:

The Lord having called us into fellowship with His Son, and convinced us of the necessity of church fellowship we do solemnly profess in the strength of Christ, the accepting of the Lord for our God, and the giving up of ourselves to Him to walk, through the strength of Christ, together in all His holy commandments and ordinances according to the rule of His word. And we do likewise give up ourselves to one another in the Lord, to walk together in all those graces and discharging all those duties which are required of us as a church of Christ.¹⁰

On one occasion the covenant was renewed in a fresh form:

O Thou most holy God, and Searcher of all hearts; we, Thy poor people, unworthy to be called Thy children by reason of our manifold backslidings and violations of Thy holy covenant, are emboldened through Thy goodness, promise and covenant mercy in Thy Son, to prostrate ourselves our souls at the feet of grace, confessing from our hearts all our transgressions against Thy holy law and gospel, with our breaches of covenant with Thee and our great unfaithfulness, desiring to be ashamed in Thy sight, to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes for them, humbly begging Thy pardon in the blood of Thy dear Son, and desiring and professing from our hearts our willingness to return unto Thee, and to walk more closely with Thee in Thy covenant for the time to come. And therefore do we this day re-give up our souls, bodies and all that is ours to Thee, to be more entirely Thine for ever; and do, in the strength of Christ, resolve and bind our souls by solemn vow and covenant to Thee and one another in Thee, to walk with Thee in all Thy holy will, and with one another in the fellowship of the gospel, as Thou hast required of us in Thy Word, solemnly covenanting in Thy presence and through Thy Son, to take Thy Word for our rule and to endeavour the ordering of our conversations according to it, and to be more careful in attending on Thy holy ordinances and keeping up our communion in the duties of Thy worship according to our capacity; to love and watch over one another; to endeavour the building up and saving each other’s souls; to be governed in all things by Thy holy will and to persevere with Thee too through good report and bad report, through life and death, through Thy grace strengthening us. So help us, O God.¹¹

William Gordon Robinson distinguishes several periods in the making of church covenants:—

- 1 The Separatist period when they majored on separation from the world and from the apostate church.
- 2 The period of early Congregationalism when they were characteristically concerned with walking together in the gospel way.
- 3 A later period when the gospel was perceived to be under threat from Arianism, which later deteriorated into Unitarianism.¹²

In this third period the statements of faith would characteristically be detailed and sometimes greater flexibility in covenanting together was allowed. In the Bury St Edmunds Church in 1655 the statement of faith, which is integral to the church covenant, has 11 principal heads and 29 subordinate divisions. John Browne describes it as: ‘a masterly performance’ which is ‘comprehensive judicious and scriptural.’¹³ It was ‘signed by all the brethren and sisters, but not as a mere matter of form. Those who dissented from any article or statement in it carefully noted their dissent at the time of subscription.’ It is recorded that two women added after their signatures the words ‘being clear in all but that of infant baptism’.¹⁴

I have had the opportunity to examine in detail the doctrinal statement, which is contained in the 1770 Church Covenant of the Blanket Row Church in Hull. The group had left Dagger Lane Presbyterian Church in 1769 due to doubts as to the orthodoxy of the minister. The reasons for the drafting of the Statement of Faith are also given: ‘in every church of Christ, formed on a gospel-plan, there should be a regular, methodical and scriptural Confession of the Faith of that Society, because it is impossible there should be a united Contention for the Faith, if there is not a united profession of it.’¹⁵ The statement here has some 20 sections, each with scriptural proofs and the phrasing is reminiscent of earlier declarations without being directly copied from them. The theology is the High-Calvinism of the *Savoy Declaration*, and the presentation of it cannot be said to have been improved, but it is significant that the way in which Congregationalists often responded to an attack on ‘the faith once delivered’ is not by appealing to bygone statements of faith but by framing new ones. However, some churches might declare their orthodoxy by referring to some of the *39 Articles* or to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* in their church covenants.

Preaching is another obvious way of declaring the faith of a congregation. Our church doesn’t have a detailed statement of faith but the preaching embodies a statement of faith, albeit not in a systematic form. Nonetheless none of us would want to say that a statement of faith has the power that preaching has to form and to hold together the people of God. There is a richness, a variety and a distinctive ethos to the Word of God that no statement of faith can equal. This is something vital which we need to take on board in our consideration of how a congregation is to achieve a doctrinal and ecclesiastical identity. It does so chiefly through the preached Word, and the failure to see this makes the church to be viewed as too much an organisation governed by a rule book and too little as the community of faith indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Another obvious area in which our faith is declared is that of hymn-writing and singing. This is an area in which Watts and Doddridge spring to mind as great and gifted exponents. How helpful hymns like ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’ and ‘O

God of Bethel' are to Christian faith and devotion. In *Christian Hymns* Isaac Watts has hymns in almost every section, and I am sure that you could construct his systematic theology and certainly a confession of his faith from his hymns alone. Other less known ministers did the same. Richard Davis of Rothwell in Northamptonshire composed many hymns and the one I am quoting is actually chosen because it is not very wonderful in terms of poetry and writing style. It can be misleading to concentrate our studies on the greatly gifted and exceptional, and it is helpful to see that many practitioners of the art of hymn-writing were not very gifted but served their own times and congregations. In common with most hymn-writers of his generation none of Davis's work has survived in modern hymn-books. The hymn reads:

Our Father from eternity
did see us in our sin,
His boundless grace did move him so
he called his Son to him.

Come my delight, my Glory bright
my wrath thou must remove,
there is a company of men
Whom I do dearly love.

Now for exchange thou needs must change
and take their sin on thee;
Thy righteousness, thy merits shall
to them imputed be.

The practice of many ministers, Philip Doddridge among them, was to preach and then use the hymn after the sermon, often written specially for the occasion, to enforce and apply and further elucidate the doctrine. So the hymn-writing was virtually a memory aid for use with the sermon. This may imply much about our choice of hymns because it is those your people will remember and carry with them into their everyday lives. The value of this hymnody is not its enduring quality, for even the greatest of hymn-writers will only have a small fraction of their output used by future generations, but its utility as a means of teaching Christian truth and causing it to be remembered.

I want to make a further point, which has great relevance to our current situation as the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches. Stan Guest points out, in his book *Wandering Pilgrims—What happened to the Congregational Churches?*,¹⁶ that it was probably not just reasons of economy that meant that from 1918 the 1833 *Declaration* was no longer printed in the *Congregational Year Book*. Liberalism had swept through the denomination prior to the beginning of the 20th Century. Two obvious areas of contention were over eternal punishment and over the appearance of a hymnal called *The Rivulet*. Though deviations in both areas were strongly attacked, notably by Dr John Campbell, editor of the *British Banner* and several Congregational Union publications, the tide of the times meant that once the furore died down deviations from the evangelical faith could be quietly assimilated and accepted. Despite the resolution of 1878 affirming the evangelicalism of the Union, which stated 'That the Congregational Union was established on the basis of these facts and doctrines [of the evangelical faith as revealed in Scripture] is, on the judgement of the Assembly, made evident by the *Declaration of Faith and Order* adopted at the Annual Meeting, 1833, and the Assembly believes that the churches represented in the Union hold these

Facts and Doctrines in their integrity to this day',¹⁷ Liberalism was triumphant and the Congregational Union was probably the worst affected of all the major denominations.

We now move on to a period of church history in which some who are still alive and with us were involved—that is the founding of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches. If people in EFCC wish to deplore the departure from the *1833 Declaration* on the part of others as a sign of their unfaithfulness to evangelical truth, it is somewhat strange that we ourselves never bothered to return to it and indeed I am assured that 'it was never on the agenda' that we do so.¹⁸ The founders of EFCC chose not to return to the 1833 Declaration but to draw up and adopt another statement of faith, which is briefer, less clearly Reformed and totally silent on infant baptism. I would contend that those who founded and initially led EFCC were simply making a contemporary declaration of their faith, which was less detailed doctrinally, less Calvinistic and was strongly influenced by the fact that evangelicalism as a whole was Baptist, having become increasingly Arminian during the latter end of the 19th Century and during the 20th Century. The EFCC statement of faith, then, declares the faith held by the founders of EFCC, whom I honour and admire, but honesty should compel the admission that the faith they held is not identical with the vigorous Calvinistic and Paedo-Baptist faith which the *Savoy* and *1833 Declarations* set forth. It is of course far closer to that faith than the formularies of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and of the United Reformed Church.

3. Has there been a strong objection to subscription to creeds amongst Congregationalists, and if so, what were the reasons given for this?

We will see that there has been, and that this is not a question of the strength of the evangelicalism of the persons concerned, although clearly the success of Liberalism amongst Congregationalists, especially ministers, did influence attitudes towards any form of creedalism. Rightly understood at least some of the problem comes from the very concept of the Church held by Congregationalists when they are most faithful to their own principles.

In the early 18th Century we find that Isaac Watts, who is clearly evangelical, declined to subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity during the Salters' Hall controversy. He writes in a foreword to a sermon by Matthew Henry on 'Religious contentions':

I confess, if the Matter of Debate at London were the glorious Doctrine of the Trinity, whether Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, there would be more occasion for some Fervour of Spirit: The Scripture seems to me to be sufficiently expressive of this great Truth, and the more important Doctrines of our Religion appear to rest firmly on such a Divine Foundation. Yet even then the mere manner of Subsistence of Three Persons in One Godhead, ought never to become a warm controversy (because of its deep mystery). But while the Subject of the Contest in this City is reduced to this one point, (*viz*) Which is the best way to preserve truth and peace? Whether by subscribing the Words of Scripture or humane forms? I think a happy medium might be found out to secure Liberty and the Gospel together, by every one's declaring his own sense of Scripture in his own Words, at all proper Times, Places and Occasions, and particularly to the Satisfaction of all persons who have any just concern therein.¹⁹

Now I would not want to comment on whether Watts was correctly discerning his times because that is irrelevant to my argument. Indeed I readily confess that the subsequent

doctrinal downgrade does throw that judgement into question. What is important for our present study is that he does reveal several significant convictions:—

- 1 The Doctrine of the Trinity is vital to the preservation of the Faith once delivered to the saints.
- 2 Because of the mysterious nature of the Doctrine of the Trinity we would be wrong to fall out over the precise details of this doctrine.
- 3 To insist on particular wording of someone else's statement of belief is wrong.
- 4 Those concerned as to the content of a Christian preacher's preaching and teaching are entirely right to seek clarification.

This seems to me to preserve a balance. There is a historic, biblical Christian Faith, which we must hold to and which we are to be concerned that others hold to. Much dispute doctrinally is simply about the words in which we try to express mysteries. We are to recognise the historically conditioned nature and hence the limitations of creedal statements. Gerald Bray writes:

Historically speaking, Christian Theology has developed in the context of ancient Greek Philosophy and Roman Law. These influences have produced traditions of thought which have been used to explain the teaching of the Bible. From them two different (though often complementary) traditions have emerged, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.²⁰

How then can we force someone to state detailed doctrinal convictions in language they may find unhelpful and misleading and which by its very nature is unbiblical? By 'un-biblical' I do not mean 'anti-biblical' (*i.e.* teaching what the Bible does not teach) but simply that Biblical truths are expressed in non-Biblical words and categories.

Behind what may seem to be an extreme example of refusing to subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity lies a conviction that is very important and which relates to the nature of the church. For the Congregationalist the church is primarily to be regarded as 'the fellowship of believers' and not, as in classic Presbyterian expositions, 'the company of those who hold and profess saving doctrine'. As someone of Presbyterian convictions, who used to worship at our church, said to me, 'The only point of church membership is to uphold the church's statement of faith'. The same man couldn't understand why I gave him a copy of the *Savoy Declaration* when asked what I believed but wasn't worried by the fact that neither I nor my church officers had to subscribe to it. Because of their understanding of the nature of the church, Congregationalists historically laid great stress on the emotional, spiritual and volitional aspects of faith as well as the intellectual understanding and assent to the truth. An area where this understanding is fundamentally important is that of church membership. James Bannerman asserts that the difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists is, broad and fundamental. With Independents, a saving belief in Christ is the only title to admission to the Christian society; and the candidate for admission is bound to bring with him at least credible evidence such a title belongs to him, and that he has been effectually called unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. With Presbyterians, on the other hand, an intelligent profession of belief in the Gospel is the title for admission to Church membership; and the candidate for admission is only required to show that his conduct and life are in accordance with and accredit his profession.²¹

Let me give you three examples of the outworking of the Congregational view of the church and its membership; one is from the period of Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate,

one from the period of the Glorious Revolution and one from the 19th Century. The examples I am using therefore span three centuries and three dramatically changing contexts in which the Congregational Way was being followed. The first which I want to look at involves Richard Davis of Rothwell, Northamptonshire.

An indication of Davis's gentleness as regards doctrinal exactness in a prospective church member comes in his letter to John Beart, the pastor of a church founded from Rothwell, about an applicant for church membership who holds to eternal justification. [Eternal justification is the belief that the elect are justified from eternity and that faith recognises an already existent justification rather than receiving justification at the moment of belief.] Davis carefully refutes this error and then writes,

I do hope our brother daily knows experimentally that he comes as a perishing sinner to Christ and his righteousness in every prayer to God for present pardon and justification. And when he is helped to receive this present declaration, he can then reflect with comfort upon the eternal thoughts of God his Father toward him. And if he witnesses this experience to the church, they may be certain he holds faith to be somewhat else than the manifestation of his being eternally justified, however he may express himself.²²

The second involves Thomas Goodwin, who was content to allow Zachary Mayne, a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford to partake of the Lord's Supper despite his avowed Socinianism.²³ The final example is RW Dale, who wrote: 'Can a man have faith in Christ—the faith which saves—and yet deny the Divinity of his person ...? I say Yes.'²⁴ He also comments 'What seems to be a fundamental principle of Congregationalism requires that the gates of the church should be open to a Unitarian.'²⁵ Putting it more thoughtfully he writes in his *Manual of Congregational Principles*

personal faith in Christ ... may exist, and there may be decisive evidence of its existence, in persons who have no clear intellectual apprehension of many of the great truths of the Gospel; ... in persons by whom some of these truths are rejected.²⁶

Probably few of us would wish to identify ourselves with all the sentiments expressed above but to say this is to miss the point. We may all feel that we would draw the line in different places from Davies, Goodwin and Dale, but the principle that genuine Christian experience, whether inadequately or inaccurately expressed, is the paramount consideration as regarding church membership clearly underlies these varied situations and responses and is a correct and biblical principle. We might ask what relevance the text (Romans 15:7): 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God' has for our receiving people into the membership of our churches. The text does not after all read: 'Accept one another just as they accept your Statement of Faith'! My understanding is that we accept all who belong to the Lord Jesus regardless of the level of understanding and expression of their faith. If we regard the church as primarily the community of believers then I find it hard to see how we could work in any other way. If a church will willingly exclude those who belong to Christ from its membership then my view is that it has become a theological club (most people would say a sect) rather than a church, which is professedly part of the Universal Church. RW Dale states:

A Christian society which imposes any other conditions of membership other than faith in Christ is a sect, and not, in the highest sense of the term, a Christian church. It is a private Christian club. It receives persons into membership, not because they are brethren

in Christ, but because they are brethren in Christ professing certain religious opinions or observing certain religious practices.²⁷

4. A modern question, which may have some well established answers. Is subscription to detailed confessions the way forward in Christian unity?

The original idea for this article originated in a discussion on local church unity which took place during a ministers' fraternal meeting at my home. Everyone else present, and they were reformed Baptists to a man, insisted that the unity of their congregations was based around the congregation's adherence to a full statement of faith, in nearly every case the *1689 Baptist Confession*. I found myself in a vocal minority of one, although I did manage to convince some that perhaps their own congregation's unity had not come about in this way at all.

My own questions about this have really touched on two areas in which I am involved. Firstly my own pastorate; and I entered the pastorate with the conviction that it would be most desirable that our church adopt, as explaining its commitment to Congregational faith and order, the *Savoy Declaration of Faith*. Later, when I came across the *1833 Declaration* I would have favoured that as shorter and more practicable for my congregation. In fact, nearly twenty years into the ministry in the same church, we still haven't adopted either declaration, nor have I ever proposed that we should. The reason is not that there would be such strong opposition to this move as would make life difficult, but that I have come to doubt the benefits of such a move. However, a need to respond to changing circumstances and attacks on the Faith might change my mind.

The other area is that of the fellowship of churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches to which we belong. For many years I would have seriously held the view that subscription to the *Savoy Declaration*, or at the least the *1833 Declaration*, would be strongly desirable, if not actually practicable, for our churches as a means to enhance our unity. I have now decided that I was completely wrong about that. There are a number of reasons for this change in conviction that I want to share with you. Firstly, and not in order of importance, church history has made me believe that uniformity in doctrine and practice enforced by strong creeds is not the way to ensure and encourage unity in denominations or congregations. In fact the greater the uniformity and detail insisted upon, the greater the brittleness of the union, seems to be the rule. Secondly, I have become convinced and have seen in my own experience that real unity can be developed without such a method of subscription to creeds. Thirdly, I have come to see that the New Testament, which is passionately concerned about the problems of unity in the fellowship of God's people and devotes much space to the problem, adopts an entirely different strategy in order to promote that unity. It is this third and most important area of thought to which we now turn.

The point I want to make is that the Congregational Way, as regards creeds and creedalism, has actually captured the essence of a significant area of the thought within the New Testament. It may be helpful for us to consider two areas of life that had the potential to become strongly divisive for the New Testament Churches. Those are the division between Jew and Gentile, including matters of food laws, and the problem of eating meat that had been offered to idols (which may have been a greater problem to new Gentile believers, with long established belief in idols, than to strongly monotheistic Jewish converts to Christianity). Paul devotes 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 and

Romans 14:1–15:13 to these problems. It is not sarcastic to suggest that if he felt strong creedalism was the answer to incipient disunity he could have done a far quicker and neater job. After all the whole matter can be reduced to a few propositions, which must be assented to so that unity may be achieved. There is still today a mindset abroad, which is intolerant and impatient with slow understanding and would like to legislate unity through confessions. As a method of approach it is neither Biblical nor workable.

Let us look at the possible propositions and then at Paul's handling of the matters involved.

Propositions

- 1 Romans 14:14 'No food is unclean of itself'; that on its own tells you all you need to know to be correct doctrinally in the situation Paul addresses in Romans 14:1–15:13.
- 2 1 Corinthians 8:4 'We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and there is no God but one.'
- 3 1 Corinthians 10:21 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in the Lord's table and the table of demons.' You can eat food offered to idols, as virtually all meat would have been, but not in the context of heathen worship.

The problem is that these creedal statements, which are completely correct, have to be understood, and their implications lived out, in a context where not everybody is able, as yet, to understand and to fully accept them. Weak Christians may defile their consciences eating meat offered to idols because they are still so accustomed to idols (1 Corinthians 8:7). Non-Christians may have hang-ups about Biblically permitted behaviour (see 1 Corinthians 10:27–29 where the non-Christian's conscience, about a Christian eating meat offered to idols, is to be respected). Conscience is precious and to go against conscience, however weak and wrongly informed, is sinful because (Romans 14:23): 'everything that does not come from faith is sin.'

So Paul must teach them that (1 Corinthians 8:1) 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.' That it is right to give up our rights (see 1 Corinthians 9) and that (Romans 15:1) 'We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves' and we should (Romans 14:19) 'make every effort do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.' Paul exhorts us (Romans 14:20): 'Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food'—nor, I would exhort us, for doctrinal shibboleths.

The overall point that I want to make is this: in any congregation there will be different levels of understanding, and of misunderstanding also, of the gospel. What is the way forward to unity when we are faced with such barriers? There are several propositions I would want to make which are relevant to the matter of creeds and subscription to them:

- 1 Truth and affirming truth is not unimportant within the local congregation; indeed they are vital activities if the church is to function as (1 Timothy 3:15): 'the pillar and the ground of the truth'. We are not saying that strong creedal statements cannot be made or that they should not be made. It is hard to imagine a creedal statement much stronger than the *Savoy Declaration*. Paul's creedal stance on clean and unclean foods and foods offered to idols is crystal clear. I am not suggesting that

doctrinally weak and indecisive preaching or hymnody is something that would be at all desirable in our churches.

- 2 However the presentation of such statements of truth must bear in mind that often those who are confronted with them have stumbling blocks in their minds concerning the statements. For example: the converted Jew to whom pork will never be a clean food; the converted animist for whom sacrifices offered to the spirits still have an objective reality; and the converted Nazarene in my congregation for whom Calvinism is a 'heresy'.
- 3 Hence to preserve unity we need to recognise that not only does the gospel mean that I can clearly state what I believe and that my statement of faith must be formed by Scripture, but also that I must have gospel-formed attitudes to those who also believe. As there were those in the early church whose attitudes showed that they were quite ready to destroy the work of God for the sake of food, or to act so that (1 Corinthians 11:11) '(a) weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by (their) knowledge', so such have their successors in the modern church. They are prepared to destroy the work of God for the sake of a particular phraseology as to the extent of the atonement, or a particular way of stating what the believer may expect in his experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead we must (Romans 14:1) 'Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters.'
- 4 How do we do this? Two points are worth noting:
 - We are to see that the gospel sets a pattern for our relationships and that following this pattern is what brings glory to God. Romans 15:7 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.'
 - We are to remember the things that are most important. Romans 14:17 'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.' Most church troubles and disunity come about when something else becomes more important.

Conclusion

Many years ago, early in my ministry, I read a book at the recommendation of the Rev. Alan Tovey; whether this was intended mainly for my education or my encouragement I do not know. The book was very interesting and informative but its greatest value to me was in helping me develop my understanding of church life and ministry. The book is by Murray Tolmie and is called *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616–1649*.²⁸ It is about the early Congregational churches in London and what I found helpful is the way it explodes romantic myths about church history. We may think that it would have been wonderful to be in the early Congregational churches where the members were of one mind and were not the rag-bag of denominational backgrounds that we so often accumulate. What Tolmie shows decisively, by painstaking research and documentation, is that they were not of one mind in their ecclesiology and attitudes and each congregation consisted of several groups. In each congregation some were Congregationalists, but some were the Brownists and Separatists, from which roots Congregationalism had sprung, and some were Baptists, not necessarily at that stage 'dippers'. When I thought about that situation I had exactly the same emotions that I was having when I looked at my own congregation: 'What a mess and what a mixture!' What I found helpful was this: there is no golden age of church life in which unity could be

achieved by promoting rigid formularies and tight doctrinal agreement, nor are we in such a situation today. Unity never comes about by seeking uniformity. Churches are preserved in unity and thrive and grow by the application of Christian love and the teaching of Christian truth in unpromising and difficult circumstances.

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God in Eternity and Time

Douglas Vickers

The edifice of doctrine to which *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* invites us contains at its entrance a clear declaration of the being, sovereignty, and salvific purpose of the triune God. Our doctrinal sensibilities are immediately raised to a high level of consciousness. But we pause, as we enter, to reflect on two realities that influence the significance of all of our doctrinal understanding. First, our commitment to biblical doctrine is pointless and barren unless it impinges upon and determines our Christian lives. The relation between doctrine and life should never remain unexplored. Secondly, the doctrinal locus we now come to, by reason that it stands at the beginning of God's anthropomorphic revelation to us, illumines the meaning of our personhood as the recipients of that revelation. Let me comment a little more fully on what that involves.

We exist, as the *Savoy* will go on to make clear, as the finite analogue of God. We are the finite analogue of God both as to our being and our knowledge. We are his image. And by virtue of our created constitution, our very personhood speaks eloquently of God.

God has made available to us an objective revelation of his being, character, and purpose, and because we have been established as the image of God we are able to receive and understand and act upon that revelation. The implication of that for our present study is that the essence of human personhood carries with it the inescapable conviction of the being and Personhood of God. The theology to which we are committed as custodians of the Reformed tradition requires us to state that the awareness of God is indelibly embedded in the human consciousness.

The apostle has stated that in economic language in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:20). Any imagination to the contrary, he says, and any conception that argues against the knowledge of God, and that argues more particularly against the knowledge of his 'eternal power and Godhead', is 'without excuse'. If the creation-covenantal imperative that we should be God-honoring in all things is acknowledged, there can be no escape, on any level of human intellection, from the reality that all of our knowing, and all of our capacity for knowing, are what they are because they are the derivative analogue of the absolute knowledge that exists in God. The fact that absolute being, absolute personhood, and absolute meaning and knowledge exist in God establishes meaning and the discoverability of meaning in the external reality that God has spoken into existence.

John Calvin, whose theological system *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* celebrates, has oriented his doctrine on the corresponding proposition that 'Nearly all the wisdom we possess ... consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. ... no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he "lives and moves" (Acts 17:28)'.¹ In the very act of reflective self-awareness, we can say, man is aware of God. 'Again,' Calvin continues, 'it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon

God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.'² The pressing triad of human concern, it follows, comes to articulation, first, under the headings of being and knowledge, firstly the being and knowledge of God and then of ourselves, and then, as derivative from what is understood on those levels, the matter of behavior. Being, knowledge, and behaviour, or in more formal terms metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, provide the categories in terms of which our discussion of being and our place in relation to God should proceed.

Our immediate title acknowledges and permits us to confine our attention initially to two statements on these levels in the second chapter of the *Savoy Declaration*. 'God,' it is there stated, 'is infinite in being'.³ And from that it follows, 'his knowledge is infinite'.⁴ In those statements the *Declaration* sets the compass within which our discussion proceeds. We are concerned, in short, with the revealed doctrine of the being and knowledge of God. But in the very nature of our creaturehood and finitude, we are concerned with that revelation as it bears on our condition in relation to God. We bear in mind as we proceed that while our immediate address is to the doctrine of God, 'the issues to which we turn bear forcibly on the meaning of the gospel of redemption.'⁵ In his very valuable and accessible *Our Reasonable Faith*, Herman Bavinck observes that 'These two, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the eternal salvation of souls, are not two independent doctrines which have nothing to do with each other, but are, rather, inseparably related to each other. The doctrine of God is at the same time a doctrine of the eternal salvation of souls, and the second of these also includes the first'.⁶

The *Savoy Declaration* acknowledges these interrelations by setting its doctrine of God within the context of its concern for the realities of redemption. It does that when it states, in that context, that God is 'loving, gracious, merciful ... forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him ... hating all sin ... who will by no means clear the guilty'.⁷ Indeed, our interest in the gospel requires us to place our argument within the orbit provided by three propositions: *First*, God is; *second*, God exists in eternity and we exist as the created analogue of God in time; and *third*, the eternal God has provided a revelation of himself and his will and his redemptive purpose in terms amenable to our understanding, in the language he created for our communication. All of God's revelation, that is, and in particular all of the Scripture that we have as the medium of God's communication, is, by virtue of its accommodation to our understanding, anthropomorphic. When we say that all Scriptural revelation is anthropomorphic we mean that it is God's accommodation of his timelessness to the temporal mode of existence in which he has established created finite being.

Summary propositions

The propositions we shall look at briefly, though not in detail in the order in which we now summarize them, may be stated as follows. *First*, God is outside of time by virtue of his transcendent eternity and his aseity or his independent and underived, or uncaused, existence.

Second, God created time and thereby established a temporal structure and environment in which all of reality external to himself exists and has its history.

Third, God in his being and his knowledge, referring in that to his knowledge of himself and his knowledge of all that exists and that eventuates in created reality, is timeless.⁸

Fourth, there are, therefore, no successions of moments in the knowledge of God or in the being of God. While he has knowledge of sequences of time events he does not know those sequences sequentially.⁹ God knows all things, as to his own being, his will and purpose, and his knowledge of created reality, in one eternal act of knowing. He did not wait to discover any data of reality or of the eventuation of its history. He therefore has no memory of what has been, in the sense of his having become sequentially aware of it, and he accordingly has no expectation of his own future that he must wait to discover. (Though, as we shall see, memory and expectation exist in the human nature of the Son of God who became man for our salvation).

Fifth, God has nevertheless ordained becoming and the eventuation of history and the awareness of history in his creatures, and in the light of that he eventuates all historical sequences and outcomes by his works of providence. We hold not only to the transcendence, but also to the immanence of God.

Sixth, God has entered into time in the incarnation of his Son and in the Person of his Holy Spirit in the discharge of their redemptive offices. Our redemption is played out within the orbit of temporal boundedness in which, by our natures and by the nature that he assumed in Christ, our existence and awareness are conditioned.

Seventh, by virtue of the nature of our existence as that is derived from God, it is impossible that we should transcend our finitude, and that we should ever acquire the incommunicable divine attributes of infinity, eternity, and immutability. Our existence in the eternal age of the kingdom of God will therefore continue to be a temporal existence, though the potentialities of our action within it have not been revealed to us.

If, then, we state that God is outside of time and that time is a created entity or, as Van Til has put it, that time is 'God-created as a mode of finite existence', we nevertheless state that in the incarnation of his Son, in the union in the divine Person of Christ of the human and divine natures, he entered into time. But, we shall argue, it is necessary to hold to the reality that in that union of natures the eternal and the temporal were not commingled, or joined in a way that gave rise to a mixture of them that violated the one or the other. No greater fact or mystery challenges our contemplation than this, that God in his Son entered into time for our redemption.

We might pause to note the significance of what has just been said. The eternal and the temporal were not, and could not be, commingled at the incarnation (for there was no communication of properties between the natures of our Lord), or at the atonement that he provided (because it was in his human nature that he bore the wrath of God for sinners). It follows also, from the nature of the processes of redemption, that there could be no commingling of the eternal and the temporal at the transition of the sinner from wrath to grace. By that we mean that the creation of new life in the soul, the regeneration that effects the transition from wrath to grace, is completely and solely the sovereign, unsolicited work of the Holy Spirit, the unsolicited grace of God. Any argument to the contrary, or the claim that salvation turns on a divine-human synergism, would imply that the eternal (the grace of God) and the temporal (the activity of the sinner) had been commingled. But we reject all such propositions.

The immortal God

The scope of the doctrinal statement that the *Savoy Declaration* presents in its second chapter includes, by implication or express statement in relation to its consideration of the being of God, the questions of the incomprehensibility of God in his essence, the attributes of God in terms of which he has made his self-disclosure, considering both his incommunicable and his communicable attributes, the knowability of God, the existence of God as a trinity of Persons, and the sense in which there exist distinguishable properties possessed by each of the Persons of the Godhead. God the Father possesses, that is, the distinguishable property of having generated the Son, God the Son possesses the distinguishable property of having been eternally generated, and the Holy Spirit possesses the property of proceeding from the Father and the Son.¹⁰ In his very valuable study of *The Christology of John Owen*, Richard Daniels observes on the point referred to in the preceding footnote that 'The Son is *autotheos* according to his nature, of the Father according to his person'.¹¹ In making those statements we do not assume that our finitude permits a comprehensive understanding of either the trinitarian existence of God or the intra-trinitarian communication between the Persons of the Godhead.

An approach to a consideration of these doctrinal issues is provided by a recognition of what I have referred to as the immortality of God. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, doxologically ascribes honor and glory to 'the only wise God ... the King eternal, immortal, invisible' (1 Tim. 1:17). And he focuses our thought on 'the King of kings and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality ...' (1 Tim. 6:15–16). John Calvin, in his comment on the apostle's statement, directs us to the twelfth book of Augustine's *City of God*. In that work and in his *Confessions* Augustine had wrestled at length with the mystery of time and the relation between eternity and time that the apostle here has in view.¹²

Our primary concern at this point is with the apostolic reference to God as the One 'who only hath immortality'. When we speak of the immortality of God we are taking up aspects of what we have referred to as his aseity. We mean by that that God is independent in his being and existence, and that his existence is not derived from any more ultimate cause than himself or any cause external to himself. God, we say, is in that meaning of the term, uncaused. He is, as Paul remarked to the Colossians, 'before all things' (Col. 1:17). But we do not mean by such a statement that God is before all things in a temporal sense. On the contrary, God is before all things because it is he who called all things into being and established the temporal structure of their existence. He is their cause.¹³

When we say that God alone has immortality we are directing our thought to two things. First, the immortality of God has reference not primarily to time and its possible ending or non-ending, but to a condition of God's existence outside of time. Second, God himself is accordingly the creator of the immortality which, as analogical of his own existence, he has bestowed on those of his creatures whom he has made in his image. For them the temporal process in which they exist will, in fact, be non-ending. The prefix 'im' in immortality as it is here referred to God, a translation of the negating prefix 'a' or alpha in the Greek text, is designed to convey our thought away completely from the region in which mortality or death in time can be contemplated. Our

contemplation of God, on the contrary, cannot legitimately raise the category of mortality in the sense that, in relation to him, the ending or non-ending of time could be contemplated as possible or not possible. The prefix has removed us completely from any such level of consideration. The awareness of God, as the apostle here directs us to it, has reference to a plane of God's existence that has nothing at all to do with the dimensions or possible structures, or the beginning or ending, of time.

The reality of God's immortality rests, in the second place, in the eternity of God, in the sense that only because God has, and is, life in himself can he be the giver of life to his creatures. 'In him was life', John observes (John 1:4). Because God is himself uncaused life, he confers derivative, analogical life on his creatures. If it were necessary, on the other hand, to contemplate a possible beginning or ending of God and of the life of God, then no absolute being would exist, all would then be relative, meaning would have capitulated to contingency, and blank and brute chance would be king. The Scriptures stand against all such arguments.

God, the source of life, is life in himself, and he exists as the locus of all meaning and as the source of the possibility of all creaturely apprehension of meaning. God, the one personal, self-existent, supreme, gracious, and self-disclosing God, is our only absolute. As to our life and the possibilities we have of temporal experiences, the apostle observes that 'God made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth ... [and] in him we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:24, 28). God is our ultimate cause. He is the ultimate environment in which we live and have our being. He is our ultimate authority.

We could speak of the immensity of God, and with Solomon we could acknowledge that 'the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee' (1 Kings 8:27).¹⁴ The same recognition of the transcendent being of God is reflected in the words of the Chronicler (2 Chron. 2:6). The prophet Isaiah takes up the theme of God's immensity and observes in the final chapter of his prophecy, 'Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (Is. 66:1). Again, Jeremiah conveys to us the divine self-disclosure, 'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord' (Jer. 23:24).

The omniscience, the omnipresence, and the omnipotence of God are thus brought clearly before us. They are contemplated also in that magnificent prayer of David: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me' (Ps. 139:7-10).¹⁵

The attributes of God and the Personality of the Son

The doctrinal issues we have adduced are frequently expanded under the heading of the attributes of God. It will suffice for our present purposes to refer to what has become a standard rubric in the Reformed theological tradition and speak of the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God. The question has arisen in the history of the church as to whether a distinction can properly be drawn between the *essence* of God and the *attributes* of God. The position to be taken in this respect follows from our understanding that as to his essence, God is incomprehensible. We know God, not because we can comprehend him as to either his being or his knowledge. Rather, we

know God by virtue of his self-disclosure in the attributes of being and character that he has revealed. We have, by virtue of God's objective initiative in revelation on the one hand and our capacity for the reception of that revelation on the other, true knowledge of God, though that knowledge is not, and cannot be, comprehensive. We say, then, that the essence of God is fully contained in, and declared in, each of his attributes. We do not draw a distinction between the essence and the attributes.

Turretin has observed on these issues that 'The divine attributes are the essential properties by which [God] makes himself known ... they ... are attributed to him ... in order to explain his nature. Attributes are not ascribed to God properly as something superadded to his essence'.¹⁶ We agree with Turretin's further conclusion that by virtue again of our finitude we have only 'inadequate conceptions of the essence of God' as that is revealed through his attributes. We can at best have only an incomplete and imperfect understanding of God's revealed attributes.

To observe further on this important doctrinal locus, we hold to the *unity and simplicity of God*, meaning, as we shall see further, that there are three Persons in the Godhead and that 'these three Persons are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory'. It is important to realize the implications of that for the question now before us. By the unity of God we refer, firstly, to God's numerical oneness, or his *unity of singularity* (Deut. 6:4, John 10:30). And we refer also to God's *simplicity*, meaning that God is not composed of parts external to himself. That implies, as has just been stated, that his attributes, taken together, do not constitute parts that make up his essence. If that were so, the doctrine of the simplicity of God would be destroyed.

Perhaps the most direct way to summarize what is involved in God's disclosure of his attributes is to invoke the answer to the fourth question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. 'God,' it is said, 'is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth'. In that statement of God's *infinity, eternity, and immutability* we have in essence the acknowledgment of God's incommunicable attributes. By virtue of our derivative, analogical, and finite existence as the image of God, it is not possible that God could communicate to us the characteristics of infinity, eternity, and immutability. The other attributes referred to in the Catechetical answer are communicable to us, to the extent that, and in the degree that God has ordained in order to prepare us for the place we shall occupy in the eternal kingdom to which he has destined us.

We have said with Turretin that by virtue of our finitude, as that is conditioned further by our recovery from the state of sin into which we had fallen, we are privileged to grasp in this life only a partial understanding of what, in these respects, God has revealed concerning himself. We observe in that connection that the partialness of our understanding is underlined by the fact that in each of the communicable attributes as they are descriptive of the essence of God, God is declared to be infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He is that, not only in his being, but in his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Our address to the attributes of God, and to the respects in which his revelation of them communicates aspects of his essence, does not terminate, however, on the benefits of God's salvific purpose for us, his redeemed people. We are concerned, for our immediate purposes, with the doctrine and the fact of God as he is and exists in himself.

For that reason we take brief note at this point of the trinity of the Godhead as we have already referred to it. In particular, our interest at this stage is in what has to be said of God's existence as three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in consubstantial unity and in one essence. In the brief comments we shall make we leave aside a fuller exposition of the important statements contained on this level in the second chapter of the *Savoy Declaration* that is being addressed in this conference.

The first statement to be made is that the essence of God is not distributed among the Persons of the Godhead. We hold, not to a *distribution* of the essence, but to the fact that the full essence of the Godhead is contained fully and completely in each of the Persons. Turretin makes the point by observing that 'Although there are more persons than one in God, yet there are not more natures. All persons partake of one and the same infinite nature, not by division, but by communication'.¹⁷ If it were the case that there was a distribution of essence among the Persons of the Godhead, we should be contemplating not a trinity, but, as Turretin again refers to it, a quaternity in the Godhead.¹⁸ We would have, that is, first the three Persons, and then fourthly the essence that was distributed among them. But we are not quaternitarians. We are trinitarians.

What has been revealed to us regarding the being of God, the oneness in substance of the three persons of the Godhead, has implications for the knowledge that is possessed by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is not the case, for example, that there is a divine mind in the Father and a divine mind in the Son, and that those divine minds confer and concur in the purposes and works of God. Rather, our doctrine of the unity of God requires us to say that there exists a divine mind that is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son. 'I and my Father are one', our Lord has declared. The essence of the Godhead resides fully in each of the Persons of the Godhead. It follows that there is a divine knowledge that is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit. This will in turn determine our understanding, as we shall see in a moment, of the Person and presence of the Son of God in this world and of his messianic self-awareness.

The relevance for our present argument of what has just been said follows immediately. For if, as we hold to be true, all of the essence of God, and therefore all of the fullness of the incommunicable attributes of God, exist fully in each of the Persons, then what we have referred to as the properties of *infinity*, *eternity*, and *immutability* characterize in their full and complete sense each of the Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us contemplate, then, the incommunicable attribute of infinity and its coming to expression in the omnipresence of God. We say, further, that God, as to his omnipresence, cannot be regarded as distributed in his essence throughout or across space. Rather, the omnipresence of God means and implies that in the fullness of his essence God is present in every unit of space. Recalling our earlier conclusion that time, with space, is a created entity, created, we have said, as a mode of finite existence, we must say in a corresponding fashion that God is present in the fullness of his essence in every point of time. We are confronting in these statements a remarkable implication of what we have already referred to as God's immanence in time and in created reality, as correlative to his transcendence beyond and outside of time and of all that exists external to the Godhead.

It follows that the attribute or characteristic of omnipresence is fully in God the Son, and implications must now be seen to derive from that statement for the presence of the Son of God in this world as our redeemer. We shall return to the question of God's entry into time in the incarnation of his Son, but for the present we observe the following. *First*, Christ possessed a human nature, but in him that human nature was not personalized. That is to say, he did not, by virtue of possessing a human nature, become a human person. He was, and he continued to be, a divine Person.¹⁹ *Second*, the incommunicable attributes of God (infinity, eternity, and immutability) were, by virtue of their incommunicability, not communicated to the human nature of Christ. That important doctrinal point, that has separated elements of the Christian church throughout the centuries, we put previously by saying that there was no communication of properties between the two natures of Christ. *Third*, as the full essence of God resides in Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, he eternally, without interruption in his incarnation, was, and is, characterized, as we have said, by all of the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God.

That last mentioned fact warrants further comment in the context of our present consideration of the doctrine of God. We now say the following regarding Christ's presence in this world: As to his divine nature, he was both in this world and with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. As to his human nature, he was in this world. As to his divine nature, he continued to be omnipresent, that is present in the fullness of his essence in every point of space and time. As to his human nature, he was localized, present at different points of space and time (John 3:13).²⁰ That means that Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, our incarnate redeemer, is present, in the fullness of his divine nature, in every point of space and time, though by virtue of the absence of the communication of properties between his two natures, that is not true of his human nature.

That, then, has remarkable implications for the manner in which Christ fulfills his promise that he would come to us, and that he will be with us 'to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). That he does so, and has done so, is true not only and simply by reason of the fact that he communicates to us by his Spirit. He is with us *in his actual Personhood*, in his divine Personhood in all of its attributes, though not, until the day of glory, in his human nature. The fact that we cannot see him in his divine Personhood does not destroy the fact that *in the total divine nature of his Personhood he is actually with us*. That is part of the 'mystery of Godliness' which, in its remarkable import, should influence the character of our entire Christian understanding and life. We live, that is, in the company and presence of the divine Person of our Lord.

We whom he has redeemed and brought to himself, therefore, should realize that fact and should live in the light of the consciousness of it. *We actually live in the company of the Person of Christ*. It is not that we live simply or only in the consciousness of what he has done for us in redeeming us or in impressing upon us the conscious awareness of his Spirit. The reality of the presence of Christ with us, which casts its light on the statement in Acts 17:28 that 'in him we live and move and have our being', should influence and determine the meaning of our entire walk in the Christian life to which he has called us.

To be continued in the next issue

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- 4 *Ibid.*, II, 2.
- 5 See Douglas Vickers, *The Fracture of Faith: Recovering Belief of the Gospel in a Postmodern World*, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, Mentor Imprint, 2000, 56.
- 6 Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, Trans. H. Zylstra, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956, 129–30.
- 7 *The Savoy Declaration*, II, 1.
- 8 See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nashville: Nelson, 1998, 172–77 for a dissent from the ‘timelessness’ of God, and Cornelius Van Til’s statement that ‘It [time] is God-created as a mode of finite existence’, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974, 66. In his reliance on Dabney’s *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan [1878] 1975, Reymond does not acknowledge Dabney’s distinction between God’s ‘existence without succession ... existence not related to time’ and ‘the divine consciousness of his own subsistence’. See Dabney, op. cit., 39–40. Reymond has not confronted us with the ‘timeless self-conscious God’ to whom Van Til illuminatingly refers in his classic discussion of the differences between Idealism and Theism (see Van Til’s essay on ‘God and the Absolute’ in his *Christianity and Idealism* [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955, 22]). It is relevant and salutary to consider Van Til’s comment on the position taken by the Arminian theologian, Watson, ‘with respect to the knowledge that God has of temporal events’. Van Til observes that ‘if we introduce time or succession of moments into the consciousness of God in order that we may understand how God is related to time we have to ask ourselves in turn how the consciousness of God is related to the being of God. Thus we should have to introduce succession of moments into the being of God’, *The Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963, 35–36.
- 9 That proposition might be considered in the light of the observation of Robert L. Dabney that ‘Since all God’s knowledge is absolutely true to the actual realities known, wherever he knows one thing as destined to depend on another thing, there must be a case in which God *thinks a sequence*. Let the distinction be clearly grasped. The things are known to God as in sequence; but his own subjective act of thought concerning them is not a sequence’. *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, London: Banner of Truth [1890] 1967, Vol. 1, 294. Cf. Jonathan Edwards’ comment that ‘[T]here is no succession in God’s knowledge’, *The Freedom of the Will*, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996, 144.
- 10 See Robert L. Reymond, op. cit., 324, ‘The Father’s Eternal Generation of the Son’, for the distinction he draws between the subordinationism in the doctrine of the Nicene Fathers and what he sees as the contrary position of Calvin, Warfield, and Murray. But see the *contra* argument in the review of Reymond’s, op.cit. in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, 2000, 62, #2. Note also Reymond’s discussion of ‘The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed’s Pneumatology’ which points, he argues, to the denial ‘to the Holy Spirit the attribute of autotheotic self-existence’, op. cit., 331ff. See William Cunningham, ‘The Nicene Creed—the Eternal Sonship’ in his *Historical Theology*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, [1862] 1960, Vol.1, 293ff.
- 11 R.W. Daniels, ‘*Great is the Mystery of Godliness*’: *The Christology of John Owen*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1990, 309.

- 12 Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. H. Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 229, 262–63. The contemporary British philosopher, Paul Helm, has addressed the question of God in eternity and time in an illuminating way in *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. Helm, who presents his work as controverting the positions of an ‘analytic philosophy of religion’ notes that ‘with few exceptions philosophers of religion in this tradition are united in dismissing the idea of God’s timeless eternity’. Helm observes that ‘The classical Christian theologians, Augustine of Hippo, say, or Aquinas or John Calvin, each took it for granted that God exists as a timelessly eternal being. They accepted it as an axiom of Christian theology that God has no memory, and no conception of his own future, and that he does not change, although he eternally wills all changes, even becoming, when incarnate in the Son, subject to humiliation and degradation’. xi–xii. Contra Helm, and against such reformed theologians as Charles Hodge, Robert L. Reymond, in his *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, states that ‘I remain unconvinced ... that God’s eternality necessarily entails the quality of supratemporality or timelessness’ (xxi). (See *ibid.*, 173ff. for Reymond’s comment on Dabney and Hodge). The view of Van Til on this important question is implied in his statement that ‘Time ... is God-created as a mode of finite existence’, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 66. This and other aspects of Van Til’s apologetic are discussed insightfully and extensively in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998), *passim*.
- 13 The question of time that is here at issue has been addressed in characteristically expansive fashion by Francis Turretin, the distinguished theologian of Geneva in the early post-Reformation period, in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Trans. G.M. Giger, Ed. J.T. Dennison, Jr., Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992, Vol. 1, 170–71. In the same volume, 202–204, Turretin discusses in an illuminating manner ‘The Eternity of God’, and he raises there the question of God in relation to time. Turretin observes that ‘the eternal duration of God embraces indeed all time—the past, present, and future, but nothing in him can be past or future ... God is called “the ancient of days” ... as before and more ancient than days themselves and the birth of time’ (*ibid.*, 203–204).
- 14 The question of the immensity of God, along with that of other of the attributes of the divine essence, has been widely discussed in the theological literature. Accessible discussions are contained in L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 4th ed., 1949, 60; W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 Vols., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d., Vol. 1, 339; Francis Turretin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 196–201.
- 15 See the very valuable discussion of this Psalm of David in E.J. Young, *Psalms 139: A devotional & expository study*, London: Banner of Truth, 1965.
- 16 Turretin, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, 187.
- 17 Turretin, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, 182.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 19 See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 321–22, ‘[T]he logos assumed a human nature that was not personalized, that did not exist by itself’. In the light of our discussion of the Person of Christ, it may be observed that a tendency has recently emerged among theologically conservative scholars to refer to our Lord as a ‘human being’. See, for example, John Blanchard, *Does God believe in atheists?* Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2000, 555, 558ff. Robert A. Peterson, in his *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983, presented a very valuable discussion of the fact that ‘God Became a Man for Our Salvation’, 11 et seq. In the second edition of his book, however, published under the title of *Calvin and the Atonement*, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, Peterson has amended all such references to Christ as a ‘Man’ to refer to him as a ‘Human Being’ (25ff.). But Peterson does not give any explanation of that change

of designation. With reference to the results of the Council of Chalcedon and the Christological settlement and to our earlier conclusion that at the incarnation (and similarly at the atonement and at the sinner's transition from wrath to grace) there was no commingling of the eternal and the temporal, we have stated that our Lord was not a human person. That is to say, he was not a human being. Nor can he be said to be a divine-human person. He was, we have said consistently, a *divine* Person, that is to say a divine being. He was a divine Person (Being) who took a truly human nature into union with his divine nature. Our argument coincided with that of Berkhof above. We suggest, therefore, that the requirements of Christological doctrine and of doctrinal terminology point away from the designation of our Lord as a 'human person', or a 'human being', and make it necessary to preserve the designation of him as a divine Person (divine being). See the judicious discussion of these doctrinal issues in Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963, 16. Turretin, in his extended discussion of 'The Person and State of Christ' in his op. cit. Vol. 2, 271ff., refers to 'the union of the two natures in the one person in the incarnation' (310) by stating that 'the human nature ... was destitute of proper personality ... because otherwise it would have been a person' (311), a conclusion that is reflected in the statement of Berkhof referred to above. John Owen similarly clarifies the important doctrinal issue at this point, in his reference to 'the *hypostatical* union; that is, the union of the divine and human nature in the person of the Son of God, the human nature having no personality nor subsistence of its own ... He did not become a new person, another person than he was before, by virtue of that union' (Works, Vol. 1, 228–29). It is clear that the terms of our salvation and the achievement of our Lord in the accomplishment of redemption turn on the reality and identity of his divine Personhood and on the mystery of his entering, in his incarnation, into the time that he had made.

- 20 The text referred to, which appears in the *Textus Receptus*, has been omitted from the modern or reconstructed text. But as to the doctrine to which it is addressed, an illuminating and positive statement is contained in William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1954, Vol. 2, 500–501.

This article also appears on the website of the Reformed Congregational Fellowship of New England.

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Book Brief

Day One Publications are producing a series of short books that have a new approach to introducing people to church history. Each book focuses on a particular figure and is described as 'a biography that thinks it is a travel guide' to the places where he or she lived and worked. The biography is brief and to the point and the illustrations and maps profuse. So far travel guides have appeared dealing with John Bunyan (John Pestell) and C.H. Spurgeon (Clive Anderson) and in the pipeline are ones on William Booth (Jim Winter), John Knox (David Campbell), George Whitefield (Digby James) and Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Philip Eveson). Those published so far are excellent and deserve to be bought to Christians who want a very practical approach to deepening their understanding of what God has done through some very remarkable people.

First impressions of the English Standard Version

Paul Brown

Having used the ESV (American version) in personal reading almost since it first appeared my impressions are somewhat mixed. It reads well in narrative sections and in the Psalms, but on occasion seems a little stilted—‘And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt’, rather than, ‘And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number’. I was surprised at some of the words that are used; ‘chambers’, ‘abode’, ‘multitude’, ‘whoredom’ (which my computer’s spell-check doesn’t recognise!), for example. The Old Testament temple now has a ‘nave’, and ‘resident alien’ suggests a visitor from outer space—but perhaps this is altered in the English version. I did not find it significantly easier to read than, say, the NKJV, in more difficult sections like the prophets and epistles. I have enjoyed using it, but it is not as readable as NIV and, perhaps regrettably, I think most people are likely to go for readability. ‘The words and phrases themselves,’ we are told, ‘grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy’ and this may be a little unfortunate in that I suspect a tendency to retain words and phrases that could be replaced by those that are clearer and more appropriate for the second millennium.

The ESV was published in America in the autumn of 2001, and in Britain early in 2002. The 1971 RSV text provided ‘the starting point’ for this translation. Nevertheless the Preface informs us that ‘each word and phrase in the ESV has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text.’ The NKJV and ESV are both based on the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, but in the NT the NKJV is based on what is known as the Received Text, whereas ESV is based on UBS 4 and Nestle/Aland 27. For some this will make ESV less acceptable, but others will believe it is a real advantage. Both in the OT and NT there are footnotes indicating differences in the textual record or translational alternatives.

The ESV advertises itself as an ‘essentially literal’ translation. It says that its emphasis is on ‘word-for-word correspondence’. Having said this, however, it inevitably has to qualify it, for no translation can have precise word-for-word correspondence. ‘Every translation is at many points a trade-off between literal precision and readability, between “formal equivalence” in expression and “functional equivalence” in communication, and the ESV is no exception.’ The Preface continues, ‘As an essentially literal translation, then, ESV seeks to carry over every possible nuance of meaning in the original words of Scripture into our own language. As such, it is ideally suited for in-depth study of the Bible. Indeed, with its emphasis on literary excellence, the ESV is equally suited for public reading and preaching, for private reading and reflection, for both academic and devotional study, and for Scripture memorization.’ This is a very high aim, and the claims made are considerable.

For myself, I have some doubt about attempting an ‘essentially literal’ translation that seeks ‘word-for-word correspondence’. Where receptor languages are not too dissimilar from the original language accuracy may well mean a degree of word-for-word correspondence is possible, but the goal should not be such correspondence in itself but an accurate expression of the sense of the original words. In some respects my impression is that ESV sometimes carries literalness too far, while in others it shows a freedom which is unexpected, but on the whole, improves the translation. This is only an impression, but I have compared ESV with more than half of the NT in Greek.

So far as literalness is concerned I noticed a tendency to retain a chiasmic pattern from the original, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ There is even a chiasm which is not in the original, ‘nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince’ (Psalm 82:7). Regarding freedom in translation consider, for example, Ephesians 2:8,9 ‘And this is not *your own doing*; it is the gift of God. Not *a result of works...*’. Or, Ephesians 4:29 ‘... but only such as is good for building up, *as this fits the occasion...*’. I think these are rather surprising for an essentially literal translation, and in the last reference it could be argued that NIV ‘*according to their needs*’ is more accurate, though REB supports ESV here. In 1 Corinthians 8:1 the word ‘this’ is inserted without any textual support, ‘This “knowledge” puffs up...’, which seems to change the meaning completely and loses the balance of the two clauses in the sentence.

ESV retains theological terminology, so words like ‘propitiation’, ‘regeneration’, ‘justification’ and so on are to be found. On the vexed question of gender language the Preface says, ‘The goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original. For example, “anyone” replaces “any man” where there is no word corresponding to “man” in the original languages, and “people” rather than “men” is regularly used where the original languages refer to both men and women.’ The Preface also indicates that where the Greek word ‘brothers’ refers to both men and women this has been footnoted. This means that there are many such footnotes in the Epistles and the repetition gets tedious. It seems as if the translators could not bring themselves to grasp the nettle here. If the word refers to ‘brothers and sisters’ isn’t that the most accurate translation?

The ESV is well presented and the print is clear. There are cross-references, and the footnotes contain useful information as well as textual and translational alternatives. There are brief but valuable introductions to each book. The translators are committed to ‘the truth of God’s Word and to historic Christian orthodoxy’. They have done their task well and there is much that is commendable about the ESV. But the question that nags is this: what niche is there for it amongst British evangelicals? My own view is that it is unlikely to displace the NIV in churches where that has become established. I am left with the conclusion that it is those who favour the NKJV but who do not accept that the Received Text is necessarily the best who are most likely to turn to ESV. This, I would have thought, may not be a very large market.

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Preaching Christ in a Postmodern Culture

Kieran Beville

‘When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?’ (Ps. 11:3).

We live in a pluralist society where the very concept of objective, absolute truth is perceived not just as antiquated but absurd. Epistemological and ethical fragmentation have led to moral relativism? The search for an apologetic strategy in post-modern society is a formidable challenge for the Christian church. Can we find a biblically informed and effective contemporary evangelical approach? Is the apologetic task feasible in a culture that denies the existence of objective, universal truth? Yet it is right for us to desire to communicate our faith. The challenge is how to do this in the context of today. *‘...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.’* (1 Pet. 3:15).

Under the auspices of modernity various ideologies flourished, but modernity failed to create the utopia to which it aspired and these conflicting ideologies came to be seen as ‘totatising oppressive meta-narratives’ (to use the jargon). In postmodernity Christianity too has come to be viewed in this way, a discredited meta-narrative. In facing the apologetic task, however, let us remember that *‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’* (Heb. 13:8).

There has been a significant shift in thinking which has relevance to those engaged in preaching. In the modernist mindset if something could be proved as true, or at least reasonable, the logical conclusion was that it ought to be accepted. Whereas the modernist who accepted the veracity of the Christian message was being hypocritical in not accepting its personal implications, the postmodernist is not constrained in this way. He is free to acknowledge its truth but not its absolute application because he lives in a relativistic world.

Preaching is a linear mode of discourse, which is generally coherent, sequential and essentially logical. The expository sermon, therefore, uses arguments, hypotheses, reasons and refutations as traditional instruments of rational discourse. As such it cultivates inferential thinking. In the context of postmodernism one might ask what place has a style of communication, which has a propositional content that appeals for understanding as a prerequisite to faith? It not only assumes and requires in the hearer an aptitude to organise information systematically and methodically but inferentially.

Although proclamation is, by nature, essentially spiritual it is also an intelligent activity that assumes modernist critical apparatus. In any sermon there is a particular line of thought where judgements and application are made in a coherent and orderly arrangement of argument. Preaching, therefore, assumes a competence in its hearers where the objective use of the mind is taken as a self-evident presupposition. It is not that it is essentially intellectual but that it is inherently rational. In other words it

assumes that reason is employed to enlighten. People may be moved emotionally by preaching but they are required firstly to understand its content!

Preaching is, after all, expositing a text that has syntactical structure and content that can be explicated. There is, therefore, not just a faith in the truth of the text but a concomitant and coterminous faith in reason itself. It engages the intellect and passions as well as the soul and will. It assumes that people are rational and analytical creatures. It is essentially a serious undertaking whose purpose is to convey biblical information and make claims in propositional form, all to the ultimate glory of God.

A sermon, of course, does not, necessarily, guarantee true content, for we are flawed, frail and feeble vessels made of clay. However, it does, at least, construct a context in which the question: 'is this true or false?' is relevant and meaningful. Whether it is sophisticated or simple it appeals to cognitive powers based on understanding and reason. It has a bias towards the ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially and because it is based on reason and order it has an inherent aversion for contradiction.

Preaching, we know, is not merely about knowing facts, even biblical facts! It involves an understanding of the implications, historical background and logical and theological connections. But in the postmodern world reality has been dismembered, meanings have been wrenched out of logical contexts and life has become idiosyncratic. The postmodern mindset has a predisposed antipathy to preaching because it is influenced by the philosophy of the age. Logic, reason, sequential thought and rules of contradiction are abandoned. In aesthetics this is known as Dadaism. This is a movement that flourished primarily in Switzerland, Germany and France from 1916 to 1920. In this cult aesthetic philosophy principles and practice in the arts, especially painting, were based on intentional irrationality, cynicism, anarchy and negation of the laws of beauty and social organisation. Dadaism has wider geographical, chronological and philosophical resonance as evidenced in today's postmodern psyche.

Thus it does not seem to matter that some 'truths' in the postmodern world actually contradict each other. How can this be explained? Contradiction requires mutually exclusive assertions that cannot possibly both, in the same context be true. It is context, therefore, that defines contradiction. If somebody says he prefers grapes to peaches and in the same breath says that he prefers peaches to grapes there is not, necessarily, a contradiction if one statement is made in the context of choosing curtains and the other expresses his eating preference. But if these statements are made in a singular context, say, in relation to decor alone, they are contradictory. Without a continuous and coherent context there is no such thing as contradiction.

Therefore when preaching the gospel is taken out of the context of linear history and presented in a world of discontinuity and fragmentation it is 'a truth' that does not contradict 'other truths'. The *Bible*, for example, presents us with a certain degree of Palestinian history. It has one continuous and coherent perspective. In today's world it is just one version of truth where contradictory perspectives have equal validity because culture is seen as the defining context.

To what extent, therefore, if any, should we modify either our message or methodology to adapt to a world that is pluralistic? How can we shape an apologetic

strategy that is relevant in the context of postmodernity and uncompromising in its eternal message? What are the challenges that such strategies present in the context of the local church?

Pluralism, individualism and relativism are features of our society. It is not unlike the situation that prevailed in Israel at the time of the Judges, before the authority of the king emerged: *'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit'* (Judges 21:25). If pluralism, individualism and relativism are features of our culture then there is a great need for the church to counter this by animating the biblical world-view in transformed communities. The church must not be a microcosm of the world. *'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...'* (Rom. 12:2). In a society where rational discourse has failed we ought to manifest the reality of the power of God in radically altered lives.

Nevertheless there is a danger that, in attempting to shape an effective apologetic strategy in a pluralist society, pragmatism will gain the ascendancy and secularise the evangelical church. We should take heed to the warning of Paul to the Galatian Church: *'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.'* (Col. 2:8).

Increasingly we find that churches are being influenced by postmodernity. Some evangelical churches are becoming theologically foggy and non-doctrinal with an all-inclusive ecclesiology. In such churches there is an appeal to feelings that puts emotionalism at the centre of their practice and this in turn affects preaching and music. Sadly we are beginning to see a consumerist attitude where the church has become a spiritual supermarket and there is a shift of emphasis from truth to technique. In this market-driven and consumer-oriented culture psychology tends to eclipse Christology. Postmodernity trivialises the transcendent truth of the gospel where sin and forgiveness are evacuated of meaning. So it is the role of the church to proclaim and prove these great truths in dialogue and deed.

We need to be seeker-sensitive but not seeker-centred. The desire to be relevant must be subordinate to the obligation to be faithful. Where the desire to be relevant is uppermost unpalatable truths are sidelined as 'unhelpful'. In such circumstances there is an admission that these truths are unmarketable. But we have a message to proclaim and it runs counter to the prevailing world-view.

We should not merely silently model Christlikeness and ignore preaching. That would be a contradiction because Christ engaged in proclamation. We cannot dismiss the word of God as irrelevant in a post-modern society because God says that his word will never be void of power. *'As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.'* (Isa. 55:10–11). His word must be wielded in preaching as a spiritual weapon. *'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.'* (Heb. 4:12).

Paul's instruction to Timothy applies to us and has not been rescinded. '*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season...*' (2 Tim.4:2). Yet I think it is important that we are informed about the mindset of people today. It is interesting to note that in the list of people who came to join David in battle at a crucial juncture in the history of Israel we find men who '*understood the times and knew what Israel should do*' (1 Chron.12:32). We need such men today at an equally crucial juncture in the history of God's people.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn.14:6). *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). These words are no more and no less politically correct than they were in the first century when Jesus and Peter proclaimed them. They may engender the same kind of hostility today as they did then. In seeking to find an apologetic strategy that is contemporary we must be unapologetic about preaching Christ. '*...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...*' (1 Cor. 1:23).

Preaching the cross will always be seen by many as an 'oppressive meta-narrative' because of its universal application. It warns of an ultimate judgement that involves more than just exclusion from the eschatological kingdom. There will be eternal conscious torment in hell for those who do not repent. But the glory of the gospel is that it offers salvation to all that trust in the finished work of Christ alone. To the world our preaching may be merely discredited rhetoric but to us it the honey of heaven. '*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*' (1 Cor. 1:18).

But how we live in our culture is also crucial. Daniel, for example, found himself to be an alien, a displaced person, in Babylon. He made a conscious decision that he would not be overwhelmed by the culture of his day. That is what Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do. He was trying to spiritually subjugate God's people so that they would lose their unique identity and become like everybody else. But we read '*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies.*' (Daniel 1:8). We too must make a conscious decision not to allow the prevailing culture to swallow us.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned and began to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah he sent two messengers to Jesus to inquire if he was really the Christ. It is very interesting to see how Jesus replied. *"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor"* (Lk.7:22). John doubted the deity of Jesus and doubted all that he had preached in heralding the Christ. Jesus does not answer him with abstract words of reassurance. He does not give a theological dissertation on the fulfilment of prophecy in the person and work of Christ. No, he asks the messengers to report on what they have witnessed of the transforming power of God as demonstrated in his miracles. His activity authenticated his authority! To those like John the Baptist who doubt and despair we must be messengers from the Saviour who talk as first hand witnesses of the transforming power of Christ. '*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have*

touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life'. (1 Jn.1:1). This is important in a post-modern culture where winning arguments is not so much impossible as irrelevant. The gospel is not just about words of persuasion but also about pointing to evidence of that transforming power and being evidence of that power!

We tend to think that we are ineffective because we are irrelevant and so we strive to be relevant but the truth is where we are irrelevant it is because we are ineffective. Therefore, we ought to focus more on being effective in a world that is deaf and blind and dumb and diseased with sin and lame and lost and dead! Christ was effective and relevant! We have a transforming vision to transmit but if we just talk about how things could be we are falling short. For example we cannot just talk about love we must live it. When reason and rational argument fail we might find that relationship fills the vacuum.

As evangelical churches perhaps we could do more to show the relevance of our faith to our society. Take as an example the fact that many people today are interested in environmental issues. The Christian alone can show that the ultimate ecological ethic is rooted in the creator? Are we failing our society by leaving issues such as these in the hands of new age, secular activists?

It is perfectly reasonable to examine different ways of communicating with our contemporaries. However, we must be careful not to yield to the temptation to market ourselves to 'unchurched' consumers by appealing to their emotions and forsaking the duty to teach people to think biblically. The first strand in our apologetic strategy will be to preach the word of God. The second will be the evidence of our own lives in community relationships. That is a crucial aspect of what a church should be. We are messengers, with a message but we are also models. One of the aims of preaching to our congregations is to enable people to model the message so that God's glory might be mirrored in a world that is stumbling about in post-modern darkness.

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☞ *Editor's Notes continued from page 5*

Congregational denomination in England and Wales. The story of its decline from the late 19th century is a salutary one that shows what happens when churches lose their grip on the gospel. Today the ever-shrinking United Reformed Church in this country is one of the worst advertisements for the ecumenical movement and the doctrinally and morally wayward United Church of Christ in the United States is a scandal. Thank God for those evangelical Congregationalists in this country and the United States who are maintaining the faith of their fathers and applying it to the culture in which we live today. A publishing house that is helping to do this is Quinta Press which has recently republished **Geoffrey Nuttall's *Visible Saints, The Congregational Way, 1640–1660*** (Quinta Press 2001). In this classic historical study of Congregationalism Nuttall discusses the essential Congregationalist principles of separation, fellowship, freedom and spiritual fitness. Whether or not you agree with the polity built on these principles, this book helps us to appreciate something of the spiritual dynamic that has animated Congregationalism at its best.

Church History Literature Survey

Kenneth Brownell

Some knowledge of church history is vitally important not least because of the wisdom that can be gained from the experience of Christians in previous generations. There are many books in the field and the ones I have chosen for this survey are a somewhat idiosyncratic selection. I make no claim for this to be a representative survey of recent historical literature. While I have included recent books that deserve attention, I have also included books that interest me, or I have read for preparation for teaching or have simply come my way. Inevitably this survey reflects my tastes and interests and there are many books I could have included that I haven't. Like other contributors to these theological literature surveys I will in this initial one in my area mention some books published before the past two years.

General surveys

Until relatively recently we have had to rely for general surveys of church history on older works such as Philip Schaff, Williston Walker and Kenneth Scott Latourette, but in recent years some excellent new surveys have been published. A very stimulating and promising one is the first volume of *History of the World Christian Movement* by Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist.¹ This is the first volume of a projected two-volume work surveying the history of Christianity not so much in its institutional forms but as a very multi-faceted global movement. The treatment of the early church is mildly critical, but on the whole it takes the biblical record at face value. The particular strength of this book is its treatment of the development of Christianity in the east. There are fascinating accounts of the spread of Christianity along the trade routes to China. Irvin and Sunquist also deal particularly well with the rise of Islam and its encounter with Christianity. I am sure this will be a standard work for years to come. For sheer narrative power *The Faith—A History of Christianity* by Brian Moynahan² is hard to beat. While not an academic this beautifully produced book is a well researched, gripping and sympathetic retelling of the story of Christianity full of poignant vignettes and details. The dark side of church history is not ignored, but the achievements of Christianity are celebrated. In attempting to be even handed to Protestant and Catholics Moynahan gets some things distorted, especially during the Reformation. There are odd obsessions so that, for example, there is a whole chapter on witchcraft. Its greatest weakness is its relative neglect of the eastern churches. From an evangelical perspective Nick Needham's *2000 Years of Christ's Power* is really excellent. So far Needham has published two volumes covering the early church and Middle Ages, which I mention below, and I assume two more volumes are on their way. I will review each of these volumes later, but this is my recommendation for a good survey. They are not as strong in the narrative, but for breadth and understanding of the spiritual and doctrinal development of the church they will be hard to beat. In a previous issue I mentioned *The Story of Christian Theology* by Roger Olsen.³ Olsen tells the story of historical theology well, but unfortunately he does so with an Arminian agenda that distorts the story. Calvin is demoted in stature and Arminius elevated. I think readers would be better served by other historical theologies.

Let me mention a few surveys that are more specific in scope. **Mark Noll's** *The Old Religion in the New World*⁴ is essentially a condensed version of his 1992 *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Noll has been criticised for being too reductionist and for conforming too much to the canons of the academic community. While there may be some truth in this, I think Noll and others like him have injected a dose of necessary academic rigour and sophistication into evangelical church history. In this work Noll looks at how European Christianity adapted to its new North American context. There is much here to stimulate thinking on the cultural adaptation of Christianity not only in North America but wherever the gospel engages its culture. A related book is the *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* by **Randall Balmer**.⁵ While endlessly fascinating this is a rather odd work. Written entirely by Balmer it covers many aspects of evangelical Christianity but in a very uneven fashion. You can find out about obscure evangelists and Bible schools, but oddly there are no separate articles on Gresham Machen (he comes under Westminster Seminary) or Martyn Lloyd-Jones (although John Stott gets an entry). This makes great bedtime reading but I am not sure how valuable it is as a reference work. *Firestorm of the Lord* by **Stuart Piggin**⁶ is an historical as well as theological treatment of the subject of revival. I think it is on the whole a very good book that is critically sympathetic to Dr Lloyd-Jones's understanding of revival. It is weak in dealing with revival among Roman Catholics, but even so readers will find it not only intellectually stimulating but also spiritually challenging. For various reasons women often got overlooked in church history, but with a little effort their contribution can be unearthed. **Marie A. Conn** has done something of that in *Noble Daughters—Unheralded Women in Western Christianity, 13th to 18th centuries*.⁷ Conn examines four periods—the Beguines in the 13th century, Anabaptist woman martyrs in the 15th, women and witch crazes in the 16th and the nuns of the Port Royal Convent with which Pascal and the Jansenists were associated in the 17th. There is a slight feminist tinge to these studies, but they are real eye-openers and may help us to look at church history somewhat differently. The chapter on the suffering of the female Anabaptists is deeply moving. Finally in this section I must mention *A Light in the Land—Christianity in Wales 200–2000* by **Gwyn Davies**.⁸ Lavishly illustrated with plenty of time lines and charts, this delightful book is a wonderful survey of the history of Christianity in Wales. Davies tells the story of the work of God in Wales through 20 centuries and while much of the story inspires more recently it moves us to pray for God to work again as he did in the past.

The Early Church

The first volume in **Nick Needham's** *2000 Years of Christ's Power*⁹ deals with the age of the early church fathers. The subtitle is important, as Needham wants us to engage, as evangelicals are perhaps unused to doing, with the church fathers and their theology. One of the strengths of this work is the inclusion of extracts from the fathers so that we can read for ourselves what they said. And while they said some things we may object to they said much more that should not only make us think more deeply but also worship more fervently. There are some magnificent prayers and hymns here. Somewhat different is *The First Christian Centuries*¹⁰ by **Paul McKechnie** which is not so much a history of the early church, although it follows the story line, but a discussion of the perspectives of various ancient and church historians on the early centuries of the

church. Those with a general interest may find this volume a bit too specialised, but it is well written and is very helpful as a guide through some of the scholarly discussions of this period. *The Origins of Western Christendom* is a collection of papers delivered at a conference and edited by the Mennonite historian **Alan Krieder**.¹¹ Some of these papers are more interesting than others. Krieder's own 'Changing patterns of conversion in the west' is a fascinating account of how the understanding of conversion changed as the church expanded. Other papers take up the theme in relation to regions such as northern Italy or groups such as women. There is an interesting discussion of catechesis in evangelism and initiation by Everett Ferguson. There is also a paper on defining heresy by Rowan Williams that may be of interest once he becomes the next Archbishop of Canterbury. If I understand him he thinks that heresy is a social construction. One of the figures common to all the books in this section that I have mentioned is Augustine of Hippo. **David Bentley-Taylor** has given us a short and very readable introduction to this great man in *The Apostle from Africa*.¹² For a much fuller appreciation of Augustine consult *Augustine through the Ages* edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA. This is an encyclopædia covering every possible aspect of Augustine's life, times and theology. While indispensable to scholars this is a treasure trove for anyone interested in Augustine. Next time you are in a library dip into this book for a half hour and perhaps you will catch the Augustine bug (in its Protestant form) as I have.

The Middle Ages

Again we're in debt to **Nick Needham** for the second volume of *2000 Years of Christ's Power*.¹³ In this volume we are introduced to a period with which evangelicals are even more unfamiliar. Perhaps understandably because of the state of the church on the eve of the Reformation we think the middle ages has nothing to teach us. How wrong we are. I particularly recommend the preface that explains the value of studying this period. Thereafter Needham deals with Islam, the Crusades, Russian and Eastern Orthodoxy and much else. Of related interest is **Hughes Oliphant Old's** third volume on the medieval church in his epic series *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*.¹⁴ This volume covers almost exhaustively the preaching of the Byzantine period after 540, the mission to the Barbarians in northern Europe, the preaching of the monastic and preaching orders, the German mystics and the reform movements. Readers will be surprised by what Old uncovers such as Thomas Aquinas' lunchtime Bible teaching in Naples. I understand that the next volume on the preaching of the Reformation is soon to be published.

The Reformation period and the 17th century

I have surprisingly little to note in this period, but there are several books that are well worth reading. **Bernard Cottret** has produced a splendid new study of John Calvin simply entitled *Calvin—A Biography*.¹⁵ There is not a lot new in this biography, but Cottret presents a compelling portrait of Calvin that does justice to his theology, personality and impact on the reform movement, culture and history. By digging under the surface of Calvin's writings Cottret enables us to meet a more human Calvin. Another book on the reformation period is **Diarmaid MacCulloch's** superb *Tudor Church Militant*.¹⁶ This study of the reign of Edward VI was originally delivered as the Birkbeck Lectures at Cambridge. Freed from Protestant hagiography and Catholic and

secular caricature Edward's short reign is revealed in MacColloch's hands as a dynamic period that determined the ultimate direction of the English reformation. Archbishop Cranmer is seen as a far stronger figure than often thought. This book is a good antidote to the popular disparaging of the Reformation by Catholic historians such as Eamon Duffy. **David Bentley-Taylor's** *My Dear Erasmus*¹⁷ is an excellent introduction to a man who played a key part in the Reformation even though he was not part of it. Luther, Calvin and many others owed much to Erasmus's Christian humanism. In *Sons of Calvin*¹⁸ **Alan Clifford** offers us three short and moving portraits of Huguenot pastors who in different ways are representative of the best of French Protestantism.

Among the Puritans of the 17th century John Owen stands out as a major theologian as recent studies have confirmed. In *Redeem the Time*¹⁹ **Steve Griffiths** examines Owen theology in the light of his doctrine of sin. Griffiths avoids putting Owen into a theological straight jacket but does show how the theme of sin and grace shaped Owen's theology in relation to individuals, society, the church and the pursuit of holiness. I am not sure why the book is titled as it is, but as it is it is a fine introduction to Owen's theology of the Christian life. Of a different nature but also a fine introduction to Owen is the forthcoming (in December) collection of papers delivered at the 2000 John Owen Centre conference. Entitled *John Owen—the man and his theology*,²⁰ this book contains chapters on Owen's life (Robert Oliver), Owen as a theologian (Carl Trueman), his doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Sinclair Ferguson), the challenge of the Quakers (Michael Haykin) and his doctrine of the church (Graham Harrison). One area of historical theology related to Owen that in recent years has undergone revision is that of Protestant scholasticism. Far from being the theological *bete noire* it has been portrayed as, it has recently been re-examined as an intellectual movement that for theologians like Owen was more a servant than a master as they sought to relate to the intellectual discourse of their day. One of the foremost scholars in this area is Carl Trueman who contributes to a collection of papers entitled *Reformation and Scholasticism*²¹ edited by **Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker**. Much historical theology, not least that dealing with the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, has been plagued by a lack of historical perspective and consideration of context. This volume helps to put that right.

The 18th Century

For the 18th century I enthusiastically recommend two books by **W.R. Ward**, the Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Durham. While a 'secular' historian Ward has done much work on Methodism and British and continental Protestantism in this period. His 1992 work *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*²² has recently been republished in paperback and is must reading for people interested in this period. The strength of this book is the way Ward puts the Great Awakening in its larger European cultural context. Most of us are aware of Count Zinzendorf and the Pietists, but Ward shows us that a lot more was going on in central Europe and even Siberia. Ward casts his net more widely in *Christianity under the Ancien Regime 1648–1789*.²³ Here Ward covers the story of European Christianity from the end of the Wars of Religion to the eve of the French Revolution. He shows how both Protestantism and Catholicism adapted to changing political, cultural and social circumstances. I don't agree with

everything he says and in particular have reservations about his talk of revival strategies, but his perspective is very helpful in understanding this important period.

A unique insight into this period and beyond into the 19th century is **Owen Thomas's *The Atonement Controversy***.²⁴ First published in Welsh in 1874 as part of the biography of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist preacher John Jones, Talsarn, this is an account of the intense theological debates that raged in the various denominations. While there may be too much unnecessary detail in the account the book is testimony to the theological seriousness of these men who were engaged in the work of the ministry. This is not a rarified academic debate, but rather a debate on the message that was to be preached. We have much to learn, both positively and negatively, from the substance of the debate and the way it was conducted. More specific studies of key figures in 18th century evangelicalism are offered in three books. **Faith Cook** has written an excellent biography of **Selina Countess of Huntingdon**.²⁵ The Countess has not been the subject of a substantial biography in spite of her seminal role in the Great Awakening in Britain, but Cook has remedied that as well as adding to the growing body of literature on the role of women in church history. **L. Gordon Tait** has written a fascinating biography of John Wetherspoon, Scottish Presbyterian minister, president of Princeton and signer of the American Declaration of Independence. Entitled ***The Piety of John Wetherspoon***²⁶ this book gives us an insight not only into the period, but also in the political and social impact of Scottish Calvinism. Many of the seminal political ideas of the Scottish Reformation and of men like Knox, Melville, Henderson and Rutherford came to fruition in the American Revolution. Finally **Alan Clifford's** biography of Philip Doddridge ***The Good Doctor***²⁷ is on the whole an excellent biography of the great 18th century Congregational minister in Northampton. What an inspiration Doddridge is to gospel ministry. Unfortunately the book is marred by the author's polemical Amyrldian agenda. While this is somewhat evident in the main body of the work it is most evident in a rather tendentious appendix that has little to do with Doddridge and much more to do with the author. Remove that and the book would be very good.

The 19th Century

Recently several books have appeared that deal with the early part of the century with particular reference to evangelicalism. In ***The Silent Revolution & the Making of Victorian England***,²⁸ **Herbert Schlossberg** chronicles the profound impact of the 18th century evangelical awakening on 19th century English culture and society. Much of this impact was the result of the work of voluntary societies such as the London City Mission, the subject of **Donald M. Lewis's *Lighten their Darkness—the Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828–1860***.²⁹ Originally published in the United States in 1989 but republished here last year, this book uses the LCM and urban mission as a lens to look at evangelicalism in general and at how it related to the city in particular. This subject is dealt with from a different angle in **Ian Shaw's** forthcoming ***High Calvinists in Action—Calvinism and the City, Manchester and London, c.1810–1860***.³⁰ Focusing on Manchester and London, Shaw shows how the theology of high Calvinists such as William Nunn (Anglican), William Gadsby (Strict Baptist), Joseph Irons (independent Calvinist at Grove Chapel) as well as more 'moderate' Calvinists as William McKerrow (Presbyterian) and Andrew Reed (Congregationalist) among others was expressed in their considerable social ministries.

The chapter on the lamentably forgotten Reed who had a remarkable ministry in the East End of London is inspiring as well as informative. **Ian Farley** reminds us of another urban ministry in *J.C. Ryle—First Bishop of Liverpool*.³¹ Ryle's Liverpool ministry is often neglected and Farley shows how he worked hard to reach the working people of Liverpool with the gospel. Unfortunately in spite of great sympathy for the poor and concern for the lost Farley believes that Ryle's tenure was not a success. He does not seem to have been the right man for the position, which if true probably says less about Ryle and more about the nature of Anglican episcopacy and the challenges Christianity was beginning to face in the late 19th century.

Earlier in the century Evangelicalism was in the ascendancy in the Church of England, but many evangelical clergymen found their relationship with the Establishment a difficult one. In *Anglican Evangelicals—Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c.1800–1850*³² **Grayson Carter** gives us a fascinating study of a number of evangelical Anglicans who seceded from the Establishment, men such as Thomas Kelly in Ireland, the Oxford seceders Bulteel, Tiptaft and Philpot, some of the early Brethren and Spurgeon's friend Baptist Noel. While a number of influences were at work—Calvinism, millenarianism and restorationism—all shared in the general disillusionment of many in the educational and social elite with the Church of England. **Timothy Stunt** covers much the same territory in *From Awakening to Secession*,³³ which is both narrower and broader in scope in that it deals with the period 1815–35 but covers all of Britain and Switzerland. Stunt shows the appeal of continental Protestantism on British evangelicals as well as the ideal of the primitive church. The radical evangelicals as he calls them pushed hard for a more doctrinally and morally pure church both inside and outside state establishments. When they got disillusioned they often seceded. Readers will find Stunt's treatment of the Haldane brothers of particular interest, especially the context of Robert's ministry in Geneva. There was much more going on there before, during and after than is commonly known. Both these books are excellent and are particularly illuminating on the ambiguous relationship of conservative evangelicals now as then to the Church of England. Both authors highlight the connections between these radical evangelicals and John Henry Newman and his circle. Like many of them Newman had a middle class evangelical upbringing and went to Oxford at around the same time. This connection is more fully explored in **Frank Turner's**, *John Henry Newman—the Challenge of Evangelical Religion*.³⁴ This is a really splendid book that revises the generally accepted picture of the ecumenical Newman with a far more anti-evangelical Newman. Newman is generally seen through his own reinterpretation of his early life in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Turner goes back to the angry young don and clergyman who was a bitter enemy of everything evangelical and who did much to not only undermine Protestantism but also the Christian faith by his attacks on the Bible. Unfortunately Turner's conclusion does not do justice to the body of the book. To attribute Newman's conversion to Rome to his desire for the company of other men in a monastic order not provided for in the Church of England and not to his Catholic doctrine is somewhat weak to say the least.

Several other books dealing with this period merit attention. *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World*³⁵ is an interesting collection of essays in honour of Prof. A.C. Cheyne of Edinburgh University. A wide array of subjects is covered, but of particular interest is the section on 'Faith and Doubt' where the theological transformation of the churches in

Scotland is explored. Ian's Campbell's essay on Thomas Carlyle's relationship with the Secession Kirk of his upbringing is especially illuminating. **David Bebbington's** Didsbury Lectures, *Holiness in the Nineteenth Century*³⁶ is a very readable and illuminating study of four approaches to sanctification and the Christian life—the High Church, Calvinist, Wesleyan and Keswick traditions. I do not think that Bebbington has done justice to the Calvinist tradition, either in its high or more moderate forms. Is it really right to say that Jonathan Edwards radically modified Calvinism? Nevertheless there is much here that is thought provoking. In *A Spiritual Home—Life in British and American Reformed Congregations, 1830–1915*³⁷ **Charles Cashdollar** gives us a fascinating study into what made members tick in Congregational and Presbyterian churches on both sides of the Atlantic. He covers things such as membership, social fellowship, buildings, Sabbath observance and so on. A book like this gets behind the scenes of more official church history. Its weakness is lack of theological perspective. Read from a conservative Reformed perspective the book is a testimony to the decline of Calvinism over this period. Women figure largely in this book as they do in **Linda Wilson's** *Constrained by Zeal—Female Spirituality among Nonconformists 1825–1875*.³⁸ Wilson uses Bebbington's famous quadrilateral defining evangelicalism—conversionism, crucicentrism, biblicism and activism—to examine how women understood and expressed their Christian faith. Using sources like church records and obituaries she looks at conversion experiences and home, chapel and devotional life. Another overlooked group in church history is the black community. In the United States the various African Methodist Episcopal groups share a remarkable history of preaching, evangelism and church life. **Love Henry Whelchel Jr's** *Hell without Fire—Conversion in Slave Religion*³⁹ tells this story, but it unfortunately does so through the lens of liberation theology so that conversion becomes primarily a form of protest rather than a genuine encounter with God.

The 20th Century

One of the most significant events in the early 20th century was the 1904–05 Welsh Revival. Much has been written about this, but **Noel Gibbard** comes at it from a fresh perspective in *On the Wings of the Dove*⁴⁰ in which he shows the international influence of the revival. There is much to inspire here, but I think a little more analysis and context would have been beneficial. The Welsh revival also figures in **Ian Randall's** very stimulating *Evangelical Experiences—A Study on the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918–1939*.⁴¹ Focussing on the interwar period Randall covers a wide array of movements and trends that influenced evangelicals in various ways—Keswick, liberal evangelicalism, Brethrenism, Pentecostalism, the Oxford Group and so on. I am not convinced that what Randall calls 'Orthodox Dissent'—the theological reaction of Nathaniel Micklem and others to liberal Nonconformity—falls in the category of evangelical as commonly understood. What stands out is the theological weakness of this period and the role of the Brethren in maintaining an evangelical witness. A key figure in British church life up into the inter-war period was John H. Shakespeare, the secretary of the Baptist Union in England from 1898 to 1924. In *The Making of a Modern Denomination—John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists*,⁴² **Peter Shepherd** examines the impact of this seminal figure. It was largely due to Shakespeare that the Baptist Union became the denominational

organisation it is today. He was also actively involved in the incipient ecumenical movement. What Britain did not have in this period was a figure like Gresham Machen who so valiantly fought the good fight in the United States. In *Towards a Sure Faith—J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881–1915*,⁴³ Terry Chrisope examines Machen engagement as a young man with biblical criticism. It caused a crisis of faith from which he emerged strengthened for defending the historic evangelical and reformed faith. Only after the Second World War did a similar and yet very different figure arise in Britain in Martyn Lloyd-Jones. John Brencher's study *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) and 20th Century Evangelicalism*⁴⁴ is an important attempt to assess the impact of Lloyd-Jones on late 20th century evangelicalism in Britain. Overall Brencher is sympathetic and appreciative to his subject, but he does point out what he considers weaknesses. In itself I have no problem with that since Lloyd-Jones, like any other leader, had his faults, idiosyncracies, failures of judgement, imbalances and so on. Not to deal with these would not do justice to his true greatness. However I think that Brencher goes too far at some points and in particular exaggerates the significance of Lloyd-Jones's personality and Welshness in his attitude to Anglican evangelicals. I don't think Brencher has adequately interpreted what happened in 1966 or fully understood Lloyd-Jones's position. Whatever the specific facts are—and I am sure those closer to events will dispute some of them—Lloyd-Jones acted on clearly and strongly held principles and should be judged on that basis. But my main criticism of the book is that it does not really put Lloyd-Jones's ministry in the broader sweep of evangelical history in Britain. If Brencher had done that I think we would see the Doctor in clearer perspective. A book that certainly does take in the broad picture is Iain Murray's *Evangelicalism Divided*.⁴⁵ While not a complete history of the post-war period, this book is one of the most important recently published for understanding the history of evangelicalism in the later 20th century. Also of interest are two other books. The first is another by Ian Randall entitled *Educating Evangelicalism—the origins, development and impact of London Bible College*.⁴⁶ That LBC has without doubt played an important role in post-war evangelicalism is something of a barometer as to the state of evangelicalism in this country just as Fuller Seminary has been in the United States. While fairly non-judgemental Randall records the tensions within LBC as it developed and sought to reflect an increasingly diverse evangelical constituency. With David Hilborn, Ian Randall has also written *One Body in Christ—the history and significance of the Evangelical Alliance*.⁴⁷ This book is an informative if somewhat tame and predicable domestic history of the EA. Like LBC the EA is a barometer of evangelicalism in the broadest sense of the word with all the virtues and problems that involves. The question this book raises is that for all the good things the EA has done will it be able in the decades ahead to continue to be an umbrella for such a diverse constituency. One of the newer aspects of evangelicalism that the EA now reflects has been the growth in numbers and influence of Pentecostalism. William Kay's fascinating study *Pentecostals in Britain*⁴⁸ makes use of historical, sociological and theological analysis to give us a very insightful and comprehensive picture of the Pentecostal constituency. As many readers will like me be somewhat ignorant of these churches this book will prove very illuminating.

Missions

I end this survey by mentioning a few recent books relating to mission and the church in the developing world. The biggest development in recent decades has been the shift of the centre of gravity in Christianity away from the West to the two thirds world. Future church histories will have to take this into account. One scholar who did much to advance study in this area was the late Bishop **Stephen Neill**. His *A History of Christianity in India*⁴⁹ was first published in 1985 but has been republished in paperback this year. This is an important study that covers the impact of Christian missions, Protestant and Catholic, on India during the colonial period up until the Indian Mutiny. A more recent scholar who has also done much to incorporate the history of the third world church into the mainstream of church history is **Andrew Walls**. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History—Studies in the Transmission of Faith*⁵⁰ is a sparkling collection of essays that Walls has written over the years. The common theme to a greater or lesser extent is the way Christianity has been transmitted to various cultures and how this has shaped the resulting church or churches. In some cases such as some of the African independent churches one wonders if they have lost something essential in the process, but from different angles Walls has highlighted a dimension of church that is in fact as old as Christianity itself. What is happening in Africa and Asia today is the same thing as happened in Syria and northern Europe more than a millennium ago. **Samuel Escobar** looks at mission in the context of Latin America in *Changing Tides—Latin America and World Mission Today*.⁵¹ Of particular interest here are Escobar's sharp observations on the remarkable growth of Protestantism in Latin America and the Catholic response to it. Finally in *A Heart for Mission*⁵² **Ron Davies** reminds us of the pioneering missionary thinking and theology of Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, Richard Baxter, Jan Amos Comenius and Count Zinzendorf. It has been said that what we need is not so much a theology of mission as a missionary theology. That is what these men had and a reflective reading of this book should help us to have one too. That is after all what church history is about.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
4. To stimulate interest in contemporary theological matters among evangelical churches by the way in which these topics are handled and by indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.
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