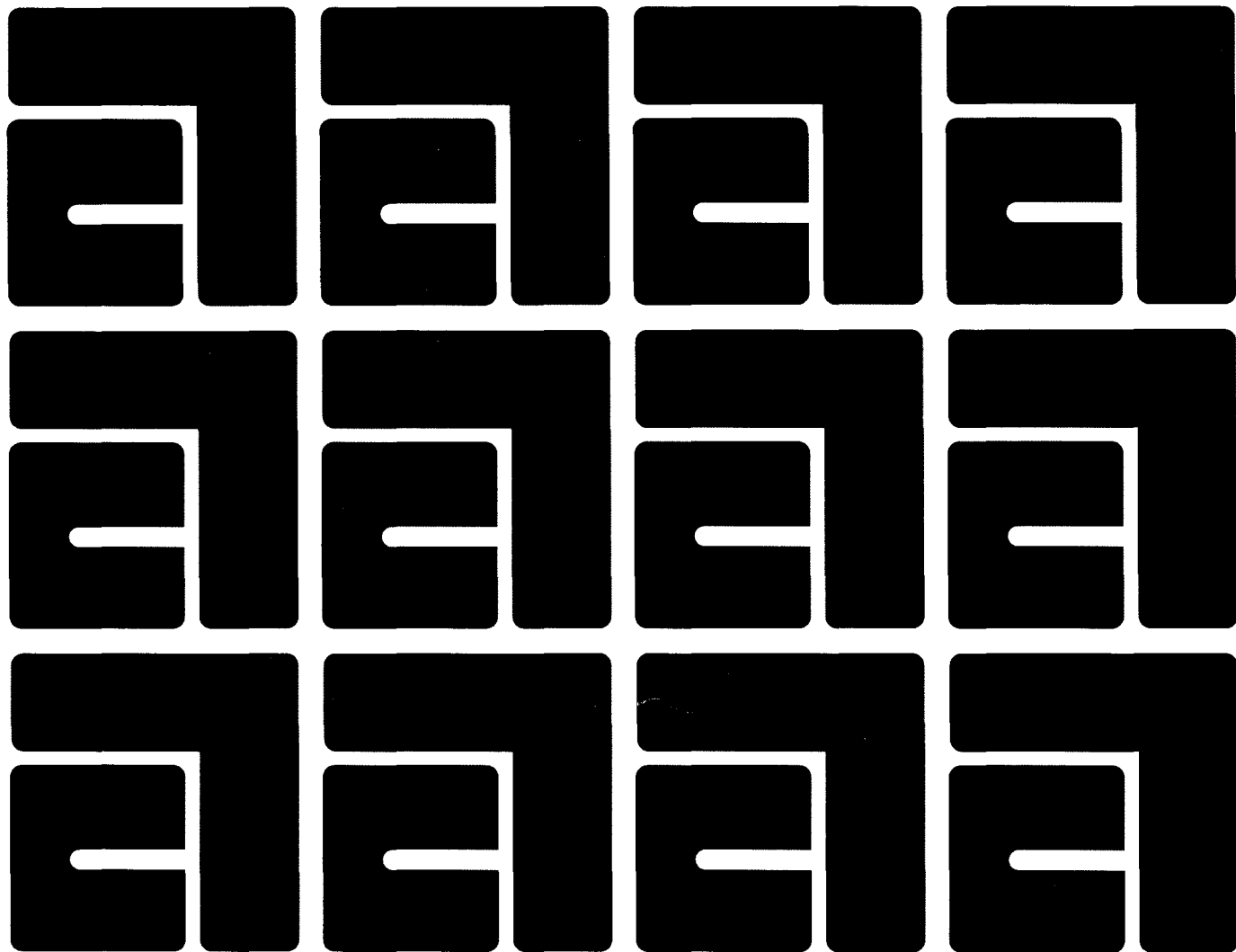


# FOUNDATIONS

a journal of evangelical theology

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## FOUNDATIONS

is published by Affinity in April and October. 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 committed to biblical ecumenism.

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## A Word of Explanation

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On March 25th 2004, the former British Evangelical Council was re-launched under its new name: Affinity – Church-centred Partnership for Bible-centred Christianity. This is no mere image update but a new approach to the expression of biblical church unity for the 21st century. We would encourage readers to send for further information or visit the [affinity.org.uk](http://affinity.org.uk) website.

As part of the reorganisation, Affinity has assumed responsibility for the Theological Team which was formerly a committee of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, and of which the Editor of Foundations, Ken Brownell, is himself a long-standing member. This is a logical development, reflecting the fact that the team has always been gathered from a number of BEC constituencies.

The Affinity Theological Team will now act as the Editorial Board of Foundations, an arrangement which we trust will increase the journal's usefulness as well as ease the Editor's burden. The Team also publishes Table Talk, an occasional briefing which concentrates on one particularly topical theological theme and is aimed to meet the needs of the busy pastor. Back issues may be viewed on the website.

Last but not least, we must apologise for the non-appearance of the Autumn 2003 edition of Foundations, which was crowded out by all the preparations for the re-launch. We are very grateful to regular subscribers for their patience during this period of silence – from which the journal has emerged with a completely new look. Do please let us know what you think. As before, we continue to welcome articles suitable for publication.

There is a university town in Britain where there is, for all intents and purposes, one evangelical church. Recently, the minister of this church told some friends of mine that he does not believe in preaching. Instead he believes that non-Christians are best evangelized and Christians edified through celebratory worship. If this church was charismatic one could understand this minister's view, but this church is known as a mainstream evangelical congregation. Which is why the attitude of this minister and too many like him around the country makes me very angry. Here is a shepherd who is neglecting his flock. In some ways I think he is more culpable than the theological liberals who lead the other churches in the town. He knows the truth but neglects to preach it.

How should one respond to such people? A start would be to direct him to read and meditate upon 1 Corinthians 3:10–17. Then he should be directed to some good books that would remind him about the nature of the ministry in general and preaching in particular. There are many excellent books in print, old and relatively new, that would benefit him and indeed any gospel minister. However there are several recently published books that are worthy of his and our attention.

The first is *Brothers, We are not Professionals* (Mentor 2003) by **John Piper**. Piper is one of those authors who writes books that consistently demand to be read. Written in Piper's customarily elegant and epigramic style, this book of 30 relatively short chapters addresses a variety of issues in the ministry. His primary concern is to wean us from the kind of professionalized ministry that has come to prevail in North America and increasingly in this country. In the preface Piper puts his thoughts in the wider

context of the challenge of secularism and Islam to Christianity and the need of a serious and godly ministry at the heart of which is the cross of Christ to meet it. The first chapter bears the title of the book and here Piper makes his point forcibly as he writes, 'Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Peter 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord. You cannot professionalise the love for his appearing without killing it. And it *is* being killed. The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions ... The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man.' Then he turns to prayer.

Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place out pour passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to material gain, and unremitting labour to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Amen to that. But this book is not a jeremiad regarding ministry, but rather an encouragement to faithful, godly ministry in the great Reformed tradition exemplified by Piper's hero Jonathan Edwards. There are several chapters that take up the familiar Piper themes, but many more on different aspects of the minister's life and work. All of us would benefit from meditating in what he writes on prayer (Brothers, let us pray), busyness (Brothers, beware of sacred substitutes), study and reading (Brothers, fight for your life), the importance of knowing the original languages (Brothers, Bitzer was a Banker), affliction (Brothers, Our affliction is for their comfort), and so much else. If you are a minister I would encourage you to get this book

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and for a month use a chapter a day in your devotions so that your ministry is refreshed and refocused for God's glory, your eople's good and your own sanity.

A book that is just as challenging to the work of the gospel ministry is *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* (Mentor 2003) by **Murray A. Capill**, who teaches at the Reformed Theological College in Australia. In the book Capill examines the ministry of Richard Baxter with particular regard to his preaching. Much of the material is drawn from the *Reformed Pastor*, but he uses other works of Baxter as well. An encounter with Baxter's ministry is always deeply challenging. The danger is to fail to contextualize Baxter. This Capill doesn't do. Baxter is put in his historical context and then appropriate applications are made to our ministries today. While deeply appreciative of Baxter, Capill does critique him when he needs to be, both theologically and methodologically. What Capill so helpfully brings out is Baxter's love for Christ and people and the passion with which he ministered. Baxter was no professional minister in the sense that Piper objects to.

The third book of this triumvirate of must reads is **John Carrick's** *The Imperative of Preaching* (Banner of Truth 2002). There are many good and helpful books on the theology of preaching, but this one is a cut above most. By examining the rhetoric of the New Testament and particularly the letters of Paul, Carrick gets to the heart of the inner logic of preaching. In six chapters Carrick examines the place of the indicative (statements), the exclamative (emphasis and feeling), the interrogative (questions) and the imperative (commands). In each chapter he examines Scripture and then gives examples from a wide range of preachers – such as Whitefield,

Samuel Davies, and Lloyd-Jones. At the end of the book are three appendices of additional illustrations of biblical rhetoric. The book is heart-warming as well as intellectually stimulating and I found that it gave me new enthusiasm for preaching. Whatever others means of communication we use, the gospel demands preaching of the kind Carrick describes. I would recommend younger ministers to read this book as an antidote to the rather lecturing style of preaching that seems increasingly common among those who are committed to biblical exposition. If we are really serious about expository preaching it will affect not only the content of our sermons, but also the way to deliver and communicate it.

Of the making of books on preaching there seems to be no end. More briefly I will mention some that have come my way. With the present travails of the American Episcopal Church one can forget that for much of the 19th century it had a large evangelical party. One of its most influential figures was **Charles P McIlvaine**, bishop of Ohio. Theologically Reformed, McIlvaine experienced revival as chaplain at West Point and had a very fruitful ministry in New York City before moving west. *Preaching Christ* (Banner of Truth 2002) was originally delivered as addresses to clergy in Ohio. With warmth and biblical fidelity, MacIlvaine urges us to keep Christ central in our preaching. The two chapters on 'How some fail to preach Christ' and 'What is it to preach Christ?' are particularly helpful. Considering when he wrote one doesn't expect McIlvaine to deal with some of the issues related to preaching Christ redemptive-historically, especially from the Old Testament, but what he says is a necessary reminder for preachers today. For how such preaching can be made more arresting and interesting, readers may

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turn to *Expository Preaching with Word Pictures* (Mentor 2001) by **Jack Hughes**. One of the criticisms of expository preaching is that it is often boring and sadly that has to be admitted. However that shouldn't be the case. From his writings and what we know of him no one could ever have accused the Puritan Thomas Watson of being a boring preacher. In this book Hughes explores the way Watson used illustrations to make his sermons appealing, interesting and memorable. But Hughes casts his net wide and refers to many other authors as well grounding what he says in Scripture. Those of us of Reformed convictions should take a leaf from Watson's book in regard to our preaching. To do so would help to make our preaching much more popular which to my mind is a crying need if we are to reach our nation and win other evangelicals to our cause. In a very different way **Stuart Olyott** advocates popular preaching in *Ministering like the Master* (Banner of Truth 2003). Based on the Sermon on the Mount, Olyott shows preachers how to preach sermons that are interesting, evangelistic and practically relevant to people. In his preaching Jesus connected with people and that is what our preaching must do today. It is the disconnectedness of much sound Reformed preaching that I suspect motivated the delivery and publication these lectures. Olyott's customary simple, clear and forthright style is itself, even in print, a model for preachers.

Word pictures were perhaps not the forte of **DM Lloyd-Jones**. Every preacher has his strengths and his was both his understanding of the text and submission to it as well as logical argument open to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But contrary to what his reputation is among some, Lloyd-Jones was

a popular preacher. Recently some of his evangelistic sermons have been published. Banner of Truth have been publishing his Sunday evening sermons on the Acts under the title *Authentic Christianity* (Banner of Truth, vol. 2, 2001, vol. 3, 2003). As well as being spiritually rewarding in themselves, these volumes are excellent examples of evangelistic preaching that all ministers would benefit from studying. Here is the rhetoric that John Carrick describes in the book I mentioned above. Here is expository preaching that is faithful to the text without being pedantic.

Mentor has recently published several helpful guides to expository preaching. **Stephen McQuoid's** *The Beginner's Guide to Expository Preaching* (Mentor 2002) is a very good introduction to preaching that might be useful in a preacher's class. There is nothing particularly new here that cannot be found in older works, but it is fresh and accessible. Of a similar nature is *And the Word became a Sermon* by **Derek Newton** (Mentor/OMF 2003). Again there is nothing startlingly new here, but this book comes from the perspective of a missionary teaching pastors in a developing country, in this case the Philippines. This is a particular interest of mine. As Christianity expands so rapidly in many parts of the developing world the imperative is to help pastors to become expository preachers, particularly when they cannot afford the books we take for granted. To that end **Peter Grainger's** *Firm Foundations* (Mentor 2003) could prove very useful. This is not a guide to preaching, but rather a book of sermon outlines with advice as to how to structure expository sermons. There is a danger in a book like this that preachers use the outlines and fail to learn how to prepare a sermon themselves. But from my experience teaching

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preaching in two Asian countries such outlines might help until a generation of preachers is reared who can prepare expository sermons from scratch. Such is the need for such preaching now that perhaps we need a book like this in the way Anglican clergy need the Book of Homilies in the 16th century. Over the years many people have been blessed by the preaching ministry of AN Martin. In *My Heart for Thy Cause* **Brian Borgman** offers us a study of what is subtitled, '*Albert N. Martin's Theology of Preaching*'. In fact while drawing on Martin's writings and tapes, the book is really about preaching of Martin's kind. Many other authors are referred to. The book reads as if Martin wrote it. Again there is not much new here, but there is a necessary reminder of some of the things close to Martin's heart in preaching—application, godly character, plainness of speech, boldness and so on.

The Proclamation Trust has done much in recent years to encourage expository preaching. From its stable have come one book and two booklets to note. *The Practical Preacher* (Mentor 2002) edited by **William Philip** is a short collection of addresses given at different PT events. There is much wisdom here from David Jackman, Sinclair Ferguson, Melvin Tinker, Jonathan Prime and Martin Allen. **Sinclair Ferguson** has written a very helpful and theologically stimulating booklet entitled *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (PT Media 2002) that every

preacher should read. We must recover thoroughly Christian preaching of the Old Testament that avoids the moralizing and spiritualizing that is too common among evangelicals. Ferguson's sensible use of a redemptive-historical approach that treats the Old Testament as Christian Scripture is very helpful.

**William Philip** has put us in his debt with *Concerning Preaching* (PT Media 2002) in which he identifies a number of unhealthy trends among those who are committed to expository preaching that we would be wise to heed. More positively, however, he calls us back to the essentials of biblical preaching. Finally I recommend a pamphlet by **Albert Mohler** of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville entitled *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture* (Banner of Truth 2002). Based on Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, Mohler calls us back to the great work of preaching. He interacts with some recent writers on preaching whose view of Scripture undermines preaching and I found his treatment of the words 'in season and out of season' particularly illuminating. We are to preach 'when it fits and does not fit, when it works and when it seems not to work, when it bears visible fruit and when it seems barren, when it is appreciated and when it is denounced, when it is legal and when it is illegal, when it is plentiful and when it is scarce, when it is broadcast on the airwaves and when it is preached in the catacombs. We are to preach the word at all times.'

## Introduction

The title I was given for this paper was 'Justification in the *Ordo Salutis*'. As you will see, I have taken the liberty of changing that slightly to 'Justification and the *Ordo Salutis*'. In the course of my preparation, it became clear that the question I needed to answer was not simply: 'Where does justification fit into the *ordo salutis*?' but 'Is the construction of an *ordo salutis* an appropriate way to deal with the doctrine of justification?' This perhaps requires a word of explanation.

As one who stands within the Reformed theological tradition and who has an interest in the history of that tradition, I have been fascinated to observe a changing approach to the subject before us today. For most of its history, Reformed theologians have generally sought to understand and explain the application of redemption by means of an '*ordo salutis*' method, namely, by demonstrating the relationship between the various doctrines in terms of the order in which they impact on the human condition. So, for example, some have argued that the *ordo salutis* begins with effectual calling, which leads to regeneration, which in turn produces faith, which leads to justification and so on. It might almost be said that these various doctrines were conceived of in terms of a 'domino' effect, such that, the process having begun, one follows from the other automatically.

In more recent Reformed theology, however, theologians have chosen to approach the application of redemption by focussing on union with Christ, instead of following an '*ordo salutis*' method. Paradoxically, this 'union with Christ' method has been adopted by two schools of thought within Reformed theology which, in most other respects,

are normally opposed to one another, namely, neo-orthodoxy on the one hand and the theologians associated with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia on the other hand. Not surprisingly, there is a marked contrast in the way in which these two schools use the 'union with Christ' method, leading to quite different conclusions.

In order to open up the discussion, this paper is divided into four sections. First, a brief general introduction to the concept of the *ordo salutis*; second, an identification of some of the important theological issues raised in seeking to discern the place of justification within the *ordo salutis* in Reformed theology; third, a discussion of the 'union with Christ' method as developed within neo-orthodox theology and as developed by scholars associated with Westminster Theological Seminary; and fourth, an attempt to draw some conclusions and to suggest possible ways forward for Reformed theology.

## 1. The *Ordo Salutis*

Louis Berkhof defines the *ordo salutis* in this way: 'The *ordo salutis* describes the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realised in the hearts and lives of sinners. It aims at describing in their logical order, and also in their interrelations, the various movements of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of redemption.'<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the term have been traced to two Lutheran scholars, Frank Buddeus and Jakobus Karpov, writing between 1724 and 1739.<sup>3</sup> As Sinclair Ferguson notes, however, the concept, '... has an older pedigree, stretching back into pre-Reformation theology's attempts to relate the various experiential and sacramental steps to



salvation. In this context Luther's personal struggle may be viewed as a search for a truly evangelical *ordo salutis*.<sup>4</sup>

The difficulty experienced in developing an *ordo salutis* is that the biblical evidence for the creation of an *ordo salutis* does not lie on the surface of the text but has to be deduced and inferred from various places.<sup>5</sup> This problem, however, did not deter many of those within the Reformed tradition from developing an *ordo salutis*, drawing their structure from Romans 8:28–30 and elsewhere.

Within Reformed theology, the development of an *ordo salutis* involved three main considerations. First, it was recognised that God takes the initiative in salvation and that he does so through his Word and by his Spirit. Second, the *ordo salutis* was developed in such a way as to give proper expression to the Calvinistic theology and its understanding of the application of salvation. Third, it was clearly understood that the *ordo salutis* must account for the two problems which fallen human beings face, namely, their broken relationship to God and their polluted, sinful condition. Thus in the *ordo salutis* the various doctrines were divided into two groups: those which described the change in the sinner's relationship to God and those which described the renovation and renewal of the human condition.

The construction of an *ordo salutis* in order to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption was essentially a Reformation and post-Reformation development. As Berkhof writes,

The doctrine of the order of salvation is a fruit of the Reformation. Hardly any semblance of it is found in the works of the Scholastics. In pre-Reformation theology scant justice is done to soteriology in general. It does not constitute a separate locus, and its constituent parts

are discussed under other rubrics, more or less as *disiecta membra*. Even the greatest of the Schoolmen, such as Peter the Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, pass on at once from the discussion of the incarnation to that of the Church and the sacraments.<sup>6</sup>

Berkhof goes on to say that 'Calvin was the first to group the various parts of the order of salvation in a systematic way ...',<sup>7</sup> while recognising that this was a very preliminary attempt at such a process. Indeed, we might say that Calvin's *ordo salutis* was very simple, consisting of faith, justification and sanctification.<sup>8</sup> As Ronald Wallace has written, 'Calvin defines what we receive from Jesus Christ by faith as a "double grace", or a twofold benefit, the whole of which can be summed up for the purpose of theological discussion under two headings: Justification and Sanctification.'<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley argues that the way in which Calvin dealt with the relationship between justification and sanctification was itself highly significant:

Perhaps Calvin's most important contribution to the understanding of justification is his reuniting of two things which for purposes of clarity had in a sense been divided, namely, justification and sanctification. Now obviously neither Luther nor Cranmer nor others meant to keep the two apart. Their anxiety to relate faith to works bears ample testimony to this. On the other hand, the Reformers in general can hardly be said to have presented a comprehensive view of Christian salvation and the Christian life in a way which brings out the full relationship of justification and sanctification. This was to be the great achievement of Calvin.<sup>10</sup>

Berkouwer puts it slightly differently, arguing that, in discussions about the *ordo salutis*, the emphasis should be on salvation in Christ and this he sees in Calvin:

Though one does not find an *ordo salutis* in Calvin, in the sense of its later development, there is nonetheless

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an order, perhaps better called an orderliness, which is determined by salvation in Christ. Salvation in Christ – this is the center from which the lines are drawn to every point of the *way of salvation*. The lines themselves may be called faith.<sup>11</sup>

Those who followed Calvin, however, developed the *ordo salutis* considerably. This was particularly true of Theodore Beza on the continent and William Perkins in England, both of whom developed charts (or *Tabulae*) in which the various doctrines were located in a logical (although not necessarily chronological) order. Perkins's 'golden chain' was particularly decisive for Puritan theology. The *ordo salutis* developed by Perkins involved first, effectual calling, which produced faith; second, justification, involving the remission of sin and the imputation of righteousness; third, sanctification, which involved mortification, vivification and repentance; finally, glorification and life eternal.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to point out, however, that the *ordo salutis* as developed by Beza and Perkins was not driven and controlled by a predestinarian or deterministic worldview as some have argued.<sup>13</sup> Richard Muller, in a profound and scholarly analysis of the relationship between Christology and Predestination in early Reformed theology, says this: It would be a mistake to say that there were no deterministic tendencies in Beza's thought, but these tendencies existed in tension with a christocentric piety and a very real sense of the danger of determinism. Beza did not produce a predestinarian or necessitarian system nor did he ineluctably draw Reformed theology toward formulation of a causal metaphysic. Nor did he develop one locus to the neglect, exclusion, or deemphasis of others. Beza's role in the development of Reformed system may better be described as a generally successful attempt to clarify and to render more precise the doctrinal definitions he had inherited from Calvin and the other Reformers of the first era of theological codification.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than predestination, the key to the *ordo salutis* in early Reformed theology was effectual calling. This was defined as that work of God the Holy Spirit whereby the outward call of the gospel was combined with the effectual call of the Spirit.

In the first half of the seventeenth century theologians tended to define the term 'effectual calling' in such a way as to include regeneration. This is reflected in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which has a chapter on effectual calling<sup>15</sup> but no chapter on regeneration. In the later seventeenth century, for example in John Owen,<sup>16</sup> a clearer distinction was made between effectual calling and regeneration, with much more stress being placed on the latter. The general shape of the *ordo salutis* was thus clarified. It was argued that effectual calling produces regeneration. Faith, being the first fruit of regeneration, the *ordo salutis* then divided into two streams. On the one hand, faith led to justification and adoption, thus dealing with the sinner's relationship to God; on the other hand, faith led to repentance and sanctification, thus dealing with the sinner's inner condition.

Some of the discussions about the *ordo salutis* in seventeenth century Reformed theology were occasioned by internal debates. For example, Arminius and the Remonstrants wanted to put faith before regeneration, in order to emphasise the human decision, as over against the Reformed view that regeneration must precede faith, in order to emphasise *sola gratia*. It is in this context that Berkouwer refers to Arminianism as '... this particular over-estimation of faith as a spiritual achievement.'<sup>17</sup>

This is only one example of the many variations between Reformed scholars on the *ordo salutis*. A more recent example concerns the disagreement

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between the Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck and G.C. Berkouwer. Kuyper taught that justification was from eternity, in order to stress the priority of grace. Berkouwer sums up his position 'If justification is a divine act of grace which no human merit can achieve, then it must also precede faith ... as eternity "precedes" time.'<sup>18</sup> Kuyper's argument is that justification is from eternity by grace but is 'appropriated' in time through faith. Bavinck rejected this theory of eternal justification because, he argued, it is not taught in Scripture and could be used in respect of many other doctrines as well.<sup>19</sup> He did, however, want to affirm with Kuyper that '... all the benefits of the covenant of grace are established in eternity.'<sup>20</sup> Berkouwer later comments, 'This concept of eternal justification reveals how a speculative logic can invade a scriptural proclamation of salvation and torture it beyond recognition. This is the danger of an apparently consistent logical process which at first imperceptibly and then quite finally estranges itself from scriptural reality.'<sup>21</sup> He concludes by agreeing with Bavinck in rejecting Kuyper's notion of eternal justification and does so in quite strong terms:

He who allows justification and redemption to ascend out of time into eternity is never again able to avoid the fatal conclusion that everything occurring in time merely formalizes or illustrates what has been molded in eternal quietness. Even the terrible reality of the cross is swallowed in the deep, still waters of eternity.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of the *ordo salutis*, then, was developed in post-Reformation theology, although the precise 'order' of the doctrines varied considerably from scholar to scholar.

## 2. Justification in the *Ordo Salutis*

We must now turn more specifically to the place that has been given to justification in the *ordo* been regarded by most scholars as following upon faith, which in turn is brought about by effectual calling and/or regeneration. There are, however, at least three significant issues on which Reformed theologians have been divided in relation to justification, namely, imputation, the nature of saving faith and the place given to repentance.

### a. Imputation

Justification was defined in forensic terms as the remission of sin and the imputation of righteousness, all of which in later Reformed theology was set in the context of a federal structure involving a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. Just as the sin of Adam was imputed to all those whom he represented in the covenant of works, on the basis that he was their federal head, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all those whom he represents as federal head in the covenant of grace.

This matter of imputation is vital to any proper understanding of the Reformed view of justification. Indeed, the very nature of the imputation became a significant issue. This is demonstrated by the way in which the doctrine of justification is presented in the confessional documents. More specifically, it is highlighted by the way in which the *Savoy Declaration* differs from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* on the issue of imputation. The *Savoy Declaration* is, on most matters, almost identical to the WCF, on which it was based. On justification, however, there is an interesting difference.

Note first of all the section from the *WCF* statement on justification:

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing *the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them*, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.<sup>23</sup>

When we come to the statement on justification in the *Savoy Declaration*, however, one part has been changed and expanded. As Alan Clifford puts it, 'Through alterations proposed by John Owen, the teaching on imputation became even more explicit ...'<sup>24</sup>

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing *Christ's active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness*, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.<sup>25</sup>

This was not an alteration which all Reformed scholars accepted. William Cunningham, for example, in discussing this issue, pointed out that it was not to be found in the writings of Calvin: It is to be traced rather to the more minute and subtle speculations, to which the doctrine of justification was afterwards subjected; and though the distinction is quite in accordance with the analogy of faith, and may be of use in aiding the formation of distinct and definite conceptions, – it is not of any great practical importance and need not be much pressed or insisted on, if men

heartily and intelligently ascribe their forgiveness and acceptance wholly to what Christ has done and suffered in their room and stead. There is no ground in anything Calvin has written for asserting, that he would have denied or rejected this distinction, if it had been presented to him. But it was perhaps more in accordance with the cautious and reverential spirit in which he usually conducted his investigations into divine things, to abstain from any minute and definite statements regarding it.<sup>26</sup>

No matter which position is taken on the issue of the imputation of the active and passive obedience of Christ, however, one thing is clear: imputation is at the very heart and centre of the Reformed understanding of justification.

### b. Faith

Another issue which Reformed theologians have debated, in their thinking about justification, concerns the nature of saving faith and the location of faith in the *ordo salutis*. In general, Reformed theologians have taught that faith is the formal or instrumental cause of justification and is not in itself meritorious. That is to say, faith is not something which sinners bring to God from out of themselves, in exchange for which God justifies them. Rather, faith is a free gift of God, by the instrumentality of which justification is obtained.

Some Reformed theologians have also been concerned lest the significance of faith be lost by regarding it simply as another step in the *ordo salutis*. Berkouwer, for example, expresses the concern in this way:

If the *ordo salutis* were really intended to be a straight line drawn through a sequence of causal factors it would be open to the same objections that we have against the Roman Catholic concept of the function of faith as a preparatory phase preceding justification or infused grace. Reformation theology has always protested that faith thus loses its central and total character and becomes a mere step

on the way of salvation. In contrast to this devaluation of faith, the Reformation confessed *sola fide*, meaning thereby to emphasize the universal significance of faith. In this way faith possesses no unique functional value; it rests wholly in God's grace. Theological study of the way of salvation, or *ordo salutis*, must, then, always revolve about the correlation between faith and justification. It must simply cut away everything which blocks its perspective of this *sola fide*. Heresy always invades the *ordo salutis* at this point, and this is why it is so necessary to realize that the entire *way of salvation* is only meant to illuminate *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. For only thus can it be confessed that *Christ is the way*.<sup>27</sup>

He underlines this point and concludes by stressing that '... it is perpetually necessary for the Church to reflect on the *ordo salutis*, or, as we think better to say on the *way of salvation*. The purpose of her reflection is not to refine and praise the logical systematization. It is to cut off every way in which Christ is not confessed exclusively as *the Way*.'<sup>28</sup>

We can now take the argument a step further and through the instrumentality of faith, a faith which is itself meritorious and which exists only because of God's grace.

### c. Repentance

In formulating its understanding of the place of justification in the *ordo salutis*, Reformed theology has often been divided over the place of repentance. There were some Scottish theologians, for example, who argued that repentance was a condition of salvation and therefore must come before justification in the *ordo salutis*.<sup>29</sup>

There have been, of course, Reformed theologians who wanted to put repentance before justification in the *ordo salutis* but who would certainly not regard justification as conditional upon repentance. Robert Reymond, for example, argues on Scriptural grounds that repentance comes before justification.<sup>30</sup>

His *ordo* is: effectual calling, regeneration, repentance unto life, faith in Jesus Christ, justification, definitive sanctification, adoption (and the Spirit's sealing), progressive sanctification, perseverance in holiness and glorification.<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that repentance comes before justification (and even faith) he is careful to insist that faith is the sole instrument of justification and that repentance is '... not to be rested in as if it were itself a satisfaction for sin or the cause of pardon, for repentance *per se* is and can be neither.'<sup>32</sup>

On the whole, however, Reformed theologians have viewed repentance as following upon justification as a result, rather than going before it as a cause. Irrespective of the view taken on the place of repentance in the *ordo salutis*, however, Reformed theologians are at least in agreement that neither justification, nor the faith which is its instrumental cause, are occasioned by repentance, which must rather be regarded as a non-meritorious but necessary accompaniment to faith.

## 3. Union with Christ

As we now turn to consider the two schools of thought which, in their teaching concerning the application of redemption, have followed the 'union with Christ' method, as over against an '*ordo salutis*' method, it must not be imagined that the Reformed theologians of earlier centuries ignored this vital doctrine. We noted earlier the emphasis on effectual calling in early seventeenth century theology. We should also note that it was characteristic of these theologians to see effectual calling as that which unites believers to Christ. Heinrich Heppé writes, 'At the root of the whole doctrine of the appropriation of salvation lies the doctrine of *insitio* or *insitio in*

*Christum*, through which we live in him and he in us.<sup>33</sup> Heppie goes on to quote Witsius: 'The goal to which we are called is Christ and communion with himself ... The result of this communion is communion in all the benefits of Christ, in grace as well as in glory, to both of which alike we are called.'<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, John Owen among the English puritans and Thomas Boston among the Scottish covenant theologians are good examples of scholars who gave due emphasis to union with Christ. John Owen followed in the general line of those we have noted above. As Sinclair Ferguson notes, 'For Owen, then, such order as there is in the *ordo salutis* would seem to be: Effectual Calling; Regeneration; Faith; Repentance; Justification; Adoption; and Sanctification.'<sup>35</sup> Yet Owen could speak about union with Christ as 'the sole fountain of our blessedness'.<sup>36</sup> His understanding was that this union took place by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through effectual calling.<sup>37</sup> This was a very significant element in his overall understanding of the *ordo salutis*. Ferguson sums up Owen's position this way: 'Thus divine election, and the outworking of it through the *ordo salutis* find their meeting place in union with Christ. This union, and all aspects of the plan of salvation are, for Owen, the application and fruit of the covenant of grace. To become a Christian is therefore to be taken into covenant with God in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.'<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Boston was an orthodox covenant theologian who developed the *ordo salutis* in line with Calvinist theology and who understood the place of justification accordingly. He argued that effectual calling leads to regeneration, which in turn produces faith by which we are justified. Nevertheless, he placed such emphasis upon union with Christ as to be able to say,

It is the leading, comprehensive, fundamental privilege of believers, 1 Cor. iii. 23. 'Ye are Christ's.' All their other privileges are derived from and grafted upon this, their justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. All these grow on this root; and where that is wanting, none of these can be. All acceptable obedience comes from the soul's union with Christ, John xv. 4. Hence faith is the principal grace, as uniting us to Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, Boston saw no incompatibility between emphasising an *ordo salutis* and at the same time recognising that union with Christ is vital for salvation. For example, in another place Boston insists that 'Union with Christ is the only way to sanctification.'<sup>40</sup> He was also very clear in his specifications as to the nature of this union with Christ. It was not an external union, such as might exist, for example between a ruler and his subjects. Rather it was an internal and spiritual union. He does not regard the benefits which flow from union with Christ as being like benefits which might be passed on to us externally but rather as benefits which flow because of the nature of the union. In seeking to explain this union and the benefits which accrue from it, he uses an illustration. The benefits we receive by union with Christ are not like those of the beggar who is thrown some money by a rich man but rather like those of a poor, debt-ridden widow who, by marrying the rich man, has her situation transformed.<sup>41</sup>

This view is shared by Louis Berkhof who writes, 'Since the believer is "a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17), or is "justified" (Acts 13:39) only in Christ, union with Him logically precedes both regeneration and justification by faith, while yet, chronologically, the moment when we are united with Christ is also the moment of our regeneration and justification.'<sup>42</sup>

We must recognise, however, that although these scholars gave a place (sometimes a significant place)

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to union with Christ, they did so without any intended critique of the *ordo salutis* method. Those we are to consider now, in placing emphasis upon union with Christ, do so with the clear theological intention of raising questions about the validity of the *ordo salutis* method.

**a. Union with Christ in Neo-Orthodoxy**

Based upon his Christological approach to theology, Karl Barth views the application of redemption from the perspective of Christ, rather than from the perspective of the individual human being. He does not regard justification, adoption, sanctification and so on as a series of separate but connected events or processes in the life of the believer. Instead he emphasises that all of these blessings come to human beings as a direct result of their being united to Christ.<sup>43</sup> He was particularly concerned that the relation between justification and sanctification should be properly understood.<sup>44</sup>

For Barth, questions such as whether regeneration precedes effectual calling, or whether justification has a logical priority over regeneration, are largely irrelevant. For him, all of these are embodied in Christ and we come to share in all of them as we are united with Christ. In this context, it is interesting to note the recently published lectures of Barth on the Reformed Confessions, which date from the very earliest days of his academic career.<sup>45</sup> In these lectures Barth touches upon the *ordo salutis* in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. His objection is not the same as that of later Barthians, who have argued that the Confession puts predestination at the head of the *ordo* and works out everything logically from there.<sup>46</sup> Rather, Barth's objection is that, by placing such a heavy emphasis upon the application of redemption and upon the

means by which the individual believer finds peace and assurance, it seeks '... to make Reformed theology into anthropology'.<sup>47</sup> He asks, 'Why could the successors of John Knox celebrate the Pyrrhic victory of Puritanism in the Westminster Confession so that they gave up their Scots Confession and exchanged the idea of the "holy city" for the deficient idea of the "order of salvation", the theology of the assurance of salvation?'<sup>48</sup>

T.F. Torrance followed the main tenets of Barth's theology in this matter of union with Christ, as in other areas, although preferring to call himself an Athanasian than a Barthian! As Duncan Rankin has demonstrated, however, there is a significant difference between Torrance and Barth in their developed positions.<sup>49</sup> Torrance built his theology around two separate notions of union with Christ: first, an incarnational (or carnal) union, which is with all humanity by the very act of Incarnation; and second, a spiritual union which is only between Christ and believers. It is not at all clear how one moves from the first union to the second, or indeed (given that Torrance is not a universalist) how unbelievers fall out of the first union. The key point for this paper, however, is that the union itself is presented in such a way as to obviate the need for a forensic explanation of the atonement.

The position is outlined with considerable clarity by Trevor Hart, who argues that both traditional Protestant theology and traditional Catholic theology have made the mistake of understanding salvation as the application of 'benefits'.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to this, he argues, we must see salvation in terms of our union with Christ who has already, in the incarnation, taken up sinful human flesh, united it with the divine and purified it from all sin. When we are

united to Christ, we share in that reconciled and purified humanity.<sup>51</sup>

In Barth, Torrance and Hart, then, justification is not conceived of in forensic terms, involving the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the non-imputation of sin but rather in terms of the participation in and the sharing of, Christ's righteousness.

In preparing this section of my paper, I am indebted to Professor Bruce McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary for sending me an unpublished lecture on justification which he gave as part of 'The Josephine So Lectures for 2001', given at the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong. In that lecture, having demonstrated that the doctrine of justification in Reformed theology was forensic, based on the non-imputation of sin combined with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, McCormack writes,

... in the period between 1551 and 1619 (the *terminus ad quem* of that period which establishes the 'originating trajectory' of Reformed teaching on any given subject), there is no deviation from a forensic understanding of justification. Seen in this light, a genuinely Reformed understanding must be forensic in both the negative and positive senses. Any deviation on either front – but especially the latter – would have to be seen as constituting not a development of the Reformed teaching on this subject but a departure from it.<sup>52</sup>

After considering the development of modern 'Protestant' theology and surveying some recent church documents which abandon forensic justification and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, McCormack's conclusion is striking. He argues that if we follow a non-forensic understanding of justification,

...then the simple demand of honesty lays upon us the requirement to find a different word than the word 'Reformed' and 'Protestant' to describe what it is that

we have now become theologically. For a forensic understanding was so essential to defining the meaning of the words 'Reformed' and 'Protestant' by 1580, that its elimination can only mean a 'break' with the Reformation at the decisive point. Such an admission would not automatically make us Catholic or Orthodox, to be sure. It is not at all clear to me what we would be. But what is clear is that we wouldn't be Protestant. And that is something which I think we all need to face squarely.<sup>53</sup>

Berkouwer reaches much the same conclusion by analysing the relationship between faith and justification in several Reformed and Lutheran Confessions. He begins with three Reformed confessional documents: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. He concludes that

A single theme plays through all three documents ... the theme of *sola fide*. And this is the heart of the Reformed confession. The various and varied expressions are religiously simple and transparent. The fathers understood that justification through faith alone was the confession pre-eminent, the confession *sine qua non*.<sup>54</sup>

He then compares these with two Lutheran documents: the Augsburg Confession and the Apology for the Confessio Augustana. These too, like the Reformed documents, emphasise *sola fide*. He notes, in passing, that this is true also of the Smalkald Articles, Luther's Catechism and the Formula of Concord. His conclusion is that forensic (or declarative) justification '... was the uniting truth of the sixteenth century. All differences, some of which were not unimportant, within the Reformation stood in the shadow of this transcending verity.'<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere he makes it clear that the imputation of righteousness is a key element in his understanding of forensic justification:

We need only state forthrightly that declarative or forensic justification, as it was, on biblical grounds,



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understood by the Reformation, rules out the thought of faith as a meritorious condition of salvation. Forensic justification has to do with what is extra nos, with the imputation of what Christ has done on our behalf. This was, indeed, the original disposition of the Reformation.<sup>56</sup>

#### **b. Union with Christ in Westminster Calvinism**

We now turn to the second group of theologians who have focussed attention on union with Christ rather than on the traditional *ordo salutis* method. In doing so, we must have in mind the trenchant criticism which Professor McCormack applied to the Barthian scholars who did likewise. We must ask whether, in taking this position, these Westminster Theologians have somehow managed to maintain forensic justification involving the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

From the influence of Gerhardus Vos and John Murray, there gradually developed within Westminster Theological Seminary (henceforth WTS) an approach to the application of redemption which seeks to draw together strands of the two positions considered so far. There is indeed an emphasis upon the 'union with Christ' method but there is also a commitment to forensic justification involving the imputation of Christ's righteousness. To understand how this position holds together, we must consider an important work by Richard Gaffin. Originally a doctoral dissertation submitted to WTS under the title: 'Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Soteriology' in 1969, it was published in 1978 as *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*.<sup>57</sup> Gaffin argues that the key element in understanding Paul's soteriology is the resurrection of Christ and that a redemptive-historical outlook is '... decidedly dominant and determinative'.<sup>58</sup> He argues that it is not possible to understand either the accomplishment or the application of redemption

without focussing on the union between Christ and believers in resurrection. The resurrection of believers is entirely dependent upon Christ's resurrection, both historically (already realised) and eschatologically (we will be raised).<sup>59</sup>

On the basis of this study, Gaffin argues that the traditional *ordo salutis* ought to be revisited. In particular he raises three problems with the traditional *ordo salutis*. First, he notes the failure to take seriously the eschatological perspective of the Pauline doctrine: 'The traditional *ordo salutis* lacks the exclusively eschatological air which pervades the entire Pauline soteriology'.<sup>60</sup> Second, he points out that traditionally, the various elements in the *ordo salutis* are regarded as separate acts, which he regards as a serious mistake:

Nothing distinguishes the traditional *ordo salutis* more than its insistence that the justification, adoption and sanctification which occur at the inception of the application of redemption are separate acts. If our interpretation is correct, Paul views them not as distinct acts but as distinct aspects of a single act.<sup>61</sup>

Gaffin emphasises this point by showing the difficulty the traditional method has in dealing with the relationship between the various doctrines in the *ordo salutis* and the doctrine of union with Christ. That is to say, if union with Christ comes before these various acts, then why are they necessary? If, on the other hand, union with Christ follows these other acts, does that not devalue its meaning and significance?

Gaffin's third issue in relation to the traditional *ordo salutis* concerns the prominent place given to regeneration and whether or not this is compatible with Paul's soteriology. His concern is whether a 'distinct enlivening act (causally or temporally) prior to the initial act of faith' might actually involve a

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‘distortion of Paul’s viewpoint’.<sup>62</sup> He does not elaborate on this point, however, saying that it ‘... brings us to the limits of this study’<sup>63</sup> although he clearly believes it to be an important question for further work.

Gaffin’s view has been very influential at WTS and others have followed his line of reasoning, including Sinclair Ferguson, who writes, ‘Union with Christ must therefore be the dominant motif in any formulation of the application of redemption and the dominant feature of any “order” of salvation.’<sup>64</sup>

There is, however, a marked difference between the understanding of union with Christ as developed by Gaffin, Ferguson and others and as developed by the neo-orthodox theologians. As we saw in the previous section, particularly in Torrance and Hart, neo-orthodoxy views union with Christ as an alternative to a forensic understanding of atonement with its key component of imputation. In Gaffin, Ferguson and the WTS theologians, the forensic element is retained. The imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers remains a key element in their theology, it is simply that the means by which this imputation is effected is located in the prior doctrine of union with Christ.

This position has not gone unchallenged, related as it is to the development of John Murray’s modified covenant theology in which he argued against a legal ‘covenant of works’ in favour of a gracious ‘Adamic administration’. Meredith Kline and others, particularly Mark Karlberg, have argued that this failure to pursue a clear law/grace antithesis is a departure from Reformed theology and endangers the doctrine of justification which they believe to be dependent upon this antithesis.<sup>65</sup> We do not have time to discuss this argument here but it is interesting

to note that Karlberg goes so far as to say that John Murray, Norman Shepherd,<sup>66</sup> Dick Gaffin and Sinclair Ferguson have moved towards a ‘Barthian’ theology!

#### 4. Summary & Conclusions

We have seen, then, that Reformed theology has characteristically dealt with the application of redemption in terms of an *ordo salutis*. Within that *ordo salutis* justification has normally been placed after faith and before sanctification. Faith itself is seen as a gift of God, which is granted in effectual calling/regeneration. This is to ensure the priority of grace and to avoid any notion that justification could be earned or achieved by sinful human beings.

This *schema*, however, involves several difficulties. First, there is the difficulty of establishing the order in which the various doctrines are to be placed (based on very little direct Scriptural evidence) and whether the sequence is logical or chronological. Second, there is the danger of viewing the various doctrines as mere steps in a sequence, which, having once begun, will continue until complete. Third, and most significant, there is the problem of ascertaining the precise relationship between the steps in the *ordo salutis* and the act of God whereby he unites believers to Christ.

In order to avoid these difficulties, particularly the third, some modern Reformed theologians have largely abandoned the use of an *ordo salutis* method and opted instead to view the various doctrines in the *ordo salutis*, not as a series of connected acts and processes, but rather as aspects of union with Christ. We considered briefly two schools of thought within Reformed theology which have taken this approach

and noted the differences between them. In particular, we noted the crucial difference, namely, that the neo-orthodox understanding of union with Christ obviated the need for a clear forensic doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. The WTS theologians, on the other hand, maintained both the doctrine of union with Christ as the key to understanding the application of salvation and a clear forensic doctrine of imputation.

In my view, we have a great deal to learn from Gaffin, Ferguson and others in this regard. It is not necessary, of course, to abandon totally the concept of the *ordo salutis*. It may well be important to retain the concept in order to clarify the nature of the various doctrines and to guard against mistakes in the relationship posited between them.<sup>67</sup> Two things, however, are certainly clear: first, the doctrine of justification by faith cannot be properly and fully understood unless it is seen in the context of union with Christ; second, any understanding of justification which fails to maintain a forensic notion of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, cannot claim to be Reformed.

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There is an introductory matter to be considered. The culture in which we live today is very different from that in which our forefathers lived. There is no longer even a general nominal understanding of Bible truth, which was there in our grandparents' days. Indeed, there is an attitude abroad nowadays which denies that there is such a thing as absolute and universal spiritual truth anyway; pluralism is the in-word in our day—any religion is as true as any other. Truth is whatever is true for you, whoever you are, they say. We must surely recognise that as the background against which we have to go to talk to people about Bible truth (which is most certainly true for everybody!) We live on a 'Mars Hill' today.

I have an English dictionary which was published in 1932. I looked up the name 'Jesus' in order to see what definition was given. It simply read *Jesus: The Saviour*; and then it gave the Latin, the Greek and the Hebrew versions of that name. 'The Saviour' – I warmed to that.

I have another English dictionary published in 1975. Again, I looked up the name 'Jesus', curious to see what definition was given there. I read, *Source of the Christian religion, accepted by Christians as the Son of God ...* and there followed a brief outline of the main features of the life of Christ. It closed the paragraph with the comment, *the Christian doctrine is that after 3 days he rose from the dead.* I was a little uneasy at that. The resurrection of Christ is an historical fact, not merely an idea that only Christians believe.

There's a third dictionary in our home, this one published in 1990. Once more I looked to see what definition it gave for the name 'Jesus'.

This time I found that the dictionary offered two meanings: 1st. (*a colloquial interjection*), an

*exclamation of surprise, or dismay, etc.* And then 2nd. – and this was in brackets – (*Name of the founder of the Christian religion, died about AD 30*) – and that was all it said. So, in a period of 60 years or so, 1932 – 1990, the common definition of Jesus has moved from *The Saviour* to an *exclamation of surprise or dismay*.

So if our Lord should ask us today, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' (Matt. 16:13) our reply would need to be not, 'you are the Saviour', and not, 'you are the Son of God' – that's only what Christians say, apparently – but 'Lord, you are an exclamation of surprise or dismay'. And if you live in the society in which I live, your ears will already have told you that this is how the name of Jesus is commonly used; this is the cultural atmosphere in which we now live, and in which we have to speak about such an unpopular thing as unique, divine truth. We face a situation today in which so many of our fellow men and women, boys and girls, are biblically illiterate.

So I suggest that if we are to think seriously about our evangelism in these days, this illiteracy is something we must take full account of. We now have to go to people most of whom have no biblical knowledge. They do not understand our evangelical language; e.g. the words 'sin' and 'God' do not mean to them what they mean to us; the word 'gospel' (which is 'the glorious gospel' to us), has no special meaning for them at all. And I want to suggest we shall fail in our responsibility to reach them in faithful evangelism, unless we take such sad facts into account. And this brings us directly to Acts 17, and particularly to the summary that Luke gives us there of Paul's great sermon on Mars Hill.

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## 1. ... 'To those not having the Law like one not having the Law'

On Mars Hill Paul was confronting people with no Old Testament Bible. Talking to Jews was one thing – they knew their Old Testament; and Paul made great use of the Old Testament promises when he spoke and wrote to Jews. But these Greeks now gathered around Paul knew nothing of the Old Testament. Talking to them is quite a different matter from talking to Jews. You notice that Paul now takes no quote from the Old Testament, as he reasons with them. He doesn't mention the Old Testament Bible, though everything he says is thoroughly biblical. Instead, he actually quotes from one of their own poets. It is a different approach, deliberately tailored to meet the special circumstances of his hearers.

I make the point that this is Paul's consistent method, when presenting the gospel to non-Jews – people without the Bible, people like those around us today. There is, for example, the brief account of what happened when the people of Lystra saw a miracle done by Paul (Acts 14:8–18). Again, Paul reasoned with them, not from the Old Testament, but from the fact of the natural creation and the goodness of the Creator. That was the only 'Bible' which those farmers of Lystra knew anything about.

In his letter to the church at Rome, which contained both Jews and Gentiles, Paul begins by addressing Gentiles in chapter 1, referring, (verses 19–20), to the evidence of the existence of God in the natural creation around them; again, that is the 'Bible' which Gentiles knew about. But in chapter 2 he turns to address the Jews (verse 17), and now he reasons from the Old Testament. So

the style of the sermon on Mars Hill was not a sudden thought, but was the *consistent* application, by Paul, of a biblical principle of communication in evangelising people who have no Bible.

Paul is deliberately *making himself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*, as he said on one occasion (1 Cor. 9:19). When presenting Bible truth to pagans Paul restricts himself to the limited understanding of his hearers, in order to win as many as possible. *To those not having the law* – i.e. biblically illiterate Gentiles – he *became like one not having the law* (1 Cor. 9:21). In other words, Paul began where his hearers were in their understanding of things. And it wasn't only Paul who adopted this practice.

I find it interesting to see how Matthew's approach in writing his Gospel differs from that of Luke. You know how, as you read Matthew's Gospel, he repeatedly uses such phrases as *What was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled ...* and, *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet ...* Matthew is writing for people who were familiar with the Old Testament prophecies. Matthew uses this formula something like 11 or 12 times.

Luke, on the other hand, doesn't use that formula (except on two occasions when he records what Jesus was saying to his own disciples, who were Jews, 21:22; 24:44). Luke, of course, was writing for Greek readers – his Gospel is addressed to *the most excellent Theophilus* (1:3). Whoever Theophilus was, it seems reasonable enough to suggest that he and other Greeks would not have had an intricate knowledge of the Hebrew Old Testament, as any Jew would have. Hence Luke does not make such use of Old Testament prophecies as Matthew does, because he wrote with a non-Jewish readership in mind.

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Being *all things to all people* was not just a Pauline idea, you see. In fact, you can find the same principle being demonstrated throughout the Scriptures. I'd love to explore that with you more fully, but it is not convenient now, for there are other matters we must come to.

Paul, then, is here addressing a biblically illiterate people. Consequently he doesn't quote directly from the Old Testament—though without doubt everything he says is completely biblical. And if we are to be biblical in outreach to our biblically illiterate society, we need to learn from Paul; what this means in practice I hope to suggest presently.

## **2. Comparing the decline in Greek History with that in British History**

But there is another parallel between Paul's situation and ours which is relevant to the matter of speaking to our neighbours of the Christian message today. There is quite an interesting similarity between the history of Athens before Paul arrived there, and recent English history which has led up to what our society is like today. The past is always the prologue of the present. Let me explain.

There was a time when Greece was a great world power, at the head of a huge empire. The influence of Greece stretched right out to Egypt, to Persia and on to the north of India. Some of the greatest human minds the world has known developed great literary, philosophical, artistic and architectural achievements in Greece which are still admired today. Pericles, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates – these are men whose renown rivals that of the great men of any nation.

But by Paul's day all that greatness had vanished.

By internal civil war, by disastrous conflicts with external enemies and by being taken over by the power of Rome, the glory of Greece – and of Athens in particular – faded and died away. Their great prosperity had led to proud self-confidence, and that in turn led to loss of moral fibre. The vigorous creative and ethical life of the nation was exhausted. It was in that cultural vacuum that the philosophies of the Epicureans and the Stoics arose, both of which have been described as 'philosophies of despair and cynicism'.

Perhaps you can recognise now something of the same sort of decline which shapes so much of the culture of our society today. For the glory of the once world-wide British Empire is a thing of distant memory now, and two great world wars have wearied our nation, too. We are no longer a great world power. The moral fibre of the nation is exhausted and philosophies of despair and cynicism have spawned again, here. We indeed are living on a 'Mars Hill'; so I suggest that gospel outreach around our homes today, if it is to be done responsibly as Paul did it, needs to follow the Pauline method. But this assumes what Paul did was the right thing to have done; was he right to do what he did? That question needs an answer.

## **3. Paul did not make a mistake in Athens**

I think it important to deal with the suggestion – not uncommo – that the paucity of the converts recorded at the close of Paul's sermon indicates that he was mistaken in what he did on Mars Hill. E.g. William Ramsay, *St Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, 1895, p.252). It has been suggested that when Paul subsequently went on to Corinth he realised his mistake in Athens, and consequently wrote to the Corinthians:

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When I came to you I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor. 2:1–4).

Now if it is true that Paul was wrong in Athens, then we have in Acts 17 a record of a serious Apostolic blunder. Did the Apostles make such serious mistakes? We know that Peter made a serious mistake as recorded in Galatians 2 – but we also there have a very clear indication that he was wrong. There is no such condemnation of Paul's sermon at Athens. I suggest that lack of condemnation must be significant.

In any case, it is not true to suggest that Paul so modified the gospel message in Athens that he omitted to mention *Christ and him crucified*. We are specifically told that Paul had been preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection (verse 18). To talk about Jesus is to talk about the Saviour; to talk about resurrection is to talk about a death. In those two facts you have the heart of the gospel message. In any case, we are specifically told (verse 18) *he did preach the good news – the evangel*.

Keep in mind the fact that it was in writing to this same Corinthian church that Paul indicated his careful practice of *becoming like one not having the law to those not having the law* (1 Cor. 9:21). He is telling them of his method of evangelism among biblically illiterate people. He is hardly likely to do that if, on Mars Hill, he made a grave mistake in what he did!

And, very significantly, the originator of the suggestion that Paul was wrong to do what he did in Athens later wrote,

I went too far ... I did not allow for the adaptation to different classes of hearers, in one case the tradesmen and middle classes of Corinth; in the other, the more strictly university and philosophic class in Athens.' (William Ramsay, *The teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day*, pp.110–111).

So the originator of the 'Pauline mistake' theory subsequently withdrew it.

Furthermore, Eusebius – the great historian of the early church – indicates that there was a church formed in Athens, and that Dionysius an Areopagite (one such was converted through Paul's ministry) was its first bishop. And although the Athens church seems to have had a chequered life initially, there is record of it again in AD 165, and also of it being represented at the Council of Nicea in the fourth century. Paul's brief visit to Athens was not fruitless; his sermon was not a mistake. But this leads us to a further comment.

#### **4. As a Generalisation, Paucity of Conversions in a Biblically Illiterate Situation is Normal**

The paucity of that initial response to Paul's preaching has a message for us in outreach around our homes today. It is a fact that the gospel always had greater success when preached on Jewish soil, or when presented to those who had been prepared for it by Old Testament knowledge, than in other circumstances. Think of the many thousands of converts from just one sermon in the earlier chapters of Acts, among Jews and proselytes who knew their Old Testament.

In contrast to that, nowhere in Bible records of preaching to non-Jews is anything like that success



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recorded. This surely underlines the fact that in a biblically illiterate situation the progress of the gospel is commonly slow, unless exceptionally, the Spirit of God is miraculously present in unusual power. We long for that special work of the Spirit, but meanwhile we are responsible to continue presenting the Christian message in the spiritual wilderness around us. We should not be surprised, nor despondent, at the paucity of result, for that is merely stark evidence of the reality of the blindness of unbelieving minds, precisely confirming what the Bible teaches about the unspiritual nature of men and women before conversion.

Now that we have looked briefly at the background of the Areopagus sermon, and seen its relevance to us today, we can look in a little more detail at Paul's approach to his hearers and, hopefully, appreciate his method.

## 5. Analysis of the Pauline Method

We need, first, to notice how Paul deliberately sets out to create a relationship between himself and his hearers. And he does this in several significant ways. Luke carefully describes this deliberate 'bridge-building', in his record of the event.

1. Paul, Luke tells us, first *reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks* (verse 17a). That is typically Paul's approach; wherever there was a synagogue he went to find Jews and their proselytes, with whom he could reason from their Old Testament Scriptures. But Luke adds another comment; Paul, he says, *taught as well in the marketplace day-by-day with those who happened to be there* (verse 17b). Now that is a very illuminating comment.

Whereas, in the synagogue, Paul adopted the

Jewish method of teaching in a fixed time and place, in the market place of the city, where the great teacher Socrates once taught, Paul used the Socratic method of teaching – that is, dialogue and discussion with groups of people as they stroll about the market place daily. He began acting as a Jew to the Jews in the synagogue, but now, in the market place, acts as a Greek to the Greeks. Had he restricted himself to the synagogue alone Paul would never have reached the Greeks with the gospel message.

What Paul has done is to seize the special opportunity which the peculiarly Greek culture provided, and place his message carefully in that setting. Long before Paul reached Athens, a famous Greek writer complained that the people 'loved to play the part of listeners to the tales of others' doings'. Paul is taking advantage of that well-known characteristic of Athenians. Luke's comment in verse 21 is not sarcastic – it is factual. Athens was a university town where one could pick-up all the latest ideas, in the market place.

2. Paul relates what he has to say to something which is very relevant to his hearers. *Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious* (verse 23). Athens was crowded with temples, altars and 'sacred' grottoes. All around him, on Mars Hill, Paul could see some of the most famous temples in Greece. So he begins where his hearers are – they are very religious. The Athenians were proud of their distinction as being the most religious of all nations.

Paul used a slightly ambiguous word *very religious* (*deisidaimon* – AV 'superstitious') which was straight out of ancient Greek writers, and could have a complimentary or derogatory sense (Cf. 22:19 for

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use of the term by Festus). Surrounded as he was by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, the use of that ambiguous word would have caught their attention – was Paul commending them or criticising? Paul is ‘bridge-building’ with great care. He is earning the right to speak. And then there comes the mention of that altar *to an unknown God*. So this man is going to talk about their own city, where there were a number of these altars – and he seems to be a very observant, relevant and knowledgeable fellow, especially if he knows the origin of those altars. Those are all factors which attract the attention of his listeners, build a ‘bridge’ and give Paul credibility in their eyes.

3. Paul makes use of the fact that there are Epicureans and Stoics in his audience. He would have been very familiar with those philosophies, for he was born and brought up in Tarsus where there was a strong Greek element and, in fact, a school which specialised in teaching Stoic philosophy. Interestingly, the piece of poetry which Paul quotes (verse 28) was from the writing of a Stoic poet. Paul knew the thinking of his hearers intimately. That made it possible for him to talk right into their attitude – and that is a very important advantage for anyone concerned with reaching out to people with the Christian message. It gives ‘street credibility’ to a message if the speaker can talk right into the listener’s mind-set.

4. Yet although Paul is concerned to build a ‘bridge’ into the minds of his hearers through politeness, through knowledge of their ways and of their thinking, in no way did he so modify the gospel as to rob it of its truth and its challenge. What he does, in fact, is to take some Epicurean and Stoic ideas, and shake them about in order to challenge them. If he cannot create faith – and he cannot –

at least he will create doubt in the minds of his hearers as to the validity of their own ideas. That is something we can, and should, always do – seek to create doubt about the validity of unbelievers’ ideas. The Epicureans believed that the universe came into existence by a chance combination of atoms. Instead, Paul told them it was this unknown God *who made the world and everything in it* (verse 24). They believed there were many gods, who lived far away and had no interest in the world. Instead, Paul told them this unknown God is *not far from each one of us* and that their ignorance of him was because they did not seek him and reach out for him (verse 27).

The Stoics believed in the supremacy of human reason, and that being guided by human reason we can be self-sufficient and perfect. No, said Paul; up till now this God you have not known has *overlooked your ignorance, but now commands all people everywhere to repent* (verse 30). The Stoics believed that at death the soul was absorbed into God. No, no, said Paul, this God you do not know *has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this by raising him from the dead* (verse 31).

There are other ways in which Paul’s words would have produced both interest in what he said and yet also brought severe challenge to both Epicureans and Stoics. But this last statement of a physical resurrection and judgement was more than either could bear to hear. The assembly breaks up with an outburst of derision. The Epicureans believed the gods were not interested in mankind; since there was no Creator, neither was there a Governor of human affairs. The Stoics believed they were perfect and had no need either of a Saviour or a Judge. In arrogant unbelief they mocked Paul.

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5. I have spent some time in looking closely at some of these points in Paul's address, because I wanted to emphasise the importance of his manner of approach. They had asked him to tell them about *the good news of Jesus and the resurrection* (verse 18). And that is exactly what he did – explaining why they needed good news and telling them of the consequences of the resurrection of Christ. The manner in which he did this is of great importance for us to notice.

He was courteous; he used arguments which were compelling by their reasonableness; he used their own confession that there was a god unknown to them and he quoted, when he could, from their own poets to support his arguments. He is not belittling them. Yet he manages to challenge their religious ideas by making clear that not to know the God of whom he spoke meant that they were necessarily ignorant. We do well to cultivate for ourselves this attitude of Paul; it is a humble attitude which springs from a love of those to whom we go, rather than a 'holier than thou' attitude of superiority, but it is not afraid to challenge illogical ideas of unbelief.

## **6. The Source of Paul's Courage?**

There is one more significant characteristic I see in Paul, as he stands on Mars Hill. I marvel at his sheer courage. Paul is standing where Socrates stood years before, on trial for his life because he was accused of *advocating strange gods* – the very same words they were using now of Paul! (verse 18b) Socrates was murdered by being made to drink poison. Now Paul stands on that very spot. Yet he is *not* intimidated!

The court of Areopagus was the highest court in the land. Yet Paul dares to throw their self-confessed ignorance into their faces (verse 23b).

Some of the greatest temples of Greece were gathered on and around Mars Hill, yet with a sweep of his arm this little Jew declares God does not live there (verse 24). Indeed, it is foolish, he says, to think that the Divine Being can be like an image made by mere humans (verse 29); your own poets tell you so, he says.

The Greeks persuaded themselves that they were a master-race on earth, and that all other races were barbarian. Not so, says Paul, for all races have descended from the same source, the same original man, and have the same blood (verse 26).

I want to know, how can Paul evangelise so courageously? There are two parts to the answer of that question. First, he had an overwhelming personal knowledge of Christ. He had seen, on the Damascus road, something of the glory of Christ. That was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. And second, he had been so *greatly distressed* (verse 16) at the sight of a city full of idols. Some of those idols no doubt were splendid works of art; but others were hideous representations of sexual immorality. The sights tore his soul. Idols were a sick caricature of what his glorious Lord was really like.

Once having seen the glory of Christ, how could his heart endure to see such ghastly images of what the Divine Being was thought to be like? And in these two facts you have the source of his courage. The knowledge of the glory of Christ, and a consequent awareness of the hideous offensiveness of idolatry will surely cause a believer to be fearless in seeking to reach others with Christian truth.

But in the absence of those two experiences there will be little courage to challenge the unbelief which gathers around us increasingly in our western culture today.

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## To Sum Up

1. I suppose it can be tempting to restrict ourselves to working among those of a Christian background. With that background in place we might feel that the cause of Christianity would be more successful. The problem is that, in our day, the number of those with a Christian background in this country is sadly diminishing. It was so with Paul – the further he got away from Palestine in his journeys so the fewer people he found with an Old Testament background. Undaunted, he turned to the Gentiles. And in Athens that meant going where the people were – into the market place. The question is, Where, today, is our ‘market place’ where people are? Where do you come into closest contact with unbelievers? That is where the gospel needs to be taken.

2. The immediate consequence of taking the gospel to people who are biblically illiterate is that – apart from some unusual and sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit – the results will seem small. Evangelism in such a situation has normally got to be a long-term effort, and cannot be done in a week of special meetings. In other words, it means a continuous work of outreach by the local church, rather than an itinerating ministry by an individual, helpful though that may be to a church.

3. Quite clearly, from the example of Paul, it is important to know well those to whom you wish to take the gospel. If you are to build a ‘bridge’ into someone’s life, over which it is your prayer that the biblical message may travel, there must be a relationship between yourself and them. Otherwise there is no way you can talk credibly into their situation. Mission is best done where you are known and where you know your hearers. Again, this is a long-term ministry and chiefly involves those with

whom you are most closely acquainted and not necessarily those who live around your place of worship.

I am not saying that you should never seek to reach out to people who are strangers to you; the point I make is that going to those who are unknown to you can generally be the hardest form of mission – unless the Lord should sovereignly and suddenly ‘break into’ that situation. Paul’s cosmopolitan background equipped him excellently to do what he did on Mars Hill, because he knew how they thought. To know your contact makes it easier to talk relevantly.

4. One great difficulty which commonly affects those who have been nurtured in the Christian faith for years is that they learn, almost inevitably, to express Christian truth in ‘the language of Zion’. Paul, as we have seen, did not express the gospel in Old Testament religious patterns, because his hearers would not have known what he was talking about if he had. The truths he presented *were* thoroughly biblical truths, yet were expressed within the limits of Athenian thought-patterns. Similarly, the words we use when we speak to the biblically illiterate need to be words *they* will understand.

Now you may want to come back at me at this point, reminding me that I said earlier that words like ‘sin’ and ‘God’ and ‘gospel’ do not mean, to the biblically illiterate, what they mean to believers. So how *can* we talk to them, using words *they* will understand? Just briefly; it is axiomatic that you cannot rightly understand the ‘technical’ terms used in *any* subject, until you understand them within the *whole* framework of that subject. Bible words, like ‘sin’, ‘God’, and ‘gospel’ can only be rightly understood within the whole framework of Bible truth.

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So if we want to talk meaningfully to biblically illiterate people it is vital that they have some idea of the 'big picture' – i.e. the *whole* framework of Bible truth. We are brought back again to the need for a good relationship with those to whom we would go, and to the fact that the process may well be a slow one – unless the Holy Spirit sovereignly and graciously exerts his quickening power in a remarkable way. It takes time to present the whole biblical picture, from creation to judgement, in order to convey the true meaning of biblical terms like 'sin', 'God' and 'gospel'.

But that is exactly what Paul did on Mars Hill – he went from the creation and the Creator, to the judgement and the Judge. Although Paul had been reared as a Hebrew and a Pharisee, probably knowing his Old Testament word for word, yet he takes the trouble, when in a pagan Greek city, to paint the 'big picture' of Bible truths in terms of his hearers' everyday language.

5. As well as the matter of the language we use, we must also be relevant to the actual needs of those to whom we go today. It is easy to answer questions which nobody is asking; but if you do, your irrelevance will rapidly convince the hearers that you have nothing to say to them of significance for their life today. Paul did not begin by attacking his hearers for being idolaters. Instead he seized upon their own admission that there was something they did

not know about – an unknown god. That made what Paul had to say intensely relevant to them. When you talk to the unbeliever, identify something he or she confesses not to know about; there's your opening!

One final word. Nothing I have said should be understood to mean that God cannot sovereignly use 'evangelism' which ignores all the rules that Paul has shown us, and nevertheless still reach the heart of the most biblically illiterate person. He can, and he does. Nor am I saying that if we do use the principles of communication which we find so clearly in Scripture, that God then just must bless our efforts with success. If he does, because it is his will, well and good – we give him the praise. But if he does not, because it is not his will, we must remain faithful anyway.

All I am saying is that it is our proper responsibility as faithful, if fallible, servants of God, to strive to follow those principles of biblical evangelism which are so clearly shown us throughout the Scriptures. Not to do so is to be careless of God's guidance, and that is surely a serious fault?

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It is nearly 30 years ago now that a little paperback appeared containing choice quotations from over 145 different Puritans.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the eminently quotable William Gurnall (1617–1679) and Thomas Watson (c.1620–1686), the most quoted individual there appears to be Thomas Adams. Gurnall and Watson are relatively well known but who is this Thomas Adams?

He is the man who has been ranked above ‘silver-tongued’ Henry Smith by John Brown<sup>2</sup> and who has been described as ‘one of the most gifted preachers’<sup>3</sup> of his day and the ‘greatest of all early Puritan divines’.<sup>4</sup>

With well over a million words in print, he is a bright star in a veritable galaxy of 17th Century divines whose reputation today rests chiefly in their literary output. In his own day, Adams was often quoted in commonplace books.<sup>5</sup> Today he is largely forgotten but his works are still available and are still quoted.

## His only monument

As for the man himself, scant detail regarding his life outside the pulpit exists.<sup>6</sup> ‘The man we cannot see,’ wrote Joseph Angus in 1866 ‘nor have we found a witness that has seen him’. Or as WH Stowell put it 20 years before, ‘His only monument is in his works’.<sup>7</sup>

Our ignorance is so great that we know neither where or when he was born, nor when he died.<sup>8</sup> It was uncertain at one time whether he was a university man but evidence has apparently surfaced to say that he graduated from Cambridge, BA in 1601 and MA in 1606.<sup>9</sup> We also know that at some point he married and had a son and two daughters, the latter predeceasing him in 1642 and 1647. Probably he

was born in the early 1580s, in the reign of Elizabeth I. As for his death, we know that in 1653 he was in ‘necessitous and decrepit old age’.<sup>10</sup> It would seem that he ‘relied upon the charity of his former parishioners during the final months of his life’ which presumably came while in his seventies, before the Restoration of 1660.

A further known date is his ordination in 1604, the year after James came to the English throne. The following year Adams was licensed to the curacy of Northill, Bedfordshire, but was soon dismissed when Northill College Manor was sold. By 1611 it seems that he was vicar in the village of Willington, near Bedford, where he remained until 1614, pursuing a ministry of preaching and putting sermons into print. While at Willington, he preached at least once before the Bedford clergy at an Archdeacon’s visitation and twice from Paul’s cross. ‘the open air pulpit in the church yard of St Paul’s Cathedral’ known as Paul’s Cross.<sup>11</sup> These sermons were published, as was the common practice at the time.

## These may preach when the author cannot

It is difficult at this remove to appreciate how popular preaching and printed sermons were in this period. The reading public was far greater than historians once thought and there was a flood of literature of all sorts to sate its appetite. This flood inevitably spilled over and affected more illiterate sections of the population too. Historian Alexandra Walsham has written of an explosion of cheaply priced printed texts designed to entertain, edify, and satisfy the thirst of a rapidly expanding reading public for information ... Hawked and chanted at the doors of theatres, alehouses, and other habitual meeting spots, and displayed for sale in shops in the vicinity of St Paul’s churchyard, they also penetrated the

provinces and countryside to a degree which is only gradually coming to light.<sup>12</sup>

The nation's preachers seem initially simply to have bewailed this flood of largely unhelpful literature. Then, reluctantly at first, they began to swell it with the most wholesome material they could produce in various formats, from cheap unbound booklets to high quality folio editions. An incentive to putting sermons into print was the fact that unscrupulous printers might otherwise produce pirated and potentially inaccurate editions, so great was the demand for such material. While sermons undoubtedly held little attraction for some, there was a sizeable number for whom 'they were like an addictive and intoxicating drug'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps especially in London preaching was as much a communal gathering as a solemn spiritual event, to which restive and wayward youth eagerly swarmed.

In general, both hearers of preaching and readers of sermons were many and varied.<sup>14</sup> Adams himself says never did the Egyptians call so fast upon the Israelites for making of bricks, as the people call on us for the making of sermons;<sup>15</sup>

He was one of many who sought to capitalise on this interest through printed sermons. Various means were used to reduce sermons to print. We do not know what happened in Adams' case but judging from the presentation of the material and its general lack of literary (as opposed to homiletical) polish, it would seem that amanuenses were employed to record Adams' sermons verbatim.<sup>16</sup>

Sensitive to accusations of simply affecting to be a man in print, in 1630 he rehearses a popular argument for printing sermons in his dedication 'to the candid and ingenious reader'.

Speech is only for presence, writings have their use in absence ... our books may come to be seen where ourselves

shall never be heard. These may preach when the author cannot, and (which is more) when he is not.<sup>17</sup>

It had been profitable when he spoke it and now he hopes it will be profitable in written form.<sup>18</sup>

### **A popular city preacher**

In 1614, Adams accepted an appointment as Vicar of Wingrave, Buckinghamshire, residing there until 1618. While at Wingrave, he seems to have taken up a lectureship<sup>19</sup> at St Gregory's, a church dating from the 7th Century near to the old St Paul's Cathedral. It was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. The *Dictionary of National Biography* also mentions a chaplaincy at this time to Sir Henry Montague, later Earl of Manchester, the Lord Chief Justice or Privy-seal.<sup>20</sup> During the Wingrave years, Adams published several collections of sermons and was in demand as a popular city preacher.

He retained his lectureship at St Gregory's until at least 1623, but as King James, following the Synod of Dort, became increasingly pro-Arminian and discouraged lectureships (even before Laud began outlawing them), this probably came to an end. By 1619 Adams was rector of nearby St Benner's, Paul's Wharf. He resided here it seems until his death, dependent on fluctuating funds available to St Paul's. In December 1623 his wife died. There is no evidence that he remarried.

Still much in demand, he preached his final sermons at Paul's Cross in 1623 and 1624. *The Temple* commemorated King James's preservation from the gunpowder plot. *Three Sermons*, 1625, suggests continued prominence as it includes sermons for the Lord Mayor's election, the triennial visitation of the Bishop of London and mourners at Whitehall two days after James's death.

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## A doctrinal Puritan

It is difficult to explain the abrupt disappearance from public view that follows. Much of Adams' preaching would have been distasteful to Laud, Bishop of London by 1628, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633. He increasingly worked to silence any suspected of Puritan leanings. It may be significant that Adams' friend and patron, metaphysical poet John Donne, died in 1631.<sup>21</sup> Donne had been Dean of St Paul's since 1621. His removal may have diminished Adams' standing. At the same time, Adams' staunch defence of the monarchy and ecclesiastical hierarchy must have counted for something. Perhaps it was his strong Calvinism, his view that matters of ceremony were 'indifferent', his fierce criticism of the popish 'idolatry' that threatened to creep back in and his popularity, that combined to bring about his disappearance from public view.<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, he had few friends on the Puritan side and their rise to power in the 1640s would not have helped him either.<sup>23</sup> He was denounced in a 1647 Puritan tract as a known profane pot-companion, ... and otherwise a loose liver, a temporising ceremony monger, and malignant against the parliament.<sup>24</sup>

His loyalty to the king, tolerance of ceremony and support for episcopalian church government would have made him objectionable to many. Unable to escape the political vicissitudes of his times, Adams may well have been sequestered as were many clergy unsympathetic to the Parliamentary cause.<sup>25</sup> Angus is sceptical and suggests that other factors may have brought the living to an end. By 1642 he was probably no longer Rector of St Bennet's, though

probably remaining in the rectory.

Stowell and Angus helpfully speak of Adams as a 'Doctrinal Puritan' in order to emphasise that although he was Calvinistic, Anti-papist and a preacher of the Word, he did not make a stand on issues of rites, forms and ceremonies from the church's Roman past.<sup>26</sup> Adams prized unity and often railed against the schismatic tendencies of some in the Puritan party.<sup>27</sup>

## Being the sum

The first of Adams' sermons at Paul's Cross (*The Gallant's Burden*) appeared as early as 1612 and had passed through three printings by 1616. The sermon of 1613, *The White Devil*, became his most popular and had gone through five editions by 1621. Other single and collected sermons followed and in 1616 he completed his short treatise *Diseases of the Soul*. In 1618 he issued *The Happiness of the Church*, consisting of 27 sermons gathered for the press, probably during a period of illness. In 1629 and again in 1630 his works appeared in a full folio edition of over 1200 pages.

Because of his peculiar position, Adams was neglected in the 18th Century but in 1847 some sermons were reprinted. Editor WH Stowell, president of the Independent College in Rotherham, thought there was little likelihood of the works being reproduced as a whole.<sup>28</sup> However, in the 1860s a group of six Scottish ministers came together to expedite publication of the Works in three unequal volumes 'Being the sum of his sermons, meditations and other divine and moral discourses'.<sup>29</sup>

These volumes contain some 65 sermons, set out in biblical rather than chronological order. They



include *The soul's sickness*, a 35 page treatise, plus the 180 page *Meditations on the creed*. The volumes also contain a memoir by Baptist Dr Joseph Angus and other brief introductory materials.<sup>30</sup> They were reproduced by a California based company in 1998.

Apart from two final sermons from 1652 (*God's Anger and Man's Comfort*) added to the later collected works from copies found in the British Museum, Adams' only other published work is his massive commentary on II Peter. He appears to have worked on this major project from 1620–1633, the year of its first appearance. It was revised and corrected by James Sherman of Surrey Chapel and published in 1839. It was reproduced in the 1990s by another American publishing house.

### **The prose Shakespeare of Puritan theologians**

The 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of Adams that

His numerous works display great learning, classical and patristic, and are unique in their abundance of stories, anecdotes, aphorisms and puns.

It argues that his printed sermons 'placed him beyond all comparison in the van of the preachers of England'. It also quotes Robert Southey's oft-repeated suggestion that he be considered 'the prose Shakespeare of Puritan theologians'. *Britannica* itself suggests that he 'had something to do with shaping John Bunyan' and, following Southey, draws favourable comparisons with Thomas Fuller, for wit, and Jeremy Taylor, for imagination. Along with Adams' known friendship with Donne, it is no surprise that he, like Bunyan and some few others, has attracted the attention of University English departments as well as historians and evangelical believers.

He has been spoken of as being 'weighty in thought and vigorous in style'.<sup>31</sup> Walsham refers to him as 'That most poetical of Jacobean preachers'.<sup>32</sup>

Angus assembles a host of names from the worlds of literature and divinity that have been linked with Adams.

In his youth he was the contemporary of the race that adorned the reign of Elizabeth, Spenser, Shakespeare and Jonson, Bacon and Raleigh. Among the men of his own age were Bishops Hall and Andrewes, Sibbes, the author of 'the Bruised Reed' and 'the Soul's Conflict', Fuller the historian, and now in the church and now out of it, Hildersham and Byfield and Cartwright. Earle was busy writing and publishing the *Microcosmography* and Overbury had already issued his 'Characters'.<sup>33</sup> A little before him flourished Arminius and Whitgift, Hooker and Reynolds; and a little after him Hammond and Baxter, Taylor and Barrow, Leighton and Howe. There is evidence that Adams had read the works of several of his predecessors and contemporaries and he has been compared with nearly all the writers we have named. His scholarship reminds the reader of that 'great gulf of learning' Bishop Andrewes.<sup>34</sup> In sketching a character he is not inferior to Overbury or Earle. In fearless denunciations of sin, in pungency and pathos, he is sometimes equal to Latimer or to Baxter. For fancy, we may, after Southey, compare him with Taylor; for wit, with Fuller. In one sermon at least, that on the Temple, there is an occasional grandeur that brings to memory the kindred treatise of Howe. Joseph Hall is probably the writer he most resembles; in richness of scriptural illustration, in fervour of feeling, in soundness of doctrine he is certainly equal; in learning, and power, and thought, he is superior.<sup>35</sup>

To the names mentioned here perhaps we could add those of the early Puritans Richard Greenham and Henry Smith. William Haller writes of the characteristic of Greenham and Smith's sermons as being 'plain and perspicuous' in that they are

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composed in straightforward lucid sentences not without wit but avoiding preciosity and the ostentation of erudition.

They were also influenced by the mediaeval tradition of making war on wickedness 'by attacking its several varieties', leading to 'more or less realistic description of actual manners and morals', the creation of 'characters' and the portrayal of social types. Haller goes on to say that these traits in Greenham and Smith are also found, in varying degrees, in other Calvinists and Puritans of the time. Alluding to Southey's statement, he cites Adams as No Shakespeare but a late and extreme though brilliant example of the persistence of these traditions.<sup>36</sup>

### Lessons in homiletics

It is perhaps the superior homiletical and literary quality of his work that stands out in Adams. It is one of the things that makes him notable. In these areas he shows strength at every point and there are lessons for preachers today to learn.

*Title.* Firstly, there are the very titles of some sermons. The works contain nearly 60 different ones. Many are striking. For example, *A generation of serpents; Mystical Bedlam; The sinner's passing bell; England's sickness; The Black Saint; Majesty in misery; The White Devil; Spiritual Eye-salve; Love's copy.* Giving good titles to sermons is perhaps a dying art in some quarters that could be usefully revived.

*Introduction.* He often has good introductions. For example

A true Christian's life is one day of three meals, and every meal hath in it two courses. His first meal is ... to be born a sinner, and to be new born a saint ... His second meal is ... to do well, and to suffer ill ... His third meal is, ... to die a temporal death, to live an eternal life.

Or

The great bishop of our souls now being at the ordination of his ministers, having first instructed them *in via Domini*, doth here discipline them *in vita discipuli*; ... How important it is for a preacher to grab his hearer's attention from the start.

*Text.* Angus commends the choice of texts, each of which is for him a sermon in itself. 'Have we rightly appreciated in the modern pulpit' he asks 'the importance of a good text?'<sup>38</sup> Sometimes the texts are carefully placed in their context, often they are not.

*Variety.* The printed sermons range from Genesis to Revelation. Some 27 are from Old Testament texts. Over 60% of these are, perhaps unsurprisingly, from the wisdom books.<sup>39</sup> Of the 38 New Testament texts, over 30% are from the Gospels and nearly half from Paul and Hebrews. In some instances we have brief consecutive series of sermons.

*Structure.* The structure of the sermons is not the later Puritan pattern of exposition, then doctrine then uses or application. Among stranger approaches include *The Gallants Burden* which includes sketches, in the tradition of the medieval descriptio, of four 'scorners' who destroy the commonwealth – atheists, epicures, libertines and 'common profane' clergy; the way *The White Devil* includes a series of twelve characters modelled on Hall and, most unusually, the examination of the nature, cause, symptoms and cure of nineteen bodily diseases with an allegorical scrutiny of parallel vices that plague the soul, in *Diseases of the Soul* from 1616.<sup>41</sup> Even when his sermon structure is formally typical, Adams often transcends it with striking ways of presenting the material. On Hebrews 13:8 he has three points but speaks, most engagingly, of a centre, a circumference and a mediate line.

The immovable centre is Jesus Christ. The circumference, that runs around about him here, is eternity ... The mediate line referring them is, *ó aútós*, the same: ...

In one particularly striking example, on Ecclesiastes 9:3, he takes the phrases in order *The heart of the sons of men is full of evil*, then *and madness is in their heart while they live*, finally *and after that they go to the dead*. His powerful imagination is so active that he comes up with no less than six conceits in which to couch his three points. Grammar – man's comma, colon, period; journey – setting forth, peregrination, journey's end; arrow – born from the bow, wild flight, into the grave; argument – harsh and unpromising proposition, wickedness; hopeless proposition, madness; inevitable conclusion, death; race – man's beginning full of evil, the further he goes the worse it is, in frantic flight he falls into the pit; stairs – a three step descent.

*Illustrations, etc.* The points themselves are fleshed out with quotations, sayings, classical allusions, illustrations, stories and fables, similes, metaphors and similar devices.<sup>42</sup> He often uses Latin and, rarely, Greek, but this is nearly always translated. Often he quotes the Latin to show an alliterative connection not found in English. His favourite ecclesiastical authors are early church fathers such as Augustine, Ambrose and Chrysostom and Bernard of Clairvaux. He also quotes from secular classical authors, Reformers and near contemporaries.

One can get the flavour from these quotations, chosen almost at random,

It is not a sufficient commendation of a prince to govern peaceable and loyal subjects, but to subdue or subvert rebels. It is the praise of a Christian to order refractory and wild affections, more than to manage yielding and pliable ones.<sup>43</sup>

He runs about the seats like a pick-purse; and if he sees a roving eye he presents objects of lust; if a drowsy head, he rocks him asleep, and gives him a nap just the length of the sermon; if he spies a covetous man, he transports his soul to his counting house; and leaves nothing before the preacher but a mindless trunk ... which way soever a wicked man uses his tongue, he cannot use it well ... He bites by detraction, licks by flattery; ... All the parts of his mouth are instruments of wickedness.<sup>44</sup>

lips, teeth, throat, tongue. The psalmographer on every one of these has set a brand of wickedness ... This is a monstrous and fearful mouth; where the porter, the porch, the entertainer, the receiver, are all vicious. The lips are the porter, and that is fraud; the porch, the teeth, and there is malice; the entertainer, the tongue, and there is lying; the receiver, the throat, and there is devouring.<sup>45</sup>

*Brief and pithy sentences.* The love of brief and pithy, often alliterative sayings is a characteristic of his work. Examples abound. Again we choose at random

- ... many go to hell with the water of baptism on their faces and the assurance of salvation in their mouths.
- Generation lost us; it must be regeneration that recovers us.
- If men were God's friends, they would frequent God's house: there is little friendship to God where there is no respect of his presence, nor affection for his company.
- Worldly friends are but like hot water, that when cold weather comes, are soonest frozen.
- If we open the doors of our hearts to his Spirit, he will open the doors of heaven to our spirit. If we feast him with a 'supper' of grace, Rev 3:20, he will feast us with a supper of glory.<sup>46</sup>

*Exposition.* The scriptural hermeneutic is generally sound, though some expositions are rather idiosyncratic. Sometimes individual words are taken up and expounded in a surprising but generally profitable way. Scripture serves both as a source book for illustrations and supporting arguments.

*Expansion.* Another feature is the way Adams will often take up a minor point and expand on it. Because Proverbs 14:9 speaks of fools in the plural Adams distinguishes the sad, glad, haughty and naughty fool. In *A contemplation of the herbs* it is the one word *herbs* from Hebrews 6:7 that leads to his consideration of some 13 herbs or flowers, to each of which he attaches a virtue, which he then expounds. Adams' method means that almost every line is rich with spiritual teaching. One cannot read very far in his sermons without finding something spiritually striking and wholesome. In a subsequent essay we would like to conclude by dwelling more on the content of his sermons and what he has to teach us particularly about aspects of Christian piety.

*To be continued.*

## References

- 1 D E Thomas, *A Puritan Golden Treasury* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977)
- 2 According to Moira P Baker, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: British Prose Writers of the Early Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 151, ed. Clayton D Lein (Detroit, Gale Publishers, 1995), pp.3–10.
- 3 WK Jordan, *The development of religious toleration in England 1603–1640* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1936), p.155.
- 4 W Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of its Literary Aspects* (New York, Russell and Russell, 1932, reprinted 1962); quoted by Baker.
- 5 *Works*, 3, p.x. Referring to the Library of William Bentley, preserved in Allegheny College, Edwin Wolf says interestingly 'He did own, as did most colonial Americans who had a shelf of folios, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, the works of Thomas Adams, ... the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes'. Cf <http://library.allegheny.edu/Special/ObservationsPt1.htm>.
- 6 Most of the material here is gleaned from Baker. She says '... the eclipse of his reputation belies the achievement of his earlier career and his enduring stature as a gifted preacher.'
- 7 WH Stowell, Introduction, *The three divine sisters*, etc. (London, Thomas Nelson, 1847), p.lxi.
- 8 Thomas Adams is not an unusual name and it may be worth making clear that our man is not the Brasenose fellow and rector of St Mildred's ejected in 1662, author of 'the main principles of Christian religion' who died in 1670 or the rector of Wintringham and author of 'Private thoughts' who died in 1784.
- 9 This also fits with his remark that universities were 'nurseries of Christian learning' *Works*, 2, p.112. NB 'For only about 5% (38) of the [London] lecturers is there good reason to suppose that they did not attend university at all.' Paul Seaver, *The Puritan lectureships the politics of religious dissent 1560–1662* (Stanford, CA, Stanford UP, 1970), p.181.
- 10 Cf. *Works*, 3, pp.lvi, 264.
- 11 Cf. Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford UP, 1999), p.281. She calls it a 'rostrum contemporaries revered as the "chiefest Watchtower" and the very "stage of this land"' and reproduces a crude 1625 woodcut of Thomas Brewer preaching there.

At <http://www.britannia.com/history/londonhistory/paulcross.html> there are better visuals and a digest of a 1925 article by E Beresford Chancellor saying that it was the setting, perhaps the inspiration in part, for some of the most pregnant scenes in London's, indeed England's, history. Even before it was the cathedral pulpit, it was a traditional spot for announcing proclamations, civil and religious. At times of national crisis, Londoners were drawn there as by a magnet. Its history goes back at least to the 13th Century. Down the years declarations, proclamations and public confessions were made there; impostors and frauds were exposed, traitors denounced, sermons preached, books burned. In the late 15th Century the pulpit was rebuilt. Largely of timber, mounted on steps of stone with a lead covered roof and a low wall around, it held three or four. It was said that 'All the Reformation was accomplished from the Cross.' It fell into disuse early in Elizabeth's reign but was revived and continued until swept away in 1643. From then the site remained unmarked until in 1910 a new cross was built. It marks the site today.

12 Walsham, p.33.

13 Walsham, p.61.

14 Walsham, p.62. Adams complains of 'perfunctory hearing', *Works*, 2, p.271 and 'How many sermons are lost whiles you bring not with you the vials of attention.' 'You come frequently to the wells of life,' he complains 'but you bring no pitchers with you.' The people either lack mouths to receive the balm of grace or bottoms to retain it. *Works*, 3, p.366.

15 Typically, he cannot resist adding 'and our allowance of materials is much alike!' Cf. *Works*, 2, p.169. He also asks of London 'What city in the world is so rich in her spiritual provision as this? Some whole countries within the Christian pale have not so many learned and painful pastors as be within these walls and liberties.' *Works*, 2, p.271. Cf. 'In its preaching, as in so many other respects, London was without rival. Nowhere else were there so many lectureships packed into so small an area ...' Seaver, p.121.

16 Cf. 'I know you have long looked for an end, I never delighted in prolixity.' *Works*, 1, p.421; '... it hath led me further than either my purpose or your patience would willingly have allowed me.' *Works*, 2, p.38; 'You see the measure [the hour glass]. Only give me leave to set you down two short rules ...' *Works*, 2, p.45; 'I am loath to give you a bitter farewell, or

to conclude with a menace. I see I cannot, by the time's leave, drink to you any deeper in this cup of charity ...' *Works*, 2, p.412. His printed sermons vary in length. Possibly material was added.

17 *Works*, 3, p.ix

18 *Works*, 3, p.xvii.

19 Lectureships, especially popular in London, were a Puritan attempt to promote preaching. 'These lecturers (almost entirely called and supported by the laity) created a situation in which much of the preaching in the city took place outside of normal ecclesiastical lines of authority,' Dever, *Richard Sibbes Puritanism and Calvinism in late Elizabethan and early Stuart England* (Macon, GA, Mercer UP), p.81. A full study can be found in Seaver.

20 Adams dedicated his works to Montague and to William, Earl of Pembroke, Lord Chamberlain and privy counsellor, founder of Pembroke College, Oxford. Immediate successors of both served in the Westminster Assembly.

21 John Donne (1572–1631) 'England's greatest love poet', a leader of the metaphysical school, he is also noted for his religious verse, treatises and sermons. Adams dedicated *The Barren Tree*, preached at Paul's Cross, 1623, to Donne. Daniel Doerksen ('Milton and the Jacobean Church of England', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 1.1, 1995) helpfully points out how in the 1620s '... there was no great divide between moderate conformists like John Donne and moderate or even fully conforming puritans.' He notes that Donne was not only Adams' friend but had been able to 'satisfy the benchers at Lincoln's Inn, where his predecessor and successor as reader in divinity were the moderate puritans Thomas Gataker and John Preston.' He says 'There is good evidence to show that ... Donne ... was not essentially a Laudian, but identified strongly with the rather Calvinist Jacobean Church.'

22 For evidence of Calvinism, cf. Angus, *Works*, 3, pp.xxvii, xxviii. In a piece of unwarranted hyperbole, he says 'Adams is as fair a representative of Calvinistic doctrine as Calvin himself!' Thinking on the Jacobean church has altered greatly since the 16th Century. It is no longer acceptable to posit the idea that Anglicans and Puritans were distinct and coherent groups, with no middle ground. It is incorrect to suppose that there were no moderate or non-separatist Puritans or that only Puritans were Calvinist and interested in doctrine and preaching. Doerksen

says that Milton's high esteem for Calvin was probably shared by most leaders of the Jacobean church. Anti-popish sentiments abound in Adams. To complaints of excess he answers 'I can often pass his door and not call in, but if he meets me full in the face and affronts me, for good manners' sake, ... I must change a word with him.' *Works*, 1, p.203

23 Phrases such as this could have been seized upon 'The unicorn—that is, the hypocrite—the foul-breasted, fair-crested, factious Puritan hath but one horn, but therewith he doth no small mischief,' 'And there be bawling curs, rural ignorants; that blaspheme all godliness under the name of Puritanism.' *Works*, 2, pp.118–119.

24 Cf Baker, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

25 Cf. Angus, relying on Newcourt's *Repertorium*, *Works*, 3, pp. ix, xiii.

26 Cf Angus, *Works*, 3, p.xiii; Stowell, p.xiv.

27 He speaks of Anglican efforts to deal with Roman ceremonies by reducing them 'for their number to paucity, for their nature to purity, for their use to significancy'. 'Separate we not then from the church' he says 'because the church cannot separate from all imperfection'. *Works*, 2, p.156.

28 Stowell, p.lxii.

29 The General Editor was Thomas Smith. A further selection appeared later under the editorship of John Brown, *The Sermons of Thomas Adams, The Shakespeare of Puritan Theologians* (London, Cambridge UP, 1909).

30 The memoir was originally to have been executed by CH Spurgeon but he was unwell.

31 Cf. Article on preaching in *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* available on-line at <http://www.ccel.org>.

32 Walsham, p.281.

33 John Earle (1601?–1665) Bishop of Salisbury in his final years, wrote *Microcosmography*, a collection of witty characterisations, his best known work, 1628. Thomas Overbury (1581–1613) enormously popular poet and essayist, his sketch in verse, *A Wife* (1614), outlines his idea of the perfect wife. To it he added over 80 character sketches, 'a collection marked by its extravagant fancy, pungent wit, and flippant mockery of social folly'. 'One of the most striking literary features of Adams' sermons is his ubiquitous use of the satiric prose character, a form introduced into English prose by Joseph Hall ... Drawing upon both Hall and the Overburians,

Adams shapes characters appropriate to his preaching of conversion.'

34 Though Adams is often compared with Taylor, Andrewes and Donne, Seaver is still clear on the difference between 'a witty sermon preached by Lancelot Andrewes or John Donne' and 'one in the plain style of Richard Sibbes or Thomas Adams'.

Cf. Seaver, p.181.

35 Angus, p.xxi.

36 William Hailer, *Rise of Puritanism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), pp.30–31.

37 *Works*, 3, p. 22; *Works*, 2, p.109.

38 Angus, p.xxv.

39 John H Primus, *Richard Greenham: Portrait of an Elizabethan Pastor* (Macon, Georgia, Mercer UP, 1998) notes that Greenham had a similar preference for Psalms and Proverbs.

40 Series of consecutive sermons are found on Genesis 25:27 (2); Psalm 66:12, 13 (3); God's bounty Proverbs 3:16 (2); *The fatal banquet*, Proverbs 9:17–18 (4); Jeremiah 8:22 (4); Matthew 2:11–12 (2); Ephesians 5:2 (3); Hebrews 6:7–8 (5).

41 Other examples, the hunt figure (*Politic Hunting*, 1629) where he structures his characters of the powerful who prey on the weak by depicting the depopulator as a wild boar, the cheater a crafty fox, the usurer a wolf, the grain engrosser a badger. We have mentioned *A Generation of Serpents*, 1629. He uses a similar approach in his references to thorns, briars and brambles rending the flesh of the commonwealth in *A Forest of Thorns*, 1616. *Eirenopolis* allegorises London's gates in an appeal for peace amid the growing factionalism of the time.

42 Adams argues 'God has given us ... liberty ... not only to nakedly lay down the truth, but with the helps of invention, wit, art, to prevent the loathing his manna ... But ... all our hopes can scarce help one soul to heaven.' *Works*, 1, p.335.

43 *Works*, 1, p.265.

44 *Works*, 2, p.39.

45 *Works*, 3, p.21.

46 *Works*, 1, pp.62, 256; *Works*, 2, pp.83, 138; *Works*, 3, p.37.

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Reformed Christianity is a major stream of the world Christian movement. Most of Protestantism, with the exception of Lutheranism and the Anabaptists, has branched off from Calvinism, even if in forms most Calvinists would disapprove. An historical understanding of Calvinism is therefore vitally important if we are to understand Christianity in the present.

If there is one book among all that I mention that you should read it is *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* by Philip Benedict.<sup>1</sup> Subtitled 'A Social History of Calvinism', this book is an account of the emergence and development of what has become known as Calvinism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Philip Benedict is not a church historian as such and indeed not a Christian. In the preface he mentions that he is an agnostic Jew who, unlike John McNeill who wrote an earlier history of Calvinism, is not writing from within the tradition. However he writes with remarkable insight and sensitivity to both the spiritual life of the Reformed churches and the doctrinal issues they faced. Benedict is a professor of history at Brown University in Rhode Island and a leading authority on the Huguenots. The book is elegantly and clearly written and reads easily. It is a joy to read such a book. In addition to its massive scholarship, one of the strengths of the book is its sensitivity to the human dimension of the Calvinist movement. There are numerous anecdotes and vignettes of ordinary people seeking to live out their faith in often very difficult circumstances. Unlike many historians Benedict takes seriously the faith commitment of many of the leading figures. For example, dealing with the Calvinism of many of the princes in the German Palatinate he recounts how many of them had become convinced Calvinists at university in Switzerland or Holland or England and that their

motivation in trying to reform the churches in their principalities was genuinely spiritual and not primarily political.

The book is divided into four main sections. In the first Benedict examines the formation of the Reformed tradition within Protestantism. Beginning with the differences between Martin Luther and Carlstadt, Benedict discusses the formative influences of Zwingli, Bullinger, à Lasco and Calvin. By 1555 the emerging Reformed movement had experienced, in Benedict's words, a 'modest but strategic expansion', but in the decades to follow the movement experienced an explosion of growth. That is the theme of the second section, 'The Expansion of a Tradition'. What is significant about this growth was that initially at least it was not imposed by the magistrate, but rather emerged from below as groups of Christians met together for Bible study. Benedict argues that Calvinism was more adaptable than Lutheranism to local circumstances and became a more clearly defined alternative to Roman Catholicism. In this section Benedict explores the development of Calvinism in France, Scotland, The Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, England, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania. Benedict is understandably excellent on France, but his treatment of Eastern Europe is particularly illuminating. What is interesting is the way that the movement adapted to the different political, cultural and social contexts in which it spread.

In the third section, 'The Transformation of a Tradition', Benedict examines the theological disputes in the Age of Orthodoxy with particular emphasis on the disputes surrounding the doctrine of predestination, the role of the Sabbath in British Calvinism, the development of scholastic theology,

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Puritan practical divinity, covenant theology and the rise of rationalism. Calvinism in this period cannot be understood without reference to its political context. The change of the religion of the ruling prince affected the fortunes of Calvinism, especially in states where it was dependent on his favour for its establishment. In the Palatinate the picture was very confusing as a Calvinist father might give way to a Lutheran son or a Catholic relation and the religion of the state changed accordingly. Benedict has a whole chapter devoted to the problems of British Calvinism from the early Stuarts to the Restoration and the recognition of Protestant pluralism. The fourth and final section, 'New Calvinist Men and Women', looks at what Calvinism meant to ordinary people. Contrary to what some might think Calvinism was not simply a system of religion imposed on reluctant populations, but was often a popular movement. In this section Benedict focuses on three areas: the ministry of pastors, elders, deacons and teachers, church discipline and the practice of piety. The latter chapter on piety is particularly illuminating if all too brief as Benedict examines how Calvinism sank deep roots in human lives and communities through corporate worship, family religion, catechizing, and the nurture of the godly life.

The conclusion is the most disappointing section of the book as Benedict reflects on the impact of Calvinism on the modern world. Understandably as a 'secular' historian he does not have a confessional interest in Calvinism and while admitting its obvious significance for those who are that is not his concern. But in looking at the impact of Calvinism on western society he questions, as have a number of recent historians, how much Calvinism as such contributed to the advance of science or the

development of capitalism and liberal democracy. In the end he seems to think that Calvinism's greatest legacy to contemporary society is its history of resistance to tyranny and the abuse of power. But in spite of its somewhat downbeat ending I wholeheartedly recommend this book. It is not perfect. Readers may have reservations about how Benedict handles some of the doctrinal developments. Possibly the book is not as much a social history of Calvinism as it claims to be. Considering its scope Benedict is stronger in some areas than in others. But who is capable of mastering all the languages and history required to deal in consistent depth with such a diverse movement as Calvinism? No, all Calvinists should be thankful to Philip Benedict for his achievement in writing such an excellent book that captures something of the remarkable movement that Calvinism was and continues to be.

Several of Benedict's articles on French Protestantism are brought together in *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-1650*.<sup>2</sup> These articles deal with a fascinating variety of subjects that together offer a glimpse into the world of French Protestantism in the period between the end of the Wars of Religion and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He studies the make up of the Reformed communities in towns such as Alençon and Montpellier, the significance of book and painting ownership, Protestant devotion, relationships with Roman Catholics. One of the most fascinating chapters is the one dealing with the Breton reformed pastor Philippe Le Noir de Crevain in which we see how one pastor dealt with the conflict of his literary ambitions and pastoral responsibilities and ultimately having to flee the country. This book is a good example of the value of social history for church history. More focused but



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still dealing with the same subject is *Huguenot Heartland* by Philip Conner.<sup>3</sup> In this book Conner looks at a community where Protestants were in the majority and how that shaped its self-understanding and practice of religion.

One of the most significant Reformed leaders in the last two centuries is Abraham Kuyper. His monumental achievements as a pastor, churchman, theologian, educator, journalist and politician are well known. In *A Free Church, A Holy Nation – Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology*<sup>4</sup> John Bolt offers us a fascinating and very stimulating study of Kuyper's political theology as applied to the American context. This book delivers far more than it promises. I thought it would be a rather interesting study of Kuyper's thinking on politics, but in fact it is a three-way interaction between that, the contemporary American culture wars and American history. There is much interest in Kuyper on the part of evangelicals involved in politics in the United States who are in search of theological roots. Bolt thinks that Kuyper is somewhat superficially understood by many of his critics and admirers and has to be understood within his own context and criticized at a number of points. In particular Kuyper still worked with a Christendom model of a Christian nation even though he wrestled with the issues of pluralism within Dutch society. It is his formative thinking on the latter that has the most relevance today as we confront issues of pluralism on an even greater scale than he did. Fascinating as Bolt's wide-ranging discussion is, British readers have to make adjustments for our different context. As the cultural consensus collapses Christians need to think along the lines of Kuyper's big themes of sphere sovereignty, antithesis and common grace.

While mindful of the dangers of political and cultural engagement and not dismissing the need of revival and the work of the Spirit in the churches, we must not fall into the trap of a form of Reformed pietism that is not concerned to see, however imperfectly, something of Christ's reign come in every sphere of life. But for me the most fascinating aspect of Bolt's book is his treatment of Kuyper's artistic imagination. By this he means not Kuyper's interest in the fine arts, although he had interesting things to say on this, but rather his appeal to the imagination in his advocacy of various causes. When he set out to rally the little people of the Netherlands to the cause of ecclesiastical and national renewal he sought to win their hearts as well as their minds. Reformed leaders today can learn much from Kuyper in this regard. What is so desperately needed today is a popular Reformed Christian movement that captures the imagination of people. In very different ways Whitefield and Spurgeon did this as well. Pray that the Lord would raise up men like them to reach our very different European culture.

One of the areas of church life where Calvinism has made its mark is in public worship. With their distinctive application of the sola scriptura principle the Reformed churches sought to order public worship in as biblical a way as possible. *Christian Worship in the Reformed Church Past and Present*<sup>5</sup> is an historical and theological survey of public worship in Reformed churches. Parts one and two are the most helpful in looking at the historical development of Reformed worship and offering some reflections on contemporary practice. Of particular interest are the contributions from the developing world where Reformed principles have had to be applied in very diverse contexts. The discussion of the various

approaches of missionaries in the Dutch churches in the East Indies is illuminating. Some rigidly imposed Dutch patterns on the new congregations whereas others, and often indigenous pastors, sought to contextualize the worship. The chapters on Brazil and Korea show the way the European model was filtered through a somewhat revivalistic North American Presbyterianism. However the value of this historical section is lessened by the lack of any interaction with more conservative Reformed denominations. This deficiency is even more evident in the theological reflections in the third section. For a book from a Reformed stable there is little real grappling with Scripture, but rather a series of reflections on Reformed themes of worship – the centrality of the Bible, the significance of preaching, the place of the sacraments, etc. I suspect that most of the contributors are not evangelicals, which makes for problems. The impression one gets is of theologians trying to sustain a tradition but without the theological convictions that brought that tradition into being. So the practical result is the kind of watered down liturgical approach to worship that is increasingly common in mainstream Presbyterian churches. Interesting as this book is in parts I am afraid that it is symptomatic of how many of the historic Reformed denominations have lost their way theologically.

The same confusion but even more so can be seen in *Reformed Theology for the Third Millennium*.<sup>6</sup> Edited by **Brian Gerrish** this book consists of the 2003 Sprunt Lectures delivered at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (the same series in which Gresham Machen delivered his lectures on the virgin birth). Again there are some interesting chapters in this book, not least Gerrish's own introduction on doing theology in the Reformed

tradition, but other chapters simply explore some rather esoteric areas of theology. Did Reformed aesthetics really contribute to the ending of apartheid? Whatever good Martin Luther King did can it really be considered a major contribution to Reformed theology?

What a different atmosphere we breathe in two books by **Roger Nicole**. Nicole is one of those theologians who has written relatively little, but what he has is worth its weight in gold. For many years this Swiss Reformed Baptist taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he exercised a formative influence on many students. In *Standing Forth*<sup>7</sup> a number of his shorter writings have been brought together. The introductory chapter, 'Polemic Theology – How to Deal with those who differ from us', is full of wisdom and should be read by everyone who engages in theological discussion. His plea is that among other things we ask ourselves what we owe and what we can learn from those who differ from us. Would that more of the Reformed did that before they so easily condemned others. Most of the other essays deal with the two areas that have concerned Nicole. The first area is the Bible where there is excellent material on inerrancy, including the articles that Nicole wrote for *The Churchman* dealing with JDG Dunn's view of the Bible's inspiration. The other area is the atonement where Nicole defends the doctrine of definite atonement particularly in relation to Calvin. Then there are a number of miscellaneous essays dealing with a wide range of other theological issues. All in all this is a superb example of how Reformed theology should be done.

On a more popular level is *Our Sovereign Saviour, the Essence of the Reformed Faith*<sup>8</sup> in which are collected

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Nicole's addresses over the years at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology held at Tenth Presbyterian Church under the direction of the late James M. Boice. Personally I owe much to these conferences when I was an undergraduate, which helped so many like me to be initiated into Reformed theology. This book shows how Reformed theology can be expounded in a winsome and popular way. Ministers and elders will profit from this book and it is an excellent book to give to church members and others who want to explore the Reformed faith.

Along the same lines of the last book is *After Darkness, Light, Essays in Honour of RC Sproul*.<sup>9</sup> Edited by his son, these essays by a number of Reformed ministers and theologians are not scholarly in nature, but in keeping with the ministry they honour, seek to explain the Reformed faith in a popular way. The book is organized around the solas of the Reformation and the five points of Calvinism and there are some excellent things here. I particularly liked Robert Godfrey on unconditional election, in which he expounds the relevant canons of Dort, and Sinclair Ferguson on justifying faith. O. Palmer Robertson does a good job on definite atonement, but he unfortunately veers into speculation when he says that Christ remembered the names of each of his elect on the cross. Where in the Bible is that? But all in all this is another excellent book that deserves a wide readership.

Less popular but even more deserving to be read widely is *Counted Righteous in Christ*<sup>10</sup> by John Piper. Here with his customary clarity and warmth Piper defends exegetically and theologically the historic Protestant doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which is under sustained attack from several quarters. This doctrine is central

to the evangelical faith and all of us need the ammunition this book offers in order to defend it as well as the fortification it offers in order to preach it with confidence.

Turning again to history there are a number of recent books that I would like to mention briefly. In *Reformation Sketches*<sup>11</sup> Robert Godfrey gives us scintillating studies in Luther, Calvin and the Reformed Confessions. Originally written as articles in a magazine each of the short chapters deal with an aspect of the lives of the two great Reformers and the confessions. This is a good introduction to the Reformation. Another popular book that I much enjoyed is *Calvin for Armchair Theologians*<sup>12</sup> by Christopher Elwood. Illustrated with rather humorous cartoons by Ron Hill (although depictions of God would have been better left out), this book is a faithful, easy to read and understand exposition of Calvin's theology. I don't think it can be bettered and even to old Calvin hands it is a refreshing and even inspiring reminder of what Calvin taught. Unfortunately the book falls down at the end when Elwood tries to accommodate Calvin to a wide range of contemporary theologies. But don't let that put you off this really very fun introduction to Calvin

Paul Zahl, the very Protestant dean of the 4000 member Episcopal cathedral in Birmingham, Alabama, gives us a unique insight into the English Reformation in *Five Women of the Reformation*.<sup>13</sup> Anne Boleyn, Anne Askew, Katherine Parr, Jane Grey and Catherine Willoughby each receive a chapter. What a remarkable group of women they were. They formed a group of lay theologians near to the centre of power and were very influential in advancing the Protestant cause. Three of the women were executed, one of them, Anne Askew, by

burning at the stake. Heaven will reveal how much we owe these women for the protestantism of England. The women covered in **Sharon James's** *In Trouble and in Joy*<sup>14</sup> – Margaret Baxter, Esther Edwards, Anne Steele and Frances Havergal – were just as remarkable in their different circumstances. Here are women whose devotion to Christ had great influence for good and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Evangelical Press have been publishing some other excellent biographical books.

**Tim Shenton's** biographies of the Welsh Baptist preacher *Christmas Evans*<sup>15</sup> and the Cornish Anglican clergyman Samuel Walker, *The Cornish Revival*<sup>16</sup> are both excellent, but the latter is particularly revealing. Walker is often neglected in considering the 18th century Great Awakening, but his life had a great impact in Cornwall and is a reminder of what God can do through a faithful ministry. Another unfamiliar chapter in church history is covered by **Crawford Gribben** in *The Irish Puritans, James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church*.<sup>17</sup> Ussher is usually remembered for his dating of creation, but he was in fact a very learned and godly theologian who became Archbishop of Armagh. His great passion was the evangelisation of Ireland, a project that ultimately failed for a number of reasons. This book reminds us both of the remarkable spread of the gospel in the northeast of Ireland in the 17th century and the great impact of Puritanism in the 'Anglican' Church of Ireland. Its articles are far more Calvinistic than the Church of England's. This short book will give you much insight into the church in Ireland past and present. Let me leave you with two books that perhaps more than most illuminate where Reformed churches are today. The first is *Holy Fairs, Scotland and the*

*Making of American Revivalism*<sup>18</sup> in which **Leigh Eric Schmidt** follows the trajectory of the Scottish communion season through American church history with particular reference to the camp meetings that were such an important part of the Second Great Awakening. These camp meetings are the historical template for revivalist meetings that became such a significant part of American popular Protestantism, perhaps reaching their apogee in the Billy Graham crusades. Here is a fine example of social religious history where the experiences of ordinary people are explored. So much of popular American evangelicalism is really a mutation of this kind of Scottish and Irish Calvinism.

But the book that I think most helps us to understand evangelicalism today and why Reformed Christianity has been so relatively marginalized within it is *Occupy until I come, AT Pierson and the Evangelization of the World*<sup>19</sup> by **Dana L Roberts**. Most readers will remember Pierson as the pulpit supply at the Metropolitan Tabernacle during Spurgeon's last illness and after his death. He was in truth one of the most seminal figures in the history of evangelicalism and as Joel Carpenter says in his commendation it is hard to believe that he has not received serious scholarly consideration until now. Born in 1834, Pierson was brought up in New Light Presbyterianism sympathetic to Charles Finney. He trained at Union Seminary and after a difficult first pastorate became the hugely successful minister of the wealthy and influential Fort St. Presbyterian Church in Detroit. But in spite of his success Pierson felt something was wrong, not least in the comfortable respectability of the church and its failure to reach the urban working class. After a spiritual crisis he eventually became pastor of an evangelistically and socially active Presbyterian

church in Philadelphia. Along the way he picked up dispensationalism (through a conversation with George Müller on a train journey across the US) and began to move in holiness circles. He became closely associated with DL Moody and the work of the Student Volunteer Movement with its motto, 'The evangelization of the world in this generation'. Pierson became a key missionary strategist and the father of North American faith missions. It was he who introduced a reluctant Hudson Taylor to the North American churches. How Reformed Pierson was at the beginning of his ministry is difficult to say, but by the end he was a key figure in the dispensational, holiness, faith mission and Bible school movements that shaped the American evangelicalism we know today. If you want to know why Gresham Machen ended up such a marginal figure when the old Princeton school had been so influential in the 19th century then read this book. The problem was not only modernism but also the changing nature of evangelicalism. But Pierson also has much to teach us about concern for the lost, simple faith and zeal for the gospel. Spurgeon recognized his spiritual stature as one who lived for Christ. Robert has written an excellent biography that, while not always theologically sensitive (as when he says, for example, that in dropping his postmillennialism for dispensationalism Pierson started to believe in the second coming), is very illuminating both of its subject and of 20th century American and indeed international evangelicalism. But sadly it also illuminates the decline of influence of historic Calvinism within evangelicalism.

- 1 Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed, A Social History of Calvinism*, Yale University Press, 2002.
- 2 Philip Benedict, *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots*, 1600-85, Ashgate Press, 2001.
- 3 Philip Conner, *Huguenot Heartland, Montauban and Southern French Calvinism during the Wars of Religion*, Ashgate Press 2002.
- 4 John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- 5 Lukas Vischer (ed.), *Christian Worship in the Reformed Churches Past and Present*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003.
- 6 Brian Gerrish (ed.), *Reformed Theology in the Third Millennium*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003.
- 7 Roger Nicole, *Standing Forth, Collected Writings of Roger Nicole*, Mentor, 2002.
- 8 Roger Nicole, *Our Sovereign God*, Christian Focus, 2002.
- 9 RC Sproul, Jr., *After Darkness, Light*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003.
- 10 John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, IVP, 2002.
- 11 W Robert Godfrey, *Reformation Sketches*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003.
- 12 Christopher Elwood, *Calvin for Armchair Theologians*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- 13 Paul FM Zahl, *Five Women of the Reformation*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- 14 Sharon James, *In Trouble and in Joy*, Evangelical Press, 2003.
- 15 Tim Shenton, *Christmas Evans*, Evangelical Press, 2001.
- 16 Tim Shenton, *The Cornish Revival, The Life and Times of Samuel Walker*, Evangelical Press, 2003.
- 17 Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans, James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church*, Evangelical Press, 2003.
- 18 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs, Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001 (Princeton University Press, 1989).
- 19 Dana L Robert, *Occupy until I come*, AT Pierson and the Evangelization of the World

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*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* by David Instone-Brewer; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK. 355pp. Price: \$26.00.

This must rank as one of the most important, possibly *the* most important, and certainly one of the finest treatments by a Christian writer of the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. The author is superbly equipped to write on this subject. He has a vast knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern marriage contracts, which provide a fascinating background to the Old Testament teaching on marriage. His Ph.D. from Cambridge University was awarded for his thesis *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 C.E.* As a research fellow at Tyndale House, Cambridge, he is in the closest contact with 'cutting edge' biblical scholarship. The fact that he used to be a Baptist minister ensures that while his treatment of the subject is academically rigorous, there is a clear pastoral concern which lies behind his writing of this book. He has also written a more popular book on the subject. But pastors who wish to get to grips with the arguments which lie behind the position he adopts really must read this, the academic book which he has written.

Dr Instone-Brewer (I-B) surveys the Old Testament teaching, developments during the intertestamental period, and the rabbinic teaching, before turning to the teaching of Jesus and then of Paul. It is not possible in a review article to communicate the richness of what 'I-B' has written. I shall try, as briefly as possible, to summarise some of the main points and then seek to evaluate the case he has presented.

The Old Testament views marriage as a contract. As with any other contract, there is an agreement and there are penalties for breaking the agreement. I-B

argues that the Old Testament penalty for breaking the marriage contract was divorce with loss of dowry. The marriage contract would stipulate that the man was to provide the woman with food, clothing, and love (which would include sexual relations) while the woman was to prepare meals from the food, make clothing from the cloth and also to reciprocate love to the husband (including sexual relations). I-B traces the prophetic denunciation of the breaking of marriage vows or promises (the contract) and seeks to show that the LORD's controversy with his people was that they had broken their covenant with him.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 are crucial verses for an understanding of the Old Testament teaching on divorce. I-B understands this passage to be regulating divorce for sexual infidelity on the part of the wife. He notes that during the intertestamental period there were increasing rights for women. Exodus 21:10–11 was a crucial passage in this respect. Those verses provide for a slave wife to be allowed to be divorced where her husband was not providing her with food, or with clothing, or with love (three of the things stipulated in marriage contracts). It was believed that it would be manifestly unjust for a slave wife to have these rights but not a free wife. Far from wanting to multiply divorces, there were various means which the Jewish courts might adopt to encourage a husband to take his commitments seriously, but if all failed these verses provided for divorce.

Just before and during the time of Jesus a sharp difference arose between the school of Rabbi Shammai and Rabbi Hillel. The school of Shammai held that the 'indecent matter' of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 referred to sexual infidelity: the emphasis fell on the word 'indecent'. Divorce was obligatory in such a case. The school of Hillel held that the phrase

covered two situations: that of sexual infidelity ('indecent') and also any other matter, be it as trivial as burning or spoiling the food ('matter'). Although the Shammaites were, therefore, much stricter than the Hillelites, each school recognized the validity of the divorces and remarriages granted by the other. I-B argues that this was the main area of contention in Jesus' day. It was accepted by all that there were three other grounds of divorce, based on Exodus 21:10–11. This being so, Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees, recorded in Matthew 19:1–11 and Mark 10:1–12, concerns where he stood on this issue. I-B seeks to demonstrate that Jesus agreed with Shammai, not Hillel, on the *ground* of divorce but differed from Shammai in two respects: first, he taught that while divorce was permissible where there had been sexual infidelity, it was not obligatory; second, by treating remarriage after a Hillelite divorce as adulterous, he was indicating that the divorce itself was not valid. Similarly in Matthew 5:31–32 and Luke 16:18 Jesus expresses himself with respect to the *Hillelite* divorces.

The significance of I-B's work lies in the fact that the other three grounds of divorce, based on Exodus 21:10–11, are outside the universe of discourse of Jesus' teaching. This being so, it is a serious misinterpretation of Jesus' teaching to say that he forbade divorce for all reasons other than sexual infidelity. I-B then goes on to consider Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7. I-B argues that while Paul was aware of Jesus' teaching, he was addressing a different situation from that which Jesus addressed. Paul forbade the easy divorces which were common in the Roman Empire and which, therefore, were similar to Hillelite divorce (vv.12–13), but if a believer were thus divorced by an unbeliever, he/she was free to remarry (v.15). Paul, however, also applies Old Testament teaching to this subject. Exodus 21:10 lies behind vv. 3–6 (emotional obligations) and vv. 32–35 (material obligations). This being so, divorce

would be permissible where these obligations were not honoured.

The remainder of the book deals with the influence of marriage vows from the Bible and from Judaism, an overview of interpretations in church history, an assessment of different views of understanding the biblical text, and the final chapter offers some pastoral conclusions.

While this is undoubtedly the most stimulating, comprehensive, informed and informative book that this reviewer has ever read on the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage, serious criticisms must nevertheless be made. The first criticism concerns hermeneutics. Jesus repeatedly referred to himself as the eschatological fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g., Matthew 5:17; 11:11–15; Luke 16:16; Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39–40) but I-B does not consider the significance of this with respect to the continuity/discontinuity *motif* which runs through the New Testament. I-B so concentrates on Jewish and biblical marriage and divorce material that he fails to set the biblical teaching in the wider context and background of eschatological fulfilment. Furthermore, he does not engage with the scholarly literature which makes much of this (e.g., Carson on *Matthew*, Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*). Consequently his exegesis of certain material in the Gospels and in 1 Corinthians is bound to be flawed.

An example of I-B's flawed exegesis is his treatment of the words, '*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard*' in Matthew 19:8. I-B understands hardness of heart to refer to the stubborn refusal of an unfaithful wife to repent of her unfaithfulness. But a careful study of the pronouns used in the verse demonstrates that Jesus is referring to the hard-heartedness of the men who divorced their wives. Word for word it reads: '*Moses on account of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives*'. A number of important

consequences follow from this. First, Moses' teaching was *concessionary*. Second, Jesus contrasted his teaching with that of Moses. Third, since Jesus allowed divorce for sexual infidelity and since he contrasted his teaching with that of Moses, it follows that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 cannot be dealing with divorce for sexual infidelity. But this inevitably calls into question large swathes of I-B's understanding of the Old Testament teaching as well as his understanding of Jesus' teaching. In this connection it should also be noted that I-B's treatment of *all* the pentateuchal material is not nearly as thorough as his treatment of other passages of Scripture.

Another serious criticism is that I-B has not considered in sufficient depth and detail the Roman law background to 1 Corinthians 7. Whereas I-B deals in considerable detail with aspects of Jewish law, there is a surprising lack of reference to standard Roman Law works. Corbett's *The Roman Law of Marriage* is not cited, nor is Buckland's *Textbook of Roman Law*, nor other leading works in this field. This leads to an unevenness in the overall quality of the work. It seems to this reviewer that I-B's undoubtedly important insights into the Jewish background to the New Testament divorce material have blinded him to the significance of any other background material. Furthermore, some important verses in 1 Corinthians 7 are not considered as thoroughly as other passages treated by I-B.

The next criticism is more of a 'niggle' or concern and is not unrelated to the previous criticism. It concerns I-B's understanding of how and why some things were written and his reconstruction of the background and context against which some passages are to be read. My niggle arises from the fact that when he explains how and why I reached a certain understanding of some verses in 1 Corinthians 7 in my own book on divorce, he is completely wrong, and this in spite of the fact that we live in the same

country, at the same time, and have spoken on the phone on numerous occasions. How much more likely it is, therefore, for him to be mistaken when reconstructing the background to documents written in a different culture and two millennia ago! It is good to have a historical section in this book. While detailed consideration is given to the views of the Church Fathers, the Reformed and Puritan writers are not dealt with in such detail. No account is given of the reasons for the omission of a section on divorce in the Savoy Declaration and the London Confession of 1689 (although the Westminster Confession, on which they were modelled, had quite a full statement), nor is there any discussion of the divergence between the views represented by Perkins and those later represented by the Westminster divines.

My final criticism is of the following statement: *In the scholarly world there are no firm conclusions, only theories that are internally coherent and that fit the facts to a greater or lesser degree* (p. x). The implications of such a statement with respect to theology in general and the perspicuity of Scripture in particular are alarming. While it is essential to seek to understand Scripture in its historical context before seeking to draw lessons for ourselves, it is to be feared that we could be returning to a pre-Reformation position, with this difference, that a *scholarly* magisterium, as distinct from an *ecclesiastical* magisterium, is being intruded between the Christian and his Bible.

These criticisms notwithstanding, this is a truly great work. It is highly recommended to all who wish to engage seriously with the biblical text in order to relate its timeless teaching to our contemporary situation.

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## Jonathan Edwards on Preaching

In the next issue there should be a review article dealing with George Marsden's magnificent new biography of Jonathan Edwards (*Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, Yale University Press 2003). In the meantime let me pass on a gem regarding Edwards's understanding of preaching and its relation to the affections. It is found on page 282. Critics of the revival such as Charles Chauncy said that it wasn't good for people to hear too many sermons as they could not remember them. In reply Edwards wrote in *Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, 'The main benefit that is obtained by preaching is by impression made upon the mind in the time of it, and not by the effect that arises afterwards by a remembrance of what was delivered'. While clearly people need to remember something of what they are taught in a sermon they will not remember everything. Because of that some critics of preaching today question its usefulness as a form of communication. But as Edwards points out there is more to preaching than simply instruction. There is also an immediate 'impression made upon the mind in the time of it'. This is what lifts preaching out of the realm of mere lecturing that sadly too much expository preaching has a tendency to become. Interestingly in his footnote Marsden acknowledges his debt to Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York for pointing out this passage. That connection suggests something of the relevance of Edwards's insight to preaching to post-moderns today.

## Notes

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