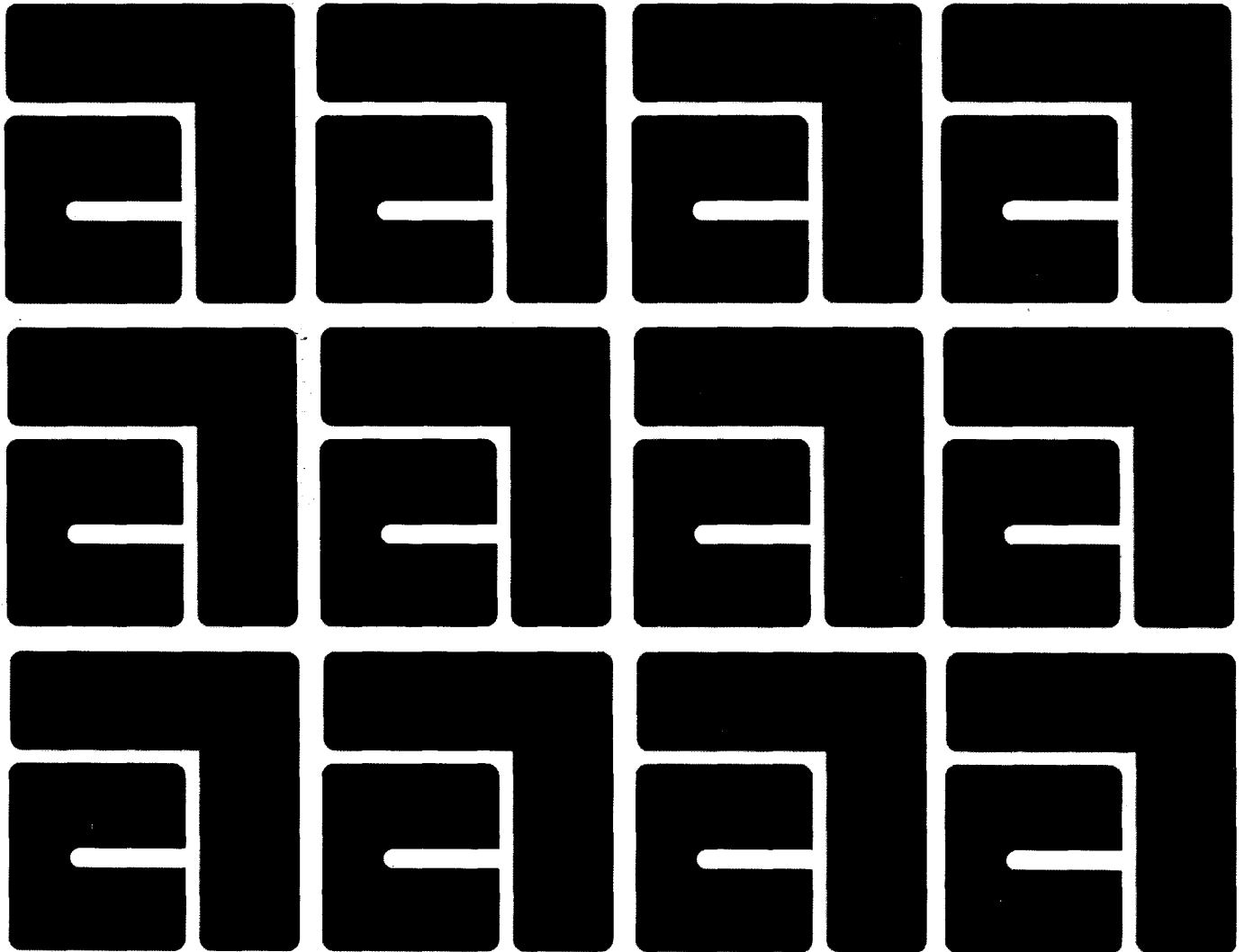




FOUNDATIONS

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FOUNDATIONS

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Editor's Notes

The relationship of Christians to society and the nature of their political engagement has been a matter of debate from the beginning. In the first centuries the nature of the relationship was perhaps not as problematic since Christians were a relatively small minority in the Roman Empire. But as Christians grew in numbers and influence and after Christianity was officially recognised by the empire the nature of the relationship became an increasingly pressing one. Augustine wrestled with this issue in the *City of God* which in many ways has set the agenda for subsequent debate as his thinking did on so many other issues. The changing context of the church in different cultures and societies has forced Christians to constantly rethink the issue. Today we are facing new challenges in a Europe that on the one hand is increasingly secular and yet that contains a large and vocal Muslim minority that has a very different understanding of the relationship with the state and society. And whereas evangelical Christians in Europe are a relatively small minority they are not in many developing nations or in the United States where they exercise much greater influence and political power. It is important then that as Christians we reflect on our political engagement. The Affinity theological study conference of 2004 sought to look at this matter and the papers delivered at it have been gathered together in *Tales of Two Cities – Christianity and Politics*¹ edited by Stephen Clark. I must admit to a hand in the planning of the conference that brought together a range of biblical, historical and systematic theologians. There is some overlap between contributions and the book doesn't cover everything that a more comprehensive one would have and there are some gaps that Clark seeks to make good in his excellent final chapter. Perhaps the biggest gap is any in-depth treatment of Romans 13 and parallel passages in the letters. Historically it is

Paul's reference to the 'sword' that theologians throughout the history of the church have wrestled with, particularly in the light of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. However there is an excellent survey of the Old Testament by Gordon Wenham and the teaching of Jesus by Steve Wilmschurst. Various approaches to political engagement that have been adopted in history are dealt with by David Field, David Smith, Paul Helm and David McKay. Clark tries to tie the very loose ends together in the final chapter and is especially helpful in exploring the problem that constantly emerges in any discussion on this matter, that is, the relationship between the old and new covenants and its bearing on Christian political activity. If this book won't answer all your questions it will certainly stimulate many.

A very helpful book in this area is the *Jubilee Manifesto*.² This book is the product of thinking going on at the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge that has sought to present what it calls 'Relationism' as an alternative to ideologies such as capitalism and socialism in political discourse. This approach takes seriously the Bible and particularly the Old Testament in shaping Christian political and social thinking. Israel is seen as a paradigm by which the social dimension of the law is commended to the nations. The chapter by Christopher Wright on the 'ethical authority of the biblical social vision' is key to this and a fine summary of what he has written elsewhere. A vast 'agenda' is covered in other chapters. If in some places the feel of the book is not unlike the more secular 'communitarianism' that influenced Tony Blair's attempts at finding a third way, there is much excellent material here that needs to be integrated into Christian political vision and engagement. Here is the stuff that can reorient evangelical political thinking in a much more

biblical way that can have real purchase in the public square of a pluralist society.

Some of the ideological traps that evangelicals need to avoid are surveyed and critiqued in *Political Visions & Illusions*³ by David T. Koyzis of Redeemer College in Ontario. This is a most helpful guide to the ideologies that have shaped the modern world. While the usual suspects of socialism and nationalism are here, so too are liberalism, conservatism and democracy. I would especially commend reading the chapters on the latter since these are the ideologies that those of us in the west are all too familiar with and can assume uncritically. Koyzis offers both a rich and nuanced historical orientation and exposition as well as a critique that at every point is illuminating. His antidote is what he calls 'societal pluralism' rooted in a biblical worldview and articulated historically by among others, Calvin, Althusius and Kuyper and is not dissimilar to the relationism of the previous book. Contra neo-Anabaptists and in line with the Reformed tradition, Koyzis has a positive view of the state as the God-appointed agent for doing justice in his world. It is interesting to note yet again the influence of Abraham Kuyper's thinking. While he by no means got everything right, his basic ideas – antithesis, common grace and sphere sovereignty – are being rediscovered by theologically conservative Protestants who need a strong public theology. Unfortunately Kuyper can mean many things and is selectively appropriated by Christians on the left and right. To do so is to misunderstand the richness of his thought and the historical context of his political activity in the Netherlands. A helpful introduction to Kuyper's thinking is *The Spirit in Public Theology*⁴ in which Vincent Bacote expounds and critiques Kuyper's theology of the Holy Spirit and common grace in relation to his political and

social theology. Bacote argues that Kuyper's own penetrating doctrine of the Spirit helps to remedy some of the weaknesses of his doctrine of common grace. The result is a very suggestive but at points somewhat speculative treatment. The creational dimension of the Spirit's ministry is more easily affirmed than discerned, but nevertheless vital to an evangelical public theology.

One of the great gains in political theology as in other areas of theology has been the development of Reformed biblical theology in the last century. I am currently doing some research on the Puritan doctrine of just war and certainly the Puritans could have done with a better understanding of the progress of redemptive history. In this area the patriarch on whose work so many others have built is Geerhardus Vos. In theological college I had to read his pioneering *Biblical Theology* which if somewhat incomplete nevertheless showed the way for a theology that took the form of divine revelation seriously. Danny E. Olinger has done the church a great service in compiling the *Geerhardus Vos Anthology*.⁵ Buy this book. Not only do you get Vos's insights on a vast array of biblical subjects, but you get a spiritually rich feast that will satisfy your soul. Almost every entry is pure gold, to change the metaphor, that both opens up the theology of the Bible and exalts the glory of the triune God who has so graciously revealed himself. This book can be used as a resource for preaching and study but also for meditation and devotions. Those wanting to know more about Vos as a man will find *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*⁶ fascinating. It has to be said that like his Princeton colleague, BB Warfield, Vos did not live an outwardly eventful life. He was a serious academic who lectured, wrote and lived quietly with his family. But he had a wide range of correspondents that included Warfield, Kuyper,

Gresham Machen and Herman Bavinck. These letters give both insight into this great man and the events related to the changes in Princeton Seminary. Vos remained at Princeton for reasons that are not clear, but his sympathies were with Machen and the new Westminster Seminary. Also included are some poems he wrote and an informative biography by **James Dennison, Jr.**

Largely because of Vos we enjoy today an ever increasing number of excellent works on biblical theology that has enriched systematic theology and expository preaching. One such book is **Michael D. Williams's** *Far as the Curse is Found*.⁷ The advantage of this book is not that it has some novel approach to the story of redemption, but that it tells the story so well and felicitously. With its pastoral and evangelistic warmth this book is one of the most useful I have come across that I now consult first along with Goldsworthy's *Gospel and Kingdom*. The central motif in the book is God's covenant, a subject taken up more academically in *The God of the Covenant* ⁸ edited by **Jamie Grant** and **Alistair Wilson**. Various aspects of covenant theology, both in the Bible and systematics, are discussed. Christopher Wright's chapter, 'Covenant: God's Mission through God's people' I found particularly helpful with its emphasis on the missional nature of the Old Testament, as I did ATB McGowan's 'In defense of 'headship' theology'. By 'headship' theology McGowan means federal theology which he restates in a fresh and useful way that is sensitive to a deepening understanding of biblical theology. A testimony to the impact of biblical theology on Reformed systematic theology is *Always Reforming – explorations in systematic theology* ⁹ edited by **ATB McGowan**. Richard Gamble takes up the theme specifically in the chapter 'The relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology', as also

does Henri Blocher in 'Old Covenant, New Covenant' and Richard Gaffin in 'Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections'. The latter is a very insightful examination of John Murray's teaching and method on the subject. However there are many other good things here such as Gerald Bray on the Trinity, McGowan on substitutionary atonement and Cornelis Venema on justification. There is also a chapter on the idea of theological system by Kevin Vanhoozer whose major work is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. On the evidence of this book, far from being fossilised, Reformed theology is very much alive.

It may surprise some to know that Jonathan Edwards gave much attention to biblical theology and was in fact something of a pioneer in this. In his chapter in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* ¹⁰ **Harry Stout** sees redemptive history, not only in the Bible but in the outworking of God's purposes in the world, as Edwards' great obsession, so much so that he informed the trustees of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) that he intended to write a new theology that would weave together the histories of heaven, earth and hell. His conviction was that 'a body of divinity in an entirely new method, being thrown into the form of a history' was needed. **Stephen Nichols** sees the seven years in Stockbridge as key to Edwards' life as it was the period when some of his greatest works were written. Two chapters by **George Marsden** and **Samuel Storms** respectively show how Edwards' Reformed theology enabled him to challenge the philosophical assumptions of his age and transcend them so that he can still address those of ours. The latter chapter relates the relevance of Edwards to the debate on open theism. The section on Edwards' legacy raises some important questions. **DG Hart** critiques Edwards' emphasis on experience and its long-term

impact on an evangelicalism that has come to downplay the church and sacraments and **Douglas Sweeney** and **Sean Michael Evans** recount some of the baleful effect of the later New England theology that looked back to Edwards, the latter in terms of RL Dabney's criticisms. **Michael Haykin** has a different focus in *Jonathan Edwards – the Holy Spirit and Revival* ¹¹ where he examines the place of the Holy Spirit in Edwards's teaching within its historical context. Because the Holy Spirit is so important for Edwards the result is a superb guide to Edwards not only as a theologian of revival but of the Christian life and mission. In recent years Edwards has often been more used than understood in debates about physical phenomena and revival. Haykin is a sure-footed guide not only to his teaching, but to this remarkable man whose teaching and life has so much relevance today. It is the relevance of Edwards that **Josh Moody** emphasises in his excellent *The God-centred Life*.¹² Moody looks at different aspects of Edwards's life and ministry and applies them to the Christian and church today. If sometimes his applications are a bit strained, the effort is well worth it to help people appreciate what Edwards has to say. There are many good things here on revival, spiritual experience, discernment, secondary issues, family life and ministry. Edwards is not spared criticism in the chapter 'Human leaders failed' where his tolerance of slavery, perhaps less than proactive pastoral care and doctrinal weaknesses (yes Edwards had them as do all of us) are highlighted. However the chapter that I want to commend is 'The cause of modernism's plight is its human-centredness'. Read this to see how Edwards' God-centred theology can both give sanity to our Christian lives and help us to address the plight of our generation as Edwards did his.

Perhaps no one today does more to propagate the

heart of Edwards' theology and to some extent exemplifies aspects of his ministry than **John Piper**. In *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* mentioned above, DG Hart asks where in evangelicalism Edwards would fit today and rather cheekily suggests the pastorate of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. There are many aspects of Piper's ministry that differ from Edwards, but he shares Edwards' radical God-centredness in thinking about reality. The God-centredness of the gospel is the theme of *God is the Gospel – meditations on God's love as the gift of himself*.¹³ Piper tends to hammer home the same great themes in his books, but with variations. Here he simply explores how the gospel is not primarily about the benefits that we have, but the God we come to know in the revelation of his glory in Jesus Christ. The book is built around an exposition of 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. Two other books in this connection need to be mentioned. Hendrickson Publishers have produced an edition of *Edwards Sermons* ¹⁴ that contains all the well-known ones as well as *Day by Day with Jonathan Edwards* ¹⁵ which as such books do gives us short readings from across Edwards' works for every day of the year. I suspect that Edwards would have been bemused at the thought of his works being used in this way, but also approving if it would help Christians to be God-centred not only in their daily devotions but in their lives.

Before I conclude I want to mention a book that is neither theological nor even Christian. I commend *Our Culture, What's Left of It - the mandarins and the masses* ¹⁶ by **Theodore Dalrymple**. Anyone who knows Dalrymple's writing (often in the Daily or Sunday Telegraph in the United Kingdom) will know him as a very perceptive and pessimistic observer of life in this country. He has been until

recently an inner city general practitioner and prison doctor. A common theme is life at the bottom of society where he sees the baleful effects of the social and cultural revolution so gleefully advocated by the social and intellectual elites. His writing has been compared to that of George Orwell. The book is a collection of articles largely taken from that excellent periodical *City Journal* that so wonderfully extols the modern city and yet shows how well-meaning but deluded politicians, usually on the left, and others let it down, not least in education. The subject matter ranges from Virginia Woolf to Versace and modern art, from the art of Gilray to the kitsch of the Diana industry and much more, but always with an eye to the impact on ordinary people. Dalrymple is a self-confessed atheist, but his take on life has a resonance with an Augustinian understanding of fallen human nature. Reading a book like this that is so full of human sensitivity makes one realise that the only remedy for man's plight is the God-centred gospel of the Bible.

1. Stephen Clark, *Tales of Two Cities - Christianity and Politics* (Leicester: IVP 2005), ISBN-10:84474-096-X.
2. Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft, *Jubilee Manifesto – a framework, agenda and strategy for social reform* (Leicester: IVP 2005) ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-074-9.
3. David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press: 2003), ISBM 0-8308-2726-9.
4. Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology - Appropriating the legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2005), ISBM 0-8010-2740-3.
5. Danny E. Olinger, ed., *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed 2005), ISBN 0-87552-618-7.
6. James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed 2005), ISBN-10: 0-87552-187-8.
7. Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found – the covenant story of redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed 2005), ISBN-13: 978-0-87552-510-5.
8. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson, *The God of the Covenant-biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives* (Leicester: IVP 2005), ISBN 1-84474-061-X.
9. ATB McGowan, ed., *Always Reforming – explorations in systematic theology* (Leicester: IVP 2006) ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-130-4.
10. DG Hart, Sean Michael Lewis and Stephen J Nichols, eds., *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2003), ISBN 0-8010-2622-9.
11. Michael AG Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards – the Holy Spirit in Revival* (Darlington: Evangelical Press 2005), ISBN-13 978-085234-599-3.
12. Josh Moody, *The God-centred Life – insights from Jonathan Edwards for today* (Leicester: IVP 2006), ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-131-1.
13. John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Leicester: IVP 2005), ISBN-10: 1-84474-109-5.
14. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 2005), ISBN 1-56563-770-4.
15. Randall J Pederson, ed., *Day by Day with Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 2005), ISBN 1-56563-388-1.
16. Theodore Dalrymple, *Our culture or what's left of it* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee 2005), ISBN 1-56663-643-4.

*Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee*

George Herbert

Introduction: Public Theology? Public Enemy?

The title of this article refers to my ‘proud’ announcement last year to friends and family that I had been appointed as ‘Friends Lecturer in Culture, Religion and Public Theology’ at Oak Hill Theological College. Culture, or ‘culcha’ as we native Southenders call it, most people have some idea about, whether it is Matthew Arnold’s prescriptive definition which equated proper culture with high cultural pursuits, or more descriptive anthropological definitions which sees all human activity as cultural activity. ‘Religion’ well, this could be religion in general, or specific religious traditions. But what about ‘public theology’? Blank faces: ‘*What on earth is that*’ was the question. Well in my articulate way I mumbled “its kind of, you know, Christian engagement in society and public life...kind of thing, I think...” Blank expression now turns to quizzical expression ‘*Why on earth would you want to teach about that?*’ was the reply. Since then, this typical little exchange has become a helpful microcosm, illustrative of a larger bewilderment concerning the state we are in, both the state evangelicals are in concerning ‘public theology’ and as a result of this, more controversially, bewilderment over the state (of Great Britain) we are in.

Well what is public theology, or rather what is evangelical public theology? Now I don’t want us to get mired in defining terms. If theology is hard to define, just think about different senses of the term ‘public.’ Suffice it to say that for those in the

academy, ‘public theology’ is fast becoming a well established discipline with its own language and grammar, its own doyens, projects and publications. That ‘Joe-public Christian’ might not have a clue about it does, I’m afraid, say something about the in-house and isolated nature of much theology in the university. Public theology appears neither to be in public or for the public!

However, our ignorance of the discipline says something about us, because as usual, we, as evangelicals, seem to be playing a game of catch-up and now as we breathlessly arrive late on the scene ready for our turn, we discover that Public Theology is a game we don’t want to play indeed can’t play because in reality it is a game which others don’t want us to play. The rules of this game rule us out. Put simply, much public theology is a child of the modern university whose presuppositions are ultimately anti-Christian, or what Marsden calls ‘established unbelief.’ ² This child has some noticeable family features and characteristics. For example let’s take David Tracey in his lecture ‘Defending the public character of theology’ “To speak in a public fashion means to speak in a manner that can be disclosive and transformative for any intelligent, reasonable, responsible human being”. ³ Alarm bells start ringing here, although this kind of statement is consistent with Tracey’s view of theology as a whole. Note this infamous statement in his book *Blessed Rage for Order*:

... In principle the fundamental loyalty of the theologian qua theologian is to that morality of scientific knowledge which he shares with his colleagues, the philosophers, historians and social scientists. No more than they, can he allow his own – or his tradition’s beliefs to serve as warrant for his arguments. In fact, in all proper theological inquiry, the analysis should be characterised by those same ethical stances of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly sceptical hard-mindedness

that characterize analysis in other fields...the theologian finds that his basic faith, his fundamental attitude towards reality, is the same faith shared implicitly or explicitly by his secular contemporaries.⁴

To which I ask, whatever happened to the noetic effects of the Fall, and our ultimate commitment that Jesus Christ is Lord?

Alternatively, public theology is defined in such a way that there is an inbuilt bias towards an ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and co-operation, for example that all 'faiths' and 'faith communities' can and should speak together in the public square, however conceived. To which I ask, whatever happened to the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ?

So is Evangelical Public Theology a contradiction in terms? Should I hand in my letter of resignation because Evangelical Public Theology is a dead end, or do I need be dismissed from my post for leading Oak Hill College down the wrong path? Well I don't think so, because I think it is possible for an evangelical to do 'public theology', that is to say there is not total incommensurability between 'public theology' and my own definition of evangelical public theology. Let me attempt my own working definition which is a slightly tweaked version of the definition given by the Lutheran theologian Robert Benne: "the engagement of a living religious tradition with its public environment – the economic, political and cultural spheres of our common life."⁵

I would want to nuance this slightly to the following: Evangelical Public Theology is:

1. the theological *reflection* on the relationship of and responsibilities between evangelicals and their society / public environment (economic, political and cultural spheres)

2. the theological *engagement* of evangelicals within their society / public environment (economic, political and cultural spheres)

I make the distinction here because it is possible that after reflecting there might be a realisation that as evangelicals we want to limit our engagement or not be engaged at all. Fine; but in coming to this conclusion we would still be doing 'public theology'. Unless we completely shut our ourselves away in an hermetically sealed Christian enclave (and then how 'evangelical' would we be?) we will be doing some form of public theology.

Equipped with these definitions and knowing a little bit about the terrain ahead of us, let us take a few tentative steps into the world of evangelical public theology. What follows is not meant to be merely descriptive but prescriptive.

Portrait of the speaker as a grumpy man

I would like to read two quotations by Christian authors.

To affirm and bask in the goodness of the world, to praise God for the wonders of creation, to practice responsible stewardship of this small planet, and to honour its Maker by using its resources widely for the welfare of the race and the enriching of human life are all integral aspects of work that Christians are called to do. Any idea that consistent Christianity must undermine or diminish concern for the tasks of civilization should be dismissed once and for all.

*Jim Packer and Thomas Howard*⁶

Who can doubt that there is something deeply wrong in the United Kingdom today? Everyone seems to be looking out for themselves, nobody seems to care, nobody appears to have any honour or respect - from the top to the bottom. There is a political culture of spin and lies, in which no-one can be trusted. Marriage vows don't matter, half a generation of children are growing up

without a father, the government is encouraging children into promiscuity, homosexuality and infertility, crime has soared, people seek escape in drugs, our hospitals are filthy, our politicians spend our money like water while we all live on debt, injustice is done in the courts and the poor are robbed by the national lottery. The Christian Faith itself is under attack from politically-correct local government and the media and indecency is the rule in the arts. Last but not least, we kill our own children in what should be the safest place on earth. How did it come to this?⁷

Christian Voice

Are you a half glass empty or a half glass full person? I don't know if you have come across the television programme *Grumpy Old Men* (and now *Grumpy Old Women*.) I will stick to the male version. The premise is quite simple: one camera and lots of 'talking heads'. Well-known middle aged men moan about everything, music, television, politics, kids, dogs, pavements. Many of these grumpy old men look back to a time when things were better, music was better, television was better, politics was better, dogs were better, pavements were better, Britain was better.

Now I am very aware that this article could be interpreted as a Christian version of a grumpy 'youngish' man for I want to start by making two bold and provocative claims that are linked:

1. the positive impact that the gospel has had on our national and cultural life continues to disintegrate around us and this is something we should be deeply concerned about.
2. As evangelicals we need to acknowledge that *we* are partly to blame for this decline but that we have the God-given power of the gospel not only to stop the rot but to transform lives, communities and even our nation and culture.

Before I elaborate on these points I want to

acknowledge some immediate objections you might have to such claims.

a) memory loss. Unlike the grumpy old-men, I am aware of the dangers of putting on rose tinted glasses and looking dewy-eyed at a so-called golden era in British life – here the writer of Ecclesiastes is ready to rebuke me “Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions” (Ecc. 7:10).

Christians, particularly of a more mature vintage, can lapse into nostalgia and sentimentalism. But remember, to quote Ecclesiastes again, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc.1:9). One commentator puts it like this “to sigh for the good old days is doubly unrealistic: a substitute not only for action but for proper thought. It overlooks the evils of past generations that took a different form or vexed a different section of society in other times.”⁸ One age is very much like the other.

While sin is still the same from generation to generation, I do want to assert that there is a historical and theological link between the closeness or distance of the gospel to the bloodstream of a culture/nation and the cohesion and well-being of that culture / nation. Yes I know the concept of Christendom, that Britain was and still is, or was and is not, or in fact never was, a 'Christian nation', yes I know this is a hotly disputed term among theologians and historians, yes I know such a statement is not in the spirit of multiculturalism or passes a PC test, and to the twisters of truth might sound more BNP. Yes I know that Christendom, had, has its own issues.

And yet, I would still maintain that in terms of certain areas in our society, public morality being one, there is a worrying decline and this has to do with a gradual drift away from Christian principles and culture.

b) **short-sightedness**. Like the grumpy-old men, as well as memory loss there can also be short-sightedness, a tendency to gloss over or even forget completely positive aspects present in our society and situation. Even though they have important apologetic ramifications, I am not here talking about general issues to do with the role and profile of religion in our society and the debate between sociologists of religion over variations of *secularization* (the inevitable withering of religion) against *sacralization* (the flourishing of religion). I am also not talking about the role and influence of Islam in the UK, or the fact that when the Archbishop of Canterbury or Chief Rabbi speak on a particular issue, it is usually covered by the media, or the decline in church attendance, or the claim that 'spirituality' is fashionable. In actual fact I would not call these things 'positive' *per se*, although they do provide us with opportunities for bringing the gospel into conversations.

Rather I am focusing in more narrowly looking at the continuing impact of Christianity in Britain. To measure this impact is hard to evaluate, but I take comfort that I am in good company here. In his updated and best-selling book *'Who runs this place: an anatomy of Britain in the 21st century'*, Anthony Sampson deals with the individuals and institutions which make Britain tick. In his introduction he writes: "I do not feel qualified to explain the churches, whose political influence may well be increasing but is difficult to assess and analyse!"⁹

In terms of our topic, I am aware of the amazing work of thousands of Christians around the country in terms of the voluntary sector and charity work – if this work was to stop tomorrow we really would see a societal breakdown. I am also aware, of the number of Christian MP's in Parliament with links to outside groups (Remember that the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, inspired by the Jubilee Centre

was the only pressure group to inflict a defeat on Thatcher's government in the 1980's, Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History etc.) And only in the last few months it has been encouraging to see the mobilisation of Christians to bring some influence to bear on the Incitement to Religious Hatred Bill, Civil Partnerships and now the Assisted Dying Bill.

And yet I also weigh this up with the quality and quantity of coverage of evangelicals in the media, and the real influence evangelicals have on public policy. I compare this to the increasingly prominent presence of Islam in the public square – disproportionately compared to their numbers, 2%. In today's climate could we envisage a modern day Wilberforce or Shaftsbury? Therefore even noting the above caveats, I still would like to maintain my two opening statements.

Now I want us to remember that what I am saying is that we have to ask questions 'in here' before we look 'out there'. We need to get our house in order. I could talk about the way in which the world's values are eating into Christian values, but I would like to go in a slightly different direction.

I believe that we have dropped the ball and that it is skewed theology that is to blame. Now you may be thinking – ah he would say that, he is a theologian saying that the problem is theological - this is what keeps him in the job. All I would like to say is something that I am sure you are well aware of – a cliché but true – we are all theologians, all the time: "there will inevitably be theology: will it be good or bad, conscious or unconscious, disciplined or diffuse?"¹⁰

Now my contention is that when it comes to questions of our engagement in society from a grass roots level up, these have been insufficiently thought through either by unconsciously not thinking or consciously wrong thinking.

Let's get personal. Just for a moment think about your life, your work, your leisure time, your relationships. Why do you do what you do? Is there a thought through strategy - think about your church and all the things that go on there, why do you do what you do, what is the big picture, what's the plan? Can you justify them all, can you link them all together, Can you say, we do x because of y ? The problem, I think, is that we don't think, we switch off, we coast, we accept things without questioning them and so are moulded by other agenda and worldviews.

If you were put on the spot and someone asked you as a Christian what you thought about the following what would you say, where would you go to in the Bible, would you even think the Bible had something to say on this: the welfare state, foreign aid, immigration, European integration, Town-planning, table-manners, Tracey Emin, *The House of tiny-tearaways*?

Perhaps we think but are just confused and think that we are getting mixed messages from our Christian friends, and even mixed messages from the Bible. Let me explain.

As a young Christian I was often confidently told that the answer to many of my perplexing questions concerning life and my place in it, was that I was to be 'in the world, but not of the world'. I was shown substantial biblical support for this statement that I could not deny.¹¹ However whenever it came to 'cash value,' I was left hanging as to what such a statement meant in practice, with the consequence that a wonderful biblical truth started to become rather trite and cliché ridden. As a slightly older Christian, I become more and more convinced of the truth of being 'in the world, but not of the world' but equally more and more convinced of the profound depth and complexity of such a statement,

needing prayer for God-given wisdom and discernment. For underlying our seemingly simple statement are huge theological tectonic plates that are put up against each other. If we start from the beginning we see both the goodness of creation ('the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof' Ps. 24:1), but also the 'badness' of a fallen 'world' (Do not love the world or anything in the world, 1 Jn. 2:15). Or from the perspective of praxis we have to obey and relate both to the cultural mandate 'to fill and subdue the earth' (Gen. 1:28) and to the gospel mandate 'to make disciples of all nations' (Mt. 28:19).¹² In terms of God's revelation we have to compare and contrast God's knowledge of himself in creation, and the knowledge of Himself in His revealed Word in Scripture and in Christ. Even if we choose to start at the end, we have to account for biblical teaching on both the continuity *and* discontinuity between the earth now, and the new heaven and new earth to come. What do we mean by, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on *earth as it is in heaven*'

Paradoxically the pinnacle of creation, mankind created in the image of God, also highlights the pinnacle of the complexity. First, 'not of the world' believers have to work out how they are to live amongst and interact with 'of the world' unbelievers. Second, Christians have to account that just as they continue to battle with sin in their hearts, so non-Christians are often producers of great cultural achievement. Consider the following everyday examples: Am I wrong not to worry whether the computer I am using to type this paper was made by a Christian or not? Am I right to be concerned when a Christian friend of mine marries a non-Christian? Am I wrong not to vote in an election because I will be associating myself with unbelievers voting for the same party? In trying to influence public policy can I rely on a measure of divine law and common

sense left in natural man “and that given a proper choice and good conditions, he may well choose biblical justice without himself being biblically converted”? ¹³

Alternatively consider the following biblical examples: the Israelites ‘plundered the Egyptians’ (Ex. 12:35-36) and yet Paul is very clear that Christians are not to be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14). The Samaritans were not allowed to help the people of God in the rebuilding of the temple, and yet Phoenician workmanship was welcomed (Ezra. 3-4). In Galatians we are told to do good to all, especially to the family of believers. Even if our first priority is to look after other believers, how do we explain the culture transforming power of the gospel in the first few hundred years of the church which turned the world upside down.

You see being ‘in the world but not of the world’ suddenly seems quite a messy business! What are the boundary lines that mark out legitimate commonality from an illegitimate compromise, and what are the theological presuppositions behind our drawing of them?

Now I don’t think I need to tell you that there has been a long running debate between evangelical theologians and missiologists concerning the nature of our social engagement in the world, where our priorities should be. As Robert K. Johnstone astutely observes:

*That evangelicals should be involved socially has become a foregone conclusion..... but how and why evangelicals are to be involved themselves in society have proven to be more vexing questions. That they are to be involved brings near unanimity; how that involvement takes shape and what is its Christian motivation brings only debate.*¹⁴

Getting a Blurred picture

Before presenting a constructive basis for

Evangelical Public Theology, I need to do a little deconstruction to clear the decks. I want to alert us to two very different approaches to evangelical public theology and societal engagement both of which in their own ways, are not, in my opinion, totally in focus with the biblical picture and so in terms of our understanding of the gospel and its implications, present a somewhat blurry image.

1. A Diluted Gospel. *In our desire for social transformation, we relegate the call for conversion through the proclamation of the gospel and so lose our distinctiveness and effectiveness.*

As I have already stated, the debate over the relationship between evangelism and social action is a well rehearsed one. Maybe at its core ‘public theology’ is little more than another round of this old debate but with a posh name. I cannot go into theological or historical detail over the debate here, suffice it to say I am happy with Tim Chester’s trio of statements: Evangelism and social action are distinct activities, proclamation is central, evangelism and social action are inseparable. ¹⁵

As evangelicals we have a unique message which no social service or charity can give, the evangel, the gospel. This message is unpopular and yet is a message which we must urgently tell people because it is their only hope. What can happen though is that we may be tempted to treat the visible symptoms without getting to a real diagnosis, let alone cure. We focus on felt needs because we can see these needs. Working with students for five years, I met students who were in debt and who had painful family backgrounds, students who were struggling with self-esteem because of obesity or anorexia. I never came across a student who came up to me and said they knew they were struggling under God’s wrath. Lloyd-Jones puts it well:

Why is it that people do not believe in the Lord Jesus

Christ? Why is it that people are not Christians and not members of the Christian church? Why is it that the Lord does not come into their calculations at all? In the last analysis there is only one answer to that question: they do not believe in Him because they have never seen any need of Him. And they have never seen any need of Him because they have never realised that they are sinners. And they have never realised they are sinners because they have never realised the truth about the holiness of God and the justice and righteousness of God; they have never known anything about God as the judge eternal and about the wrath of God against the sin of man.¹⁶

As Chester astutely comments:

Many evangelicals want to argue that evangelism and social action are equal activities. They describe evangelism and social action as two wings of a bird or the blades of a pair of scissors. While evangelism and social action are partners in many situations, it is inadequate to think of them as corresponding activities of equal impact...the greatest need of the poor, as it is for all people, is to be reconciled with God and escape his wrath. Only the message of the gospel can do this. The adage, often attributed to St Francis of Assisi, 'Preach the gospel, use words if necessary' will not do. Social action can demonstrate the gospel, but without the communication of the gospel message, social action is like a signpost pointing nowhere. Indeed without the message of the gospel it points in the wrong direction. If we only do good works among people, then we point to ourselves and our charitable acts. People will think well of us but not of Jesus Christ. We may even convey the message that salvation is achieved by good works. Or we may convey the message that what matters most is economic and social betterment. We must not do social action without evangelism.¹⁷

We must not lose our distinctiveness. One danger I see is that in our floundering around in a culture of unbelief and wrong belief, we desperately grasp around and cling onto the nearest 'faith' we can find, assuming we are all in the same situation and that 'faiths' can speak as one voice against the

tide of secularism.

While there may be justification for co-belligerence on certain issues,¹⁸ it is theologically naïve to simply lump ourselves with other faiths. We must maintain the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ, not only do all other faiths say very different things about the nature of God, the nature of mankind, and the nature of salvation, they say very different things concerning matters of social ethics and public policy. We must always remember that the faith/no faith axiom is a false one. All humans are religious creatures, all have faith, all have a worldview and presuppositions – the question is: is it true and good faith or false and bad faith, faith in the triune God or faith in idols that are nothing. If we can even get this point across we will have done something.

The danger: a 'social gospel'

Danger here is always the Social Gospel or to give it another name, theological liberalism which is no gospel at all with its reduction of theology to ethics and its self-effort salvation. However there is a second danger.

2. A stunted gospel. *In our desire to call for conversion through the proclamation of the gospel we forget the power of the gospel for social transformation and so lose our place in public life.*

Here the problem is with a stunted view of the Christian message that does not see its full-flowering implications. Here is an example:

One well known evangelical Bible teacher from Britain was travelling with a white church minister in South Africa along a coastal road after apartheid had ended. On coming to a particularly attractive stretch of beach, the South African pointed to it and said approvingly, 'That used to be a 'whites only' beach. Now it is open to all.' The response of his English visitor was simply to shrug his shoulders and say, 'It doesn't matter one way or the other- it is not a Gospel issue.' What he meant of course,

was that whether people could or could not use that beach because of the colour of their skin did not have any direct bearing on their eternal destiny, that was to be determined by their response to the Gospel message. However, from another viewpoint he was profoundly mistaken. It *was* a Gospel issue for not only did such restrictions constitute a barrier to black people in particular from hearing the Gospel, especially from whites who introduced such discriminatory laws, but it denied a fundamental tenet of the Gospel, namely, that in Christ there is 'neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.' Here is a failure to recognise that the Gospel has certain entailments which need to be worked through which go beyond private morality.¹⁹

Here is a comment by Dewi Hughes – theological director of Tearfund.

By the middle of the twentieth century any Christian who dared to make a comment about the conduct of public life was very generally shouted down because it had become an assumption that Christianity was a matter of fostering individual spiritual experience that had nothing to do with the way in which the country was governed. I find it very odd that Reformed people who believe in a sovereign God who is the ruler of heaven and earth are happy to accept the position given to them by modernism. To denigrate Christian involvement in society is to accept the place that the world has given us.²⁰

The danger: a 'pietistic gospel'

The danger here is an unhealthy pietism, that we end up internalising or spiritualising everything and just quietly and passively wait for it all to go even more pear-shaped. We really have nothing to say constructively concerning the issues of the day and so become increasingly inward and ingrowing. But you see not only do I think that God's word speaks into every area of life and that only God's way allows for human and societal flourishing in every area of life, but that if we don't speak God's way then others will readily speak in their godless ways which will inevitably lead to human and societal withering

and decay. The gap or territory that is the public square will always be filled by one someone and some ideology, be it secular humanism, Islam, or Christianity.

Getting the BIG picture

Let us attempt to be more constructive? How do we begin to orientate ourselves in these issues? How are we to be faithful to the tenor of Scripture in our public theology? To return to Johnstone's remark we know *that* we are to be involved but *how* and *why*?

I believe we need to get God's 'big picture'. I mean 'big' in two ways: big in terms of seeing an overall framework and context within which we can place ourselves and our activities. I also mean 'big' in terms of quality. Do we understand and live in the knowledge of the full cosmic implications and application of the gospel, or is our view unnecessarily restricted, narrow, and impoverished?

Such a 'big picture' is not at all out of our reach for we are able to work from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a story that is very familiar, the story of the gospel, what Don Carson calls the redemptive-historical plot-line of Scripture: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation.

I would like to make three short statements which are basically saying the same things but from three different perspectives. They are pretty general things but may act as compass points in our orientation into Evangelical Public Theology.

Listening to the past

In both word and deed we must affirm both the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) and the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28)

The Bible gives us two great commissions, although we may be more familiar with the one in Matthew's Gospel. But God told Adam to be fruitful and

multiply, to *fill* the earth and *subdue* it, to both *tend* and *keep* the Garden (2:15). These verses are technically referred to as 'the cultural mandate'. It is God telling us as his unique image bearers, the importance of work and the culturative task in all its almost infinite differentiation and specialization. Of course with the Fall, this work becomes hard, frustrating and sin-tainted, but the mandate is not abrogated, indeed even breakers of God's covenant, through God's common grace may further the mandate albeit in rebellion. We might even want to interpret Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' in light of the cultural mandate. John Frame comments on the comprehensiveness of Jesus' words:

The Great Commission tells us not only to tell people the Gospel and get them baptized, but also teaches them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Everything. The Gospel creates new people, people radically committed to Christ in every area of their lives. People like these will change the world. They will fill and rule the earth to the glory of Jesus. They will plant churches, establish godly families, and will also plant godly hospitals, schools, arts, and sciences. That's what has happened, by God's grace. And that is what will continue to happen until Jesus comes.²¹

What has Jesus saved us for? He has saved us to work, creating an army of people to fill the earth and subdue it and the direction and structure of this Christian culture building is distinctive and comprehensive. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31).

Looking forward to the future

In both word and deed we must affirm both the new heaven and the new earth

Here we must ask two questions: what are we waiting for and how are we waiting for it? We need to remember the physicality of the future. Christians must resist the intrusion of popular cultural images that picture heaven and the after-life as being 'up there in the sky'; of apparitional spiritualised existence; of clouds and harps and wings. Just as the Fall had cosmic implications so there are cosmic implications of Jesus' death and resurrection. 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col. 1:19-20). As Christians, we have a wonderful, exciting and distinctive hope that is the final resurrection of the body and the new heaven *and new earth*, transformed and renewed. Yes, there will be both continuity and discontinuity between our bodies now and our resurrection bodies to come, and between the earth now and the earth to come, and yet our hope is more physical and concrete than is often believed. As one writer puts it, "we must abandon any view of the future 'that abandons the earth to the wicked' and where 'The righteous are taken away from the world, whereas the wicked remain' - the exact opposite of Christ's point, where, with Noah, the eight Christians remained alive on the earth, whereas all the wicked were taken away by the flood. It is the meek who inherit the earth - not the wicked."²²

Therefore rather than thinking of ourselves as 'resident aliens' might it be more accurate to think of ourselves as 'alienated residents'?²³ And when our framework encompasses the movement from Paradise lost to Paradise regained, and when we recognize the physicality and continuity between now and not-yet, this will motivate us to start working as soon as we are converted. Anthony Hoekema puts it like this:

As citizen's of God's kingdom, we may not just write off the present earth as a total loss, or rejoice in its deterioration. We must indeed be working for a better world now. Our efforts to bring the kingdom of Christ into fuller manifestation are of eternal significance. Our Christian life today, our struggles against sin – both individual and institutional – our mission work, our attempt to develop and promote a distinctively Christian culture, have value not only for this world but even for the world to come ... Only eternity will reveal the full significance of what has been done for Christ here.²⁴

Living in the Present

In both word and deed we must affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

A final way of saying the same thing. Whether people acknowledge it or not, Jesus Christ is Lord of the Universe, he is King, he is in control of everything. Abraham Kuyper the great Dutch theologian and prime-minister said famously “there is not a thumb-breadth of the universe about which Christ does not say ‘It is mine’”. Jesus has reconciled all things and this means for us that there is no such thing as a sacred / secular split, or a physical/spiritual split, we must live under the authority of Christ and his Word in all the dimensions of our life. David McKay notes that there is “in this perspective, a thoroughgoing rejection of any privatization of the Christian faith. Christian principles cannot be restricted in their application to private and church matters... but have relevance to every sphere of life. The task of the people of God, individually and corporately, is not only to seek the conversion of sinners, but also to train them to live in every part of life in accordance with the royal words of King Jesus.”²⁵

Tim Chester uses a nice illustration. He says “imagine you had just turned on the TV. You have one of those television sets that take a moment to

warm up, so the sound comes on before the picture. And you hear the words ‘Jesus is Lord.’ What kind of image would you expect to see?” An interview with a government minister explaining policy, an A-level student writing a geography essay, a business man discussing company strategy, a builder mixing concrete, a world leader discussing international affairs. He says “I guess you might be surprised if any of these pictures came into view. In all of these contexts ‘Jesus is Lord’ sounds out of place.”²⁶ But it shouldn't be.

What does Christ's Lordship over your life mean for your calling and vocation, what you do with your leisure time, your views on the economy?

And please don't think that any of this will detract from gospel proclamation. In reality it will provide *more* opportunities to speak about the gospel for we will realise that there is no neutrality, and that following the Maker's instructions actually works and what's more we can explain why it works. And there's even more because we can go on the offensive and argue that for the autonomous rebellious unbeliever, any order, structure and goodness in their life cannot be explained by them and that they can only make sense of it by borrowing Christian capital. As Cornelius Van Til once famously said, the non-Christian mathematician can count but he can't account for accounting!

Conclusion: “don't get bitter, get better”

I would like to conclude this lecture by returning to where I started, with those two quotations by Jim Packer and Christian Voice. After listing the ways in which our nation is unraveling before us, Christian Voice ask ‘How did it come to this?’ My argument tonight has been that one important reason ‘it has come to this’ is because we ‘consistent Christians’ in Jim Packer's words have ‘undermined or diminished

concern for the tasks of civilization.' I have argued that we 'undermine or diminish' by either 'going out' with a diluted gospel or 'staying in' with a stunted gospel. Both I believe are biblically wrong-headed and are not going to bring about the transformation we desire and pray for, 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

What do we do then? Well faced with what might seem to be an insurmountable task, we don't freeze in the headlights and do nothing, we don't sulk, or snipe, or mope or blame, but we pray, roll our sleeves up and faithfully start doing some hard work. As a good friend of mine always tells me, 'don't get bitter, get better.'

Evangelical Public Theology is simply one attempt to do some hard theological work which will lay solid foundations for more hard work in ministry. Here is a trite start to my answer and finish to this article: 'the longest journey begins with a single step'. As I have already said, the three points I outlined in the previous part of this talk are meant to act both as boundary markers and foundations for us to build a solid and substantial evangelical public theology. Yet I am well aware that these points are rather vague, a bit like helping someone who asks for directions to Oak Hill College by pointing to the dot that is London on a wall-map of Great Britain as opposed to a six-figure grid reference on an ordinance survey map. The temptation to be caught in the headlights is great: overwhelmed with the realization that we are far behind in thinking these things through, staggered with how we could have not thought through these things before. We certainly have to continue thinking through the answers to big questions of theological method and biblical interpretation: questions about the presence and usefulness of a 'natural law', about how we

relate God's law in Scripture to the social issues of today, questions about the similarities and dissimilarities between the Israelite nation and the church, between the Israelite nation and our nation, questions about who does what when it comes to social involvement: individuals, local churches, parachurches, questions about our attitude toward the progress of the gospel in world history and whether we are to be optimistic, pessimistic or both. This is not even to mention the actual issues themselves, the nature and function of the State, Politics, Economics, Welfare and Aid, Asylum/Immigration, Multiculturalism, Crime and Punishment, the Family, Education, The Environment, Work and Employment, Leisure, Entertainment, the Arts. In summary, questions that ask '*What on earth? why on earth?*'

But at least we are asking the questions....

And as we continue to pray for understanding and discernment, as the Holy Spirit graciously illuminates the Bible to us as we study and reflect upon God's word in class and out of class, as iron sharpens iron, as students and faculty and even faculty and faculty discuss, debate and even disagree, we might just send people out who will go into church leadership, or other ministries, who might feel better equipped, equipped to comment constructively in the local paper on the issue of housing asylum seekers, who might encourage their congregations to tear down any sacred/secular partition they may have, and put their vocation and calling totally and utterly under Christ's Lordship, the computer programmer, the teacher, the businesswoman, the bin-man, the art student, knowing that this may bring trials and hardship. Leaders who might even tentatively question both the legitimacy and competency of the State to monopolise welfare, and education, who might come

to the conclusion that perhaps the church could and should start getting involved in these things.

And that as all these little things begin to happen, the urgency to evangelize is not relegated or embarrassingly bolted on as an afterthought, but the gospel message is proclaimed and displayed in all its glorious technicolour, men and women are converted, the kingdom grows, and whole communities, even whole nations are influenced by the good news.

Now this kind of vision might make even the most grumpy old Christian smile with joy.

‘He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and

planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” Matt. 13:31-33.

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One of the most influential theological institutions in the evangelical world is Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. Its influence extends beyond Australia to many parts of the world, both inside and outside Anglicanism. In recent years its influence has been particularly felt in the United Kingdom. 'Moore theology' refers to teaching associated with the college. As it happens, this year the college is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its foundation so it is an appropriate time to consider the teaching and influence of this institution. While critical in some respects this assessment is not meant to be censorious but rather friendly with the intention of encouraging some constructive thinking and debate in an amicable spirit on the subjects raised.

Moore history

Moore College is named after Thomas Moore (1762-1840) who came to Sydney as a ship's carpenter in 1791. He became a landowner and magistrate and, dying childless, he left his house and grounds at Liverpool for the education of young men of 'the Protestant persuasion'. The Bishop of Sydney set in motion the plans for the foundation of a theological College in Moore's old home and the college opened 1 March, 1856. The College moved to Newtown in 1891 in order to be near the University of Sydney.

During its history, the College has had eleven principals and over three thousand graduates. Some of its illustrious principals in the 20th century have included T.C. Hammond (1936-1949), Marcus Loane (1954-58), D. Broughton Knox (1958-1985) and Peter Jensen (1985-2001) who has become the Archbishop of Sydney.

Since the late 1950s there has been a significant extension of the campus and this year the College boasts the largest number of students it has ever had – one hundred and forty in the first year alone. Not

all the students are going into the Anglican ministry and not all the students are Anglican. According to its literature, Moore College exists to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ by equipping ordination candidates, and other men and women, to deepen their knowledge of God as revealed in the Bible, proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, facilitate the building of the church, care for their fellow Christians, and develop in Christian faith, maturity and service.

Moore training

Moore College's ministry to students is based on a four-year full-time residential course leading to the Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree and it is specially designed for those who desire a biblical and theological foundation for full-time Christian service. Postgraduate programmes are offered to those who desire to gain a recognised qualification at a higher level.

Since it is the conviction of the College that theology is best learned in the context of community, its courses (other than postgraduate) are full-time and **residential**. The students are part of a living community that is both a Christian family and an academic fellowship. In keeping with the subject matter of the course, attention is paid to the spiritual context of education and regular chapel services are central to the College's life.

Moore's Protestant credentials

The college has always been strongly Protestant and a thorn in the side of liberal Anglicans.² It was, however, under Broughton Knox that the College embraced Reformed and Biblical Theology in what Peter Jensen calls 'a new and powerful way.' Knox was strongly Protestant and something of a Puritan in sympathy, but as Donald Robinson, a former Archbishop of Sydney, explains, it was a stance

'within the constitutional breadth of the Church'. The Banner of Truth published a book of Broughton Knox in 1992 entitled *Sent by Jesus: some aspects of Christian ministry today*. The influence of the College on the diocese of Sydney has been considerable and St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral in the centre of the city is probably the most Protestant looking cathedral in the world.

Moore's sources

The best way to taste Moore theology is through the Matthias Media, the Good Book Company and books produced by lecturers and ministers associated with Moore. We are informed that the Matthias Media is a reformed, evangelical publishing house. It was the vision of Tony Payne and Phillip Jensen. Phillip Jensen is now the dean of St Andrew's cathedral. In 1988 Tony Payne, the church administrator at St Matthias' Sydney became editor of 'St Matthias Press and Tapes' which included the production of a fortnightly paper that soon came to be called *The Briefing*. The St Matthias Press (UK) is now known as 'The Good Book Company' and publishes resources developed in Australia including the UK edition of *The Briefing* and other literature for the UK market. In the last few years, Matthias Media has also established a strong distribution point in South Africa, and a co-publishing arrangement in the USA with Crossway Books. As a result, over the past twelve months it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Matthias Media resources were sent out around the world. Well-respected lecturers of Moore have included Graeme Goldsworthy, David Peterson, Peter O'Brien and Barry Webb.

Moore's influence

It is because of the influence that this establishment is having, both directly and indirectly, on evangelicals

of an anti-charismatic persuasion that Moore's particular emphases are being considered. Many ministers and students in the UK take The Briefing, read books and attend churches, conferences or courses that are to some extent influenced by Moore College teaching. Some are even tempted to consider training for the ministry at Moore itself or follow the correspondence courses they offer.

Moore's evangelical credentials

Before embarking on the Moore theology that gives some cause for concern, it is only right to record our admiration for the people behind the publications, conferences and courses that are available. The influence for good that has emanated from Moore College should not be under-estimated, devalued or ignored. They are evangelical in the best sense of that word. Putting the tests that Lloyd-Jones gave at the IFES Conference in 1971³ you will find that the people associated with Moore and its theology believe that their sole authority is the Bible and they seek to submit everything to it, regarding it as divine revelation, entirely trustworthy and containing propositional truth. Though they are not reticent to fly the Anglican flag they would insist that they are not Anglican first and evangelical second.

They are watchful of the devil's subtleties and have no time for philosophising the faith. On the other hand, they are far from being anti-intellectual and aim for the highest academic standards but at the same time they are aware that scholarship can lead them astray and hide the truth of the gospel. They are strongly non-sacramentalist in their position concerning the sacraments⁴ and endeavour to act on their convictions. They are also concerned about right doctrine and warn against heretical views.⁵ Giving attention to prayer and the reading and expounding of Scripture is vitally important to Moore theologians. Furthermore, they regard the

preaching of God's word as of paramount importance and are always concerned about evangelism.

As for their fundamental beliefs they acknowledge God as creator; they believe in Adam and Eve, the Fall, the hopeless and helpless state of humanity in sin, the eternal damnation of the lost in hell, that there is only one way of salvation and in the necessity of regeneration. They believe in God's wrath, the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ and in justification by faith alone. For them there is only one way of salvation, Jesus Christ. They reject the notion of apostolic succession, the distinctions drawn between clergy and laity, and the notion that bishops are essential to the life of the church.

In addition, they believe in election and predestination, they are against women's ordination to leadership positions over men⁶ and they are strong in their stand for biblical morals. On the issue of hermeneutics they do not think that the supposed time and culture gap between Bible times and our own is as significant and central for reading and applying the Bible as many modern evangelical scholars maintain. They insist that it is the Bible that must be allowed to critique, challenge or reaffirm our own culture.⁷ They have no time for the charismatic movement and would prefer to sing nothing than sing some of the mindless ditties that are repeated *ad nauseam*. They are also strong in their opposition to the new perspectives on Paul including the views of Tom Wright.

Moore's distinctives

What then are the distinctives that set Moore apart from the Reformed evangelicalism we are accustomed to and concerning which there is some unease? There are three main areas of concern:

Understanding the Scriptures

We applaud them for their biblical emphasis. They are very opposed to exalting theology above the text

of Scripture and have no time for philosophical theology – apologetics yes, but philosophy no. Also abhorrent to them is the tendency to engage in proof texts to support a theological position. They believe strongly in viewing every verse in its context and encourage preachers and teachers of God's word to reflect on individual passages and verses in the light of biblical theology. In other words, the text must be viewed not only in its historical context but its place must be appreciated within the flow of the history of God's saving activity. This is an extremely attractive and helpful approach to the study of the text of Scripture for it not only enables the reader to understand better the particular passage, it guards against misapplying the text. However, if taken too far this method can lead astray.

There is a tendency to be too dismissive of systematic, dogmatic theology. It must be readily admitted that no one comes to the text of Scripture free of bias and prejudice. Our presuppositions will affect our approach to the text, which in turn will affect our interpretation and understanding. If we dismiss the value of historical theology and systematic theology and rely purely on biblical theology we shall end up turning that biblical reflection into a dogmatic theology of our own making that we then seek to propagate as biblical teaching. This is what is happening through Moore. They must reckon with the possibility that some of their teaching, because it is the product of their biblical theology approach, may well turn out to be defective because they have failed to take into account the wider scriptural teaching relating to the subject that is achieved through a more systematic approach and by examining the theological reflections of former generations encouraged by the discipline of historical theology.

Here are some examples where the biblical theology approach and narrow study of words is leading astray those under the Moore influence:

1. *The 'Call' and the 'Ministry'*

In *The Briefing* October 2001 (pp.6-10), Michael Bennett has an article entitled 'Biblical Terms Evangelicals Consistently Misuse: "The Call"'. He rightly points out that the Greek verb *kalein* and the family of words associated with it are used with nine different senses in the NT, that it is not used in LXX in relation to priests and prophets being set apart for God and that it is never used in the NT to describe appointment to ministerial office in the church. The use of such language in Heb.5:4-5 in relation to the Apostles, to Christ and to Aaron, he insists, is not transferable to gospel ministers today. Bennett emphasises that while the prophets and Apostles were called by God to their special ministries the word 'call' is never used of an ordinary Christian being 'called' by God to a particular ministry. People are called to be followers of Christ, and Christians are then called to be holy. But statements like 'I feel God is calling me' and 'I think God is calling me' are totally absent from the New Testament. As the word 'call' is never used of an ordinary Christian being 'called' by God to a particular ministry, the new dogmatic theology of Moore is that the language of 'call' is inappropriate to describe what happens when a person is entrusted with the responsibility of preaching and teaching God's word and pastoring God's people. Moore dogmatics based on biblical theology concludes there is no such thing as 'being called into the ministry'.

'The Ministry' is another term Bennett highlights as being consistently misused by evangelicals. Such phrases as 'going into the ministry' are a misuse of biblical terms, he argues, 'which can lead earnest Christians into much confusion and heartache.' Bennett looks at the NT terms for the 'so-called ordained ministry' such as elder, shepherd, overseer

and servant and then asks in the light of these word studies 'what is the ministry?' He focuses on Eph.4:11-13 where the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teacher gifts are listed. These 'word-based' ministries have one job to do, to equip the saints, the people of God, 'for ministry' so that the body of Christ will be built up. Bennett remarks: "As I studied I suddenly realised the answer to my perplexing problem. Why was it that I had never felt 'called' to the ministry? Answer: Because I was already in the ministry. Every saint is already 'in the ministry' from the time he or she became a Christian."

If all Christians are 'in the ministry', the next question posed is why some people are paid to do it full-time and are called pastors or ministers? Bennett states that it is because some gifts are more important to the life of the church than others. He rightly shows that teaching the word of God and pastoring the people are essential for the good of the church. We consider them so necessary, he argues, that we are willing to pay some of our members to give up normal employment so that they can devote themselves fully to this work. Thus the question is not about looking for some 'subjective' call but an objective one. The question is, "Do I have the gifts that are required for a person to be a pastor-teacher?" Thus a person can look at his own efforts to see whether or not he has gifts in that area and more importantly the person can seek the advice of others. It is all a question of assessing gifts for teaching the word. It is suggested that there is no "better way to find out whether you are suited for the job of paid full-time Christian work than doing paid full-time Christian work." ⁸ Those going for full-time ministry must of course pass the tests required in the Pastoral Epistles, that include the assessment of one's life and abilities and one's

motives but also the desire. This desire we are told does not mean some special prodding from God, rather it is what Bennett describes as the “unspiritual” motive of “just wanting it”. In other words, someone is called to the work of pastor-teacher “by a rightly motivated and rightly tested human desire.”

There is much that we can go along with and we appreciate again their biblical approach to the subject and the implied warning concerning those who ‘feel called’ by God when clearly they are not. What Bennett and others of the Moore theology thinking fail to appreciate is that there is a theology that lies behind the word ‘call’ in the biblical instances that applies to all who are led to give themselves to the gospel ministry. Those who minister the gospel are gifts of God to the church that God himself sovereignly appoints. Insufficient notice is taken of the significance of such texts as ‘How shall they preach except they are sent?’ (Rom.10:15) and Jesus’ words urging us to pray that the Lord of the harvest would ‘send out labourers into his harvest’ (Matt.9:38). And the reason why those texts are ignored or dismissed is precisely because their biblical theology approach has paradoxically failed to present a full biblical picture. They have taken a certain set of texts of Scripture and formed their theology of the gospel ministry around those texts without taking sufficient notice of other important passages of Scripture that suggest a more direct inward personal experience of God’s dealings with an individual where it would not be out of order for the individual to believe that he was ‘moved by God’. We shall return to ‘the call’ at a later point.

2. *Worship*

This subject has been aired in *The Briefing* on numerous occasions and books have been written by Moore men.⁹ Looking at worship from a biblical

theology perspective they rightly show that Old Testament (OT) worship revolves around the tabernacle and later the temple whereas the New Testament (NT) shows that Jesus Christ fulfils the temple worship. They consider carefully the ‘worship’ group of words in the NT and conclude that worship is for all the people of God at all times and places, and it is bound up with how we live on a daily basis. This then leads them to think that worship is not what Christians specifically do when they come together on a Sunday. Rather, when Christians, who are worshipping all the time, corporately gather on the Lord’s Day, the distinctive element of their meeting together is not worship but edification.

This is why those churches following this teaching are so non-liturgical and non-charismatic in their appearance. They strongly resist the modern idea of dividing up a meeting into a worship time with a worship leader before the preaching session; nor do they believe in coming together ‘to worship’ and having ‘worship services’. The OT worship associated with priests, vestments, altars, lighted candles and choirs are out. We are urged not to make a big deal of ‘the worship service’.

Concerning praise, the argument is that we are not to see it in OT Temple terms as a cultic, religious activity or experience, set to music, to be conducted in church. Just as our spiritual worship is the sacrifice of our whole lives to God, so our praise is to be the lifelong and lifewide confession before the world of what God has done for us. Praise is advertising. It is remembering and declaring who God is and what he has done. It takes place in his hearing, but it is done by telling others. It is boasting about God to others and springs from salvation. Praise is the testimony of the redeemed. ‘Praise is part of our whole life of worship, but only one part

of it'. The call to give thanks and sing in Is.12 is not a call to gather in the temple but a call to mission. 'The greatest worship we can offer God is to gather more worshippers' and 'The job of the person leading the meeting is to provide a framework in which we can exhort one another to serve God and proclaim his glory to the nations.'¹⁰

Tony Payne, while sympathising with those who say we can do without singing in church, especially for new-comers who only sing when drunk or at birthday parties, states that the NT portrays singing as a helpful and worthwhile corporate activity, both as a means of teaching and encouraging one another and as a natural human way to express the inexpressible joy that is ours in Christ. But he refrains from describing this as worship in any special sense from what we should be doing in our lives as Christians all the time.¹¹ Singing 'in church' is regarded as 'one more avenue through which we can live for the sake of others as we follow in the footsteps of our Lord.'¹²

Moore theology sees Christians coming together on Sundays and other days to build each another up by hearing God's word preached and taught and by singing praises that express who God is and what he has done for the benefit of one another and others. Peter Jensen argues that the words 'worship' and 'fellowship' should be avoided in connection with church for worship degenerates into thinking of ritual observances, our offering to God, the holiness of beauty, the numinous, the symbolic, etc., while fellowship can degenerate into the cult of the informal, the trivial and the temptation to turn Christianity into a vaguely religious secularism. He encourages the use of faith and love. Faith focuses on Christ and his word, and love focuses on our brethren and the demand to serve them.¹³

Again, there is much truth in what these Moore men say. We admire the simplicity of their

buildings and dress and have much sympathy with their attitude to worship times and worship leaders. A more systematic approach in association with their biblical theology emphasis would reveal that the Lord's people are to come together specifically to worship God in the sense of bowing their heads and hearts before the Almighty, expressing heartfelt love toward God, directing their thoughts and words Godward, adoring God, responding to his word with humility and faith and godly fear and doing all this together in one place. Constantly in the book of Revelation we read of the heavenly beings falling down before him who sits on the throne and worshipping him who lives for ever and ever. John is exhorted not to fall down and worship the angel but to worship God. Surely, what is already being done in heaven and that John is called to do, Christians should engage in when they meet together. The Moore theology of worship is too wooden in its approach to the biblical text precisely because it does not take a more systematic approach.

3. The Law

Again, using the biblical theology approach Moore teaching rightly sees the implications of Jesus having fulfilled the law by his perfect obedience and sacrificial death on the cross. Christians are no longer under the law (Rom.6:14-15) in that it no longer stands condemning those who have faith in Jesus nor are all the detailed laws binding or authoritative for Christians as they were for the Israelites. Christians are not under the Mosaic Law but they are under Christ's law and the heart of Christ's law is at the heart of the Mosaic Law, namely, love for God and neighbour. While it is appropriate, like David, to meditate on the law because the law gives expression to a life of loving response to God, the claim is made that there is absolutely no obligation on the Christian to obey

the Mosaic Law just because it commands something. To do so would be a denial of the gospel so it is claimed. The Christian is free from the law and should staunchly resist any idea of obeying the law as an obligation (Gal.5:2-3). The imperative for the Christian life does not come from the Law of Moses but from our union with Christ. The Christian has been set free from obligation to the law.¹⁴ From Matthias Media Bible Studies on Deuteronomy the Mosaic Law should be thought of as one would view a retired professor: 'he is very useful to go to for advice, but he no longer sets the exams.' On the other hand, Moore teaching also insists that this understanding of the law from our position in Christ also means that Christians will never use the law like Israel did and seek to minimize our response to God. Rather as the Sermon on the Mount indicates we should seek to maximize our response. The commandment against murder is extended to include anger, and the one against adultery is stretched to include lust. Paul indicates that meditating on the law means finding principles behind the specific legislation (1 Cor.9:9) and by pointing to the fulfilment of the law's promises (Eph.6:2).

On this subject again, systematic and historical theology are not taken into account. The biblical theology approach, while so helpful in many respects, is being used to blinker the Moore people. While we agree that Christ has fulfilled the law for us, the Mosaic Law is more than useful advice for believers. The OT Scriptures are not to be thought of as a retired professor. They are still God's authoritative word. Paul states that all scripture is useful not only for teaching, but for showing us where we are wrong, for correcting us and instructing us to do what is right (2 Tim.3:16). That is more than useful advice. We are obligated to mend our ways and act according to God's good word. While

there is no disagreement that the Mosaic Law must be viewed from our position in Christ and his finished work, it is unbiblical and out of keeping with the way both Christ and his apostles use the Mosaic Law to say that there is no obligation on Christians to keep the OT precepts and principles as revealed in the law of Moses. Being 'in law to Christ' does not mean we have no obligation to obey all God's word.

This understanding of the law and of worship affects their treatment of the Fourth Commandment, although there is a variety of opinion on exactly how the Sabbath rest is to be applied today. While it is right to warn against legalism the Moore position comes dangerously close to an antinomian position. Paul's words in Romans and Colossians are used to suggest that every day is alike and that Sabbath days are but a shadow like the other ceremonial legislation. But some accept the principle of one day of rest in a week based on the creation pattern and as a pointer to the heavenly rest but this has nothing to do with worshipping God together as his people on the Lord's Day.¹⁵ While the biblical theology approach has rightly shown the discontinuity between Old and New Testaments it has prevented Moore students from appreciating the continuity that exists between the two epochs.

Understanding the Spirit

Moore College theology has a clear Reformed view of the Spirit in terms of his illuminating, regenerating activity and of the Spirit's indwelling presence in the lives of believers. It understands Pentecost as the once for all coming of the Spirit upon the church in a way that was not the case in the OT. All the Lord's people now have the Spirit. This means that in Christ, the Father comes and makes his home within each believer through his Spirit, so that he is constantly present.

It must be said, however, that over the years, in *The Briefing*, very little emphasis has been given to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The subject is usually raised only in connection with articles warning against the charismatics. This imbalance has recently been rectified by a book published for The London Men's Convention that seeks to present an understanding of the Spirit's work in the lives of Christians.¹⁶

Moore's repugnance of all things charismatic has had the effect of presenting a less than biblical view of the Spirit's activity in the church and the individual believer. Its biblical theology approach has not been done in a vacuum but has been influenced by its opposition to the charismatic movement. All the more reason then why Moore men should take on board a more systematic approach and learn from historical theology.

1. *'The Call'*

It is their view of the Spirit that has helped colour their understanding of the call to gospel ministry. We can appreciate that the dismissal of a person's inward call by God to the gospel ministry is due to a fear of opening the door to charismatic ideas. They are suspicious of any direct work of the Holy Spirit and it is this in turn that has affected Moore's biblical theology approach that we considered earlier. To deny or underestimate the Spirit's direct activity in this area of the ministerial call is a serious error. That which has often sustained a pastor under severe pressure to give up the Christian ministry has not been the call of the local church or the views of trusted friends for they can change but this inner constraint by the Holy Spirit.

Thornwell has an interesting chapter on 'The Call of the Minister'. It is as if he had Moore theology in mind when he states: 'That a supernatural conviction of duty, wrought by the immediate

agency of the Holy Ghost, is an essential element in the evidence of a true vocation to the ministry, seems to us to be the clear and authoritative doctrine of the Scriptures. Men are not led to the pastoral office as they are induced to select other professions in life; they are drawn, as a sinner is drawn to Christ, by a mighty, invincible work of the Spirit. The call of God never fails to be convincing. Men are made to feel that a woe is upon them if they preach not the Gospel. It is not that they *love* the work, for often, like Moses, they are reluctant to engage in it, and love at best can only render its duties pleasant; it is not that they desire the office, though in indulging this desire they seek a good thing. It is not that they are zealous for the glory of God and burn for the salvation of souls, for this is characteristic of every true believer; nor is it that upon a due estimate of their talents and acquirements they promise themselves more extended usefulness in this department of labour than in any other, for no man is anything in the kingdom of heaven except as God makes him so; but it is that the Word of the Lord is like fire in their bones; they must preach it or die; they cannot escape from the awful impression, which haunts them night and day and banishes all peace from the soul until the will is bowed, that God has laid this work upon them at the hazard of their lives.'¹⁷

2. *Worship and the Presence of God*

Again, when it comes to Moore's views on what happens when Christians come together for communal worship, there is an inadequate view of the Holy Spirit. Moore theology has no place for God being specially present when Christians meet together.¹⁸ It is claimed that this is an OT idea where God was especially present in the temple. They rightly discourage the creating of an atmosphere through music and singing where God's

presence is then thought to be manifest. But have they not gone beyond the Scriptures when they suggest that Christians do not need to pray for God's presence when they meet together?

Peter Jensen has a helpful article on 'Union with Christ' but again, as a reaction to the charismatic emphasis, he argues that because we are complete in Christ we therefore already have the Spirit in such a way that there is no need to expect more.¹⁹ He continually shies away from any direct experience of the Holy Spirit. For Jensen Christ is present in the assembly of Christians when Jesus is acknowledged as prophet, priest and king.²⁰ Much of what he has to say is very perceptive and helpful, but it falls short of the biblical spirituality that we have been accustomed to when we sing Charles Wesley's hymn, *Jesus, we look to Thee, Thy promised presence claim... Present we know Thou art, but O Thyself reveal!*

Along similar lines is an article in which a certain Geoff Bullock is quoted with approval. Take, for instance, the following: 'We almost try to create a temple experience where we are using OT theology and OT yearnings for something that has already happened. We try to create this climate of expectation that God is going to fall, rise, move, presence himself, turn up... Like worship leaders meeting before the service asking God to anoint their music. Or asking God to presence himself – God has already presenced himself, he hasn't gone anywhere. We ask God to bless us – he has already blessed us at the cross, we can't receive any more blessing than that with all the blessings in the heavenly places, what more could we possibly ask for?'²¹

Surely, if Christians have everything they can have in this world, why does Paul pray as he does in Eph. 1:15-23 that God would give the Christians 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the

knowledge of him' and in 3:14-21 'to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fulness of God'? Why are we urged to draw near to God so that he will draw near to us (James 4:8) if he is present already? How can Christ be outside the church and call for individuals to hear his voice and open the door so that he might have personal communion with them if he is present already?

In Moore theology, seeking spiritual experiences is frowned upon and again we can appreciate the reasons in the light of so much modern evangelicalism that can degenerate into pure mysticism. We would agree with this statement: 'Paradoxically it is a mark of true Christian experience not to be terribly interested in experience, but to be interested in Christ.' In an article on Edwards there is a warning about feelings and emotions that are fervent in praise of God where the people are not saved.²³ To ensure emotions are godly we are urged not to concentrate on our emotions but to think on God and his gospel. The article encourages us not to think that feelings are wrong, even strong, overwhelming ones. But we must train our hearts in God's word and take stock of our emotional trends, and this is certainly wise advice. But there is no mention of the need of the Spirit of God to revive his people or seeking God for those special assurances of his love and blessing that strong Calvinists like Augustus Toplady knew.

3. Revival

There is an article in The Briefing with the title 'A drug called Revival' by an unnamed Welshman who has little sympathy toward the 1904-5 revival in Wales and the emphasis on revival.²⁴ He is not happy with the use of the term 'revival' preferring to speak of such church phenomena as 'sudden spurts of church growth' that seem unpredictable. He does

not clearly distinguish between revival and revivalism. But it is clear that it is revivalism that deeply concerns him as it does many Bible believing people. But what does he mean when he says that the search for a spectacular media grabbing revival takes away from the gospel of Jesus who rose for our justification? The Easter faith, he declares, does not need to look for such future hopes in this world. But, surely, when God acts in astonishing ways the media will naturally be attracted and it leads to many lives being affected for good. In this era of the Spirit when the Church in this country is clearly in a low and sorry state, we are surely not wrong to look expectantly and to pray fervently that God would do something wonderful to vindicate his holy name and to revive his work in our land. The Easter faith and the whole of Scripture encourage us to look for times of spiritual refreshment. How are texts like Luke 11:13 to be interpreted that were spoken to disciples not to unconverted people?

Moore theology has no theology of revival. The most recent pocket guide from this stable on the work of the Spirit makes no reference to it. There is a right emphasis on every true Christian being baptised by the Spirit into Christ and having the Spirit. While it points out Luke's teaching on the Spirit specially empowering people for a particular purpose in line with OT examples, it fails to make clear how this is important today. In fact, the reader could be left with the idea that the Spirit's special empowering gifts to individuals is confined to the OT period.²⁵

4. *Word and Spirit*

John Woodhouse, the recently appointed principal of Moore, has three articles in early editions of *The Briefing* entitled 'The God of Word'.²⁶ He rightly emphasises the place of God's Word in evangelical Christianity. He concludes his first article: 'If our Christianity has become dry and dull and dead it

will be because the Word of God does not occupy the place it should... It is not that Evangelicals emphasise the Word of God while Catholics emphasise sacraments, and Charismatics emphasise the Holy Spirit and Liberals emphasise good works, and Anglicans keep it all in balance! The Word of God is not just the evangelical party flag, some arbitrary element that is our particular hobby horse. Our whole practice and experience of Christianity flows from this reality: that GOD HAS SPOKEN. Everything – and I mean everything – is a consequence of that reality.'

This strong emphasis on the importance of the Word of God, the gospel Word, is good and necessary. We warm to the insistence that it is the Word of God that must be central when Christians gather together. But from this firm foundation false deductions are made, suggesting that because Christians already have the Spirit all that is needed is to have gifted men who will faithfully preach and teach the Word. But is the Bible on its own the answer to our dryness, dullness, deadness, prayerlessness as is assumed? Surely we can be reading and studying the Bible and listening to biblical sermons by gifted men and still be dry, dull and dead. The church at Ephesus was doctrinally secure but had lost its first love.

In his second article entitled 'Word and Spirit', Woodhouse turns to experience. He is aware that some might take him to mean that he is arguing against all experience in the Christian life. Far from it, he exclaims, for the Christian life is characterised by deep and profound experiences. Explaining what he means he draws attention to the experience of being called through the gospel word by God himself. In addition, to be called believers means that they have not only been addressed by God but they have been brought to the experience of trust or

belief. Again, it is important to be reminded of how wonderful it is to be a Christian. But Woodhouse then goes on to answer the objection that this presents a too narrow emphasis on the *word* at the expense of the *Spirit*. As he counteracts this objection he has in mind particularly the charismatics.

He, therefore, discusses the connection between God's Spirit and God's Word, the Bible. He argues that throughout the Bible the Spirit of God is as closely connected to the Word of God as breath is connected to speech, reminding us that in both Hebrew and Greek the word for 'spirit' also means 'breath'. Gen.1:1-3 shows the close connection between breath of God and word of God. In Is.11:2 the attributes of the Spirit of the Lord are closely related to the attributes of the Word of God – wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, etc. In Is.59:21 God's Spirit is in parallel with God's words. He concludes from this that where 'the word of God is there the Spirit of God is also.' Word and breath cannot be separated. To back this up he includes Matt.10:16-20. The Spirit speaks through the testimony of the disciples. Acts 1:8 tells us that when the Spirit comes they will witness to Jesus, in other words they will speak the gospel. Acts 5:30-32 is taken to mean that when they preach the gospel it is not only the testimony of the Apostles but the testimony of the Spirit. There are not two separate testimonies but one, for the Holy Spirit speaks through the testimony of the Apostles. Concerning 1 Thess.1:4-6 he again asks: 'Are there two things going on here – "not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit"? No is the reply. Paul, we are told, is describing one experience: the thing they experienced "when our gospel came". The gospel is 'never just words.' Likewise in 1 Thess.2:13 he argues: 'The gospel comes in power and in the Holy Spirit precisely

because it is the word OF GOD.' And notice, he adds, that in this passage God is at work in those who believe. How is God at work? 'By his Spirit' he says would be a thoroughly Pauline way of putting it but here he says it is the word of God that is at work. 'Is there a difference?' he asks between by his Spirit and by his word. He answers, 'I suggest not. It is by his word that God's Spirit is at work.'

What then does he make of Rom.8:16? He believes that 'Like many NT statements, this refers to the subjective effect of the Spirit's work. The question, however, remains – how does the Spirit testify to me? The answer is: by the gospel, by the word of God. That after all is his sword!' There are not two witnesses but one. Unless you understand these passages in the way he presents them, he maintains that you will believe in two sources of revelation.

Thus the Moore view is that there is no need to pray for unction, for some special anointing on preacher or people. The Spirit is automatically at work when the word of God is proclaimed. The handling of such texts as Rom.8:16 is typical of the way Moore men operate. I know of no commentator worth his salt who exegetes Rom.8 in the way Woodhouse does. John Murray comments that in verse 15 'the witness is borne by the believer's own consciousness in virtue of the Holy Spirit's indwelling as the Spirit of adoption' but in verse 16 'it is the witness borne by the Holy Spirit himself'. Again, 1 Thess.1:5, as most scholars will agree, there is the human speech of the apostles and there is the convincing power of the Holy Spirit.

We can sympathise with the emphasis on the Bible word over-against any additional authority. But Woodhouse has gone too far and so identified word and Spirit that the Spirit has no separate identity and function. This has been a Moore characteristic and must be seen as a serious departure from the Puritan and Evangelical teaching of the past.

Because of their fear of charismatic influences they have re-interpreted texts of Scripture to silence any suggestion of a direct work of the Spirit.

Understanding the church

On the one hand Moore theology can say all the right things about the church universal gathered around Jesus in heaven and the local gatherings. Peter Jensen quotes John Owen with approval on the status of the individual congregation. But in practice, Moore people have a very low view of the church. This is inevitable given their views on worship, the Lord's Day and the Spirit. No great difference is seen between meeting in small groups, such as Bible study or cell groups and larger meetings called 'church'. The basic purpose is the same: mutual encouragement, building up the people of God, spurring one another to love and good deeds. The benefits of the smaller group are that it is easier to relate informally, to talk through issues at length, to answer individual questions, etc. In the large group, on the other hand, the gifted teacher can reach larger numbers of people all at once. It is also an important means of keeping the smaller groups together, and saving them from splintering off.

Moore theology can thus speak of 'small church' and 'large church'. Any assembly of Christians can be called a church gathering and the sacraments can be administered in any such context. The primary reason for going to 'church' is to enable Christians to have the opportunity to love and encourage other people in Christ.²⁷ On this understanding there seems to be very little difference between a Christian Union Bible Study and Sunday at St Philip's. I fear lest the Moore influence is behind some of the church partnership schemes that are currently being promoted.

Denominationalism means very little to Moore people. At best the denominations including Anglicanism are reckoned to be similar to para-church organisations. At other times denominationalism is a bit like the world in general. You live with it, work in it and you gather people together from it. Those of a Moore Anglican outlook act like nonconformists within the system especially those with large congregations. On the other hand, Peter Jensen was not embarrassed to come over to this country soon after he was appointed Archbishop of Sydney to speak on Anglicanism, of why he was proud to belong to this body and saw no reason for abandoning it. However, he would, if necessary, be prepared to sever the link with Canterbury.

There are clear dangers with a position like this, for it encourages a too pragmatic approach to the mixed denominations. The clarity that Lloyd-Jones brought to the subject is missing and this can only result in confusion and a weak view of the local church. Despite being nonconformist in terms of Anglican authority, Moore men remain very Anglican in their thinking and practice. True nonconformity means being captive to God's word when it comes to church government and practice. Despite all the good and noble features that have challenged and encouraged every biblically-minded Christian, what Moore College is producing and influencing has elements in it that could well be detrimental to the future spiritual life of gospel churches. What needs to be encouraged is that warm spirituality associated with the Puritans and the Great Awakening, and that has produced the kind of preaching in the tradition of Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Newton, Spurgeon, Ryle and Lloyd-Jones.

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References

1. The following article is the substance of a paper given at the Westminster Fellowship of gospel preachers, London and the Bala Ministers' Conference earlier this year. It was a subject that the author was asked to address and it was not presented in a censorious way. The author hopes that it will encourage some constructive thinking and debate in an amicable spirit on the subjects raised.
2. Cf. Muriel Porter, *The New Puritans: The Rise of Fundamentalism in the Sydney Anglican Church*, Melbourne University Press, 2006.
3. Cf. D.M. Lloyd-Jones *Knowing The Times*, Banner of Truth, 1989, pp.299-355.
4. Cf. *The Briefing* #203-205 for their views on baptism. Some have accused them of being more 'Salvation Army' in their view of the sacraments.
5. *The Briefing* warned of IVP's publication of Clark Pinnock's book on *The Openness of God*. The following edition had to make clear to readers that it was IVP in USA not UK who had published it (cf. ##204-205).
6. Cf. *The Briefing* #217.
7. Cf. *The Briefing* #209.
8. Cf. *The Briefing* #321, pp.22-23.
9. Cf. David Peterson's book *Engaging with God*, Apollos, 1992; Vaughan Roberts has done something similar in a popular style more recently. Cf. also *The Briefing* ## 227, 299, 301, 302, 305.
10. Cf. *The Briefing* ## 170, 227, 241 (p.14).
11. Cf. *The Briefing* #176.
12. Cf. *The Briefing* #208. In point of fact, Moore theology men do major on music more than their writings indicate.
13. *Explorations 2 Church Worship and the Local Congregation*, ed. B.G. Webb, Lancer, 1987, pp.119.
14. Cf. *The Briefing* #315.
15. Cf. *The Briefing* #293.
16. Pete and Anne Woodcock, *The Holy Spirit: Understanding His work in our lives*, The Good Book Company, 2006.
17. Thornwell's Works, vol.4, pp.32-33, Banner of Truth.
18. Cf. *The Briefing* #170.
19. Cf. *The Briefing* #223, p.6-11; #224, p.10-12; #223, p.6-11; #224, p.10-12.
20. *Explorations 2*, pp.114-118.
21. *The Briefing* #227.
22. *The Briefing* #85.
23. *The Briefing* #194.
24. *The Briefing* #204.
25. P & A Woodcock, *The Holy Spirit*, pp.62-85.
26. *The Briefing* ##10-12.
27. *The Briefing* #208.

Some theological reflections in the light of recent controversies

Introduction

The night before his crucifixion the Lord said to his Father, 'I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do' (John 17:4).² On the cross, he said 'It is finished' (19:30). What was this work?

The Integrating Principle - Obedience

The words of Jesus in John 17:4 guide us: it was the work his Father had given him to do. It was the course of his obedience on earth, that work described in Philippians 2:5-11 which culminated in his death on a cross. On its completion the Father highly exalted him and he was given the glory which he had before the beginning of the world (John 17:5). He entered on to the reward promised in the eternal covenant of redemption referred to in Isaiah 53:10-12, John 17:2-5 and Hebrews 12:1-3.

Obedience is the overarching category within which to understand the work of Christ. Obedience was the great representative work he completed on behalf of those federally united with him in eternity, the 'one act of righteousness' of which Paul speaks in Romans 5:18 which cancelled out the 'one trespass' of the first Adam and marked a new beginning for humanity. On the basis of the imputation of his righteousness, they are justified. By this work of the second man, the last Adam, a new creation is inaugurated.

Any description of what Christ accomplished on the cross must have this broad, cosmic perspective in view and see the work of Christ characterised by obedience. It is what God requires. It is what man must render. Where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. Two elements in Christ's obedience are rightly

distinguished but never separated: his obedience to the precepts of the law and his obedience to the penalty of the law. He had to obey the law perfectly as man because man had failed to do it. He had to bear the penal sanction of the law - death.

'Preceptive' and 'penal' are better descriptions than active and passive, because all of his obedience was active, no more so than in his death where he loved the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength as no human being has ever done; and all was passive in the sense that his humiliation was a state he entered at conception and which characterised his whole life and death.

This work was part of Christ's priestly work, of a piece with his continuing work of intercession in heaven. It was also a work that was complete before his resurrection though without resurrection it would have had no saving efficacy, accessibility or perpetuity.

But the culminating point of this work was at the cross.

It is not (yet) a point of controversy among evangelicals that Christ's obedience unto death on the cross was somehow central to salvation. What is too often in controversy is precisely what 'happened' on the cross - what Christ accomplished and how. This is where we turn to a passage rightly valued for its richness on the meaning of the cross - Romans 3:21-26. It does not say everything there is to be said on the subject but as a single passage it says more than any other in the New Testament.

The 'Problem': Wrath active through retribution: the background to Romans 3:21-26

A study of 3:21-26 requires a grasp of the preceding argument in Rom 1:18 - 3:20. Paul proclaims the revelation in the gospel of a righteousness of God to be received by faith. This is necessary because of the

prior existence of another reality - the wrath of God. This is being revealed in the course of history as God judicially hands man over to the sinful course of life he has chosen (1:18-32). It is further 'stored up' for the end time, even for the moral man and the Jew who know better but do not do it (2:1-5; 17-24). The conclusion is that not one is righteous, neither Jew nor Gentile (3:9-20); all are under sin, every mouth will be silenced on the last day. There is no escape, and there is no escaping the conclusion - the wrath of God against human beings because of their sin is the presupposition for the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel. Emil Brunner says: '...the objective aspect of the divine which corresponds to the condition of man is the wrath of God. Hence a theology which uses the language of Christianity can be tested by its attitude toward the Biblical doctrine of the wrath of God, whether it means what the words of Scripture mean'.³

We must pause to look at this great truth which is central to understanding the cross and is the one thing that detractors of penal substitution have to ignore, explain away or play down. Indeed this is to say that the debate about the atonement is nothing less than a debate about our view of God.

1. WRATH IS NECESSITY.

If God is a holy God then wrath is a necessary response to sin. Wrath is 'no capricious passion, but the stern reaction of the divine nature towards evil',⁴ his 'holy reaction to evil'.⁵

2. IT IS PERSONAL.

C.H.Dodd in his commentary on Romans⁶ explained God's wrath as 'the inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe' and A.T.Hanson in *The Wrath of the Lamb*⁷ followed him. Certainly there is a 'process' of wrath described in Romans 1 but it is process which God initiated and which he

superintends. The interposition of secondary causes do not cancel out the agency of the first cause who put those secondary causes into place. The 'impersonal' argument has been put more recently in slightly different form by Stephen Travis⁸ and is answered well by Garry Williams in his EA lecture in July 2005.⁹ Williams points out that '...with God the creator it is quite possible for a punishment to be intrinsic, to follow from an act, and yet still to be retributive in character' (that is, to be divinely inflicted punishment).

3. WRATH IS OPERATIVE IN RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

The divine logic is that sin deserves to be punished. Retribution has not as its main aim the reformation of the offender, nor merely the declaration of what is right and wrong, nor the warning of others lest they offend, but the visiting of sin with its just deserts. This is the very essence of justice. Man is responsible and the principle of retribution treats him as responsible, not as sick or ignorant or under the influence of others. Retribution protects both human dignity and divine honour. The only alternative to retribution is a change in the law and that means a change in the character of God.

Retribution is seen in the Old Testament for example in Psalm 106 which gives six examples of what incurs God's wrath: discontent (13-15); rebellion (16-18); idolatry (19-23); unbelief (24-27) apostasy (28-32) and obstinacy (32-33). Moreover the form that God's wrath takes expresses the *lex talionis* principle - an eye for an eye. There is in other words a correspondence between crime and punishment: God 'hands over' people to their choices - if they are greedy, to meat that will kill them; if they make alliances with pagan nations, to the rule and the gods of those nations, as Stephen teaches in Acts 7:41, 42. Paul makes *paredwken* ('he handed over') a principle of history in Romans 1.

But there is more direct infliction too - Dathan and Abiram are struck dead immediately for trespassing on the holy.

All this is subject in the case of God's people to two crucial qualifications: **first**, God's undergirding love and faithfulness to them expressed in the *covenant* and in such passages as Hosea 11: 8-9: 'How can I hand you over O Israel...?'; and **second**, *the provision for the aversion of retributive punishment* either by the sacrificial system, the sacrifices being expiatory or attached to those that were; or by a mediator (Moses in Exodus 32,33 or Phinehas among the Midianites (Num 25:10f; Ps 106:28-31). The prophets reminded Israel and Judah time and again of God's wrath but also that in the end he was amazingly gracious: 'You will know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD' (Ezek. 20:44). The covenant God is faithful when he is gracious.

The New Testament references to wrath also demonstrate retribution and the 'correspondence' principle of punishment as in Romans 1. One of the contemporary objections to penal substitution is that 'revenge' is unworthy of God. How can one who bids us turn the other cheek or prays 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do' be one with a God who inflicts punishment on those who offend him? Is this not this the 'myth of redemptive violence' to use Walter Wink's ¹⁰ phrase? But no-one taught more on hell, which is the ultimate in retribution and correspondence, than the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul's teaching is the same as that of Jesus. In Romans 12:19-21 he asserts that we are not to take revenge but he then says: '...but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord"'.

Why not say 'do not avenge yourselves because God is a God who does not take revenge'? On the contrary Paul affirms that God is a God of retribution. The restoration of justice has been temporarily delegated to the state in international relations and internal peace and security, but on a cosmic scale and in the sphere of sin, God avenges himself and his own. He is the guardian of justice. And for this reason we leave it to him.

4. IT IS AT WORK NOW.

Romans 1 asserts in that sin and its consequences are the punishment for sin.

5. WRATH IS PRIMARILY ESCHATOLOGICAL.

See Romans 2:5; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Thess 1:5-10. It is this eschatological wrath that the proponents of wrath as 'impersonal' or merely 'cause and effect' fail to deal with. It is this wrath from which Christ saves us, not the outworking of it in history. Yet for believers, those within the covenant, the experience of even 'historical' wrath is transformed from the infliction of judgment to fatherly chastisement.

The solution: satisfaction accomplished through substitution.

Wrath is relieved by satisfaction through substitution. First, we will consider **substitution**. The Old Testament sacrificial system was built on this principle. The sacrificial animal was a substitute for the sinner who offered it. The heart of the system was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The blood of a bull was sprinkled on the mercy seat lest the High Priest should die. In addition there were two goats: the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness, representing visually what was accomplished in the death of the sacrificial goat - the taking away of sins by a substitute. This is taken up in Hebrews 9 and applied to Jesus as the sacrificial animal who dies (vv7,12) and the

scapegoat who takes away sin (v28).

Then again of course we have the substitution of Isaac by a ram in Genesis 22 and above all the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who 'bears their iniquities', all together pointing us to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Two points emerge in the Old Testament system:

(1) THE PRINCIPLE OF GRACE.

Substitution is an expression of grace. It bears witness to the truth that atonement is God's work. In Psalm 78:38, 79:9 it is God who atones. This is most expressly stated in Leviticus 17:11 (NIV): 'For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life'. This states the principle of substitutionary atonement: life is given for life, of the victim for the offerer. It was given by *God* for this purpose. Atonement is ultimately his provision.

(2) THE PRINCIPLE OF INADEQUACY.

In the sacrifices the people of God could see the principle of grace but also the inadequacy of their system. Sacrifices had to be repeated. The priest himself was sinful. Some sins could not be atoned for but were visited with the death penalty. All pointed to the need for a greater sacrifice. God in his grace would reveal not only substitution but self-substitution.

The principle of substitution is impossible to deny. Moreover so too is what substitution achieved, that is - **satisfaction**. Concluding a study of the *kipper* (atonement) word-group in the OT, Leon Morris ¹¹ found that both within and outside the sacrificial system it meant much the same thing: averting punishment especially the divine anger, by the offering of a ransom which could be a life or money. See Exod 32:30; Num 35:33; Num 16:41-50; 2 Sam

21:1-14; Deut 21:1-9. Remember also Psalm 106. Until atonement is made the displeasure of God rests upon the sinner.

John Stott ¹² has a useful discussion of what satisfaction means: (1) the satisfaction of God's law in that its sanctions are met; (2) upholding moral order in the universe. Emil Brunner says: 'The Law of his divine being, on which all the law and order in the world is based...the logic and reliable character of all that happens, the validity of all standards...the Law itself in its most profound meaning, demands the divine reaction, the divine concern about sin...if this were not true, then there would be no seriousness in the world at all; there would be no meaning in anything, no order, no stability...'; ¹³ (3) the satisfaction of God himself. This occurs in (1) and (2) in that there is no law or moral order outside of or greater than God which are to be satisfied independently of him. But this third point also takes into account the Biblical expressions of very personal reactions to sin - God's being provoked (Dt. 32:16; Ps 78:40,41); 'burning' (Gen 39:19; Ex. 32:19; Jer. 4:4; Deut 4:24 - 'God is a consuming fire') and of 'satisfaction' itself in which God's anger is spent, accomplished, poured out (Lam 4:11; Ezek 7:7,8). Hence Stott's conclusion is that the biblical means of atonement is God's self-satisfaction by self-substitution.

What we learn from God's provision of atonement is that *God's wrath is entirely compatible with God's love* - indeed a Christian understanding of the gospel requires these two realities. This is not to say that wrath and love are of equal ultimacy. Love is essential to God; wrath is reactive to sin. Love will be forever; wrath can be assuaged. But that both are real and compatible is essential to the gospel. The cross is where wrath and mercy meet. To quote only one of many such statements: James Denney says of

1 John 4:9,10: 'So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation, the apostle can convey no idea of love to any except by pointing to the propitiation - love is what is manifested there; and he can give no account of the propitiation but by saying, Behold what manner of love. For him, to say 'God is love' is exactly the same as to say 'God has in His Son made atonement for the sin of the world'.¹⁴ To posit a conflict between God's love and wrath is biblically impossible.

Morris concludes that while we want to do away with the crude notion of man bringing gifts to appease an angry deity, the concept of propitiation cannot be expunged from the Old Testament. The principle of retribution is that 'the soul that sins shall die'. The principle of substitution is that God may accept another death in the place of the sinner. The principle of satisfaction is that thereby God's wrath is quenched.

In this light therefore we return to Rom 3:21-26.

The Righteousness of God

Verse 21: 'But now...' the righteousness of God is manifested. This righteousness is evidently that referred to in 1:17 and is the answer to man's plight. Its revelation is independent of the law (probably meaning here the 'law covenant', the law as a system) yet the law and the prophets bear witness to it - it is new but has been long announced. It is in fact the righteousness of God. This is the righteousness of God on the basis of the imputation of which God justifies sinners (Rom 4:5; 5:1,9,10; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).¹⁵

Verses 22,23, 24a: It is a righteousness that is received through faith and is for all who believe, for all have sinned - there is no distinction in the plight or the remedy.

Verse 24b: Now Paul brings in the death of Christ.

What is its place in this argument? It is the rationale for justification through faith alone. It is the reason why God can be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ Jesus, the justifier of the ungodly. It is the justification for justification. Sinners are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith (or, through faith in his blood).

If the origin of justification is God's grace, its historical basis is 'the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus'. *Apolutrosis* is liberation on the payment of a price. It is the ransom of which the Lord speaks in Mark 10:45. In the New Testament sinners are seen as being in bondage which is many-sided but is specifically to (1) the law and (2) to sin.¹⁶ Quite evidently what is uppermost here is deliverance from the guilt of sin which is precisely what justification is (cf Eph. 1:7, Col 1:14; Heb 9:15).

How is this redemption effected? It is because Jesus Christ was 'put forward' by God 'as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith'. In John Murray's words commenting on 'to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45), 'Redemption, therefore, in our Lord's view, consisted in substitutionary bloodshedding ...with the end in view of thereby purchasing to himself the many on whose behalf he gave his life a ransom'.¹⁷

What does Paul mean by *hilasterion* in Rom 3:25? A first century Greek would have thought in terms of propitiation. In the LXX it translates 'mercy seat' in 22 out of some 27 appearances. It means 'place of atonement' or 'means of atonement'. In addition the *hilaskomai* word group is used overwhelmingly to translate the Hebrew *kipper* which Leon Morris says 'carries with it the implication of a turning away of the divine wrath by an appropriate offering'.¹⁸ There

are therefore good *linguistic* reasons for 'propitiation' or 'mercy seat' (that is, a propitiatory offering or place) over C.H. Dodd's preferred alternative of expiation, and probably for propitiatory offering / sacrifice over 'mercy seat' as the introduction of a Levitical 'cult' word seems out of place here. In addition the *contextual* considerations for 'propitiation' (either 'place' or 'means' is secondary) are overwhelming. Expiation has sin as its object; it means the cancelling out, putting away or covering of sin so that it no longer constitutes a barrier between man and God. Propitiation has God as its object. It means the pacifying of his wrath. In Morris' words, '...while other expressions in verses 21-26 may be held to deal with the judgement aspect, there is nothing other than this word to express the turning away of the wrath. Wrath has occupied such an important place in the argument leading up to this section that we are justified in looking for some expression indicative of its cancellation in the process which brings about salvation'.¹⁹ Propitiation is secured as a result of expiation of guilt. 'God is propitiated as the result of the expunging, the wiping out, the making atonement for the sin. What has been done satisfies God and he therefore forgives; he is propitiated as the result of expiation'. (D.M. Lloyd-Jones).²⁰

So propitiation must be there; the work of Christ on the cross is directed first to God and by his sacrifice God's wrath is assuaged. The very thought contains the idea of substitution. Because Christ died, God's wrath is quenched in respect of those who believe. There is real redemption because there has been a real propitiation.

In verse 25 the phrase 'through his blood' surely emphasises the Old Testament context of sacrifice. Compare Rom 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20. The life is in the blood; it is the blood that atones.

Verses 25b, 26: Finally, the purpose for which this is done: there is the justification of God and the justification of sinners. Our thinking must be guided by the last phrase - that God may be just, not merely be *seen to be* just, and the justifier. To summarise a complex argument, the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ enables God to maintain his righteous character in postponing punishment of sins in the past and in justifying those who in the present age place their faith in Jesus.²¹

God may therefore be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. The cross is at one and the same time the satisfaction of God's justice, the demonstration of it and the provision of a 'righteousness of God' on the basis of which God justifies the ungodly.

'Romans 3:21-26' says Don Carson, 'makes a glorious contribution to Christian understanding of the "internal" mechanism of the atonement. It explains the need for Christ's propitiating sacrifice in terms of the just requirements of God's holy character'.²²

What did Christ accomplish on the cross? Christ accomplished the removal of wrath active through retribution by providing satisfaction through substitution. More simply, with regard to God Christ accomplished satisfaction; with regard to man Christ accomplished righteousness leading to justification. How did he accomplish it? He did it by consenting to be a wrath-bearing sacrifice, or as we may also call it, by penal substitution, effecting redemption and reconciliation, providing the rationale for justification.²³

I shall return to 'penal substitution' later and try to show how, whatever else may be true of Christ's achievement, penal substitution is the infrastructure without which everything collapses. Let's now look

briefly at the current debates. The fundamental objection is to 'penal substitution' as a description of what Christ 'did' on the cross.

Steve Chalke, 'The Lost Message of Jesus' and recent objections to 'penal substitution'.

This book created a furore in 2004 mainly after it was publicized by a review in *Evangelicals Now*. It is not a book primarily about the atonement but to recapture Jesus' lost message that 'the kingdom of God, God's inbreaking shalom, is available now to everyone through him'. In the course of the book Chalke is dismissive of what he sees as evangelical shibboleths including the need to be born again. His basic conviction about God is that God is love and is never defined as anything other than love.²⁴ He quotes 1 John 4:8 yet not verses 9,10 which explain that God's love is most clearly seen in the cross - indeed, in Christ's propitiatory sacrifice.

He says:

'John's gospel famously declares, "God so loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). How, then, have we come to believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own Son? The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse - a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. The truth is, the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as his Son are prepared to go to prove that love'.²⁵

He is concerned because he thinks the world sees evangelicals as hard and censorious and the implication is that this is due at least in part to a theology of the atonement that legitimises power and a God of anger, justice and power. We need to restate everything in terms of love and tell people that God loves them and that they are fundamentally good rather than originally sinful.²⁶ And so on.

Chalke's book is bad in theology and exegesis. A

wrong view of God, of man and of the cross, were the accurate headings in the 'Evangelicals Now' review. Moreover it makes its point by setting up and knocking down straw men - caricatures of positions he wants to demolish.

But what is behind this? Chalke's book did not come out of thin air and the recent EA debate in July revealed a movement within broader evangelicalism that opposes penal substitution. One of the speakers was Joel Green the co-author with Mark Baker of *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*²⁷ which argues against penal substitution. What are the arguments of those who oppose penal substitution?

Garry Williams in an excellent paper defending the doctrine categorises (and answers) four them as follows. A number of the answers will have been anticipated in what I have already said.

1. PENAL SUBSTITUTION ENTAILS A MISTAKEN DOCTRINE OF GOD, principally in that it ascribes retributive justice to God. What has already been said covers the main answers to this objection.

2. PENAL SUBSTITUTION CONFLICTS WITH THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY BY SEVERING THE PERSONS.

Williams quotes Joel Green: 'any atonement theology that assumes, against Paul, that in the cross God did something "to" Jesus' is 'an affront to the Christian doctrine of the triune God'.²⁸

Williams in his argument quotes in reply among others, Stott: 'We must never make Christ the object of God's punishment or God the object of Christ's persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners'.²⁹ Also, John Owen says: 'The Agent [Subject] in, and chief author of, this great work of redemption is the whole blessed Trinity; for all the works which outwardly are of the Deity are undivided

and belong equally to each person, their distinct manner of subsistence and order being observed'.³⁰ Remember the words of Jesus in John 10:17,18 - he lays down his life, no-one takes it from him, yet this is why - even when he is forsaken - the Father loves him. The Son is willing; the Father sends; the Son is sent; the Father strikes (Matt 26:31 - quoting Zech 13:7); the Son bears. This is not anti-trinitarian; it is the profound heart of the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity.

3. PENAL SUBSTITUTION THRIVES IN THE SOIL OF MODERN WESTERN INDIVIDUALISM.

This is a strange criticism to make of a doctrine that depends on the federal unity of the Surety and the members. The corporate - covenantal context of penal substitution is the very opposite of individualistic. It is the more modernist interpretations of the cross that are individualistic.

4. PENAL SUBSTITUTION CANNOT LOOK BEYOND ITSELF (IT IS SOLIPSISTIC).

This has various elements. (1) 'It cannot make sense of the life of Jesus'. But the obedience of Christ as we have seen was both preceptive and penal all his life long. At the cross it all came to a climax: he was loving his Father with all his heart and mind and soul and strength even as he bore his Father's wrath. But his life was an experience of the curse all the way through. (2) 'It cannot make sense of the cosmic scope of Christ's work on the cross'. Williams says: 'Penal substitution teaches that on the cross the Lord Jesus Christ exhausted the disordering curse in our place. It is thus that there can be resurrection and new creation, because the curse, our punishment, has been spent'. (3) 'It cannot ground the work of sanctification'. But it is rooted in the same doctrine of union with Christ: we died with him as well as he for us. Moreover the freedom of redemption is an incentive to holy living. (4) 'It

amounts to cosmic child abuse'. This is a common feminist critique of the cross. Coupled with this is the accusation of 'violence' paraded as salvific. How can one respond? (i) As long as we believe the Bible we have no option but to see the death of Christ ordained by the Father. (ii) To object to Christ's death as 'violent' is at root to strike against any system of justice in a fallen world; for ultimately, Christ's death was punishment for sin. (iii) The willing approach of Christ to his own death makes any suggestion of 'abuse' blasphemous. His was a loving obedience as was the Father's gift costly.

Other objections to penal substitution are:

5. IT IS RELATIVELY NEW.

Chalke alleges (in a website article) that it first emerged in Anselm, matured under Calvin and came to full growth in Hodge. But Williams in an *Evangelicals Now* article³¹ gives plenty of evidence of the doctrine in the Fathers and cites Justin Martyr, Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory the Great.

6. PENAL SUBSTITUTION IS THE CAUSE OF OR CONTRIBUTORY TO EVANGELICALS BEING REGARDED AS HARSH AND CENSORIOUS.

This begs many questions. (1) How widespread is that image? (2) Is there a causal connexion? (3) What difference would changing either the theology or the image make to the acceptance of the gospel? (4) Who are we listening to most - the world or the Word?

7. IT REPRESENTS A 'BOOKKEEPING' OR 'COMMERCIAL' MODEL OF ATONEMENT.

'Yes - and...?' almost suffices as an answer to this. Remove the emotive and negative connotation of 'bookkeeping' or 'commercial' and what you have is the fact that the atonement involves substitution, imputation and exchange. Alleluia!

8. IT REPRESENTS GOD AS BEING IN A 'LEGAL BIND' - subject to a law bigger than himself. We must be careful how we preach the atonement if we use language of 'God's having a problem' etc. God's law is unchanging not because it is an expression of his will by which he is then bound eg as King Darius was by his edict and then had to pronounce another one to get himself out of a 'fix'; but because it expresses his character which is unchanging. But God is not subject to powers higher than he; he is being self-consistent in sending his Son to the cross. But this objection is a distortion of the real doctrine.

9. THERE ARE MANY MODELS OF THE ATONEMENT IN SCRIPTURE AND PENAL SUBSTITUTION IS ONLY ONE AND PROBABLY NOT THE BEST.

This is the line taken by *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*: that the NT material on the atonement is varied and that we should construct similarly varied models to suit different situations today - one of which may be penal substitution. So penal substitution may at best be one of a constellation of models of the atonement but no more. How do we respond to this 'one of many metaphors' argument?

That there is 'polyphony' in Scripture in speaking of the death of Christ is not denied. What is denied is: (1) that the various pictures used are mere metaphors and we are free to jettison them to reach a 'deeper' truth; (2) that we can pick and mix between them; (3) that they give us licence to create our own equally valid metaphors. What must be remembered is that (1) these are God's accommodation to our weakness and being God's language they have divine authority; (2) they reveal truth about the atonement; (3) they will harmonise perfectly and not be conflict - there is in them a consistency because God's truth is ultimately one truth and we should expect a cogent picture to

emerge; (4) we should not be surprised if one 'model' is seen to be dominant, central, even indispensable, to the understanding of all the others. It is demonstrable that 'penal substitution' (which after all is not a biblical 'model' in the same way as 'reconciliation' but is theological shorthand to describe a biblical truth) summarises the truth of God as to the 'mechanism' of the atonement.

In *The Glory of the Atonement*³² Roger Nicole explains why, with reference to other 'models' of the atonement, penal substitution is the 'linchpin'.

(1) If there is a model of Christ as our example (1 Pet 2:21) then the self-giving must be properly motivated - not an empty gesture. (2) If the cross was to move us to love God, then how are we to be moved by death as an expression of 'love' that meets no need in us? It is a strange expression of love - as likely to repel as attract. (3) If the cross is a victory, then it is a victory over Satan because it deals with human guilt. For Satan's power over believers is to accuse, and when a believer can point to the cross and say 'he took my guilt' Satan is cast down (John 12:31; Rev. 12: 10,11 - 'they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony'.) (4) If the cross is a governmental display of God's justice, then unless Christ really bore the sin of men it is a flagrant act of injustice in itself. (5) If the cross is in any sense seen as a vicarious repentance - this cannot be. A vicarious sacrifice is possible; a vicarious repentance is not. We have to repent; if Christ had repented for us, we would not have to. At his baptism he was not repenting, only identifying with us.

So Christ's substitutionary interposition as a 'sin-bearer who absorbs in himself the fearful burden of the divine wrath against our sin and secures a renewal of access to God'³³ is the 'linchpin' of the doctrine of the atonement which makes possible the

unified function of the other parts. If the linchpin is removed, the rest fail to function. So whether our problem is guilt, alienation, bondage to sin, captivity to Satan, death or the cosmic curse, it is met by the work of Christ as a wrath bearing sacrifice. As Garry Williams was brave enough to say at the EA debate, this is not a discussion 'within the family'. Penal substitution is not all there is to the cross but it alone makes sense of all there is and if we reject it we are flying in the face of the Scriptures and of God's grace. To the question 'Can one be an evangelical and reject the doctrine of penal substitution or even reject its central and essential role?' the answer must be 'No' - unless the word evangelical has lost all meaning.

The New Perspective (NP)

The nub of the NP is its redefinition of justification by faith and therefore of the gospel. Proponents of the NP differ on many things but let's take N.T. Wright as its most influential exponent at least in the UK. For Wright ³⁴ the gospel is the announcement of a great victory of Christ, not an account of how people get saved. It is 'an announcement of the true God over against false gods'; the true God has sent his Son to redeem his people from bondage to false gods. The proclamation of the gospel results in people getting saved; through the proclamation the Holy Spirit works on man's hearts and they believe the message. The very announcement is the means whereby God reaches out and changes hearts.

Justification meanwhile is *implied* by the gospel but is not itself the gospel. "The 'gospel' is the announcement of Jesus' Lordship, which works with power to bring people into the family of Abraham, now redefined around Jesus Christ and characterised solely by faith in him. 'Justification' is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith

belong as full members of this family on this basis and no other".

Justification is therefore an ecclesiological doctrine not a soteriological one - to do with how the people of God are defined, not a declaration that an individual is right with God. Implicit in this is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the basis of justification is denied.

What consequences does this have for their understanding of the cross work of Christ? One would expect an interpretation along the lines of the 'victory' model and this is borne out at least in Wright's exegesis of texts in Romans.³⁵ On Romans 3:21-26 Wright supports 'propitiation' as the meaning of *hilasterion* on lexical but primarily contextual grounds, as do more conservative scholars. It is 'exactly [the idea of punishment as a part of atonement] that Paul states, clearly and unambiguously, in 8:3, when he says that God "condemned sin in the flesh" - i.e. the flesh of Jesus'.³⁶ But what does Wright say on 8:3?

'God, says Paul, condemned sin. Paul does not, unlike some, say that God condemned Jesus. True, God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus; but this is some way from saying, as many have, that God desired to punish someone and decided to punish Jesus on everyone's behalf. Paul's statement is more subtle than that. It is not merely about a judicial exchange, the justice of which might then be questioned (and indeed has been questioned). It is about sentence of death being passed on "sin" itself, sin as a force or power capable of deceiving human beings, taking up residence within them. And so causing their death (7:7-25). To reduce Paul's thinking about the cross to terms of a lawcourt exchange is to diminish and distort it theologically and to truncate it exegetically. For Paul, what was at stake was not simply God's honor, in some Anselmic sense, but the mysterious power called sin, at large and destructive within God's world, needing to be brought to book, to have sentence passed and executed upon it, so that, with its power

broken, God could then give the life sin would otherwise prevent. That is what happened on the cross'.³⁷

Wright therefore sidelines penal substitution and the imputation of righteousness even while 'agreeing' with the texts that teach both.

Guy Prentiss Waters³⁸ confirms the impression that Wright's theology of the cross is more to do with breaking sin's power than removing its guilt. The connection between justification (remember - that you are a member of God's covenant people, not that you are right with God through faith) and Christ's death is vague. On Rom 3:25a Wright says "Thus is God's righteousness revealed in the gospel events of Jesus' death and resurrection: God has been true to the covenant ('covenant faithfulness' is Wright's understanding of *dikaiosune theou*), has dealt properly with sin, has come to the rescue of the helpless and has done so with due impartiality between Jew and Gentile'.³⁹

'Vague' is the only word that Waters can use to describe the connexion Wright makes between the death of Christ and the believer's pardon. He comments 'Since Wright rejects imputation as a Pauline category ... he cannot mean by "atonement" and "propitiation" what these terms have traditionally been understood to mean. Atonement and propitiation cannot, therefore, play a central role in Wright's real understanding of the significance of Christ's death'.⁴⁰ Wright gives us a primarily *Christus Victor* view of the atonement, focussing on the defeat of sin as power rather than dealing with guilt. The *obedience* of Christ is his succeeding where Israel failed, entering into the 'exile' of the cross and re-emerging in resurrection to new covenant life.

Sinners are saved by identification with him in his death and resurrection - he is representative but not strictly a substitute.⁴¹

Conclusion

There is absolutely no need for evangelicals to be defensive about the doctrine of penal substitution. There is nothing new in the recent attacks once the contemporary wrappings have been removed. The evangelical understanding of the cross does full justice to the biblical material. It most fully expounds the character of God as he has revealed himself as Triune love and holiness. The 'high mysteries' of his Name an angel's grasp transcend, but we should glory in understanding them as well as we can. Let us regard the Word as more authoritative than the world. Understand the doctrine accurately. Preach it carefully but passionately. It alone is the power of God unto salvation. Moreover never let penal substitution be sidelined as one understanding of the atonement among many, whatever truth there is in other aspects of the multifaceted cross. In a real sense, penal substitution is the gospel.

'Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood;
sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah! what a Saviour.'

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1. This article was originally delivered as a paper at the Westminster Fellowship in October, 2005.
2. Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version (Crossway Bibles, 2001) unless otherwise stated.
3. *The Mediator*, (Lutterworth 1927) 152.
4. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 3rd Ed., 1988), 150.
5. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (IVP 1986), 103.
6. Moffatt New Testament Commentary, 1932; Fontana, London 1959.
7. SPCK, London, 1957.
8. In *Christ and the Judgement of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Marshall Pickering, 1986).
9. All references to 'EA Lectures' are to the lectures held at the London School of Theology on 6-8 July 2005 under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance following the controversy caused by Steve Chalke's book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Zondervan, 2003). A number of these papers can be seen on the EA website, www.cauk.org/theology.
10. Quoted by Chalke, op cit, 125.
11. See *Apostolic Preaching*, chaps 5,6.
12. Op cit, 122-23.
13. Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (Westminster Press, 1947, edition), pp. 444-445, quoted by Stott, loc cit.
14. James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, (1902; Shepherd Classic Edition, 1981) 276.
15. For a brief discussion as to why this does not mean 'God's covenant faithfulness' as eg N.T.Wright would have it see Don Carson's useful exposition of this passage in *The Glory of the Atonement* (ed. Charles Hill and Frank A. James III, IVP, 2004); and for a longer discussion see *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, (Stephen Westerholm, Eerdmans 2004, pp 286-96).
16. As to the law, we are in bondage (a) to its curse which is its penal sanction and Christ redeemed us from this curse being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13); (b) to the law of works as a condition of salvation from which we are redeemed by the perfect obedience of Christ being constituted righteous by that obedience (Rom 5: 19) and (c) from the ceremonial law and its tutelary role. Hence obedience for Christ also meant fulfilling all the ceremonies of the law (Luke 2:22-24; cf Matt. 3:15) for he was born under the law (Gal 4:5).
As to sin, we are in bondage to sin 'in all its aspects and consequences' (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 46) and salvation is not fulfilled until the redemption of our bodies. Redemption embraces all salvation including the eschatological deliverance from sin (Rom 8:23, Eph 1:14). But in Rom 3:24 Paul has in mind something already accomplished and in this regard we think of bondage to (a) the guilt of sin and (b) the power of sin.
17. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (Banner of Truth edition, 1961 reprint 1979), 47.
18. Op cit, 170.
19. Ibid, 201. See also Carson, op cit, 130; Stott, op cit, 172.
20. *God's Ultimate Purpose* (Banner of Truth, 1978), 156-57.
21. 'His righteousness' in vv 25,26 being his attribute of justice, not the righteousness whereby he justifies the ungodly; the former is 'demonstrated' (*eis endeixin*) at the cross, the latter, on the basis of which generations before Christ were proleptically justified, is 'made manifest' (*pephanerwtai*) - v 21. See Douglas Moo's discussion, *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, Romans 1-8* (Moody Press, 1991) pp238-43.
22. *Glory*, 138.
23. Sinclair Ferguson in a lecture at Keswick in July 2005 listed six consequences of the Fall from which Christ's death redeems us: guilt (by justification), alienation (in reconciliation), bondage to sin (in redemption), captivity to Satan (by victory over the devil), death (through his death and resurrection) and the cosmic curse (by inaugurating the new creation as the last Adam).
24. *Lost Message*, 63.
25. Ibid, 182-83.
26. Ibid, 67.
27. *Paternoster*, 2001.
28. *Recovering* 57.
29. Op cit, 151.
30. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* Bk.I, chap.III; Works (Banner of Truth edition) vol 10, 163.
31. October 2004.
32. Postscript on Penal Substitution, *Glory*, 445.
33. Ibid, 446.
34. *What St. Paul Really Said*, Lion, 1997.
35. *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol X (Abingdon, 2002).
36. Ibid, 476.
37. Ibid, 578.
38. *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (P&R, 2004).
39. Wright on *Romans*, 477.
40. Waters, op cit, 142.
41. Interestingly, Wright is obviously an influence on Chalke - he is frequently cited and commended Chalke's book as 'rooted in good scholarship'.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998 (ISBN Hardcover: 0-310-21156-5); (Apollos in UK).

Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics*. Leicester: Apollos, 2002 (UK ISBN: 0-8308-2681-5).

Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005 (ISBN 0-664-22327-3).

Theology can be a lonely, depressing business these days. Those so inclined to plough through contemporary scholarship are greeted with a dizzying array of diversity, much of it scarcely recognizable, even when advertised, as evangelical. Concepts such as God's providence, even his omniscience, certainly once unassailable convictions of the evangelical communities of Europe and America, are routinely contradicted and replaced by the stepchildren of process theology (open theism). There is, of course, nothing new with opposition to the idea of divine sovereignty. What is new is that these and other formerly "unacceptable" ideas have been subsumed within the label, "evangelical." The list of former offences now fashionable and widely published through traditionally evangelical or conservative Protestant publishing houses is long. Penal substitution, biblical inerrancy, exclusive salvation through Christ, biblical authorial intent, Trinity, Canon, and progressive revelation are all on the block. A survey of recent evangelical, theological writing reveals that polygamy is not wrong, Hinduism is a gift of God to Christianity, Jesus only became the Son at the resurrection, Trinity is a dated Greek anachronism better quietly forgotten, a propitiatory God is a "child abuser," and that texts such as the Bible are products of readers more than authors.

Theology has become a narrow ghettoised discipline. It now deals with long, tedious discourses on epistemology, feminism, thoroughly detached from any normal reader's thought world or it seems to serve the bidding of a tyrannical global homogenisation that sets standards for life and then dictates terms to the church. It is an age dominated by pragmatists such as George Barna and Brian McLaren, men of small theological vision, not deep, integrated intellects such as Calvin or Kuyper. Barna and the others are just front men however. Behind their practicality and pragmatism lurk theologically-minded scholars often intent on creating "generous orthodoxies" barely recognizable to the Reformers or their spiritual ancestors. Don't get me wrong, conservative theologians exist, but they certainly no longer hold sway. Some disqualify themselves, choosing to fight battles among themselves in the hope of establishing one properly functioning outpost in a land increasingly filled with hostility to their message. A recent systematic theology is an example. The author treats at length, neo-orthodoxy, dispensationalism, the swoon theory, creationism, and Amyraldianism, but pays scant attention to entire schools of theology synthesizing liberal, unbiblical ideas into practices that strike at the very heart of Reformationally-based doctrine.

I am not decrying their inclusion, since there is nothing new under the sun, but I do note the common failure to address contemporary theological issues or scholars with integrated theological solutions. Interestingly, one such evangelical offering cites John Murray 132 times but never mentions N.T. Wright (I recognize that in our over-specialized academic world he is classified as a New Testament scholar, but his works are redolent with theological observation and he exerts enormous influence on theological formulation), much less John Milbank, or today's subject, the fellow-

Presbyterian Kevin Vanhoozer. My point is that works such as this become instant anachronisms rather than important counterpoints to contemporary discussion. Other, more accessible works, such as Wayne Grudem's, are helpful in many ways (though I also disagree with him in significant areas), but still manage to reinforce an unfortunate situation. First, many new challenges to conservative, and especially reformed evangelicalism come from scholars working at a level that Grudem does not address (I assume by design) and second, Grudem still tries to write in a manner that is shaped by modernist concepts of systematic theology. His work considers categories and fields familiar to Turretin, but does little to address problems martialing on the borders of theology, where it meets, for example, language and the Bible. The difficulty with the compartmented approach of course is that large, conceptual (often world view) problems tend by their natures to be multi-disciplinary. My comments are not intended to criticize Grudem; his is an important work in its own right. It does point out the acute need for an integrated theological work of significant breadth. This raises an important point. Why is it that a survey of new books (say within the last ten years) shows that biblical scholars are writing a great deal of theology (see James Dunn, N.T. Wright, Frank Thielman, Tom Holland, Larry Hurtado, Richard Bauckham etc.), far fewer theologians write books classified as biblical studies? If nothing else, this points out the utter modern domination of "Christian" scholarship by biblical studies and the parallel discounting of theology. Carl Trueman's *The Wages of Spin* offers wise, acerbic and therapeutic commentary that is a must-read for those considering the discounting of theology and dominance of biblical studies. It was not always this way.

Theologians, the Biblical Doctor of Calvin's Geneva, were once considered officers of the Body of Christ, separate from pastors, and wielded tremendous influence in shaping heart and home, church and community. Theologians were preservers of the Rule of Faith, the church's historical understanding of the unified message of Scripture. They were also biblical scholars, translators of the Bible into the vernacular and embodied biblical wisdom. They manifested "a particular gift of interpreting Scripture, so that sound doctrine may be kept. (See Calvin's *Commentary on Ephesians*, Ephesians 4:11)." They trained both common citizenry and the elite for leadership in God's Kingdom. Most importantly, as Calvin noted, "without pastors and doctors there can be no government of the church." Doctors were theologians and biblical scholars, masters of contemporary scholarship, biblical languages, and their practical outworking in the church.

Enter Kevin Vanhoozer, once lecturer at New College, Edinburgh, and presently professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Following the publication of a number of well-received articles and an edited work, he made a "big splash" within academic circles in 1998 with the publication of *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* His difficult prose (partly due to the nature of the material) made painful reading but indispensably introduced readers to key debates over biblical hermeneutics. His work was not esoteric but sought to expose issues that lay at the heart of controversies dividing the evangelical community. Fundamentally, he sought to re-assert the authorial rights of the biblical authors as opposed to those of the readers or community (see Stanley Fish). The work really dealt with two overarching goals, proving that texts have determinative meanings and that authors determine what they are. The purpose of a believing interpretive community is not to determine what a

text means, but to guard the otherness of a text. With *First Theology* and *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer has set his aim on even larger targets.

Vanhoozer views *First Theology* as a sort of antecedent to *Is There a Meaning to This Text?* Rather than focusing on meaning *per se*, the author focuses on God himself as the communicative agent that generates meaning. From the start therefore Vanhoozer fuses together two disciplines sundered by modernism, Scripture and theology. Covenant, Trinity, the cross, pneumatology and speech-act theory interact in what shapes up to be a faithful promotion of traditional evangelical theology that fully interacts with a post-modern critique. His work is immensely significant. Post-modern, post-liberal evangelicals often appear to demonstrate supreme confidence, bordering on arrogance that theirs are the only formulations interacting with contemporary ideas. Vanhoozer it seems to me not only addresses current critiques of traditional biblical beliefs, he recasts many of these doctrines in a way that interacts with the new ideas and offers trenchant criticism of new schools as well. A refreshing bonus found in reading this work is the use of post-modern critique to deconstruct post-modern darlings such as pluralism, before constructing on its ruins a new understanding based on Trinitarianism. It is significant that he sees this synthetic process as enriching rather than undermining or countering Reformed theology. Eastern Orthodoxy and other non-evangelical systems are all integrated at times into the new fabric.

Vanhoozer divides his book into three parts, God, Scripture and hermeneutics. Connecting each section is a theme running through the entire work, covenantalism. The motif of the covenant is important to his work because it affords him the means to avoid dividing the baby (story and

doctrine). Additionally, his work holds together because its theology moves toward one single goal, the right practice of theology, practical wisdom, or what he calls “performance knowledge.” In contradistinction to many modern or post-modern stabs at theology, he chooses to shape the work around the cultivation of divine wisdom (as opposed to prolegomena such as epistemology). This he describes as “living along the text” rather than attempting to stand apart from it and judge it in some attempt at neutral analysis. Vanhoozer’s commitment is to build up the church, rather than the academy. In short, he attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice, church and school in such a way that theology positively under-girds every initiative of the believing community. It is important that the paradigm for the believer and even the theologian is not the scholar or scholar-minister, but the martyr, the faithful witness, even unto death.

The author signals his intention to produce a synthetic work right from the start. Posing the perpetual dilemma of the theologian, he asks, which should come first in a discussion of the “first things” of theology, God or Scripture? Characteristically, he says that both must be understood dialectically. The separation of the two has after all led to the fracturing of disciplines evident today between biblical studies and theology, with each making nightly “trench raids” into each other’s positions, but never staying long enough for real learning to take place. Subsequently, the resulting scholarship can produce no more than “an abbreviated, short-circuited substitute.” He finally settles on the balance of theological hermeneutics and hermeneutical theology, all formed around a Trinitarian approach. Popular criticisms of traditional evangelicalism as exclusivist are dealt with in a chapter that addresses love. Taking on critics such as Rahner and Pinnock,

he asserts that their imposed "openness" and pluralism, consequences of choosing between the false choice of sovereignty or love, are nothing more than thinly disguised imperialism. Not content with turning their objections on their head, Vanhoozer counters that real love has to depend on something greater than the desire to protect someone else's "otherness." His efforts to use Paul Ricoeur's *ipse* (covenant similarity) or *idem* (sameness) identities strikes me as far less successful than his appeal to the relations of the Trinity as the ground for our consideration of one another. This is important. With a growing body of evangelical writing extolling religious pluralism (see Amos Yong) that asserts God's saving activity through the prevenient and independent agency of the Holy Spirit, it is crucial of Vanhoozer to pose a Trinitarian understanding of religions based on covenantal relations that extend from the godhead to creation, fully identified in Scripture. In other words, he once again ties word and Spirit together. Perhaps another way to describe it is to say that many ideas considered traditionally as "liberal" have simply been subsumed within evangelicalism. At any rate, he counters critics of classical theism such as Clark Pinnock and the religious pluralism/panentheism of advocates such as Raimundo Panikkar, himself influenced by Hindu models with a tolerant, committed Christianity exemplified by Isaac Walton's *Complete Angler*. "The angler has his commitments, but he is willing to be tolerant of others and to argue his case with humility and humour as well as conviction." This tolerant faith is also balanced however by theistic transcendence seen in an effectual calling (as divine speech-act) and supervenient grace.

Targeting the relationship between love, freedom, and the will, he resolves the tension between

openness theology with its human, limited definition of love and a view of reformed theology as imperial causality by introducing us once again to a God whose loving words never return void. This communicative theory focuses on successful communication rather than coercive power. Scripture, therefore, is divine communication action that has real power to change. The underlying idea of course is that language has the power to transform not just to inform. "Is the grace that changes one's heart a matter of energy or information? I believe it is both, and speech act theory lets us see how. God's call is effectual precisely in bringing about a certain kind of understanding in and through the Word. The Word that summons has both propositional content (matter) and illocutionary [explained below] force (energy). This has a number of implications. First, it drives readers back to the intentions of an author to communicate something that we recognize as meaning. Second that the act of divine communications involves the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit whose rights rank above the readers'. At the very least, it supplants much language theory with its emphasis on language as an accumulation of symbols that can be encoded and decoded at will. Vanhoozer returns to this well-ploughed ground in his work on speech-act theory. This is, as it certainly was in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, a jarring experience for theologically-minded evangelicals. Before explaining speech-acts, the author summarizes an alternative, the code model of language. Championed by Eugene Nida, the model sees words as signs that represent thoughts. Understanding therefore consists of encoding thoughts as symbols and then decoding them. Unfortunately, the model is seriously deficient, since significant information conveyed in a communicative act is not encoded (the context for

example), understanding means more than simply decoding linguistic symbols, and perhaps most significantly because words convey more than information. Clearly, effective understanding, particularly biblical understanding, requires something more robust.

Vanhoozer, like Anthony Thiselton, and Nicholas Wolterstorff finds the way forward in speech-act theory. Speech acts (illocutions) focus on successful, intentional communications that include words embedded in context (the author includes a useful excursus on relevance theory) to convey meaning. Unlike the code model which encourages the interpretation of texts as autonomous units, speech acts along with relevance views texts both as discrete communicative acts and as parts of covenantal, canonical communication. Communicative action is classed as locution (the words themselves, independent of context or communicative intent), illocution (the essence of communication: what one does when saying something) and perlocution (the effect of the illocutionary act). Vanhoozer summarizes the importance of all this when he defines the literal sense as “the illocutionary act performed by the author” not simply the locution. Context matters. Small texts or books must be seen both in their local settings and within their canonical framework. It seems to me the author aims at and strikes the very heart of much of contemporary biblical scholarship.

Perhaps the most entertaining chapter in the book revolves around the motif of body piercing. He makes the act of body-piercing analogous to the damage done to texts by violating the rights of their authors. Rather than readers running rough-shod over authorial intent, Vanhoozer suggests adopting a natural sense reflective of the author and his context. This is no mere surface interpretation involving

the simple encoding and decoding of symbols (translation), it is canonical understanding based on “thick descriptions.” Interestingly, he mentions, as an example of the excessively narrow interpretive practices of the biblical studies elite, the fact that recent dictionaries of biblical interpretation “are virtually silent on the subject of the theological interpretation of Scripture.” Thick descriptions (the natural, literal, literary, authorially intended sense) are arrived at through careful consideration of language, culture, history, theology (rule of faith), literary context etc. To do less is to miss or misunderstand the illocutionary act and therefore the meaning of the communication. The truth underlying all of this is ultimately theological. Vanhoozer notes Christopher Seitz, “The crisis in hermeneutics is in reality a crisis involving God’s providence, a proper ecclesiology and doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”

Stylistically, the work is uneven, perhaps a bit choppy. The reason is clear. Each chapter was written at a significantly different time, with a different setting and perhaps purpose. Clarity sometimes suffers. Each section is, it must be said, important to the whole, but the mortar between the joints is too stiff and cracks appear. At times Vanhoozer appears to invest too much trust in paradigms or devices furnished by a host of fascinating intellects (Wittgenstein, Ricoeur, Polanyi, etc). His choice of communicative force as a way of dealing with election and calling seems helpful, but left my old Calvinist bones aching a bit. I kept reflexively returning to why God needed such an excuse in order to exercise his choice. Perhaps this is just a bit of theological impatience on my part.

First Things represents brilliant change and synthetic development seemingly beyond the grasp of modern, over-specialized scholars. *The Drama of*

Doctrine, is profound theology that exceeds the earlier work in nearly every way. Previewed in an earlier article, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Ministrelsy of Theology (*Evangelical Futures*, John G. Stackhouse, ed.), this is sometimes demanding reading that does not bore and rarely disappoints. I hasten to add, it is a truly important work, one of very few. Its aim, like its predecessor, is to argue "that doctrine, far from being unrelated to life, serves the church by directing its members in the project of wise living, to the glory of God." "Doctrine seeks not simply to state theoretical truths but to embody truth in ways of living." This practical bent is the result of Vanhoozer's modification of the cultural-linguistic (post-liberal) theology learned at Yale University at the hands of George Lindbeck. The former focused on the connection between theology and living. Unlike Lindbeck however, who placed control in the hands of the interpretive community of believers, Vanhoozer envisages a canonical-linguistic theology that vests the canon of Scripture with ultimate authority. The author sees this as a retrieval of sorts of *sola scriptura*. This is hugely significant given the fact that evangelicals increasingly adopt the local community as the ultimate basis of interpretive authority. While it may be true that the evangelical community primarily spurns the most radical excesses of Stanley Fish and reader-response, for example, it is equally apparent that relativism and pluralism continue to make significant inroads. The motif that unifies the work is the presentation of doctrine as drama lived out. Once again Vanhoozer is conscious to unite the idea of story with theology. Doctrine serves to bridge the gospel as "theo-drama" (borrowed from Balthazar) and theology as "gospel performance." The motif serves a

useful function. It results in a methodology that drives biblical interpreters to consider historical background, cultural, social and intellectual concerns (stage and setting). The end of such consideration is not the development of narrow expertise, but rather the wisdom of Christ manifest in faithful and competent witnesses. The role of the theologian is to therefore serve as a dramaturge, an assistant to the director, able to remind the cast of faithful ways to interpret the script.

As he sees it, the outcome of theology viewed as dramaturgy is "a Christocentric focus, canonical framework, and a catholic flavour." Interestingly, he aims straight at the emergent church movement declaring that his aim is for a "non-reductive" rather than a "generous" (see Brian McLaren) orthodoxy. His interest in canonical faithfulness seen as orthodoxy also leads to his reassessment of themes covered earlier in *First Theology*. The dramatic script, of course, is the canon. He sees canon and covenant as the "form" and "content" of the divine theo-drama. The practical responsibilities for providing adequate doctrinal direction to the church dictate that the whole "canonical script" (as one cohesive story) be considered. As such, the Bible cannot be considered as autonomous texts mixed and matched to circumstances at will. Neither does it allow for a primary concern for the world behind the text. In other words, the best tool for interpreting Mark is the canon, not Second Temple Judaism. It does not deny the usefulness of the latter, but it reduces its priority.

In particular, Vanhoozer is intent to recover a more prominent role for tradition, at least in the sense that the Reformers understood it, particularly with regard to the Rule of Faith (summary of apostolic teaching). This is not explained primarily either metaphysically or historically, but through an

exegesis of the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). He points out that it is Philip who leads the eunuch into a canonical, typological reading of the Isaiah 53. The text itself did not generate understanding (hence the eunuch's question), but Philip was able to serve as an "external aid" to understanding the Scripture. As such, he was "a link in the chain of apostolic tradition" and "a symbol for the church." Vanhoozer cites both other biblical support for tradition (1Cor 15:3-5; 2Th 2:15; 2Th 3:6; Mk 7:8; Col 2:8), and also notes that the early church did not see any significant difference between Scripture and tradition. Tradition is just "a passing on of performance knowledge, canonical competence, or what we might simply call Christian wisdom." He notes, "Orthodoxy is a crystallization of the church's universal and unified knowledge of God and the gospel." He cautions against simply equating these historical opinions with scripture, but points out that "we should assume that the stance and content of the human discourse coincides with the divine discourse unless there is a good reason to think otherwise." This leads to a clear endorsement of creeds as universal helps to our understanding of the divine "script." Confessions are also supported, but only as "regional" expressions of orthodoxy.

Vanhoozer also places a premium on canonical reading that unites the whole, transcultural believing community through time and space. Interestingly, he contests the idea of cultures as closed systems impervious to change. Citing a number of scholars, he views cultures as having a "porous border" that can interact with Scriptural concepts. He is quick however to state that there is no single set of beliefs or customs that can be characterized as Christian. The goal therefore is not to create one worldwide culture through the transforming power of canonical truth. The goal

rather is "non-identical repetition," or living tradition that takes place dynamically through the incarnational, prophetic power of the Word and Spirit. Citing Christopher Morse, change takes place within cultures as the Scripture is applied in a way that insures "apostolic tradition, congruence with Scripture and catholicity." He makes a vital point in considering the interaction of gospel and culture. He underlines the criticality of seeing the canon forming the community rather than the community giving the canon authority. Quoting in part Serene Jones, he states, "The canon, then, is not some social contract drawn up by a voluntary association. The church is not a community of choice but has been brought into being by a divine initiative: an effectual call. This means that the church doesn't just choose to inhabit the story; it understands itself as being inhabited by the story." Evangelicals guilty of all sorts of excess regarding attempts to contextualize the gospel would do well to heed Vanhoozer on this point.

Perhaps the work's most exciting moments take place in the later chapters. These concern themselves with the interaction of doctrine and church. Vanhoozer concentrates on seeing the church carry through what it learns into the theatre of the world. "The church becomes deadlly theatre when it loses its prophetic edge or when its members become passive spectators who feel no call to become participants." This is fundamentally true because "the church is the corporate rendering of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit." It is the proof of the transforming power of God. It is a truthful following after Jesus in life and death. Therefore both doctrine and praxis are indispensable. For example, the author singles out C. Peter Wagner's "homogeneous unit principle"

for criticism as a crass, convenient pragmatism that is both sub-evangelical and sub-Protestant, since it bears witness to something that may be popular in the community but less than the truth of the Gospel, the fact that believers are all one in Christ. The need for a prophetic witness also drives Vanhoozer to address the unspoken “elephant in the living room,” heresy. “The church must discern the difference between the orthodox and the heterodox, between fitting and unfitting participation in the drama of redemption.” Ultimately Christian faith calls for the entire church, regardless of context to become a “theatre of martyrdom,” as “truth tellers, truth doers, and ultimately people who suffer for the truth they show and tell.”

These two works represent great competency with an enormous array of disciplines and opinions. It is theological synthesis of the highest order, and at the same time the most exciting reformulation of Reformed theology seen in many years. What Vanhoozer represents is evangelicalism’s best and most creative response to post-modernism in all its

forms. Keep an eye on this guy. Chris Sinkinson, in a *Table Talk* critique of D.G. Hart’s *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* (Issue 14, Summer 2005) excoriates Hart for the latter’s preference for denominationalism over evangelical parachurches as “blinkered idealism.” Sinkinson was of course correct to point out the significant differences between American and British evangelicalism. This, however, does not cancel the validity of Hart’s critique of evangelical drift (evident on both sides of the Atlantic). These two works both elucidate significant ways in which contemporary evangelicalism departs from a traditional, and indeed biblical, understanding of the faith, they offer positive alternatives based on a properly catholic, canonical, and reformed understanding. It would be difficult to overestimate their significance. Finally, Kevin Vanhoozer is the theologian’s treat, his reward. This reviewer may stray into excess, but it is not every day that I am able to find a place of worship in such a wilderness of words. Buy it or borrow it, but in any case read it.

Introduction

Once again I have the opportunity to highlight some recent literature of which serious students of the New Testament, whether college lecturers, students, or preachers, might wish to be aware. As was the case for previous surveys, my criteria for inclusion have been as follows: 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 homiletical; (d) I think could be of benefit to students and/or preachers as well as theological lecturers. Thus, I make no claim to be exhaustive in my survey, but I hope that my comments may still prove useful. A move from Scotland to South Africa, and thus a new and very different context for my own ministry, has also undoubtedly influenced my choices to some extent.

New Testament Greek

Those who still have to begin studies in NT Greek, or those who feel the need of a refresher course, may be interested to know that a classic book, known by countless students who used it (including myself) as 'Wenham', has been thoroughly revised by J. Duff, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (3rd edition; Cambridge: CUP, 2005). Duff has done an excellent job of maintaining the best qualities of the previous edition while also taking account of the needs of today's students. The presentation is clear and attractive. While I have enjoyed teaching from W. Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek* ¹ book for most of the last decade, I can see that many teachers will be attracted by this new textbook since it is reasonably priced and contains both lessons and exercises in a single volume. Whether this version of a classic text will eventually become identified simply by its author's surname remains to be seen.

Historical Context

Biblical Studies do not normally make headlines, but

The Brother of Jesus, by Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, ² tells the story of the discovery of an 'ossuary' (Jewish bone-box for burial purposes) which appears to be inscribed with the words, 'James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus'. The first part, written by Shanks, tells the story of the box itself, full of drama and intrigue. The second part, by Witherington, is a study of the character of James. While Christian faith does not stand or fall on the authenticity of this artefact, this is an interesting archaeological issue which hit the headlines and this book is a helpful guide for those who are interested in the archaeological issues or who want to be able to discuss the issues if the topic comes up in pastoral discussion.

An interesting blend of historical context, exegesis and contemporary appropriation is K. E. Bailey's book, *The Cross and the Prodigal*. ³ Bailey's slim book is a revision of one of his earliest publications, in which he examines the parables of Luke 15 in the light of his extensive knowledge of modern middle-eastern peasant culture. He further interprets the passage through the use of calligraphy and a short play. Bailey has had a huge impact on contemporary biblical studies (although the benefit of reading the biblical text in the light of a *modern* expression of a culture is still debated) and this book provides a gentle, yet stimulating, entrance into his approach. Preachers will find many thought-provoking ideas here, it being very suggestive, although they may wish to reflect carefully on the exegetical foundation of Bailey's suggestions before being carried away by his undoubted gift for communicating his perspective.

In Search of Paul, by J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, ⁴ is an attempt to allow archaeological discoveries to inform a new portrait of Paul the Apostle. Reed is an expert in archaeology and Crossan is well known within historical Jesus studies as a scholar who has little confidence in the reliability of the canonical gospels, but this book is a generally sympathetic study of the apostle. There is certainly a lot of interesting

archaeological material in the book and plenty of good illustrations and photographs of artefacts, but potential readers should be warned of some very strong language is one chapter discussing attitudes towards sex and violence in the ancient world. This would not be a priority purchase for me.

Reading the Biblical Text as Scripture

The latest volume in the Scripture and Hermeneutics Project series, *Reading Luke*,⁵ is intended to show how the hermeneutical methods which have been discussed in earlier volumes in this series have a direct impact on the reading of a specific biblical text. Although I have not had an opportunity to deal with this book seriously yet, it looks very promising. The so-called 'Scripture Project' (quite different from the previously mentioned project), initiated by Princeton Theological Seminary, has resulted in a collection of essays under the title, *The Art of Reading Scripture*. This is one of a number of recent initiatives which emphasise the need for theological reading of Scripture.⁶ Although most of the contributors are not confessional evangelicals, the book does argue that the Bible should be read 'confessionally', that is, as a text for the church. Some of the most interesting contributions come from Richard Hays, whose work is always worth reading. It is particularly interesting to see several examples of sermons preached by the editors along with explanations for the approach adopted. I will mention the inaugural volumes of the Brazos Theological Commentary on Scripture and the Two Horizons New Testament Commentary a little later. I should also mention the recent publication of the Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, edited by K. Vanhoozer and others,⁷ although I have not yet been able to use this resource myself. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*,⁸ is a readable reflection on Scripture which, as so often with Wright, is full of insight and yet raises numerous questions.

Introductory Issues

It is remarkable how many 'Introductions' to the NT

have been published in recent years. Into this increasingly crowded field comes, firstly, D. A. deSilva's *An Introduction to the New Testament*.⁹ This is a very large volume which has the advantage of being quite comprehensive and the disadvantage of being difficult to read completely in the course of a one-semester class. Despite its size, this volume is clearly written and is well designed. Two distinctive features are deSilva's use of worked examples to introduce 'exegetical skills' (such as the use of 'social-scientific criticism') and his interest in the significance of the various biblical texts for 'ministry formation'. In general, deSilva holds fairly conservative views of authorship, etc., although he is quite prepared to say where he feels evidence is inconclusive and he is perhaps a little more open to the possibility of pseudepigraphy in the case of 2 Peter than some evangelicals would wish.

The second edition of W. Elwell and R. Yarbrough's generally excellent, *Encountering the New Testament*, is somewhat disappointing in that a page-by-page comparison with the first edition shows that the text has not been substantially modified except for occasional minor adjustments. This, no doubt, indicates that the text is serving its intended purpose well but, in my opinion, there were several places in which the text was too thin for undergraduate students (notably the brief remarks on 2 and 3 John) and it would have been good to see some development here. This book remains, however, a super general introduction to the New Testament and the CD-ROM has been developed so as to be a more useful resource.

Ben Witherington has written *The New Testament Story*.¹⁰ which is an attempt to provide an account of the origins of the New Testament documents together with an introduction to the basic message of these documents for a general audience. Witherington always writes clearly and helpfully and this would be a good book for someone who is planning to do New Testament studies shortly or for a preacher who wants

a short overview of the subject. Witherington often refers to his many other books, which is fine if you have access to them but is frustrating and eventually a little irritating if not.

D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo completed their long-awaited second edition of *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Readers who, like me, were hoping for greater engagement with the content of the biblical text than in the first edition, will, I think, be pleased with the result. It is still a work of 'special introduction' and so there is considerable emphasis on issues such as date and authorship and provenance, but there is certainly more emphasis on the content and message of the text. As I completed this article, the death of Leon Morris was announced. Although he was unable to participate in the revision of this volume, he will always be associated with the project to provide a conservative but academically credible account of the New Testament documents, not only in this volume but in many other of his writings.

Reinventing Jesus, by J. E. Komoszweski, M. J. Sawyer and D. B. Wallace,¹¹ is a difficult book to categorise. In some respects it seems most like a piece of Christian apologetics written in the context of controversies such as the release of *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown, first as a book and then recently as a film. And as such it is both useful and well done. It is clearly written and addresses important issues, including the divinity of Jesus, thoroughly for a general readership. Yet, because of the issues raised in the recent controversies, this book also serves as a careful study of the text of the New Testament and the formation of the canon. Thus there are very helpful discussions of the manuscript evidence and the various means used to judge between variant readings. Thus, someone looking for a clear discussion of textual criticism and related issues will certainly find this book worth consulting.

Biblical Theology

O. P. Robertson's book, *The Christ of the Prophets*, is a long-awaited sequel to his widely used, *Christ of the Covenants*.¹² In some respects this is a standard study of the Old Testament prophets and prophetic literature, but I think it deserves to be classed as 'Biblical Theology' because of the constant reference to the way in which prophetic figures or texts are used in the New Testament and the way in which themes which are present in the prophetic literature find their fulfilment in the New Testament. It would make an excellent textbook on the prophets. P. G. Bolt has written, *The Cross from a Distance*.¹³ Part of the 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' series, this book is a study of one aspect of the theology of Mark's Gospel; specifically, his theology of atonement. In the same series, Craig Blomberg combines careful exegetical work with challenging application in his study of common meals, *Contagious Holiness*.¹⁴ *The Story of Israel*,¹⁵ by Pate, Duvall, Hays, Richards, Tucker and Vang is both a helpful and a puzzling book. It is helpful as a theologically sensitive survey of the whole Bible. On the other hand, it presents itself as a basic text for undergraduate students yet the only supplementary reading which is suggested comes from a single (very useful, certainly) source: IVP's *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, even although other literature is mentioned in the footnotes. It is probably best to read this as a basic introduction to biblical theology rather than a textbook on the subject.

I had anticipated the publication of G. S. Dawson's, *Jesus Ascended*,¹⁶ in which a Reformed minister addresses this neglected issue. In fact, I was a bit disappointed with the very brief discussion of the biblical material, but this book is not designed to be a work of exegesis. Taken on its own terms, however, it is a richly theological study of this important doctrine with an eye to its importance in the church. Well worth reading.

There have been some important recent attempts to describe the theology of the New Testament in one-volume. I. H. Marshall has completed an eagerly anticipated volume entitled, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*.¹⁷ Written with great clarity, this book deals effectively both with the theological contributions of collections of documents (such as the Synoptic Gospels or the Pauline letters) and the distinctive messages of the individual documents. A helpful introductory chapter considers the task of New Testament Theology and the various challenges and objections that face those who wish to practice it. It also introduces some of the most important recent books on the subject. Most of the volume is quite accessible to a wide range of readers and although Marshall engages with scholarship he does so in an understated manner which does not allow the theological message of the biblical texts to be overpowered. This volume is highly recommended. F. Thielman has contributed a similar volume, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*.¹⁸ Sadly, the two volumes seem to have been produced in parallel and so there was not enough time between their publication dates to allow any interaction. Both authors take a high view of Scripture and are sensitive to the distinctive voices of the various authors and documents. Both volumes will prove very useful to preachers. On balance, if I had to choose one of these books, I would probably go for Marshall's.

Gospel Studies

Two volumes in the 'McMaster New Testament Studies' series have appeared in the last couple of years. The first is entitled, *Reading the Gospels Today*.¹⁹ This series has included some very helpful volumes which serve as useful introductions to various topics for students, but the essays in this volume, while useful enough, are rather diverse and so this book will not really serve as an adequate introduction to contemporary study of the Gospels as the title might

suggest. The second is entitled, *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*.²⁰ This is a much more coherent volume and includes serious but readable essays from notable authors such as Ben Witherington, Howard Marshall, Richard Bauckham, Douglas Moo and many others. Together, the authors sketch the background to New Testament Christology and then consider the Christological emphases of the various New Testament documents. This is an excellent volume which would make a great textbook

Pauline Studies

S. Westerholm has revised two important books which were previously published some years ago. The first is entitled *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*.²¹ This is a substantially revised and expanded version of his book, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, which first appeared in 1988. In its earlier form, Westerholm's book was quickly recognised as a very significant contribution to the developing discussion of the 'New Perspective on Paul'. In its new form, it is indispensable. Although it is a very substantial book, it is written with verve and some humour. The analysis of the current debate is still as helpful as before, although now Westerholm takes account of some of the vast amount of literature which appeared since his first edition was published. In addition, he has included introductory chapters on the thought of Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley which provide some helpful historical perspective. In the final part he offers his own proposals, which are close to a traditional 'Lutheran' reading of justification by faith, etc. This would be my first choice for a book on this important and rather contentious topic. On a very different scale, Westerholm's little book, *Understanding Paul: The Early Christian Worldview of the Letter to the Romans* ²² is a reading of Paul's thought on the basis of Romans. It is not really for those who have some background in Paul's thought. Rather it is for those who are entering that world for the first time. There is no attempt to engage with scholarship; there is simply careful attention to the biblical text in the

light of the Old Testament. *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul*,²³ by G. P. Waters is a study by a Reformed scholar of a scholarly phenomenon which has generated a great deal of controversy. Waters is well placed to make an important contribution, having done doctoral studies at Duke University where he studied with E. P. Sanders and R. B. Hays. His aim is to present fairly the views of representatives of this academic position (broad collection of positions is probably more accurate) and then to submit them to scrutiny on the basis of his own exegesis. While there are some valid criticisms and helpful insights in this volume which certainly deserve attention, I was disappointed that there was not a more sympathetic tone for the discussion and more recognition of differences between the various authors (cf. p.151: 'the revisionist exegesis of E. P. Sanders, J. D. G Dunn, and N. T Wright fails to render satisfactory readings of Paul' as if they were all saying the same things).

A major new study by Francis Watson entitled, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*,²⁴ considers how Paul reads biblical texts from the Old Testament, particularly the Torah and the Minor Prophets, in relation to readings in other contemporary Jewish literature. Watson provides a stimulating study which follows the pattern of his previous studies in challenging significant mainstream academic views (in this case, the idea that Paul's reading of Scripture is inconsistent). Paul, for Watson, is a careful reader who appreciates themes which run through the Torah. Yet many evangelicals, while appreciating this emphasis, will have to wrestle with his view that some tensions in Paul's thought arise from incompatible statements which he, as a careful reader, finds in the Torah. This is a technical study which will be rather difficult for many readers, but it certainly is significant and deserves attention by those able to do justice to it.

Also on Paul's use of the Old Testament, but with a rather different focus, is C. D. Stanley's book, *Arguing with Scripture*.²⁵ which argues that Paul incorporated

the Old Testament into his letters in ways which were appropriate for the varying competences of his readers. A further book on Paul which I have been unable to see for myself yet, but which is too significant to go without comment is the latest offering on Paul from N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Fresh Perspective*.²⁶ The play on the phrase 'the New Perspective' is unmistakeable and suggests (as Wright has stated more than once plainly) that Wright does not wish to be regarded simply as an exponent of a monolithic 'New Perspective' on Paul. The reviews I have seen of this book suggest that it will be as stimulating, provocative and controversial as his others. We still await with anticipation his major study of Paul.

Commentaries

Numerous commentaries in numerous series have been published in the last few years. Here are just a few. J. Nolland has completed his volume on Matthew,²⁷ one of two recent additions to the excellent NIGTC series. Nolland makes no real effort to connect the Gospel with the apostle, but this book is full of careful exegesis on the text as it stands and is an important resource for students and preachers with facility in Greek.

On John's Gospel, it is worth mentioning C. Keener's mammoth two-volume commentary,²⁸ the Baker Exegetical Commentary by A. J. Köstenberger and the revised Tyndale commentary by C. Kruse.²⁹ Each of these authors take a high view of the Gospel as both a theological and a historical document, although Keener is probably generally slightly less conservative. Keener's book is a piece of painstaking research and most of the first volume is taken up by his extensive introduction. There is also a huge bibliography in volume 2. While these qualities will be welcomed by scholars, they may prove overwhelming to students or busy preachers. The other two commentaries are, in my opinion, more generally useable. Köstenberger builds on earlier studies to provide a richly theological reading of the text, which neither neglects nor gets

obsessed by historical issues. Kruse's commentary has all the benefits and disadvantages of the Tyndale series: clear exegetical discussions of the text from a conservative perspective, but limited space for extensive discussion (although this volume is longer than most in this series).

Journeying through Acts by F. Scott Spencer is a repackaged version of Spencer's 'Readings' commentary, first published in 1997 by Sheffield Academic Press. It is a lively, literary study and has real value for a preacher who wants to appreciate the flow of Luke's narrative but there is a frustrating disregard for historical foundations that left me feeling somewhat short-changed.

The first volume of the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible is also on Acts and comes from the pen of the distinguished historian Jaroslav Pelikan, recently deceased shortly after the publication of this volume.³⁰ This volume contains very brief comments on selected verses from each chapter, interspersed with significant theological essays which are linked to a particularly relevant passage in the biblical text. Thus, the essay on 13:48 is headed 'Foreknowledge/Election/Predestination', while the essay linked to 23:1 is entitled 'The Testimony of a "Good Conscience"'. These essays involve close attention to the whole canon, often drawing on the Septuagint version of the OT, and draw on a wide range of writers from all ages of the Christian Church. I found this an interesting volume in its own right, but rather awkward to use as a commentary. It would have to function as a supplement to more conventional commentaries.

In a similar vein, the first two volumes of the Two Horizons commentary have been published: S. Fowl writes on Philipppians and M. M. Thompson writes on Colossians and Philemon.³¹ The first part of these volumes follows a fairly traditional format for a commentary, working through the text with useful

exegetical comments being made, while there is no attempt to be exhaustive. The second part, however, is taken up with theological essays which reflect on one or more themes from the documents in question. This format seems to be helpful and the first two volumes suggest that this will be a series which will be helpful for students and preachers.

A further addition to the BECNT series is the commentary by D. E. Garland on 1 Corinthians.³² Though perhaps not quite so exhaustive as Thiselton's NIGTC volume and also a little less distinctly theological in its approach, Garland provides a careful and dependable analysis of the Greek text of this letter along with helpful discussion of significant scholarship. This is a useful volume.

M. J. Harris has written the commentary on *2 Corinthians* in the NIGTC series. This is, in fact, the second significant commentary on the letter by Harris (the first formed part of the Expositors Bible Commentary in 1976). It is a detailed analysis of the Greek text. Harris emphasises careful analysis of the textual witnesses to, and then the resulting grammar of, the Greek text. This challenging Pauline letter is now well served by several substantial recent treatments (including other recent studies such as those by Barnett and Garland) which take its coherence seriously.

Moises Silva's important commentary in the BECNT series has been slightly revised, but those who possess the earlier version will probably not need to purchase the second edition.

A recent addition to the EP Study Commentary series is a volume on *Ephesians* by H. Uprichard.³³ This is a simple and helpful exposition, by an experienced pastor as well as an able scholar. As usual in this series, there is a strong emphasis on application. The author does make some reference in endnotes to the views of commentators such as Calvin and, among recent authors, O'Brien, but generally there is very little

engagement with scholarship. I have not seen the most recent volume on 1 and 2 Timothy by William Barclay, but it sounds very promising.

The letters of Peter and Jude are given serious treatments in the New American Commentary volume by T. R. Schreiner³⁴ and in the BECNT commentary on 1 Peter by K. Jobes.³⁵ Schreiner's skill as an interpreter of Paul has been shown in numerous recent publications, and his work on Peter and Jude also displays similar qualities. Schreiner argues for Petrine authorship of both letters attributed to Peter (quite rare these days with respect to 2 Peter) and provides a clear explanation of the biblical text with a good measure of engagement of scholarly discussions. Jobes argues for Petrine authorship of 1 Peter and aims to make a distinctive contribution, as those who know her work might suspect, by focussing on the use of the Septuagint and by paying careful attention to linguistic issues.

Tom Wright continues to produce volumes in his '... for everyone' series. The latest 'Paul for everyone' book is on Romans and provides a very readable avenue into this letter from Wright's distinctive perspective.

General NT Studies

*The Glory of the Atonement*³⁶ is a substantial contribution to discussion of the atonement. Some twenty essays by excellent scholars address this central concept in Christian theology at a time when it has received renewed attention due to various controversial views being expressed on the subject. Thus the discussion of 'divine child abuse' sounds very contemporary, even though the phrase was earlier used in 1992 by a feminist theologian. This collection is also a *Festschrift* for the veteran Swiss theologian, Roger Nicole, and has the unusual merit of including an essay by the one it was designed to honour. This collection includes detailed exegesis, historical studies and essays of practical application and is highly recommended.

A similar collection of essays, *Justification: What's at*

Stake in the Current Debates,³⁷ addresses the issue of justification, particularly in light of debate about imputation. These essays were originally prepared for a conference held at Wheaton College and are perhaps not quite so accessible

Mission Studies

As I prepared to move from Scotland to missionary service in South Africa, I thought it would be useful to pay particular attention to treatment of the NT in some recent studies of mission. There have been commendable treatments of the relevant biblical material in past years. Studies by Bosch, Larkin and Williams, Köstenberger and O'Brien, among others have provided some important studies. In the last couple of years, one of the most generally useful studies is by A. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*.³⁸ This book by a distinguished missiologist is essentially a biblical theology of mission. It is a generally competent, if necessarily quite cursory, treatment of the biblical texts and will be helpful to preachers, but it does not take account of recent publications. Gallagher and Hertig have edited a volume of essays entitled, *Mission in Acts*.³⁹ Pride of place must go to E. Schnabel's two volume study, *Early Christian Mission*.⁴⁰ This mammoth piece of scholarship is certainly demanding, but it is extremely important, not simply because it is a careful study of the evidence for early Christian mission, but because the author has missionary experience and intends to write with a view to serving the missionary activity of the modern church. When it comes to broader studies of mission, I will mention only three significant books. *Introducing World Missions*, by Moreau *et al*,⁴¹ contains several chapters on the biblical texts which are foundational to mission studies. The authors do an admirable job of surveying the material briefly. A brief study entitled, *Mission: An Essential Guide*, by C. F. Cardoza-Orlandi,⁴² has a chapter on 'the Bible and Mission', which is a useful methodological discussion of how the Bible may be used in mission, but I was rather disappointed with

how little the Bible contributed to the book itself. Finally, we should note the important book by S. B. Bevans and R. P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*.⁴³ This book is really a study in missionary history and theology and the authors do not claim that it is a work of biblical studies, but I was still disappointed that the opening chapter which purports to provide the biblical foundations, felt rather dated and reflected critical positions that certainly cannot be said to be unquestioned in the modern scholarly world.

On a related theme, G. Lemarquand's study, *An Issue of Relevance*,⁴⁴ is a comparison of exegetical approaches to the account of the Bleeding Woman (Mark 5:25-34 and parallels) in North Atlantic and African contexts. This is an important study which forms part of an important series, Bible and Theology in Africa. Unfortunately, the high price of these volumes makes it unlikely that it will be widely read outside academic libraries, and in Africa it is unlikely even to appear in libraries. It is encouraging, however, to see that perspectives from Africa and elsewhere in the world are being more explicitly given a voice in the international task of biblical interpretation. *The Global Bible Commentary* is another part of that trend.⁴⁵ Although it is a valiant attempt, I was left unsure of how helpful it would be in practice given that each contributor reads the text explicitly from their own cultural perspective and the contexts are highly diverse. I wonder how relevant a self-consciously Japanese reading of a text will be to a South African or a Brazilian. Another problem with this book is that often the commentary is only on a portion of a biblical text so that it functions more as an illustration of doing contextual exegesis than as a resource for a student of preacher who wants help in reading a particular text. A much more promising effort in the same vein is the recently-published *Africa Bible Commentary*, which focusses on one broad non-Western context (diverse as the continent of Africa is) and functions more like a

traditional one-volume commentary, although I have not yet been able to see a copy myself.

The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins is a *Festschrift* for J. D. G. Dunn.⁴⁶ Dunn has been a controversial figure throughout his academic career, holding quite conservative views on some issues but then making rather controversial statements about other aspects of Christian theology, notably the pre-existence of the Son and justification, but his contribution to the academic study of the New Testament is beyond question. This collection of essays by a host of international scholars reflects both the regard with which Dunn is held world-wide and the particular historical and theological interests which have been his foci of attention in his publications. This is a collection of technical essays and many will place heavy demands on a student or preacher, but there is some rich exegetical and theological material to be found here by those who will persevere. Contributors reflect a variety of attitudes to the text of Scripture, but there is a generally constructive approach and there are numerous evangelical authors such as Richard Bauckham, Gordon Fee, Howard Marshall and Max Turner.

Other literature

Sometimes biblical studies can seem very detached from the realities of everyday life, but A. Köstenberger has collaborated with a colleague in the field of ethics to write *God, Marriage and the Family: Rebuilding the Foundation*,⁴⁷ which employs careful biblical and theological analysis in the service of a book which will be of great benefit to pastors, counsellors and Christians who wish to develop a biblical view of the family and related ethical issues.

Those who take an interest in the way that popular culture deals with Christian issues may want to read *Jesus and Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ*, edited by K. E. Corley and R. L. Webb.⁴⁸ This is a scholarly book, with contributions from scholars such

as John Dominic Crossan, Mark Goodacre, Scot McKnight and Craig Evans, yet Gibson's controversial film sets the agenda items to be discussed. There is no unanimity of perspective on the film, with some contributors being very dismissive and others much more appreciative. It is a useful tool for serious readers in thinking through the significance of this film.

*Baptism in the Early Church*⁴⁹ is not strictly an example of NT studies. Rather, it is a resource of quotations (with some brief comment) from early Christian writings which relate to the issue of baptism. The book is published by a Baptist press, but it is a resource that Christians who take a paedobaptist view should also consult.

The final book I want to mention is quite distinctive. It is a daily devotional book by Adolf Schlatter, entitled *Do We Know Jesus?*⁵⁰ This is a further contribution from A. Köstenberger and R. Yarbrough to make Schlatter's work more widely accessible to English speakers. These readings, first published in 1937, were Schlatter's last literary product at the age of eighty-five. They were written during the developing political crisis in Germany and Schlatter calls his German

readers to reflect on the character of Jesus and his mission as they face the claims of Hitler. This book, therefore, has both historical and spiritual value. Each day's portion includes a verse or several verses of Scripture followed by some reflective comment. The readings are quite short and manageable, although as with much of Schlatter's writing, they require some careful thought.

Conclusion

I leave my readers to consider how they should spend their time and their money in the face of an overwhelming array of literature. May the Lord grant that the books we read, whether in (reflective) agreement or (fair and loving) disagreement, press us to re-examine the authoritative texts of Scripture and may his Spirit lead us to viewpoints which may truly be described as biblical.

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References

Recommendations:

For the teacher/student:

Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*;

K. Jobes, *1 Peter*; Hill and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*;

Longenecker, *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*.

For the preacher/ pastor:

Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*; Köstenberger, *God, Marriage and the Family*;

Rebuilding the Foundation; Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*.

For the interested general reader:

Komoszewski, Sawyer and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*; Schlatter, *Do We Know Jesus?*.

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