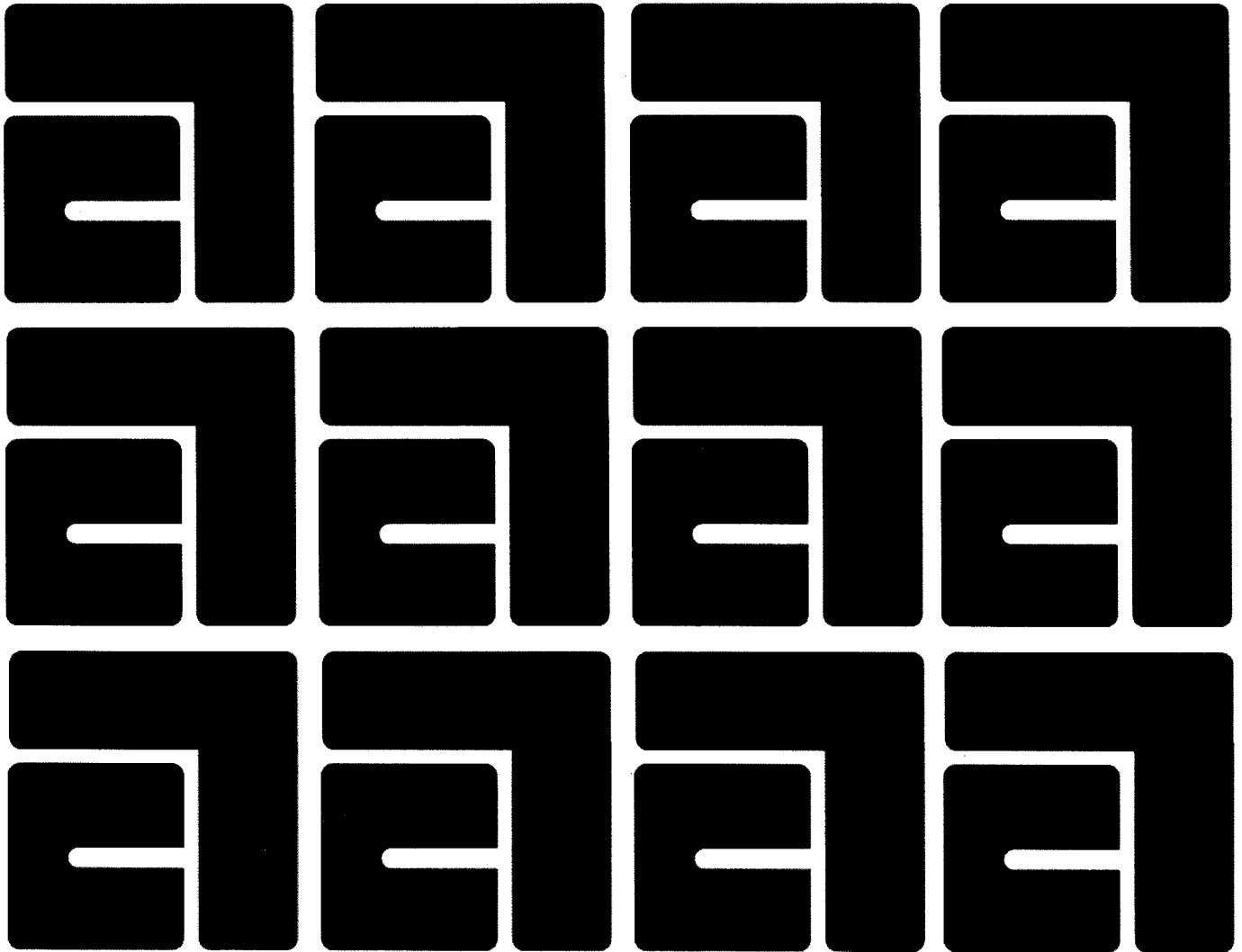


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Editor's Note

I must apologise to you for the absence in this issue of my Editor's Notes and Church History Survey. I was beginning to write up the latter when severe pain in my left wrist made it impossible to type any more than a few lines. As the result I have been unable to finish the two pieces I intended for this issue. I plan to include them in the autumn issue. In the meantime there is much in the present issue of interest. There is something of a missional theme. The articles by Daniel Webber and Leonardo de Chirico had their origin in the 2006 conference of the John Owen Centre when the theme was Mission in Europe. Stephen Clark's review of books by Richard Dawkins and Alistair McGrath reminds us of the challenge of the new atheism. Bill Nikides' review of Christopher Wright's new book on mission should inspire you to read the book itself which I warmly recommend. We must never forget that theology is fundamentally missional in nature and should help the church in its task of proclaiming the grace of God to the nations.

An address delivered at the *Mission in Europe* Conference, John Owen Centre, Finchley, London, 11-12 September 2006

The title of this lecture is *Mission in Europe: Biblical Basis and Cultural Context*. This immediately informs us that there will be two main parts to this particular concern for missionary work in Europe. In the first part we shall remind ourselves of several key biblical principles which ought to govern our thinking with respect to any missionary activity, whether this is in Europe or any other continent of the world. In the second part we shall draw attention to some of the main influences currently affecting the church's ability to implement its biblical mandate in Europe. Then, in a brief conclusion, I will highlight three priorities which I hope will help sharpen our focus and provide fresh impetus to our missionary endeavours.

Those who in one way or another are actively engaged in missionary work will quickly realise that my own particular stance is a conservative one. I make no apologies for this. Although I am aware of the main developments in missiological thinking, I do have difficulties accepting the thrust of some of these trends. The work that has most influenced my own outlook is J. H. Bavinck's *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*.⁴ Even though times have changed since I first became acquainted with the contents of this book, thus far I have seen no good reason to doubt the essential soundness of its stance.

BIBLICAL BASIS

We begin by seeking to establish a biblical rationale for the work of mission. In doing so there are three points that need to be made at the outset: firstly, although this is an issue sometimes debated among modern evangelicals, I am assuming that the most fundamental business of the church's mission to the world is the proclamation of the gospel. It is my

conviction that the church's task – as distinct from the multi-faceted tasks which may be assigned to individual Christians living in the world – is not social, political or ecological², but the evangelization of a world that is eternally lost without the uniquely salvific merits of Jesus Christ. Secondly, in terms of basic principles affecting content and/or approach to the work of mission, I am assuming that there is nothing fundamentally distinctive about the needs of Europe. In other words, it is not our view of Europe that is to dictate what the church is to proclaim or how she is to carry out the responsibilities thrust upon her, but the teaching of the Bible. The biblical model is sufficient for the work of mission wherever and whenever it is carried out.

Thirdly, in seeking to establish a biblical basis for mission, I must of necessity be selective. Therefore, reflecting on Old and New Testament perspectives, I shall limit myself to the task of reminding you of the following truths with respect to mission:

- (1) that the true author of all missionary activity is, and always has been, the Triune God. He has always been more concerned about this work than we could ever be. Therefore, all mission work should be seen as being first and foremost his work, not ours.
- (2) That the church of Jesus Christ is God's specially appointed *agent* for the work of mission. Therefore, this work must be obediently and continuously carried out, consistent with the principles set out in his Word and 'until the end of the age'.
- (3) That for this work to meaningfully prosper the church must labour to proclaim God's uniquely inspired truth in dependence on the Holy Spirit and through the use of the gifts he has so abundantly provided. In that which immediately follows I shall be seeking to lay a foundation for the way in which we relate to our times and its influences.

1. Mission in the Old Testament era

We begin with the Old Testament. In spite of what may sometimes be supposed, the Old Testament makes clear that the future welfare of all the peoples of the world has always been a concern of the Triune God. The entire world is his creation and under his constant jurisdiction: 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters' (Psalm 24:1–2 cf. 33:12–15). Moreover, perhaps in retrospect, it is possible to see that the very first verse of the Bible – 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' – is the proper basis for the New Testament's perspective of taking the gospel to 'all nations', 'all creation' and 'to the ends of the earth' (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

The fact that the nation of Israel was uniquely raised up to a favoured position in no way diminishes the reality of God's concern for the entire world. Indeed, it was prophesied that all the nations of the earth were destined to be blessed through Israel (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Israel had been called into a special covenant relationship with him. Although this was wholly undeserved on her part, she was not left to the wayward inventions of her own heart and mind like those in the surrounding nations. God had peculiarly revealed himself to her and allied his own glory to that which happened to her. Nevertheless, these privileges brought definite responsibilities with them. Israel was to live out her covenantal relationship with God before the gaze of the nations around her. Through the example of her distinctive life, and the Lord's special dealings with Israel, God could also in some sense be seen stretching out his hand to the rest of the world. Even when he is forced to call his people to repentance through the ministries of his prophets,

this wider vision for the whole world is never far from view (Isa. 2:2–3; 19:23–25).

In that older dispensation, Israel's role with respect to the surrounding nations was of course predominantly passive. Israel would not assault the nations of the world with missionary activity. Nevertheless, the recognition of the glory of God among this people would draw others both to them and to him. This is what Zechariah envisages when he declares, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the edge of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you'" (8:23). Although the primary fulfilment of this reference is reserved for the Messianic age, foretastes of the full outworking of this prophecy were experienced prior to that greater era. The point of interest for us is that although in Old Testament times Israel was to be a nation separate from all others by her peculiar relationship to the Lord, he had not lost sight of the world in his redemptive purposes; even in those times peoples were sometimes provoked into seeking the one, true and living God.

Israel's position between the testaments was still one of separation, but her circumstances altered the character of this separation and prepared the way for the arrival of the Messiah and the future work of missions. With their return from Babylon, not only did a covenant people occupy the Promised Land again, but a *diaspora* continued to exist in both East and West. Sometimes they were misunderstood as worshippers of stars and as those who offered human sacrifice; but among those who took the trouble to get to know Judaism more thoroughly, there were those who found themselves particularly attracted by its strong monotheism. Other factors also contributed to the eventual world-wide spread of the

gospel. Not least among these were the translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language, the acceptance of Judaism by Rome as a legitimate religion, and the *Pax Romana*. With hindsight it is easy to see how respect for Roman law, and the great benefit to travel afforded by Roman roads, was to aid the subsequent evangelization of the world.

2. Mission in the New Testament era

As this brief survey moves into the New Testament era, the first tragedy to confront us is that of the Jewish tendency to overlook those Old Testament prophecies which pointed to the sufferings of the Messiah. The vision that tended to dominate their horizon was his eschatological glory. Therefore, it was something of a surprise to everyone that, when the Christ actually came, he not only preached eschatological glory, but a period of prior sufferings and mission too. Indeed, as his own ministry developed he gave increasing emphasis to these features. Then, with his resurrection, and prior to his ascension, Christ purposefully impressed on the hearts of his disciples the necessity of mission (Luke 24:47; Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21). At first they seemed to think that their immediate task was simply to wait until Christ should restore the kingdom to Israel; to bring in the eschatological glory. This view Jesus had to correct. Their role was not to be a passive one. They were to be active witnesses (Acts 1:6–8). Furthermore, this view of their task is shown through the teaching of the Gospels to be an essential part of the Messianic expectation of salvation. Its fulfilment arrived in principle with the coming of the Christ (Luke 4:16–21), but the great day of glorification was to be preceded first by his sufferings and then by the work of mission.

The great missionary document of the New Testament is of course the book of Acts.

Interestingly, Acts does not actually add a great deal to the Gospels in terms of the foundation for mission. What it does is to emphasise the necessity of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ would continue to be present in the church, accomplishing his missionary purposes. The book of Acts does however emphasise that the work of mission continues to be first and foremost the work of the glorified Christ. It is the work he not only ‘began’ through his incarnation (Acts 1:1), but continues by his Spirit, through the church, and all her providential twists and turns. And so, a misunderstanding in the congregation in Jerusalem leads to the emergence of Stephen conducting a mission among the Greek-speaking Jews in that city (6:1ff); persecution turns out not to be the calamity one might immediately have supposed, but a means of spreading the gospel (8:4); and when the apostles and the church in Jerusalem are slow in fulfilling their calling, Christ raises a Saul (9:15), confronts a Peter (10:1ff), and utilises the amazing gifts enjoyed by the church in Antioch (13:2).

This clear testimony to the existence of Divine activity continues to be prominent in the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. Although forging his missionary strategy consistently with the use of his considerable natural abilities, he is still profoundly aware of being ‘prevented’ at one place (Acts 16:6–7) and encouraged in another (16:9–10; 18:9–10). The one notably identified as responsible for this interference is none other than ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ (16:7). Indeed, there is such an emphasis in Acts on Christ as the author of mission that the task of his agent, the church, is almost totally eclipsed. Her role however is immensely important, and becomes increasingly obvious. It is the church at Antioch that is called upon to ‘set aside for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have

called them' (13:1–3). And further on, it is to this same church in Antioch that these men were subsequently expected to report (15:4). Even so, although by this time the church's role has become increasingly apparent, these men still report 'everything *God* had done through them' [emphasis added].

The church is also described as employing all kinds of non-apostolic agents and secondary means in the dissemination of the gospel. Those who had been scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem 'preached the word wherever they went' (8:4): some telling the message 'only to Jews', while others 'began to speak to Greeks also'. The result was that 'a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord' (11:19–21). Paul himself is found picking up a number of 'companions' on his missionary journeys who assisted him in his great missionary enterprise (16:3; 19:29; 20:4). If at this stage we briefly trespass into the New Testament epistles, it is also apparent that a much broader work than that which we normally associate with the public proclamation of the Word was having its place in the life of the church; work that made room for the involvement of both men and women. For example, Priscilla and Aquila are described by the apostle Paul as 'my fellow-workers' (Rom. 16:3); Euodia and Syntyche are recognised as those 'who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel' and, together with Clement and others, are among his 'fellow-workers' (Phil. 4:2–3). 'Our sister Phoebe' is described by the same apostle as 'a servant of the church in Cenchrea' (Rom. 16:1), Mary is one 'who worked very hard for you' (Rom. 16:6), and Tryphena and Tryphosa are 'women who work hard in the Lord' (Rom. 16:12). These forces may have been better organised and utilised later on, but they were certainly not suppressed. We ought not to underestimate the

importance of this. Although the book of Acts attaches great significance to the preaching of the gospel, it never loses sight of the fact that the life and witness of the whole church should be one of its most attractive qualities as far as the unbeliever is concerned.

Having anticipated a move into the New Testament epistles, not only do we continue to observe an ongoing emphasis on the necessity of divine activity but, in greater detail, the way in which the church is to discharge her responsibilities. It is still God who is taking the work and its workers forward. For his part, the apostle Paul views the work of mission as something that is thrust upon him (1 Cor. 9:16). He is God's representative; an instrument in the divine hand. This being so, there can be no room for personal pride (1 Cor. 5:10), and no despairing helplessness either (Gal. 2:20). It is true that the work presents to mere men some seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Nevertheless, the servant's hope is to be in the God who has given a command, who has access to the hearts of men and women, and who alone has power to change them in response to the message given to him to proclaim. It is this reality that quite rightly prompts Bavinck to say that, 'Missionary work borders on the miraculous'.³

This confidence should inspire the whole church in a variety of ways. In addition to those described by Paul as 'sent' to preach (Rom. 10:14–15), the entire congregation is regularly urged to make its contribution to the spread of the gospel. Primarily she does this through continuous intercession (1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:19) and the attractiveness of a life lived in accordance with the Word of God (Phil. 2:14–15). The congregation's role is not, however, to be interpreted exclusively in passive terms. To the degree of gift received, each member is to make the gospel known

to others (Col. 4:5–6). Like the Old Testament prophets, their New Testament counterparts believed that the distinctiveness of the Christian life would arouse the curiosity and envy of those outside the church's fold, and that this would lead to enquiry. In fact, the New Testament seems to envisage the church being in permanent discussion with the world (1 Cor. 15:58).

In summary, therefore, we are bound to say that whatever the function of human agents may be, the work of mission has always been first and foremost the work of God. It is he who planned it, creates the environment in which it becomes possible, and is ultimately responsible for its success. His normal way of carrying out his work is through the agencies of men and women called out of the world and into the church. The church's responsibility is to proclaim the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, aided and abetted by the daily prayer, life and witness of the people of God. And it is this that ought to be at the heart of the church's mission 'to the very end of the age'.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

We now move on to the second main part of this address. Here I shall limit myself to an examination of some of the ways in which modern culture has influenced the way the world views the church, and to identify ways in which the church has sometimes struggled to avoid being absorbed by the prevailing culture. As we proceed, I shall provide hints about what I consider the best response to these influences. Nevertheless, I will reserve my final recommendations for the conclusion.

1. The influence of modern uncertainties

I begin our examination of the cultural context with what I am calling the influence of modern

uncertainties. Here I am referring to those world-views which have, for more than a century, influenced the outlook of the vast majority of those living on this continent. We currently live in a world which, in one way or another, has been strongly influenced by the combined forces of Relativism, Pluralism and Secularism.

Relativism is the view that 'true truth' – as Francis Schaeffer used to refer to absolute truth⁴ – is something unknowable. The would-be evangelist is regularly faced with individuals who look at him with incredulity as he seeks to proclaim Jesus Christ as 'the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6). They ask, "But how can you know for sure that this is true?" Alternatively, and somewhat disarmingly, the same sort of person may say something like, "If it helps you to believe in this, then I am happy for you. I wish I had your faith". These and similar convictions are the inevitable outworking of Enlightenment philosophy. In the absence of Divine revelation, the world is condemned to an endless Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis: 'always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth' (2 Tim. 3:7). Even though there have been those brave enough to condemn this stance as 'self-defeating', their voice is rarely heeded in the modern climate.⁵

A close cousin to Relativism is Pluralism. Assuming that all claims to truth are relative, the Pluralist naturally argues that all views are equally valid. As far as religion is concerned, if there is a God, in the absence of certainty about who he is or what he is like, it must be assumed that all roads will eventually lead to him. Superficially, of course, Pluralism seems to offer the moral high ground to its advocates. In theory, at least, it is a call to universal toleration. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly evident that tolerance does not always

extend to those who are not convinced that all religions are man-made and therefore a matter of personal preference. Those who hold to such views are not only considered naïve, but a danger. In the present climate they could so easily find themselves on the wrong end of populist legislation.

A popular alternative to both Pluralism and Relativism – although both so easily and logically shelter under its umbrella – is Secularism. This is the view that this world is all that there is. We are born, we live, and we die. There is no such thing as ‘true truth’; there are no ultimate values or worth. We are meaningless germs whose stark choice is between playing the game of life – ‘eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die’ (Luke 12:19; 1 Cor. 15:32) – or, perhaps, refusing to do so by means of suicide. It was Albert Camus who argued that suicide is the ‘one truly serious philosophical problem’⁶. In other words, he was asking whether or not we should bother to play the game at all. During the twentieth century he, and many like him, sought to offer an alternative in which the individual creates for himself temporary, existential reasons or expedients for living. To do so is of course to play the game *and lose*.

The impact of all this upon missionary activity in Europe should be immediate and obvious. If there is no such thing as truth, or if absolute truth is something that cannot be known, why bother with missionary activity at all? Indeed, if there is a God, and all roads finally lead to him, what right does anyone have to go to any other person with the intention of seeking their conversion? Alternatively, if this world is all that there is, then why not simply dedicate yourself to “sucking the marrow out of life”?⁷ *Carpe Diem*—‘seize the day’. Although most human beings rarely function consistently with even their most cherished theoretical convictions, the

church and her missionaries ought not to imagine that they can go about their work without recognising the existence of these and similar convictions.

2. The vacuum created by familiarity

Another difficulty to have surfaced to prominence within Europe during the same period is that of a discernable religious vacuum, created in part by over-familiarity with the Christian religion. For the most part of course it is not biblical Christianity with which men and women are familiar. Very often it is simply a second-hand, media-driven presentation of it.

For good or ill, however, European culture is replete with images of the Christian religion. It is difficult to travel anywhere within this continent without coming face to face with reminders of its existence, history, art and architecture. These representatives do not always present a very good image of the faith that, some 2,000 years ago, first entered Europe’s doorway through Greece. Its age is also part of the problem. Christianity has been around for so long that it is often regarded as a spent force; even an irrelevance to the needs of the modern world. Generally speaking, its main public image is portrayed through Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. All of which, in their own way, have a tired look about them.

Despite all the attention that surrounded a recent papal death, the Roman Catholic Church does not have the practical hold upon its baptised community that it could once take for granted. Although still numerically the strongest of these groups, its members too have been strongly affected by the combined effects of our recent philosophical history. This can be seen in the indifference that often plagues church attendance (particularly in the cities), its failure to recruit sufficient priests for its

parishes, and the open disregard of its stance on moral issues (not helped by the much-publicized sexual scandals affecting some of its leading churchmen). However, such comments ought not to be taken to suggest that the Roman Catholic Church is on the brink of collapse. Far from it! Roman Catholicism still acts as a vast cultural net, waiting to scoop up those feeling the deadly chill of a materialistic world, plagued by metaphysical uncertainties.

Unlike Roman Catholicism, which has always been capable of adjusting itself to whatever prevailing wind happens to be blowing, the Eastern Orthodox Church finds it extremely difficult to countenance change. At least as far as its external *persona* is concerned, 'tolerance' is a concept with which it struggles to come to terms. Therefore, in the modern age, its primary appeal is likely to be confined to those who have either been raised within its existing boundaries, or among ultra conservatives with mystical tendencies. Then there is Protestantism. It is sad to admit that modern Protestantism often seems woefully disconnected from its sixteenth-century roots. Theological liberalism and the neo-orthodoxy of Barthianism have taken their toll of many of the theological institutions of Europe. In some countries this has had a devastating effect on the ministries and lives of academics, pastors and people. An example of how far-reaching this decline can go is to be found in the Hungarian Reformed Church where it is estimated that, despite heroic efforts on the part of the Bible Union,⁸ 90% of its pastors are open advocates of a Christianity shorn of its super-naturalism. When Christianity is seen through the eyes of these representatives, the popular image conveyed is of a tired, failed dinosaur, currently in the midst of its death-throes.

Interestingly enough, despite this somewhat bleak picture, Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*⁹ has not been eradicated from European man. All that has happened is that a vacuum has been created by the failure of traditional expressions of Christianity to meet the expectations set for it by the New Testament. Throughout the post-Enlightenment age there have been those who have believed that some form of Atheism was set to take its place. Not only have recent political events seriously undermined this view (and here I am particularly thinking of 1989 and the beginnings of the collapse of European Communism), but some would be prepared to argue that Atheism has itself contributed to the existence of this vacuum. Prominent among Christian commentators in this respect is Alister McGrath and his provocatively insightful book, *The Twilight of Atheism*.¹⁰ I believe that this vacuum clearly exists and that there is no shortage of players seeking to fill it. The growing influence of eastern religions, the rise of neo-pagan, experience-orientated New Ageism, and the authoritarian appeal of Islam are all contenders. The question is: who or what will step in to fill the void? It is time to look at European Evangelicalism.

3. The capitulation among Evangelical churches

Within modern Europe, the one Christian group where growth is supposed to be ongoing is among Evangelicals. To some extent this has been particularly true among Evangelicals living and working in parts of Eastern Europe. Sadly, since 1989, additional freedom followed by disillusionment, have done much to undermine this growth; not to mention the exodus of large numbers of people to the West. In a much more limited sense there has also been some evidence of numerical growth among some Evangelical groups and churches on the other side of this geographical divide.

Nevertheless, before we allow ourselves to get too carried away by the available statistics, it is important that we ask ourselves a simple question: what kind of Evangelicalism are we talking about? Here I am not alluding to denominational differences; nor to those which divide Calvinist from Arminian, or even charismatic from non-charismatic churches. These and other such divisions and sub-divisions exist within Evangelicalism.¹¹ I am more concerned about the capitulation among evangelical churches to those elements in their thinking and behaviour which simply, and often unthinkingly, reflect the outlook of the unconverted masses living around them. Although not wishing to condemn all that is either 'of this world' or, still less, 'of this age', it should be a matter of concern to evangelicals that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern any significant difference between the church and the world. If it is proper for the church to resist being 'squeezed into the world's mould',¹² then surely an invaluable part of her testimony will include an 'other worldliness' which is alert to compromise in both thought and deed. Too often the modern reality is tragically different. Sadly, most of evangelicalism's current difficulties also have their roots in the political, religious and cultural turmoil which began in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Not only was evangelicalism shaken by Enlightenment philosophy, but subsequently by the combined forces of Higher Criticism, Darwinian optimism, modern psychology and the existentialism which followed. Most churches did not of course capitulate immediately to any of these influences; they were steadily worn down by them. Although initially priding themselves on their 'separation from the world', much modern Evangelicalism has gradually assimilated the world's outlook and ethos. Even

where a 'last ditch stand' was attempted, it often took the form of an anti-intellectual pietism which overly-emphasised individualism and subjectivism. In those places where 'tradition' was not entirely discounted, it eventually learned not to look back more than 150 years. More often, however, tradition was simply supplanted by what C. S. Lewis used to refer to as 'chronological snobbery'. This he defined as 'the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.'¹³ Again, more so in Western Europe, but also increasingly so in the East, Evangelical churches have become mesmerised by all that is modern. Our churches are not so much looking to the Bible for their beliefs and practices, but to the consensus around them. Too often the questions being asked are not, "What is true? What will God approve?", but "What will work? What will attract the outsider?" Although theoretically the Bible is held in high esteem, psychological and pragmatic considerations often dictate the way churches think and function.

4. The challenge of mass migration

Another significant influence on both religious and secular spheres has been the movements of large numbers of peoples around the globe. To some extent this is nothing new. Wherever oppressive regimes have existed, so there have been those trying to escape them. Wherever social and economic conditions have been extremely difficult and an opportunity has presented itself for improvement, so there have been those willing to uproot and take great risks in the search of a better life. However, perhaps the main difference between the more distant past and more recent times has been the scale of this movement. The past two decades have witnessed large swathes of people

migrating from Central and Southern America, Africa and, increasingly, the former Communistic countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The chosen destination for many of these migrants has been the wealthier climes of Western Europe. Such large-scale movement of peoples is not always welcomed. We do not always find it easy to adjust to those whose appearance, language, and customs often differ from our own. Fears are easily fanned into a flame by concerns about employment, housing, and security. In this environment, Nationalism is quick to raise its ugly head.

In the past, however, churches have often shown themselves more adept in responding to such challenges than society at large. Generally speaking, this has continued to be the case in Western Europe. Initially, at least, the influx of peoples from other parts of the world has been welcomed by evangelical congregations. Some have quite rightly seen this as in part “the mission field coming to us”. On the other hand, where migrants have come espousing the Evangelicalism of their home lands, they have usually been welcomed for other reasons. Where churches have long struggled simply for their existence, the sudden influx and enthusiasm of new people has been a source of great encouragement.

This is not to suggest that integration has always been easy. Differences of language and custom – not to mention different theological emphases and styles of worship – have sometimes created their own tensions. In such circumstances, rather than persevere with integration, the easy option for immigrants has been to set up ethnic churches of their own. This, in my view, is almost always regrettable. It denies the body of Christ its opportunity to testify to the uniqueness of the bonds that exist among God’s people whatever their place of origin. Even when this particular temptation is

resisted, such people often absorb a great deal of time and attention as they seek help with housing, employment, and immigration authorities. Then there are those who, having been awakened to the gospel for the first time in their lives, suddenly find themselves faced with an agonising moral dilemma brought on by their status as illegal immigrants. These and similar issues present real challenges to Western congregations, but they can also be a genuine means of demonstrating to the world a oneness of which it knows so little: ‘see how these Christians love one another’.

5. The tendency towards ‘every-thing-ism’

This in turn brings us more specifically to the subject of the church’s mission. I have already hinted at the tendency within modern Evangelicalism to equate mission with (what I call) ‘every-thing-ism’. For the best part of the last fifty years there has been an increasing tendency to equate mission with everything Jesus expects his people to do in this world. No longer is mission primarily seen as the church sending people to preach the gospel with a view to bringing men and women to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, she is now regularly urged to concern herself with the vast humanitarian needs of mankind, agitate for social justice and work for a more ecologically-friendly environment.¹⁴

Now there is a sense in which none of this is particularly new either. With varying degrees of emphasis, Christian people throughout the ages have been concerned about such matters. The difference now is that all these concerns are being placed on an equal footing with the proclamation of the gospel. This, in my view, ought to be challenged. This definition of what constitutes the church’s mission in the world is far too broad. For all the good that

was done by New Testament believers in such areas, it is doubtful whether the apostles would have understood 'the Great Commission' in such terms. It certainly confuses primary and secondary responsibilities. Yes, the church is to 'seek to do good to all people' (Gal. 6:10); but experience suggests that when equal emphasis is given to the entire range of human needs, it is the gospel that usually suffers most. This emphasis also blurs the distinction that ought to exist between the responsibilities of the church and those of the individual Christian. We ought to have no objection to a Christian involvement in political, social and economic spheres, but it is dangerous for churches to do so. They too readily become identified with particular secondary issues and emphases, rather than the gospel.

CONCLUSION

So then, briefly, and in conclusion, how is the church to respond to all this? How is she to combine a proper faithfulness to her missionary obligations as set out in the Scriptures and respond to the emphases thrown up by the demands of her immediate cultural context? What are to be the main *foci* of her response? Although I must again be selective, I wish to emphasize three areas which ought to be priorities of concern for us.

1. The battle for truth in the mind of man

Firstly, in the age and environment in which we find ourselves, and for the good of the work we are seeking to advance, *there is a great need for the church to be actively engaged in the ongoing fight for the establishment of truth in the minds of men and women.* In the training of ministers and missionaries, this will involve the need to rehabilitate the place of apologetics. This must of course be done in due proportion to the requirements of other disciplines,

but it must not be relegated to the sidelines. We need to put into the hands of those who will preach the Word of God the tools that will enable them to relate the timeless truths of the gospel to the circumstances in which they minister. Then, as they become increasingly proficient in this, it is to be hoped that they will inspire 'the Christian in the pew' with the confidence to address the assumptions implicit in the world-views of those amongst whom they are living and working.

We have given too much ground to the enemies of truth. Instead of being boldly set 'for the defence of the gospel' (Phil. 1:16), we have tended to retreat into our pietistic ghettos, failing to provide 'an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pet. 3:15). Not surprisingly, in an address delivered nearly one hundred years ago at Princeton Theological Seminary, Professor J. Gresham Machen was sounding this same note. Although acknowledging that 'the regenerative power of God' was the crucial thing in evangelism, he reminded his hearers of the simple fact that...

God usually exerts that [regenerative] power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favourable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, *if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as any thing more than a harmless delusion.*¹⁵ [Emphasis added]

I am fully persuaded that this 'battle for the mind' will always require an important place among the priorities of the Christian church if she is to retain any meaningful credibility for her message. This is

particularly so in the anti-intellectual age in which we live. Alongside a clear, straightforward and earnest proclamation of the gospel, there must be an untiring willingness to engage and undermine those ideas which have reduced Christianity to the status of 'a harmless delusion'.

Sadly, for more than a century, much of the evangelical focus in evangelism has been on methodology. We have become obsessed with ways and means of attracting people into the churches. In doing so, we have succeeded in doing little more than mimic the gimmickry and faddishness of the world around us. In choosing this as our priority we have simply 'fiddled while Rome burns'. But, more importantly, and perhaps inadvertently, we have given credence to the notion that we have lost confidence in the power of God-given truth, proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, to prevail in the minds and hearts of men and women.

2. The primacy of the spiritual and eternal

Secondly, *there is a great need for the modern church to be actively seeking a new sense of the spiritual and eternal among those who make up her number.* Relating this to mission, this is simply another way of saying that the church needs life, as well as light, among its peoples if mission is to be a meaningful part of its work in the world. Just as churches rarely flourish in the absence of a keen sense of their dependence on the Spirit of God, so the work of mission can only survive where there is spiritual life and vitality among the churches. True mission is essentially an overspill of spiritual life, and although the external form of missionary activity may survive two or three generations of general spiritual decline, it rarely survives much longer.

One of the regrettable tendencies within the evangelical church during the twentieth century has

been the tendency to confuse *liveliness* with *life*. Very often the evangelical cause has been content with its situation so long as it could be seen to be doing something. Often the great boast was and is that "We have meetings going on every night of the week in our church". Meetings have been multiplied; countless innovations adopted. But the underlying conviction seems to be that all that is needed to halt our decline is a little 'tweaking' of the system. Interestingly enough, the one meeting most likely to be overlooked in this assessment is 'the prayer meeting': the place where a proper sense of inadequacy should be found seeking its sufficiency in God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5).

The underlying problem here of course is the absence of a meaningful experiential sense of the greatness of God, the glory of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal destiny of all human beings. This of course is not unrelated to the role of preachers and the work of preaching in the churches. We are in great need of *preachers* of the Word of God. We do not need mere 'talkers'; we have no end of them. We need those who are called and gifted by God to bring the great truths of the gospel to the people in such a way that those who hear its message cannot remain immune to its claims upon them. As in New Testament times, the gospel needs to be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. Its truth needs to grip the lives of the people of God and, through their response to it, affect the lives of men and women living around the worshipping community. How is this to be brought about? The only means suggested by the Bible is: 'I will be enquired of Israel for this thing'. We need to realise our utter helplessness again; that without the intervention and aid of the living God we can do nothing. We need to re-discover the importance of the prayer meeting for our spiritual life.

At this point perhaps a brief comment about the resurgence of interest in Reformed theology among evangelicals during the past fifty years may not be out of place. This resurgence is undeniable, even though it has been more prominent within the English-speaking world and among those who have access to its literature. It has brought some much welcomed intellectual vigour and doctrinal clarity into the churches that it has touched. Nevertheless, if it is to make progress, two things are urgently required: firstly, the Reformed movement will need to demonstrate in practice that it is more than an intellectual movement. Historically, it has always been at its best when it has been obviously concerned for spiritual life and practical godliness. Unfortunately, this has not always been evident in the present climate. Secondly, and not unrelated to what we have just said, more must be done to overcome what sometimes seems like a pathological tendency to ignore the necessary distinction between primary and secondary truths within the movement. We know that all truth is important, but not all truth is equally important. A failure to recognize this distinction is constantly threatening to diminish the standing of Reformed theology among those it is trying to attract, and is in danger of sowing seeds of disillusionment among those who count themselves its friends.

3. The role of the church in the world

Thirdly, and finally, *there is a great need for the church to recapture a biblical view of the true nature of her role within the world.* Her primary task is the proclamation of the gospel. This is to be that for which she is known at home and overseas. As I have already suggested, a distinction must be maintained between the respective roles of the Christian church and the Christian individual. It is true that there may be occasions where there is some measure of

overlap between their roles but, whatever callings Christian individuals may legitimately pursue, the church is to see her task as the need to prepare men and women for heaven. It is in this great work that she is to be primarily investing her energies. This is in large measure the *raison d'être* for her existence in the world. Although Christian people will always be concerned for 'the whole man', the church must not be deflected from giving priority to the importance of the soul. Especially in a materialistic age, the note she is to be constantly sounding is, 'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?' (Matt. 16:26a).

It should go without saying that our churches should be places where people immediately feel welcomed. They are to be places in which men and women from all backgrounds and cultures are made to sense something of the reality of what it means to be the people of God. Those who are converted need to be integrated in such a way that they are not merely occupiers of pews, but meaningful contributors to the life and ministry of the whole church. It is vitally important that in each local Christian church the outsider has before him a living example of the oneness that rarely exists anywhere else in the world. No matter what their racial origin, the colour of their skin, or the social strata from which they have come, the church is to be an environment in which it is possible to get such a foretaste of heaven that the outsider wants above all else to become an insider.

These, then, are to be our priorities: we must fight for the truth in the minds of men and women; we must cultivate through prayer a return to God as the only sure means of influencing the world around us; and we must recapture a proper vision of what the role of the church is to be in a culturally confused and embattled world.

References

1. J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960.
2. The position I am opposing here is the one essentially outlined in the contribution made by J. A. Kirk on 'Missiology' in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988). This view seeks to place humanitarian aid, social justice, and ecological issues on the same level as the evangelisation of the lost.
3. Bavinck, op. cit., p.44.
4. F. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (1968), Complete Works, vol. 1, Illinois: Crossway, 1982, p.143.
5. R. Scruton, *Modern Philosophy*, London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994. Concerning Relativism, Roger Scruton makes the following helpful observation: 'A writer who says that there is no truth, or that all truth is "merely relative", is asking you not to believe him. So don't' [p.6].
6. A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, p.12.
7. This quotation is from the film, *Dead Poets Society* (1989), starring Robin Williams as an English Professor (John Keating) who seeks to inspire his students to a love of poetry and to seize the day.
8. The Bible Union is an evangelical group operating in Hungary and mainly among evangelical members within the Hungarian Reformed Church.
9. J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p.43–47.
10. A. McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, London: Rider, 2004.
11. In using the term 'evangelical' I am referring to those who in some sense claim allegiance to the supremacy of biblical authority, the necessity of regeneration, and the belief that justification is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.
12. This is a utilization of a paraphrase on Romans 12:2 from J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947, p.27.
13. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955, p.196.
14. Op. cit., Kirk, *New Dictionary of Theology*, pp.434–436.
- 15 J. G. Machen, *Christianity and Culture from Selected Shorter Writings* (edited by D. G. Hart), Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004, p.404.

Evangelicals and Catholics: do they share a common future? This is the title of a recently published book which looks into the state of the current relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals throughout the world. The title well reflects the attitude observed in many circles. There is a feeling which is spreading: the past has been characterised by the doctrinal and ecclesiastic separation but the present is different.

For several decades now, historical Protestant churches have moved on the ecumenical path along with Rome. Many viewed the 1999 signing of the “Joint Declaration between Lutherans and Catholics” concerning the doctrine of justification as an indication that the long division had been overcome. In a different context, for many observers the growth of the Catholic charismatic movement is a sign of the changes within the church of Rome and the decline of the historical reasons for the division.

In evangelical circles, especially so in USA but in Europe too, an increasing number of Evangelicals are convinced that, in the light of the challenges of the secular trends in society, what unites them to Catholics is more important than what separates them.

We are therefore witnessing a transition in the perception of Catholicism. What was once taken for granted is no longer taken so. Yet, Evangelicals do have instruments which spell out very clearly an evaluation of Catholicism. An important document is the 1986 ‘Singapore Declaration’ sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance; another is the 1999 ‘Padua Declaration’ sponsored by the Italian Evangelical Alliance. These are valuable tools for interpreting Roman Catholicism from an evangelical perspective.

Thus, do Evangelicals and Catholics have a common future? To answer I should like to refer to a Biblical quotation which can help detect the difference between Catholicism and the evangelical faith. A

passage in 2 Corinthians leads to perceiving what is truly at stake. Here are the verses (2 Corinthians 1:12–20)

Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace. For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say Yes, yes and No, no?

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in Him has always been Yes. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ. And so through him the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God.

The context of the passage we have just read could be thus summarised: in the course of performing Paul’s service, there was a change in the plans for the apostolic itinerary. The reasons for this change will be explained later on in the letter (cf. 1:23 – 2:4) but we do know that the change had caused some perplexity within the Church of Corinth. In this passage Paul confronts the criticisms that had been addressed to him concerning his alleged superficial attitude in planning his journey.

Now, the questions of the changes in his itinerary

are the opportunity which Paul uses to deal with a more profound issue. Paul appears to be aware of the fact that criticisms were not raised simply to question his ability to plan his activities but had a much deeper intent: that is to undermine the very basis of the apostolic service, discredit his preaching, disown Paul's apostolic authority. What is at stake here is not so much the apostolic programme but the apostolic message, not so much the stages of Paul's journey, but the preaching of Paul's gospel. The question is much more serious than that. To the accusations of instability and unreliability, Paul replies by going back to the distinctive traits of his gospel preaching: "our word toward you was not 'yes' and 'no'" he says at verse 18. The message had not been ambiguous and contradictory as the accusations would lead to believe. Later Paul takes a further step in vindicating the coherence of the Gospel and its roots in God's promises, fulfilled by Christ. The message was coherent in that at verse 19 it says "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea". What was preached was not a 'yes' and a 'no' because Christ himself is the 'yes' of God's promises. In this way, the apostolic preaching was "the Amen, unto the glory of God" (20), the obedient 'yes' of faith to the 'yes' of the promises fulfilled by Christ.

Now what does this passage tell us about Catholicism? Borrowing the language of 2 Corinthians we could say that Catholicism is the religion of the 'yes' and 'no' to God's truth at the same time, of the assertion and denial of the biblical message, of the coexistence of submission and rejection of God's Word. It cannot be denied that the 'yes' is totally missing from Catholicism; the problem stems from the fact that it is not a 'yes, yes' but that it is a 'yes and no' at the same time. The 'yes' is juxtaposed to the 'no' so as to produce a invalidating effect of the 'yes'; it is not 'yes' nor is it

'no' but it is 'yes' and 'no' at the same time. How does this come about?

For example, Christ is told 'yes' but also 'no' because, in the Catholic view the prerogatives of the church end up by arrogating what belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. As to grace, it is told 'yes' but also 'no' because, in line with Catholicism, nature holds in itself the capacity to be elevated in spite of sin. Faith is told 'yes' but also 'no' because, according to Catholicism, in order to receive God's grace there's the need for the sacramental instrumentality of the church which makes faith insufficient. The Word of God is told 'yes' but also 'no' in as much as the Scriptures are sided by the tradition of the Catholic church and its teaching, which end up by prevailing on the Bible. The church worship rendered to God is told 'yes' but also 'no' because the veneration of Mary is encouraged as well as that of a host of other side figures which detract from the worship of the one and only God.

1. The catholicity of Catholicism

On the wake of the conclusion of Vatican II, in 1967 the Italian protestant theologian Vittorio Subilia published a book in which the approved documents were examined and in which the author provided an interesting interpretation of Catholicism as it emerged from the council. The title of the book *The New Catholicity of Catholicism* captures the keyword: catholicity. Certainly, it is not the only feature to be borne in mind in dealing with such a complex issue; nevertheless, catholicity is a required interpretative paradigm to confront the design of Catholicism. The Catholicism which surfaced from Vatican II disrobed itself of the theocratic vestments inherited from the long centuries of its history and invested massively in the implementation of its catholicity. It can no longer think of dominating the world

absolutely and thus tries to infiltrate the world in order to modify it from inside. It no longer hurls anathema against all that is modern but it strives to penetrate it and elevate it. No more can it enforce its power with coercive measures but tries to exercise it in a more polished way. The Catholic church no longer enjoys a popular following when speaking of doctrine and morals, but it does strive to maintain its ability to influence, to condition, to direct society. It can no more afford the antithesis of confronting the world face to face in order not to be relegated to a corner and accepts modern society so as to permeate it from its interior. To use a military metaphor, we could say that the tactic of catholicity is no longer that of a frontal clash but the folding in of its wings. The aim is no more that of annihilating the antagonist but to absorb it. The aim is no longer the conquest but a consensual annexing through the expansion of its catholicity boundaries. Catholicity does not express itself exclusively in Catholic doctrine but in all aspects of the church is involved. Its borders are as many as the dimensions of reality. All becomes part of the jurisdiction of catholicity and the Catholic church tries to invest in the growth of catholicity.

The catholicity of Catholicism is its skill to ingest on a global scale divergent ideas, diverse values, heterogeneous movements, holding tensions and integrate them within the framework of a system. As we have seen, if the evangelical faith chooses (*Scripture alone, Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone*) Catholicism adds Scripture and tradition, Christ and church, grace and merits, faith and works; if the evangelical faith is expressed with “yes, yes,” and “no, no” (according to the words of 2 Cor.1:17–18) the Catholic’s opts for “yes” and “no” at the same time. Catholicism does indeed possess a platform of thought so wide that it accommodates everything, a thesis, its antithesis, a claim and a disclaimer, one element and another, all integrated in a system which is dynamic.

In the Catholic vision of the world, nature is coupled to grace, Scriptures to traditions, Christ to the church, grace to the sacraments, faith to works, Christian life to folk religion, evangelical godliness to pagan folklore, natural philosophy to beliefs based on superstition; ecclesiastical centralism to a universal scope. In short, *et-et*, and-and, both-and, one thing and the other too. There are no choices which are patently limpid, clear, exclusive or inspired by an integrity of thought able to choose in a coherent manner. On the contrary, the receptive ability of the Catholic church makes Roman Catholicism a system ever opened to new integrations in view of the progressive expansion of the system itself.

The basic criterion of Catholicism is no evangelical purity or Christian authenticity, but the integration of the particulars which is put in a universal horizon serving the institution that holds the reins of the whole project. The only “no” which Catholicism is able to utter addresses what threatens its purposes. When this pivot is left undisturbed, all else can be integrated and catholicised. Catholicism’s talent for integration, its absorbent resources, are indeed extraordinary. For this reason it is necessary to be aware of the system of Catholicism and analyse it in accordance with a systemic approach.

A few examples of how Catholicism operates are in place as far as ecumenism is concerned. Ecumenism is a standpoint to look at the catholicity of Catholicism. In respect of Catholic ecumenism, there is a significant feature to be recorded. Before the Vatican II council, non-catholic Christians – and in particular Protestants – were considered “heretics”. Excommunications and “anathema” decreed by the Council of Trent against Protestants made the Protestant Reformation to be seen equal to a heresy and Evangelicals branded with the name of heretics. Now, in countries of catholic majority, this designation has heavily conditioned the evangelical message and often fostered strong

discrimination against Evangelicals. With respect to such disparaging label, Vatican II has introduced a significant change in the estimation which Catholicism has of other Christians; in the Council papers these are no longer termed heretics but rather 'separated brethren'. They are acknowledged as brothers even if the "separation" persists because it stems from the fact that other Christians have no place in the Catholic church, which holds the fullness of the means of divine grace. Nevertheless, they are 'brethren' and from heresy to brotherhood, the step is an important one indeed. No more aversion but empathy, no more distance but proximity. After Vatican II, the Catholic church has joined with full entitlement the ecumenical movement, becoming one of its most energetic and active members. Indeed, during the last few years there has been a further step. In the 1995 encyclical on ecumenism *Ut unum sint*, the pope refers to non-catholic Christians as "retrieved brethren" as a demonstration of the progress in Catholic ecumenism at the service of catholicity.

Heretics, separated brethren, brethren retrieved: three stages which mark a surprising inversion trend which cannot but make us reflect upon it. Now, we may well ask if this opening has its place in a wider perspective and what could be the strategy of Catholic ecumenism. Evidently there is need to understand the new ecumenical order of things in the light of the wider project of catholicity. The pressing encouragement towards a more ample fulfilment of catholicity must flow in the attempted integration, above all else, of all Christianity into Catholicism. All historical and confessional forms of Christianity can be led back to the inner folds of the catholic system.

At what price? The catholic vision is summarised by two significant expressions: "cum Petro" and "sub Petro". First of all, "cum Petro", with Peter, with the Catholic church, together with the Catholic

church, in communion with the Catholic church but also and concurrently "sub Petro", under his jurisdiction, ascribing him a leading role, attributing to him a primary position. The dimension of the communion with Rome and that of the submission to Rome are inseparable features of Catholicism's ecumenical vision. None can stand without the other. Not by chance, *catholicism* is universal, but remains *Roman*, papal and of the Vatican to its very core. Ecumenical overtures of Catholicism are therefore tailored for the assimilation, the integration, the catholic embrace of the whole Christianity. It is the catholic system which calls for it and it is the catholic system that has the resources to accomplish it.

The discussion on Catholic ecumenism could also be extended to the relationship with other religions. In effect, the Catholic tradition used to operate according to the principle "extra ecclesia nulla salus", outside of the church there is no salvation. According to a rigid interpretation of Cyprianus which took hold in the Medieval church, belonging to the Catholic church was the condition for salvation. It is clear that followers of other religions were excluded from the chance of being saved as a result of being outside the Roman institution. Here too, the profound transformation emerged from the Vatican II council should be underscored. In fact, the council documents deal with the change in status of non-Christian believers, just as non-Christian religions are seen in a new light. People who follow other religions, even if far away from Christianity, are not considered away from Christ. They are instead in some measure 'related' to Christ (LG 16) whether they wish it or not, whether they know it or not. If we take into account the fact that, again according to the council, Catholics enjoy a privileged relationship with Christ being "incorporated" with him (LG 11,14,31), Catholicism is seen as a completion, the achievement

of aspirations existing in non-Christian religions. The grace of God is already present in the nature of religions and the church, because of its special prerogatives, is the place where they can be exalted to their accomplishment. Here too the universalism of salvation is combined to the character of the church. Clearly, the catholicity of Catholicism transcends the rather narrow boundaries of Christianity and addresses the world of religions proffering the catholic church as the place where the legitimate claims of religions find their fulfilment. Christianity, religions, culture, society, the whole world: these are the borders of the catholicity of Catholicism.

Examples could be many more. The fact remains that in Catholicism we are witnessing a deep rooted ambiguity between the statement of the Gospel “yes” and the “no” of the motives of pagan origin which are engrossed within the system. Here the coexistence of biblical and non-biblical motives is settled. As the great Welsh preacher of last century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, said in Catholicism “it is not so much a denial of the truth that comes to pass as the addition to the truth which becomes a departure from it”. The scheme thus engineered is incessantly oscillating. The system of Catholicism is continuously expanding because it is not ruled by a “yes” or by a “no” which act as binding criteria, but rather by a simultaneous “yes” and “no” which opens the way to which is against biblical integrity.

2. The evangelical alternative to Catholicism

Already, by a cursory look, we have come to the realization that when we confront Catholicism, we find ourselves facing a system which is solid and dynamic, unitarian and pluralist, with a fenced nucleus but with open borders. What is to be said of the evangelical faith?

Evangelical faith is, on the contrary, the faith of a “yes” which is firm, convinced, unequivocal,

exclusive, bright to God’s truth; it is the “Amen to the glory of God”, the acknowledgment, the adhesion, the conformation to it. In this, it takes form and character because of its “simplicity” and “sincerity” (12), it flees from a “carnal wisdoms” nor is it “directed by the flesh” (17) again to echo Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians. Evangelical faith, as much as concerns the foundations of the faith, chooses on the basis of faithfulness and integrity according to the Scriptures: in continuity with the biblical message and the teaching of the Protestant Reformation, evangelical faith proclaims the renowned *sola*:

Christ alone: the Christian faith hinges on the person, work and prerogatives of Jesus Christ. Salvation is entirely through him and leads to him alone;

Scripture alone: the Bible is the supreme authority for the faith and the whole life: other authorities are subjected to the Bible;

Grace alone: salvation comes from the undeserved and unconditional favour of God and is not entrusted to the administration of the church, nor by any priestly cast;

Faith alone: the means of receiving God’s grace is faith, that is the awareness of what Christ did, the sincere acceptance of his message and total trust in him;

To God alone be the glory: worship is to be rendered only and exclusively to the Triune God, Lord of heaven and earth, to the Creator, Provider and Saviour of the world. All forms of adoration rendered to human beings must be rejected as having a tendency towards idolatry.

Here lies the whole difference between Evangelicalism and Catholicism. Catholicism can be viewed as the haughty “carnal wisdom”, a majestic cathedral of human thought, a fascinating religiously ideological structure, ever expanding; the evangelical faith on the contrary aspires solely to remain a simple and

sincere “amen” to the Word of God. All the “alone” of the biblical message which the Reformers have re-discovered bear witness to the integrity of evangelical faith which refuses to be contaminated by pagan motivations, to be exclusively anchored to God’s truth. The evangelical alternative is alternative because it refuses *in toto* this spurious scheme and is evangelical because it simply upholds the “yes” of God’s truth which the gospel heralds.

If the reference criterion is the gospel of Jesus Christ, revealed in his Word, it is not only possible but indeed necessary to speak in terms of *alternative* to Catholicism. In fact, one is either sucked inward the expandable and entangling confines of Catholicism or faced with a radically different proposition which casts doubts upon the Catholic system from its very roots. An alternative, in effect, is something which cannot be accommodated in a system extraneous to it and which stands as a distinct and distant way.

Now, as regards Catholicism, when speaking of an alternative we need to do so with reference to the system in its fulness. In other words, it is its ideological nucleus that should be questioned, its ambitious project and the strategy by which it is carried forward. If there is to be an alternative to Catholicism, we cannot rest content with criticism aimed at this or that point; if this is what we were to do, it would not be a question of alternative but of simply correcting one aspect of the system which, nevertheless, is capable of absorbing changes without modifying its basic structure. What is at stake is not just a question of accents, emphasis, particulars. No, it engages the foundations of the Catholic vision of the world. If we can talk of an alternative to Catholicism, we need to cast doubts on no less than the whole of the Catholic system. The Catholic worldview needs to be reshaped according to Biblical truth. One point must be made clear: unless we face up to Catholicism in the

perspective of an alternative, we have as good as abdicated in favour of it. The annexing will only be a question of time. If we are not alternative we are already Catholic. On the other hand, if we fail to face up to Catholicism in systematic terms, we cannot be alternative.

We have spoken of an alternative, a heavy word. But the gospel of Jesus Christ calls for a stand before a religious system which, on the strength of a spurious motive, sees itself as an extension of Jesus Christ’s incarnation and thus as the institution which mediates the encounter with God. In the name of faithfulness to the gospel of Christ we cannot accept all that. What needs to be of foremost importance is the gospel and for this reason it is fitting to emphasize that the alternative of which we spoke has meaning only if it is evangelical, if it embraces the criteria of the gospel, if it bows to the authority of the gospel, if it professes the gospel. What must animate criticisms of Catholicism is not anticlericalism, nor anti-authoritarianism, nor the rejection of this or that Catholic practice. This alternative can only be an evangelical alternative, upholding the gospel as its point of reference. The Evangelical alternative not only disputes the system of Catholicism but is also competent to elaborate an alternative project, a vision of the world that feeds upon the worth of God’s Word and has a bearing on whom and about whom professes it. The alternative is doctrinal but also cultural. Catholicism is a vision of the world against which the evangelical vision of the world must take its position.

Ecumenical pressure for a merging of Evangelicals and Catholics is very pressing; many Evangelicals hear the alarms with increasing force without knowing how to cope with and react to it. To answer this challenge an anti-Catholic attitude is not enough; there must be a driving force rooted in evangelical truths, in favour of evangelical unity and for a vision of life centred on the gospel.

The trend today seems to be away from ministers and preachers acquiring and developing a working knowledge of biblical languages. In part this reflects the trend away from full-time theological training towards a preference for part-time and correspondence courses which usually do not include Greek and Hebrew. Even if they are competent in New Testament Greek, however, most preachers know little Hebrew. This article addresses the question of whether the study of biblical Hebrew is a worthwhile pursuit for the Christian preacher. The question is not whether the study of Hebrew is a worthwhile pursuit for *some* individuals with sufficient desire and ability, but whether it is a good or even justifiable use of the minister or preacher's time. After all, there have been many great preachers who have known no Hebrew and apparently been none the worse for it. In an age when several good English translations are available and an increasing number of excellent, evangelical commentaries on the books of the Old Testament, written by good scholars of biblical Hebrew (and Aramaic), is it really necessary for a preacher to know any Hebrew? With all the other demands on a minister's time, can he afford to spend the hours necessary to learn Hebrew? These are not frivolous questions. To address them, it is necessary to say some things about the study of biblical languages in general, and then make some points specific to the study of Hebrew.

Why Study Biblical Languages?

We can begin with general points about biblical languages since many of the same arguments may be advanced against the study of New Testament Greek as Hebrew: the availability of several accurate English translations, and of good exegetical tools in commentaries, written by evangelical scholars who keep abreast of the latest developments in the study of *koine* Greek.

Understanding language

The first point is the very general one that preaching is about communication through language, and that all preachers should be interested in how language works, what its limitations are, what it can and cannot reveal, and how to analyse and interpret it. Every preacher, whether he realises it or not, is involved in semantics when he interprets and expounds the Bible. An invaluable tool in understanding how language works is the knowledge of some other language. English-speaking people are notoriously poor with languages, and embarrassed and apathetic about learning them. But if we imagine that every language works like English, we do not understand how language works. This will also mean that we are unlikely to interpret the English Bible correctly. If knowledge of how language works is greatly enhanced by knowing another language, then understanding the Bible will be greatly enhanced by knowing how the biblical languages work.

Verbal inspiration

In this context, it is worth remembering that God has chosen to communicate through words, indeed ultimately through the Incarnate Word himself. Given that, we cannot pay too much attention or give too much care to understanding the words God has used. As John Currid asks:

The Holy Scriptures were revealed by God through his prophets in Greek and Hebrew (and Aramaic). Why would the pastor as interpreter not want to study God's word in its original linguistic revelation and form? ²

No doubt some preachers feel that biblical languages put a barrier between us and God. They probably feel that they are interacting more 'directly' with God by reading the Bible in the language they most readily understand. But is this

really a more direct interaction with God's Word? It might be compared to listening to God through an interpreter, rather than hearing directly. Greek and Hebrew can (and should) be more than interpretative tools, they can become devotional languages as we become more familiar with God's words as they were originally expressed. To use an illustration, no photograph of a great painting, however faithful a reproduction, can ever be a substitute for the original.

If we rely on translations, we can never be entirely sure that the English word in the passage before us has exactly the same semantic range as the word in Greek or Hebrew which lies behind it. Languages do not map precisely onto one another. In Russian (I understand), there is no equivalent to our word for 'blue', but two words depending on whether the blue is light or dark. Words in Greek and Hebrew are both narrower and broader in meaning than any English equivalent and therefore a translation cannot be made by simply substituting one English word for one Hebrew or Greek word. A simple and obvious example of the imperfect mapping of one language onto another is the fact that the English word 'you' is unspecific. In Greek and Hebrew, different words are used if one or several people are addressed, and if they are male or female. How difficult it is to read publicly the beginning of Song of Songs in English, and convey who is speaking to whom. The Hebrew has no such ambiguity. A more significant example is the 'you' in Zephaniah 3:14–17, which is feminine singular, indicating that the 'daughter of Zion' is addressed throughout, a fact obvious in Hebrew, but not in English. More generally, passages in the Bible can be easily misapplied to the singular 'you' when they are in fact addressed to the community of faith in plural. An example of the opposite case, where English is

more specific than Greek or Hebrew is in the case of our two words for 'woman' and 'wife' whereas a single Greek or Hebrew word can mean either, depending on context. One such context is 1 Timothy 3:11, where 'likewise women' might refer to women deacons or the wives of male deacons. A great deal hangs on which interpretation a translator decides upon, but decide he must, one way or the other, and the fact that he has made a choice may not be footnoted. All translations to some extent reflect theological presuppositions, and not always obviously. There is truth in the saying that 'all translations are really condensed commentaries'.

As far as is possible, preachers must strive to ensure that they interact with the word of God and not the word of the translator. This is not to denigrate the work of translators, however: a knowledge of Greek or Hebrew can actually serve to underline, not undermine confidence in a translation. Knowing the underlying Greek or Hebrew often means the preacher can emphasise an English translation. It also means he can have confidence in which sense a particular English word or phrase is used in translation. All the same, a preacher who knows the original languages is unlikely to place too much store by any particular version, appreciating for different reasons features of translations from both the 'literal' and 'dynamic' ends of the spectrum. He will also know that there can be no such thing as a literal translation. J. Hafeman has insightfully pointed out that the proliferation of translations and commentaries makes the need for knowledge of the biblical languages greater, not lesser.³ Without Greek and Hebrew, the expositor has no basis to assess the merits and demerits of the interpretations of translators and commentators.

Traditional Interpretations

The fact that there have been centuries of Bible translation into English is a cause for thanksgiving. All the same, there are inherent dangers in this interpretative tradition. A new translation inevitably builds upon or reacts against its predecessors. Sometimes translators feel unable to 'tamper with' cherished translations endorsed by usage within the community of faith. The more well-known and well-loved a passage is, the more reluctant translators (or editors) are to depart from familiar turns of phrase. Isaiah 53 is a good example of this, where even the NIV sounds suspiciously like the AV. Another example is Psalm 46:10, where even the NIV and ESV follow the AV in rendering the (masculine plural) imperative 'be still' perpetuating the impression that this verse means 'cease to be agitated within yourself, reassured that God is in control'. The idea of the verb is to be inactive, not to attain a state of inner peace. The Good News Bible alone goes out on a limb, rendering the phrase 'stop fighting'. This may ruin many people's favourite verse of Scripture, but it is a commendable attempt to make the sense of the Hebrew original clearer. The issue is what God meant when he inspired the writing of Psalm 46. Did he intend us to arrive at the traditional understanding suggested by English versions?

Understanding culture

Another benefit of studying biblical languages – both Greek and Hebrew – is that it reminds us that the Bible was not written yesterday (even if it is important to preach with a degree of immediacy, as though it was). The Bible was written by men, under the inspiration of God, in times and cultures very different from ours. Looking at Scripture through the medium of the original languages puts a helpful distance between us and the text,

reminding us that God's activity in this world is not confined to our time and culture. This fosters a necessary humility before the living and active word. Practically speaking it helps us to avoid inappropriate readings of Scripture that amount to *eisegesis* (reading into the text) rather than *exegesis*. It is no bad thing for our congregations to realise that there is some distance between them and the text before them. It can serve as a restraint against the 'promise-box' approach to Scripture where verses are wrenched from their context and applied to 21st-century circumstances which are completely alien to that context.

Avoiding pitfalls

The final general point about knowledge of biblical languages is that it teaches us which questions cannot be answered by recourse to those languages. It is common for people who know no Greek or Hebrew to assume that many points of theological controversy or interpretative ambiguity can be solved definitively by a Greek or Hebrew lexicon. Sometimes, one hears the meaning or even the etymology of a Greek or Hebrew word used as a pretext for settling what is essentially a theological issue. Such attempts can often be detected by the caveat, 'I don't know any Hebrew, but ...'. An example of this is the use of the fact that the common Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, is plural in form to 'prove' the Trinity. It proves nothing one way or the other.

Why Study Biblical Hebrew?

Having considered reasons why a knowledge of biblical languages is a useful – if not essential – tool for the preacher, we now move to consider the value of learning Hebrew. Many ministers and preachers have an adequate working knowledge of Greek and see the value of it, but do not have any Hebrew.

Some will only have had the opportunity to learn Greek at Bible College. Others will have decided that, although in an ideal world it would be good to know both biblical languages, the practicalities of life mean that only one can be studied and that it should be the language of the New Testament. Many who study both will find *initially* that Greek is the easier language, because the alphabet is closer to English and many Greek words have made their way into English. With the exceptions of camels and sacks, there is almost no shared vocabulary between English and Hebrew. Faced with such difficulties, why is the learning of Hebrew worthwhile?

The classical bias

The priority given to Greek over Hebrew is not simply a pragmatic matter. Nor does the priority given to Greek simply reflect the view that the New Testament takes precedence over the Old. It results as much from the classical basis of education in the Western world. Since the Renaissance, Latin and Greek have been the foundation of Western education. The works of pagan authors such as Homer and Horace have been as central to European learning as the New Testament. Even the works of the Puritans (who believed a preacher should be tri-lingual) abound with illustrations drawn from Greek and Latin pagan histories. Going back before the Reformation, the influence of platonic and neo-platonic philosophy did not predispose the Church Fathers to value the Hebrew Scriptures. The study of Hebrew has certainly been hindered by anti-semitism in European culture, and the church has not always remained uninfluenced by this. The church has, at times, been embarrassed by, if not ashamed of, its Jewish ancestry.

It is also hard to avoid the suspicion that underlying the priority given to Greek in the church is a fear that the Hebrew Scriptures are insufficiently

'Christian' and this is symptomatic of a wider devaluing of the Old Testament within the Christian tradition. It is also possible that some evangelicals have regarded Old Testament study as the playground of liberals and to remain evangelical, we must remain focused on the New. The surge of interest in the Old Testament from evangelical scholars in recent decades is most welcome in redressing this imbalance, and in stimulating interest in the first three-quarters of the Bible. All the same, there is perhaps a degree of closet dispensationalism even in the Reformed community when it comes to learning biblical Hebrew.

The 'classical bias' has meant that historically, New Testament Greek has been viewed through the lens of classical Greek, rather than through the lens of Hebrew or Aramaic, the first language(s) of all but one of the New Testament authors. The first port of call for understanding the meaning of a word in New Testament Greek should not be Aristotle or Plato, but the Septuagint, to see which Hebrew word (or words) may lie behind the choice of Greek word. This can be found relatively easily, for example, from Abbot-Smith's *Greek Lexicon of New Testament* (first published in 1921, but still in print), which helpfully indicates how New Testament Greek words are used in the Septuagint. This insight will be incomprehensible, however, without some knowledge of Hebrew.

We must also be clear about the value of the Septuagint. I have heard it said that so long as a preacher knows Greek and has the Septuagint, he does not need any Hebrew. Such a view gives the Septuagint priority over the Masoretic text. It also ignores the fact that the Septuagint is a translation, at times not a very accurate one, and one in which the translation approach varies from book to book. From this point of view, the Septuagint offers no

more help than a translation of the Old Testament into any other language. It may be argued that the New Testament writers were often happy to quote from the Septuagint and, at times, appear to have preferred it to the Masoretic text. In their circumstances, however, writing to Greek-speakers used to the Greek Scriptures, to quote from the most widely-used available translation was not as loaded a decision as it may seem today. The thought-world of the New Testament authors – all but one of whom were Jewish – was palpably semitic, as evidenced by many Hebraic turns of phrase reflected even in their Greek (even Luke's Greek is heavily influenced by Hebrew idiom, transmitted through the Septuagint). When James says that Elijah 'prayed with prayer' (Jas 5:17) he is using a Hebrew or Aramaic idiom. Terms like 'God of grace' (= gracious God), 'God of all comfort' (= all-comforting God) or 'sons of thunder' (= thunderous men) may produce interesting interpretations from the preacher who knows only Greek, but the preacher who knows a little Hebrew recognises simply a Semitic preference for using the 'construct chain' in place of adjectives.

The language of Jesus

It is far from mere sentimentality to remember that the Hebrew Scriptures are those which the Lord Jesus heard read, and read from himself, in the Synagogue (e.g. Lk. 4:17). When he spoke of the 'Law, the Prophets and the Psalms' (Lk. 24:44), he was using almost exactly the words still found on the spines of the Hebrew Bible. And when he referred to all the murders from Abel to Zechariah (Lk. 11:51), he was saying something like 'all the murders from Genesis to Revelation' at a time when the Scriptures began with Genesis and ended with 2 Chronicles, as the Hebrew Bible does today (the Septuagint does not). These are the Scriptures from which not a single *yodh* (not *iota*, as the ESV has!) or

even stroke of the pen distinguishing the letter *beth* from *kaph* (for example) can be removed (Mt. 5:18). These are the Scriptures from which Jesus taught the apostles to preach about him (Lk. 24:45). And these were the Scriptures which Jesus learned in Hebrew. I often encourage students in the early stages of learning Hebrew to remember that the Lord himself had to learn the alphabet they are learning. As a first-century Galilean, Jesus would probably have been a competent Greek-speaker, as is suggested by his use of the word 'hypocrite' in its strict Greek sense of an 'actor' (Hebrew has no equivalent term). A study of the words of Jesus which are transliterated in the Gospels (e.g. '*talitha qumi*', Mk 5:41) indicates that his everyday speech was in Aramaic (a sister language to Hebrew). In all probability, he read and quoted the Scriptures in Hebrew and preached and explained them in Aramaic. The living Lord Jesus graciously speaks to people today in whatever their native language is (the significance of Acts 26:14), but he was neither an Englishman nor a Greek. This is not to suggest that attempts to translate Jesus' words 'back into' Aramaic take us nearer to his teaching than the Greek version of his words we have in the gospels, but that those Greek words are best interpreted with an understanding the language(s) Jesus used and of the Scriptures he used. (For an example of this, see the discussion of John 4:23, below.) It is right to argue that the text of the New Testament we have is in Greek and should be studied in that language. By the same token, the text of the Old Testament we have is in Hebrew with a little Aramaic and should be studied in those languages. We must go further and say that New Testament Greek is best studied with an understanding of Hebrew. Old Testament Hebrew does not benefit in the same way from a knowledge of Greek.

Hebrew is not Greek

There are other, more specific and practical reasons why a knowledge of Hebrew is more than desirable for a preacher. A preacher's approach to a Greek text should differ from his approach to a Hebrew text. Greek and Hebrew are not just different languages, but belong to different continents and different language families. Nowhere is this more apparent than with respect to tenses. Greek abounds in tenses (much to the chagrin of the student) which tend to give a specific time reference. Strictly speaking, Hebrew has no tenses at all. Therefore, Greek is more precise about time than Hebrew. Similarly, Greek verbs are precise with respect to mood: a simple statement of fact, a doubtful assertion, a wish or command are differentiated. In Hebrew, all these ideas can be conveyed by the same verbal form. Such distinctions as in Greek between the present and aorist imperatives (often indicating continuous versus once and-for-all commands), or between commands not to begin and to cease from an action, are alien to Hebrew. English lies somewhere between the complexity of Greek and the flexibility of Hebrew. A preacher who knows Greek but no Hebrew will be unaware of the temporal ambiguity of Hebrew verbs. If he approaches the Old Testament through the Septuagint, he may assume that Hebrew verbs are as temporally specific as Greek. On a more general level, he is likely to attach too precise a significance to individual words, whereas in Hebrew the sentence (or at least, the clause) is the basic semantic unit, not the word. Words derive their meaning from context much more in Hebrew than in Greek or English.

Untranslatable terms

There are some untranslatable terms in the Old Testament, often theologically significant terms,

such as *hesed*, variously rendered 'mercy' 'loving-kindness', and so on. In such translations, the essential quality of covenant loyalty is missing (as is the connection with the 'grace' of the New Testament). Several words from the '*mn*' group, such as '*emeth*' and '*emunah*' are often wrongly understood as referring to a quality of objective truthfulness rather than personal faithfulness or reliability, which is nearer the mark. When the widow of Zarephath declared that the word of YHWH in Elijah's mouth was truth ('*emeth*'), she meant it was reliable (1 Kgs 17:24) because Elijah was a man of God. To illustrate: in our society a journalist who accurately reports the facts might be considered 'true'. To a Hebrew, however, if that man was also a drunkard who cheated on his wife, he was not 'true'. A good example of the difference this makes in biblical interpretation is found in Psalm 145:18, 'YHWH is near to all who call upon him ... in truth'. Our western notion of truth (classically derived) suggests that calling on God in truth means calling upon him as he actually is (in truth). The meaning of '*emeth*' here is much closer to 'sincerity' or 'faithfulness'. We must call upon God with a sincere heart and faithfully (not compromised by also worshipping idols). Along with *hesed*, '*emeth*' is a strongly covenantal term (cf. Exod. 34:6). Now consider Jesus' statement that those who worship God must worship 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:24). The word in the Greek text of John's Gospel is *aletheia*. We might gauge Jesus' meaning by recourse to the range of meaning of *aletheia* (truthfulness, reality, dependability, uprightness) in a Lexicon of New Testament Greek, which draws on the works of Homer and Aristotle, as well as Philo, Josephus and Early Christian writings. Or we can note that this word is usually used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word '*emeth*'. The question is not which Hebrew or Aramaic word Jesus may have used (for

all we know he might have spoken to the woman in Greek); the question is what Jesus meant by whatever word he used. Speaking as a first-century Palestinian Jew to a Samaritan woman, his meaning is likely to reflect a common heritage of Old Testament ideas and their Semitic thought-world. The Old Testament concept of *'emeth* strongly suggests the idea of sincerity and faithfulness here. The Lord was not telling the Samaritan woman that God must be worshipped according to some objective truth which the Jews had and the Samaritans did not (as v. 22 might suggest), but that God must be worshipped in sincerity of heart and faithfulness of life – the kind of life that the Samaritan woman was not living. This interpretation may not commend itself to every reader. The point however, is that without an understanding of the Hebrew idea of *'emeth*, this entire interpretative possibility will be difficult to evaluate, and probably overlooked.

Another point about untranslatable terms (whether Hebrew or Greek) is that they cannot be translated by the same English word in all contexts (despite attempts to do so!). So, their frequency is obscured in translation and often it is not clear that one is dealing with the same word even in the same passage.

Untranslatable stylistic features

It is not just the meaning of individual words which is difficult to convey in English. Many of the characteristic literary features of Hebrew are lost in translation. The Hebrew fondness for repeating words and roots is seldom ever apparent in English versions. Psalm 121 is a poem constructed around the shades of meaning of the word *'keep'*^{j2} (*shamar*) but very few English translations have the courage to do justice to this (the ESV is the exception). It will not be apparent that the root *sh-w-b* – 'return'

occurs twelve times in the first chapter of Ruth, because it cannot be translated 'return' in all cases. Nevertheless, it is a significant factor in the interpretation of that chapter. The Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1-9 abounds in the repetition of similar sounding words: 'build' (*bnh*), 'brick' (*lbnh*), 'confuse' (*bll*), 'Babylon' (*bbl*). This is not simply a matter of style: the author is using assonance to convey something of the meaning of the story, demonstrating that God's judgement upon the building of Babel was not arbitrary, but an inevitable consequence of and appropriate response to what humanity had done.

Conclusions: challenges and encouragements

In the few examples above, I have attempted to adumbrate something of the richness of the Scriptures in biblical Hebrew and to suggest that knowledge of Hebrew can be a powerful resource for the preacher. I have also tried to indicate some of the exegetical limitations of knowing no Hebrew. Let us now return to the question of whether it is desirable or practical to suggest that those who teach from the Scriptures in our churches can be expected to learn Hebrew. Let us consider some of the arguments against this.

Many (if not most) of the people who confidently assert that Hebrew is an unnecessary and time-consuming luxury for a preacher or pastor are speaking from a position of ignorance: they know no Hebrew themselves and are in no position to assess the benefits of knowing Hebrew and the limitations of not knowing Hebrew. David Baker finds, significantly, that those who are already (or have been) in pastoral ministry tend to get better grades in biblical language study. He surmises that those in ministry 'are able to see an immediate and practical use for their language study and so motivate themselves toward study'. They most

readily appreciate the need for Hebrew and understand the limitations of knowing no Hebrew.⁴

Secondly, it is impossible to make a case against the importance of knowing Hebrew which does not also apply to Greek. If the availability of good English translations renders the need for Hebrew redundant, this applies just as much to the need for New Testament Greek. If the increasing availability of scholarly, evangelical commentaries on the Old Testament diminishes the need for preachers to know Hebrew, then the greater availability of New Testament commentaries makes the need for a knowledge of Greek even less important! The converse is true, of course: the increasing number of commentaries makes the need for biblical languages more pressing, otherwise it is impossible to interact intelligently with linguistic discussions in those commentaries. A further point in favour of learning Hebrew is that whereas the Old Testament can be studied adequately without any knowledge of Greek, the New Testament cannot be studied adequately without some knowledge of Hebrew. The Old Testament is the foundation on which the New is built and the writers of the New were steeped in the thought-world of the Old Testament. This applies even to Luke, whose phraseology is deeply influenced by the Septuagint, itself reflecting the Hebrew cast of the Old Testament.

Some would concede that a knowledge of Hebrew is certainly desirable, but that for many preachers it is impractical to acquire. The time involved and the difficulty of learning the language place it beyond the grasp of many. Several things can be said in answer to this. First, Hebrew is not so difficult as many think. The problem in many areas is not degree of difficulty but strangeness to the English-speaker. Hebrew does not present the conceptual difficulties that Greek does, once its initial

strangeness is overcome. I would argue that Hebrew is actually an easier language to learn than Greek. Secondly, it needs to be stated that a little Hebrew is a useful exegetical tool. For sure, to know Hebrew well enough to be able to read and understand the Masoretic text requires years of work. But this is not the issue. Few preachers can read the New Testament in Greek, but have enough Greek to use as an exegetical tool. Some are probably discouraged from persevering in learning Hebrew because their sights are set too high and they want to reach a high level of competence in too short a time. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but a little knowledge used with humility can be a valuable and practically useful thing.

This is undoubtedly a controversial point to make, but the question might be asked whether a minister who is too busy to engage with biblical languages is, in fact, too busy. The trend away from the acquisition of biblical languages suggests a shift in ministerial priorities away from a deep and time-consuming interaction with God's Word. We live in a pragmatic age in which the exacting discipline of wrestling with God's Word does not produce the kind of instant results in church life which are sought today. This raises wider questions about the role of Word-based ministry which are outside the scope of this discussion. It is important to see the issue of biblical language learning as part of this wider discussion, however.

This brings us finally to a reconsideration of our Reformation heritage. What really happened in the 16th century? Did the reformed church merely replace theology according to Aquinas with theology according to Luther and Calvin? Or did the Reformers rediscover the Bible? A paradigmatic figure is Tyndale. On the one hand, he wanted to give the ordinary man and woman the Scriptures in

their own, everyday language (as Luther had done for German speakers). To do this, however, he had to become highly competent in Greek and Hebrew. The Reformers and their heirs understood that it was the Scriptures in their original languages which had set the church free and they therefore understood the central importance of the continued study of Greek and Hebrew by future generations of ministers. If we believe in the constant need for reformation then the study of God's Word in its original languages will be deemed essential. If being 'reformed' or 'evangelical' means merely preserving and perpetuating the thought of great men of bygone times, then we will view the study of Greek and Hebrew as a dispensable luxury.

Luther said that the biblical languages are 'the sheath containing the sword of the Spirit'. I would use a slightly different metaphor. Wisdom and skill will always be needed to wield the sword of God's word, but that word understood in the original languages is a sharper, keener, more lively and active blade.

1. During the preparation of this paper, I have benefited from the comments of biblical-language teaching colleagues at the London Theological Seminary: Philip Eveson, Robert Strivens and David Bond.
2. Currid (2006), p. 81
3. S. Hafeman, 'Why use Biblical Languages in Preaching?', *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 3 (1999), pp. 86–89, cited in Currid (2006), p. 82
4. Baker (1998), p. 171

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- James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London (SCM Press), 1961
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An appreciation of the role of prayer in the ministry of Alexander Moody Stuart (1809-1898).

'A man of prayer' is a title that any minister or preacher would love to be applied to his life and ministry. This is the bold and unashamed title from a son's biography of his minister father not long after his death in 1898. Writing with the intimate knowledge of a son, Kenneth Moody Stuart draws on the testimony of family, colleagues and friends to his father, A. Moody Stewart. He opens, a most illuminating chapter with these words: "Dr Moody Stuart was pre-eminently a man of prayer. He assiduously cultivated private prayer. His prayers in the family were no mere formal acts of worship; they were very solemn, very earnest, realising the presence of the Great God, and making others realise it also; yet in their pleadings, they almost amounted to a holy familiarity with God." ¹

There are many books and articles that can challenge and probe us in this most personal of areas – an area that in the end is known only to God and ourselves. This is not designed to be yet another exercise of hitting ourselves over the head, or beating ourselves up by comparing ourselves with a super-saint from yester-year. Here is pattern, right attitude, positive successful methodology – and above all an encouragement to seek to have a real vibrant passion to be real with our Lord God Almighty – and particularly in the realm of our prayer life.

So who is Alexander Moody Stuart? He was one of the first generation of Free Church of Scotland ministers, who was born in 1809. He had successfully founded and maintained Free St Luke's Church in Edinburgh. There he not only served his congregation, but also was an exemplar of good practice for evangelical ministry.² As John Macleod notes: "He was an expert in case divinity and the experimental and searching element entered largely

into his message. Yet, though it was prominent, it did not displace the more directly Evangelical note. He may be taken as a specimen of the most studious type of the old cultured gospel ministers. With his yoke fellows in the Evangel, men of like mind, John Macrae and Charles Mackintosh, he was wont to spend one day each month in private brotherly conference and prayer. When trouble arose in connection with the case of Robertson Smith he showed his quality as a student of the questions in debate as fully as any that took part in the discussions. But this critical interest was for him only a thing that came in by the way."³ He was Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland Assembly in 1875, and died in 1898.

His son said that, "Prayer was to him a second nature."⁴ He characterised his father's style in prayer as 'Pleading Praying'. "He often seemed to wrestle in prayer, like Jacob at Peniel, saying, 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.' This was manifest also in his prayers in public, from which some worshippers said that they derived more spiritual help even than from his sermons. Of him it might truly be said that he prayed 'without ceasing'; that he 'prayed always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance.' He felt that nothing was too small for him to bring to his God in prayer, and that nothing was too great for him to ask in Jesus' name."⁵ Moreover, his son writes, "There was often holy urgency and importunity in his pleading, there was no lack of submission to the divine will, or of patience when his request was deferred, or in some cases denied ... he was urgent and importunate in praying for temporal blessings for those dear to him, much more than for himself, he was still more urgent and importunate in his supplications for spiritual blessings both for himself and others. Delay in granting these did seem sometimes to

affect with holy impatience.”⁶ He son says that his father sought to practise patience like Job, and quotes some insightful words of his father from his own reflections on the patience of Job, such as: “It was not the patience of indifference – no man ever felt bereavement more keenly than Job did; it was not the patience of stupidity – his was one of the greatest intellects that has been in the world. And it was not the patience of timidity – he said, ‘I brake the jaws of the wicked and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.’ It was the patience of submission to the holy sovereignty of God, of knowing that God could do no wrong that God is good, and that everything that comes from His hand must be good. Grand old hero, formed by God’s own hand! How blessed to be a man when a man through grace is capable of such patience as that!”⁷

Moody Stuart sought to respond readily to any request for prayer, and most often he would take the initiative in seeking to bring a person or a situation to his ‘Holy Father’ or ‘Heavenly Father’. He expected answers and his son gives a number of instances where people testified to receiving the benefits of Moody Stuart’s prayers for them. Among them were his anxious prayers for two of his sons who had gone to skate, one winter, on a less popular local frozen lake.⁸ There was danger as there was no boat, ladder, or ropes provided. “All that day my father had a strong impression that his boys were in danger, and was engaged constantly in prayer for them. Opening his study door whenever a bell rang, to see if they had returned, and much disappointed when he never heard their voices in the lobby, he returned always to prayer ... at last a bell rang and he heard their longed for voices, and on asking if they were all well, they called upstairs, ‘Yes; but a boy has been drowned’ ... What is remarkable is that Andrew said that he felt an almost irresistible impulse to plunge in, not reflecting that he would

only have been another victim, and was restrained by feeling something like a strong hand pressing him back.”⁹

He son further recalls, that his father would never read or study the Scriptures in public, or with the family, or even in private “without lifting up his heart and voice in prayer for a blessing on it”. So important and vital was this attitude that, “One day in his last illness, when he seemed to be unconscious, I opened the Bible and began to read a few verses aloud, when he suddenly said, ‘Oh don’t begin to read without prayer!’”¹⁰ Have we come to treat the Scriptures in such a utilitarian way that in a real sense we have not revered the Bible as the Words of the Living God to us?

He was concerned for reality in praying: “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”¹² He had three directions that he invariably gave to encourage reality in praying:

1. “Pray *till* you pray.
2. Pray till you are conscious of being heard.
3. Pray till you have received an answer.”

Moody Stuart had an appetite for seeing the power of God display in fruitful gospel effective ways in ‘Revivals’. Perhaps this is one of those areas where we might seem most detached from those nineteenth century days, and the experiences of Moody Stuart in particular. Certainly he lived through days when there were touches of Revival being experienced in Scotland and here Moody Stuart was an encourager, by prayer and concern, for such times to happen more often. There are distinct times in his own life when he witnessed significant numbers of folk becoming vibrant Christians.

1. In his early years, having been licensed as a preacher/missioner in October 1831, he went as a Home Missioner to Lindisfarne, Holy Island, off the

Northumberland coast. There the young Moody Stuart laboured for two years, ministering to the seafaring folk, staying at his post through an outbreak of plague, and overcoming hardened prejudices against taking the gospel seriously – gaining many notable successes. His son cites a testimony to his father's work at the time: "There was a peculiar power in your father, exactly meeting one's needs, in his preaching. We often said coming home 'Mr M S might have heard what we were speaking about last night.' He seemed so to meet a felt need; I am sure he was directed by the Lord what to say."¹³

2. Moody Stuart had his part in both the Revival and the Disruption of the early 1840s. His church, St Luke's was frequently used for the initial Assembly Meetings of the young Free Church and also for Revival Meetings. His son cites a friend's testimony: "Mr Moody Stuart was the last survivor of the foremost group of the Disruption period who belonged less to the statesmanlike leaders who were the administrators of the Free Church in her early struggles, than to that cluster of pietistic order, who not less than the others attracted to the Free Church all that was best in Scotland in these memorable days, and of whom McCheyne was the first to be removed as your father was the last."¹⁴

3. During the Revival of 1859 he, not only visited Ireland, but encouraged Brownlow North, an evangelist, who was outstandingly used at the time. Free Church St Luke's became a popular venue: "Winter after winter following on his visit to Edinburgh in 1857, Mr North preached in Free St Luke's Church, and made the means of blessing to many souls within its walls ... the church, located in the central situation in the new town, and seating, when all the galleries are thrown open, nearly 1,500 people, was peculiarly well adapted for such audiences as Mr North attracted to it; while

the fact that the congregation contained a large number of very devoted and experienced Christian people, who gave themselves to earnest wrestling with the great Master of assemblies for a blessing on the word published by His servant, furnishes a key to explain the abundant blessing which descended this place of worship."¹⁵

Moody Stuart said, about those times, "At that first visit in Edinburgh we both engaged in prayer, and alike in prayer and in conversation it was impossible not to be deeply impressed with his reverential awe, his earnestness, and his tenderness of spirit ... To myself it was unspeakably refreshing to find a man with such fear of the living God, such brokenness of spirit, and such faith in the everlasting Word."¹⁶

For several weeks Moody Stewart visited Ferryden, a fishing port, near Montrose, where there was an outbreak of revival. He was also eager to visit other centres: "From his own experience, and his deep interest in such revival movements, his services were naturally in request from many quarters, but the limits of his strength, and the constant claims of a city charge, prevented him from acceding to these to a great extent ... He prayed much both in public and in the family for seasons of revival, and constantly stirred up others to pray and labour for this, being fully aware of the general apathy in regard to it."¹⁷

4. For Moody Stuart seeking for revival blessing was to pray for an increase of the work of the Holy Spirit, "In his preaching, as in all his ministerial work and his personal religion, [he gave] great prominence ... to the work of the Holy Spirit. This was not only felt to be deepest, but was also uppermost and foremost in his whole religious life. He ever realised for himself his absolute need of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to make the word of God, whether read or preached, effectual, and he let others see clearly that he realised this. In

every service he prayed for the breathings of God's Spirit. "Awaken, O North Wind; and come, thou South; and blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out."¹⁸

5. Moody Stuart reminds us of something that is a vital part of the Church's hope and experience: "When the Spirit so works in the hearts of many there is a revival of religion, and nothing else is a revival ... at such a time the Holy Ghost is peculiarly present with his people and powerfully striving with sinners. He takes his residence among men, and makes many living temples to himself. He enables many to pray, and he is found even of them that have not sought him ... in a time of much prayer on the part of others, have you not often recognised the special presence of the Spirit with yourself? In seasons such as that of your communion, when thousands are continuing in prayer and supplication, believers in other parts of the country, at the very moment of your solemnities, have unexpectedly found such access in Christ to the Father by the Spirit ... What does this prove? Not merely that the separate prayers of separate persons are heard for themselves, but that there are outpourings of supplication which bring the Spirit himself near to the land, revealing the Lamb of God."¹⁹

6. Moody Stuart took part in Prayer Union meetings. One such was reported on February 10 1867, which listened to accounts of revival movements in Tullibody, Torphichen, Larbert, and Dunipace, and then, "Earnest prayer was offered for all these places, and for the congregations of those present, and suggestions were made as to the mode of preaching most likely to be blessed to effect this end, and the most approved methods of conducting such spiritual movements. Increased prayerfulness on the part of the ministers and congregations was specially recommended, and it was suggested that

ministers might exchange pulpits occasionally with the express purpose of preaching to the unconverted."²⁰

Moody Stuart simply loved to associate himself with praying people, and to unite with them in presenting their common petitions at the throne of grace. He had a weekly prayer meeting for students at his house in Edinburgh in 1836, but he was concerned that colleagues in ministry knew fellowship and stimulus to maintain their personal sense of reality in their praying. "For many years a prayer-meeting of ministerial brethren was held in Free St Luke's manse each alternate Monday morning. One of those who attended it some time after its commencement, the Rev J Morgan of Viewforth, speaks of it as having proved 'a great spiritual force'. He writes: 'The study in 43 Queen Street was familiar and almost sacred. I can vividly recall that quiet face, with its firm, square brow and strong-set mouth and chin, both hands grasping his thick well-worn interleaved Bible. His plaintive winsome voice in prayer and intercession was most impressive. To some of us these Monday forenoon meetings for devotion, conference and study of the Word, were unspeakably precious and profitable, and are a dear remembrance still.'"²¹ Moody Stuart knew that he could not preach or exhort his people about prayer if he was not seeking to be a living example of the devotion, commitment and importunate concern that all the people of God should have, simply by being the Lord's privileged people.

For Moody Stuart, ministerial usefulness and effectiveness was bound up with the duty and responsibility of prayerfulness. This was something that was underlined in his life from practice and experience. In addressing his colleagues at a conference, he simply exposed what is on his own heart for himself and for them: "The impressibleness

of our people on the Sabbath depends much on prayer through the week; and their praying for us and for themselves depends much on our praying for them. And then on the Sabbath how much hangs, not merely on the words that are spoken, but on the spirit in which we preach and pray. Especially in extemporary prayer, we are in constant danger of sinking into a formality perhaps more lifeless than if we were using a form; a formality which we must all have detected in ourselves, by falling into the groove of the same words for want of fresh life within. Or if in such a state we make an effort at the moment toward real prayer, the prayer is constrained and laboured, instead of the spontaneous utterance of our thoughts. When the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart – out of spiritual desire, spiritual sorrow, or spiritual joy, what conciseness – what tenderness, what power is in the supplication, taking the people along with us in all our petitions, or else making them to feel their own lack of the spirit of grace. This one ordinance in our Church of public prayer without a form of words, shuts us up to a very peculiar necessity of becoming and continuing to be men of prayer; shuts us up under the pressure a severe penalty, resting on ourselves and on our people week by week, as the sure consequence of our failure.”²²

He was frequently asked to write the ‘Call to Prayer’ in preparation for an Assembly Meeting of his Church [The Free Church of Scotland], and he entered into the responsibility of the call himself. Moody Stuart knew, as surely we all do, that prayer is one area that exposes the hypocrisy of our hearts; it is always much easier to write about than to do!

“Through all his life it could be truly said of him that like the Apostles he ‘gave himself continually to prayer’. Many letters have come from friends stating that before they parted from him after a call he always joined with them in prayer. When any of

his family started on a journey his last farewell was a loving commendatory prayer, and it was noticed by them that none of those thus commended to the Divine protection ever encountered the smallest accident of any kind in their journeys.”²³ Colleagues, particularly assistants, who worked with him quickly, saw the shape of his life and the attitude of his heart. One of them wrote: “He was a man of prayer. If we were engaged in any work in his study and it did not progress as desired he stopped for prayer. All his work, and specially his difficulties, were brought to God in prayer.”²⁴

Kenneth Moody Stuart ended his chapter, reflecting on his father’s life of prayer, by giving some notes from his father on the subject of ‘importunity in prayer’. The Scripture that Moody Stuart was expounding was the Parable in which the friend came at midnight and implored some bread to give to an unexpected visitor:

“Prayer is *a sense of need*: a need which is *entire* and *ascertained*. The suppliant must first *know that he has nothing*, but is poor and needy. He must be sure of this, and make it a settled point, and not merely suspect it. There is a great difference between suspected and ascertained want ... The suppliant’s need must be *urgent*, requiring immediate assistance whether for himself or for others. Christ puts a case in which the man requiring bread could not wait till tomorrow.”

“Next *the suppliant must have confidence in Christ as being willing to grant his request* ... sometimes men are ready to say, Christ can give, but he has no will. Oh, what blasphemy! How amazing that God has endured His people when they have brought up such an evil report against Him! Oh, dear brethren, it is this that hinders prayer, and success in prayer, when we say, ‘He has no mind to give us what we ask.’”

“Next, *perseverance in asking* is needful. *The first knock has obtained nothing*; it seems to have produced no result, but the man continues knocking. *Many knocks have produced no effect*, but these knocks have troubled the possessor of the bread ... the difficulty becomes the greater, the longer we continue knocking; for if we are not to go without it, we must make louder and more continual knocking. I must either go away, and give up, or seek with such vehemence as must obtain it, as if a greater effort than ever were needed and must be made. And it must be so with us, seeing how dreadful it is to perish. I cannot perish! Or in interceding for others, ‘How can I bear to see the destruction of my people? Therefore let me seek until I find.’ Jesus says, ‘Every one that asks receives’. Never was there a case to the contrary. Thousands of cases there have been when men have knocked and gone away; but there never was a case of a man who *sought to the end* and did not get.”

“We should not diminish the request, but increase the importunity. *There will be no counting of the loaves*. There is bread enough in our Father’s house and to spare; and, oh, there is want enough! Though God tarry, have large desires and expectations, but these come to nothing unless there be large faith and large requests. Let us, dear friends, ask much of our God, and keep asking much, because when He arises He will give an abundance.” ²⁵

It could be argued that Moody Stuart belonged to the ‘Romantic Period’ of the history of the Christian Church in Britain, but it was also a period that saw great challenges to the structure, beliefs, the constitution of the Church and its basic beliefs. The scene in Scotland certainly had its own distinctiveness, but at the same time there are so many areas where Moody Stuart’s basic desire of wanting to be real with God – wanting to be true to the revelation of God’s truth in the Scriptures –

wanting God and His relationship with His people, be known, felt, and be displayed as fully as possible for the glory and delight of His people – find more than a vague echo in our 21st Century Christian experience. The area of prayer always has particular perennial concern, and Moody Stuart’s testimony has things that both challenge and encourage us all.

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The God Delusion Richard Dawkins,
Bantam Press, London, 2006. 406pp. Price: £20
and of *The Dawkins Delusion* Alister McGrath
with Joanna Collicutt McGrath,
SPCK, London, 2007. 78pp. Price: £7.99

'Dawkins, Richard: Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, Oxford University; Fellow of New College, Oxford; zoologist, with high reputation in the field of ethology (see his *The Extended Phenotype*); highly successful author of numerous popular works on science; his writings characterised by clarity and elegance; style marred somewhat by a literary pugilistic streak, most in evidence when words such as 'God', 'Jesus', 'religion', and related terms are in view; this tendency borders on the manic when the words 'creationism' and its cognates and 'intelligent design' appear; this lapse in style could be a worrying sign of Obsessional Compulsive Disorder (OCD); this could have been brought on by a mental virus or 'meme' (though there is no real evidence for such entities); his OCD tendency very pronounced in his most recent work, *The God Delusion*; humanly speaking, not a lot can be done about it, though recovery or deliverance may be aided by frequent exposure to Christian kindness, courtesy, and to a robust exposure of the falsity of his ideas; . . .'

The following review of *The God Delusion* is intended to equip those called to help any who may have caught the 'virus' from Dawkins. (The Dawkins variety seems to be an extremely nasty, mutant form of the virus.)

The God Delusion was written in a very specific cultural context. First, the religious context: political correctness has spread through secular society an idea which has been widespread in the ecumenical religious world for a very long time,

namely, that all religions are really saying the same kind of thing. The fact that 'ordinary', pleasant people can wire themselves to explosives and blast a few dozen people into shards and shreds of flesh comes as a nasty jolt to those who have bought into this kind of nonsense, so there then follows a furiously frantic, government attempt to distinguish 'extremists' (or 'fundamentalists': for many people the terms are synonymous) from 'mainline' religion, where all is sweetness and light. Running parallel to this is the philosophical context. The 'conflict thesis' invented by T.H. Huxley in the nineteenth century (that religion and science are necessarily sworn enemies), though merely a piece of political propaganda, (after all, Faraday, Maxwell, and Lord Kelvin were the premier 'scientists' of the nineteenth century and were devout Christians) filtered through to the public consciousness and became widely accepted earlier in the twentieth century. The rise of an articulate body of Christian research scientists, now with their own journal, as well as the obvious fact that many 'ordinary' scientists happened also to be Christians proved to be something of a body blow to the 'conflict thesis'. Add to this the growing popular influence of 'creationist' literature and ideas, and the rise of 'intelligent design' arguments, and you have the explanation why some have been galvanised to try to flog new life into the dying conflict thesis. Dawkins is the most celebrated or notorious advocate of this thesis. He is Huxley redivivus.

The book is really a curate's egg. Since Dawkins has also authored *A Devil's Chaplain* (the phrase was Darwin's), perhaps I should say it is 'a devil's curate's egg'. Much worse than the ordinary variety! Let me identify some points of agreement between Dawkins and readers of this magazine. First, Dawkins finds fault with religion and with a lot of

religious people. But then, so does the Bible. Jesus' severest words of denunciation were of the religious leaders of His day and of the kind of religion they promoted. Paul's sermon on the Areopagus and his letter to the Romans, like much of the Old Testament before him, indicts not the atheism of the day (atheism was very much a 'minority interest') but the false religions of that time and the correspondingly warped lifestyles to which they gave rise. Indeed, there is surely something ironic about the fact that the Romans regarded the early Christians as atheists because they did not have images of their God. If, fired by a misguided zeal to oppose all that Dawkins says, we simply defend 'religion' and 'God', without defining these terms, we shall be unfaithful to the testimony of Jesus. (Did He not warn that some would think they were serving God by killing His disciples?) We shall also box ourselves into an intellectual corner.

I presume that every reader of this magazine will be as appalled (no, that's wrong: far more appalled) than Dawkins at the insane rantings, violent, offensive, and obscene language with which some so called 'Christians' have attacked Dawkins and his atheist colleagues. Dawkins is surely aware of this. He does not, I presume, receive such letters from Alister McGrath or from Paul Helm (who was involved with him on BBC's Brains Trust back in the 90s). So while one agrees with him at one level, one has to ask why he seeks to create the impression that every Christian is tarred with the same brush.

Dawkins' treatment of Thomas Aquinas's arguments for God's existence and Anselm's ontological argument is an attack upon what Dawkins evidently considers religious people to believe to be strong arguments for God's existence. He is, presumably, ignorant of the fact that many Christian apologists would agree with him as to the inadequacy of these

arguments. Mind you, philosophy is not Dawkins' strong point. Aquinas was a medieval philosopher, as well as a theologian, and he was writing as much as a philosopher to produce philosophical arguments to justify beliefs held on other grounds. Dawkins is evidently ignorant of the presuppositionalist school of apologetics and of the rise of a school of apologetics which is severely critical of foundationalism.

Now to the bad parts of this curate's egg. I shall have to be extremely selective. First, the 'tone' of the book. Robert Thouless's justly famous work *Straight and Crooked Thinking* identified the use of emotive language as being singularly inappropriate when seeking to discover the truth or falsity of propositions. Having established a case, emotive language may then be suitable; but not until then. The opening paragraph of chapter two of *The God Delusion* is jam-packed with emotive, not to say vitriolic, language. Dawkins is 'having a go' at the God of the Old Testament. This is not calm and rational enquiry: it is Dawkins trying to prove a case and using gutter language (which I shall not repeat) to try to prove it. If you have the book, mark the margin of the page, AWSLH ('Argument weak, shout loudly here'). A Sunday School teacher could have informed him that the 'jealousy' of God is not the 'I-hate-you-because-you've-got-a-bigger-house-and-thinner-waistline-than-mine' variety, but the kind of jealousy which a husband has for his wife or even a professor for the reputation of his department. As for some of Dawkins' other ravings about the Old Testament, a five minute walk from New College to the Bodleian library would put at his disposal a wealth of literature on the Old Testament and on Canaanite society, not to mention Mary Douglas's ground breaking application of the insights of cultural anthropology to the laws of

Leviticus, that might just make him realise that he is making himself look more of an ignorant ass rather than the religious iconoclast of popular reputation. But then, if you want to prove a case, facts which rather dent it are best left ignored. 'Where ignorance is bliss . . .' It's that old mental virus again.

One would have expected the New Testament to have fared better at his hands, but such expectations are quickly disappointed. He raises old canards as to historical gaffes in Luke's account of Jesus' birth (is he really that ignorant of the work of first class New Testament scholars such as Darrell Bock, just to name one?), while he makes the rather foolish observation that most of the birth narratives were borrowed from other religions. This is just to resurrect the 'history of religions' approach to Christian origins, an approach which was popular in the early twentieth century but which, by now, has been largely discredited as a result of extensive scholarly work in this field. He devotes only seven pages to the historical reliability of the New Testament, in which he displays appalling ignorance of the arguments and reasons for belief in the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels and of the reasons for believing that Jesus did claim divine status. Apart from a few brief references throughout the book to Geza Vermes, the only New Testament scholar who gets a mention in this section is Bart Ehrman. Ehrman is hardly representative of New Testament scholarship. Otherwise, Dawkins refers to A.N. Wilson's 'biography' of Jesus. He really ought to know that Tom Wright, who was still at Oxford when Wilson's book came out, did a demolition job on Wilson. In his popular work, *Who was Jesus?*, Wright pointed out that Wilson was guilty of a considerable number of basic, factual errors, ranging from the geographical location of John the Baptist's imprisonment, to the howler that Jesus got some of

His ideas from reading the Talmud! Since, as readers of this magazine will know, the Talmud was not written down until about AD 400, this, says Wright, is akin to suggesting that Shakespeare got his ideas from Tom Stoppard! There is so much more of this kind of thing in Wilson's book. I assume that Dawkins is on speaking terms with the theology tutor in New College. He could have been saved from making such gaffes if he had consulted those more widely read in these matters than himself.

Perhaps we should not be surprised at Dawkins being out of his depth in these areas, when one realises that he seems pretty ill-informed about those matters concerning which one would expect him to be 'in the know'. He conveys the impression that there are not many distinguished scientists who are Christian believers. Why no mention of Sir John Houghton in the book? He held a chair at Oxford, is a fellow of the Royal Society, and was awarded an honorary D.Sc. at Oxford last year. No mention of Denis Alexander's *Rebuilding the Matrix*, which was highly recommended by Professor Brian Heap, Vice-President of the Royal Society, as compulsory reading for believer and unbeliever, scientist and non-scientist. I could mention much, much more, in this vein but space forbids me. Dawkins is shooting a line, so his work is characteristically tendentious.

His case for the 'improbability' of God is based on the fact that something more complex than the universe (God) is invoked to explain something less complex. This, Dawkins contends, will not do because one is then left with no explanation for God. Furthermore, Dawkins believes that processes which explain a phenomenon render the 'God explanation' redundant. On the second point Dawkins is extraordinarily reductionistic. Even within scientific discourse there are levels of

explanation, but one level of explanation does not render another level as being redundant. Furthermore, as Michael Poole pointed out in his exchange with Dawkins in the journal *Science and Christian Belief* back in the 90s, the notion of 'explanation' is somewhat multi-faceted: you will not find Sir Frank Whittle in one of the components of the jet engine and you can explain the jet engine's functioning in terms of the laws of physics and engineering, but you have not thereby made Sir Frank Whittle redundant to the existence of the jet engine. The average Christian who works in science, whether as a teacher or researcher, does not engage in theological explanations of the circulation of the blood, the nature of ionic bonding, and so on, but he/she nevertheless believes that the Lord made everything and upholds everything by His powerful Word. Why does Dawkins not refer to his exchange with Poole? Might it be because he seemed to get the worse of it?

As for the idea that invoking God is to 'explain' the complex by something more complex, Dawkins does not take account of the fact that one is invoking a different order of being to explain another order of being. We regularly do this. Hebrews 3:3–4 uses the analogy of the builder and a house to explain the nature of God's creation of the world. The builder is more complex than the house which he builds and is a different order of being. Yet the difference between God and His universe is far greater than that which exists between the builder and the house. (The builder, like the house, is composed of atoms, will decay, etc., whereas these things are not true of God). One does not, therefore, need to account for God's origin for, by definition, He is uncreated. These are fairly basic philosophical points which Dawkins does not address. But to hold (as his fellow Oxford professor and comrade-in-arms, Peter Atkins, holds) that the universe came from nothing

and that there is nothing more simple than nothing is hardly an explanation at all. For it is a basic philosophical point that nothing is not an order of being and one cannot, therefore, predicate anything of it: if one could, it would not be nothing. This is the 'ultimate free lunch' theory of the universe's origins; in this case the adage holds true, 'There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.'

Dawkins' treatment of the nature of good and evil is appallingly shallow. He appears to confuse an account of the origin of our sense of good and evil with the nature of good and evil: in other words, he is confusing epistemology (how we know something) with ontology (what a thing is). He shows himself to be a child of the Enlightenment, who has never felt the force of Nietzsche's observation that if God is dead, we must create our own values. But if this be so, there is no adequate moral basis for saying that the morals of Richard Dawkins are superior to those of Mao Tse Tung. Dawkins, from the comfort of the Oxford Common Room, may regard it as axiomatic that it is wrong to go around killing people in order to get your own way. If you are in the employ of Robert Mugabe or are living on an estate where you get your living from peddling crack cocaine, you may be inclined to reply, in the words of one of Mark Twain's characters, 'You're saying so, don't make it so.' Indeed.

Dawkins does not seriously address the question of evil committed in the name of atheism, nor the great good that has come about as a result of Christian conversion. Good for him that his book came out last year, before the bicentenary of the death of John Newton and the abolition of the slave trade.

Terry Eagleton (with no brief for Christianity) hammered Dawkins' book in his review for *The London Review of Books*. Michael Ruse wrote: '*The God Delusion* makes me embarrassed to be an atheist

Let me refer to the *Who's Who* style profile with which I began:

If Professor Dawkins' present position is a sinecure, we may well expect more of the same (OCD and all that). If not, he could well find himself removed and replaced by Denis Alexander or by Alister McGrath.

Alister McGrath and Richard Dawkins are well known protagonists: but whereas Dawkins comes out of his corner like a bare-knuckled pugilist, 'lunging, flailing, mispunching', McGrath weighs up his opponent, takes measured steps, lands deft but damaging blows, and altogether outclasses atheism's most strident polemicist. It is very much a case of the iron fist but in a deliciously smooth, velvet glove.

Whereas McGrath's 2004 *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life* was a comprehensive study of Dawkins' ideas, the present volume is a specific response to *The God Delusion*. While most of the book is Alister McGrath's own work, his wife has contributed those parts which deal with the psychology of religion. Alister McGrath is Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University. Starting undergraduate life as a Marxist atheist, he became a Christian before graduating in chemistry and taking a doctorate in molecular biophysics. He also obtained a doctorate in theology. His wife studied experimental psychology at Oxford, before going on to specialise in clinical neuropsychology. She subsequently studied theology and currently lectures in the Psychology of Religion at London University.

The book is intentionally selective: it is not a point-by-point rebuttal of Dawkins, but an analysis of some of the key themes of his book and a response to what Dawkins says about them. The McGraths have, therefore, succeeded in writing a book which is neither boring nor tedious – a fault which is, alas,

all too common in books which 'respond' to what others have written.

Unlike Dawkins, McGrath displays considerable knowledge of the philosophy of science and is widely read in the literature. He is able, therefore, to make short shrift of the idea that science has 'disproved' God. He also sets the record straight on what Thomas Aquinas was about, as well as what he was not about, in his famous 'Five Ways'.

The chapter on the origin of religion will make painful and uncomfortable reading for Dawkins: for the McGraths use the evidence-based, scientific method to demonstrate that Dawkins has simply not done his homework in this area. They do not, as Dawkins rhetorically pleads in *The God Delusion*, 'tread softly on my memes'. The idea of a 'meme', as well as Dawkins' suggestion that religion could be a 'virus of the mind', is shown to lack any real scientific basis. 'Dawkins the dogmatist' could have been the title for this chapter, for that is what Dawkins is shown to be.

Similarly, the fine chapter, 'Is Religion Evil?' amply demonstrates Dawkins' prejudice, selective use of evidence, and special pleading, as well as the fact that he has a blind eye and a deaf ear to the great good which has been done in the name of religion and the great good that has been received from religion.

I have, however, three concerns. First, while the McGraths show that a religious account of the universe is coherent, I am not so sure that they have demonstrated it to be compelling. My guess is that this is the area where Dawkins is most likely to punch back at them.

Secondly, in their desire to be scholarly, fair-minded and objective in their consideration of atheism (something which Dawkins', protestations to the contrary, most certainly is not), I fear that they have

overcooked things and conceded too much. They appear to suggest that this is simply an intellectual affair, of assessing the relative merits of arguments for theism and for atheism. But as far as Paul was concerned, both at the Areopagus and in his Letter to the Romans, failure to discern something of the being and character of God from the universe around is both the result and evidence of wilful rebellion against God. And this means that we are not neutral observers of what goes on around us. Recognition of this fact should not, as it sometimes has, lead to a short-circuiting of intellectual argumentation in the presentation of the gospel and in the apologetic task; it is, however, the context in which evangelism and apologetics takes place. I hope I am not being unfair to the McGraths. Alister McGrath certainly makes the point in other books he has written and makes it well. He may simply have thought it to be inappropriate in the present book. If so, I would query the rightness of that judgment.

My final concern is more of a general point than a criticism of the McGraths' book. The Christian writers who are truly engaging with the secular world at the interface of science and faith are invariably those who are committed to a theistic evolutionary framework. (The McGraths are a good example: atheist philosopher, Michael Ruse, said that *The God Delusion* made him embarrassed to be an atheist and the McGraths' book showed why. Denis Alexander's *Rebuilding the Matrix* is another good example.) Such Christian, theistic evolutionists usually display a knowledge and understanding of the history of ideas and the historical context in which science has been practised, and display this knowledge with a degree of sophistication, which is usually lacking from the 'creationist' literature, which, one has to say, frequently looks rather

amateurish by comparison. Even when the creationist literature is technically very competent and compelling, it too frequently lacks this broader perspective. Furthermore, there is often a woeful ignorance of the history of Christian thinking concerning creation, and a lack of sensitivity to the diverse literary genres found in Scripture. While 'creationism' may be making political headway and have a political profile, especially in the States, it is doubtful if it is seriously making much intellectual headway in the secular world. (How frequently is creationist literature published in peer reviewed science journals?) This is worrying because creationism is being routinely lined up with fundamentalism, not only by atheists, but by the likes of McGrath and Alexander. Yet for all the good work done by Alexander, McGrath, et al., it is difficult to see how the New Testament treatment of the creation and fall narratives found in Genesis 1–3 can be fitted into the evolutionary framework or vice versa.

In other words, this approach raises serious hermeneutical and theological problems. In the long haul, it could prove to be a 'Trojan Horse' for evangelicalism. Just as devout, well meaning evangelical scholars conceded far too much to liberal methodology with respect to biblical studies in the nineteenth century, with catastrophic consequences in the twentieth century, so the same thing could be happening again in a different area of thought.

We need writers with a robust, biblical doctrine of origins who are also well versed in intellectual history and the history of interpretation, scientifically expert and possessed of an ability to communicate at a number of levels. Of course, that is a tall order. But then, one only needs one David to fell a Goliath and to rout the Philistines.

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2006. ISBN 0-8308-2571-1

Of missiologies, there is apparently no end. To be honest, it used to be the other way round. Missions, now treated as a specialised field, was once seen as just an extension of ecclesiology. The location of a church work was considered in large part to be incidental. In other words, the only difference between missions and domestic ministry was the fact that one work was conducted in your own tongue and the other was not. Likewise, because mission or missions (most Protestants use “missions” while Roman Catholics and Anglicans prefer “mission”) was seen as a simple extension of business as usual, all of the tools that informed domestic ministry were applied to missions as well. In practical terms, it meant that Indians or Chinese were all too often seen as Americans and Englishmen with strange accents. Western methodologies and theological formulas were applied without modification in new, more exotic settings.

Then came illumination. Just as Western powers were divesting themselves of their empires after the Second World War, and promoted a world of United Nations, Western churches also began to repent of paternalism that had fostered aberrant dependency among mission churches and non-Western Christian populations. It was the age of late modernism and all sorts of scientific tools emerged with which to revolutionise foreign missions. Chief among these disciplines were sociology, anthropology and linguistics. These fields allowed people to understand non-Western cultures on their own terms. New church planting movements emerged with Western help that began to develop real

indigenous spirituality and ecclesiology. Much of the new developments hinged on new paradigms. For example, nationals and missiologists embraced the incarnation as *the* crucial model with which to understand the gospel's work among the nations. According to its popular use, the incarnation meant that Jesus could come into any culture as a true member of that community. The gospel was infinitely translatable. Well, that's one side of the story.

The other side, is that theology, when it was not being ignored in favour of anthropologically-flavoured pragmatism (see emergent church movement), developed either as a way of justifying the unbiblical or sub-biblical practices of host cultures or as a means for expressing the liberal sentiments of left-leaning evangelical missiologists. There were two related casualties related to these changes. The first casualty was the “Grand Tradition”, the sense of biblical, theological, and doctrinal consistency owing to an understanding that there was one grand narrative, the Christian story, connecting all places and all times. This “historical Christianity” was sacrificed for the sake of maximizing contextualisation. Creeds, confessions etc., once serving perhaps as straightjackets, preventing indigenous believers from theologising for themselves, were then systematically ignored to such a degree that new believers had no access to the visible church, either globally or temporally (unless it involved the small army of anthropologically trained missionaries.) Where once believers undertook the task of theology and ministry in dialogue with ancestors or fellow believers around the world, they now had to face the task either alone or with specialists, many of which reflected the theological, doctrinal drift so prevalent among contemporary evangelicals.

The second casualty was ecclesiology itself. There is no field within theology that has been more neglected in the late modern or postmodern world than that of ecclesiology. This is certainly no church age. On the home front, it is now the age of George Barna's *Revolution* calling for the burial of traditional churches as being irrelevant and their replacement by newer voluntary associations based on the meeting of personal needs. In the world of missions, the same thinking manifest itself in the proliferation of "Insider movements" or churchless Christianity. Emergent church spokesmen such as Brian McLaren and missiologists such as Ralph Winter proposed the preference of having "believing" Muslims or Hindus to that of having churches of former Muslims or former Hindus. This, I believe, is a reflection of both the artificial separation of missions from ecclesiology and the eclipse of ecclesiology in general terms. We do not care about the church any longer, at least not in the sense that it plays a meaningful role in the evangelisation of the world. Listening to the siren song of the anthropologists, we have concluded that the church is a disposable means to another end, the recreation of the world and evangelisation of humankind.

Enter Chris Wright. While this new work represents no panacea, it certainly is a strong step in the right direction. All too often, contemporary missiologies focus on a topical structure that underscores a pragmatic or theological approach, or they rely on locating the conceptual centre of their work in paradigms found almost entirely in the New Testament, neglecting the majority of the Bible. In the first case, these works tend to be vulnerable to proof-texting. One develops a pragmatic or sociological construct and then justifies it through the use of biblical texts. In the deepest sense, of

course, this approach is not biblical at all. In the second case, ideas such as the incarnation (in imitation of Roman Catholic practice following Vatican II) are stretched beyond their original meanings in order to provide a broad enough platform to support an entire missiology. Wright, thankfully, moves in the opposite direction. While highly influential missiologies such as that of David Bosch only spend four of 600 pages considering the Old Testament witness, and even Köstenberger and O'Brien's well received work only had 28 (compared to 177 for the New Testament), Wright commits the lion's share of his work to looking at the Old Testament. All I can say is that it is about time.

To be absolutely clear, Wright is not attempting to say that Israel had a fully formed understanding of international mission. In fact, he notes, "In my view, Israel was not mandated by God to send missionaries to the nations. I would argue that Israel had a missional reason for existence, without implying that they had a missionary mandate to go to the nations (pp. 24–25). "In other words, Wright does not think that all we have to do in order to understand missions is read the Old Testament. Rather, he thinks that an accurate understanding of mission is not possible until one understands mission from within the perspective offered by the Bible's metanarrative. If you wish to have a biblical understanding of mission, you must see mission as a biblical concept and you must begin at the beginning. Wright borrows a phrase "a hermeneutic of coherence" to describe the gospel as one redemptive story from Genesis to Revelation. Additionally, this is the world's story, not just Israel's. While he underscores this essential fact, he also manages to excoriate Western missiologists for their obsession with "contextual theology". Though this is intended to reflect the sort of incarnational

expression noted earlier, Wright claims that it actually betrays the “arrogant ethnocentricity” of the West, because it still concedes the West as the benchmark. How interesting. The West races to “help” the nations by cutting their dependent ties to others, but manages to do so in the most paternalistic of ways. Did I say it was interesting?

Wright notes that the mission of Israel was to be a light to the nations. Doing so meant living out the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants. He spends a great deal of time articulating the terms of the covenant and in particular connecting it with the outbreak of missions in the New Testament. His work is convincing. Israel alone among the nations knew the one true God as both creator and redeemer of humanity. Salvation for the world came through the covenantal relationship established by God with a people, the Israelites, through Abraham and his seed. The promise of blessings progressed through those relations from one man, Abraham and his descendents, through David and pre-eminently Jesus to the nations. To some degree, this meant, “God’s people, even under judgment, remain God’s people for God’s mission (91).” There is no room for Wright for a parenthetical, dispensational church. There is no radical disjunction between the people of God. Wright underlines the point by reminding the reader of the covenantal image that integrated together both Jews and Gentiles, the live tree.

Before getting to the church and its connection to Israel, Wright connects Jesus to the covenant God of Israel. Relying on recent work conducted by Martin Hengel, Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, the author compiled convincing evidence for the Bible’s early recognition that Jesus was considered divine, if not in the same sense as would later be expressed at Nicaea and Chalcedon. For example, the term *kyrios*

(Lord) was used repeatedly as a title for Jesus. This was a significant bit of evidence given the fact that *kyrios* was used over 1,000 times in the Septuagint as a title for the God of Israel. Over and over again, Jesus assumes the place reserved for YHWH. Christ, likewise, was identified with the glory of God, and powerfully as the great “I Am” of the Old Testament. Interestingly, the Bible does not attempt to redefine the understanding of God with the advent of Christ as resurrected saviour. Rather, Jesus is incorporated into that understanding. There was no disjunction between the God of Moses and the God of Paul. The difference was that the Lord Jesus introduced the believing community to what had always been true but not fully revealed, that God was triune.

In a bravura performance, Wright links the church to one feature of the Old Testament that has been almost repudiated in our own pluralistic age. He demonstrates how the understanding of covenantal truth is exclusive truth. There is only one creator. As Wright puts it, the Bible does not deny the existence of other gods. It simply shows how those gods are really either human creations with no power in themselves and therefore are incomparable to YHWH, or they represent a malevolent, demonic presence. In either case, they were not to be dismissed, as they often are by contemporary missionaries as simply human cultural expressions. They are to be exposed and countered. In doing so, the exclusivity of truth found in the covenantal revelation shines forth. Wright does not attempt to argue for the denying of every expression of truth found in other cultures, rather his aim seems to be that there is only one comprehensive redemptive truth. There is no room, for example, for supporting the triune God and the religion of Muhammad. Rather, “our mission, in participation with that

divine mission, and in anticipation of its final accomplishment is to work with God in exposing the idols that continue to blur the distinction, and to liberate men and women from the destructive delusions they foster' (p.165).

Underlying this concern for exposing error and promoting the exclusivity of truth was a commitment that extended far beyond the limits of much modern-day missions. Wright illustrates this with an examination of Paul's approach to the faith. "The thoroughness of Paul's mission practice is that he was not content merely with evangelism and church planting but was concerned to build mature communities of believers who could think biblically through the ethical issues they faced in the ambient religious culture. His pastoral and ethical guidance to his churches was thus as much part of his missional task as his evangelistic zeal, and just as theologically grounded too" (p. 182). This is something well worth considering as we jettison most of our distinctives in order to make the faith less offensive.

This truth spans the Old and New Testaments. In other words, the gospel of grace bridges the entire Bible. It is not something that suddenly appears at the cross. One can see in Paul's attitude the same passion for seeing the covenantal faith penetrate and transform every part of creation. This was no truncated decisionism, no "centred" embrace of a few supracultural distinctives. Mission in this sense is nothing more or less than an entry into the world of the Bible. As Wright puts it, "To belong to the Messiah through faith was to belong to Israel. And to belong to Israel was to be a true child of Abraham no matter what a person's ethnicity" (p. 194). Genesis's instrumental use of "through you" (contra Goldingay) in chapter 17 connects Abraham and everything that came after. "Abraham

and his offspring will be the means through which God (the true agent and source) will extend his blessing to the universal scope of his promise" (p. 253). In that sense, Christ does not abolish the Old Testament; he completes and extends it.

Wright also spends considerable time explaining the real scope of God's redemption. There is no "easy-believism" in the biblical record. Nor are its effects limited to the experience of the new birth. The covenant encompasses both the physical and spiritual. It is about salvation and it is about justice. Wright shows the holistic concern of the Old Testament and New Testament in the understanding of Jubilee. Unlike other treatments lobbying for the political or economic dimensions of the concept, Wright embraces aspects of these while connecting them to the larger theme of God's covenant faithfulness, expressed through his protection of the families of Israel (p. 295). He then takes the theme one step further by connecting that same sensibility to Peter's proclamation in 2 Peter 3 concerning the restoration of creation through the Messiah.

Perhaps its greatest weakness would be the evangelical Anglican tendency to make less of the connected, visible, global church than it should, but that is most likely my own Presbyterian perspective coming through. More seriously, the work seems to evidence the contemporary affliction of seeing the church in instrumentalist terms, as the means through which God accomplishes other tasks, such as evangelising creation. "A missional hermeneutic proceeds from the assumption that the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation" (p. 51). In such a case, the church exists to do something else, rather than to be something else, the Body of Christ. Was the church created in order to facilitate

something else, the church, or was the world created for a covenantal people whom God would love? I opt for number two. The church is an “is” not just a “does”. When we look at the end of the Bible, we will not see something beyond the church as the Bride of Christ. The church is not just a means, a method for doing something else. The problem with the thinking is that once you identify the church fundamentally as an instrument, it is all too easy to place it along all other such tools. It is ultimately this mistaken understanding that opened the door for arriving at an anthropological understanding of church and mission. When we begin to see the church as the Body of Christ united to him through the agency of the Holy Spirit, we will begin to develop missiology that integrates with and not works against the church itself.

Wright’s effort shows the limitations of his understanding, but it also makes a great contribution to the church and represents real progress. It is a great effort and easily the best work of its kind in some time. It may be true that missiology suffered under the theologians. I would say, however, that the situation has been far worse since it became a marginal discipline for missionaries and missiologists alike. Thankfully, Wright’s effort represents a balanced treatment that begins to pull together the separated strands of theology, biblical studies, and ministry specifics and to some degree sensitivity to the social sciences. Buy one.



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