

## Book review

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***The People's Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, Iain D. Campbell & Malcolm Maclean, eds., Mentor, 2011, 316pp, £14.99**

After a distinguished career as a pastor, theologian, author, editor, and administrator, Donald Macleod retired in 2010 as Principal of Free Church College, Edinburgh and more recently, in May 2011, as Professor of Systematic Theology. He will leave a permanent mark beyond the bounds of Scottish theology. This volume of essays celebrates Macleod's many distinctive contributions to theology and church life.

Alex Macdonald's brief introduction highlights Macleod's support for a young divinity student summoned before the Training for the Ministry Committee of the Free Church of Scotland for the indescribably egregious offence of wearing an army jacket to a prayer meeting! This support for the underdog is, he remarks, a constant in Macleod's life.

The book begins with an intriguing article by John Macleod, Donald's son, a journalist, reflecting on Macleod as a father, churchman, theologian, and editor. It considers his views on politics and contemporary issues and mentions the important point that he and his friends 'constructed a serviceable cricket-pitch on the moor downhill from the street' (p18). Since cricket is in many ways a microcosm of life, this was a good start for a productive innings by a future theologian.

Brian Wilson, editor of *The West Highland Free Press*, outlines Macleod's distinctive contributions to the paper since 1991. These articles have covered social, cultural and political matters as well as religious ones. Wilson provides a brilliant snippet on the Lewis revival of the 1950s under Duncan Campbell which, Macleod wrote, introduced 'a whole new language as unknown to the Bible as it is to the Highland pulpit' (p58).

Iain Campbell writes of Macleod's tenure as editor of *The Monthly Record*, the organ of the Free Church of Scotland, from 1977-1990. At times this proved controversial for many of the more conservative members of the church. Macleod has always been prepared to follow his convictions despite their conflicting with those of many in the Free Church. This was particularly notable on such matters as the death penalty. On a wider front, there was also interaction and strong disagreement with T.F. Torrance.

Martin Cameron provides a bibliography of Macleod's writings to the end of 2009.

In a section on historical theology there are fine contributions from Malcolm Maclean on Robert Bruce and the Lord's Supper, and from Guy Richard on Samuel Rutherford on the supremacy of God's will. The latter sheds much light – which will astound many – on the charges of fornication levelled at Rutherford in 1626, the year before his call to Anwoth. Michael Honeycutt writes on William Cunningham and the doctrine of the sacraments, of which more in a moment.

The section on systematic theology has a typically careful and well-argued contribution from Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. on the relationship between Christ's exaltation and justification. In considering the intercession of Christ, Gaffin reflects on justification as a state, which *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 11:5 affirms. This point, as an aspect of Christ's state of exaltation, has important ramifications, not least on a pastoral level.

Derek Thomas recounts the clash between the Celts, Macleod and the Welsh preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, over the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Lloyd-Jones, following Thomas Goodwin and others, held that this refers to a post-conversion experience to which many believers are strangers. The connection with the Welsh interest in revival is clear. Macleod maintains, following Calvin and John Owen, that it refers to the Holy Spirit given to all God's people. Thomas agrees, correctly, that exegetically and theologically the evidence favours Macleod.

Iain Campbell contributes an important piece on the covenant of redemption. I have criticised many of the formulations of this doctrine, such as those by A.A. Hodge and others, on the ground that they treat the trinitarian persons as agents needing to enter into contractual relations with each other, and thus breach trinitarian orthodoxy. Again, the Holy Spirit is usually left out of the picture. We thereby are presented with a divine committee meeting, to which the Spirit has presented an apology for absence. That salvation depends on the harmonious counsel of the trinity is obvious but this common construction has misrepresented it. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* describes it as a 'bargain.' Campbell goes a long way to putting this matter right. He construes the covenant in a manner compatible with the church's doctrine of the Trinity and he also makes very clear that all three persons are indivisibly active. This careful essay should be consulted by everyone concerned about the eternal trinitarian plan of salvation, and its full compatibility with the covenant of grace in human history.

There is a final section on preaching, appropriate for Macleod's commitment to the church and its proclamatory ministry. Carl Trueman makes many perceptive and incisive comments on the function of the preacher, interacting with Luther and the New Testament. Fergus Macdonald has an intriguing discussion of the Psalms in the light of postmodern literary criticism. Alastair I. Macleod writes of the multi-dimensional act of reading Scripture. Donald Macdonald discusses leadership in the church, while Rowland Ward has an interesting contribution on systematic theology and the church.

Michael Honeycutt's essay on William Cunningham's sacramental theology raises some questions, mainly in relation to its subject (pp109-131). Macleod considers Cunningham to have been Scotland's greatest theologian. That may well be so but on this particular matter he is, to my mind, seriously wanting. It is well known that Cunningham found Calvin's theology of the Lord's Supper difficult to stomach on a number of counts and described it as a blot on his reputation as a public instructor. It is clear that Cunningham was unable to grasp the element of mystery. Zwingli's attachment to neo-Platonic forms of thought had bequeathed a legacy of ontological dualism by which material objects were no longer considered to be suitable for God to convey spiritual grace. While Cunningham was critical of Zwingli on this point, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he was impacted in this direction, particularly by his opposition to the Oxford movement.

However, whatever his treatment of Calvin indicates, on baptism Cunningham is significantly mistaken. Firstly, Honeycutt argues that Cunningham thought the Westminster Assembly considered baptism in the context of the adult baptism of converts; infant baptism was not in their sights, according to Cunningham – it was an appendage, almost a singularity. Since Cunningham influenced generations down to the present day this was a portentous claim. He was wrong; totally, monumentally wrong.

It is true that Cunningham did not have access to the full minutes of the Assembly, which have only recently been transcribed. However, when he refers to the Westminster divines, it is to George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford, both Scots commissioners, *and not members of the Assembly*, that he appeals. The handful of Scots who were present participated in debate but were not part of the

Assembly as such and were unable to vote. Honeycutt himself makes this mistake (p128). Moreover, Cunningham's primary appeal is to the *Shorter Catechism*, from which detailed theological statement was expressly excluded.

There were a range of discussions on baptism at the Assembly, more fully-recorded by the scribe than most other matters. These covered both the theology and practice of baptism. In each case, the baptism of *infants* was in view. There is no evidence that the divines considered this in isolation from the baptism of adult converts.

The scribe recorded the following matters, among others, as arousing noteworthy debate: the place where baptism is to be administered, the church or the home, in connection with the necessity of baptising the child; whether only the children of godly parents are to be baptised; whether parents are to make a profession at the time of baptism; the nature of the holiness ascribed to infants of believers by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:14; and the relation between baptism and the regeneration of elect infants.

Moreover, the order for baptism in *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God* refers to 'the child to be baptised'. The words of instruction before baptism speak of the reasons why 'the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church' have interest in the covenant and the right to its seal. The exhortation is addressed to 'the parent.' The baptismal prayer asks that 'the infant' and 'the child' 'be planted into the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ.' The minister then is to demand the name of the child, to baptise the child, and his concluding prayer is for the Lord to 'receive the infant now baptised into the household of faith.'

Secondly, Honeycutt himself opposes David Wright's comment that the divines had a doctrine of baptismal regeneration. This argument fails on at least four grounds:

First, Honeycutt fails to distinguish the doctrine of baptismal regeneration taught by Rome from the position on the efficacy of baptism of the Assembly and the preceding Reformed confessions. Rome held that the grace of regeneration is conferred by the fact of the sacrament's performance (*ex opere operato*). In contrast, the Reformed maintained that the grace signified, sealed and exhibited in baptism is conferred by the Holy Spirit to the elect in God's own time, and ultimately received through faith. For the Assembly there is a definite connection between baptism and regeneration but baptism is not the efficient cause of regeneration, for the relationship is not causal, or logical, or temporal but theological. To regard a positive relationship between baptism and regeneration as necessarily entailing the doctrine of Rome is untenable and to do so clouds the issue.

Second, the record of debates underlines the divines' awareness of this connection. The scribe recorded several debates on the relationship between baptism and regeneration – and he did not write at length on many matters. These debates are found in sessions 260, 302, and 566.

Third, related to this previous point is the bibliographical evidence of the works of the divines. Cornelius Burgess, a prominent member of the Assembly, wrote in 1629 *The Baptismal Regeneration of Elect Infants* in which he expounded his understanding of the relationship between the baptism of infants, elect and non-elect, and regeneration. Daniel Featley, a fellow member, had also propounded similar ideas. The *Synopsis purioris theologiae* (1625), a major work of four professors at Leiden, defending the theology of the Synod of Dort, argued for the relationship between baptism and regeneration, affirming the same connection as the Assembly was to do.

Fourth, the Confession states that baptism is 'a sign and seal of... regeneration' (WCF 28.1), in which the grace promised 'is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Spirit' to the

elect in God's own time (WCF 28.6). There is a definite theological connection between baptism and regeneration that is not to be confused with those of Rome or Lutheranism.

What emerges from Honeycutt's essay is that Cunningham's baptismal theology was hardly distinguishable from a credo-baptist one; he tacked on infant baptism as an appendix, scarcely related to the whole. Indeed, Cunningham makes the extraordinary statement for a Presbyterian that infant baptism cannot be brought within the definition of a sacrament.

Still, Honeycutt's is a provocative essay that helps to highlight why the case for the classic Reformed doctrine of baptism as expressed in the Confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has largely gone by default in the UK and elsewhere. This has had the effect of impoverishing theological debate, regardless of a person's views of the subjects of baptism. This lowered view of the sacraments has led the evangelical church into a kind of gnostic belittling of the material in the interests of a spiritual religion, in contrast to the magisterial statement of Genesis that God created the heavens *and the earth*.

The authors and editors are to be congratulated on this impressive volume. With them, we wish Donald Macleod many future years of the productive ministry we have valued and have come to expect.