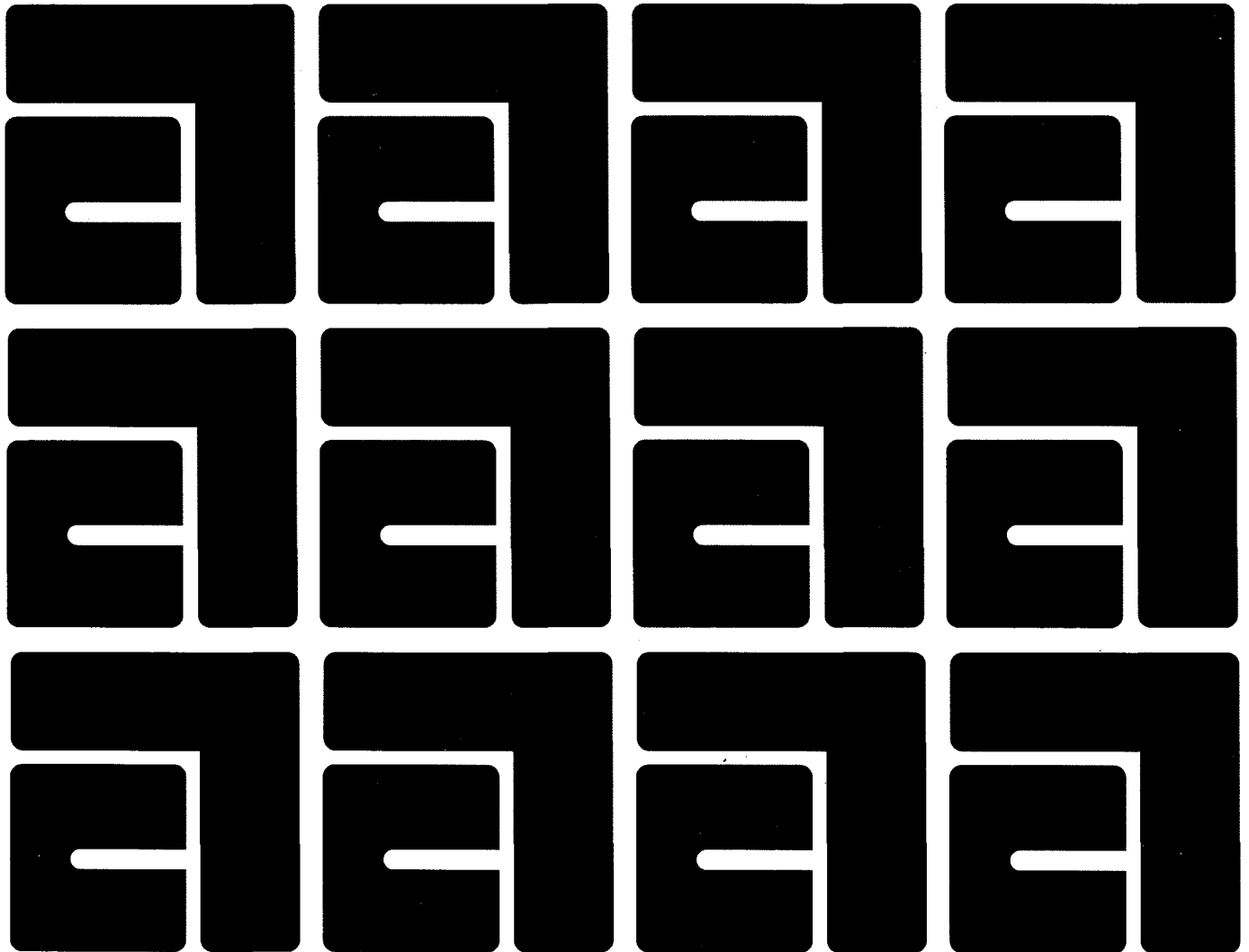


FOUNDATIONS

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FOUNDATIONS

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CONTENTS

Editor's Notes	1
Where Do Evangelicals Come From? Martyn Lloyd-Jones Memorial Lecture 2003 <i>Garry Williams</i>	5
The Passion of the Impossible? <i>Mostyn Roberts</i>	14
Shakespeare of the Puritans – aspects of piety in the preaching of Thomas Adams, Part 2 <i>Gary Brady</i>	25
The Eschatological Dimensions of Isaiah <i>Erroll Hulse</i>	33
New Testament Literature Survey 2003-2004 <i>Alistair I. Wilson</i>	41
Book Review: The Rise of Evangelicalism (M.A.Noll) <i>Esther Bennett</i>	48

ERRATUM: please see p.24.

The evangelical emperor has no clothes. According to D.G.Hart, in *Deconstructing Evangelicalism—Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*,¹ the evangelical colossus of the late 20th century that emerged from the fragmented and defensive fundamentalism of the early 20th century is not all that it is made out to be by its proponents. Writing as an unreconstructed American Old School Presbyterian, Hart subjects evangelicalism to a sharp historical and, to a lesser extent, theological critique and finds it wanting. His basic thesis is that what we know as evangelicalism in North America was the result of the efforts of post-war moderate fundamentalists such as Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry and Billy Graham to fashion a conservative Protestant movement that would challenge the liberals who had taken control of the mainstream denominations. As a nomenclature they took a term that had hitherto been synonymous with orthodox Protestantism. The problem was that in the process they also adopted a minimalist approach to doctrine and marginalized the church. The integrated doctrinal systems of Protestant orthodoxy were supplanted by atomized doctrinal statements, and loyalty to the church by loyalty to a plethora of para-church organizations and personalities.

Hart has a number of targets in his sights. He particularly questions the emergence of evangelical history and accuses its practitioners such as Mark Noll, George Marsden, Nathan Hatch and David Bebbington of carving out a nice academic niche at the expense of the older discipline of ecclesiastical history. He makes the same charge about evangelical social scientists with their passion for quantifying religious phenomena. He goes on to expose the weakness of the new evangelicalism's ecclesiology and excessive individualism, its approach to doctrine (here questioning the elevation of inerrancy to the primary defining doctrine) and the impact of

contemporary worship music. I don't think Hart listens to worship CDs in his car. All this is done with considerable wit and brio. For example, he rather cheekily defines being an evangelical as whether or not one likes Billy Graham.

I think that Hart, who has taught at Westminster Seminary in both Philadelphia and Escondido, is broadly right in his critique of the confessional and ecclesiastical shallowness of contemporary evangelicalism. However, he overstates his case. Surely after the rise of modernism and the battles of the early 20th century, evangelicalism was bound to become a distinct movement within the broader Protestant world, with a just claim to being considered the heir of orthodox Protestantism, but it is a pity that the post-war leaders didn't give greater emphasis to the church and avoid a lowest common denominator approach to doctrine. It also has to be said that Hart's analysis doesn't quite fit what happened in Britain. Here evangelicalism has had a more distinct identity, largely because of the High Church tradition in Anglicanism. It was that and the threat of Rome that prompted the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1841. But it was still essentially orthodox Protestantism as was the evangelicalism of British post-war leaders such as D.M. Lloyd-Jones and John Stott. Indeed it was their concern for the ecclesiastical expression of evangelicalism that led to their disagreement in 1966. Also it is difficult to see how inerrancy would not become a defining doctrine, considering the modernist attack Scripture. But looking at evangelicalism today, much of that has been ignored or forgotten. But now the important question is less where evangelicalism came from than what it is becoming. It seems to me that here and around the world it is mutating into forms such as prosperity Pentecostalism or open theism that are different in kind from historic Protestantism. We need then to

heed Hart's counsel and return to the orthodox faith of our fathers as it is expressed in the communion of saints.

One of the 20th century leaders who exemplified the confessional and ecclesiastical evangelicalism Hart advocates was J. Gresham Machen, the Princeton professor, founder of Westminster Seminary and leader of conservative Presbyterians in the modernist controversy of the 1920s and 30s in the United States. Hart is probably the greatest authority on Machen. In *J. Gresham Machen – Selected Shorter Writings*² Hart brings together a number of Machen's articles, papers, reviews and addresses. The core of the book is the chapters taken from a volume posthumously published in 1951 and entitled *What is Christianity?*, but never republished. These lucidly elegant chapters (Machen was a fine stylist as well as a courageous theologian) deal not only with basic Christian doctrines, but also with the church and its mission and the influence of Christianity in society. While Machen was no advocate of the church's involvement in politics, he did believe that Christians as individuals and through voluntary associations such as schools should have a great deal of influence. He has some excellent things to say on education. Politically Machen was something of a civil libertarian who loathed the centralizing tendencies of modern governments. Rightly he considered that political freedom was one of Calvinism's greatest legacies to the world. I think his political theology was a little superficial in places and perhaps reflected too much of his American cultural context. Nevertheless he has some stimulating things to say about pluralism and toleration. Interestingly he was not an optimist as to the church's prospects in the world and, while to some extent he may have been influenced by his bitter experience in the modernist controversy, he argues his case biblically. He was a theological realist

and as such has much wisdom for Christians today living as a minority in an increasingly pagan society. I found his repeated call for the church to concentrate on its God-given task of proclaiming the gospel particularly challenging. To these chapters are added others that cover a wide range of subjects from Machen's battles in the Presbyterian Church to the minister and his Greek New Testament, to the joys of mountain climbing and walking. What comes through is just what a rich and full human being Machen was. Often he is seen as the brilliant scholar and doughty defender of the faith, but here we discover something of his humanity and largeness of soul. I found this to be one of the most interesting and stimulating books that I have recently read.

Hart makes the point that Machen's social vision was very different from that of Calvin and much of the Reformed tradition. Certainly within that tradition there is a tension as to how much transformation we can expect. **Lester De Koster** reminds us of the more optimistic strand in *Light for the City – Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty*.³ This book brings together two passions of mine – Calvin and the city. The book is simply about the spiritually, socially and culturally transforming power of Calvin's preaching in Geneva and as such is a plea for such preaching today. At points De Koster is a bit naïve about what would happen if there was such preaching, but he has a point. Calvin sought to change the world not by force but by the word. And he did, as Western history bears witness. As Emile Leonard, the eminent historian of Protestantism, wrote: 'Calvin invented a new kind of man in Geneva – Reformation man – and in him sketched out what was to become modern civilisation.' I don't think that Machen would disagree with that or that we should aspire to do the same, but only that we need to be realists in terms of the reality of

sin in the Christian, the church and the world, something Calvinists have not always been good at. Let me add one caveat. In spite of John De Witt's comment that De Koster writes like Carlyle, I didn't find the style easy, but then I don't find Carlyle's easy either.

Let me mention a few books that will help us understand our culture as we try to influence it through the preaching of the gospel. **Marcus Honeysett's *Meltdown*⁴** is a lucid analysis of contemporary culture that in a short compass gives us an overview of the challenges of post-modernism to historic Christianity and suggestions on how to meet them as evangelicals. Like Paul visiting Athens we need to spend time looking at our culture so that we are able to connect the gospel with it. Popular culture – music, TV, literature, IT, fashion, films, advertizing, shopping, sports, etc.– is all-pervasive and shapes unconsciously the way not only non-Christians but also Christians think and live. Two recent books help us to approach popular culture as Christians. **T.M. Moore's *Pop Culture – A Kingdom Approach*⁵** is written from a distinctly Reformed perspective. In assessing pop culture he is critically sympathetic and avoids condemning it outright. As with any culture, Christians need to be discerning, and Moore supplies us with a biblical worldview that is centred on God's kingdom. His concern is to see the reign of God transforming culture. This book is a very accessible way of developing a Christian mind in relation to culture along the lines of Francis Schaeffer. More comprehensive but less theologically discerning is ***A Matrix of Meanings – Finding God in Popular Culture*⁶** by Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor. The book is almost encyclopaedic in breadth and covers a vast amount of material, and the authors are very penetrating and insightful in their understanding of the various aspects of popular culture.

The book suffers from not having Moore's theological framework and tends as a result to accept everything that calls itself Christian at face value. Nevertheless it is a real eye-opener to popular culture, especially if you prefer Radio 3 to Radio 1. The danger with this whole area is that we can think that our preaching and evangelism will only be effective if we are up on the latest cultural trends. In the end our confidence is in God's word. But surely any normal human being wants to understand his or her culture so that they can relate to it in a godly way. Failure to do so may mean not only that our preaching and evangelism, not to mention raising children, don't connect, but also that we may think we are living godly lives when in fact we are very conformed to the world.

Two other books deserve the attention of evangelicals. **Clive Marsh** is a liberal Methodist minister who has written *Christianity in a Post-Atheist Age*.⁷ I must admit that I approached this book sceptically, but was in fact quite impressed with it. Marsh writes with 'an unashamedly missionary purpose'. In part this is to present what he calls 'a chastened liberalism' to people on the edge of the church or beyond who are put off by traditional Christianity. It is liberal Christianity that he presents. He has no time for an absolute religion and doesn't expect Hindus, Jews or Muslims to become Christians. But it is a chastened liberalism that is less confident of the claims of human reason and more open to spiritual reality. It is in fact a religion that I think many people will increasingly be attracted to. That is why evangelicals need to take it seriously. This is a Christianity that is more in tune with the culture than orthodox Protestantism and to which some from evangelical churches will be drawn. Read this book with a discerning eye, but also learn from the many

insightful things Marsh has to say about British culture and church life.

The sort of people who might be attracted to a chastened liberalism is the subject of a *Churchless Faith – Faith Journeys beyond the churches*⁸ by Alan Jamieson, a New Zealand Baptist minister. He observed that a number of seemingly committed Christians were leaving churches and going nowhere and yet still called themselves Christians. The book is the result of a study he undertook of these churchless believers. In different ways most became dissatisfied with evangelical church life. He particularly examines what he calls ‘evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic church leavers’ or EPCs. From his description of these people, most seem to have been involved in broadly charismatic churches. I don’t have space here to sum up the process of disenchantment and disengagement that Jamieson describes. However, it seems to me that many of these people simply discovered the unreality of so much that passes for evangelicalism and decided to drop it. In the end Jamieson suggests developing what he calls leaver-sensitive churches that are committed to discussion, openness, doubt, questioning and very much about being on a journey than having arrived at a destination. I think that there is much that classical evangelicals can learn here. All of us know people who have left our churches and are nowhere or are drifting to less than satisfactory forms of Christianity. While being convinced of what we believe, we must make room for those who are asking questions. Nevertheless what Jamieson highlights is the unreality of so much modern evangelicalism. What our churches need to be are communities of faith, hope and love where everyone is welcome and lives are transformed by God’s grace. On that point let me finally mention Steve Chalke’s now notorious *The Lost Message of Jesus*.⁹ The implications of his denial of the doctrine of

substitutionary atonement are serious. He asks where on earth did we get this doctrine? The simple answer is in the Bible. Strangely, in his own handling of the Bible Chalke conveniently omits the bits he doesn’t like, such as Jesus’ teaching on hell. Much of the book seems to me to be simplistic, clichéd and ironically conventional criticisms of evangelicalism. In some parts he is simply ignorant as in his criticism of Jonathan Edwards’ sermon ‘Sinners in the hands of an angry God’. He objects to Edwards’ doctrine of hell and wants more preaching of God’s love and yet no-one preached more sublimely of God’s love than Edwards. But there are some good things in the book as well, such as what he says about the kingdom and repentance and in some of his criticisms of churches. My hunch is that Chalke is himself facing up to the unreality of so much contemporary evangelicalism, but tragically his diagnosis and thus his prescription are disastrously wrong.

1. D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism— Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 224 pages, ISBN 0-8010-2728-4.

2. D.G. Hart (ed.), *J. Gresham Machen— Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 590 pages, ISBN 0-87552-57-9.

3. Lester De Koster, *Light for the City - Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 139 pages, ISBN 0-8028-2780-2.

4. Marcus Honeysett, *Meltdown - Making Sense of a Culture in Crisis* (Leicester: IVP, 2002), 223 pages, ISBN 0-85111-492-X.

5. T.M. Moore, *Pop Culture – A Kingdom Approach* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 167 pages, ISBN 0-87552-576-8.

6. Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meaning - Finding God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 351 pages, ISBN 0-8010-2417-X.

7. Clive Marsh, *Christianity in a Post-Atheist Age* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 149 pages, ISBN 0-334-02869-8.

8. Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith – Faith Journeys beyond the churches* (London: SPCK, 2002), 179 pages, ISBN 0-281-0546-7.

9. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 204 pages, ISBN 0-310-2488205.

One of the perennial tasks of church historians is the definition of movements in such a way as to emphasize their meaningful identity and historical continuity. Among the more successful of such definitions has been the account of evangelicalism offered by David Bebbington in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, a work rightly hailed for its liveliness, breadth, and light touch amid extensive documentation. As you know, Bebbington defines the four essential evangelical characteristics as conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism.¹ His definition has been widely accepted, on both sides of the Atlantic. Here, however, my interest is not so much in the defining characteristics themselves as in the way in which Bebbington uses them to date the origins of evangelicalism.

Bebbington declares that 'Evangelical religion is a popular Protestant movement that has existed in Britain since the 1730s.'² The movement did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but it was nonetheless something new which emerged in the eighteenth century. I will seek to show that the case made for this dating does not hold, though it is not my purpose here to propose an alternative dating. I am seeking to reopen the case for seeing Puritanism and the Reformation as themselves authentically evangelical movements.

Bebbington offers a detailed argument for the origins of evangelicalism in the 1730s. He believes that the movement was a child of the Enlightenment. The evidence here rests on the role which the second characteristic (activism) plays. He writes:

The activism of the Evangelical movement sprang from its strong teaching on assurance. That, in turn, was a product of the confidence of the new age about the validity of experience. The Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment.³

The link from activism to the Enlightenment is made here by the evangelical doctrine of assurance. Bebbington explains that 'the dynamism of the evangelical movement was possible only because its adherents were assured in their faith'.⁴ Earlier Protestants had been concerned with assurance, but now there was a new doctrine. He writes:

Whereas the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the experience of believers, the Evangelicals believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God.⁵

The final phrase here is significant: all that was needed for assurance from the start of the Christian life was 'simple acceptance of the gift of God'. The Puritans were caught up in introspective gloom, but the evangelical position was one of robust confidence in which early assurance was the norm.

Bebbington identifies the 1734-5 revival in Northampton under Jonathan Edwards as the point at which this shift took place. He asks how Edwards could give confident assurance to his people:

How could he be so bold? It was because he was far more confident than his Puritan forefathers of the powers of human knowledge. A person, he held, can receive a firm understanding of spiritual things through a 'new sense' which is as real as sight or smell.⁶

Edwards reached this epistemic confidence because he drank deeply from the empiricist waters of the English Enlightenment, in particular from John Locke. Putting it crudely, Locke said 'trust your senses', Edwards said 'trust your spiritual sense'. As did John Wesley. Thus the confident activism of evangelicalism was born from the epistemology of the Enlightenment.

Many accept this dating for the emergence of evangelicalism, and it too has crossed the Atlantic. My present aim is thus to scrutinize Bebbington's

argument that a new evangelical doctrine of assurance arose from Enlightenment epistemology and grounded a distinctive activism.⁷ I will proceed by testing the claim against the evidence which we find in selected writings of John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and John Newton, and by questioning the type of activism which Bebbington requires to discern the presence of evangelicalism.

Wesley does speak of a direct and immediate assurance normally given on conversion. In *Sermon 10* (1746) he argues against identifying the witness of the Spirit with a rational process of reflection. This supports Bebbington's argument. Nonetheless, in the same text Wesley also argues that there is a subsequent conjoined rational testimony from the believer's *own* spirit. He can even conclude in syllogistic form (how Puritan!): 'It all resolves into this: those who have these marks, they are the children of God. But we have these marks: therefore we are children of God.'⁸ What is the relation between the two witnesses? In *Sermon 11* (1767), Wesley holds that upon conversion and in times of strong temptation the witness of the Spirit exists on its own without the witness of the believer's spirit. As soon as time has passed, however, every believer must ascertain that he is not deluded by the devil: 'let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it.'⁹ Both witnesses 'testify conjointly' and it is when they are joined that we cannot be deluded.¹⁰ In *Sermon 10*, Wesley goes so far as to specify self-examination as a universal Christian duty: 'it highly imports all who desire the salvation of God to consider it with the deepest attention, as they would not deceive their own souls.'¹¹ Thus for all his asseverations concerning the witness of the Spirit, Wesley still has to urge the believer to come back to self-examination.

For example, he pictures a man hearing the voice of God saying 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'¹² This voice is known by the spiritual sense. Wesley can see the next question coming: 'But how shall I know that my spiritual senses are rightly disposed?' He answers:

Even by the 'testimony of your own spirit'; by 'the answer of a good conscience toward God.' By the fruits which he hath wrought in your spirit you shall know the 'testimony of the Spirit of God'. Hereby you shall know that you are in no delusion; that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit ruling in the heart are 'love, joy, peace'; 'bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering.' And the outward fruits are the doing good to all men, the doing no evil to any, and the walking in the light – a zealous, uniform obedience to all the commandments of God.'¹³

This test is the rational scrutiny of good works.

The Wesleyan appeal to self-examination is a real problem for the thesis that Wesley's care-free doctrine of assurance is the explanation of evangelical activism. The Christian could only be free from self-scrutiny at the very outset of the Christian life or in the worst of times. Such brief times without scrutiny will not suffice to explain the activism of evangelicals.

From Bebbington's account we would expect to find Wesley casting spiritual sense in terms of physical sense. In this piece he does something more subtle. When he speaks of the witness of the believer's own spirit, Wesley readily draws such comparisons. But Wesley then contrasts physical sense with the witness of the Spirit of God:

The *manner* how the divine testimony is manifested to the heart I do not take upon me to explain. 'Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it.' 'The wind bloweth; and I hear the sound thereof'; but I cannot 'tell how it cometh, or whither it goeth.' As no one knoweth the things of a man

save the spirit of a man that is in him, so the *manner* of the things of God knoweth no one save the Spirit of God.¹⁴

The manner of the two witnesses is beyond comparison since one relies on human reflection and the other on the direct work of the unfathomable Spirit of God. This means that Wesley is careful to *avoid* the epistemic step from Enlightenment views of sense-knowledge to the doctrine of assurance.

Moreover, writers on Wesley frequently point out that he found his idea of spiritual sense in diverse sources, most of them pre-dating the Enlightenment. Theodore Runyon cites this example from the patristic Macarian Homilies:

Our Lord Jesus Christ came for this very reason, that he might change, and renew, and create afresh this soul that had been perverted by vile affections, tempering it with his own Divine Spirit. He came to work a new mind, a new soul, and new eyes, new ears, a new spiritual tongue [...].¹⁵

Randy Maddox notes that the idea of spiritual sense survived in Puritan writers.¹⁶ To take one example, John Owen in his *Pneumatologia* can speak of a 'unique spiritual sense of the defilement of sin' and a 'gracious view' of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.¹⁷ In *The Reason of Faith* (Book VI of *Pneumatologia*) he uses the language of the senses to describe the way in which the Scripture 'evinced this its divine efficacy by that *spiritual saving light* which it conveys into and imparts on the minds of believers.'¹⁸ I do not for a moment want to deny that Wesley shaped his idea of spiritual sense in the language of, and relevantly to, his times. The *leitmotif* of Bebbington's work is the claim that evangelicalism has always been fashioned by its contexts. In principle that is an unobjectionable claim, but it is quite another step to say that evangelicalism was 'created by' one of its contexts.

From his early works onward Edwards, like Wesley, held to a high view of the new sense given to the believer by the Holy Spirit. His sermon *A Divine and Supernatural Light* argues for the necessity of a Spirit-given revelation of God. This is a direct, unmediated sense of divine excellency which affects the 'heart'. Such evidence might suggest that Edwards did indeed preach and write about an immediate, early assurance for Christians. But *Divine and Supernatural Light* is a sermon concerned exclusively with the objective truth of the gospel, and not with the truth of the claim that any individual is saved. Edwards does not advocate an immediate sense in the Christian that he or she is saved. It is also necessary to consider the provenance of even this emphasis on the objective truth of the gospel.

The 1746 *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is often said to be Edwards's most revealingly Lockean text. In it, he defends the concept of a new spiritual sense against its detractors, and he grants that it is 'what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea.'¹⁹ The exact relation between Edwards and such metaphysicians is, however, a matter of great and lively contention. Where did his concepts come from? On the one hand Perry Miller famously emphasized the Lockean identity of Edwards. Norman Fiering countered by emphasizing his debt to Nicolas Malebranche. Fiering writes of Miller's work as 'an unaccountable lapse in the scholarship of one of the greatest of American historians.'²⁰ Similarly, Conrad Cheny identified Edwards as 'first and last a Puritan theologian' rather than an Enlightenment thinker.²¹ Now it is vital to Bebbington's reading of evangelical origins that Edwards was decisively influenced by Locke, a claim which is at the centre of this controversy.

Some kind of assessment is thus unavoidable. In short, I find that there are two insuperable problems with the attempt to class Edwards as in any significant way a Lockean. First, he disagrees with Locke on a number of philosophical issues central to both their intellectual projects. Many examples of clear divergence between Edwards and Locke could be cited, but two brief and pointed instances will suffice to show the extent of the problem. Like Locke, Edwards speaks of simple ideas generated by perceiving a particular content and reflecting on that content with reason. And yet, going far beyond and against Locke, he understands the content of spiritual perception to be divine excellency and holds that it can only be perceived through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the individual, creating in him a new sense. This particular supernatural claim was entirely unacceptable to the philosopher. Consequently, even here, where Edwards is using language definitely attributable to Locke, he is giving it a quite contrary meaning. Another major instance of disagreement is this: the whole *Religious Affections* can be understood as a rejection of Lockean-style hostility to religious enthusiasm. Edwards sets out to establish the centrality of affections in perception and thus disagrees with Locke in arguing that the Christian individual is strongly *inclined* to the divine excellency which is spiritually perceived. These and many other examples show that, as Brad Walton puts it, Edwards has 'a panoply of un-Lockean concepts' which are deployed at crucial points in the *Affections*.²²

The second insuperable problem with a strongly Lockean Edwards is the sufficiency of the Augustinian-Reformed theological heritage as an explanation for the language and concepts which he uses. Edwards himself takes us to the Scriptures to

show the origin of his concept of spiritual sense, and in terms of the more immediate background, he repeatedly cites long passages from Puritan writers in his footnotes. For example, he gives the following passage from John Owen on spiritual perception:

The true nature of saving illumination consists in this, that it gives the mind such a direct intuitive insight and prospect into spiritual things, as that in their own spiritual nature they suit, please, and satisfy it; so that it is transformed into them, cast into the mould of them, and rests in them.²³

At this point it is important to note the recent work of Brad Walton on the *Religious Affections*.²⁴ Walton has done something which, in the light of the footnotes in the *Affections*, ought to have been very obvious. He has worked his way through a long list of Puritan writers to search for the kind of religious psychology which we find in Edwards. And he has found it abundantly. He carefully traces the pre-history of the Edwardsean conceptions of, *inter alia*, assurance, illumination, spiritual sense, the affections, authentic signs, and the heart. One of Walton's most apposite Puritan examples is Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) sounding just like Edwards on a new sense: 'whenas God regenerateth any man, and constitutes him a new creature, lo, that man hath a new eye to see, an ear to hear, and all sorts of new senses to take in all sorts of spiritual things.'²⁵ With page upon page of such evidence carefully detailed and expounded, Walton has further undermined any conception of an Edwards decisively shaped by Locke. But he has also raised serious questions about attempts to make any *other* Enlightenment thinkers decisive for the shape of Edwards's thought.

Walton's is the most radical non-philosophical reading of Edwards. A less dramatic and equally suggestive account holds that Edwards was engaged

in an apologetic project in which he used the language and concepts of philosophers to his own theological ends. There are pointers in this direction in various commentators – Norman Fiering and Michael McClymond pursue similar lines of argument. Fortunately, I do not have to adjudicate here on the precise extent of the terminological influence of the Enlightenment. It is enough to note that at the least the substance of Edwards's thought is not derived from the Enlightenment, while at the most even its language was derived from elsewhere. Either way, recent work has dismantled the conception of Edwards on which Bebbington's assessment of the origins of evangelicalism depends. When in the *Religious Affections* Edwards considers how an individual can discern true, saving spiritual affections, he again employs the concept of spiritual sense, this time with reference to knowledge of true personal religious affections, knowledge that I am saved. Edwards gives an account of assurance which is quite distinct from that held by Wesley. Specifically, he refuses to count as evidence for authentic spiritual affection the same phenomena which Wesley endorses. As we saw above, Wesley favourably cites the example of a man hearing the statement 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'²⁶ For Edwards, this is just the kind of thing which someone deluded by Satan might use as the basis for his assurance. Edwards holds that anything which could be emulated by the devil is automatically excluded as a ground of assurance.

The difference can be set out with an example which Bebbington himself uses when he asserts the novelty of the evangelical epistemology. In the middle of an account which makes no distinction between Edwards and Wesley, Bebbington tells us that the rank and file 'formulated their experience in the same way' as their leaders. He provides this example:

'By the eye of faith,' wrote an early Methodist about his sense of pardon through the work of Christ, 'I had as real a view of His agony on Calvary as ever I had of any object by the eye of sense.' The understanding of faith in terms of self-validating sense impressions was a striking novelty.²⁷

Edwards refers to just such an instance:

Some have had ideas of Christ's hanging on the cross, and his blood running from his wounds; and this they call a spiritual sight of Christ crucified, and the way of salvation by his blood.²⁸

Does Edwards affirm such a witness? On the contrary, the idea the man has of Christ 'is no better in itself, than the external idea that the Jews his enemies had, who stood round his cross and saw this with their bodily eyes'.²⁹ For Edwards, such imagination is the prime instrument which Satan uses in deceiving people about their spiritual status. True affections may produce lively imaginations, but lively imaginations are no assurance of true affections.

The feeling one gets when reading the *Religious Affections* as a Christian is a feeling of gradual, painful deconstruction. Piece by piece Edwards removes the spiritual props which so many rely on. He anticipates the reader's growing concern. He writes, 'But here, some may be ready to say, what, is there no such thing as any particular spiritual application of the promises of Scripture by the Spirit of God?'³⁰ His reply unmistakably affirms such an application, but in a way that contradicts what will be Wesley's doctrine of assurance and Bebbington's picture of Edwards himself. The application of the promises is to be found in the fruit of the Spirit: 'A spiritual application of the Word of God consists in applying it to the heart, in spiritually enlightening, sanctifying influences.' The application of the offer of the gospel entails 'giving the man evidence of his title to the thing offered'.³¹

We must consider carefully the use of the term 'evidence' here under the account of the first authentic sign. Where Wesley posits a direct, unmediated witness, Edwards routes all assurance via evidence considered by the individual's conscience, in these cases the sanctifying influences of the Spirit and an obedient response to the gospel. Edwards writes adamantly that 'there are no propositions to be found in the Bible declaring that such and such particular persons, independent on any previous knowledge of any qualifications, are forgiven and beloved by God.' He finds that people have been misled by the term 'witness' into denying that the Spirit uses evidence. They have done this by failing to note how the words 'witness' and 'testimony' are used in the New Testament. There, he points out the idea of witness entails evidence being adduced. Having routed all assurance via evidence, Edwards argues that there is no twofold witness: 'When the apostle Paul speaks of the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit, he is not to be understood of two spirits, that are two separate, collateral, independent witnesses...' ³² There is one witness: the Spirit through his fruits.

The position which Edwards takes on evidence emerges most clearly in the treatment of the twelfth authentic sign, defined by the claim that 'Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.' ³³ In terms of the structure of the book and, the direction of the argument, this sign is the centrepiece. Edwards takes great care in explaining it. He argues that genuine Christian practice is shown by perseverance, defined as 'the continuance of professors in the practice of their duty, and being steadfast in an holy walk, through the various trials that they meet with.' ³⁴ For the individual Christian, practice is 'the chief of all the evidences of a saving sincerity in religion, to the consciences of the professors of it.' ³⁵ One's own scrutiny of practice involves scrutiny of the inner

life, the acts of the soul, as well as outward actions. At one point Edwards turns to address the question of instant assurance, aware that his view might be taken to exclude even its possibility. In a statement the tone of which hardly suggests a new, bold evangelicalism, he allows that early assurance can be experienced: 'Tis possible that a man may have a good assurance of a state of grace, at his first conversion, before he has had opportunity to gain assurance, by this great evidence I am speaking of.' ³⁶ But quickly Edwards moves on to assert that this does not hinder the view that actual obedience is *better than* an early sense of certainty that one will obey.

In the light of such arguments it is no surprise that in the course of the work Edwards urges a thorough, suspicious and relentless self-examination, most notably on the issue of pride and humility. ³⁷ His sustained urging sounds far more like the voice of the Puritan of Puritans than of a carefree evangelical ready for action. In the *Religious Affections* we therefore find a doctrine of assurance based not on Enlightenment epistemology but on a close attention to the language of Scripture. We find a doctrine concerned to urge not reliance on a direct witness, but careful scrutiny of on-going good works done in a filial disposition amid trials and temptations.

It is notable that it was *after* writing this treatise, perhaps a more cautious treatment than his earlier revival writings, that Edwards himself worked among the Indians in the frontier town of Stockbridge. Where we would expect from Bebbington to find the earlier, possibly more confident theology fuelling evangelistic activism, we find that Edwards's activism followed his attack on the idea of a direct witness. Perhaps the opposite of Bebbington's view is the case; that a more reserved

view of assurance encourages activism in an attempt to provide the evidence which comforts the conscience.

If we have not already seen enough to demonstrate that there was not a new carefree view of early assurance, let alone a consensus on the subject, let me mention the treatment which the *Religious Affections* received at the hands of John Wesley. Wesley produced abridged editions of many works as part of his *Christian Library*, one of which was the *Affections*. Only a sixth of the work survived his editorial knife, with the twelve signs of Part 3 being reduced to eight. Wesley did not like the work as he found it because he thought that it was a defence of the doctrine of the final perseverance of all true believers. He described the treatise as a 'dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison.'³⁸ There was clearly no uniform, agreed rejection of the Puritan emphasis on self-examination.

The lack of early evangelical uniformity on assurance is further highlighted by the teaching of John Newton. Bebbington cites Newton as an example of an evangelical who departed from traditional Puritan theological distinctions. But for our purposes Newton is interesting because of his doctrine of assurance as it is found in his sermon 'Of the Assurance of Faith'. Like Wesley, Newton speaks of assurance as a common privilege of Christians. In his own day he trusts that 'there are more than a few' who have it, though 'the greater part [...] live far below their just right and privilege.'³⁹ The reason for this hesitation becomes clear when he discusses the ground on which assurance is established:

Assurance is the result of a competent spiritual knowledge of the person and work of Christ as revealed in the Gospel, and a consciousness of dependence on him and his work alone for salvation.⁴⁰

The young convert lacks these. Hence, Newton says, with a significant choice of words, 'though his eyes are opened, his sight is not yet confirmed, nor his spiritual senses exercised.'⁴¹ Newton sounds more like one of Bebbington's Puritans than one of his evangelicals: 'Remember that the progress of faith to assurance is gradual. Expect it not suddenly; but wait upon the Lord for it in the ways of his appointment.'⁴² At least this evangelical did not believe assurance to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God.⁴³ There comes a point where the whole idea of a marked distinction between Puritanism and evangelicalism must be re-examined.

Having looked at three individuals, some more general remarks are necessary on the idea of evangelical activism. As we have seen, Bebbington ties the origins of evangelicalism to the emergence of activism. Such claims highlight the importance of ascertaining exactly what the activism in question entailed. In most of Bebbington's publications he deploys the four characteristics of evangelicalism with a number of examples of each. Detailing these examples suggests a wide array of evangelical activism from across the centuries: preaching, visiting, distributing tracts, prayer meetings, Sunday schools, evangelism, pastoral care, missionary work, general philanthropy, and social reform. Surely here Bebbington grants too much in his definition of activism. Allowing such breadth to the acceptable types of activity will result in finding the beginning of evangelicalism not in the eighteenth but in the sixteenth century.

The Reformers themselves were undeniably activists on these terms. John Calvin and the Huguenots provide an excellent example of the Reformation concern for evangelism. The list drawn up for Admiral de Coligny in 1562 indicates that there were by then 2,150 Huguenot churches in France,

and McGrath estimates a total membership above two million (more than a tenth of the population).⁴⁴ This was within thirty years of Calvin's own conversion. In England we need only think of a John Bradford preaching in the north of England, or Hugh Latimer urging practical reform on the young King Edward. Into the seventeenth century we find the quest for souls amply represented among the Puritans. Even in a writing which represents the height of John Owen's Reformed Scholasticism, his *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, we find a conclusion on the uses of the doctrine which directly addresses the unbeliever with a personal appeal.⁴⁵ Richard Baxter held to as complex a theological system as any of the Puritans, but from his work in Kidderminster he could hardly be thought of except as an activist.

It is no surprise then that when Bebbington denies the activism of the Puritans he immediately specifies the absence of foreign missions.⁴⁶ This is a much tighter definition of activism than he suggests elsewhere, but it is the only one which will sustain his argument. The dating of evangelicalism to the 1730s will only work if we say that preaching, pastoring, evangelism and social concern do not count as examples of evangelical activism. To my mind, and it would seem from his other examples to Bebbington's, that is far too specific, and would be a better designation for a particular expression of evangelicalism than for the movement *per se*. If my argument in this paper is correct, then the way is opened to reconsidering the case for the Reformation and Puritanism being authentically evangelical movements. Whatever differences pertained between the various evangelical movements would then be understood as differences of accidents rather than substance.

In closing, I wish to step out of the realm of history by commenting briefly on the consequences of this possibility for evangelical self-understanding. If we think that evangelicalism began in the 1730s, then Wesley and Edwards become its most important fathers. This means that evangelicalism was from its origin *equally divided* between Reformed and Arminian theology; neither could claim to be the mainstream doctrinal position. In this sense it is easy to see how Bebbington's analysis serves to give a strong foothold to Arminianism within the evangelical movement by making foundational one of its most noted proponents. If, however, we reconsider the origins of evangelicalism and find that it is a Reformational and Puritan phenomenon, then the picture looks very different. The Magisterial Reformers on the Continent and in England during the sixteenth century and the Puritans of the seventeenth were almost without exception (e.g. Melancthon) committed to a Reformed account of the doctrine of election. Evangelicalism considered as continuous from the sixteenth century becomes aboriginally Reformed on the doctrine of election rather than divided, and the position taken by John Wesley on election becomes a minority report much like that of Arminius. With such an historical perspective, Reformed theology constitutes the authentic, evangelical mainstream of three centuries, and the historical case for the foundational status of Arminianism is undermined.

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After months in which Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of The Christ* has been breaking box office records and hitting the headlines in both secular and Christian papers, it seems almost impertinent to pose the question: 'Does God suffer?' The Christian wants to shout out 'Of course! What gospel would there be if he did not?' Such a response is more readily given today and with fewer qualifications than in previous generations. The doctrine of divine impassibility, which is often taken to be the antithesis of the idea that God suffers, has taken a dreadful battering in the last century or so. Yet many Christians who have no desire whatsoever to create an unfeeling, impersonal God in what J.I.Packer calls an 'eternally frozen pose'¹ will nonetheless feel the need to protect God from the instability attendant on being able to suffer. We want a God who loves and relates – this is the drive behind much of the attack on impassibility – yet we are not convinced that the suffering God is entirely – well, *God*.

Does God suffer? And if so, does it make sense to describe him as 'impassible'?

Getting our theological bearings

Tracing back from divine impassibility we begin with God's *aseity*. God is *a se* – of himself, self-existent, self-sufficient and self-contained. No person or thing can threaten his existence or change his essential nature. The divine name I AM WHO I AM² (Ex.3:14) is a biblical foundation for this as for God's eternity and immutability. *Immutability* indeed is an implication of aseity. How, people may ask, can God be said to be immutable when Scripture portrays God as being in contact with this world and the people of God experience now his wrath, now his love? Nevertheless, in all these

relations, God does not change (Mal.3 :6; James 1:17). Though everything perish, he remains the same (Ps. 102:26), unchangeable in his essence, thoughts, will, purposes and decrees. Another way of asserting this is to say that God is *pure act* or *pure actuality* – the opposite of potentiality. He has no passive potentiality; he cannot therefore change or develop. He is entirely involved in everything he is and does. His immutability, at least in terms of his will, is, positively, 'the moral consistency that holds him to his own principles of action and leads him to deal differently with those who change their own behaviour towards him'.³

This is the conceptual range in which we need to think about God's impassibility. When we come however to the Reformed Confessions we do not find mention of impassibility as an attribute.⁴ Stephen Charnock is typical in touching on it in the context of God's immutability.

The Westminster Confession, chapter two, states that God is 'without body, parts or passions' because, according to Hodge, such are inconsistent with God's absolute perfections such as simplicity, unchangeableness, unity, and omnipresence.⁵ Yet impassibility is part of Christian orthodoxy. Thomas Torrance, for example, affirms: 'God is certainly impassible in the sense that he is not subject to the passions that characterise our humanly and creaturely existence.... He is moreover intrinsically impassible for in his own divine Nature he is not moved or swayed by anything other than himself or outside himself.'⁶ Similarly J.I.Packer, reflecting some of the modern defensiveness about the doctrine, says: '[that] God is impassible... means not that God is impassive and unfeeling (a frequent misunderstanding), but that no created beings can inflict pain, suffering and distress on him at their own will. In so

far as God enters into suffering and grief (which Scripture's many anthropopathisms, plus the fact of the cross, show that he does), it is by his own deliberate decision; he is never his creatures' hapless victim'.⁷

Meanwhile if we turn to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* we find a definition of impassibility that Thomas Weinandy is keen to defend: 'There are three respects in which orthodox theology has traditionally denied God's subjection to "passibility" namely (1) external passibility or the capacity to be acted upon from without, (2) internal passibility or the capacity for changing emotions from within, and (3) sensational passibility or the liability to feelings of pleasure and pain caused by the action of another being'.⁸ As it stands, this definition would seem to be narrower than Packer's in that it leaves no room for God even voluntarily to enter into suffering and grief.

Enough of the 'bloodless definitions of theological philosophy'. What do the Scriptures say?

Biblical Landmarks

'Men tell us that God is, by the very necessity of his nature, incapable of passion, incapable of being moved by inducements from without; that he dwells in holy calm and unchangeable blessedness, untouched by human sufferings or human sorrows forever...let us bless our God that this is not true. God can feel; God does love. But is this not gross anthropomorphism? We are careless of names; it is the truth of God, and we decline to give up the God of the Bible and the God of our hearts to any philosophical abstraction'.⁹ So says B.B. Warfield. The God of the Bible is certainly a God to whom emotion is attributed. There are 'for example' sorrow and pity (Ex.3:7-12); wrath and compassion

(Ex.34:6); delight (Zp.3 :17); jealousy (Ex.34:14); grief (Gn.6:6) and love (Je.31:3). When we come to God incarnate the full range of emotions is attributed to Christ: weeping (Jn.11:35); rejoicing (Lk.10:21); anger (Mk.3:5; Jn.2:15); annoyance (Mk.10:14); sorrow and indignation (Jn. 11:38); anguish (Lk.22:44); forsakenness (Mk.15:34).

Two particular verses in the Old Testament call for attention, on which I shall make some general comments and return to them later in the article. In Genesis 6:6 we read: 'And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart'. The first part of this verse is one of those statements that seems to call into question God's *immutability* in that it suggests regret or repentance in God. Similar passages are Exodus 32:12, 14; 1 Samuel 15:11, 35; 2 Samuel 24:16; Jeremiah 18:10. God changes his mind, it appears, about some good he had intended for his people or some judgment he was to inflict. In Genesis 6 he regrets having created man. How do these verses harmonize with Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29 which state that the LORD is not a man that he should repent? The second part of Genesis 6:6 moreover calls into question God's *impassibility* in that it attributes grief – bitter indignation – to God. Gordon Wenham calls it the most intense form of human emotion – a mixture of rage and anguish.¹⁰ The word is used of men in e.g. Genesis 34:7 (Dinah's brothers' feelings after she was raped); 1 Samuel 20:34 (Jonathan when hearing of his father's plan to kill David), 2 Samuel 19:3 (David on hearing of Absalom's death) and of God in Psalm 78:40 (the people 'grieved' God in the wilderness), and Isaiah 63:10 (grieving his Holy Spirit). How are we to understand this attribution of change of mind and deep inner perturbation to God?

Four approaches are discernible, the first three being hermeneutical methods that safeguard God from mutability and passibility, the fourth theological, seeing in such verses an adumbration of the incarnation.

(1) Relating to immutability rather than to impassibility, that what is represented is God's consistency in the face of changing human attitudes and behaviour. Weinandy for example says: 'In a sense God is said to "change his mind" precisely because, as the Wholly Other, "he does not change his mind"'.¹¹ It is precisely because God is unchanging in his righteousness that he reacts so strongly against evil, and shows favour to human repentance. This is God's moral consistency.

(2) That this is an illustration of God's accommodation to our capacity, using anthropopathy. The attribution to God of human feelings is a didactic method adopted by God to teach us about how God views (in this case) sin. This is Calvin's approach; he is worth quoting at length:

The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for our sake, he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God, easily appears from this single consideration, that nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning, and remark, applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad, but remains for ever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit *accommodates* himself to our capacity. Wherefore, there is no need for us to involve ourselves in thorny and difficult questions, when it is obvious to what end these words of repentance and grief are applied; namely, to

teach us, that from the time when man was so greatly corrupted, God would not reckon him among his creatures, as if he would say, 'This is not my workmanship.' ...Similar to this is what he says, in the second place, concerning grief; that God was so offended by the atrocious wickedness of men, as if they had wounded his heart with mortal grief. ...This figure, which represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called *anthrōpopatheia*.¹²

(3) That we are to understand the 'repentance' and 'grief' as referring only to the actions God performs in history, 'not with respect to his counsel but to the event; not in reference to his will, but to the thing willed; not to affection and internal grief, but to the effect and external work because he does what a penitent man usually does'.¹³ Thus these verses explain what God does on the 'horizontal' plain, not what goes on in his mind.

(4) That by the anthropomorphisms of Scripture we are prepared for the coming of the Son of God. Jesus, for example, wept and lamented the ravages of sin and death (Jn.11:35,38; Mt. 23:37). Another striking locus is Hosea 11:8-9. God has threatened judgment on his people but then his covenant love takes over:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man;
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.

Here God asserts his covenant faithfulness (v.8) but *based on* his ontological immutability (v.9), as the reason why he will not destroy his people. The same faithfulness is the cause of his 'pain'.

Notice firstly, that in both Genesis 6 and Hosea 11 we see the juxtaposition of wrath and grace in the presence of sin. In Genesis 6, God is 'in anguish' over the sin of the world and will exercise judgment on the world, but in Genesis 6:8 we are introduced to Noah, the righteous man, who was saved with his family from the wrath to come. Here God's 'bitter indignation' blends into his wrath. In Hosea the LORD expresses a more complex inner turmoil between justice and mercy. The pain of God here arises from the apparent conflict of love and justice in the presence of sin. Secondly, we need to realise that if we call this 'suffering', we are interpreting emotional pain as 'suffering'. Physical pain in relation to God was not on the horizon in the Old Testament and in weighing up the early church's discussions of impassibility it is worth remembering Gerald Bray's point that their concept of suffering was physical pain that was an inevitable accompaniment of life; God has no body; to speak of 'God suffering' apart from the incarnation would therefore not be meaningful to them'.¹⁴ Thirdly, 'the Holy One in your midst' (Ho.11:9) is a remarkable combination of transcendence and immanence. Thomas Weinandy concludes that it is precisely because God is the Wholly Other that he can be 'passionate' in a sense that is beneficial to his people. He argues that in using language that is anthropomorphic the Bible is saying something that is true about God but it is crucial to remember that 'the one who is so filled with passion is the Wholly Other...who transcends what is beyond the merely customary and humanand he is able to express such depths of passion only because he is the Wholly Other'. While asserting that such language about God says something true about him we must not fall into the trap of so conceiving of God's compassion and grief that it undermines his otherness, for then precisely what gives it value – that he is the Holy One – will

be undermined and the significance of his suffering lost.¹⁵

The Origins of 'Impassibility'

The concept of impassibility has negative connotations today, yet according to Pelikan 'the early Christian picture of God was controlled by the self-evident axiom, accepted by all, of the absoluteness and impassibility of the divine nature'.¹⁶ Could this possibly, have been derived from Scripture whose God is so full of life, dynamism and emotional expression? The answer of course is that while we do not want to take the fire out of God's anger or the warmth out of his love, we do want to protect certain truths about God. It seems a very natural development of the more easily substantiated notion of immutability to hold that if God cannot change neither can he 'be moved' or 'suffer pain' in the emotions. Suffering is experiencing change, and change is within time; God being atemporal and incorporeal, absolute and perfect, cannot change, therefore cannot suffer. It is argued,¹⁷ however, that the baneful influence of Greek philosophy is seen, in which emotion is viewed as dangerous, even evil, and God is the 'Unmoved Mover'. The perfect being was *apatheōs* – without suffering, enjoying perfect tranquillity – and human happiness consisted in achieving this state. The notion of *pathos* in Greek thought means both suffering, and passion in the sense of emotion. The connecting idea is passivity – both come upon you against your will and are therefore a mark of weakness, therefore God cannot suffer or be emotionally moved.

Weinandy argues however that the Fathers were far more influenced by Scripture than by Greek philosophy in coming to their insistence on the

absoluteness and impassibility of the divine nature. He asserts that the Fathers were concerned to protect the complete otherness of the one God in relationship to the created order. They denied existence to the anthropomorphic and mythological gods of the pagans, but more significantly stressed that the one God was the Creator *ex nihilo* of all else that exists. He did not just relatively transcend all else as the pinnacle of a chain of being but he 'transcended creation in that he constituted a distinct ontological order all his own'.¹⁸ We find that the doctrine of Creation is pivotal in deriving a biblical understanding of impassibility; we shall find that the cross is pivotal in understanding how God suffers.

Such positive assertions about God are further clarified and his transcendence protected by a cluster of negative attributions – equivalent to the 'without body, parts or passions' of the Westminster Confession. What was never denied of God was that he was passionate in his love, compassion, mercy or wrath; and what was never asserted was that his impassibility entailed his being static, inert and emotionally cold, as many of the modern critics of impassibility have assumed. To assert impassibility is never, in orthodox thought about God, to assert that he is devoid of love or compassion. Rather it is to establish in his unchangeably perfect being a love that is perfectly passionate. 'It is clear that impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that he surveys existence with Epicurean impassibility from the shelter of a metaphysical isolation, but that his will is determined from within instead of being swayed from without. It safeguards the truth that the impulse alike in providential order and in redemption and sanctification comes from the will of God'.¹⁹

What is also hinted here is that divine passibility would make God in his purposes and plans vulnerable to the dictates of the created order, even to meeting his own needs through the work of redemption. Critics of the Fathers therefore overemphasize the influence of unbiblical philosophy on the early church and underestimate the influence of contemporary culture on themselves. In similar vein Richard Muller states of critics of post-Reformation orthodoxy, that their assertion of impassibility was not to deny affections in God; nor to imply an absence of relatedness, love, long-suffering or compassion in God. The Protestant Orthodox, says Muller, wrote out of a tradition of God's aseity and pure actuality, but not out of the Stoic notion of a God as uninvolved or unrelated. 'The modern writers who argue against the doctrine of divine impassibility as if it were little more than the uncritical importation of a Stoic concept are beating, not a dead, but a nonexistent horse'.²⁰ It is arguable that it is the modern critics, not the Fathers, who are importing contemporary philosophy into the doctrine of God. To some of these critics we now turn.

Contemporary Criticisms of Divine Impassibility

Richard Bauckham lists five factors in the development of what he calls the modern doctrine of divine passibility: (1) The modern context – especially Auschwitz; (2) Biblical understanding – especially of the prophets; (3) The God of personal love – if he loves he must suffer; (4) the 'crucified God' – sometimes expressed (as in Horace Bushnell) as being the expression of the suffering in the eternal heart of God; or (as in Kitamori and Moltmann) the decisive event of divine suffering; (5) the problem of theodicy. We can examine these briefly under the heading of

Theology after Auschwitz

Although criticism of impassibility was not new (Weinandy quotes A.M.Fairbairn in 1893 saying that 'Theology has no falsier idea than that of the impassibility of God'),²¹ after Auschwitz the question was posed with greater point, 'What kind of God can we believe in now?' A ground-breaking work was the Japanese Lutheran Kazoh Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God*,²² arguing that only a God who suffered could make sense of the immense pain in the world. Jeremiah 31:20 is seminal for him:

Is Ephraim my dear son?
Is he my darling child?
For as often as I speak against him,
I do remember him still.
Therefore my heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,
declares the LORD.

More influential has been Jürgen Moltmann who is moved by the accounts of Jews in Auschwitz, especially that of Elie Wiesel.²³ Moltmann argues that only a God who suffers in solidarity with the innocent is worthy of the name God; that the cross is not just an act of divine sympathy but an act of 'divine solidarity with the godless and the Godforsaken'; that the Father suffers, but differently from the Son; and that the cross is an intratrinitarian event and therefore determines the doctrine of God. The basic problem Moltmann addresses is that of theodicy – the justification of God to a sceptical world. As Bauckham puts it, 'Only the suffering God can help'. It is seen as axiomatic that if God loves he must suffer, entering into the lives and griefs of people. This is the *pathos* of God. Indeed the one who cannot suffer, cannot love and is poorer than any man. Biblically Moltmann draws on the Old Testament, especially the prophets, as portraying a God who draws near his people (Ex.2:23-27; Je.31:20).

Moltmann of course focuses on the cross where the suffering of God is seen at three levels: (1) with the incarnation it is the clearest disclosure of the empathy of God with a suffering world; (2) it reveals the Son to be passible not only in his human nature but in his divine Person; (3) the Father suffered too in abandoning the Son as the Son suffered abandonment.

It is important to note that Moltmann tends towards a panentheistic²⁴ concept of God: God is identified with the universe but is much *more* than the universe (unlike pantheism); the universe is 'in God'. In other words, God is not ontologically distinct from all he has made.

Another contemporary challenge to impassibility is found in

Open Theism

The motivation is again the justification of God, but the focus is more on presenting God as loving and relational, rather than on defending him against the charge of allowing untold suffering. God is primarily love, therefore open and responsive. We must do away with the 'aloof monarch' concept of God; there is no blueprint of the future; the future is open, even to God. We have been created as free beings; our decisions change God's plans and decisions; he is immutable in his essence, but changes in his plans and purposes as he learns new things and his thinking develops as the future unfolds. God is personal and loving, therefore feels and suffers; he is not only not responsible for the holocaust which is the action of free human beings, but could not prevent it because of our freedom. The God of Open Theism is markedly different from the God of historic Christianity and a basic problem is the one-dimensional nature of the thinking on

passibility: if he is to love, he must allow us free will and he must suffer; if he suffers, it must be at the expense of his transcendence. There is a rationalistic failure to maintain both immanence and transcendence. The desire for a God of love who sympathizes with us and the perception that the impassible God cannot be such a God, is giving us a God who is part of the same ontological system as that in which suffering takes place. He is in our midst, but he is not the Holy One. He may be Moved, but is he a Mover?

If the doctrine of creation gives us God transcendent, then the cross is where we must meet the immanent God.

God's Suffering at the Cross

First, some basic issues. What is suffering? All suffering is a form of death and is a precursor of death. Death in Scripture is the divinely inflicted penalty for sin. God's response to sin is wrath; the imposition of the curse (Gn.3:14f.). Expressions of God's wrath against sin are many and powerful (Ex.34:7; Na. 1:2,3; 2 Thes.1:6-9; Rev.14:19). Death is not extinction; it is existence under the wrath of God. There is no suffering like eternal death – eternal existence under the wrath of God, that is, hell. Suffering therefore is not the basic human problem. Sin is. It is because of sin that God imposed death and all forms of the curse. Death (and all forms of suffering with it) is an enemy to be abolished but only as a consequence of first dealing with sin.

Wrath is not the only response of God to sin. There is of course the promise of salvation. It is also, however, in relation to sin, not to suffering, that the striking expression is made in Genesis 6:6 concerning pain in God. It is not the suffering of mankind

that evokes the pain of God. God most assuredly has compassion on all he has made (Ps.145:9; Lk.6:35; Acts 14:17; Rom.2:4) and the fact that people are described as enemies of God in their hearts and subject to God's wrath does not mean that God does not feel or act compassionately towards them. Yet Genesis 6:6 is not with reference to human suffering but to human sin. God in his hatred of sin purposes to destroy man. But there is grace – Noah will be saved. God's condemnation is seen in relation to the world, and his salvation in relation to Noah and his offspring.

In Hosea 11 the objects of anger are God's covenant people; but here his grace is in apparent conflict with his justice. Both are directed at the same people. In the end this will only be resolved not by Ephraim's being handed over, but by God's only beloved Son being given up to judgment for the much more profound spiritual salvation of which the redemption of Israel is a picture.

Suffering within God in the Old Testament is therefore specific. It is firstly an expression of God's reaction to sin, and secondly of the tension in him between mercy and justice. In Genesis this is relieved by disparate acts of judgment and mercy – the Flood, the Ark; in Hosea it is left unresolved but points forward to a deeper, spiritual salvation as God sends Christ to endure ultimate suffering on the cross. The suffering of God is because of sin; it is in Christ; it is mediatorial; it is redemptive.

Argument along these lines is found in Kitamori, but it is taken to a point where the transcendence of God is lost and God appears to be under a necessity of sending Christ and saving sinners to resolve his own inner tension. Redemption becomes self-serving. For example: 'Our reality is such that God ought not to forgive it or enfold it.... The

living and true God must sentence us sinners to death. This is the manifestation of his wrath...The “pain” of God reflects his will to love the object of his wrath’. This ‘pain’ is the ‘tertiary’ produced by love and wrath. ‘God who must sentence sinners to death fought with the God who wishes to love them’.²⁵ The cross, says Kitamori, is the bitterest pain imaginable. In it God entered the world of sin to bear the the bitterest pain imaginable. In it God entered the world of sin to bear the responsibility for sin. In doing so he not only answered our pain, which is the reality of living under God’s wrath and our estrangement from God, but also answered the prior problem, the solution of the conflict between wrath and love in himself, the cause of his pain.

The significance of this is that the cross is always logically prior to the incarnation in the purposes of God. A problem, as already mentioned, is that the cross becomes the answer to a need in God. Moltmann’s solution is slightly different. His concern is theodicy. He discusses the concept of Christ being ‘handed over’ (Rom.8:32; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal.3:13) and concludes that God the Father abandoned the Son for, and in solidarity with, godless and God-forsaken men. A major problem with Moltmann is the blurring of what ‘forsakenness’ and ‘abandonment’ mean. For Moltmann it is always suffering, not sin, that is the essence of man’s problem. There is at the cross the loving identification of Father and Son with ‘sinners’ but in the end there is little need for propitiation; the cross merely becomes another, if the most extreme, element of the incarnation. There is identification but no substitution. Man is a victim, not an offender.

If man as sinner, rather than man as victim, is to be the beneficiary of the atonement, then the doctrine

of penal substitution is essential and central to our understanding of the cross. Identification is not enough. The incarnation is not enough. Christ suffering and dying with and ‘for’ suffering humanity is not enough. The only satisfactory explanation of the cross is the biblical one: that there is a demonstration of both the love and the justice of God. He is the propitiation for our sins.²⁶ His suffering was the enduring of divine wrath (Rom.3:25; Gal.3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Jn. 2:2). In Torrance’s words:

It is then, the mediatorial passion of Christ in life and death in bearing the wrath of God upon the sin of the whole human race, the fearful anguish of his soul in making that sin his own and bearing the infliction of divine judgment upon it, the indescribable agony and sorrow that overwhelmed him in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the darkness of dereliction which he endured on the Cross, in which spiritual and physical pain interpenetrated each other, all that unveils for us something of the infinite depth of the active suffering of God.²⁷

In this light such Scriptures as Hosea 11:8 and Jeremiah 31:20 are anticipatory of the cross. The pain of God described in them points to the cross. These passages are not prophetic as is Isaiah 53, or typical as are the sacrifices, but are anthropopathic revelations of something of what the cross meant for God.

A crucial question however is: if Christ suffered – *who* suffered? God? Or man? Christ in his human nature? Or in his divine nature? Or both? Or the divine person of the Son of God? Cyril of Alexandria wrestled with the doctrine of the incarnation in the struggle against Nestorius and worked towards some important clarifications. For example, in the context of the ‘communication of idioms’ (attributes) he ‘grasped and explicitly stated for the first time that the attributes are predicated not of the natures,

but of the person, for the incarnation is not the compositional union of natures but the person of the Son taking on a new manner or mode of existence'.²⁸ It is therefore the Son who grieves, suffers and dies as *man*, for that is now the manner of his existence. This is doubly important: (1) he who truly experiences the ultimate in human suffering is none other than *the Son of God* who is one in essence with the Father; (2) the manner in which he experiences suffering, as he has experienced every facet of human existence, is *as man*.

Every facet of human existence includes, now, death. For death is not extinction, or it would be nonsense to say that the Son of God died; but death is existence under the wrath of God; and this was certainly true of the Son. It was true in that 'he who is impassible as God is passible as man. The Impassible suffered...To say that "the Impassible suffers" is not, then, to be incoherent, but to state the very heart of the incarnational mystery'.²⁹ It simply means that he who is in the midst of us is indeed the Holy One. What is ruled out by this formula is also important: for if Christ suffered in his divine *nature* he would no longer be experiencing human suffering in an authentic human manner, but in a divine manner. All of the human experiences of Christ – being born, weeping, rejoicing, fearing, groaning, suffering, dying – must be predicated of him – the *Son of God* – as *a man*. If 'the Impassible suffers' is replaced by 'the Passible suffers', the death of Christ loses its significance entirely. Within the incarnation the Son of God never does anything as God *merely*, nor as God *in a man*, but as God *as man*. And how does the predication of suffering of the divine person not affect his divinity? Here we are at the heart of mystery. In Torrance's words:

On the one hand, therefore, we cannot but hold that God is impassible in the sense that he remains eternally and changelessly the same, but on the other hand, we cannot but hold that God is passible in that what he is not by nature he in fact became in taking upon himself 'the form of a servant'. He became one of us and one with us in Jesus Christ within the conditions and limits of our creaturely human existence and experience in space and time. That is surely how we must think of the passibility and impassibility of God: their conjunction is as incomprehensible as the mode of the union of God and man in Jesus Christ.³⁰

It remains true therefore that the Christian can rejoice in 'the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.'

Another important question is: did the Father suffer and if so how? It is axiomatic for Moltman, for example, that the Father suffered in abandoning, as the Son suffered in being abandoned. By theological inference our doctrine of the Triune God leads us to affirm that if the Son suffered, the Father and the Holy Spirit also suffered. Moreover, by analogy, the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac speaks of a God who knew the cost of giving a son. Other verses in Scripture (Jn.3:16; Rom.8:31,32) speak of the giving of the Son in terms implying cost. The Father suffered the anguish caused by sin (Gn. 6:6) and the conflict between wrath and mercy (Ho.11:8). What did he feel as his Son cried out in forsakenness on the cross? We cannot imagine. The Father's suffering is divine and a mystery to us. John Frame's counsel is wise: 'In the Incarnation, the Son suffers loss: physical pain, deprivation and death. The Father knows this agony, including the agony of his own separation from his Son...What precise feelings does he experience? We do not know and we would be wise not to speculate'.³¹

What then of God identifying with humanity in their suffering? We know that God is a God of compassion and if we hard-hearted creatures can 'feel' another's pain it is difficult to imagine him not suffering in some way when his creatures suffer. But we have to be very careful; we must not attribute our sinful and fallible feelings to God; anthropomorphism is to describe God to us, not to attribute our feelings to God. That God 'feels' is a biblical given; exactly what that means is unknowable by us. It is, I suggest, biblically unwarranted to describe God as suffering with humanity generally in its suffering. Indeed it risks undermining the uniqueness and glory of the cross, for it is there that God shows his love for us; there that we see what God's suffering and, indeed, love is; in Christ dying for, not merely sympathizing with, sinners.

Yet it would be warranted to speak of God's identifying with one group of people: his covenant people, elect from eternity and blood-bought. This is what Exodus 2:23,24 points to and Acts 9:4 clarifies.³² Christ suffers in or in communion with his people, his body. Their suffering meanwhile is transformed, for their own blessing (Rom.8:28) and the building of the church (Col.1:24). Moreover their sin still grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph.4:30).

The New Testament's insistence on the finished work of Christ on the cross; on irreversible victory revealed and sealed by the resurrection and on the accomplishment of propitiation, reconciliation and redemption by the cross; and the correlative absence of emphasis on God 'suffering with' or even sympathizing with humanity apart from the cross, make it imperative to see the passibility and impassibility of God in the light of a crucified saviour.

Conclusion

'He suffered impassibly.' 'The Impassible suffers.' Perhaps this is as close as we can get to the mystery of the suffering of God. I conclude with some summary statements:

1. The doctrine of the impassibility of God must be maintained if our God is to be the God of the Bible – the God who suffers.
2. To maintain it truly requires a correct balance of God's transcendence and immanence. He is 'the Holy One in our midst'.
3. To the extent that the Old Testament speaks of 'pain' in God it is: in relation to sin in creation, where it merges into his wrath; or the conflict of wrath and mercy in relation to his covenant people.
4. Such 'pain' is anticipatory of the cross; it is fully revealed at the cross; and explained by the cross.
5. The suffering of the Son of God on the cross was in his being inflicted with the wrath of God against sin.
6. The one who died on the cross was the Son of God as man. It was not God suffering as God, nor in man, but *as* man. Only the mystery of the incarnation gives the suffering of God its essential ontological framework.
7. The Father, it may be affirmed, suffered; but exactly how is not revealed.
8. God in Christ suffers with his covenant people; in all their affliction he is afflicted.

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1. Article on *God* in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester:IVP, 1988).
2. Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers ©2001by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. Packer, *loc.cit.*
4. Richard Muller notes that 'the Reformers do not typically argue "impossibility" as an attribute'; though they deny the existence of *passiones* in God, they speak of this as an aspect of his immutability. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Vol.3: The Divine Essence and Attributes*; p.309. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). There are 42 index references in Muller's volume to immutability; only two to impossibility.
5. *The Confession of Faith*, p.49 (London: Banner of Truth, 1958).
6. *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p.248 (Edinburgh:T&T Clark, 1996).
7. *Loc. cit.*
8. 3rd Edition; OUP, 1997. Quoted in Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) p.38.
9. B.B.Warfield, 'Imitating the Incarnation' in *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950) p.570-71.
10. G.Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), ad loc.
11. Weinandy *op.cit.* p.61.
12. Calvin, Comm. on Genesis ad loc. (Baker Book House, 1993 reprint). My emphasis.
13. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg:Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992) I.3.11.11.
14. Gerald Bray, 'Can God Suffer?' www.geocities.com/the_theologian/content/doctrine/impossible.
15. Weinandy, p.59.
16. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition I* (Chicago University Press, 1971), p.229; cited in Weinandy, p.85.
17. e.g. Richard Bauckham in 'Only the Suffering God can help' in *Themelios*, April 1984, vol.9 no.3.; D.A.Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (John Knox Press, 1981) p.215 quoted in John Frame, *No Other God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey:Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), p.181.
18. Weinandy, p.109.
19. G.L.Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London:SPCK, 1952) p.7; cited in Weinandy, p.111.
20. Muller.*op.cit.*, p.310.
21. Weinandy, p.1, citing Fairbairn in *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), p.483.
22. 1946; E.T.(London: SCM Press)1966.
23. In *Night* (Fontana/Collins, 1972). See Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p.273.
24. *The Crucified God*, p.277.
25. Kitamori, *op. cit.*, p.21.
26. This of course has implications for the extent of the atonement – for whom did Christ die? As penal substitute – not for the whole world.
27. Torrance, *op.cit.* p.249.
28. Weinandy, p.200.
29. Weinandy, pp.202f.
30. Torrance, p.250.
31. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), p.614.
32. See also 2 Cor.1:5; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13.

We greatly regret a serious error in our last edition in the article by A.T.B. McGowan, **Justification and the Ordo Salutis**, p.15, column 1, line 2.

'a meritorious condition of salvation' should have read 'an unmeritorious condition of salvation'.

We offer our profound apologies to the author and to our readers. - Ed.

Introduction

In the previous article we sought to introduce the forgotten doctrinal Puritan, Thomas Adams, surveying what little is known of his life, identifying his substantial literary legacy and drawing some contemporary lessons from his homiletical style.

In this concluding article we want to concentrate on the content of Adams' preaching. Style is of some importance, certainly, but content is fundamental. Adams himself says:

Indeed, rhetorical flourishes without solid matter is like an Egyptian bondwoman in a queen's robes.¹

In the course of his sermons, Adams considers a wide variety of themes. In this article we wish to consider something of what he has to say in the central area of Christian piety. From the time of Elizabeth we can trace an increasing interest in matters of personal piety, but the interest goes back to Tyndale, Bradford and the Reformers. Adams himself declares that

The main intents of all preachers and the contents of all sermons aim to beat down sin and to convert sinners.² This he seeks to do by a variety of means. Here we wish to outline some of his more distinctive approaches.

At the end of a sermon on Psalm 94:19 called *Man's Comfort* in a passage typical of his style he likens sin, repentance and pardon to the English Spring months of March, April and May.

Sin comes in like March, blustering, stormy, and full of bold violence. Repentance succeeds like April, showering, weeping, and full of tears. Pardon follows like May, springing, singing, full of joys and flowers.

In application, he says

If our hands have been full of *March*, with tempests of unrighteousness, our eyes must be full of *April*, with the sorrow of repentance; and then our hearts shall be full of *May*, in the true joy of forgiveness.

Sin, repentance and forgiveness are themes that Adams often deals with and an examination of what he says on these three great subjects will give us a good idea of his approach. Adams spoke of sin in order to excite repentance, and repentance in order to help people to find forgiveness. He tends to spend more time on sin and less on repentance and forgiveness. As he himself might have put it, in his sermons March is longer than April or May!

Sin

I.D.E. Thomas records typical aphorisms from Adams on this subject.

Heaven begins where sin ends.

When gifts are in their eminency, sin may be in its prevalency.

Sin is the strength of death and the death of strength.

Iniquity can plead antiquity.³

Adams is clear on original sin, as is apparent from his sermon on Psalm 58:4 *A generation of serpents* and his *Meditations on the creed*.⁴ In a sermon on Galatians 5:9 he likens sin to leaven. As leaven is 'not bread but the corruption that maketh bread' so 'sin is not a created quality, but the corruption of a created quality.' Dough becomes leaven by adding salt, so 'The very same work that might be good and acceptable to God, by addition of our pravity becomes evil.' As sour leaven makes bread tasty, 'so by the ungodly's most cursed sins God will advance his glory.' As man cannot live on bread alone, much less on leaven so 'No man can live for ever by his righteousness and good works, much less by his sins.' 'Lastly, sin and leaven are fitly compared for their sourness' to God, angels, saints and the sinner himself.⁵

In the second half of *The fool and his sport* Adams speaks about actual sin. He says some eight things

to show that it must be taken very seriously. Sin is entirely contrary to goodness. It brings on judgments even in this life and where it does not that should make us alert to the fearful judgment ahead. Though little sense of guilt is present now, there will be a very great sense of it one day. Sin provokes God to anger. What a fearful thing to fall into his hands. Sin was punished even in heaven, when the angels that sinned were thrown down. It is so loathsome that God 'could not save his own elect because of it, but by killing his own son.' 'Lastly, Sin shall be punished with death'.⁶

In another place he compares sin with leprosy, emphasizing that sin is ubiquitous, soul infecting, hereditary, incurable, going on beyond death, shutting us out from fellowship with God and, unpurged by repentance, from heaven itself.⁷

We need to see that

Every sin dishonours God and offers to stick ignominy upon that infinite majesty; therefore deserves an infinite penalty.⁸

The trouble is that we fall to temptation too easily. Satan doth diversify his drinks, to keep the wicked man's appetite fresh and sharp. If he be weary of one sin, behold another, stands at his elbow.⁹

'Temptation misleads the navigators with a pirate's light'. Sin is like a bloody prince that, having invited several great men to a great feast, flattered them one by one and then chopped off their heads.

She hath a siren's voice, mermaid's face, a Helen's beauty, to tempt thee; but a leper's touch, a serpent's sting, a traitorous hand to wound thee. The best way to conquer sin is by Parthian war, to run away.¹⁰

What we need to see, therefore, is the harm that sin does. In the second part of *The fatal banquet* Adams

goes to great lengths to show that 'every sin robs some'. Some sins particularly harm God – atheism, heresy, sacrilege, faction and profaneness. Others particularly harm men – irreverence, murder, adultery, thievery, slander and flattery. Still others directly harm ourselves – pride, epicurism, idleness, envy, drunkenness, covetousness. All these should be incentives to turn from sin.¹¹

This last section highlights Adams' determination not to preach simply against sin in general terms but against particular sins. In another listing of sins he attacks epicurism, pride, lust, hypocrisy, avarice, usury, ambition, drunkenness, idleness, swearing lying busybodying, flattery, ingratitude, anger, envy, contention, impatience, vainglory and papistry.¹² In *A generation of serpents* he attacks the 'salamander' of contentiousness, the 'dart' of anger, the 'dipsas' of drunkenness,¹³ the 'crocodile' of hypocrisy, the 'cockatrice' of prostitution, the 'caterpillar' of covetousness, the 'asp' of the Roman Catholic infiltrator, the 'lizard' or 'tortoise' of sloth, the 'sea serpent' of piracy, the 'stellion' of extortion and the 'draco' or devil himself.¹⁴ Besides these sins he also attacks failing to pay debts or keep promises,¹⁵ extortion,¹⁶ duelling¹⁷ and other sinful practices.¹⁸

Often he is very specific regarding the sins of certain callings. He rails against the tricks of shopkeepers who hide the truth, especially apothecaries who might cause their customers' deaths.¹⁹ In one place he lists 'many kinds of private thieves'. These are magistrates ruled by popularity, partiality or passion; lawyers who double deal or are dishonest in other ways; officers involved in bribery; tradesmen with false weights and measures, deficient goods and preying on men's necessities; those who take

advantage of the church to line their pockets; covetous landlords; engrossers who 'hoard up commodities and by stopping their community raise the price'; enclosers who were still taking common land for themselves;²⁰ tap-house keepers and taverners who 'chop away a good conscience for money' and encourage drunkenness; flatterers who think of ways for the rich to make money; brokers and breakers, by which he means unscrupulous pawnbrokers and bailiffs; usurers.²¹ Adams often opposed this latter sin, little spoken against today.²² With all this negative content it must not be supposed that Adams fails to encourage virtue. In his *A contemplation of the herbs* mentioned above he advocates humility, patience, joy, charity, contentment, continence, meekness, frugality, peaceable love, pureness of heart, confidence in God's promises, following Christ, casting care away and good resolution.²³ Among the gates to the *City of peace* are patience and beneficence.²⁴

Repentance

Adams speaks of repentance in one place as 'that old laundress'.²⁵ Elsewhere he assures us that tears of repentance will not drown us but will save us from drowning. Emergent repentance is 'the main plank that shall preserve thee from perishing'.²⁶

People do not care for repentance by nature. In one passage, Adams exclaims 'O blessed repentance, how sweet and amiable art thou! Yet how few love thee!' He identifies some of the characters who hate it – the proud great man, the greedy wealthy, the miserly 'country Nabal', cheating 'avarous citizens', the hypocritical 'muffled lawyer', the bloodthirsty 'sharking officer'. The usurer, drunkard and adulterer are obvious targets but, he points out, the tragedy is

that they think they will one day repent before it is too late.²⁷

How foolish to think repentance is something so easy. Tears alone will not do it. Judas and Esau wept as much as David and Peter, but they did not repent in their souls.²⁸ In *The Black Saint* where he deals directly with superficial repentance, he warns that

Sin is congealed, concorporated, baked on; and must be pared and digged away by greater violence than sweeping. ... Impiety is habituated by custom, hardened by impenitency, incorporated to him by his affection to it; and shall he think that a formal repentance, like a soft besom, can sweep it clean? Can a few drops and sprinklings of water purge off the inveterate foulness and corruption of the flesh? There is required much rinsing to whiten a defiled soul.²⁹

Some think they can 'boldly, stain the cloth a whole vintage, and at last let one washing serve for all' or put out a thousand fires with one tear. This is a great error.

'Repentance' can be thought of as 'an ascent of four steps'.³⁰ Some don't even begin on this ascent, others only come so far. Unless we ascend all four stairs we are not really repenting. We must begin with amendment of life and preparation for Christ's coming. The third rung on the ladder is abstaining from sin and setting out on a new path. All these are useless if they do not lead to actual repentance. That is the only 'bulwark to defend us from the shot of God's thunder from heaven' and hedge against 'his judgments on earth'.³¹

Repentance ought to be a daily thing. God is very gracious but to rely on a last-minute repentance is not wise. 'It is better to make this thy diet than thy

physic.' 'He that will wear a crown in heaven must be all his life on earth preparing it.'³²

Adams also speaks of repentance and her daughter, faith, as 'two most valiant and puissant (i.e. powerful) soldiers that are the soul's champion.' They fight sin and lust and all the powers of evil. Repentance fights with some apparent disadvantages. She fights kneeling and stoops as low as she can.' However, this invites mercy and 'the fearful thunder of vengeance is resisted by the soft wool of repentance.' Then there is the fact that her fellow-soldiers can often fail – faith droops, hope faints, conscience sleeps. However, Holy fear wakens conscience; conscience, faith; faith hope; and hope, repentance; and there is pardon and comfort. Similarly, by bringing up the rear this 'conquering queen' may seem far off but 'comes in with her reserve' and deals with sin at last.³³

On March 29, 1625, the first Tuesday after the death of King James I, Adams preached in Whitehall. Seeking to take advantage of the sober frame that many were in, he preached on Job 42:6 *Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.*³⁴ It is a brief but powerful sermon in which he refuses to 'pull the text in pieces' and simply works his way through Job's words. On *I repent* he notes that repentance is 'better known than practised'. He seeks to urge everyone to take advantage of this 'universal antidote'. He especially warns against supposing it is something we can do at will. After some time on the subject he closes with this beautifully arresting paragraph.

If I should give you the picture of repentance, I would tell you that she is a virgin fair and lovely; and those tears, which seem to do violence to her beauty, rather indeed grace it. Her breast is sore with the strokes of her own penitent hands, which are always either in Moses's

posture in the mount, lift up towards heaven, or the publican's in the temple, smiting her bosom. Her knees are hardened with constant praying; her voice is hoarse with calling to heaven; and when she cannot speak, she delivers her mind in groans. There is not a tear fails from her, but an angel holds a bottle to catch it. She thinks every man's sins less than her own, every man's good deeds more. Her compunctions are unspeakable, known only to God and herself. She could wish, not only men, but even beasts, and trees, and stones, to mourn with her. She thinks no sun should shine, because she takes no pleasure in it; that the lilies should be clothed in black, because she is so apparelled. Mercy comes down like a glorious cherub, and lights on her bosom, with this message from God, 'I have heard thy prayers, and seen thy tears;' so with a handkerchief of comfort dries her cheeks, and tells her that she is accepted in Jesus Christ.

In a sermon on Galatians 6:7 *Man's seed-time and harvest* or *Lex Talionis* Adams lists seven general pleas or excuses given for sin.³⁵ He mentions predestination, God's will, ignorance, outweighing good deeds, God's mercy, Christ's infinite satisfaction and repentance. Dealing with this latter excuse he points out that although God promises to forgive you if you repent, whereas he will always be 'so good as his promise', you cannot be so sure that you will be 'so good as thy purpose'. You can only expect God to 'forgive thee repenting' not to 'give thee repentance sinning'. The promise is to repentance' not of 'repentance'. Repentance is Gods gift. Unless God give thee repentance, and another mind, thou shalt speed as the lost angels did; for God may as easily cast thee from the earth as he did them from heaven.³⁶

Forgiveness

'God is glorious,' Adams observes, 'in all of his works, but most glorious in his works of mercy.' He suggests that this may be why Paul refers to the *glorious gospel* in 1 Timothy 1:11.³⁷ It is in forgiving men's sins that God shows his greatest glory.

In his sermon *Mystical Bedlam*³⁸ he says that the heart needs emptying, cleansing and replenishing.

If you welcome repentance, knocking at your door from God, it shall knock at God's door of mercy for you. It asks of you amendment, of God forgiveness.

He goes on:

The heart thus emptied of that inveterate corruption, should fitly be *washed* before it be replenished. The old poison sticks so fast in the grain of it, that there is only one thing of validity to make it clean – the blood of Jesus Christ. It is this that hath bathed all hearts that ever were, or shall be, received into God's house of glory. This blood cleanseth us from all sin,' I John 1:7 ... In vain were all repentance without this: no tears can wash the heart clean but those bloody ones which the side of Christ and other parts wept, when the spear and nails gave them eyes, whiles the Son of eternal joy became a mourner for his brethren. Could we mourn like doves, howl like dragons, and lament beyond the wailings in the valley of Hadadrimmon, *quid prosunt lachrymae* – what boots it to weep where there is no mercy? And how can there be mercy without the blood of Christ?

This is that ever-running fountain, that sacred pool of Bethesda,' which, without the mediation of angels, stands perpetually unforbidden to all faithful visitants. Were our leprosy worse than Naaman's, here is the true water of Jordan, or pool of Siloam 'Wash, and be clean.' Bring your hearts to this bath, ye corrupted sons of men. Hath God given you so precious a laver, and will you be unclean still? Pray, entreat, beseech, send up to heaven the cries of your tongues and hearts for this blood; call upon the preserver of men,' not only to distil some drops, but to wash, bathe, soak your hearts in this blood. Behold, the Son of God himself, that shed this blood, doth entreat God for you; the whole choir of all the angels and saints in heaven are not wanting. Let the meditation of Christ's mediation for you give you encouragement and comfort. Happy son of man, for whom the Son of God supplicates and intercedes! What can he request and not have!

He doth not only pray for you, but even to you, ye sons of men. Behold him with the eyes of a Christian, faith and hope, standing on the battlements of heaven, having that for his pavement which is our ceiling, offering his blood to wash your hearts, which he willingly lost for your hearts; denying it to none but wolves, bears, and goats, and such reprobate, excommunicate, apostate spirits that tread it under their profane and luxurious feet, esteeming that an unholy thing wherewith they might have been sanctified' Heb.10:29. Come we then, come we, though sinners, if believers, and have our hearts washed.

By his death Christ the Lamb has provided nourishment, covering and cleansing for all who trust in him.

His flesh is meat indeed ... the fleece of his imputed righteousness keeps us warm, clothe our nakedness, hides our uncleanness. ... His blood hath recovered our life, our health, and washed us as white as the snow in Salmon.³⁹

On the fullness of forgiveness he says that 'Sins are so remitted as if they had never been committed.'⁴⁰ Of course, without faith all that Christ has done is useless to us. Adams urges:

The blood of Christ runs fresh; but where is thy pipe of faith to derive it from his side to thy conscience? Say it should shower mercy, yet if thou wantest faith, all would fall beside thee. There would be no more favour for thee than if there was no Saviour.⁴¹

Other aspects of piety

With some sadness, Adams states at one point:

...as there was never less wisdom in Greece than in the time of the seven wise men so never less piety among us than now, when upon good cause most is expected.⁴²

With some nostalgia he compares former times with Leah, 'blear-eyed but fruitful' and his own with Rachel, 'fair, but barren'. From our vantage point the disappointment expressed may be hard to accept. The suggestion that piety was diligently

sown cannot be gainsaid, however. Adams himself preaches not only sin, repentance and forgiveness, but many other aspects of piety too.

Assurance has been identified as a crucial element in Puritan piety, as both a root and a fruit. Adams has a sermon called *Heaven made sure or the certainty of salvation* on Psalm 35:3⁴³ where he asserts:

1. That salvation may be made sure to man.
2. That the best saints have desired to make their salvation sure.

He carefully applies this second point, noting that there are degrees of assurance and that even 'The wealthiest saints have suspected their poverty' and 'the richest in grace are yet 'poorest in spirit.' Somewhere he also says that 'Sense of sin may be often great, and more felt than grace; yet not be more than grace.' It is like when a person's body is well but he is more aware of his finger aching. He puts it in perspective.⁴⁴ Assurance is not always immediate. There is also such a thing as a false assurance. Assurance comes 'by word, by deed, and by seal' – Scripture, good deeds and the inward witness. It is the sweetest comfort a man can know in this life. In various ways God speaks to the Soul of the believer, speaking peace to his conscience and assurance of salvation to his soul. Adams is very clear that conversion must lead to godliness:

A sound conversion is proved by a good conversation. But tremble ye wicked; if ye have not fought in his camp, ye shall not shine in his court.⁴⁵ Good deeds are such things that no-one is saved for them, or without them.

We know there is a sun in heaven, yet we cannot see what matter it is made of, but perceive it only by the beams, light and heat. Election is a sun, the eyes of eagles cannot see it; yet we may find it in the heat of vocation, in the light of illumination, in the beams of good works⁴⁶

We cannot be perfect in this life but we must seek to be thoroughly sanctified.⁴⁷ Adams warns against the traditional triumvirate of foes, the world, the flesh and the devil.⁴⁸ Worldliness is 'too much oil which quencheth our lamp'; the flesh borrows the vessel of the heart and returns it 'broken, lacerated, deformed, defaced'; the devil is a fisherman who 'baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish',⁴⁹ then a cannibal who feeds on human flesh; a crafty fox first and then a strong lion.⁵⁰

As one would expect, Adams is a great advocate of prayer and of getting to know the all-sufficient Word of God.⁵¹ He is keen on kneeling for prayer. 'Never tell me of a humble heart, where I see a stubborn knee.'⁵²

Without fear the good child may come to his kind father. ... We believe in our Father, ability to give, never denying; wisdom to give, never repenting; goodness to give, never upbraiding. This makes us cry, not speak softly, as in fear, but loud, as in assurance. When the king has promised a boon, the subject comes with special security into the presence. Are we laden with sin ... privy to imperfections ... Do we fear some judgement ... are we haunted with a temptation ... full of thankfulness ... ? We have the warrant of a Father, Pray, and be comforted.

Shake off the dust of neglect from the cover, and wear out the leaves with turning; continually imploring the assistance of God's Spirit, that you may read with understanding, understand with memory, and remember with comfort; that your soul's closet may never be unstored of those heavenly receipts which may ease your griefs, cure your wounds, expel your sicknesses, preserve your healths, and keep you safe to the coming of Jesus Christ.⁵³

He advocates the orderly piety that we associate with Puritan godliness:

We must give the first hour of the day, the first work of our hands, the first words of our lips to the Lord.⁵⁴

At night we must give account how we have spent our day; happy are we if we can make our reckoning even with God; a day misspent is lost. ... I fear too many may say so of the whole day of their lives: I have lost my day. Time is precious; and howsoever our pride and lusts think it, God so highly prizeth it that he will punish the loss of a short time with a revenge beyond all times: the misspense of a temporal day with an eternal night. Every hour hath wings, and there is no moment passing from us but it flies up to the Maker of time, and bears him true tidings how we have used it. There is no usury tolerable but of two things, grace and time; and it is only blessed wealth that is gotten by improving them to the best. We brought with us into the world sin enough to repent of all our short day. There is no minute flies over our head without new addition to our sins and therefore brings new reason for our sorrows. We little think that every moment we misspend is a record against us in heaven, or that every idle hour is entered into God's registry and stands there in capital letters till our repentant tears wash it out...⁵⁵

He urges self-examination, another typically Puritan activity. He calls for a natural, moral and spiritual self-contemplation, remembering our souls and spirits, considering our frequent sins and searching our hearts so that we sound 'the lowest depths of conscience' and spy 'blemishes in the face of whitest innocence'.⁵⁶

In his sermon on *England's sickness*, Adams commends moderation, labouring in our callings, and abstinence.⁵⁷ On the second of those subjects he says 'Let the shoemaker look to his boot, the fisher to his boat, the scholar to his book.'⁵⁸

Finally, hear him on death:

All are like actors on a stage, some have one part and some another, death is still busy amongst us; here drops one of the players, we bury him with sorrow, and to our scene again: then falls another, yea all, one after another, till death be left upon the stage. Death is that damp

which puts out all the dim lights of vanity. Yet man is easier to believe that all the world shall die, than to suspect himself.⁵⁹

Death is ready at hand about us, we carry deaths enow within us. We know we shall die, we know not how soon; it can never prevent us, or come too early, if our souls be in the keeping of God.⁶⁰

For the believer it is 'nothing else but a bridge over this tempestuous sea to paradise.' Though evil in itself, cannot ultimately harm the good, as it is the door to eternal life. He likens the believer's death to a clock-mender dismantling and cleaning a timepiece to make it 'go more perfectly'.⁶¹

...though the soul is gotten when man is made, yet it is, as it were, born when he dies: his body being the womb, and death the midwife that delivers it to glorious perfection. The good man may then well say... 'Death shall be my advantage' ... His happiest hour is when ...he can say 'Into thy hands, Lord, I commend my soul'.

Conclusion

So should we all rush to buy copies of Adams' works for ourselves and for others? Should we be laying Bunyan, Goodwin, Owen and Watson on one side and taking up Adams? It probably would not do us any great harm, but Adams' strength is in his aphorisms and illustrations, not in his systematic treatment of doctrines and passages of Scripture. We would probably be wise to buy the Commentary on 2 Peter before the sermons. The sermons need to be put under a gentle heat until the aphorisms are distilled and then presented in something of the style found in I.D.E. Thomas's collection. This may sound sacrilegious but when we consider the wealth of talent that followed Adams, it should be no surprise to us that, stood on his shoulders, they produced superior work. Rather than completely neglecting Adams, however, let us make what use of

him we can. Hunt down his *The three divine sisters* and his *Crucifix* or some of the other items that we have mentioned, store up his axioms as best you know how? and let us be thankful for a man of God, who preached faithfully and in the power of the Spirit, who served his own generation and was then gathered to his fathers in glory.

Works by Adams

Thomas Adams, *The Works of Thomas Adams*, Three Volumes, edited by Thomas Smith with a memoir by Joseph Angus, reprinted from the series of Standard Divines by James Nichol, 1861-1866. Reissued by Eureka, California, Tanski Publications, 1998.

Thomas Adams, *The Three Divine Sisters, Faith, Hope, and Charity*, edited with an introduction by W. H. Stowell, London, Thomas Nelson, 1847.

Thomas Adams, *Everlasting mercy* ('Majesty in misery' and 'Mercy in perpetuity'), Apples of Gold reprints, Sheffield, Zoar Publications, no date.

1. In the preface to his 1614 set of sermons 'The Devil's Banquet'. *Works* 3, p.xxxii.
2. Also in the preface to his 1614 set of sermons 'The Devil's Banquet'. *Works* 3, p.xxxii.
3. I.D.E.Thomas, *A Puritan Golden Treasury* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp.133, 116, 261.
4. *Works* 1, p.71; *Works* 3, pp.194ff.
5. *Works* 2, pp.345-349.
6. Cf. *Works* 1, p.248-253.
7. Cf. *Works* 1, pp.442, 443.
8. *Works* 1, p.53.
9. *Works* 1, p.170.
10. *Works* 1, p.222.
11. *Works* 1, pp.175-197.
12. *Works* 1, pp.276-287.
13. Salamanders are amphibians, fabled to live in, or to be able to endure, fire; the draco is a snake; the dipsas is a serpent whose bite was fabled to produce intense thirst.
14. The draco and stellion are types of lizard. See *Works* 1, pp.77-80.
15. *Works* 1, pp.145, 146.
16. *Works* 1, p.79.
17. *Works* 1, p.183; 2, pp.321, 322, 556.

18. E.g. suicide: 'No man must let the tenant out of the tenement, till God the landlord call for it.' 'As we cannot live without a *permittis*, so we must not die without a *dimittis*.' *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p. 289; making images of Christ, *Works* 2, p.291.
19. *Works* 1, p.146, 147.
20. A sin that had been preached against from at least the time of John Bradford (1510?-1555).
21. *Works* 1, pp.276-287.
22. Adams takes this even further when he speaks of characteristic sins of nations - Spanish pride, French lust, Italian poisoning, German drunkenness, English epicurism. *Works* 1, pp.368, 369.
23. *Works* 2, pp.446-467.
24. *Works* 2, pp.316-319.
25. *Works* 3, p.273.
26. *Works* 3, p.297.
27. *Works* 2, p.488.
28. *Works* 2, p.346.
29. *Works* 2, p.56.
30. It is interesting to compare this sermon with John Bradford's popular 1552 sermon on repentance for their basic similarity and Adams' increased awareness of the danger of hypocrisy.
31. *Works* 2, p.490.
32. *Works* 2, p.572.
33. *Works* 3, p.297.
34. *Works* 1, pp.49-59.
35. *Works* 2, pp.360-374, see pp.364-367.
36. *Works* 2, p.252.
37. *Works* 1, p.51.
38. *Works* 1, pp.254-293, see pp.267, 268.
39. *Works* 2, p.114.
40. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.110.
41. *Works* 2, p.276.
42. *Works* 2, p.179.
43. *Works* 1, pp.460-70.
44. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.23,
45. *Works* 1, pp.362, 401ff.
46. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, pp.127, 88.
47. *Works* 3, p.78.
48. *Works* 1, p.401ff.
49. Cf. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.290.
50. *Works* 1, pp.431, 260, 220, 2, p.211. Worth noting is Adams' insistence that the devil does not know who is elect, *Works* 2, pp.53, 147.
51. ...now to expect revelation of things by dreams were to entreat God to lend us a candle while we have the bright sun. *Works* 2, p.16.
52. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.316.
53. *Works* 3, p.105; *Works* 1, p.303.
54. *Works* 2, p.536.
55. *Works* 2, p.88.
56. *Works* 2, p.384.
57. *Works* 1, pp.426, 427.
58. *Works* 1 p.383.
59. *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.69.
60. *Works* 3, p.32.
61. *Works* 2, pp.227, 228.

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The substance of this exposition was presented at the FIEC Church Planters' Conference at Cuckfield, Sussex, on 11th November, 2003. At the conclusion of this, the second of three expositions, a leader of the FIEC testified that in forty years of ministry in England he had witnessed downgrade only and that Isaiah's optimism was hard to credit. It is mysterious that while there is serious decline in Western Europe there is significant advance in most other parts of the world.

Isaiah is pivotal historically. He is quoted sixty times in the NT, more than any other prophet. His long ministry began during the reign of Uzziah and continued on through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Mannaseh is not mentioned but Isaiah may well have continued into that time as well.

Isaiah was the foremost spiritual leader of his times. This is illustrated by four historical chapters (36-39) devoted to a time of acute national crisis when Sennacherib the Assyrian and his mighty army besieged Jerusalem. Isaiah guided the king and the people through this crisis.

As far as salvation is concerned, Isaiah is the evangelical prophet of the Old Testament (45:22). As far as language is concerned, he is the Shakespeare of the Bible. As far as the Son of God is concerned, Isaiah describes in most detail his incarnation, his life of perfect obedience, his sufferings, death and burial. 'He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death' (53:9). Isaiah also foresaw a kingdom that would expand to the point of world dominion: 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (11:9). All this was revealed to the prophet in a time when Judah would increasingly struggle to survive at all. Only a stump would be left. Yet out of that stump of Jesse the salvation of the worldwide Church would come.

Here I will explore the dimensions of the last times as we find them described by Isaiah.

Isaiah 2

They will beat their swords into ploughshares

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war any more.

Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD. (2:1-5)

The last days we take to refer to the times of the Messiah from his first coming to his second coming. The second coming will usher in the final judgment of all mankind and the eternal state of blessedness for the righteous and eternal hell for the wicked.

'A strict sequence of events must be observed here. The abolition of war cannot come about before the nations have learned to submit to the Word of God' (Leupold).

Sin leading to war has always been the greatest curse of the human race. It was the two great world wars

of the 20th century that blew away the liberal postmillennial optimism that prevailed in the early part of that century and which has led to the disintegration of the philosophy of the Enlightenment (Modernism) to give way to a now rampant postmodernism. There is a gulf between optimism based on self-confident humanism of what man can do and what the LORD achieves by spiritual means (Zc.4:6). He has purposed to achieve the impossible by his omnipotence in his own time and according to his own will. His instruments are weak. He perfects strength out of our weakness, as Paul says: 'my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9, cf. Heb. 11:34).

Isaiah concludes this prophecy with a call to unbelieving Israel to walk in the light of the LORD. E.J. Young points to the fact that there are two basic interpretations of this passage. The first is that this prophecy will be fulfilled in the present final age. The second is known as dispensationalism, which takes the fulfilment to happen in the millennium following Christ's return. Young says that 'dispensationalism does violence of a serious kind to the general structure of biblical eschatology.' Young also points out the difficulty in believing the possibility of the cessation of wars when sin is endemic in the human race. The poetic nature of Isaiah may give licence to the idea that this prophecy is relative, that is that the gospel will be so pervasive that peace will prevail as never before. If we look at the European Union of today and compare it with the horrors of the 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 wars, this is peace indeed! But if we look at Africa chaos predominates.

Isaiah 9

the government will be on his shoulders

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this. (9:6,7)

'What this child inaugurates in a seemingly small beginning will have within it potentialities of growth well nigh unbelievable' (Leupold).

The obstacles to this increase seem insurmountable but we must, in the words of Alec Motyer on this text, note, 'the zealous determination of Yahweh, the exodus-God, whose nature it is to save his people and overthrow his foes'. Isaiah stresses divine omnipotence to achieve his purpose, 'The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this!' The matter is expressed by Daniel, 'In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever' (2:44).

This spiritual conquest takes time. It goes forward by prayer. 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession' (Ps.2:8). This conquest cannot be achieved without open doors. Iron barriers must be

broken down. Hence the above text is followed by, 'You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.' In our generation the fall of atheistic Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe illustrates this factor of Christ's power to break down iron curtains (Ps 110:1). The bronze gates of the false prophet today impede the advance of the gospel. All power belongs to Jesus (Mt. 28:18). Only he can remove these barriers and at the same time impart the strength to his labourers to go through open doors into the harvest fields. The universal evangelical Church is burdened in prayer about this above all other subjects.

With regard to increase we should take heart that during the 20th century evangelicals increased as never before one hundredfold in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of Asia such as South Korea and China.

Isaiah 11

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD

God loves to bring great blessing out of weakness and humble beginnings. King David was the last in a line of brothers of an obscure family. In this chapter the focus is on the stump of Jesse. From that unlikely background and from the roots of that stump of Jesse came a branch, the Messiah. His attributes of wisdom and understanding and the righteousness of his reign are described in 11:1-5. Then follows a metaphorical description of the regenerative effects of his gospel which are far-reaching and extend eventually to all the earth:

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.(11:6-9).

Isaiah goes on immediately to declare that in that day when knowledge is advancing, the Root of Jesse (the Messiah) will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious.

The time described does not refer to heaven. While we cherish the reality of the coming regeneration of the cosmos and the presence on the new earth of many of the finest animals (Rom 8:22-25). I for one do not expect that there will be cobras and vipers there!

It is vital to discern when Isaiah is using metaphor and when he is not. For instance, note metaphor and hyperbole in 55:12, 'You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.'

On Isaiah 2:6-9 Matthew Henry is emphatic when he says that this is poetry and expounds as follows: 'Unity and concord; these are intimated in these figurative promises, that even the wolf shall dwell peaceably with the lamb. Men of the most fierce and furious dispositions, who used to bite and devour all about them shall have their temper so strangely altered by the efficacy of the gospel and grace of Christ, that they shall live in love even with the weakest, and such as formerly they would have made an easy prey of. So far shall the sheep be from

hurting one another, as sometimes they have done (Ezk.34:20,21),that even the wolves shall agree with them. Christ, who is our Peace, came to slay all enmities and to settle lasting friendships among his followers, particularly among Jews and Gentiles, when multitudes of both, being converted to the faith of Christ, are united in one sheepfold,....they that inhabit the holy mountain shall live as amicably as the creatures did that were with Noah in the ark and it shall be a means of their preservation for they shall not hurt or destroy one another as they have done.'

This beautiful scene of peace is so far removed from terrorism and wars that fill our TV screens that it seems like a pipe dream. Yet we should note Isaiah 42:4.'He will not fail or be discouraged until he establishes justice in the earth.' These words suggest a long hard battle which is won in the end by patience until the true religion prevails in all the world.

Isaiah 19

Blessed be Egypt my people

This chapter is devoted to Egypt. The first part of the chapter is a warning to Israel not to put her trust in Egypt. Israel was a weak small nation placed between two mighty powers, Assyria in the north and Egypt in the south. The chapter is a warning that even the strongest nations can implode from within. Germany, a strong nation, was destroyed by Naziism (1933-1945). The Soviet Union was brutalized by Stalin and tortured by atheistic Communism, finally falling apart into fifteen nations and from the premium league of power was relegated to a lower division. Isaiah sees better times ahead for Egypt.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork and Israel my inheritance" (19:23-25).

'A highway is a favourite metaphor in this book for the removal of alienation and separation (11:16; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10). In rough and hilly Israel, the force of such a figure is obvious' (Oswalt). Swift and open communication comes when there is a powerful unity and zeal in the truth. Here warring Assyria and Egypt which stand for all the warring nations of the earth are in complete unity.

The full dimensions of this prophecy await fulfilment. Pentecost was a beginning. In the centuries following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Diaspora of the Jews (AD70) Christianity was established in North Africa, but in that time it is difficult to see a union through Jerusalem to Assyria of a kind which satisfies this prophecy. Today there is a literal road from Baghdad to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to Cairo. It may not be a double carriageway yet, but this prophecy depicts a time when such will be needed for use for conferences of Christians from these nations.

Isaiah 49

That you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth

Alec Motyer in his exposition of Isaiah stresses the biographical and autobiographical character of the four Servant passages. The second Servant passage is of special interest since it describes the despondency of the Messiah who voices inward pain at his seeming lack of success. The spiritual harvest is so small.

'I have laboured and spent my strength for nothing.'
God says to him:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of
the earth." (49:6)

Albert Barnes suggests that the application of redemption on such a wide scale is the highest honour conferred on God's Son. He makes this application, 'There is no higher glory for man than to tread in the footsteps of the Son of God, and he who by self-denial and love and personal toil and prayer does most for the conversion of the whole world to God, is most like the Redeemer and will have the most elevated seat in the glories of the heavenly world.' Daniel 12:3 would certainly support this.

Isaiah 59-60

nations will come to your light

Motyer collates the passages from chapter 59 to 66 under the heading, 'The Anointed Conqueror' (Motyer p.15). Isaiah describes the development of a worldwide reverence for the LORD. This will come about through the coming of a Redeemer in Zion. This advent is characterized by the power of the Holy Spirit as he comes like a pent-up flood (59:19). His coming in power is against a dark background of rebellion and ignorance. 'See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples' (60:2). The LORD is grieved by the absence of justice. He is appalled that there is no one to intervene. Therefore he comes to work salvation himself. 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins' (59:20).

The apostle Paul cites this scripture in his treatise on the future of ethnic Israel in Romans 11. In answer to the question, has God finished with the Jews? he suggests an answer in two parts. First, there is always a remnant of which he Paul was a representative. Second, there is a larger gathering yet to be, a fullness which will bring blessing as life from the dead (Rom.11:12,15,25-36).

Isaiah 60:1-22 consists of ten stanzas, all of which except one fall into eight lines, five on each side of the pivotal statement of verse 12 that the nation which will not serve Zion, will perish. Isaiah is unique among the prophets in his use of the metaphor of light. Jesus is the light of the world. 'The poem centres on the Abrahamic theme that those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed (Gn. 12:3; 27:29)' (Motyer, p.493). 'The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly' (60:22). 'It may seem to be delayed, and put off so long, that we are out of hopes for it; but as the Lord will do it, so he will hasten it; will do it with all convenient speed; though much time be passed before it is done, no time will be lost; he will *hasten it in its time*, in the proper time, in the season wherein it will be beautiful; he will do it in the time appointed by his wisdom, though not in the time prescribed by our folly. And this is really hastening it; for though it seem to tarry, it does not tarry if it come in God's time; for we are sure that that is the best time, which he that believes will patiently wait for' (Matthew Henry).

Dirk Odendaal in his work on Isaiah 40-66 (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970) draws the threads together: 'In these chapters we also see the nations subjecting themselves to Israel (49:23; 60:12, 14),

being themselves active in bringing the scattered people of Israel home (49:22; 60:9), then performing the most menial tasks for Israel (49:23; 60:10; 61:5) and acknowledging the true mystery of Israel, i.e. “God is with you only...” (45:14 – the end of anti-Semitism?). The nations are all streaming to the light of Yahweh’s glory which has arisen over Israel (60: 1-3).’

Isaiah 62

they shall never keep silence

It is fitting that we should conclude on a practical note. Since we have these promises we are called to intercession of a kind that gives God no rest by day or by night. Leupold translates:

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have appointed watchmen;
All the day and all the night
they shall never keep silence,
They are the ones that keep reminding the LORD:
Take no rest.
Do not grant him any rest,
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it famous in the earth. (62:6,7)

The watchmen are set upon the walls of Zion by the Lord Messiah himself. They are the true guardians who keep vigil and who know the times. Their prayer is ceaseless *all the day* and *all the night*; vocal, verbalizing the need, *they are never silent*. They are effectual because they are holding the LORD to achieve what he has promised, *they keep reminding the LORD*. Their prayer is disciplined, *they shall never keep silence*. It is prevailing intercession, *until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it famous in the earth*.

Will the outcome in view actually materialize? Jonathan Edwards’ thesis for the future was based on the prophecy of Zechariah 8:10-12. There will be a

mighty confluence of peoples and strong nations for the purpose of prayer. There will also be the establishment of the gospel in nations hitherto held in ignorance. From these nations now described as developing nations will emerge a mighty army of missionaries. Already the Chinese believers talk of preparing and sending out 100,000 missionaries into the world. Brazil and the Philippines now send out more missionaries than they receive. In Edwards’ day the known world was tiny compared with the 21st century. With *Operation World* (660 pages), together with *Operation China* (700 pages) and *Peoples on the Move* (488 pages) and *The Unreached People Groups of Indonesia* (155 pages) in his hands, how would Jonathan Edwards have written the concluding chapters of his book *The History of Redemption*?

The geographic and ethnic dimensions of Isaiah’s eschatology can be summed up by the verses that were used in the salvation of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other’ (45:22). This text is set within the context of Gentile salvation as Israel’s glory (45:18-25). Be saved! is an imperative. The sure outcome of the act of looking away from the idols of this world to the Cross of the One crucified is salvation (Nu.21:8, 9). We have here the fulfilment of the promise made at the beginning to Abraham: ‘And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (Gn.12:3).

Inexpressible and glorious joy appropriate for such a marvellous salvation is expressed in 52:9, 10:

Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The LORD will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God.

Psalms 67 and 72 are parallel. Psalm 67 embraces all the people groups of the world, while Psalm 72 tells of the extent of the Messiah's dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (cf. Zc.9:9-10). Malachi expresses it like this, "My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name shall be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty' (1:11).

'Jesus prayed that his church might be one (John 17), not only in a spiritual sense or in heaven, but visibly in the world, "so that the world will believe" that the Father sent him. This unity is to mirror on a creaturely level the union in the trinity. It is thus a unity grounded in truth, not merely institutional or enforced unity but a unity in deed and truth. It is not yet evident. For the furtherance of the world-wide advance of Christ's rule, it must come. We must work towards it in some practical terms now, by abandoning manipulation, by teaching and doing the truth and by seeking to promise the unity and catholicity of the church, as well as its purity and apostolicity.' (Robert Letham in his book on the Trinity to be published by Presbyterian & Reformed).

Promises such as, 'nor will they train for war any more' and, 'earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea', are amazing! Since they provide hope and vision, these promises influence our intercession. These descriptions of the success of the gospel inspired the pioneer

missionaries such as William Carey and Adoniram Judson to effort and enterprise. May that be the effect of these and many more biblical passages upon the rising generation of evangelical believers, for it is upon their shoulders that the responsibility to complete the great commission will rest.

Contradictions?

To say the least, it would seem that these glowing descriptions of Isaiah contradict our Lord who said 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith in the earth?' (Lk.18:8). But surely he did not mean that there will not be any saving faith when he comes? We believe that if he returned today more than 50 million Chinese would exult in his coming! Surely we are intended to apply Luke 18:8 in its context. That means if we search our own hearts we will hardly find *the kind of faith* that the persistent widow displayed in her ceaseless petitions. Very few indeed have that kind of faith.

Isaiah seems to contradict the words of our Lord in Matthew 7:13,14 where he speaks of a wide road and a narrow gate, and of the few and the many. It is true that with regard to most of human history there has been a small proportion that are saved. But our Lord here is pressing home the reality of discipleship, which he did on many occasions. He is not closing the door on any being saved, no more than Paul did on the ship carrying 276 on board (Acts 27). Paul's aim was to save every one of those on the ship. Paul did not suggest a law of necessity that only a tiny number on board would land safely on Malta and that the rest would have to drown! In some large Christian families we know we rejoice to observe that every member maintains a credible profession of faith. Yet in many others there is the dreadful reality of division. The New Testament is

not a numbers game. We should not set up one text against another. The Lord saves by few and sometimes he saves by many.

There have been times when the gospel has been powerful and pervasive and there is no reason to believe that such times cannot be repeated on a large scale. A massive effect takes place in any society when ten per cent of a population consist of earnest believers who are well taught and act as salt and light.

We could think that Isaiah seems also to forget the terrible reality of apostasy. That is odd, since he himself was living in just such a time. We see that from the appalling nature of his call described in chapter six. Isaiah faced a barren ministry. Paul warns of evil times to come. We observe today evils of horrendous kinds. Evil men like Saddam Hussein seem to get worse and worse. While evil will gain ground, that does not automatically mean that that evil will extinguish the gospel. Indeed great evils such as the cruelty in Indonesia by the Muslims against the Communists in the 1960s only served to add significant numbers to the Christian Church. There is a worldwide movement of Iranians moving from Islam because their minds have been opened to the gospel by the barbarity of the system in which they were reared. When they see Christian love, the Holy Spirit uses that reality to draw them to Christ. The battle for the Iranians is only beginning. Unless the Lord raises up reformers and sound teachers for them, it is possible that most will be lost to charismania and to shallowness.

A further factor in our reckoning today is the difference between revival and revivalism. Some areas have reported revival but sadly there has been excitement without teaching. In all the statistics of *Operation World* we have to take account of

shallowness. Yet even when we have allowed for superficiality, the picture is by no means all sombre. There is a wonderful hunger for the truth in many areas. I can name areas of the world where there is a greater appetite to read doctrinal books than there is here in the UK. Jonathan Edwards predicted a time when there would be divines in Africa, and if in Africa why not in China? And why not all over the world?

It is not acceptable when we are perplexed by Isaiah to say that the prophet is simply using poetry to describe heaven. There are too many present continuous participles for that. A participle has an 'ing' at the end. They are not beat'ing' their swords into ploughshares in heaven. There are no swords in heaven. Now is the era that the transforming takes place. To get justice on earth seems impossible. But Isaiah says 'he will not fail or be discouraged until he establishes justice in the earth' (Isa.42:4). There is no discouragement in heaven. And there is no easy way on earth. To overcome evil involves a mighty battle. Isaiah is assuring us of eventual victory. Whenever victory is attained, vigilance is needed because while we are in this world we have a terrible propensity to backslide. Messiah, as I have shown, is depicted in the concluding chapters of Isaiah as a worldwide conqueror. Let us not view our Lord as the perpetual loser, a wretched failure. Let us not place the crown of triumph on Satan's head. Let's remember that while battles may be lost the war will be won. In the last great war, 1939-1942, there were no successes until 1942. It was only then that there was a gradual change. Then came D-day and the storming of the beaches of Normandy. That was the beginning of the end for Hitler. We look for a time when we will see much more of the truth that Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan (1 Jn.3:8).

Introduction

New books in the field of NT studies continue to flood the shelves (whether wooden or 'virtual') of the booksellers. In this survey, I have attempted to identify and comment on a selection of these. My criteria for inclusion have been fairly arbitrary: I have included those titles on the NT, and related subjects, which (a) have been available to me; (b) seem to me to be significant and worthy of note; (c) are primarily exegetical and theological rather than expository; (d) I think could be of benefit to students and/or preachers. Thus, I have not attempted to be exhaustive, but perhaps I may point readers to some usable resources which they might not easily have discovered for themselves.

Study Aids

Two very practical books appeared at about the same time. *The Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*¹ and the *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*² both offer concise definitions (and sometimes discussions) of concepts and technical terms which often prove problematic to students of Biblical Studies. The articles in the former book are fairly brief (a short paragraph) and generally conservative. Those in the latter tend to be longer and more reflective of a mainstream critical position. The *Handbook* also has the advantage of suggesting materials for further investigation. Not only will these books be useful to students, but they will also help anyone who wishes to read modern theological books which use any technical vocabulary.

Historical Context

Christianity is rooted in history and thus it is vital to be aware of the world in which the events of the NT took place. The publication of the third edition of E. Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*³ is therefore to be warmly welcomed. This has been a standard reference book for many years, but it has now been improved by updated bibliographies and further discussion of several topics, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is an excellent tool for students and others who want a comprehensive guide to the ancient context (political, social, religious, etc.) of early Christianity, yet who do not

wish to be overwhelmed with detail. Ferguson encourages the reader to engage directly with the ancient world by including selections of primary sources. Clear black and white photographs and illustrations add to the value of this book. D.A.deSilva's *Introducing the Apocrypha*⁴ provides a resource by which even readers who would not accept the so-called Apocrypha as part of their Bible may nonetheless appreciate how these Jewish documents can increase our awareness of the history, religion and politics of the NT world. This is a serious study, but it is clearly written and might be read by any intelligent reader. Unfortunately, books which introduce the ancient world to modern readers can sometimes seem rather dry. Not so in the case of *The Lost Letters of Pergamum* by B.W. Longenecker.⁵ This remarkable 'historical novel' provides us with a series of fictional letters between 'Antipas' (a fictional character inspired by Rev. 2:13) and Luke, in which Luke responds to questions about Christianity from a somewhat sceptical Roman citizen. This correspondence provides much information about the ancient Greco-Roman world along the way. I enjoyed this book very much and found its ending rather moving. Nonetheless, it has to be recognized that the 'historical novel' genre leaves a measure of confusion in the reader's mind as to what is history and what is fiction. Longenecker is aware of this and provides endnotes which identify those elements of the story which can be defended historically and those which cannot. Readers will be able to read this book quickly, will learn a lot here and may be spurred on to further investigation.

O. Skarsaune has written a fascinating book entitled *In the Shadow of the Temple*,⁶ which traces the relationship between the Christian Church and the Jews. This wide-ranging book takes the reader through discussions of ancient Judaism, early Christianity and developments in the early Church, constantly emphasizing the value of appreciating Jewish influence on Christianity. An excellent study for the keen reader.

A couple of atlases have come to my attention recently. SPCK have produced *The Essential Atlas of the Bible*⁷ – a well produced atlas for a general readership using high-quality graphics and lots of photographs. While the

visual aspects of this atlas are very attractive, I was, overall, somewhat disappointed with it. Discussions of particular issues are rather brief and selective, and the text assumes standard critical views without discussion, but my main criticism of this atlas is the limited number of actual maps. On an entirely different scale is the *Tübinger Bibelatlas*.⁸ This is a scholarly atlas which is full of large, detailed maps (comparable to OS maps) relating to biblical times and beyond. The text, brief as it is, is in both German and English, so the book is perfectly usable by those without German. These maps will be far too detailed for most general readers, but for students, teachers and those who are fascinated by geography and archaeology, this is a goldmine which can be purchased for a comparatively reasonable price. Libraries should certainly consider purchasing this book.

Reading the Biblical Text

Let the Reader Understand,⁹ by D. McCartney and C. Clayton, is an important discussion of the principles of biblical interpretation from a Reformed theological perspective. While it does deal with academic issues (making it an excellent resource for students), it also addresses issues which would be of importance to preachers, and indeed to any Christian (e.g. Scripture in worship and witness, guidance), and should be accessible to a wider readership. Much more briefly, R. Briggs has written *Reading the Bible Wisely*.¹⁰ Briggs' work is based on detailed scholarship, but here he writes briefly and simply on how to read the biblical texts, drawing on the biblical concept of 'wisdom'. This readable book will help readers think through how they read Scripture, even if they do not accept all its arguments. Another very helpful book is S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*.¹¹ In ten short chapters, Moyise surveys the way in which OT texts are employed in the NT documents. Generally, the discussion is careful and helpful, if necessarily brief; aware of scholarship but not dominated by it. I was disappointed, however, that Moyise too quickly disparaged the interpretation found in some of Paul's contested letters.

One important aspect of biblical interpretation is translation. *The Word of God in English* is a study of

translation method written by a Professor of English and a key figure in the translation of the *English Standard Version* of the Bible. It thus serves, not only as an independent study, but also as a defense of the *ESV*, which has been the subject of considerable scrutiny in the last year or two. While the debate over translation method will continue, Leland Ryken's book is an elegant and easily read argument for an 'essentially literal' approach to Bible translation.

Also important, volume 3 in the *Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* has just appeared.¹² This volume is devoted to examination of the use of the Bible in politics, with particular reference to the work of Professor Oliver O'Donovan. Each chapter is devoted to an aspect of O'Donovan's work and then O'Donovan provides his own written response. This book is very important, although it is perhaps rather difficult for those who have not read O'Donovan's writings to gain the full value from it. This series continues to be a source of good, if demanding, discussion of how Scripture may be read for the good of the Church.

Biblical Theology

The discipline of 'Biblical Theology' is receiving more and more attention and reflection in recent years, which can only be a good thing for the Church as it attempts to engage responsibly in interpretation of the whole Bible. An international conference held at Wheaton College was devoted to the topic and has resulted in a collection of papers, *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, edited by S. Hafemann. As with many collections of essays, they cover a range of topics without working systematically through the issues – some essays deal with methodology while others are discussions of specific biblical texts. Nevertheless, this is a very stimulating collection which includes contributions from distinguished scholars such as W. Dumbrell, G. H. Wilson, G. K. Beale and C. R. Seitz. More systematic in its approach is *The Ways of our God*,¹³ which represents the mature thought of Professor C. H. H. Scobie, a key figure in reflection on Biblical Theology in recent years. Scobie's early chapters are particularly helpful surveys of the key

methodological issues relating to the discipline. The bulk of the book is an attempt to actually do biblical theology and is perhaps somewhat less successful. In his trying to cover such a vast amount of material, one sometimes has the feeling that exegetical decisions which really require some justification are simply assumed. This is, nevertheless, a useful resource for students and preachers, even if it is only a starting point. S. Hafemann has written his own 'Biblical Theology' for a general readership, entitled *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith*.¹⁴ This traces the story at the heart of the Bible from creation, through covenant, fall and redemption. There is a particular emphasis on the place of suffering in the life of the Christian. Although this is serious theology, Hafemann writes clearly and with pastoral concern and this book would be of value to any serious reader. Some biblical theology studies have been more narrowly focused. In the 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' series, D. Pao has written a book on the Pauline theme of *Thanksgiving*,¹⁵ which is both academically rigorous and pastorally helpful, while J. D. Hays has written a study of race, entitled *From Every People and Nation*.¹⁶ Hays' book addresses an important contemporary ethical issue and deserves serious attention. Hays focuses mainly on the black-white race issues which are dominant in the USA, but the outcomes of his biblical study will have much wider significance. D. Wenham has devoted many years to the study of the relationship between the teaching of Jesus and the writings of Paul. Now he has taken his more technical research and presented it for a general readership in *Paul and Jesus: The True Story*.¹⁷ This is a useful book for Christians who wish to begin to reflect on the relationship between the teachings of Jesus and Paul from an informed and solidly evangelical perspective.

Introductory Issues

D.A. Black has edited two useful volumes on introductory matters: *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*¹⁸ and *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*¹⁹ provide clear and up-to-date discussions of the main scholarly positions as articulated by important advocates of these positions. These volumes will be particularly useful to students seeking discussion of these important issues

which goes beyond dictionary article length but is not unduly technical. L. McDonald has built on his previous work on the NT canon by editing a substantial volume entitled, *The Canon Debate*,²⁰ which includes numerous important essays. This is certainly a book for teachers and students rather than for the general reader and, as such, it provides a useful collection of essays. It is unfortunate, however, that it does not better reflect the more conservative position of, for example, R. Beckwith. For most people, this is probably a book to refer to in the library. Also for specialists is M. Hengel's *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*.²¹ Hengel's books are always full of carefully researched detail and thorough documentation. In this volume he addresses the significance of the Greek OT for the canon of Christian Scripture, raising provocative questions which deserve attention. As forecast in my last survey, the new textbook *Exploring the New Testament: Volume 2, Introducing the Letters and Revelation* by I. H. Marshall, S. Travis and I. Paul has appeared.²² This will, doubtless, join its partner as a popular textbook in academic courses, but it will also be a very useful guide for anyone who wishes to work through the issues relating to the NT documents. Scripture is treated with respect by the authors although I would differ from them at certain points. There is also regular encouragement to the reader to think for him/herself. C. Rowland's book, *Christian Origins*,²³ has been republished in a second edition. It is exceptionally helpful in its clear presentation of information on all aspects of NT context and content in numerous short chapters. Students will appreciate the 'bite-sized' division of material in particular. It will probably be of less use to preachers.

Gospel Studies

The most recent major study of the historical Jesus is that by J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*,²⁴ which forms the first volume of a series entitled 'Christianity in the Making'. Dunn takes a generally positive approach to the Gospels as the products of carefully remembered oral tradition which was passed along and preserved within the early Christian communities. This is not an easy book, and, although Dunn indicates that he has deliberately tried to make it accessible to non-specialists, many such

readers would possibly find its 900 pages of solid discussion rather daunting. Nonetheless, ministers and students should certainly consider reading this book, whole or in part, for careful engagement with the Gospel texts in their historical context.

Also worthy of note is the revised second edition of G. Stanton's textbook, *The Gospels and Jesus*.²⁵ Stanton is clear, concise and generally conservative as he engages with historical, theological and literary questions. The book is readable and will be of use to students in particular.

D. Bock's *Jesus According to Scripture*²⁶ is not really a commentary, nor is it an original contribution to 'Life of Jesus Research'. Rather, it follows the structure of a synopsis and comments on each unit of text with respect to its place within the individual Gospel and also the different features of any parallel passages. It is extremely useful for students and preachers and would be accessible to a wider readership also.

*Gospel Women*²⁷ is a collection of careful studies by R. Bauckham of the women who are named in the Gospels. This is not a 'role of women in the Church' book. Rather it is a collection of essays which are sensitive to historical, literary and theological features of the texts and also to contemporary trends in biblical interpretation. There are rich resources in this book on women who have not often been the centre of attention. For example, there are almost 100 pages on Joanna. This will not be an easy read but it will certainly be a rewarding one.

Pauline Studies

Two textbooks on Paul's life and writings have appeared in the last year or so. J. McRay, a noted NT archaeologist, has written *Paul: His Life and Teaching*.²⁸ The book is divided into the two parts suggested by the title. The first part reflects McRay's particular expertise, helpfully outlining Paul's life with a high view of the historical value of Acts and all the Pauline letters and illuminating his discussion with supporting non-canonical evidence. McRay's own photographs add to the value of this section. Unfortunately, the section on

Paul's teaching is rather idiosyncratic and does not provide a rounded presentation of Paul's theology. This is likely to mean that this book will not become a standard textbook since there are several other volumes which do the job more effectively. The other textbook is *The Cambridge Companion to Paul*, edited by J. D. G. Dunn.²⁹ This volume joins this valuable series which already boasts a useful volume on 'the Historical Jesus'. It contains seventeen fairly short essays, plus an introduction by the editor. Several of the contributors are conservative, although others represent a fairly wide range of perspectives. An interesting feature of this collection is a section devoted to discussion of how Paul has been interpreted at various times in history. Evangelicals will want to read other books along with this one, but this collection of essays gives a good, fair and digestible indication of the current state of Pauline studies.

At a more technical level, and continuing a recent flow of substantial studies which engage critically with the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul', S. Gathercole has written *Where is Boasting?*, which is the published version of his PhD thesis, written under the supervision of J. D. G. Dunn at the University of Durham. Gathercole provides both a study of 'boasting' in Paul and an evaluation of the 'New Perspective'. The bulk of the book is devoted to discussion of Jewish literature and perhaps only students and teachers will have the patience to work through this material. The shorter section on Romans 1-5 should be of wider interest.

*Paul, the Law and the Covenant*³⁰ by A. Das is a careful exegetical study of Pauline texts (mainly from Romans and Galatians) written in direct response to the arguments of E. P. Sanders and those who have followed after him. This is an excellent, detailed study which should be read widely by those who follow this ongoing debate.

Briefly, a paperback edition of C. E. B. Cranfield's essays, *On Romans, and Other New Testament essays*,³¹ will bring his lively and thoughtful essays on a range of topics to a wider readership. His critical engagement with aspects of the work of J. D. G. Dunn will be of particular interest to many readers.

Commentaries

When I wrote my previous survey (May 2002), I was able to mention the publication of two substantial commentaries on Mark's Gospel but, as I had not then seen them, I was unable to comment on them. Now I can remedy that situation. R. T. France has produced *The Gospel of Mark* as his contribution to the excellent *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series and C. A. Evans has completed the commentary on Mark 9-16 for the *Word Biblical Commentary* series. In the former volume, France writes with clarity and deliberately avoids the common clutter of endless footnotes. The result is a careful exegesis of the Greek text of Mark which treats the text seriously as Scripture and which is a pleasure to read. It should prove very useful for preachers with Greek. The latter is a very detailed commentary which displays the astonishing competence which Evans has demonstrated over twenty years of prolific publishing. Unfortunately, page xxx (part of a bibliography) was blank in my copy.

Large commentaries seem to have been the order of the day recently. H. Hoehner has written a major commentary on Ephesians and is painstaking in his care over the text. He also provides an extensive and careful argument for Pauline authorship. G. Osborne has produced the commentary on *Revelation* in the 'Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament' series.³² This series contains some excellent volumes already and Osborne has contributed a very strong addition. He maintains the pattern of engaging seriously with the Greek text of the NT, while making the comments to those who are not experts in Greek. Osborne is frank about his literalistic approach to Revelation in his youth, but now places his commentary as following the same basic approach as G. Beale's important volume, although with a stronger emphasis on future fulfillment. I found him, in general, to be a cautious and reliable guide. D. E. Garland has contributed the volume on *1 Corinthians* to the same series, although I have not yet seen this book.

Less exhaustively, G. Green has contributed a volume on *The Letters to the Thessalonians* for the 'Pillar' series.

Although there is plenty of careful and useful discussion, ultimately, Green doesn't resolve the knotty problems (especially those in 2 Thessalonians) and perhaps he does not help the reader to make sense of these difficult letters as much as one might have hoped. Also on a smaller scale, but more concerned with application of the biblical text, the latest volume in the E. P. Study Commentary is by P. Naylor on *2 Corinthians*.³³ Typical of this series, it is solidly evangelical in its approach to the biblical text, exegetical and based on solid research (although not as detailed as the Pillar commentaries) yet readable and pastorally useful. Although Naylor's scholarship is evident from the endnotes, this serves to enrich the commentary without making it technical. A very useful tool for students, preachers and teachers.

On an entirely different scale, N. T. Wright has produced several further volumes in his project to provide accessible commentaries on the whole NT. *Matthew for Everyone* and *John for Everyone* both appear in two volumes. *Paul for Everyone* serves as the title for several volumes which together will cover Paul's letters. So far, two volumes have been published: on Galatians and Thessalonians; and on Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. This series is quite a remarkable feat. Wright is always interesting, even when controversial. Although some readers may have reservations about recommending these books to a general readership because of some of Wright's views on justification, etc, there is nonetheless a warmth, a reverence for Scripture and a practicality about them that makes them an attractive means of reading the Scriptures.

Although not really commentaries, there have been two further recent additions to the 'Encountering the New Testament' series from Baker. *Encountering the Book of Hebrews* by D.A. Hagner and *Encountering the Book of Romans* by D. Moo are both fairly brief surveys of the text of the biblical document. This aspect of the book will not really provide the same resource as a standard commentary, but it is very accessible to readers who are developing their knowledge of the text. Certainly anyone who owns Moo's major commentary on Romans will find nothing new in this brief book, but perhaps they will find a more

manageable approach to the whole of the letter. Some of the most interesting material is found in the various text boxes which are scattered throughout the books. There are also helpful suggestions for further reading.

General NT Studies

Two large books deserve particular mention. The first is the latest major volume from N. T. (Tom) Wright, entitled *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.³⁴ As with Wright's previous books, this is an astonishing blend of exceptional scholarly competence and clear presentation. In what (Wright explains) was intended to be the final chapter of his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) but which has now grown to a book of over 800 pages (!), Wright argues clearly that people in the ancient world knew exactly what 'resurrection' meant (the bodily raising to life of a dead person) but almost universally rejected the notion. He then goes on to argue that 'resurrection' is central to the proclamation of the early Christian communities. Along the way, the reader is provided with stimulating discussion of the theological and historical significance of Jesus' resurrection as Wright progresses through the relevant NT texts from Paul, etc., before finally discussing the Gospel narratives. There is a delightful irony in the fact that this book which robustly defends the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus should have been written by the new Bishop of Durham.

The second large volume is *Lord Jesus Christ* by L. Hurtado.³⁵ This is certainly a book for more advanced students, teachers and preachers who are prepared to do some serious reading. The fundamental purpose of the book is to explore the evidence relating to the early Church's recognition of Jesus as a divine person, particularly in terms of worship. However, the scope of the book is such that it draws the reader into discussions of Jewish monotheism, non-canonical presentations of Jesus, second-century Christianity as well as substantial discussions of many NT texts. Hurtado's discussions of contemporary scholarship make this a particularly useful guide for students. Generally Hurtado is a helpful guide through the material, although I would take issue with some of his decisions. He concludes that devotion to Jesus

was not a late development but is characteristic of the earliest evidence.

On a much smaller scale, but of considerable importance is J. Piper's *Counted Righteous in Christ*, which robustly defends the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. After a brief introduction, it is a careful exegetical study of the relevant NT texts. The debate is not over. I understand that a response has been written by D. Garlington, but Piper's book is an important contribution from a careful scholar with a pastor's heart.

The latest volume to stand in the tradition of the *McMaster New Testament Studies* series, edited by R. N. Longenecker, is devoted to *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, and is somewhat more wide-ranging than previous volumes, drawing in representatives of various modern ecclesiastical traditions. In fact, only four chapters are devoted to discussion of the NT materials. Perhaps for this reason, it does not seem to have been formally included in the series. D.F. Ford and M. Higton have edited an 'Oxford Reader' entitled simply *Jesus*. It is a compilation of three hundred and forty-three short extracts from writers of all varieties who have said something about Jesus through the ages. These range from extracts of the NT itself to the famous 'clay sparrows' text from the non-canonical *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, to Athanasius, to Julian of Norwich, to Martin Luther, to the Book of Mormon, to Dorothy L. Sayers, to N.T. Wright. The content of the extracts ranges from the insightful to the moving to the bizarre! Be warned. Tender confession and heresy rub shoulders here. Yet, for those who have sufficient discernment, this collection makes for fascinating reading.

The Brother of Jesus, edited by D. Chilton and J. Neusner,³⁶ is a collection of essays on 'James the Just and his Mission' (according to the subtitle). There are eight chapters by various scholars, including a substantial biography of James. Several of the contributors are evangelical scholars with considerable expertise in the study of James (e.g. Bauckham and Davids). The text is largely uncluttered and a wide readership could benefit from this book.

Studies in the Book of Revelation,³⁷ edited by S.Moyise, is a collection of articles by a very diverse range of scholars. Some of the essays are very insightful, although this collection will probably be of more importance to students and teachers than to preachers.

*The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity*³⁸ by J. T. Carroll *et al* is a useful study of this important theme in the NT and through history. These concise and quite readable essays contain much helpful theological reflection on the canonical text, although occasionally standard critical assumptions show through and the final note of expectation seems rather vague.

Conclusion

Once again I have highlighted a range of books from which the reader will have to select those which seem best to serve the task of equipping him or her to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ in whatever calling lies to hand. I have sometimes been asked to offer my particular recommendations, and I will do so here with this cautionary note: what is of great significance to me may not be so to another and so I urge the reader to consult more detailed reviews and other wise readers before parting with money. If at all possible, look at some of the content of a book you plan to purchase so that you can decide whether it is what you need. But do attempt, at least now and again, to read material which goes beyond the immediately useful to the thought-provoking, the stimulating, the idea-forming. Finally, read *everything*, thoughtfully, with discernment and with prayer.

Recommendations:

For the teacher/student:

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*;

McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*;

Wright, *Resurrection*; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

For the preacher:

Pao, *Thanksgiving*; Piper, *Counted Righteous*;

Hoehner, *Ephesians*.

For the interested reader:

Hafemann, *The God of Promise*; Hagner, *Hebrews*;

Moo, *Romans*.

1. Leicester: IVP, 2002.
2. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.
3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
4. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
5. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
6. Downers Grove: IVP, 2001.
7. London: SPCK, 2002.
8. Stuttgart: Deutsche Gesellschaft, 2002.
9. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002.
10. London: SPCK, 2003.
11. London: Continuum, 2001.
12. Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Zondervan, 2003.
13. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
14. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001.
15. Leicester: Apollos, 2002.
16. Leicester: Apollos, 2003.
17. London: SPCK, 2002.
18. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
19. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
20. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002.
21. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002.
22. London: SPCK, 2003.
23. London: SPCK, 2003.
24. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
26. Grand Rapids/ Leicester: Baker/Apollos, 2002.
27. London: Continuum, 2002.
28. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
30. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001.
31. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003.
32. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.
33. 2 volumes; Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002.
34. London: SPCK, 2003.
35. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
36. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.
37. London: Continuum, 2001.
38. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000.

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The Rise of Evangelicalism: The age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys by Mark A. Noll, IVP, 2003, 330pp.

This is the first in a projected 5-volume series on the history of evangelicalism written by an evangelical historian. It takes the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century in Britain and America for its starting point.

In a lucid style, Mark Noll traces the rise of evangelicalism chronologically in five main parts: antecedents of revival, revival (1734-8), revival and consolidation (1738-45), development (1745-70) and diversification (1770-95). Each section contains plenty of narrative, and is anchored in the wider historical scene. As you would expect from the title, the main revival leaders receive ample coverage. What is less expected, and especially gratifying, is the way Noll pulls together the scholarship of the last twenty years to give an integrated picture of the transatlantic communication between evangelicals in Britain and America, and of the link with the European continent, in particular, the influence of pietism and the Moravian missionary fervour on the revivals and their leaders. Noll also uncovers the revivals' impact on groups traditionally neglected by historians – Africans, women and lay-people – vitally significant for understanding the later development of evangelicalism. Themes such as theology, hymnody, warfare and politics, are skilfully drawn in, and developed. Noll interacts with current historical scholarship throughout the book, and footnotes direct the reader into specialized follow-up.

Noll is at pains to justify his treatment of the eighteenth century revivals as the birthplace of what we now call 'evangelicalism'. His arguments are convincing. But his continual use of the term 'evangelicalism' in connection with the revivals of the mid-eighteenth century has an anachronistic ring, and gives the misleading impression that the nascent movement already had a self-conscious identity. One suspects this tendency is the consequence of writing the first book in a series on the 'history of evangelicalism'!

Though a respected academic historian, Noll does not hide his evangelical sympathies. He gives the participants

of the revivals the first and primary voice in describing and interpreting the work of the revival – ahead of the cacophony of historical theorists, who would claim the authority of distance and objectivity to downgrade and reassess the participants' own 'spiritual' analysis of the revivals. The final chapter outlines experiences of ordinary people whose lives were changed through the revivals. Notably, Noll concludes that not only do these autobiographies provide us with the best way of discovering how these individuals understood their experiences, but 'an evangelical historian of evangelical history may be pardoned for his own conclusion that in many particulars they also sound like the truth'!

Regrettably, however, Noll gives far too much weight to humanistic explanations of the revivals, which as secondary causes he regards as compatible with the primary 'spiritual explanation'. Political, social, ecclesiastical and intellectual trends, of course, all played a part. Under God's overarching providence this is not a problem for the Christian. But Noll attempts to syncretize the contributions of contemporary historians, (including those whose work effectively denies the spiritual reality of the revivals), within one interpretative framework. In his chapter entitled 'Explanations', he quotes with apparent approval the view of Michael Crawford that 'the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival had more to do with adaptations to structural changes in society, in particular, those conducive to religious voluntarism, than with death and rebirth of evangelical piety', and of David Bebbington that Jonathan Edwards and other early evangelicals got their 'confidence about salvation from the atmosphere of the English Enlightenment'. Noll has failed to grasp the humanistic nettles, evident, alas, even among evangelical historians, and, as a result, his interpretation of the revivals becomes seriously skewed.

Despite these reservations, any serious reader or student of history will find this book highly stimulating. Noll's research and learning is immense. His ability to serve it up in palatable form is masterly. The book will repay thoughtful reading.



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